

FACULTY MEETING
April 9, 2010

COMMITTEE ON EDUCATIONAL POLICIES AND PLANNING
MOTION ON POLICY TO APPEAL A FINAL FAILING GRADE

MOVED: That the Skidmore College faculty:

- A) adopt the Policy to Appeal a Final Failing Grade stated below;
- B) amend the Faculty Handbook to incorporate the policy as indicated below;
- C) direct that the College Catalog be revised in accord with the policy, as indicated below;
- D) recommend that the *Student Academic Handbook* and other print and electronic publications accord with and refer to the Policy to Appeal a Final Failing Grade language appearing in the Faculty Handbook.

RATIONALE

In May of 2007, the Committee on Academic Freedom and Rights (CAFR) requested of the Dean of Faculty, the Associate Dean of Faculty for Academic Advising, the Committee on Academic Standing (CAS) and the Committee on Educational Policies and Planning (CEPP) that they take up the issue of grade appeal. In the fall of 2008 CEPP, CAS, and CAFR formed a joint subcommittee to draft a grade appeal policy. This process of consultation has led to the present motion.

The principle of fairness and the educational purpose of assigning grades require a clear and effective means of settling grade disputes. At present, statements addressing this matter in the Faculty Handbook and the Student Academic Handbook are inconsistent. Appropriate channels for appeal are unclear. While CAFR may hear any appeal based on a violation of rights, CAFR does not have authority to change a grade. Further confusion may result from the adoption in spring 2008 of Part Six of the Faculty Handbook, which refers to “unfair grading or evaluation of performance or assignments” as one form of retaliation prohibited under Part Six, VIII, C.

The present motion provides a clear statement of policy and procedure, promotes consistent communication of the policy, and recognizes the final authority of CAS to determine a change in grade. Students are assured of effective redress in cases where a claim is found to be justified. The limitation of claims to final course grades protects faculty against excessive intervention in an area where their judgment and authority are primary.

TEXTS

A. Policy to Appeal a Final Failing Grade

Preamble

Instructors are responsible for clearly articulating the basis for determining students' grades. Sharing the basis for grades is essential to ensure fair and equitable treatment of students and their work. A student has the right to be informed in a timely and clear manner of the basis for the evaluation of his or her academic performance in a course, and a student is entitled to fair, equitable treatment in his or her academic relationships with members of the faculty. In most, if not all instances, the College expects any misunderstanding regarding grading will be resolved informally, either in writing or in discussions, between a student and an instructor. The following appeal process is only for final failing grades.

Appeal Process

A student who believes that he or she has a legitimate grievance that his or her coursework has been evaluated in a prejudicial or capricious manner in the calculation of his or her final failing grade should first make a request in writing to the faculty member involved to confirm that no computational or clerical error has been made. The student must make this request not later than two weeks from the start of the following semester. The instructor must respond to the student in writing within two weeks of receipt of the request. Ideally, the student and faculty member should then meet to discuss the final grade in question. If the communication between the instructor and student results in the instructor requesting to change a grade, then the instructor must submit a petition to change the grade to the Associate Dean of Faculty for Academic Advising and the petition must be brought before the Committee on Academic Standing (CAS) for consideration. If the student is studying away from Skidmore College in the following semester, or if the faculty member is on leave in the following semester, the request for an explanation still must be filed within two weeks after the start of that semester. But, if the student or the faculty member makes the request, the appeal process may be deferred by the Dean of Faculty and the Associate Dean of Faculty for Academic Advising until the student returns to his or her studies on campus or the faculty member returns from leave.

If the student is not satisfied with the instructor's explanation, or if a meeting with the faculty member was not possible or not advised, or if the instructor did not respond within two weeks of receipt of the student's request, then the student may report the grievance in writing with supporting documentation to the appropriate department chair (in the case of an ID course, to the chair of the faculty member who has assigned the grade) or program director and submit a copy of the report to the Dean of Faculty and the Associate Dean of Faculty for Academic Advising. If the instructor is the department chair or program director, the request may be addressed to the Dean of Faculty. The student must make this request within four weeks after having sent his or her initial request for an explanation from the instructor. The student's supporting documentation must provide evidence of prejudicial or capricious grading. In particular, the student must provide evidence of one or more of the following conditions:

- a. The instructor used inappropriate criteria in determining a final failing grade.

- b. The instructor assigned a grade on some basis other than performance in the course.
- c. The instructor did not adhere to stated procedures or grading standards.

The appropriate department chair or program director must respond to the student in writing within two weeks of receipt of the request. The department chair or program director will contact the instructor to obtain an explanation of the criteria and standards used in evaluating the student's course work. If, after consultation with the faculty member (when possible) and after a review of the written evidence, the appropriate department chair or program director finds legitimate cause for the complaint, he or she will try to work toward an equitable solution with the student and faculty member. If the solution results in the instructor requesting to change a grade, then the instructor must submit a petition to change the grade with the Associate Dean of Faculty for Academic Advising and the petition must be brought before the CAS for consideration.

If the appropriate department chair or program director concludes there is no cause for the complaint, or if there is a disagreement between the appropriate department chair or program director and the faculty member, the student may request in writing a review by the Dean of Faculty and the Associate Dean of Faculty for Academic Advising, the faculty member, and the appropriate department chair or program director. The request must be submitted to the Dean of the Faculty and the Associate Dean of Faculty for Academic Advising by the end of the semester following the semester in which the grade was awarded.

The written request must include a full account of the incident or circumstances giving rise to the complaint of prejudicial or capricious grading. If the Dean of Faculty and the Associate Dean of Faculty for Academic Advising conclude there is no cause for complaint, the Dean of Faculty will inform the student, the instructor, and the appropriate department chair or program director in writing that the appeal has been denied. If, however, the review results in the instructor requesting to change a grade, then the instructor must submit a petition to change the grade with the Associate Dean of Faculty for Academic Advising and the petition must be brought before the CAS for consideration.

If the Dean of Faculty and the Associate Dean of Faculty for Academic Advising recommend changing the final failing grade to a passing letter grade, and if the faculty member who gave the original grade objects to changing the final failing grade to a passing letter grade, then the Dean of Faculty, in consultation with the Associate Dean of Faculty for Academic Advising and the department chair or program director, may recommend to the faculty member changing the grade to Satisfactory.

If the faculty member rejects the recommendation of the Dean of Faculty, Associate Dean of Faculty for Academic Advising, and the appropriate department chair or program director, to change the final failing grade to a passing grade or to Satisfactory, the Dean of Faculty, with the Associate Dean of Faculty for Academic Advising, may submit a petition to change the grade to the CAS for consideration. Only the faculty representatives on CAS have the authority to change the final failing grade to Satisfactory, and only following a vote where the majority of those faculty representatives on CAS approves the change.

A student's failure to meet time limits will result in denial of the student's appeal. If the faculty member, department chair, program director or dean fails to meet a deadline, the appeal will move to the next level.

B. Faculty Handbook amendment: Part Two, III

C . Grading

[Current Handbook language:]

1. These policies are printed in the College Bulletin and may change only by vote of the Faculty.
2. Grades should be submitted to the Registrar according to a schedule set by the Registrar. Faculty members are asked to record grades on official forms, either paper or electronic, available from the Registrar.
3. If an instructor has made a computational or clerical error, he/she may request a change in the student's grade. No grade may be changed on the basis of re-examination or supplementary work. Petitions to change grades must originate with the faculty members concerned and be brought before the Committee on Academic Standing for consideration.

[Proposed new Handbook language:]

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2. Grades should be submitted to the Registrar according to a schedule set by the Registrar. Faculty members are asked to record grades on official forms, either paper or electronic, available from the Registrar.
3. If an instructor has made a computational error, he/she may request a change in the student's grade. No grade may be changed on the basis of ~~re-examination~~ ~~re-testing~~ or supplementary work. **Except in the circumstances outlined in the Policy to Appeal a Final Failing Grade (Part Two, III, D),** petitions to change grades must originate with the faculty members concerned and be brought before the Committee on Academic Standing for consideration.

D. **Policy to Appeal a Final Failing Grade** (text to be inserted following adoption of A above)

Current D and E to be relettered E and F

C. College Catalog revision

[Current Catalog language:]

Grade Change

All grades are considered final once they are submitted to the Office of the Registrar. An instructor may request a change in the student's grade only if the instructor has made a computational or clerical error (or if an academic integrity infraction requires a change in the course grade). No grade may be changed on the basis of reexamination, reevaluation, or supplementary work. Petitions to change grades must originate with the faculty members concerned and be brought before the Committee on Academic Standing for consideration.

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D. Other College publications

The *Student Academic Handbook* and other print and electronic publications should accord with and refer to the Grade Appeal Policy language appearing in the Faculty Handbook.