

Student Disputes with Instructors

Applicability. This document describes the process for handling student disputes with or complaints about instructors.¹ Although it is anticipated that the primary use of these procedures will relate to grade disputes, the procedures are applicable to the resolution of any student-instructor disagreement or student-initiated complaint related to an instructor's teaching or other interactions with the student. These procedures do not apply to any matter that falls under the applicability of either the Academic Honor Code or the Code of Student Conduct. As with those codes, the school's Statement of Community Values provides the context for these procedures. Also, these procedures are not applicable to allegations of legal violations or to alleged violations of school or university policies for which there are formal procedures to handle such allegations (e.g., sexual harassment).

The spirit of these procedures is for the student and instructor to resolve the matter informally without invoking the higher-level, more formal steps in the process. It is nevertheless recognized that on occasion certain very serious matters may require more timely resolution and thus may require beginning the process with the area chair.

Time Limitation: All student disputes about final grades must be initiated within fifteen (15) business days of the grade being posted to the student transcript in Wolverine Access. No grade appeals initiated after this timeframe will be reviewed.

Reporting and Resolution: The sequence of steps for the reporting and resolution of student-faculty disputes is as follows:

1. Meeting with the Instructor: The student should first describe and discuss her or his disagreement with the instructor, preferably in person. In preparation for this discussion, the student must convey in writing the basis for the complaint with specific evidence (if available) in support of the argument for the appeal request. It is expected that this will be the only step needed to resolve most relatively minor complaints or disagreements.
2. Meeting with the Course Head: If the instructor is teaching one of several sections of a course for which there is a designated course head, this person should be the next one contacted if Step 1 did not result in a resolution of the issue. The formal appeal by the student should summarize the outcome of the previous step, indicating what aspects remain in dispute. The student may request that the first meeting with the course head not include the instructor. Subsequent meetings of the course head and the student, if any, may also include the instructor at the course head's discretion. The course head will promptly discuss the matter with the instructor, in person if feasible. The course head will inform the student

¹ As used herein, "student" may mean either one or several students. "Instructor" means any individual responsible for teaching a class or supervising and grading a student project, irrespective of that individual's title or official status at the school. Although in most instances the student will be enrolled in a course taught by the instructor, these procedures can also be applied to complaints about other instructors with whom the student has had interactions, such as project advisers, area chairs and student club advisers.

and instructor in writing and in a timely manner of his or her proposed resolution of the matter.

3. Meeting with the Area Chair: If there is no course head and Step 1 did not result in resolution, or if there is a course head and Step 2 did not result in resolution, then the area chair should be the next one contacted. The formal appeal by the student should summarize the outcome of the previous step, indicating what aspects remain in dispute. The area chair will promptly discuss the matter with both the student and the instructor, preferably in person, and with the course head (if applicable), either individually or simultaneously at the chair's discretion. The chair's proposed resolution will be conveyed in writing in a timely matter to the student, instructor, and course head (if applicable).

4. Meeting with the Faculty Program Director: If the area chair's proposed resolution in previous step is not acceptable to the student, then the faculty program director should be the next one contacted. The formal appeal by the student should summarize the outcome of the previous step, indicating what aspects remain in dispute. The faculty program director will promptly discuss the matter with both the student and the instructor, preferably in person, and may also choose to meet with the area chair, and, if applicable, the course head. The faculty program director's resolution will be conveyed in writing in a timely matter to the student, instructor, and course head (if applicable).

5. Meeting with the appropriate Associate Dean: If the faculty program director's proposed resolution in previous step is not acceptable to the student, then the student may appeal the matter in writing to the associate dean. The formal appeal by the student should summarize the outcome of the previous step, indicating what aspects remain in dispute. The associate dean will promptly discuss the matter with both the student and the instructor, preferably in person, and may also choose to meet with the faculty program director, area chair, other students and, if applicable, the course head. The associate dean's resolution will be conveyed in writing in a timely matter to the student, instructor, and course head (if applicable). The associate dean's written resolution of the matter will be sent to and binding on all involved parties. There are no further appeals beyond this step.

No matter how many of the preceding steps are involved, the instructor is the only person who can change a grade unless the appropriate associate dean concludes that the decision not to change the grade is arbitrary or unreasonable.

It is important for successful resolution that student-faculty disputes be addressed in a timely manner. At each stage of the appeals process, once a decision has been rendered, the student has ten (10) business days to initiate an appeal to the next level. Similarly, at each stage of the appeals process, the instructor, course head, area chair, faculty program director, and/or associate dean shall typically meet with the relevant parties within ten (10) business days and render a decision within fifteen (15) business days. If, in exceptional circumstances, the academic calendar makes it difficult for the instructor, course head, area chair, and/or associate dean to render a decision within this timeframe, then the decision must be rendered within (10) business days into the next full term.

Updated October 2014