

POLICY: Student Grievances Policy

DATE: March 27, 2024 (Revised)

This document is a revision of the 2017 DMSB Student Grievances Policy. The revision updates the policy (based on *STAF 6.30, Academic Grievances*) and clarifies the definition of academic grievances and the procedures for handling academic grievances. The revision also incorporates two additional student grievances that are related: 1) non-academic issues; and 2) freedom of expression issues. Both are referenced as “related policies” in *STAF 6.30*. While non-academic grievances and grievances of freedom of expression can be distinct from academic grievances, they may carry an impact on a student’s grade. The following items about the three university policies, and where relevant, the current DMSB policy are noted below. Examples of grievances are also provided.

- “The procedures herein shall not extend to matters of grading student work where the substance of a complaint is simply the student’s disagreement with the mark or grade placed on the work.” (*STAF 6.30, Academic Grievance Policy*)  
  
“The instructor retains authority over the assignment of grades and the faculty member’s judgment about the *quality* of a student’s work or grading standards is not grievable.” (*DMSB Student Grievances Policy (2017)*).
  - For example, a student may not appeal the points awarded on a short answer question because he or she disagrees and thinks the answer was satisfactory and worth more points, or because he or she disagrees with the grading formula for the course.
- “When a student has questions about a grade for an assignment or the course or, concerns about whether actions were taken that are inconsistent with the course syllabus or university policies and guidelines.” (*DMSB Student Grievances Policy (2017)*)
  - For example, a student may appeal a grade if the grading formula stated in the syllabus is used incorrectly.
  - For example, a student may appeal points that were not awarded on a quiz or an exam for which there were, e.g. two correct answers, yet the instructor only awarded points for one of the answers.
- “...a complaint by a student about an alleged action by a university employee which adversely affects the status, rights, or privileges of the student.” (*STAF 6.27, Non-Academic Grievance Policy*)
  - It should be noted that non-academic grievances are distinct from academic grievances yet may affect a student’s grade.

- For example, a student misses an exam for reasons believed to be valid yet is denied the opportunity to make up the missed exam. The outcome of such a grievance may impact the student's grade and GPA, which may subsequently impact progression in the college, graduate school admission, or career placement.
- Students should have protections of 'freedom of expression' and 'against prejudiced or capricious academic evaluation.' In the classroom, "Student performance should be evaluated solely on an academic basis, not opinions or conduct in matters unrelated to academic standards." (*STAF 6.28, Academic Freedom*).
  - For example, a student believes he or she was marked down on a graded assignment for expressing views that oppose the instructor's views and wishes to file a grievance. Since there is no stated procedure in STAF 6.28 for resolving grievances related to Academic Freedom, the student may pursue an academic or non-academic grievance.

## A. Procedure for Academic Grievances

**1. In all cases,** students must begin by contacting the instructor. All such grievances should be presented clearly and professionally to the instructor and supported with documentation.

- Instructors include tenured, tenure-track, and professional track faculty (clinical, lecturers, temporary faculty, adjuncts, and PhD students) that teach a course under an academic department; *and* staff teaching courses under a non-academic unit as part of their full-time duties.

**2. If the student** is not satisfied with the instructor's response regarding the grievance, then the student should contact the chair of the instructor's academic department or the director of the instructor's non-academic unit via email. The student's email should clearly and professionally explain the action or decision that is being appealed and provide a justification for the grievance.

- The department chair or director of the unit must discuss the grievance with the instructor and get his or her response. The department chair or director is not permitted to change a grade that has been assigned but may recommend that the instructor reconsider how the grade was assigned.
- The recommendation of the chair or director must be maintained for the record.
- At this point in the grievance process, it is the instructor's decision as to whether to take the recommendation of the chair or director, an alternative action, or no action.

**3. If the student** is not satisfied with the instructor's response after the department chair or director has reviewed the grievance, then the student may appeal to the Senior Associate Dean for Academics and Research in the Moore School.

- In the appeal, the student should include all prior emails and documentation regarding the grade grievance. The appeal should explain why there is concern with the outcome achieved to this point in the process. The Senior Associate Dean must request the department chair or director's recommendation as part of the documents relevant to the student appeal. The Senior Associate Dean will review all documents and make a recommendation to the instructor. The Senior Associate Dean may not change a grade but may recommend that an instructor reconsider how the grade was assigned.

- The recommendation of the Senior Associate Dean must be maintained for the record.
- At this point in the grievance process, it is the instructor's decision as to whether to take the recommendation of the Senior Associate Dean, an alternative action, or no action.

**4. If the student** is not satisfied with the outcome at this point, the student may request that the Student Academic Grievance (SAG) committee hear the appeal.

- The committee consists of three faculty members, one undergraduate student member, and one graduate student member. Any member of the Faculty may serve on the committee. The undergraduate and graduate student members of the committee shall be students at the School. Members are appointed by the Dean's Office and approved by the Faculty Council. Each faculty member shall come from a different department. Student members will also be appointed by the Dean's Office and approved by the Faculty Council. In addition, if the grievance involves DMSB staff with teaching responsibilities, an additional committee member may be appointed on a contingent basis. This additional member should be a staff member with teaching responsibilities, appointed by the Dean's Office and approved by Faculty Council.
- The student's grievance must be substantiated with documentation, including any correspondence between the student, the instructor, the department chair, and the Senior Associate Dean. The recommendations of the Department Chair and the Senior Associate Dean must also be included.
- The committee must review all documents and correspondence and may request separate meetings with the student and with the instructor, prior to making a recommendation.
- The committee may not inquire about a student's mental or physical health status.
- The committee is expected to complete its review and any meetings with the student and instructor within 3 weeks of receipt of the documents.
- The committee cannot overturn the instructor's decision, but a recommendation by the committee can be made that the grade, grading policy, or grading formulae be reconsidered, or alternative accommodations be made.
- The committee must provide a rationale to the student and the instructor for the recommendation.
- At this point in the grievance process, it is the instructor's decision as to whether to take the recommendation of the committee, an alternative action, or to take no action.

**5. If the student** is not satisfied with the outcome at this point, the student may contact the Office of Student Advocacy for advice about the grievance. See STAF 6.27 below.

**Notes:**

A faculty member who feels that he or she has been aggrieved as a result of the student grievance proceeding has the right to appear before a Faculty Grievance committee to present his or her case.

Students should be aware that violations of USC's honor code (e.g., lying or misrepresentation) when making statements at any time during the grievance process will be reported to the Office of Academic Integrity.

## **B. Procedure for Non-Academic Grievances (STAF 6.27)**

1. “A grievance must be initiated within 30 calendar days from the date of the alleged action.
2. The university has an Office of Student Advocacy where students can go to get advice on grievance resolution. Students are encouraged to first attempt to resolve the grievance with the person with whom they have a grievance.
3. If the student has a good reason not to attempt a resolution with this person, the Office of Student Advocacy will arrange for the student to meet with the appropriate supervisor to address the grievance.
4. If the student is unsatisfied with the initial response to their grievance, the Office of Student Advocacy will facilitate a meeting between the student and the appropriate department head or his/her designee.
5. If the issue remains unresolved, the student may appeal to the vice-president level.
6. If the issue remains unresolved after an appeal to the vice-president level, an ad-hoc committee will be appointed by the Vice President for Student Affairs to hear the student’s grievance. The department head / director and Senior Associate Dean shall not serve on the ad-hoc committee. The decision of the committee is final.”

## **C. Procedure for Academic Freedom Grievances**

Students with grievances related to prejudiced or capricious academic evaluation or freedom of expression (STAF 6.28, Sections D – F) may seek resolution through the academic grievance policy or the non-academic grievance policy.

## **D. Links to University Student Grievance Policies**

STAF 6.30 Academic Grievance Policy - <http://www.sc.edu/policies/ppm/staf630.pdf>

STAF 6.27 Non-Academic Grievance Policy - <http://www.sc.edu/policies/ppm/staf627.pdf>

STAF 6.28 Academic Freedom Policy - <http://www.sc.edu/policies/ppm/staf628.pdf>