

UNIVERSITY OF ALASKA ANCHORAGE
College of Health and Social Welfare

RESOLUTION OF DISPUTES INVOLVING ACADEMIC DECISIONS OR ACTIONS

Authority:

Academic units within the College of Health and Social Welfare (CHSW) comply with University of Alaska Anchorage policies and procedures for Academic Dispute Resolution defined in the UAA Course Catalog Academic Policies; derived from UA Board of Regents policies (P09.03.01-04) and regulations (R09.03.01-02). These policies and procedures are developed to provide fair and expeditious procedures for students to contest actions or decisions that adversely affect them. Examples of decisions that students can challenge include grades, admissions decisions and dismissal from a program of study for academic reasons. All parties are referred to the UAA Catalog for a full description of the policies and procedures.

Definitions Applicable to Academic Disputes

Definitions: The following terms are defined specifically for this policy and related procedures:

- a. Academic Decision Review Committee: This Committee is an ad hoc Committee appointed by the Dean of CHSW or designee to review contested academic decisions or actions.

A College-Wide Academic Decision Review Committee is composed of four full-time faculty, one of whom serves as a non-voting committee chair and one non-voting student representative. Up to two faculty members are from the academic unit in which the appeal originates. One of these individuals serves as the committee chair. Additional faculty are selected from other academic units within the college.

The student representative shall be a student enrolled in a program/specialty other than the one in which the complainant student is enrolled. The student member of the committee will be appointed by the campus student government president from a list of students recommended by the CHSW Dean/designee. To be eligible, the student must be currently enrolled in at least three credits, in good disciplinary standing, with a cumulative GPA of 3.0 or higher.

If the academic decision being challenged is for a graduate course or program, the faculty appointed will be from academic units that have graduate programs. The student committee member will be a graduate student.

- b. Arbitrary and Capricious Grading: Arbitrary and capricious grading means the assignment of a grade on the basis of something other than the student's performance in the course or the use of standards different from those applied to other students enrolled in the same course; or substantial, unreasonable, and/or unannounced departure from the previously articulated standards or criteria announced by the instructor.

- c. Class Day: A class day is any day during which the University delivers scheduled instruction, including days during the final examination period but excluding Saturdays and Sundays. The term class day **does not** refer to the specific days that a particular class is normally scheduled to meet.
- d. Course Completion: Course completion refers to the date when the course is scheduled to end. Course completion for some courses does not necessarily coincide with the end of the regular semester.
- e. Days: The term “days” always refers to class days (see definition above).
- f. Final Grade: The final grade is the grade assigned for a course upon its completion.
- g. Grading Error: A grading error is a mathematical miscalculation of the final grade or the inaccurate recording of the final grade.
- h. Next Regular Semester: The next regular semester is the fall or spring semester following that in which the disputed academic decision was made. For academic decisions made in Spring or Summer course offerings, the subsequent fall term constitutes the “next regular semester”; for academic decisions made in Fall course offerings, the subsequent spring term constitutes the “next regular semester”.
- i. Timely: Within the time frames outlined in this policy. *With regard to academic decisions involving a final grade, a student who wishes to make uninterrupted progression towards graduation in the event of a resolution of the dispute in the student’s favor should initiate the resolution process within 15 days of learning of the failing grade.* The semester class schedule lists the date the final grades are available. Students are advised to learn their final grades through Wolfline or Enrollment Services and initiate a review, where desired, as soon as possible. *A student who wishes to delay initiation of the process to the next regular semester should be aware that s/he may not be able to re-enter required course work for an additional semester, even if the decision is in his/her favor, due to having already missed a significant amount of content or number of class sessions.*

Policy:

Students may challenge academic actions or decisions by faculty or the academic administration of the relevant program when that decision or action is arbitrary and capricious or erroneous.

When an academic decision or action by a member of the faculty or academic administration is disputed, informal resolution procedures will be carried out, where possible.

All informal review processes must occur within the academic unit in the timeline prescribed by UAA policy. Formal reviews may be managed within the academic unit or referred to the Dean's Office for a college-wide review process. The Director/Chair of the academic unit will either refer the student to the Dean's office for a CHSW review or provide the student with information on how to request a formal review within the academic unit. The decision of whether to refer a review to the college level resides with the Director/Chair. In the case of a college-wide review, the Director/Chair must provide the Dean's Office with a copy of a notice to the student that an informal resolution has not been reached and instructions for initiating a formal review process in the CHSW Dean's Office.

Obligations of the Student with the Dispute: A student who wishes to resolve an academic dispute is required to:

1. Give notice of the desire to implement the dispute resolution policy by discussing disagreement with the final grade with the course instructor or program chairperson in a timely manner (within 15 class days of learning of the final grade or sooner to facilitate steady progression in the program of study; within a maximum of 15 class days of the next regular semester if steady progression is not a concern) and
2. Make a good faith effort to resolve the dispute using the informal dispute resolution procedure prior to requesting the implementation of the formal dispute resolution procedure.

Note: Because of the potential that the receipt of a failing grade in a required course may prevent enrollment in subsequent required courses, ultimately extending the time to graduation, students are strongly urged to implement dispute resolution procedures as soon as possible after learning of the grade under dispute. When the maximum time limits specified in this policy are strictly adhered to, even if a dispute is resolved in favor of the student, the decision may occur too late to enable the student to enroll in the next required course in the program of study during the next semester.

Obligations of the CHSW Faculty and Administration: Once a faculty member or the academic administration is notified of the existence of an academic dispute, faculty and administrators are obligated to:

1. Activate dispute resolution procedures in a timely manner (within five class days of notification of the student's disagreement with the final grade);
2. Make a good faith effort to resolve the dispute using the informal procedure.

Description of Academic Decisions or Actions Leading to Implementation of Dispute Resolution

Procedures: Dispute resolution procedures may be activated for the following reasons:

- 1) actions or decisions by faculty alleged to involve arbitrary and capricious grading or grading error;
- 2) actions involving the denial of admission to an academic program;
- 3) actions involving the dismissal of the student from an academic program.

It should be noted that admission, progression, and retention *criteria* as well as course requirements, policies, and grading standards are matters reserved to the faculty. Such matters are inappropriate targets of disputes and will not lead to implementation of the dispute resolution procedures.

Procedures:

General Provisions:

1. Students may challenge a grade or academic decision on the basis of alleged grading error or arbitrary and capricious grading.
2. Because grades may affect such things as a student's ability to progress to the next course in a sequence, eligibility for financial aid, or eligibility to participate in selected University activities (e.g., athletic team participation), students are strongly urged to learn their grades in a timely manner and to initiate dispute resolution procedures (if desired) as soon as possible after learning of the final grade.
3. Maximum time schedules within which the processes must be completed are included within this procedure; extensions must be requested in writing by the student and, if sufficient justification is provided, may be granted by the Dean of CHSW or designee; determination of sufficient justification will be at the discretion of the Dean of CHSW or designee. The time limits specified in this policy are **maximum** time limits; they may be shortened at the request of the student and with the agreement of the involved faculty member.
4. When the academic decision under dispute would prevent the student's progression into a subsequent course in the student's program of study, the student may not enroll in the subsequent courses for which the course under dispute is prerequisite until the dispute resolution process is completed.
5. During the review of an action or decision by the university, the action or decision being contested will remain in effect until the dispute is resolved. Should an academic action or decision affect the student's eligibility for financial aid, housing, or other university service, the student will be informed of the steps to be taken that may maintain or reinstate the affected service. The student will be responsible for initiating any necessary actions or procedures relative to the maintenance or reinstatement of services.

6. Unless an extension has been granted by the Dean of CHSW or designee, disputes concerning academic actions must be completed by the next regular semester following the term in which the disputed action occurred. Requests for extension must be submitted in writing to the Dean of CHSW.

Academic Dispute Resolution Procedures Involving Final Grade Assignment

Informal Procedures

1. Where possible, the student will be expected to first request an informal resolution of the final grade assignment with the course instructor; requests may be made verbally, by e-mail, or by letter.
2. The process must be initiated by the 15th class day of the next regular semester; students wishing to make continued steady progress toward program completion are strongly advised to initiate the process by the 15th class day after learning of the final grade.
3. The course instructor must respond to the request within five class days of receipt.
4. If the instructor's decision is to change the final grade, the instructor must promptly initiate the process.
5. If the instructor does not change the grade and the student's concerns remain unresolved, the student may notify the program chairperson of the dispute; such notification must occur within five class days of the receipt of the instructor's decision to not change the grade.
6. Within five class days of receiving notification, the program chairperson must either work with the student and the instructor to effect a resolution of the dispute or provide the student with written notification of the process for formally appealing the final grade assignment.
7. Alternative informal procedures:
 - a. If the course instructor is not reachable within the specified time frame, the informal procedure shall be initiated with the program chairperson.
 - b. If the course instructor and the program chair are unavailable within the specified time frame, the informal procedure shall be initiated with the CHSW Dean or designee.
 - c. It should be noted that the only individuals who are able to change a grade are the course instructor who initially awarded the grade or an Academic Decision Review Committee (see formal procedure). If the instructor is no longer employed by the University, the Program Chairperson must either effect resolution of the issue through contact with the course instructor or inform the student of the process for formally appealing the final grade assignment.

Formal Procedures for Academic Dispute Resolution Referred to the CHSW Dean's Office

1. Formal reviews may be managed within the academic unit or referred to the Dean's Office for a college-wide review process. The Director/Chair of the academic unit will either refer the student to the Dean's office for a CHSW review or provide the student with information on how to request a formal review within the academic unit. The decision of whether to refer a review to the college level resides with the Director/Chair. In the case of a college-wide review, the Director/Chair must provide the Dean's Office with a copy of a notice to the student that an informal resolution has not been reached and instructions for initiating a formal review process in the CHSW Dean's Office.
2. The request for initiation of the formal procedure for dispute resolution must be submitted to the Dean of CHSW in writing within five class days of the receipt of notification of the outcome of the informal process by the program chairperson.
3. The request for initiation of formal procedures shall include the following:
 - a. Specific academic decision being reviewed
 - b. Basis of the dispute (i.e., evidence of arbitrary and capricious behavior by the course instructor or of grading error).
4. The CHSW Dean shall convene an Academic Decision Review Committee and will forward the student's written request to the Committee Chair within three class days of receiving the written request.
5. The Committee Chair will convene the Committee within 10 class days of the receipt of the student's written request.
6. Academic Decision Review Committee Activities
 - a. Initial Considerations
 - 1) The Committee shall first consider whether the facts submitted by the student warrant a formal hearing. The student and course instructor must be notified in writing at least three class days in advance of the time and place of the meeting at which the student's request will be considered and of the process to be followed.
 - 2) If the Committee determines that the facts, as presented, do not constitute arbitrary and capricious grading or grading error, the Committee will dismiss the case without a formal hearing.
 - 3) The Committee Chair shall submit the Committee's decision in writing by the Chair to the student, the course instructor, the program chairperson, and the CHSW Dean within three class days of the Committee meeting.

4) This decision shall constitute the final decision of the university.

b. Formal Hearings

- 1) If the Academic Decision Review Committee determines that the facts, as presented, may constitute arbitrary or capricious grading or a grading error, the committee will proceed to a formal hearing.
- 2) The Committee Chair shall inform the student and the course instructor in writing at least three class days in advance of the date, time, and place of the formal hearing.
- 3) At the hearing, the Committee shall consider information provided by the student, by the instructor, and by others as it sees fit.
- 4) Academic Decision Review Committee hearings will normally be closed to all parties except the committee members, the student and the course instructor.
 - a) Requests for an open proceeding must be made to the Committee Chair in writing prior to the start of the hearing by a party to the dispute (the student or the course instructor).
 - b) Such requests shall be granted to the extent allowed by law unless the Committee Chair determines that all or part of a proceeding should be closed, based on considerations of fairness, justice, or other relevant factors.
 - c) Either party to the dispute may choose to have an advisor present at all times during the hearing; however, the advisor may not speak on behalf of the party.
 - d) Either party may suggest potential witnesses to provide information to the Committee; such suggestions shall include a description of the type and relevance of the information that the witness may be expected to provide.
 - e) The Committee may direct that witness, but not the parties or their advisors, be excluded from the hearing except during their testimony.
- 5) The deliberations of the Committee will be closed to the public, the parties, and their advisors.

6) Academic Decision Review Committee Decisions

- a) The Academic Decision Review Committee proceedings will result in the preparation of written findings and conclusions. Conclusions will result in one of the following:
 - (1) the request for the grade change is denied
 - (2) the request for the grade change is upheld and the Committee requests the course instructor to change the grade and the course instructor does so; or
 - (3) the request for the grade change is upheld and the course instructor is either unavailable to change the grade or refuses to do so; the Review Committee will then direct the program chairperson or the CHSW Dean to change the grade.
- b) The decision of the Academic Decision Review Committee constitutes the final decision of the university and will be provided in writing to the student, the course instructor, the program chairperson, and the CHSW Dean. The Committee Chair is responsible for the preparation of a record of the hearing.

Procedures for Resolving Disputes Regarding Denial of Admission to or Dismissal From a Program of Study for Academic Reasons

A student formally requesting a review of a denial of admission to or dismissal from a program for academic reasons must provide the CHSW Dean a signed, written request for a formal review, indicating the basis for requesting a review.

The request must be filed by the 20th class day of the next regular semester or within five (5) class days of receipt of notification of the process for filing a formal review by the program chair after completion of any informal review. The only exception will be when written permission for an extension of time is granted by the Dean of CHSW.

Formal reviews and hearing of academic decisions involving denial of admission to or dismissal from a program of study for academic reasons will be conducted by an Academic Decision Review Committee according to the same timelines and procedures for academic disputes regarding arbitrary and capricious grading or grading error with the following exceptions:

1. The Academic Decision Review Committee proceedings will result in the preparation of written findings and recommendations to the CHSW Dean and the student. The Committee Chair will be responsible for the preparation of the record of the hearing.
2. The student will be given the opportunity to comment on the findings and recommendations of the committee. Written comments must be submitted to the CHSW

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Dean or designee within seven (7) class days of the day that the committee findings and recommendations are sent to the student.

3. The Dean or designee will review the written findings and recommendations of the Academic Decision Review Committee, the record of the hearing, and any written comments submitted by the student and make a decision. The Dean's decision will constitute the final decision of the University on the matter and will be provided in writing to the student, the Program Chair, and the Committee.
4. The Dean will make the final decision of the university on the matter if the Dean of CHSW is the person who made the academic decision under review.

STEPS IN THE DISPUTE RESOLUTION PROCESS - ASSIGNMENT OF FINAL GRADE

STEP	REQUIRED ACTION	TIME LIMITS
1	Student receives notification of final course grade; notification may occur in writing from the instructor to the student, in a conference between the student and instructor, or via Wolfile following posting of grades, whichever occurs first .	
2	Student notifies instructor of disagreement with final grade by requesting an appointment verbally or in writing (but not by voice mail). If the student is unable to contact the instructor, notice is given to the Program Chairperson or in the Chairperson's absence, to the Dean of CHSW.	Within 15 class days of next regular semester; to facilitate steady progress to program completion, within 15 class days of final grade notification
3	Instructor meets with student to discuss the request for change of academic decision.	Within 5 class days of request for grade change
4	Instructor provides written response to student's request for a change in the academic decision under dispute. If the dispute is resolved in the student's favor, instructor initiates change in academic decision (usually submits a grade change).	Within 5 class days of meeting with student.
5	If the dispute remains unresolved, student requests continuation of informal resolution processes in writing to the Program Chairperson.	Within 5 class days of notification by instructor.
5a	Program Chairperson either effects a resolution or provides student with notice of the process for initiating formal dispute resolution processes. Copy of notice is forwarded to the Dean's Office.	Within 5 class days of notification by student.
6	If the dispute remains unresolved, student notifies CHSW Dean of desire to initiate formal dispute resolution processes in writing.	Within 5 class days of notification by program chair.
7	Dean appoints Dispute Resolution Committee and forwards the student's complaint to the Committee Chair.	Within 3 class days of notification by student
8	Committee Chair notifies student and instructor of date of planned meeting of Committee.	Within 7 class days of appointment of committee
9	Committee Chair convenes Committee to consider whether facts submitted by student constitute a basis to convene a formal hearing. At the meeting, the Committee determines whether the evidence provided by the student merits movement to a formal hearing.	No less than 3 class days of notification of student & instructor of meeting date and within 10 class days of appointment of the Committee.
10	Committee Chair communicates Committee decision to all parties in writing. If decision is that there is no basis to the student's complaint, the matter is ended. If the decision is to proceed to a formal hearing, the Committee Chair will schedule the hearing and notify all parties to the dispute of the date.	Within 3 class days of Committee meeting and decision.
11	Committee Chair convenes formal hearing; Committee hears information provided by the student, the instructor, and others (as it sees fit). The parties to the dispute may be present for the hearing but will be excluded during deliberations of the Committee.	Not less than 3 class days following notification of all parties and no more than 10 class days following original Committee meeting (Step 9)
12	Committee arrives at decision and communicates that decision to all parties and to the CHSW Dean.	Within 3 class days of conclusion of the hearing.
13	CHSW Dean directs the implementation of the Committee decision.	Within 3 class days of notification.

Individual(s) responsible for taking action within each step is indicated by **bold face** type

* All time frames may be compressed **except** those relating to notification of parties to the dispute of the dates of Academic Dispute Resolution Review Committee meetings; in no case will the Committee meeting occur less than three days following notification of the parties to the dispute.