

# GRADE APPEALS POLICY

## Preamble

The Instructor(s) of Record for courses offered to students in the School of Pharmacy and Health Professions have jurisdiction in assigning grades earned by students at the end of each term in which the course is offered. The criteria and mechanisms for performance evaluation shall be published in the course syllabus and communicated to students at the beginning of the course. When assigning course grades, Instructor(s) of Record will evaluate students in a manner that is fair, unbiased, and consistent with those criteria and mechanisms.

It is the responsibility of the student to review final course grades posted online by the Registrar's Office at the end of the semester.

## Pre-Appeals Process

Students have the right to appeal a grade that they believe to have been assigned in an arbitrary or capricious manner<sup>1</sup>. The appeal process for all students in the School of Pharmacy and Health Professions taking courses offered by a department within the Health Sciences disciplines requires that the following steps be taken in the sequence listed below.

### Step 1

The student confers with the Instructor(s) of Record, outlining the basis for dissatisfaction with his/her original grade in an attempt to come to resolution in the absence of third parties. It is the responsibility of the student to contact the Instructor(s) of Record to initiate this step. It is expected that the student and Instructor(s) of Record meet alone but, in the rare instance when one and/or both have a concern about meeting privately the student's academic advisor may be invited to attend. In that event, the role of the academic advisor will be to facilitate professional and productive communication between the student and the Instructor(s) of Records. If, at any point in this process, the Instructor(s) of Record agree(s) with the student and elects to alter the original grade issued, the process is terminated and the issue is considered closed. Likewise, if the student becomes convinced at any point in the process that the original grade was issued in a manner that was neither arbitrary nor capricious, the process is terminated and the issue is considered closed. If the dispute is unable to be resolved, the preliminary process proceeds to Step #2.

### Step 2

The student and the Instructor(s) of Record confer with the Chair of the Instructor(s) of Record's department unless the department is external to the School. In that situation, the Chair will be invited to participate and, if s/he declines, the administrator's function will be assumed by the Assistant/Associate Dean in the Office of Academic and Student Affairs. The administrator's role is to host the meeting and facilitate professional and productive communication between parties. At no time should the administrator assume the role of decision-maker in the grade dispute. The student may request the presence of his/her academic advisor during this meeting. The academic advisor, if present, may counsel his/her advisee but should not take an active role in the discussion. Either party may request the presence of the Assistant/Associate Dean in the Office of Academic and Student Affairs to interpret policy and/or provide administrative guidance on the process. If, at any time during this step of the process, the Instructor(s) of Record agree(s) with the student and elects to alter the original grade issued, or if the student becomes convinced that the original grade was issued in a manner that was neither arbitrary nor capricious, the process is terminated and the

issue is considered closed. The Administrator must write a memo to the Assistant/Associate Dean in the Office of Academic and Student Affairs which summarizes the outcome of the meeting. Copies of this memo must be sent to the Instructor(s) of Record, the student, and to the student's academic file through the Assistant/Associate Dean in the Office of Academic and Student Affairs.

If the student disputing a course grade is out of the Omaha metropolitan area, the required preliminary conversation with the Instructor(s) of Record may be made by phone, followed by submission of a written summary of the outcome of the conversation by the student and the Instructor(s) of Record. Copies of the summary must be sent to the Assistant/Associate Dean in the Office of Academic and Student Affairs, and the student's academic advisor. If a conference call is deemed necessary, the cost of the call will be borne by the School. If, subsequent to preliminary Step #2, a grade appeal is filed and the Academic Issues Hearing Board wishes to interview the student, this interview can be conducted by phone, video-conference, or when the student is next in Omaha at the discretion of the administrator in charge.

<sup>1</sup> For the purpose of this policy, "arbitrary or capricious" refers to the assignment of a final course grade through means that are erratic, irregular or inconsistent with grading policies published in the course syllabus and/or inexplicably different from those applied to other students enrolled in the same course.

## Formal Grade Appeal Process

If resolution of the issue cannot be attained through the preliminary steps outlined above, a formal grade appeal may be filed by the student. If the grade being contested was issued in a course taught by a department or division outside of the School of Pharmacy and Health Professions, the Grade Appeals Policy of that department or division will be followed. The Assistant/Associate Dean in the Office of Academic and Student Affairs will obtain a copy of that policy to share with the student and his/her academic advisor.

If the student elects to formally appeal the grade, s/he must inform the Assistant/Associate Dean in the Office of Academic and Student Affairs in writing. In the written appeal, the student must outline the specific grounds for the appeal, and clearly and precisely describe the basis for the complaint. A copy of the student's letter of appeal, and any supporting documentation provided, will be forwarded to the Instructor(s) of Record and the appropriate Department Chair and the Chair of the School's Academic Issues Hearing Board. It is on the basis of the student's written appeal and the supplemental documentation provided to or gathered by the Academic Issues Hearing Board that the Board will decide whether or not to hear the case.

The student formally appealing a failing grade has the right to attend classes and exercise the privileges of all other School students pending the outcome of the appeal except when prohibited by department policy or in cases where there are reasons relating to the physical or emotional welfare of the student or of others, or reasons involving the safety of persons or property. The decision on student status will be made by the Assistant/Associate Dean in the Office of Academic and Student Affairs.

## Academic Issues Hearing Board

The Academic Issues Hearing Board, a standing board consisting of one faculty member and one student from each program, is chaired by the Senior Associate Dean or his/her designee. The Chair shall be a non-voting member, except in the case of a tie when the chair shall cast the

deciding vote. The Academic Issues Hearing Board will be convened by the Assistant/Associate Dean in the Office of Academic and Student Affairs for the purpose of reviewing and acting upon written appeals of grades presented by students who have followed the process described in this policy.

When presented with a student appeal by the Assistant/Associate Dean in the Office of Academic and Student Affairs, the Chair of the Academic Issues Hearing Board shall secure the course syllabus and request from the Instructor(s) of Record his/her written response to the appeal, as the Board shall also request from the Instructor(s) of Record any additional written information on grading policy previously communicated to the class.

Within two weeks of being convened, the Academic Issues Hearing Board shall review the student's allegations and the documentation provided by both the student and the Instructor(s) of Record. The Board shall also have access to information contained in the student's academic file and transcript. At the conclusion of the review, the Board shall determine whether sufficient evidence has been presented to proceed with a formal hearing. The burden of proving that a course grade was assigned arbitrarily or capriciously rests with the student.

If the data presented by the student are judged to be insufficient to warrant a hearing, the Chair of the Academic Issues Hearing Board will so indicate, in writing, to the Assistant/Associate Dean in the Office of Academic and Student Affairs who will inform the student and Instructor(s), in writing, of this determination. At that point, the issue is considered closed. If sufficient evidence is presented by the student to warrant an appeal hearing, the Board will act in a timely manner to collect the information necessary to render a decision as to whether the grade issued to the student was assigned in a manner that was neither arbitrary nor capricious. All written documentation provided to the Board by the student petitioner and/or the Instructor(s) of Record will be shared with the other party. The Board is under no obligation to share information it gathers on its own.

The specific charge to the Academic Issues Hearing Board regarding a grade appeal is to assess whether the mechanisms utilized by the Instructor(s) of Record to determine the grade in question were applied consistently and fairly to all students enrolled in the course and, if not, to identify specifically which evaluation mechanisms were arbitrarily or capriciously applied. The Academic Issues Hearing Board should not attempt to determine the grade to be received by the student.

The Board shall convene as soon as possible to evaluate all evidence pertinent to the case. In the course of its investigations, the Board may choose to interview other faculty and students who may provide insight and/or have direct knowledge about the events of the case. At the invitation of the student, his/her academic advisor may attend the interview but may not take an active role in the discussion. No other individual will be allowed to sit in on an interview unless permission is granted by the Board Chair. The Board's decision will be reached by simple majority vote.

Once a decision is reached, the Chair of the Academic Issues Hearing Board will inform the Assistant/Associate Dean in the Office of Academic and Student Affairs, in writing, of the decision. The Assistant/Associate Dean in the Office of Academic and Student Affairs then communicates the final decision to the student and Instructor(s) in question.

The Chair of the Academic Issues Hearing Board will also inform the Dean, in writing, of its decision. The Dean vests full authority for the adjudication of grade appeals in the Hearing Board, and will not serve as

a source for further appeal or decision review unless requested to do so by the Provost.

## Timeframe for Appeal

Failure of the student to adhere to the time deadlines described below will result in forfeiture of all rights to appeal the grade in question. If deadlines cannot be met due to legitimate reasons, the student can appeal to the Assistant/Associate Dean in the Office of Academic and Student Affairs for an extension.

For didactic and experiential courses, the student will have two weeks after the start of the next semester in which the student is enrolled to file a formal grade appeal. This allows time to work through the pre-appeal process described above and submit a written appeal of a grade. Failure to review grades that have been posted online by the Registrar's Office at the end of the semester will not be viewed as a reason to suspend any of the time deadlines set forth in this policy. It is the responsibility of the student to ensure that the Registrar's Office has the address to which official correspondence should be sent so that it is received by the student in a timely manner.

If there is the possibility of a grade dispute in an experiential course being completed during the final semester prior to graduation, it will be the responsibility of the student to obtain his/her final course grade from the Instructor(s) of Record in writing, preferably prior to leaving the rotation.