

GRADE APPEALS BOARD

The major function of the Grade Appeals Boards is to mediate between student and instructor without creating an air of judicial inequity. The intent is not to embarrass students or instructors or to assess penalty or retribution when mistakes on either side are discovered, but to provide a forum in which honest differences of opinion can be discussed rationally and peacefully.

It is the responsibility of the faculty members of Oklahoma State University to communicate to students early in the term a clear statement of the grading practices and procedures that will be used to determine the student's final grade. If a student believes those practices and procedures were not consistently and accurately followed when the faculty member determined the student's final grade, the student shall have the right to appeal the case to the Board if informal discussions fail to resolve the issue. The burden of proof rests with the student. The proof shall be a preponderance of evidence.

This brochure contains excerpts of the official University policies governing grade appeals. For a detailed copy of the policies and procedures or for assistance with filing an appeal, contact the Office of Academic Affairs, 101 Whitehurst Hall or look on the website at <http://academicaffairs.okstate.edu/content/grade-appeals-board-policies-procedures>.

CRITERIA FOR GRADE APPEALS

The guidelines of the Grade Appeals Board specify that the process is not an adversarial process. The Board makes a determined effort to provide a mechanism for exchanging information between student and instructor, and affecting reconciliation without creating an air of judicial inquiry. The intent is not to embarrass students or instructors, nor to assess penalty or retribution when mistakes on either side are discovered, but to provide a forum in which honest differences of opinion are discussed rationally and peacefully. For these reasons, the Board does not have the student and the instructor appear at the same time in the proceedings.

A. The University considers the syllabus a contract between a faculty member and each student within a course. As such, the Board hears appeals based on concerns related to the course syllabus. Types of

issues that might come before the Board related to a syllabus include, but are not limited to:

1. The student was not adequately informed of the details of the requirements of the course, the prerequisites for the course, and/or the grading system.
 2. The evaluation system was not consistently and fairly applied to all students.
 3. Criteria for determining the final grade were changed during the course of the semester, and the students were not adequately notified of this change. It is important to note that changes in syllabi need not be made in writing as long as students are given adequate notice of the changes.
 4. All students did not receive equal notification and consideration of extra credit or other grade adjustment opportunities that were provided during the course of the semester.
 5. Items such as attendance, participation, and/or attitude were criteria for determining the final grade and were not made clear in advance to the student.
 6. The student was not adequately informed in advance of criteria used in making subjective evaluations of academic activities such as essay examinations, papers, projects, speeches, and practice teaching.
 7. The grading system included non-academic criteria.
- B. When evaluating the grading system of an instructor, the Board makes no attempt to establish whether a grading system is academically sound; that is, the Board is not in a position to decide the case on the instructor's choice of one particular grading system over another. Rather, the Board must rule solely upon whether the grade was assigned fairly within the grading system adopted and announced by the faculty member. In all other instances, the case will be referred back to the departmental and college levels for resolution. The following guidelines have been cautiously developed to be used when examining the internal merits of any grading system:
1. Were errors made in calculating the final grade?
 2. Was the student accurately informed, in writing, of the instructor's grading system; that is, was the student clearly and precisely informed of the decision-making process the instructor was using in determining the final grade for the course?
 3. Student absence is not to be considered a valid excuse for being unaware of the details of the grading system.
- C. Subjective criteria are recognized as valid in determining a grade. The grading system can be subjective but not arbitrary, capricious or personally biased.
4. Did the instructor consistently and fairly apply the grading system to all students?
 5. Did the instructor change the grading system during the course of the semester in such a way that it put the student at a serious disadvantage or without adequately communicating the change to the students in the class?
 6. Were all students given a chance to improve their grades when grade adjustment opportunities were made available during the course of the semester?
 7. Did the instructor single out the student for arbitrary or discriminatory treatment?
- D. It is very important to note that the Board, while considering all the above issues does not engage in the following activities:
1. Grading papers or examinations or challenging the instructor's evaluation of oral participation in class.
 2. Hearing cases involving graduate oral or qualifying examinations or theses/dissertations.
 3. Making decisions on the basis of the academic soundness of the instructor's teaching methods or grading system.
 4. Basing decisions on a general consideration of "good" or "bad" instruction.
- E. The Board does not have the academic competency in the various fields that are involved to evaluate field specific instruction; nor can the Board overcome the differences of opinion over soundness of teaching methods. Recourse against general "bad" instruction must be handled at the department or college level; therefore, these cases will be referred back to the departmental and college level for resolution.
- The Grade Appeals Board is authorized to hear those cases in which a student believes an instructor's grading practices and procedures were not consistently and accurately followed when determining a final grade.

PROCEDURES FOR GRADE APPEALS

In cases where a student appeals a final course grade and where allegations of violations of academic integrity are not involved, the following procedures shall be used:

A. Student obtains and completes an appeal form. Appeal forms are available at the Office of Academic Affairs the day after grades are posted. In completing the form, the student must discuss the action with an advisor, the instructor, the instructor's department head, and the instructor's dean or dean's representative and thereby informs each official of the pending action. For the purposes of this document, "instructor" shall mean "instructor of record." This procedure may encourage any dispute to be solved by the instructor, the department head and the instructor's dean before it is heard by the Board. If during these discussions it becomes clear that a grade change is necessary, the instructor will submit a change of grade form to the Registrar. If the instructor is no longer employed by the University, the responsibility falls to the department head.

B. The Appeal Form, student's statement, and any evidence is submitted to the Appeals Board Coordinator. The Coordinator, who can be contacted in Academic Affairs, accepts Form A, the student's statement, and any evidence. The Coordinator is responsible for collecting forms from the advisor, instructor, department head, and dean. Prior to the hearing, the student will receive a copy of the instructor's verification form and the instructor will receive a copy of the student's form and written statement.

C. The Coordinator schedules hearings for both student and instructor. Appointments for hearings are confirmed by email. Both hearings are generally held on the same day, but never simultaneously so that there will be no confrontation between student and instructor. Both parties have the right to call witnesses to assist in establishing the facts of the case. Each party is permitted to have one silent observer of their choosing present during their part of the hearing and the right to call a short recess and consult with that observer outside the hearing.

D. The instructor's verification form needs to be returned in a reasonable amount of time. If a student has conferred with the instructor and has delivered the appropriate form to the instructor, but the instructor does not return the form in a reasonable amount of time the Board may hear the case without the instructor's form. In such a case, the Board should hear the case without prejudice, and the rights of the instructor to present evidence and testimony before the Board should not be restricted. A statement of this policy and the address to which the forms are to be returned are included on the instructor's grade appeal form.

E. The Grade Appeals Board renders a decision and notice of the decision is sent within 10 working days to the student, the student's advisor, the instructor, the instructor's department head, and the dean. When the Grade Appeals Board votes to alter a grade, the decision is sent to the Registrar's Office and the grade is changed.

Oklahoma State University, in compliance with Title VI and VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, Executive Order 11246 as amended, and Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972 (Higher Education Act), the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990, and other federal and state laws and regulations, does not discriminate on the basis of age, race, color, religion, sex, sexual orientation, genetic information, gender identity or expression, national origin, disability, protected veteran status, or other protected category, in any of its policies, practices or procedures. This provision includes, but is not limited to admissions, employment, financial aid, and educational services.

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