

## Final Course Grade Grievance Procedure

A final grade grievance is defined as a student complaint regarding an academic action taken by instructional personnel in assigning a final grade for a course, qualifying, or comprehensive exam. In addition to complaints against a particular instructor, students may also file complaints against a committee concerning academic evaluations that adversely affect them (i.e., the grade given on a comprehensive examination or a thesis or dissertation final oral exam.) Normally, such complaints can be resolved quickly through discussions with the faculty member involved. In some situations the matter cannot be satisfactorily resolved at that *step*. For such cases, a student may file a formal final grade grievance using the procedures specified below. **(Note that while a grievance may be filed against a committee, the term “instructor” is used throughout the following description of procedure to refer to the person or entity against whom the grievance is brought.)**

For a complaint about a final course grade or other academic evaluation to be considered, the complaint must be based on one or more of the following grounds and upon allegation that the ground(s) cited influenced the grade assignment to the student’s detriment:

1. arithmetical or clerical error
2. arbitrary or capricious evaluation on the part of the instructor
3. substantial failure on the part of an instructor to follow the course syllabus or other announced grading policies
4. extraordinary mitigating circumstances beyond the student’s control.

Students may not file a grade grievance until a final grade is received in a course. This procedure may not be used to complain about an instructor’s grading policy, assignments, the difficulty of a course, or other comparable matters. Finally, students may not file a grievance about a final course grade that was assigned as the result of an academic misconduct procedure.

A Final Course Grade Grievance must be filed no later than 20 class days into the succeeding semester to include summer term if the student is enrolled. **Note: the term “class day” as used in this document means any weekday (Monday-Friday) during which the official University of South Alabama calendar indicates that classes are in session.**

### Meet With Instructor

As a prerequisite to filing a grievance and within the time frame allowed for filing a formal grade grievance (no later than 20 class days into the succeeding semester to include the summer term only if the student is enrolled), the student must attempt to resolve the matter with the instructor. In some cases, the student may make reasonable attempts to contact the instructor and be unsuccessful. If the student is unable to contact the instructor, this should be documented in writing by the student and the student must submit the written documentation to the instructor’s department chair (or dean if the department chair is either the party to the

grievance or unavailable). In the absence of the instructor, the department chair/dean will act in the instructor's stead.

### **Filing the Grievance Form**

A Final Grade Grievance Form must be filed by the student no later than 20 class days into the succeeding regular semester. *A student may file a grievance at any time prior to the deadline.* A blank Final Grade Grievance Form may be obtained on the University's website [www.southalabama.edu/](http://www.southalabama.edu/), or from any departmental office, any college dean's office, or the Office of Student Affairs. Page One of the Final Grade Grievance Form must be completely filled out and turned into the chair of the department in which the course is taught or the academic evaluation took place. The form will be dated and signed by both the department chair and the student and a copy given to the student.

If the department chair is the party against whom the grievance is being brought, the student should submit the Final Grade Grievance Form to the dean of the college in which the course is taught or the academic evaluation took place. In the event that the grievance is against the dean who is the instructor, the student should submit the Final Grade Grievance Form to the Senior Vice President for Academic Affairs.

### **Grievance Facilitator**

The department chair will facilitate the grievance process unless replaced as follows:

- \* If the department chair is the party against whom the grievance is being brought, the dean will then appoint another department chair to facilitate the grievance process.
- \* If the dean is the party against whom the grievance is being brought, the Senior Vice President for Academic Affairs will appoint an individual to facilitate the grievance process.

### **Initial Grievance Review**

The department chair will arrange a conference with the student and the instructor involved to attempt resolution of the grievance. The department chair should schedule a conference within ten (10) University class days of receipt of the Final Grade Grievance form.

For grievances filed during the summer term, instructors on 9-months contracts may not be available for a conference. In these circumstances, the department chair may schedule the conference during the following fall semester, unless the delay would unfairly penalize the student's progress in the program.

Prior to the conference, the facilitator will ensure that both the student and instructor involved have copies of the grievance procedure. The instructor will be given a copy of the Final Grade Grievance Form filed by the student and will be allowed to examine any supporting documentation. Both parties will be informed that the purpose of the meeting is to attempt to resolve the grievance.

If a mutually satisfactory resolution is achieved during the conference, the process will end and no further action will be taken. A record of the outcome of the conference will be filed along with the Final Grade Grievance Form in the department chairs office and the dean's office.

If a successful resolution is not achieved at the conference, the department chair will conclude the conference. The department chair will advise the student that he/she has the right to accept the original grade given or to request a hearing before the College Grade Grievance Committee. The student must request a hearing at the conclusion of the conference otherwise the final course grade will stand and the student will forfeit the opportunity to appeal the grade to the Final Grade Grievance Committee. The student's decision should be noted on the Final Grade Grievance Form. If the student accepts the grade at that point, the process ends and the form serves as a record of that acceptance. If the student requests a hearing, the department chair will notify the dean's office who will convene the appropriate College Grade Grievance Committee within three (3) class days of the conclusion of the conference.

### **College Grade Grievance Committees**

The dean of each College/school will appoint annually an Undergraduate and a Graduate Grade Grievance Committee. The Undergraduate Grade Grievance Committee will hear grade grievances of undergraduate students and the Graduate Grade Grievance Committee will hear grade grievances from graduate students.

A minimum of five faculty members and one alternate member shall be appointed from the full time faculty to each College Grade Grievance Committee. Faculty members must serve if appointed. Faculty appointed to the Graduate Grade Grievance Committee must hold graduate faculty status. A minimum of two students from the College will also be appointed by the Dean of the College to each committee. Students appointed to the Undergraduate Grade Grievance Committee will be undergraduate students. Students appointed to the Graduate Grade Grievance Committee will be graduate students.

The Dean will review the Grade Grievance Committee membership prior to a hearing to determine members who may have a conflict of interest. No member of the instructor's department shall serve on the committee. Likewise, should a member of the Committee be a party to the grievance to be heard, an alternate should serve in their stead and they should absent themselves from any discussion of the grievance in which they are involved.

The Dean will appoint the chair and vice chair of the Grade Grievance Committees and will convene the appropriate Committee prior to a hearing to review the grade grievance process and answer any questions regarding the policy. Four faculty members and one student will constitute a quorum. The vice chair will preside in the absence of the chair. Majority rule will apply to decisions, with the student members having full voice and vote.

## **Grade Grievance Committee Hearing**

Upon receipt of the materials and request for a hearing, the Chair of the Grade Grievance Committee will conduct a hearing within ten (10) class days of the receipt of the request. The College Grade Grievance Committee hearing process will afford both parties the right to submit any documentation, supporting witnesses, or relevant information at the hearing. Legal representation at the hearing is prohibited. The Committee will review the evidence presented by both parties, interview both parties, and make a decision in the grade grievance. Decisions may: uphold the grade given or academic action taken, or find the grievance is valid and assign a new final course grade or impose another appropriate action. The student, instructor, department chair, and dean will be notified in writing of the Committee's decision within three (3) class days of the conclusion of the hearing.

## **Appeal**

The only grounds for an appeal are violation of due process or the rendering of a decision that is in conflict with a university policy. Either the student or the instructor may appeal the Committee's decision to the dean of the college in which the course is taught or the academic evaluation took place. The appeal must be in writing and must be made within ten (10) University class days of notification of the Grade Grievance Committee's decision. The dean will review the evidence presented to ensure that the Grade Grievance Policy was followed, that due process was provided, and that the decision of the committee is consistent with University policies. If the dean determines errors were made in the process or the decision rendered is inconsistent with university policies, the decision will be rescinded and the grievance will be sent back to the committee for corrective action.

The student, the instructor, and the department chair will be notified, in writing, of the dean's decision regarding the appeal within ten (10) class days following receipt of the appeal. The dean's decision is final and no further appeal is allowed.

## **Implementation of Grievance Outcome**

The department chair will implement the outcomes(s) of the grievance conference or appeal, as required, at the conclusion of the grievance procedure.

## **Confidentiality**

Throughout the entire procedure, from filing of a formal complaint to final resolution, all information related to the grievance must be kept confidential. Once a final decision has been made and implemented, the original copy of the completed Final Grade Grievance Form and related Grievance documentation will be placed in the official confidential Grievance File of the department or other academic unit in which the grievance was recorded, for a minimum of five (5) years.

## Summary

The following summarizes the timeline and procedures for a Final Grade Grievance:

1. A final course grade grievance cannot be filed until a grade has been received in a course. A Final Grade Grievance Form must be filed by the student no later than 20 class days into the succeeding *regular* semester. *A student may file a grievance at any time prior to the deadline.*
2. Prior to filing a grade grievance the student must meet with the instructor to attempt resolution. If the instructor is unavailable the student documents attempts to contact the instructor in writing. The student contacts the instructor's department chair in the event a meeting with the instructor can not be arranged. If there is no resolution, proceed to step 4.
3. The student completes a Final Grade Grievance Form files the form with the department chair within the required time frame.
4. A facilitated grievance conference with both the student and instructor present is conducted by the department chair within 10 class days of receipt of the Final Grade Grievance Form.
5. If a resolution is reached in the grievance conference, resolution will be noted and the process ends.
6. If the student requests review by the College Grade Grievance Committee, the department chair will forward all materials within three days of the request to the dean's office. The dean will convene the appropriate College Grade Grievance Committee (i.e. the Undergraduate Grade Grievance Committee if the student is an undergraduate student or the Graduate Grade Grievance Committee if the student is a graduate student.)
7. The Grade Grievance Committee holds a hearing within ten (10) days of receiving the request from the dean. The student and the instructor will be provided opportunity to present evidence and supporting materials.
8. The Committee's written notification of their decision is made within three (3) class days to the student, instructor, department chair, and dean. The department chair will implement the decision if there is no appeal.
9. The student or instructor may appeal the Committee's decision to the Dean within ten (10) class days. The only grounds for an appeal are violation of due process or the rendering of a decision that conflicts with university policy. The decision of the Dean regarding the appeal is final and the process will end.