

Academic Grievance Policy for Online Courses

It is inevitable that students will sometimes disagree with faculty decisions regarding grades, instructional techniques, advising, course content and classroom experiences. Students with concerns regarding any of the aforementioned are provided with the following grievance process:

Grievances Regarding Grading

Each course syllabus must clearly delineate the grading scheme for the course. The weights given to each assignment should be reflected and adhered to consistently in the class. Students should receive clear instructions regarding the prerequisites for successful completion of the course requirements, i.e., on what basis would a student not receive a passing grade (usually "C" or above).

If a student receives a grade that they believe does not reflect their performance in a class, the student has a right to consult with the professor to discuss the grading process. The student should be prepared to present evidence of work completed in the class. If, after consulting with the faculty member, the student reasonably believes that they have still been graded unfairly, the student should consult with the Department Chairperson to discuss the grievance. If the Department Chairperson is the subject of the grievance, the Department Chairperson must recuse themselves. The Provost will appoint an alternate Chairperson to hear the grievance.

The Department Chair will consult with the faculty member to determine if there is sufficient evidence (grades and written assignments and work) to substantiate the grade received by the student. Once the Department Chairperson consults with the faculty member the Chairperson should decide to either uphold the decision of the faculty member or to ask the faculty member to reevaluate the student's grade.

If the student is not satisfied that the Department Chairperson and faculty member have offered a fair evaluation of her/his grievance, the student should submit an official grievance report to the Office of the Dean of Undergraduate Studies. If the Dean of Undergraduate Studies, who typically holds faculty rank and teach, is the subject of the grievance, the Dean must recuse themselves. The Provost will appoint an alternate to replace the Dean of Undergraduate Studies.

The Dean will consult with the student, faculty member and department chair individually and, if necessary, in a group to discuss the grading process and resulting grade assignment.

Grievances not resolved at the departmental level will be adjudicated by an ad hoc committee of four faculty representing each division and two staff, one of whom may be the Dean of Undergraduate Studies. The ad hoc committee will review the evidence and render a decision. The Dean of Undergraduate Studies or ad hoc committee chair, if the Dean is recused, will inform the student(s), faculty, and department chair of the grievance disposition within forty-eight (48) hours of the decision.

Grievances regarding the grading process should be filed and addressed by the mid-semester of the semester following the semester that the aggrieved incident occurred.

Grievances Regarding Course Requirements

Course syllabi should reflect all course requirements. Course requirements must be directly related to the course objectives. Students must not be required to complete any requirement that could prove injurious to their physical or mental health. Any student who believes that they are being required to complete and/or adhere to unreasonable requirements should voice her/his concern to the instructor.

The faculty member must consult with the student to discuss their grievance and render some decision regarding the contested matter. If the faculty member does not believe that there is any reason to reevaluate course requirements, the student has a right to then take the matter to the Department Chairperson for discussion and evaluation.

The Department Chairperson, after consulting with the aggrieved student, should thereafter speak with the faculty member regarding the reasonableness of the course requirements. The Department Chairperson should make an assessment of the validity of the grievance and render a decision. If the Department Chair believes that unreasonable requirements exist, the Chairperson must request that the faculty member remove the requirement in question.

If a student is not satisfied with the decision of the Department Chairperson, the student should file an official grievance with the Office of the Dean of Undergraduate Studies. The Dean will consult with the student, faculty member and Department chairperson individually, and if necessary, in a group to attempt to resolve the situation.

Grievances not resolved at the departmental level will be adjudicated by an ad hoc committee of four faculty representing each division and two staff, one of whom may be the Dean of Undergraduate Studies. The ad hoc committee will review the evidence and render a decision. The Dean of Undergraduate Studies or ad hoc committee chair, if the Dean is recused, will inform the student(s), faculty, and department chair of the grievance disposition within forty-eight (48) hours of the decision.

Grievances Regarding Classroom Atmosphere

The classroom should reflect an environment where teaching and learning occur in a cooperative fashion between students and the instructor. Inappropriate behavior on the part of students or faculty will not be tolerated. Inappropriate behavior includes excessive absences, tardiness and lack of preparedness for class. In addition, the use of profanity or sexist or racist characterizations, or sexual harassment will not be tolerated. Disruptive behavior, including talking during presentations and lectures will not be tolerated. Faculty members are required to conduct themselves in a professional manner at all times. Students are expected to conduct themselves in a respectful manner throughout the class period.

If a student believes that the classroom atmosphere is inappropriate or improper as defined herein, the student should share their concerns with the faculty member. If the faculty member does not address the student's complaint in what the student considers a satisfactory manner, the student should submit a written grievance report to the Department Chairperson.

The Department Chairperson should give due consideration to the student's grievance and speak with the faculty member and other students in the class, if necessary, to determine the validity of the grievance. If the grievance is not resolved at the Department Chair level of intervention, the student should file an official grievance with the Office of the Dean of Undergraduate Studies.

The Dean will consult with the faculty member and the Department Chairperson to discuss the grievance. If necessary, the Dean will consult with other students in the class. Grievances not resolved at the departmental level will be adjudicated by an ad hoc committee of four faculty representing each division and two staff, one of whom may be the Dean of Undergraduate Studies. The ad hoc committee will review the evidence and render a decision. The Dean of Undergraduate Studies or ad hoc committee chair, if the Dean is recused, will inform the student(s), faculty, and department chair of the grievance disposition within forty-eight (48) hours of the decision.

Grievances regarding inappropriate classroom conduct should be filed before the end of the semester in which the alleged inappropriate behavior occurs.

Grievances Regarding the Advising Process

Students are assigned academic advisors upon first year enrollment and once they select their major. Students have a right to effective advising throughout their matriculation. Academic advisors are required to provide accurate and timely information regarding course and graduation requirements and academic support programs for their advisees.

If a student believes that they are not receiving adequate advising the student should bring their grievance to the attention the Dean. The Dean should discuss the grievance with the student to determine the validity of the student's concerns. If the Dean believes that the student has a valid grievance Dean should speak with the advisor to address the student's concerns. If the student wishes to be switched to another advisor, every effort will be made to honor the student's request.

If a student reasonably believes that their academic progress toward completion of required courses has been hindered because of poor or inaccurate advising, the student should bring the matter to the attention of the Dean. The Dean, in consultation with the Department chair, will evaluate the existing options for the student. The Dean will issue a written response of disposition to the student and her/his department chairperson.

Grievances regarding the advising process should be filed as soon as the student believes that the student is or has been ineffectively advised.

Unresolved Grievances

If the student is unable to reach a resolution with Spelman concerning the grievance or complaint, he/she may go to the State of Georgia NonPublic Postsecondary Education Commission website at <https://gnpec.georgia.gov/student-resources/student-complaints/ga-sara-online-student-complaint-form> to submit the complaint/grievance with the state agency.

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