



Number: 10-002
Title: Academic Grievance Process for Students
Responsible Office: Academic Affairs

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I. PURPOSE & INTENT

The purpose of this Policy setting forth an Academic Grievance Process (AGP) is to provide all undergraduate and graduate students taking courses within the University of South Florida an opportunity for objective review of facts and events pertinent to the cause of the academic grievance.

II. STATEMENT OF POLICY

Review of the facts and events pertinent to the cause of the academic grievance will be accomplished in a collegial, non-judicial atmosphere rather than an adversarial one, and shall allow the parties involved to participate. All parties will be expected to act in a professional and civil manner. Students must be advised of the Triggering Academic Decision and have a right of at least one level of review to ensure the Triggering Academic Decision did not violate a USF Regulation or Policy. This Process may be used by Colleges from inception to final university decision or supplement a Colleges' internal processes. Examples of Colleges with full internal due process steps include USF Health Colleges and Programs.

In the case of Academic Integrity violations, the appeal or grievance of a decision or academic action regarding Academic Integrity is contained in [USF Regulation 3.027 Academic Integrity of Students](#) and that Regulation has a review process that may be followed in place of the AGP at the discretion of the Academic Unit Representative. In the event it is unclear which review process is most applicable, the Academic Unit will determine the process and advise the student accordingly.

III. DEFINITIONS:

- **Academic Grievance:** A claim by an enrolled student receiving academic credit for a course that a specific academic decision or action (such as the assignment of a final grade or academic dismissal of a student or other grade assignment) has

violated published policies and procedures or has been applied to the grievant in a manner different from that used for other students.

- Academic grievances will not deal with general student complaints.
 - An academic grievance must include a reference to a violation of a specific USF Policy, or an academic decision that was applied differently to the grievant than other students to be considered under this Policy.
 - Disagreement or issues with individual test grades, responses to exam questions or general disagreement with the academic discretion or professional judgment of instructors, (defined below as including all levels of academic administrators for purposes of this Policy) will not be considered grounds for an academic grievance, except where they impact the final grade. If a student has a concern on an individual assignment, and would like some formal consideration, the student should contact the instructor to discuss the issue and may submit the concern as a general complaint in writing to the instructor. If the student and instructor cannot resolve the complaint, the student may forward the complaint to the instructor's supervisor and that supervisor shall review the complaint and provide a response to both the student and instructor. If the supervisor identifies a need for a review by another office or process, the supervisor may make an additional referral.
 - Dismissals based on University protocols such as failure to maintain GPA, probation for academic performance or other automatic administrative actions are not grievable.
 - Only the final grades assigned in a course, final actions or dismissals by the academic unit are grievable.
- **Academic Decision:** See Triggering Academic Decision below.
 - **Academic Unit Representative:** The academic head of a college department; director of a school; concentration leader or the representative/office designated to oversee academic grievances in the academic unit.
 - **Administrative Officer:** The Dean of the Office of Undergraduate Studies (UGS) or the Dean of the Office of Graduate Studies (OGS) or their designee.
 - **Burden of Proof:** Burden of Proof is upon the student such that the student challenging the decision, action or final grade assigned has the burden of supplying evidence that proves that the instructor's decision was incorrect. In cases where the academic decision is based on a deficiency in or a violation of a clinical or

professional standard, the deficiency or violation may be considered sufficient proof to support an academic failure or dismissal notwithstanding a student's success in other areas of academic performance. In addition, failure to maintain the necessary GPA or meet academic requirements is considered sufficient proof of academic failure.

- **Dean:** A College Dean, or the Dean of the Office of Undergraduate Studies, or the Dean of the Office of Graduate School, or the equivalent as indicated on their designee" appointed to oversee academic grievances for the unit.
- **Instructor:** Any classroom instructor, thesis/dissertation/directed study supervisor, or the Dean or supervisor who imposes the Triggering Academic Decision.
- **Jurisdiction:** Where the course (not the student's registration status) is housed as the faculty member's primary academic appointment determines the appropriate forum (college or department/school) where the grievance will be conducted. The college of the faculty member's primary affiliation must share the outcomes of the grievance with the student, student's home campus and academic major. In the case where there is a joint program or it is unclear where jurisdiction shall fall, the Provost (or designee) may be consulted to identify the appropriate forum for the grievance.
- **Legal Representation:** Counsel elected by either party with the understanding that although either party may bring an advisor to specific meetings, at no time in the academic process may Legal Representation be actively involved in the internal review of an academic decision.
- **Notification Letter:** A student drafted email effective the day it is sent to the Academic Unit Representative (Note: a student copying multiple offices outside of process may create delays and confusion and result in the termination the process)with a concise written statement of particulars and must include specific reference to the (a) published USF Policy, procedure or official published catalog and the manner in which it was allegedly violated and the decision that affected the student's academic record or status based on a violation of that specific written USF Policy, procedure or official published catalog and/or (b) a description of the manner in which the student was treated in a substantially inequitable.
- **Time(s) or Day(s):** Academic time which is the period the University is open for business and delivery of academic services exclusive of holidays, emergency closings or other days where the office or academic delivery of services are closed. The person vested with authority at the appropriate level may extend any of the time periods contained herein for good cause. Any extensions must be

communicated in writing to all parties. For the purposes of this Policy, each step shall be afforded fifteen (15) Academic Days as a standard time limit (often referred to as “3 weeks”). When a department considers a grievance according to published departmental procedures approved by the College Dean and Provost, as pertinent, the time line specified in that academic unit’s procedures will govern the process and no additional notice of time extension is needed.

- **Triggering Academic Decision (TAD):** The academic action made by the Academic Unit Representative or Instructor which may include a final grade assignment or dismissal and the Decision is considered communicated on the date the email notice of the TAD is sent to the USF email on record. For the purposes of the Grievance Review, if it is unclear the date of the TAD, the Academic Unit Representative may identify that date. If the TAD is dismissal or suspension, it is within the Academic Unit’s discretion to implement all or some of the academic sanctions before the end of the grievance process (such as restriction from clinical site or practicums).
- **Written Communication:** Considered communication by email to the recipient’s USF official email address of record or e-mail communication using assigned USF e-mail addresses effective the date the email is sent.

IV. **PROCESS STEPS**

A. **Resolution Process at the Academic Unit or Formal Grievance at College Level**

1. Notice to the Student

The Academic Unit Representative or Instructor provides notice to the student of the Academic Decision which is the TAD.

2. Possible Resolution

The Student may make a reasonable effort to resolve his or her grievance with the Academic Unit Representative or instructor as soon as practical but no longer than 15 Academic Days from the TAD to enable a Notification Letter if desired within the 15 Academic Day time limit.

3. Student sends Notification Letter

If the situation cannot be resolved or a meeting is not feasible, a student may file an Academic Grievance by emailing a Notification Letter within 15 Academic Days of the TAD to the Academic Unit Representative (or in cases where there are no Academic Unit Representatives, or the Instructor is the Academic Unit Representative the Notification Letter may be to the College Dean)

4. Determination of Academic Grievance Acceptance

The Academic Unit Representative must determine whether the matter is an Academic Grievance that includes reference to a specific Policy violated or includes proof that supports an allegation that a student has been treated in a substantially inequitable manner as it relates to other students. A complaint regarding the course or instructor is not subject to the AGP.

a. *Not an Academic Grievance:* If the Academic Unit Representative determines that the matter is not an Academic Grievance, the Academic Unit Representative will discuss the complaint with the student and/or the faculty member and must advise the College Dean of the complaint and the recommended resolution if any. The College Dean will then implement one or more of the following:

- 1) Implement the recommendation of the Academic Unit Representative (which can include dismissal).
- 2) Reject the classification of the matter as a Complaint and move the matter forward as an academic grievance.
- 3) Make referrals to appropriate Human Resources or employee supervisor/office for intervention and/or to appropriate USF Equal Opportunity offices..

b. *Academic Grievance:* If the Academic Unit Director or the Dean determines the matter is an Academic Grievance, the process below shall begin within 15 days of the TAD.

5. Committee Reviews and Recommendation to the Dean

a. If the Academic Unit maintains its own grievance procedure or has its own professional review board or internal review committee where the student's position is considered that Academic Unit process/determination may be applied or recognized at this point. In specific instances where the Academic Unit process occurs before the TAD, no additional Committee review is needed as the Academic Unit Review outcome will be considered the recommendation to the Dean.

b. If there is no Academic Unit grievance procedure or professional review board or internal review committee, the Academic Unit will forward the Notification Letter to the College if needed and the College will determine the Notification Letter meets the elements of an Academic Grievance and if it does, the College will establish

an Academic Grievance Committee. College Committee make up is as follows:

- 1) *Make-up of Committee:* Three (3) faculty members and two (2) students (undergraduate or graduate as appropriate to the case) shall be selected from the college by the Dean. Wherever practical, the Committee shall not include members of the faculty or students of the department directly involved with the grievance, or faculty or students of the student's major department. However, for cases involving Clinical or Professional Standard violations, the Committee shall include, when feasible, at least one member assigned to oversee or with expertise in, a clinical area. The Committee Chair shall be responsible for scheduling meetings, overseeing the deliberations of the committee, and ensuring that full and fair consideration is provided to all parties. The Committee Chair shall vote on committee decisions only when required to break a tie.
- 2) *Participation by Student:* The student and/or instructor may request to attend a Committee meeting to present a final statement to the Committee. The Chair will designate which meeting the student and/or instructor may attend to present any final statement to the Committee. Only the Committee may invite additional parties such as faculty or students from the department involved with the grievance or from the student's major department or other outside party to provide expert or other relevant testimony in the proceedings. The student and/or instructor may be present during the other's final statement and may hear the additional information provided; however, neither may be present during the Committee's deliberations. The meeting time and place is to be set by the Committee. Failure or an inability of the student or instructor to attend a meeting will not force the meeting to be rescheduled or cancelled.
- 3) *Advisor to Student:* The student and/or instructor who elects to attend the meeting may be accompanied by one individual who may not act as Legal Representation. The individual may be required to sign a confidentiality agreement.
- 4) *Communication outside of Process:* Students may not initiate contact regarding or relating to the grievance process or outcome with any member of the Committee outside of this

established process before, during or after the Committee review process and any such contact may be considered a violation of [USF Regulation 6.0021 Student Code of Conduct](#).

- 5) *Timetable*: Within 15 Academic Days of determining the matter will be processed as an Academic Grievance, the Committee Chair will be appointed by the College Dean from among the three (3) faculty members appointed to the Committee.

All deliberations shall be in private and held confidentially by all members of the Committee. The recommendation of the Committee shall be based on their interpretation of the evidence presented to it.

6. Committee Recommendation & Decision of the College Dean

- a. Within 15 Academic Days of the Committee appointment, the Committee Chair (or if the Academic Unit Committee recommendation is applicable that recommendation may be used) shall deliver in writing to the College Dean a report of the findings and a recommended resolution.
- b. Within 15 Academic Days from the date the Committee forwards the Committee recommendation, the College Dean shall provide a decision in writing by email to all parties (the student, the instructor, and the department Academic Unit Representative). The College Dean's decision shall indicate whether the College Dean's decision was consistent with the Committee's recommendation. If the College Dean's decision is consistent with the Committee recommendation, that decision is considered a final University decision and not appealable by the instructor or student to the University level. The only decisions appealable to the University level are those where (1) the decision of the College Dean is contrary to the recommendation of the Committee (which may be the Academic Unit Committee recommendation which will be indicated in the College Dean's decision) or (2) the student can reference a specific and identified substantive procedural violation of these Student Academic Grievance Procedures. Such an appeal must be made in writing to the Dean of Undergraduate Studies or Graduate Studies (as appropriate) or their designee within fifteen (15) Academic Days from the date the College Dean sends a decision.

B. Formal Grievance Appeal to the University Level

1. For this level of appeal process, the Provost/Executive Vice President for Academic Affairs or the Sr. Vice President for USF Health has delegated authority for academic grievance appeals at the University Level to the Dean of Undergraduate Studies for appeals involving undergraduate courses and to the Dean of the Office of Graduate Studies for appeals involving graduate courses (referred to as the Administrative Officer). The process steps are outlined below.
 - a. The student or the instructor may appeal at the University Level within 15 Academic Days from the date the College sends the College Level decision when (1) the decision by the College Dean is contrary to the recommendation of the Committee or (2) a party identifies a specific substantive procedural violation in the application of the AGP. Within fifteen (15) Academic Days of the student sending in the appeal of the decision, the Administrative Officer shall determine whether the appeal is merited. If the Administrative Officer determines the appeal is not merited, the Administrative Officer shall advise the student, the instructor, and the College Dean accordingly and that notice shall be a final University Decision. If the appeal is determined to be merited, the Administrative Officer (who may consult with the Faculty Senate and Student Senate) shall appoint an Appeals Committee consisting of three (3) faculty members drawn from the appropriate USF Campus Undergraduate Council or Graduate Council, and two (2) students, undergraduate or graduate (as appropriate and to be determined by the Administrative Officer).
 - b. The structure, functions and operating procedures of the Appeals Committee will be the same as those of the College Committee (i.e. chaired by one of the appointed faculty members appointed by the Administrative Officer who will not vote except in the case of a tie, having no representation from either party's respective departments, developing a recommendation to the Administrative Officer, etc.).
 - c. Within 15 Academic Days of the appointment, the Committee Chair shall deliver in writing to the Administrative Officer a report of the findings of the Committee and a recommended resolution.
 - d. Within 15 Academic Days of receipt of the Committee recommendation, the Administrative Officer shall provide a decision in writing to all parties, as noted in Section IV(C).

- e. In all academic grievance appeals, the Administrative Officer's decision is a final University decision and not subject to further appeal within USF. If the Administrative Officer's decision is that:

*a grade change is merited; the Administrative Officer shall initiate the grade change on the authority of the Provost and so inform all parties and process that grade change through the academic process.

*an academic sanction such as dismissal, suspension, probation, or other academic sanction is to be imposed, the Administrative Officer will advise the Provost's office through their designee referenced above for processing which may include a form required by the Administrative Officer. The Administrative Officer will process and notify the student of the changed status. This notice is not a new TAD as it is the final step in the AGP process.

C. Final University Decision

Final University decisions are rendered as defined above including when no grounds for an Academic Grievance are identified in the process or when a Committee decision is upheld by the Dean or Academic Officer. There are no further internal university appeals of those final university decisions.

An external appeal may be filed if the Final University Decision is an Academic Dismissal from a College or University. In those cases of Dismissal, a student may seek judicial review pursuant to [Florida Rule of Appellate Procedure 9.190\(b\)\(3\)](#) by filing a petition for certiorari review with the appropriate circuit court within thirty (30) days of the final University decision. If a person seeks review with the court, a copy of the petition must also be provided to the University of South Florida Office of the General Counsel at University of South Florida, CGS 301, 4202 E. Fowler Avenue, Tampa, Florida 33620-4301.

D. Outcomes

The final outcome will vary on an individual case basis. In the case of grade appeals, USF reserves the right to change a student's grade if it is determined at the conclusion of the grievance process that the grade given was incorrect. The term "incorrect" means the assigned grade was based on something other than performance in the course, or that the assignment of the grade was not consistent with the criteria for awarding of grades as described in the course syllabus or other materials distributed to the student. In such circumstances, the Administrative Officer may file an administrative grade change. In the case of all other academic grievances, the University reserves the right to determine the final outcome based on the procedures detailed herein.

E. Record Keeping

In the event a grievance moves to a Formal College Grievance Appeal, the grievance will be considered a Written Complaint as defined in [USF Policy 30-053 Student Concern Processes](#) Section V(B). Accordingly, each College is responsible for maintaining a list of formal grievances and their final outcomes. The Office of Undergraduate Studies or the Office of Graduate Studies are responsible to keep records of any formal grievances and their final outcomes that are appealed to them.

HISTORY

Date Approved: Jul. 1, 1974

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