

Biophysics Program Grade Grievance Policy

Introduction

The faculty of the Biophysics Program strongly believes that the determination of the grade for course work is the prerogative of the instructor in the course. Grades as a judgment of quality will always be in part inherently subjective, and it is recognized that the course instructor is by far in the best position to make this judgment. On the other hand, it is also recognized that the students and the Program as a whole have a strong interest in ensuring that grades are assigned fairly, equitably, and without personal bias.

Therefore, the Biophysics Program adopts the following procedures to resolve disputes over course grades.

Grounds for Appeal

A grade in a course can be appealed on grounds that it is unjust because of clerical error, capricious or biased judgment, ex post facto changes in course requirements or lack of uniformity in the application of standards within a class. Dissatisfaction with the grade alone is not sufficient for an appeal. This procedure is also not applicable to complaints stemming from differences in the level of difficulty from one course to another or to complaints arising from a misunderstanding of the basis for evaluations if that basis was described clearly in writing.

Informal Appeal

The best way to resolve grade disputes is through direct communication with the course instructor. Therefore, the appeals process is initiated through a request from the student to meet with the instructor within two weeks after the final course grade is assigned. This request should be submitted by email and include the grounds for the appeal. The course instructor should meet with the student as soon as possible. Should off-campus duties prevent the instructor from meeting with the student within two weeks after the request is made, a meeting must be scheduled as soon as feasible, and the appropriate Associate Chair of the Program be informed. If the instructor is a Graduate Student Instructor (GSI), the faculty member in charge of the course will be included in all communications and the meeting. After the meeting, the instructor shall follow up with an email to the student and the relevant Associate Chair to confirm any decisions reached in the meeting. This informal appeal can be bypassed only with the permission of the Associate Chair, if the nature of the dispute is such that it would be unreasonable to expect the student to meet with the instructor directly.

Formal Appeal to Associate Chair

If the grade dispute cannot be resolved through the informal appeal process above, a formal appeal can be filed with the Associate Chair for the Undergraduate Program for courses up to the 400-level, and the Associate Chair for the Graduate Program for courses at the 500-level or above. If the relevant Associate Chair is also the course instructor, the other Associate Chair will take his or her place in the appeals process. This formal appeal to the Associate Chair has to be filed in writing within one week after the

meeting with the instructor, or within three weeks of the assignment of the final grade. The appeal must state the grounds for the appeal and the remedy sought.

This formal appeal process is intended to correct gross injustices, but not minor disagreements which are inherent to the grading process. Therefore, only appeals that would make a significant difference in the student's grade or affect his or her standing in the College or Program can be pursued through this process. As a rule, a dispute over one fractional grade (B+ instead of B, for instance) in the final course grade is not considered significant enough for the initiation of a formal appeal, unless overriding concerns of fairness warrant otherwise. The Associate Chair will make this determination.

Once the appeal is received and the determination of significance is made, the Associate Chair will contact the course instructor and request a written reply within two weeks. Based on the complaint and the reply, the Associate Chair will issue a recommendation in writing to the instructor and student, which may range from a request to the instructor change the grade, to requirement for additional work, or to dismissal of the complaint. The instructor must acknowledge the receipt of the recommendation promptly and state whether he or she will abide by it.

Appeal to the Grade Grievance Committee

If the student is not satisfied with the recommendation of the Associate Chair, or if the course instructor refuses to follow the recommendation, the student may request a hearing in front of an ad-hoc grade grievance committee. Such a hearing must be requested in writing within two weeks after the recommendation is issued or the instructor refused to comply. The Grade Grievance Committee is appointed by the Chair of the Program and consists of the appropriate Associate Chair who will chair the Committee, one additional instructional faculty member of the program, and a student representative. If the complainant is an undergraduate student, the student representative should be an upper-level biophysics major in good standing; if the complaint is filed by a graduate student the student representative should be a graduate student in the Biophysics IDP. The hearing will be scheduled as soon as practical. During the hearing, all sides should state their positions, and every attempt to reach a mutually agreeable resolution should be made. A student services associate will record minutes of the hearing and collect any documents that are presented for the files of the Program. After the hearing, a written decision will be issued and certified by the Chair of the Program within two weeks of the hearing.

Resolution of the Case

The decision of the Grade Grievance Committee is final and no further appeals are possible. This decision shall be reached within six months after the grade in question is assigned, at the latest. The Program expects everyone involved to abide by the decision, even though it is recognized that the final authority for the determination of the grade still rests with the course instructor. In the unlikely event that a situation arises in which a course instructor refuses to comply with the ruling of the Grade Grievance Committee, a copy of the decision will be included in the instructor's personnel file together with any response he or she might want to add. In such a case, the student is encouraged to consult with the Associate Chair or Assistant Dean for Student Academic Affairs to look for constructive solutions outside this process.