SUNY New Paltz
The Graduate School

Academic Policies: Student Grievance

The State University of New York at New Paltz complies with New York State Education Department regulations requiring that campuses have procedures in place for filing complaints and seeking resolution of perceived academic problems.

**Purpose:** The purpose of these policies is to facilitate the reconciliation of student complaints, including academic and nonacademic issues (e.g., student services, administrative concerns, or matters involving any form of discrimination). Grievances involving academic issues will be limited to final course grades and satisfactory completion of instructional program requirements.

**Student Complaints Regarding Alleged Sexual Assault, Harassment, and/or Discrimination**

If the complaint involves allegations of sexual assault or harassment, and/or discrimination based on race, sex, ethnicity, national origin, sexual orientation, religion, age, disability, or marital status, the student should use procedures administered through the Office of Compliance and Campus Climate, Haggerty Administration Building, Room 602A. Allegations of sexual assault, harassment, and/or discrimination should be reported immediately to this office for confidential discussion.

**Student Complaints Regarding Nonacademic Issues**

If the complaint involves nonacademic issues, the student should follow the procedures set forth by the Department of Student Affairs and administered by the Dean of Students, Haggerty Administration Building, Room 702. However, students are encouraged to seek resolution of the perceived problem directly in the unit in question before initiating processes that are more formal.

**Student Complaints Regarding Academic Competence and/or Disposition**

If the complaint involves failure of a course, placement/practicum, or suspension or dismissal from a program for reasons related to competence or disposition, the student should contact the department chair or coordinator of the program in which the course is offered. They will assist you in dealing with these kinds of grievances.
Student Grade Appeals

The following procedures pertain to a student’s grade appeal and reflect the College’s commitment to a fair and prompt resolution of such appeals.

Grade Appeal Procedures

The procedures begin with an informal process (see Step I below) and proceed to a formal process (see Steps 2-5 below) that includes hearings and investigations that are intended to render an impartial solution.

The student may only appeal a final course grade (i.e., the grade submitted by the instructor at the end of the course.) The grades on individual course assignments may, however, serve as the primary evidence for a grade appeal.

Basis for Student Grade Appeals

1. The student may not base a grade appeal on disagreement with the grading policy as established and published by the course instructor.
2. Only the final grade submitted by the course instructor at the conclusion of the course can be appealed. Grades on individual course assignments cannot be appealed separately in this process although demonstration of instructor’s error on the grades for individual assignments may serve as the primary evidence for a successful appeal of the final course grade.
3. The student may base a grade appeal on the instructors’ (a) failure to follow a published grading policy in calculating grades for the course as a whole or in calculating the grade for the complainant and/or (b) erroneous or unfair application of the published grading policy or standards in determining the complainant’s grade in the course.

Time Limits

At the informal level (Step 1), the student must file a grade appeal by the second week of the following semester. At the formal level (Steps 2), the grade appeal must be submitted to the department chair by the fifth week of the following semester.

Guidance Regarding Documentation

The burden of proof in the grade appeal is always on the student. Therefore, the student must substantiate the grievance. Retention of all documentation from a course, including but not limited to the syllabus, tests, papers, and any other graded evaluations is strongly recommended.
Grievance Resolution Process

The grade appeal process includes the possibility of hearings at the Department, School, Graduate Dean/Graduate Council, and Provost levels.

It is imperative that the student recognizes the responsibility for taking the initiative in the appeal and for processing the appeal. It is the student’s decision whether or not to proceed to each step of the process.

Step I: A student grade appeal can be filed only if the student has first attempted to resolve the complaint informally with the instructor involved. As previously stated, the contact must be initiated by the second week of the following semester. If the instructor is not available, the student should contact the department chair for assistance in contacting the instructor. It sometimes is the case that instructors are not available after the spring semester ends and during the summer months.

If a satisfactory resolution of the problem is not achieved and the student wishes to initiate a formal grade appeal, the instructor must provide the student a signed acknowledgement stating that the consultation took place, and that the student’s attempt to resolve the appeal was unsuccessful. If a student wishes to initiate a formal appeal, see Step 2.

Step 2: The student who is unable to achieve resolution with the instructor may initiate a formal grade appeal, with the department chair (by the fifth week of the semester), by preparing a written statement. If the chair is the party against whom the grade appeal is brought, the student may appeal at the dean’s level (i.e., the dean of the School/College offering the course). The appeal to the chair (or dean if the chair is by-passed) should include:

- A statement of the case in detail, including the reasons the student believes the grade should be reconsidered.
- All information about the consultation with the instructor.
- All relevant supporting materials, which should be identified and listed in an appendix.

The department chair will notify the instructor of the student’s decision and, if deemed necessary, will advise the instructor to prepare a written statement explaining his/her position on the case. In attempting to resolve the grievance, the chair may consult with the student, instructor, and program coordinator. The chair’s response to the student must be made within ten days of the date of the student’s appeal. It should briefly state the nature of the appeal and the reason for its approval or denial. If a satisfactory resolution of the problem is not achieved, the student may appeal at the dean’s level (i.e., the dean of the School/College offering the course).

Step 3: The student who decides to appeal to the School/College dean must inform the department chair of the decision, and must file the appeal with the dean within two weeks of receiving the department chair’s decision. The chair will notify the instructor of the student’s decision and will forward to the dean any correspondence pertaining to the case, as deemed necessary. The documentation that the student submits to the dean includes those described in
Step 2, along with the correspondence from the instructor and the department chair.

Upon receiving the student’s grade appeal, the School/College dean or his/her designee will examine the documentation and determine whether a hearing is needed. If the dean/dean’s designee finds that there are no valid grounds for the grade appeal, s/he will inform the student and the course instructor (with a copy to the chair) of the finding. However, if the dean/dean’s designee finds valid grounds for the grade appeal, the dean/designee will notify the student, the chair, and the instructor that a hearing will be held. The student and instructor may seek the dean’s/dean’s designee permission to bring to the hearing witnesses to support their position. The dean/dean’s designee will hold the hearing as quickly as possible.

If the dean/dean’s designee finds that the student has not proven that the course grade should be changed, the instructor’s grade will stand, and the student will be notified of the decision within one week of the hearing. However, if the dean/dean’s designee finds grounds to uphold the appeal, the dean/dean’s designee, in consultation with the course instructor, will determine what the correct grade should be, and the dean/dean’s designee will inform the student of the decision within two weeks of the hearing. The dean/dean’s designee will require the course instructor to change the grade by submitting a grade change via my.newpaltz.edu. A record of this decision will be kept on file in the dean’s office for six years.

Step 4: The student who is unable to achieve resolution at the School/College dean’s level may appeal to the Dean of the Graduate School, and must inform the dean/dean’s designee of the decision. The student must file the appeal with the Graduate Dean within two weeks of receiving the dean/dean’s designee decision. The documentation that the student submits to the Graduate Dean includes those described in Step 2, along with the letters from the instructor, department chair, and School/College dean/dean’s designee.

The Graduate Dean and Graduate Council will examine the documentation and determine whether a hearing is needed. If the Graduate Dean and Graduate Council find that there are no valid grounds for the grade appeal, the Graduate Dean will inform the student, course instructor, and School/College dean of the finding. However, if the Graduate Dean and Graduate Council find valid grounds for the grade appeal, the Graduate Dean will notify the student, instructor, chair, and dean that a hearing will be held. The student and instructor may seek the Graduate Dean’s permission to bring to the hearing witnesses to support their position. The Graduate Dean and Graduate Council may also call witnesses. The Graduate Dean and Graduate Council will hold the hearing as quickly as possible. If the Dean and Graduate Council find that there are grounds to uphold the appeal, the Graduate Dean, in consultation with the course instructor and School/College dean will determine what the correct grade should be. The Graduate Dean will require the course instructor to change the grade by submitting a grade change via my.newpaltz.edu. The Graduate Dean will notify the student of the decision, copied to the instructor, chair, School/College dean, and Provost. A record of this decision will be kept on file in the Graduate School for six years.

Step 5: The student who is unable to achieve resolution at the Graduate Dean/Graduate Council level may appeal to the Provost/Vice President for Academic Affairs. The student must inform the Graduate Dean of the decision to continue the appeal, and must file the appeal
with the Provost/Vice President for Academic Affairs within two weeks of receiving the Graduate Dean’s decision. The documentation that the student submits to the Provost/Vice President for Academic Affairs includes those described in Step 2, along with the letters from the instructor, department chair, School/College dean/dean’s designee, and the Graduate Dean.

The Provost/Vice President for Academic Affairs or designee will examine the documentation and determine whether the appeal will be granted or denied. In deciding the appeal, the Provost/Vice President for Academic Affairs or designee may consult with one or more of the following: student, instructor, chair, dean, and/or Graduate Dean. The Provost will notify the student of the decision, copied to the instructor, chair, School/College dean, and Graduate dean. A record of this decision will be kept on file in the Provost’s Office for six years.

The Provost/Vice President for Academic Affairs’ decision on the student’s grade appeal is final. In other words, there is no appeal of this decision beyond the Provost’s Office or in the future—with one exception. Only new evidence on the student’s or course instructor’s part will reopen an appeal. Any subsequent request to reactivate the appeal must be brought within one calendar year of a decision by the Provost/Vice President for Academic Affairs and would be addressed to the School/College Dean’s office.

If a student grade appeal submitted by a graduate student in his/her last semester is successful after the student graduated, the College Registrar is authorized to make any grade change to the student’s final transcript as directed by the School/College dean. A student must file a grade appeal by the mid-point of the following semester or forfeit his or her right to appeal the grade.

**Confidentiality**

All individuals involved with a grade appeal are required to maintain the confidentiality of the proceedings and of all materials presented.