

## Grade Grievance Policies and Procedures – Do’s and Don’ts

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At some time in your faculty career, you may have a grade that you have given a student challenged, or grieved. Reasons for students to grieve grades may vary, but the procedure for dealing with them does not. The following is a description of the process that should be followed by both you and the student, should that student have an issue with a grade you have assigned. (The full Grade Grievance Policy may be found in the *Off-Campus Bulletin, 2008-2009*, page 33.)

**Step 1:** The student should try to talk with you first (contact needs to be made with you no later than 30 days after the course grade is made available). Please make time to listen to them. Often, grievances occur because students cannot gain audience with the instructor to discuss their issue and feel there is no other recourse but to engage the process. When you have this meeting, listen calmly, ask appropriate questions, and take clear notes. No one enjoys being challenged, but remember that you are the instructor and you want to maintain a professional stance.

**Step 2:** If the student does not feel that his/her situation has been resolved by talking with you, s/he should then notify both you and the Program Director in writing, to indicate that s/he wishes to proceed with a grade grievance. Once the Director has determined that the student followed Step 1, s/he will notify you that the student has engaged the process. The Director will then set up a time for a telephone conference call between you, the student, and the Director, the purpose of which is to allow the two of you another opportunity to work things out. The Director makes no decision or determination; s/he simply facilitates the conversation and may pose questions to help clarify the situation.

**Step 3:** If the situation is not resolved with the telephone conference call, the student may decide whether to proceed to step three. If they choose to do so, the Program Director will forward the grievance and all documentation provided by both parties to the program council or to the relevant department. The council or department will examine all available documentation for evidence of capricious grading and will make a final determination, which will then be communicated back to you, the student, and the Program Director.

What constitutes capricious grading? Capricious grading consists of any of the following: (a) the assignment of a grade to a particular student on some basis other than her or his performance in the course; (b) the assignment of a grade to a particular student that resorts to more exacting or demanding standards than were applied to other students in that course; it is understood that standards for graduate credit may be different from standards for undergraduate credit; (c) the assignment of a grade by a substantial departure from the instructor’s previously announced standards. (*Off-Campus Bulletin, 2008-2009*, page 33.)

**IMPORTANT NOTE: DO NOT** share information about a student’s grievance or their grade with others, especially not with other students in the same class. This is not only a breach of confidentiality, but

violates FERPA (Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act) as well. Such breaches of confidentiality could result in discontinuation of your employment with the university.

The best grade grievance is none at all, so how can you avoid getting into these circumstances? Here are some helpful tips to keep in mind:

**Communication is KEY:** In your first class meeting, share your expectations with students regarding attendance and participation; if you intend to include participation as part of the course grade, provide them with clear standards for how they will be evaluated. Help students to know what full participation looks and sounds like – rubrics can help! Let students know how you will evaluate the assignments for the course; help students to see how the assignments speak to the course learning outcomes. Take a little time in the first class meeting to review any policies and procedures that you have included in your syllabus. The more connections you make to help students see relevance to their learning, the better!

**Provide substantive feedback on assignments.** All students deserve to know how they earned a particular grade, and this is even more salient with adult learners. Many grade grievances arise simply by virtue of the fact that students have not been provided with a sound basis for how they were evaluated. Again, let students know how you intend to evaluate them, and then follow through with that. Means for evaluating work must be consistent for all students so again, I highly recommend rubrics for this purpose. The principal criterion by which grade grievances are determined is whether or not the grading was capricious. If you assign grades arbitrarily, or do not follow what is stated in your syllabus, you may be guilty of capricious grading.

**Documentation is critical.** Students and instructors can easily get into a “he said/she said” kind of situation. Keep good clear notes on your assignments, and on your interactions with students, so that should a question or issue arise, you have that information to back you up.

Following these simple guidelines for your teaching practices can help you to avoid having grades grieved. However, if you do find yourself in a grievance situation, please remember that there is a process in place to ensure that both you and the student are treated fairly.

If you have any questions regarding the policy or the process, or if you would like more information on rubrics , please feel free to contact me at [cochr1jp@cmich.edu](mailto:cochr1jp@cmich.edu)..

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