

CIAS Final Course Grade Disputes (RIT Policy D17.0)

I. Introduction

Policy procedures related to student grade disputes are formed by following national best practices:

- The presumption that the instructor will evaluate a student's work based on individual student merit.
- An instructor's evaluation of student work is authoritative.
- A process exists for students to appeal the perception of unfair academic evaluation.
- The appeal process protects the prerogative of instructors and the rights of students to an appeal.
- The review of a student final course grade dispute should be by the instructor using the following procedures.

II. Final Course Grade Dispute Committee

The CIAS Academic Integrity Committee will be responsible for hearing final course grade disputes. This committee will consist of six members: three instructors (senior or principal lecturer, tenured, or tenure-track), an alternate instructor and three students. Instructors and students should recuse themselves based on case involvement or bias and alternates will be appointed. The student bringing the case to the Committee may also provide justification to request an alternate member of the Committee, based on case involvement or bias. A full complement of the committee must be present at the meeting in person or via electronic conferencing.

If a final course grade dispute is the result of an alleged breach of academic integrity, the Academic Integrity Committee (See Policy D8.0-Academic Integrity Policy) shall hear the case first after which an evaluation can be made as to whether or not a grade change is warranted.

Should any question arise as to the nature of a dispute or the committee to hear the case, the Dean's designee (role defined below) shall be consulted for guidance.

III. Roles and Communication

- A. **Dean's Designee:** The Dean's Designee in CIAS is the Associate/Associate Dean. The Designee will manage the hearing process and attend hearings as a non-voting advisor to the Committee. In the event that the Associate/Associate Dean is not available to facilitate the Final Course grade dispute process the Sr. Associate Dean will take on this role. If the Sr. Associate Dean is not available the Dean will assign another designee.

- B. **Committee Chair:** The Dean's Designee will appoint the committee chair from among the three instructors serving. The Committee Chair will preside over the grade dispute hearing and facilitate the recording of this session. After the hearing the Committee Chair will complete the written summary and recommendation and forward it to the student's home college Dean's Office and academic unit.
- C. **Communication:** Email, meeting notes, transcribed recordings of the meeting are all acceptable forms communication for all contact regarding grade disputes.
- D. **Meetings:** Meetings can be face to face or through technology.

IV. Procedures for Handling Final Course Grade Disputes

- A. Students may appeal a final course grade by following the procedures outlined below.
 - 1. For final course grades, the appeal must be filed by the student with the instructor and copied to the instructor's academic unit head by the end of week eight (8) of the next term (excluding summer and intersession) of the final course grade being posted.
 - 2. If a final course grade appeal is not filed by the end of week eight (8) of the next term (excluding summer and intersession) following the posting of the final course grade, the original grade stands and no further appeal will be granted.
- B. If a student disputes an instructor's decision regarding a final course grade, the student must submit the dispute to the instructor in writing and then arrange a meeting with the instructor to discuss the issue. If a meeting between the student and the instructor does not result in a mutual agreement, or if the instructor declines the meeting, the student will arrange a meeting with the instructor and the instructor's academic unit head.
- C. If a meeting between the student, instructor, and instructor's academic unit head does not result in a mutual agreement, the student will arrange a meeting with those parties and the Dean's Designee to resolve the dispute.
- D. If the matter continues to be unresolved, the Dean's Designee, in consultation with the instructor and the student, will convene the Final Course Grade Dispute Committee.

V. Final Course Grade Dispute Committee Hearings/Procedures

- A. **Notification of Hearing Date:** Both the student and the instructor will be provided with written notice of the date, place, and time that the case will be heard by the Final Course Grade Dispute Committee at least seven (7) business days prior to the hearing.
- B. **Notice of Dispute:** The student and instructor will be sent written notice (email is acceptable) of the dispute brought forth by a complaint at least seven (7) business days prior to the scheduled hearing. The notice will include:

1. A description of the dispute.
 2. The names of individuals expected to be present at the hearing.
 3. A copy of the policy or link to the online version of this policy as well as the university's grading policy.
- C. Advocates: The student will be informed that he or she has a right to bring to the hearing an advocate from among the RIT faculty, staff, or student body who is not a practicing lawyer. Advocates can actively participate in the formal hearing process. The Center for Student Conduct, upon request, will assist the student in obtaining an advocate or provide information and training to those instructor/staff advocates new to the process.
- D. Lawyers (or attorneys?): Practicing lawyers are not permitted to participate in the academic conduct process as a representative of the student or the instructor.
- E. Parents/Guardians: Parents/guardians are not permitted to participate in or be present during the academic conduct process unless the involved student is under the age of 18. In those instances, the parent/guardian can observe the hearing process and give their son or daughter quiet counsel.
- F. Hearing Participants: The designated chair facilitates the hearing process and only participants involved in a particular case may be present (including the Dean's designee). Other persons who might be present at the hearing include the instructor, and appropriate access services providers if necessary.
- G. Recording of the hearing: All final course grade dispute committee hearings are recorded. Recordings may be audio or video depending on the needs of the participants. Recordings are saved only until the time for appeal has passed. There shall be a single record of a final course grade dispute committee hearing and this record shall be the property of the university. Students may request to listen to or view a copy of the recording or read a copy of the transcript (if the student is deaf/hard of hearing) by submitting a written request to the Dean's Designee.
- H. All hearings will be conducted in private.
- I. The designated Committee chair will inform the participants that the hearing is being recorded.
- J. Each grade dispute participant (student and instructor) will have fifteen (15) minutes to describe their situation and their individual perspectives. The individual filing the grievance will present first.
- K. Time will be allotted for questions from the committee immediately after each party presents.
- L. Each party will have an opportunity for five (5) minutes of closing remarks after the question and answer period.
- M. The final course grade dispute process is not a court of law and legal rules of evidence and procedure do not apply. The chair Committee will determine at his or her sole discretion the range of testimony permitted by witnesses and items of information that will be considered based on principles of fundamental relevance and fairness.

- N. At hearings involving more than one student, the Dean's Designee, at his or her discretion, may permit hearings concerning each student to be conducted separately or simultaneously.
- O. All procedural questions will be decided at the discretion of the Committee chair and Dean's Designee and she/he may decide to adjourn the hearing for a reasonable period of time, if warranted.
- P. If the student fails to appear at the hearing, the Committee will review the evidence to support the assigned grade and make a determination based on the evidence. The same would apply if an instructor is not present at the meeting.
- Q. Following questions, explanations, discussion, and closing statements, all participants will be dismissed and the Committee will deliberate privately.
- R. At the conclusion of the final course grade dispute hearing, the Committee chair will provide written notification of the committee's recommendation to the instructor, the student, and the student's home college Dean's Office and the student's home academic unit within seven (7) business days of the hearing.
- S. If the Committee, through its inquiries and deliberations, determines that compelling reasons exist to change the grade, it will request that the instructor make the change, providing the instructor with a written explanation of its reasons. If the instructor accepts the written explanation of the committee, he or she will change the grade within fourteen (14) business days. Should the instructor decline, within fourteen (14) business days he or she shall provide a rationale to the Dean's Designee. The Dean's Designee shall inform all parties.
- T. Once the recommendation has been made to the instructor and the instructor has made a decision, the case is considered closed and may not be appealed further.
- U. The instructor is the only one who can change a grade unless extenuating circumstances exist. Such extenuating circumstances may occur when an instructor member is no longer available to participate in a grade dispute hearing or other extreme circumstances as determined by the dean's designee, Grade Dispute Committee or the dean. In such cases, the Committee, after considering the issue and upon concluding that it would be unjust to allow the original grade to stand, may then recommend to the academic unit head that the grade be changed. Within fourteen business days, the academic unit head, upon the written recommendation of the Committee and with concurrence from the dean, shall have the authority to change a grade when the assigning instructor is not available due to extenuating circumstances.
- V. Upon conclusion of the college hearing, all documentation regarding the hearing will be submitted to the Dean's Office of the student's home college and stored for a period of six years.

Responsible Office: CIAS Dean's Office
Effective: March 2014
Policy History: