Policies for Handling Student Complaints

Undergraduate Appeal Process Regarding the Final Grade in a Course or Allegations of Academic Dishonesty

Absent a grade based on constitutional violations or prohibited discrimination, the final grade in a course is within the sole judgment of the instructor. Allegations of academic dishonesty are handled in accord with the Academic Honesty Policy Statement (see USM Catalog) and the procedures described below. In the event that a student disagrees with the final grade assigned in a course, or disputes an allegation of academic dishonesty, the following informal procedure will be initiated by the student.

The student informs the instructor that the grade or academic honesty allegation is under dispute. If the dispute involves a final grade, the student must inform the instructor by the end of the drop/add period of the following spring/fall semester. It is recommended that the student do this as soon as possible after receiving the grade.

If the dispute involves an allegation of academic dishonesty, the student must inform the instructor within three days of instructor notification to the student of the allegation of academic dishonesty.

The student consults with the appropriate individuals at each of the three levels indicated below and seeks resolution on the lowest possible level.

1) Absent unusual circumstances, the student consults with the instructor who renders a decision and notifies the student personally or at the student's last address on file with the University within one calendar week of the consultation.
2) If the matter is not satisfactorily resolved with the instructor, the student consults with the department chair within one calendar week of the decision of the instructor and the department chair will notify the student personally or, if personal notice is not feasible, at the student's last known address of the instructor's decision within one calendar week of consultation. If the dispute is with the department chair who is the instructor, the student moves to step 3.
3) If the matter is not satisfactorily resolved in steps 1 or 2 above, the student may consult with the Vice President for Academic Affairs within one week regarding a formal appeal process. The Vice President for Academic Affairs will confer with the instructor, the student, and the chair to assure that informal process was followed and will then advise the student within one week as to the appropriate steps in initiating a formal appeal process, should the student desire to do so. The role of the Vice President at this juncture is to assure due process, not to deal with the substantive matters of the appeal.

Formal Appeal Process

If the issue cannot be resolved informally, the student may file a formal appeal. Procedures for appeal are available in the Office of the Registrar. Refer to the USM Catalog.

Appeal Process Regarding Admission to Teacher Education Program (TEP) or Student Teaching (ST)

Acceptance to the TEP or ST is the decision of the Teacher Education Committee (TEC). If this acceptance is denied and the candidate contests the decision, the candidate consults with the appropriate individuals at each of the levels indicated below and seeks resolution on the lowest possible level.

1) The candidate consults with the chair of the Teacher Education Committee.
2) The chair confers with the TEC regarding the appeal and seeks the TEC's recommendation.
3) The chair communicates the recommendation to the candidate.
4) The candidate may consult with the Vice President of Academic Affairs who will act as monitor of a meeting between the candidate and the chair of the TEC.
5) The Vice President of Academic Affairs will notify the candidate of the decision within two weeks.

If the issue cannot be resolved informally, the candidate may file a formal appeal with the supporting documentation within one week of the notification by the Vice President of Academic Affairs. The formal process should not take longer than 30 days.

The candidate may ask to have the decision of the TEC reviewed formally:

1) A review committee will be formed consisting of three faculty members, to include:
   - a faculty member from the TEC
   - a faculty member from a related discipline
   - a faculty member from an unrelated discipline
2) The candidate may choose one of the three; the Vice President of Academic Affairs will appoint the remaining members.

The committee meets in private to form the agenda and to review materials submitted by the candidate and the TEC chair and to write their final recommendations. The candidate and the TEC chair are present for the formal presentation of the dispute and for the deliberations.

The role of the review committee is to insure that academic practice is followed in the decision of the TEC and in the review process. In arriving at its conclusions, the committee is not to judge the TEC criteria for acceptance into the TEP and/or ST.

The committee has the right to make judgments regarding the manner in which the TEC applies these criteria, taking into consideration such issues as fairness, consistency, and the communication of the teacher education goals, standards/competencies, and assessment of standards/competencies.

The committee informs both parties of its recommendations and conclusions and sends these to the Vice President of Academic Affairs for action. The Vice President of Academic Affairs acts on these recommendations and notifies the candidate and the chair of the TEC of the final decision. The decision is final and may not be appealed. A record of the formal procedures is kept on file in the office of the Vice President of Academic Affairs.

Grievance Policy for Education Candidates in Graduate Programs

Change of Grade

If an error in a student's final course grade is discovered, an amended grade report is filed with the registrar, with a copy provided to the department chair. Course grades are not changed based on additional work done after the end of the term. The final grade in a course is ordinarily based on the sole judgment of the instructor. If the student disagrees with that grade, the student must first discuss the grade with the instructor and if the student remains dissatisfied then the student is required to put it in writing to the program director to resolve the issue accordingly. The student must initiate the grade appeal process within the first two weeks of the next full term. The grade appeal process must be completed within one month after it has been initiated; unless, for reasons beyond the student's control, the department chair grants an extension in writing.

Grievance Policy

Graduate students have a right to procedural due process in the case of an alleged grievance, e.g., disagreement about a course grade or other perceived issues. A student who believes there may be a legitimate issue about which to file a grievance should first discuss concerns with the faculty member believed to be the source of the grievance. If this is not successful the student should obtain a copy of the Student Initiated Grievance Procedures maintained in the Registrar's office and request assistance from the department chair in its implementation. The deadline for appeals and grievances regarding course grades is stated above in the Change of Grade section. In other situations, notification to the department chair should be as timely and precise as possible and certainly no later than the end of the semester following the alleged grievance. Ordinarily the student should attempt to resolve the matter with the individual in question. The department chair will try to assure that appropriate steps have been taken to resolve the issue in a mutually-agreeable way.

If a satisfactory solution is not achieved, the appropriate vice-president may establish an ad hoc committee to hear the grievance. Membership on the committee is described in the Student Initiated Grievance Procedures, maintained in the Registrar's office. At this stage of discussion information will be gathered and carefully noted, but a hearing by such a committee will not be conducted through attorneys. The committee will render a decision within 15 days, which the student may appeal in writing to the Vice President of Academic Affairs. The student may appeal this decision to the President of the University whose decision will be final.

(USM Catalog p.224)