

Islamic Studies Grade Grievance Procedures

Normally students accept an instructor's evaluation of their work. Nevertheless, there are instances when a student feels that his or her academic performance has been unfairly or improperly graded. Typical complaints include prejudice, capricious changes in the course requirements, and lack of uniformity in judgment applied. When these charges arise, discussion and arbitration can bring out the facts to ascertain if there is a wrong that should be righted. However, such hearings are not intended to dispute the instructor's right to make his or her own evaluation of a student's work.

GROUNDINGS FOR A GRADE CHANGE

For a change in grade to be recommended, a student must make the case that the grade originally given was unjustly awarded. Dissatisfaction with a grade alone is not sufficient for an appeal.

Grade appeal procedures are available only for review of alleged capricious grading, and not for review of the judgment of an instructor in assessing the quality of a student's work. Capricious grading, as that term is used herein, constitute any of the following: (1) the assignment of a grade to a particular student on some basis other than performance in the course; (2) the assignment of a grade to a particular student by resorting to more exacting or demanding standards than were applied to other students in that course; (3) the assignment of a grade by a substantial departure from the instructor's previously announced standards. Correction of clerical errors does not require grade appeal procedures; the instructor simply fills out a Supplementary Grade Report.

We recognize that an unjust grade should be changed, and that students need and deserve a means of redress. The establishment of a grade appeal procedure provides this means. However, the committee that is called upon to hear an appeal by a student must acknowledge that it cannot possibly share the instructor's familiarity with the subject matter of the course or with the specific material used in it. The committee must also acknowledge that there is an inevitable minimum of imprecision in grading, and that the difference between a C and a B-, for instance, is hardly one that can, or should, become a matter for detailed litigation. The committee, in judging a single case, cannot know the range of excellence of the students in the class, and it should be cautious about raising the grade of one individual. Otherwise, it may thereby diminish the apparent achievements of other student who may have done better and whose original grade may have been higher. A grievance based on the argument that one instructor's grading standards are stricter than those of others will not be pursued.

For all these reasons, students contemplating appeals should be warned that the review committee will not, and must not, place their judgment over that of the instructor involved except in clear cases. The burden of proof in challenging a grade once given must rest on the student. In all cases of a reasonable doubt, the grade once given will be approved. The department's obligation to handle a grade complaint is limited to a maximum of one term after the course in question.

ADJUDICATION PROCESS

1. Within two weeks after the start of the following semester, the student should convey his or her concerns about the grade in writing to the instructor or professor who assigned the grade and request a meeting to discuss the matter. At this meeting, the instructor/professor should explain the basis upon which the grade was conferred and give the student an opportunity to point out any apparent errors or misjudgments. If the instructor conferring the grade is a Graduate Student Instructor (GSI), the GSI should be consulted first. If agreement is not reached with the GSI, the student should then contact the faculty member in charge of the course. If the instructor/professor is not available to respond to the student's concerns, then the student should proceed directly to step 2. It is expected that Step 1 will be completed by January 30th of the following year for a grade given in fall term or by September 30th for a grade given in spring, summer, or winter term. Only in extenuating circumstances will a grievance beyond this time frame be heard.
2. In the event that the conference with the instructor does not resolve the difficulty, the student should discuss the problem with the Director of the IS program, and should submit to him/her a letter detailing the nature of the complaint. The Director of the IS Program shall solicit a response from the instructor and shall then determine whether any basis for a committee hearing exists. If the Director of the IS Program is a party to the grievance, his/her role shall be assumed by the Director of the International Institute.
3. If the Director of the IS Program concludes that there is no basis for a committee hearing, he/she will inform the student. If the student is not satisfied with the explanation, he/she may still insist upon a committee hearing.
4. If the basis for a formal hearing is found to exist in the review described in item 2, or if the student insists upon a review in spite of the advice of the Director of the IS Program, the grievance shall be referred to an ad hoc review committee.
5. The review committee shall consist of three persons to be appointed by the Director of the IS Program (or the Director of the International Institute, if the Director of the IS Program is a party to the grievance or if he/she has decided there is no basis for a formal hearing): two faculty members and one student. The student member of the review committee will be an undergraduate if the grievant is an undergraduate or a graduate student if the grievant is a graduate student.

6. The review committee will submit a written summary of its findings and recommendations to the instructor and the Director of the Islamic Studies Program.
7. If the review committee concludes that the assigned grade should stand, the Director of the ISP Program (or the Director of the International Institute) will inform the student in writing that the grade will not be changed, and that no further appeal within the Islamic Studies Program is possible.
8. If the review committee concludes that the instructor did not act fairly, properly or judiciously, the Director of the IS Program shall attempt to persuade the instructor to follow the recommendations of the committee.
9. If the instructor refuses to change a grade in spite of the recommendations of the review committee and the urgings of the Director of the IS Program, the instructor shall provide the student and the Director of the IS Program with a written explanation for his/her refusal to change the grade, and the Director of the IS Program shall provide the student with a written statement summarizing the procedures followed in processing the appeal, noting the recommendations of the review committee, adding his/her own evaluation of the review committee's findings, and noting the refusal of the instructor to change the grade. There is no appeal beyond the Islamic Studies Program.
10. These procedures describe the full appeal mechanism available in the Islamic Studies Program to deal with grade grievances. When these procedures have run their course, no further appeal within the Program is possible.

The only exception we envisage would be when the instructor is no longer at the University of Michigan. In that case a student may present a grievance to the committee without first discussing the conflict with the instructor. The committee will try to contact the instructor to elicit a response and arrive at a recommendation. If this attempt is unsuccessful, the Director of the Islamic Studies Program may approve a grade change in consultation with the committee.