Student Course Grade Appeal Procedure

The Houston Community College Student Course Grade Appeal Procedure is based on the following principles:

- A student has a right to appeal a grade that the student believes was contrary to procedures as specified in the course syllabus or was based on bias, caprice, or computational or clerical error.
- A student's grade should reflect the student's mastery of the subject matter of the course.
- Students are entitled to a fair and impartial evaluation of their work.
- Students and faculty should communicate regularly and openly about course requirements, assignments, tests, grading procedures, and grades.
- The college faculty is responsible for creating the curriculum and establishing the standards by which students will be evaluated in each course.
- Faculty members are entitled to the presumption that the grades they assign are an accurate reflection of the performance of the students in their courses.
- A course grade may only be changed by the course instructor or by the recommendation of a Faculty Grade Appeals Committee. College administrators may not change grades.

Both students and faculty members have rights and responsibilities in the grading process:

- Students who wish to appeal a final grade are responsible for demonstrating that the grade they received was contrary to procedures as specified in the course syllabus or was based on bias, caprice, or computational or clerical error.
- Faculty members have a responsibility to provide their students with syllabi that clearly delineate the bases on which student grades will be assigned.
- Faculty members are responsible for providing their students with timely feedback on their performance on tests, papers, projects, and other graded assignments.
- Faculty members are responsible for keeping course records, final exams, and other materials on which grades are based (that have not been returned to students) for a year.
- Faculty members have a right to have the grades they assign upheld unless it is clearly demonstrated that a grade was contrary to procedures as specified in the course syllabus or was based on bias, caprice, or computational or clerical error.
- Both faculty members and students have a right to have grade appeals resolved in a timely fashion (as prescribed in the timelines given in this document).
- Both faculty members and students have a responsibility to attempt to resolve grade disputes informally.

Grading Disputes During a Semester

Faculty members and students should communicate regularly and openly about all grading issues. A student who is dissatisfied with an instructor's grading decision during a semester should discuss the issue with the instructor and attempt to resolve the matter informally. A student who believes that a grading issue has not been satisfactorily resolved should speak with the instructor's department chair about the matter. The department chair should work with both the student and the instructor to address the issue.

Students may not file a formal course grade appeal during the semester. Grading issues that remain unresolved during the semester may become the basis for a formal course grade appeal once the semester has ended and a final course grade has been assigned. The formal process may be used only for grading issues that impact the final course grade. For example, if a student disagrees with a grade given on a particular assignment but changing the grade on that particular assignment will not affect the student's final course grade, then the issue is not appropriate for a formal appeal. In this situation, the student may lodge a verbal or written complaint about the instructor's grading practices with the department chair or the dean, but may not file a formal course grade appeal.

Disputes Over Final Course Grades

Disputes over final course grades may reflect disagreements that have carried over from the semester or new issues that have arisen as the result of a late-semester project or test or the final exam. A student who is dissatisfied with a grading decision should attempt to resolve the matter by contacting the instructor. The student may wish to contact the department chair to facilitate communication between the student and the instructor and to help resolve the dispute.

Grounds for a Formal Course Grade Appeal

A student may file a formal course grade appeal if the following conditions are met:

- The student has attempted to resolve the dispute informally.
- The grading issues at stake impact the final course grade. (A course grade appeal may not be filed until the semester has ended and a final course grade has been assigned.)
- The student believes that his or her final course grade was assigned contrary to procedures as specified in the course syllabus or was based on bias, caprice, or computational or clerical error.
- The formal course grade appeal is filed no later than thirty calendar days after the start of the next long (spring or fall) semester. Students who fail to file a grade appeal within the time limit may ask the appropriate academic or workforce dean to allow an exception, but the exception must be based on extraordinary circumstances.

Students who are unhappy with their instructor's grading system or grade assignment practices may complain verbally or in writing to the department chair and/or the dean even if the issue does not qualify for a formal course grade appeal.

Filing the Formal Course Grade Appeal

A student can file a formal course grade appeal by completing the *Student Course Grade Appeal Form* and submitting it to the appropriate department chair or instructional dean. The form asks the student to provide a written statement that clearly and specifically states the grounds on which the grade appeal is based. The student must explain why he or she believes that the assigned grade was contrary to procedures as specified in the course syllabus or was based on bias, caprice, or computational or clerical error. The student should attach supporting documentation to the form, such as the following:

- A copy of the course syllabus.
- A copy of the graded assignment on which the formal course grade appeal is centered if it is available.
- A portfolio of the student's other graded work from the course, including papers, projects, homework, tests, and other assignments, if these materials are available.
- Any other documents the student believes are relevant to the resolution of the course grade appeal.

The form also asks the student if he or she wishes to appear in person before the Faculty Grade Appeal Panel.

Informal Resolution

Upon receipt of a *Student Course Grade Appeal Form*, the dean, department chair, or designee should contact both the student and the instructor involved to attempt to resolve the dispute informally. If the instructor is no longer with the college or is unavailable, the dean, department chair, or designee shall appoint another instructor to represent faculty interests in the appeal.

The faculty member representing the absent instructor shall act as a good faith representative of the faculty whose goal is to resolve the grading dispute fairly. The instructor may agree to resolve the dispute informally if he or she believes it is appropriate. For example, if the dispute involves a computational or clerical error and the instructor representing the absent faculty member agrees with the student, he or she may simply sign the *Change of Grade Form* to change the grade rather than force a Faculty Grade Appeal Panel to resolve the issue.

Instructor Response

If the dispute is not resolved informally, the dean, department chair, or designee shall give the instructor a copy of the *Student Course Grade Appeal Form* submitted by the student and ask the instructor involved to prepare a written response to the appeal. The instructor's response should include the following:

- A copy of the course syllabus.
- A copy of any relevant graded assignments that had not been returned to the student.
- A written statement responding to the issues raised by the student.
- A statement indicating whether the instructor wishes to appear in person before the Faculty Grade Appeal Panel.
- Any other documents the instructor believes are relevant to the resolution of the course grade appeal.

The department chair or designee should continue to pursue an informal resolution to the dispute if he or she believes that a resolution is possible. The department chair or designee may share the instructor's response with the student in hopes of finding common ground between the two. If appropriate, the chair or designee may wish to give the student the opportunity to address issues raised in the instructor's response that the student has not previously addressed.

The Faculty Grade Appeal Panel

If attempts at informal resolution of the grading dispute fail, the dean, department chair, or designee shall appoint a Faculty Grade Appeal Panel to consider the appeal. A departmental standing grade appeal panel may be used if one exists. The panel shall consist of at least three full-time instructors from the instructional area involved or from a related discipline. The instructor involved in the grade dispute is not eligible to serve on the panel. The dean, department chair, or designee will appoint one of the members of the panel to serve as its chair.

The chair of the Faculty Grade Appeal Panel is responsible for ensuring that the grade appeal process is completed in a timely fashion. Unless there are exceptional circumstances (as determined by the appropriate academic or workforce dean), the appeal process must be completed before the end of the semester in which it is filed. The chair is also responsible for ensuring that the instructor has at least a week to prepare a response to the grade appeal and that both the student and the instructor have at least a week's advance notice of the time and location for appearing before the Faculty Grade Appeal Panel in person if they have requested an appearance.

Panel Review

The Faculty Grade Appeal Panel is responsible for determining the facts in the dispute and making a judgment on the merits of the course grade appeal. The panel shall review the materials submitted both by the student and the instructor. The panel may request any other information it deems necessary, including additional instructor records and input from third parties.

Both the student and the instructor have the right to appear in person before the Faculty Grade Appeal Panel if they request the opportunity. If both parties appear before the

panel, they should be heard separately. If neither party requests to appear in person, the panel should complete its review based on the written materials supplied by the parties and whatever other information the panel may request. The panel's deliberations, including hearing testimony from the parties involved and third parties, shall take place in private.

The student has the burden of proof. The student must present clear evidence that a grade was contrary to procedures as specified in the course syllabus or was based on bias, caprice, or computational or clerical error. The instructor's grade stands unless the Faculty Grade Appeal Panel determines by the preponderance of the evidence that the grade was contrary to procedures as specified in the course syllabus or was based on bias, caprice, or computational or clerical error.

Once the members of the Faculty Grade Appeal Panel have determined that they have sufficient information to make a decision, they will vote either to grant or reject the grade appeal. A simple majority is sufficient to decide the issue. If the panel grants the appeal, it determines the appropriate course grade for the student. The panel chair shall prepare a written report stating the panel's decision and the justification for that decision. Copies of the report must be conveyed to the student, the instructor, and the instructor's department chair. If the panel determines that the student's grade shall be changed, the chair of the Faculty Grade Appeal Panel will prepare a *Change of Grade Form* and submit it to the department chair for processing with the panel report attached. The stated reason for the change of grade will be "the recommendation of a Faculty Grade Appeal Panel." The chair of the Faculty Grade Appeal Panel will sign the form instead of the course instructor.

Sometimes a course grade appeal raises issues that go beyond the resolution of grading issues. These issues could include questions about compliance with ADA guidelines, concerns about an instructor's following departmental policies, or questions of a student's academic integrity. At its discretion, the Faculty Grade Appeal Panel may prepare a supplementary report addressing those issues and present it to the department chair and/or dean.

Appealing the Panel's Decision

The losing party to the grade appeal process has a limited right to appeal. The appeal can be based only on procedural rather than substantive grounds. If the losing party believes that the appeals process was not properly followed and as a result he or she was treated unfairly, then he or she may file a written appeal with the appropriate academic or workforce dean. The appeal can only be based on procedural errors that compromised the fundamental fairness of the process. Minor procedural errors that do not materially affect the outcome of the process are not grounds for appeal.

The dean will review the appeal and conduct whatever investigation he or she deems appropriate. If the dean determines that the grade appeal process was not properly followed *and* that the failure to follow proper procedures biased the result of the grade

appeal, then the dean will vacate the judgment of the grade appeal panel and direct that the process be repeated with a different panel. If the dean rejects the appeal, the decision of the Faculty Grade Appeal Panel is final.

STUDENT COURSE GRADE APPEAL FORM

Please read the *Course Grade Appeal Procedure*, which is available online, before completing this form.

Name: _____

Street address: _____

City/State/Zip: _____

Telephone numbers: _____

Email address: _____ semester: _____

Course: _____ Section Number: _____

Instructor: _____

Please state the basis for your grade appeal. Be as specific as you can. Attach another sheet if necessary. You should also attach additional documentation as specified in the *Course Grade Appeal Procedure*.

Do you wish to appear in person before the Faculty Grade Appeal Committee? _____

Have you spoken with your instructor in hopes of resolving this dispute informally? If not, why?

Student's signature: _____

Date: _____

Please submit this form to the instructional dean or department chair with supervisory responsibilities for the course whose grade you wish to appeal.