

PROPOSAL TO REVISE FSU'S GRADE APPEALS SYSTEM

At the September 2004 meeting of Council of Assistant and Associate Deans (CAAD), the issue of the current Grade Appeals System was brought up for discussion. There was consensus among CAAD members that there was a need to clarify some of the language and to streamline the process. A subcommittee was charged with drafting a proposal to revise the Grade Appeals System, specifically addressing the following:

Substantive Issues:

1. Emphasize that faculty judgment of academic performance is inherent in the grading process and that the faculty member's judgment is supported by the University, unless there is evidence of gross violation of grading standards or inequitable grading that results in the grade's being awarded in an arbitrary, capricious, or discriminatory manner.
2. Strengthen the "burden of proof" language, emphasizing that it is the student's responsibility to present evidence that the faculty member violated his or her own grading standards or awarded the grade inequitably.
3. Clarify how a final determination is made if the grade is not upheld.
4. Exclude doctoral preliminary examinations and thesis/dissertation defenses that do not include a standard syllabus and thus require a Student Academic Relations Committee Review.

Procedural Issues:

5. Streamline the process by eliminating unnecessary and duplicative levels of review.
6. Clarify the selection process of the student advisory board and its role in the process.
7. Make references to departments/colleges/schools consistent, as well as the role of the chair/director/dean (e.g., references to "dean of the college")
8. Clarify whether "days" should refer to calendar days or business days.
9. Include the role of the Student Academic Relations Committee.

An initial proposal was presented to CAAD in January, 2005, and then again in February and March. Modifications were recommended and incorporated. The proposal was also submitted to the Deans of Undergraduate and Graduate Studies and the General Counsel's Office for review; their feedback has also been incorporated.

The proposal was formally approved by CAAD on March 15th. It is being forwarded to the Undergraduate Policy Committee and the Graduate Policy Committee for their consideration. It is understood that to be implemented, any changes in the Grade Appeal System would need the approval of the Faculty Senate.

PROPOSED REVISION TO THE GRADE APPEALS SYSTEM

The purpose of the grade appeals system is to afford an opportunity for an undergraduate or graduate student to appeal a final course grade under certain circumstances. Faculty judgment of students' academic performance is inherent in the grading process and hence should not be overturned except when the student can show that the grade awarded represents a gross violation of the instructor's own specified grading standards and therefore was awarded in an arbitrary, capricious, or discriminatory manner. The grading standards utilized during the grade appeals process are those that were contained in the instructor's syllabus at the beginning of the semester. This system does not apply to preliminary or comprehensive exams or to thesis or dissertation defenses; these issues are reviewed by the Student Academic Relations Committee via the Dean of the Faculties.

Step 1.

Within 30 calendar days following the date that final grades are made available to students, the student must contact the instructor in question to discuss the grade and attempt to resolve any differences. The student should document any attempts to contact the instructor in order to establish that the appeal was begun within this 30-day period. In the event that the instructor is not available, the student should provide that documentation to the instructor's program or department chair.

Step 2.

If no resolution is reached within this 30-day period, after the student's documented attempt, the student has an additional 15 calendar days to submit a written statement to the program or department chair. This statement must include an account of attempts to resolve the issue, as well as the evidence that forms the basis for the appeal.

Within 20 calendar days thereafter, the department or program chair will arrange for a meeting of a grade appeals screening committee composed of three students enrolled in the academic unit offering the course to review the appeal. Appropriate students who have no conflict of interest will be chosen to serve on this screening committee by a student organization associated with the program or department, if such an organization exists. If members of such an organization are not available, the department or program chair will select appropriate students who have no conflict of interest. Both the student and the instructor may attend the meeting.

The role of the screening committee is solely to determine whether the student has presented sufficient evidence to warrant further review. Within five calendar days after this meeting, the screening committee will render its decision in writing (recommend/do not recommend further review) to the program or department

chair, the student, and the instructor. A negative decision will end the appeal. A positive decision will trigger the next step in the process.

Step 3.

Within 20 calendar days of a positive decision from the grade appeals screening committee, the program or department chair will appoint and arrange for a meeting of a grade appeals board. This board is composed of three faculty members and two students other than those who served on the screening committee.

The purpose of this board is to determine whether or not to uphold the final grade assigned by the instructor. The board will consider only the evidence provided by the student and the instructor in making the determination. Both the student and the instructor may attend the meeting.

The grade will be upheld unless the evidence shows that the grade was awarded in an arbitrary, capricious, or discriminatory manner, as a result of a gross violation of the instructor's own grading standards. If the original grade is not upheld, the board will recommend that an alternative grade be assigned by the program or department chair.

If the student has evidence that this grade appeals process has deviated substantially from these established procedures, resulting in a biased decision, the student may consult with the Dean of the Faculties regarding referral to the Student Academic Relations Committee.

KM/JB/FT/TM/Revisions approved by General Counsel's Office/03/01/05