



# School of Public Affairs

UNIVERSITY OF COLORADO **DENVER**

## **SPA PROCEDURES FOR RESOLVING STUDENT ACADEMIC GRIEVANCES**

This document describes the procedures by which a student may seek to resolve a dispute about an academic issue, such as a grade in a SPA course or a decision about academic standing in a SPA program.

Please note that faculty members have wide discretion in assigning grades, and this discretion will not be disturbed absent evidence that the faculty member has made a clear mistake, has failed to adhere to stated standards, or has otherwise engaged in arbitrary behavior. It is the student's responsibility to provide evidence that the faculty member acted outside of their traditional discretion.

Disputes about grades in non-SPA courses or relating to non-SPA programs should be handled according to the grievance resolution process of the unit involved.

### Informal Resolution of Academic Grievances

Absent unusual circumstances, students must first discuss the situation with the faculty member involved to see whether an informal resolution is possible.

### Filing a Grievance

If the student and the faculty member are unable to reach resolution, the student may file a grievance with the Associate Dean for Student Affairs. All grievances should be filed as quickly as possible, preferably within the same or following semester but in no case to exceed six months after the decision that is the subject of the grievance.

The grievance may be filed via email or in paper format, and should contain all of the following information:

- The student's name, degree program, and student ID number
- The name of the faculty member involved, if any
- The course name and semester, if the dispute involves a course
- A brief statement of the nature of the grievance (not to exceed two pages)
- Any evidence that the student wishes to be considered in support of the grievance, such as a course syllabus, assignments, and communications with the faculty member
- The remedy requested by the student

### The Grievance Investigation

The Associate Dean will acknowledge receipt of the grievance, forward a copy to the faculty member involved and to the faculty program director. The faculty program director may decide to seek informal

resolution by mediating between the student and the faculty member. If the faculty program director does not seek or obtain informal resolution, the Associate Dean will begin investigating the grievance. Investigation of the grievance will include speaking to the student and to the faculty member involved, and the Associate Dean may request additional information from the student or the faculty member. The Associate Dean of Student Affairs may also seek input or support on the investigation from the Associate Dean of Faculty affairs as needed.

In the event that the Associate Dean for Student Affairs is involved in the circumstances leading to the grievance, the grievance will be investigated by the Associate Dean for Faculty Affairs.

The Associate Dean will conclude the investigation and prepare a written report. The Associate Dean will strive to complete this report within 30 days of the filing of the grievance; however, please note that additional time may be required due to breaks between semesters or over the summer or efforts by the faculty program director to resolve the dispute informally.

#### Decision by the Dean

The Associate Dean's report shall be submitted to the Dean and shall include a recommendation about the disposition of the grievance. Within ten business days, the Dean will decide whether or not to follow the recommendation, and will forward a copy of the report together with the Dean's decision on the disposition of the grievance to the student, the faculty member, and the faculty program director.

#### Appealing the Dean's Decision

If the student is not satisfied with the Dean's decision, he or she may make a written request to the Dean that a faculty panel be appointed to review the grievance and consider the appeal. This request should be submitted within ten business days after receipt of the Dean's decision, and may be submitted via email. The Dean shall appoint a panel consisting of three faculty members who were not involved in the original circumstances of the grievance. The faculty panel will consider the evidence and will make a written report with recommendations to the Dean within 30 days, unless additional time is required due to breaks between semesters or over the summer. The Dean will decide whether to uphold or deny the appeal, and will notify the student and faculty member of that decision in writing within ten business days.

The decision of the Dean is final with respect to students in the BACJ, BAPS, and MPA programs. Students in the MCJ and PhD programs may be permitted to appeal the Dean's decision to the Graduate School according to its procedures.

#### Resolution of Other Types of Disputes

This policy only relates to academic grievances at SPA. Other types of disputes are handled in different offices and/or with different procedures, as follows:

- Disputes relating to academic integrity are handled according to SPA's Academic Integrity Policy. Contact your advisor or the Associate Dean for Student Affairs for more information.

- Disputes related to protected category discrimination (such as race, sex, or disability discrimination) are handled by the Office of Equity.
- Disputes related to the conduct of other students are handled by the Office of Student Conduct.
- The Ombuds Office is available to discuss or mediate other types of interpersonal disputes if needed.

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