

**SUGGESTIONS FOR PREPARING A GRADE APPEAL CASE FOR  
FORMAL DISPUTE RESOLUTION**

**Should I file a grade Appeal?**

- Course grades assigned by instructors are presumed to be correct. If you appeal an assigned grade, you must demonstrate clerical error, prejudice, or capriciousness in the assignment of the grade.
- You should first seek to resolve the matter informally with the instructor. Sometimes the problem is just a mix-up of names, or a miscalculation. These errors can be corrected quickly if you bring them to the instructor's attention without assessing any blame.
- You should not appeal a grade because the final was very difficult or because most of the students in the class were given failing grades (or because most of the students were given "A" grades). You should not appeal because the instructor refused to discuss the homework or avoided answering questions in class or during office hours. You may wish to share these concerns with the department chair, but they are not grounds for appealing your grade.
- You should not appeal a grade because the instructor did not give partial credit, did not grade on a curve, did not allow calculators, did not distribute a review sheet, etc. These all relate to the instructor's style of teaching. If the instructor outlined her or his evaluation procedure on the course syllabus and/or applied it in a consistent manner to all students, a grade appeal will not be successful.
- You should file a grade appeal if you can demonstrate that the grade reported by the instructor does not reflect the quality of evaluated work that you submitted in class.
- You should file a grade appeal if you can demonstrate that you were evaluated in a different manner than other students without good cause.

**How does the process work?**

- You, as well as any faculty, staff, or administrators involved in a grade appeal, have an obligation to make every effort to resolve the differences fairly and informally and to negotiate in good faith towards a mutually agreeable resolution of the problem.
- You should start the grade appeal as soon as possible after the grade is reported. If it is necessary for you to file a grade appeal for Formal Dispute Resolution, you will need to do so 30 days following the beginning of the semester after the grade was assigned. Make note of the meeting dates and deadlines at <http://senate.sonoma.edu/meeting-dates-dispute-resolution-board-consider-disputes>
- If you cannot resolve your grade dispute with the instructor, you must first informally appeal to the Department Chair and School Dean. If your instructor is a department chair, go directly to the Dean.
- At this point, if the dispute has not been resolved to your satisfaction, you may file a grade appeal for Formal Dispute Resolution. Formal Dispute Resolutions

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are adjudicated by the Dispute Resolution Board. Note that adjudication of a grade appeal might take six to eight weeks. If your appeal is informally resolved after you have filed a formal Grade Appeal, please contact the Dispute Resolution Board immediately.

- The Chair of the Dispute Resolution Board will forward your appeal to the instructor. The instructor will be required to respond in writing. The entire committee will then review your statement and the instructor's response. The committee will make a decision and you will be notified in writing.

### **What is Formal Dispute Resolution?**

For Formal Dispute Resolution, a grade appeal is a file submitted to the Dispute Resolution Board through the Academic Senate office in Stevenson Hall 1027. The file should include:

- Your name, address, phone, and Sonoma State email address.
- The course number and title, the instructor's name, the semester taken, the grade received, and the grade expected.
- A statement that provides a clear explanation of the error, prejudice, or capriciousness that occurred.
- Documentation that supports your explanation, such as a course syllabus or copies of assignments and exams.

### **Any advice on preparing a formal grade appeal?**

- Keep your statement simple. State what happened without adding your opinions. Be as specific as possible. For example, "He said on Friday, May 13, during his office hours that female students should not take music" is better than "I don't think he likes female students."
- Avoid inflammatory remarks, such as, "This instructor should never teach again!"
- Don't include arguments that are not grounds for an appeal. They will distract the committee from the more significant arguments.
- Do not just submit all the notes and assignments you completed for the class. Submit only work that supports your appeal. Your statement should explain how to interpret the documentation that you do include. It is helpful to the committee for you to include explanations such as, "The first midterm, dated May 13, 2004, demonstrates that the instructor did not follow the grading scheme outlined on the syllabus."

### **Where can I get more information?**

- CSU Executive Order 792 establishes minimum standards for campuses governing the assignment of grades by faculty and for provisions for appeal to ensure that the rights and responsibilities of faculty and students are properly recognized and protected. You can read it at [www.calstate.edu/eo/EO-792.pdf](http://www.calstate.edu/eo/EO-792.pdf).

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- The policies and procedures for grade appeals are in the catalog and on the web at (<http://www.sonoma.edu/policies/grade-appeal-policy> and <http://www.sonoma.edu/policies/formal-dispute-resolution-procedures>).
  
- You may also discuss your case with the Chair of the Dispute Resolution Board (<http://senate.sonoma.edu/memberships-and-meeting-dates/sac#DRB>) or the Academic Senate Analyst, [holmstrl@sonoma.edu](mailto:holmstrl@sonoma.edu).