

Official Process and Format for a Communication Course Grade Grievance Approved by the Communication Faculty 5-2-12

By the authority of UWM Faculty Document 1243: “A student may appeal a grade on the grounds that it is based on a capricious or arbitrary decision of the course instructor. Such an appeal shall follow the established procedures adopted by the department, college, or school in which the course resides.”

The Department of Communication follows the College of Letters and Science Grievance/Grade Appeal Procedure (attached to this document and available at: http://www4.uwm.edu/lets/upload/grievance_procedure.pdf), which proceeds through the following steps. No step may be waived or skipped by a party to the appeal.

Pre-Formal Grade Grievance Step “Informal Resolution of Grievance/Grade Appeal”:

As the L&S policy states, many situations that students perceive as a reason to file a grievance are based on misunderstandings or incomplete information. With additional informal communication that focuses upon clarification and explanation, it may be possible to resolve many complaints BEFORE any grievance is filed. To facilitate the resolution of cases at an earlier stage, the student and instructional staff member—with the assistance of the Department’s Grievance Officer, if desired—must attempt to resolve the situation informally before the student files a formal grievance.

Step 1 of Filing a Formal Grievance – Written Appeal, Written Response, and Mediation

1. Within 30 days of the action prompting the appeal or grievance and after the parties have sought to resolve the issue informally (with the help of the Department’s Grievance Officer or his/her designee, if desired), the student files with the Grievance Officer or his/her designee a written statement (in the form of a Word document) that includes all of the following information arranged in the format shown on page three of this document; attach any supporting documents:
 - A description of the relevant facts surrounding the appeal/grievance
 - A specific proposal of the actions that will resolve the problem to the student’s satisfaction
 - A statement regarding why the proposed remedy is justified and appropriate
2. The instructor will be provided a copy of the student’s written grievance and will prepare a written response and attach any supporting documents. The Department’s Grievance Officer or his/her designee will give a copy of this document (minus any FERPA protected materials) to the student.
3. Based on the written grievance and written response, a mediator from the department will meet jointly or individually (face-to-face or via some mutually acceptable medium, such as telephone, Skype, email, etc.) with all parties in an effort to resolve the problem and will prepare a written “mediation report” of the results of his/her mediation efforts that will be kept on file in the department along with the statement of appeal and the instructor’s response. *****This**

process is separate from the informal attempts at resolution that preceded the formal filing of a grievance and only occurs once a written statement of appeal has been filed with the department and the instructor's written response submitted.

4. If the proposed resolution or another resolution that is worked out during the mediation is agreeable, the student will be asked to formally indicate that the matter is resolved. If no resolution that is agreeable to both the instructor and the student can be reached, the process moves to Step 2.

Step 2 of Filing a Formal Grievance – Department Appeals Committee

1. A departmental appeals committee will be convened, be given the student's written statement of appeal, the instructor's written response, and the mediation report, and hear the appeal/grievance. Before the hearing, either party may add an addendum to his or her original statement, which will be shared with all parties.

In the spirit of due process yet consistent with FERPA privacy protections, all parties shall be given access to non-protected documents presented as evidence by any party.

2. The committee will gather and consider all information it deems appropriate, afford the student and instructor an opportunity to present their cases, and recommend a course of action.

3. Since Step 2 occurs only after attempts at mediating for mutual understanding and a commonly agreeable resolution have failed, the committee's recommendation usually will be limited to upholding or overturning the grade in question.

4. A written committee report will be given to both the instructor and the student and a copy will be retained with the department's file on the grievance.

5. If the committee's recommendation is agreeable to both the instructor and the student, each will be asked to indicate formally that the matter is resolved. If the committee's recommendation is unacceptable to either the student or instructor or if no decision is reached, the process moves to Step 3.

Step 3 of Filing a Formal Grievance – Decision by the Associate Dean of Humanities

1. Within 10 working days of receiving a copy of the departmental appeals committee's written report, either the student or the instructor may request that the appeal/grievance be referred to the Office of the Associate Dean for the Humanities.

2. The Associate Dean will review all documents, independently consider all information s/he deems appropriate, afford the student and the instructor an opportunity to present their cases, and decide on a course of action.

3. The decision of the Associate Dean on the matter is final.

Grievance/Appeal Format

Department of Communication

Date: _____

Student Name: _____ Student ID: _____

Email Address: _____ Phone: _____

Course _____ Instructor _____

To provide background information about the grievance, please prepare a Word Document that addresses in order each of the following four items (usually a paragraph or two per item). Submit any relevant supporting documents with the written appeal (for example, returned assignments with instructor feedback, copies of emails or text messages, discussion/chat threads from D2L, etc.)

- A. Please provide a description of the relevant facts surrounding the appeal/grievance. In doing this, explain details about the topic of the disagreement, the timeline of events, and other relevant background.
- B. In your interactions with the instructor, what were the reasons that you were given for the disagreement? For example, if you disagree with a grade on an assignment, what were the instructor's reasons for providing that grade?
- C. What is a solution that would address your grievance? Although a grievance committee may or may not regard this solution as acceptable, please describe what you see as an outcome that would address your concerns.
- D. How does the solution identified above remedy the situation in an appropriate manner? That is, why does the solution justly address the concerns that you have about the subject of the disagreement?

COLLEGE OF LETTERS AND SCIENCE GRIEVANCE/GRADE APPEAL PROCEDURE

Informal Resolution of Grievance/Grade Appeal

According to UWM Policies and Procedures 1.02(1), “the University Faculty has charge of all educational matters which concern more than one college, school or division, or which are otherwise of general interest.” UWM Policies and Procedures 2.03(1) states that the College Faculty has the duty and power “to control matters involving scholarship, including the advancement of students, and dismissal for defective scholarship.” For each course, the Faculty (in S-28 of “Selected Academic and Administrative Policies”) has invested in the individual instructor of record for a course the responsibility for evaluating student work in the class and assigning grades. Faculty members, graduate teaching assistants (GTAs), or other instructional staff also may interact with students in the classroom or in the advising process. On certain occasions, students may experience actions on the part of a faculty member, GTA, or other instructional staff member assigned to the course that cause the student to consider filing a grievance or grade appeal. Many such situations arise as the result of misunderstanding or incomplete information. The majority of situations in which students consider taking a formal action are resolved informally. If the situation involves a teaching assistant, the student first should discuss the situation with the TA. If the situation is not resolved to the student’s satisfaction, the student should discuss the matter with the supervising instructor for the course. If the difficulty cannot be resolved informally, the student has thirty (30) working days from the date of the instructor’s action to initiate a formal appeal as indicated below. Therefore, efforts to reach an informal resolution should be initiated as soon as possible.

Formal Grievance/Grade Appeal Procedure

Step 1 Within thirty (30) working days from the date of the action prompting the appeal or grievance, the student may file with the chair of the department or his/her designee a written statement of appeal. The statement should describe relevant facts surrounding the appeal/grievance and identify actions that will resolve the problem to the student's satisfaction. In response to this statement, the chair or designee will meet jointly or individually with all parties in an effort to resolve the problem and will prepare a written “mediation report” of the results of his/her mediation efforts. Additionally, the chair or designee will issue a status report on the resolution progress via email to all parties every 15 working days until the written “mediation” report is completed. Concerns about lack of progress or reporting may be referred to the Office of the Associate Dean for humanities, natural sciences, or social sciences, as appropriate. The mediation report will be given to both the student and the instructor, and both the statement of appeal and the mediation report will be retained in the department’s files. If a proposed resolution is agreeable, the student will be asked to indicate formally that the matter is resolved. If the proposed resolution is not acceptable to either the student or the instructor, or if no resolution has been proposed, then the process continues to Step 2.

- Step 2 If the situation is not resolved in the Step 1 process, the student or the instructor may request, within ten (10) working days of receiving a copy of the written mediation report, that the chair or designee send the appeal/grievance to an existing departmental appeals committee. If none exists, the chair or designee will appoint a committee to hear the appeal/grievance. The committee will gather and consider all information it deems appropriate, afford the student and the instructor an opportunity to present their cases, and recommend a course of action in its own report. The chair of the appeals committee will issue a status report on the committee's progress via email to all parties every 15 working days until the written committee report is completed. Concerns about lack of progress or reporting may be referred to the Office of the Associate Dean for humanities, natural sciences, or social sciences, as appropriate. The committee report will be given to both the student and the instructor, and a copy will be retained in the department's files. If a proposed resolution is agreeable, the student and instructor will be asked to indicate formally that the matter is resolved. If the proposed resolution is not acceptable to either the student or the instructor, or if no resolution has been proposed, then the process continues to Step 3. Both the student and the instructor will be informed that the decision arising from Step 3 is final.
- Step 3 If the situation is not resolved in the Step 2 process, the student or the instructor may request, within ten (10) working days of receiving a copy of the written report from the departmental committee, that the appeal/grievance be referred to the Office of the Associate Dean for humanities, natural sciences, or social sciences, as appropriate. The Associate Dean will review all documents, independently consider all information s/he deems appropriate, afford the student and the instructor an opportunity to present their cases, and decide on a course of action. The Associate Dean or designee will issue a status report on her/his investigation via email to all parties every 15 working days until s/he reaches a decision. Concerns about lack of progress or reporting may be referred to the Office of the Dean of the College of Letters and Science. Following evaluation at this level, the decision of the Associate Dean is final.

While due consideration will be given to summer or other recess periods, failure by the student or the instructor to meet any of the prescribed deadlines terminates the appeal procedure, and the decision at the previous appeal level stands.

Approved: L&S Academic Policy and Appeals Committee, November 29, 2000
L&S Faculty Document No. 579 (Revised), February 8, 2001
Revised: L&S Academic Policies and Curriculum Committee, September 24, 2010
L&S Faculty Document No. 857, November 4, 2010
N:CJ-KR/Policies/L&S Academic Policies/Grievance Procedure