Academic Grade Appeal Procedure

The grade-appeal procedure is designed to provide an undergraduate or graduate student at The University of Mississippi with a clearly defined avenue for appealing the assignment of a course grade he/she believes was based on prejudice, discrimination, arbitrary or capricious action, or other reasons not related to academic performance. The student’s request for a grade appeal may be taken successively to the professor, the chair of the department in which the grade was given, and the dean of the school or college to which the department belongs, with a possible resolution of the conflict at any stage. Either the student or the professor may appeal a decision made at the dean’s level by making a written request for a review by an Academic Appeals Committee. A final grade is the professor’s evaluation of the student’s work and achievement throughout a semester’s attendance in a course. Factors upon which the final grade may be based are attendance, recitation, written and oral quizzes, reports, papers, final examinations, and other class activities. There is a presumption that the professor who has conducted the course is professionally competent to judge the student’s work, and in the absence of convincing evidence to the contrary, has evaluated it fairly. In all cases, the complaining student shall have the burden of proof with regard to all allegations in his/her complaint and in his/her request for review or hearing. If any party fails to pursue any step of the grade-appeal procedure within its allotted time, the disposition of the case made in the last previous step shall be final. All correspondence and records shall be retained in the office in which the complaint is finally resolved. In any situation in which a graduate student wishes to appeal the results received on his/her comprehensive examinations, he/she should contact the dean of the Graduate School for a copy of the Graduate School Appeal Procedure, which shall apply in such a case. In the outline below and in the sections that follow, time periods in Steps 1 and 2 are in calendar days and are measured from the first day of the regular semester that follows receipt of the grade being appealed. That is, for a grade received for work done in a fall semester (including grades awarded in the fall for I’s received from previous work), the time deadlines are measured from the first day of the following spring semester. For grades received for work done in a spring or summer semester, the time deadlines are measured from the first day of the fall semester. The remaining time periods are in calendar days and are measured from the date of an initiating action.

Outline of Grade-Appeal Procedure and Time Schedules

Step 1. Informal Consultation With Faculty Member Must be initiated within 30 calendar days. Must be completed within 45 calendar days.

Step 2. Appeal to the Department Chair(s) A written appeal must be submitted to the chair of the department in which the course is being appealed and to the chair of the department in which the student is majoring (if different). The department chair has 15 calendar days from receipt of the appeal to achieve resolution of the appeal.

Step 3. Appeal to the Dean A written request that the appeal be forwarded to the dean of the school or college in which the course was offered must be submitted to the department chair within seven calendar days following the end of the 15-day time period in Step 2. (In the case of a graduate student, the appeal is forwarded to the dean of the Graduate School.) The department
chair must forward the request and pertinent material to the dean within five calendar days of receipt of the request. The dean must render a written decision within 15 days of receipt of the appeal.

Step 4. Appeal to Academic Appeals Committee Either the student or the faculty member may request a review by an Academic Appeals Committee. A written request must be submitted to the vice chancellor for academic affairs within 15 days of the receipt of the dean’s decision.

Explanation of the Steps in a Grade Appeal

Step 1. Informal Consultation The student shall first consult with the faculty member in an effort to reach a satisfactory resolution of his or her appeal. It is a part of the professional obligation of members of the University faculty to meet with students who wish to avail themselves of this academic grade-appeal procedure for the purpose of reviewing the grade assigned and attempting to resolve the matter. In the event that the student cannot schedule a meeting with the faculty member, the department chair may be contacted to schedule the meeting between the student and the faculty member. Informal consultation is a required first step, and no further grade appeal is permitted unless informal consultation is first attempted. The only exception to this procedure is when the faculty member no longer is employed by the University or is otherwise unavailable so that it is impossible to complete Step 1. In this case, the student may proceed directly to Step 2. Step 1 must be initiated within 30 calendar days of the beginning of the regular semester following receipt of the grade being appealed.

Step 2. Appeal to Department Chair If the matter is not resolved in Step 1, the student may present an appeal in writing to the chair of the department in which the course was offered within 45 calendar days from the beginning of the next regular semester after the grade was received. The department chair shall attempt to resolve the appeal in consultation with the faculty member and the student within 15 calendar days of receipt of the written appeal. The department chair may counsel with the faculty of the department about the matter.

Step 3. Appeal to the Dean If the appeal cannot be resolved at the level of Step 2 within the 15-day prescribed time period, the student, within seven calendar days following the end of such period, may request in writing that the chair forward the appeal to the dean of the college or school in which the course was offered. In the case of a graduate student, the appeal is forwarded to the dean of the Graduate School. The chair must forward the student’s appeal to the dean within five days. The chair shall provide the dean with a copy of all correspondence and records pertaining to the appeal. The dean may use any resource available to the dean’s office to resolve the grade conflict within a 15-day period following receipt of the appeal. The dean shall communicate his/her decision to the student, faculty member, and department chair.

Step 4. Appeal to the Academic Appeals Committee Either the student or the professor may appeal the decision made under Step 3 within 15 days by submitting a written request to the vice chancellor for academic affairs for a review by an Academic Appeals Committee. In the event of such an appeal, the decision made in Step 3 shall be stayed pending the completion of the procedure in Step 4. The dean and the chair must be provided a copy of the appeal request. The written request for a review by an Academic Appeals Committee should state the factual basis for the appeal of the dean’s decision. This request for appeal is the primary document setting forth the
contention of either the student or professor that the decision made by the dean should be reversed. Therefore, this request for appeal should be carefully drawn and supported by attachments of all relevant documentary material. Upon receiving a request for a review by an Academic Appeals Committee, the vice chancellor for academic affairs shall appoint an Academic Appeals Committee composed of seven members constituted as follows: Appeals Committee for Undergraduate Students A chair; three faculty members, two of whom must be from the department involved; and three undergraduate students. Appeals Committee for Graduate Students A chair, to be selected from the graduate faculty; three graduate faculty members, two of whom must be from the department involved; and three students selected from the Associated Graduate Student Body. The chair of the Academic Appeals Committee shall appoint a subcommittee that shall review all written requests for an appeal to determine if a formal hearing is warranted. If, in the opinion of the subcommittee, a formal hearing is not warranted, a decision on the appeal shall be made by the Academic Appeals Committee based upon written evidence submitted by the student and the faculty member. If the subcommittee finds that the student’s or the professor’s request merits a hearing, the chair of the Academic Appeals Committee shall notify all parties (student, professor, chair, and dean) in writing of the time and location of the hearing. The purpose of the hearing is to elicit information on which the committee may base a recommendation to the vice chancellor for action. It is not to be construed as a trial in a court of law. The hearing shall be closed. Both student and professor may provide any written materials they desire, and the committee may request additional material if it deems such necessary. Both the student and professor concerned shall be afforded the right to present witnesses or other evidence, question opposing witnesses, and make a concluding statement. No attorneys shall be permitted to represent participants in Academic Appeals Committee hearings. The Academic Appeals Committee shall tape record all hearings and preserve these tapes until all further avenues of appeal shall have expired. At the student’s or faculty member’s request and expense, copies of the tape shall be made available. When the committee has reviewed all documents and heard such testimony as it considers necessary to reach a conclusion, it shall adopt by majority vote a recommendation to be made to the vice chancellor for academic affairs. The recommendation should be either to sustain the action taken at the dean’s level (Step 3) or to take some other action with respect to the grade that is being appealed. The committee may (1) recommend that the grade remain as it was originally assigned by the professor, or (2) report that in the judgment of the committee the original grade was arbitrarily or capriciously assigned and recommend that another designated grade be given. The recommendation of the committee should be in the form of a letter to the vice chancellor for academic affairs and should contain as explicitly as the nature of the case will allow the grounds on which the recommendation of the committee is based. The chair of the committee shall send copies of the committee’s letter to the vice chancellor for academic affairs and to the student, professor, department chair, and dean.

Step 5. Final Decision by Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs
The vice chancellor for academic affairs shall make the final decision, utilizing any resources to assist in deciding the appeal. The vice chancellor shall have the right to allow the assigned grade to stand or to raise or lower the assigned grade. He/she shall inform all parties involved, including the Academic Appeals Committee, of his/her final decision on the matter.
Retention of Records

As part of the University’s grade-appeal procedure, faculty members are required to keep grade-related materials until the completion of the next regular (spring or fall) semester. Material that applies to an ongoing grade-appeal process must be retained for six months following completion of the grade-appeal process. In this section, "grade-related material" refers to examinations, projects, term papers, records on grades, attendance records, and other material that is used in the grading process and is not returned to the student. If materials are returned to the student, a student desiring to appeal must present any tests, examinations, term papers, or other graded material that form the basis for his or her appeal.