

Policy on Course Grade Appeals including Narrative Assessment

I. PURPOSE

To ensure a fair and equitable appeal process to all, medical students in the University of Pittsburgh School of Medicine (UPSOM) may appeal a final course grade when students can demonstrate that the grade was assigned in error, violated policy/procedure, or was issued unfairly.

II. SCOPE

This policy applies to:

- Medical students
- Faculty

III. POLICY

“**Course director**” refers to the faculty director of any unit of curriculum at UPSOM—e.g., course, clerkship, elective.

“**Grade**” refers to any transcript-level final grade, performance on a benchmark assessment (e.g., summative exam in Foundations, clinical performance exams such as an OSCE or Clinical Competency Assessment), or narrative comments about a student’s performance that are entered into a student’s official record.

Students who decide to appeal a grade must follow the appeal process within the timeframe specified in this Policy. Appeals that do not comply with the timeframe are not accepted.

Students must not approach faculty, residents, fellows, or other teaching personnel (other than those individuals outlined in this policy) to ask them directly to revise any assessment or grade. Students who do so will have the reconsideration or appeal denied and may face additional professionalism sanctions.

Throughout this policy, “one week” refers to calendar weeks.

Reconsideration Request

If a student has concerns about the determination of the final grade, the student should meet with the course director to discuss performance data to understand how the final grade was calculated. This meeting must take place within one week of the issuing of the grade to the student.

If miscalculations are identified, the course director will recalculate the grade and reassign a grade if appropriate. A decision on reconsideration is made by the course director and communicated in writing to the student within one week of the meeting with the student.

Level 1 Appeal

A student may appeal a final grade, summative narrative comment, or other benchmark assessment (e.g., OSCE) if a student believes that a grade has been incorrectly assigned. Such formal appeals must be based on a student's belief that the assignment of the final grade did not follow the appropriate procedures, or that the final grade was assigned as a result of arbitrary, capricious, or discriminatory approaches as set forth by UPSOM academic policies.

A student who wants to appeal a grade must formally submit the appeal in writing within one week of either the issuing of the final grade to the student or written notification of the reconsideration request. The student must then follow up with the responsible UPSOM Representative (see Procedures) to ensure appropriate documentation is submitted.

Within one week of receiving the written appeal request, the responsible UPSOM Representative will meet with the student to discuss the appeal. The responsible UPSOM Representative then has one week to determine whether to grant the appeal or not and will notify the student in writing within one week of the meeting.

Level 2 Appeal

If a student wishes to dispute the Level 1 Appeal decision, the student must submit the appeal (and rationale) within one week of receipt of Level 1 Appeal decision through a formal written notification to the Associate Dean for Medical Education, who chairs the Grade Appeals Committee at UPSOM (see below for committee details). The Grade Appeals Committee must review the appeal and render a decision within two weeks of receipt of notification by the student with the Associate Dean for Medical Education responding to the student in writing. The decision of the Grade Appeals Committee is final.

Grade Appeals Committee

This standing committee hears Level 2 Appeals. It is chaired by the Associate Dean for Medical Education and consists of five other regular faculty members, plus two alternate faculty members (who can serve if any regular faculty members must recuse themselves from an appeal). Members must recuse themselves from hearing an appeal if the member has any significant relationship with a student (see Procedures). Grade Appeals Committee members will not also be voting members of the Committee on Student Promotions. A quorum of three must be present to review an appeal. A simple majority determines the outcome of any vote. The committee chair would only vote if necessary to break a tie.

The Grade Appeals Committee will be given the student's written appeal. The course director will provide a written justification for the assigned grade; the responsible UPSOM Representative who conducted the Level 1 Appeal will also provide a written justification for the

decision. To avoid conflicts of interest, neither the course director (of the course that is being discussed) nor the Level 1 Appeal UPSOM Representative will be present at or participate in the discussion with the Grade Appeals Committee.

Task Duration	Task	Time from Grade Issue
n/a	Student asks course director for grade reconsideration	<1wk
<1wk	Course director meets with student	1wk
1wk	Course director considers request and writes student with decision	2wks
1wk	Student files formal Level 1 appeal	
1wk	Responsible individual meets with student	3wks
1wk	Responsible individual informs student of outcome of Level 1 appeal	4wks
1wk	Student files formal Level 2 appeal	5wks
2wk	Appeals Committee informs student of outcome of Level 2 appeal	7wk

Appeal Phase	Responsible UPSOM Representatives
Reconsideration	Course director
Level 1 Appeal	Responsible individual (see procedures)
Level 2 Appeal	Grade Appeal Committee (chaired by Associate Dean for Medical Education)

Narrative assessment is part of the course grade. Appeals to the narrative assessment are handled in the same manner described above.

IV. POLICY AUTHOR(S)

- Office of Medical Education

V. RELATED POLICIES AND PROCEDURES

- Policy on Non-Involvement of Providers of Student Health Services in Student Assessment
- Policy on Academic Remediation, Observation, and Warning
- Policy on Academic Progress and Promotions
- Policy on Timeliness of Evaluations in Courses, Clerkships, Electives, and Sub-Internship
- Policy on Medical Student Assessment in Courses and Clerkships: Narrative Assessment
- Code of Professionalism

VI. REFERENCES

- LCME Standard 9.9: Single Standard for Promotion, Graduation and Appeal Process
- LCME Standard 10.3: Policies Regarding Student Selection/Progress and Their Dissemination:
- LCME Standard 11.6 Student Access to Educational Records

VII. APPROVALS

Curriculum Committee, revision approved July 7, 2025.

Dean, School of Medicine, originally approved December 18, 2018

VIII. PROCEDURES

Reconsideration:

Reconsideration meetings can be in-person, by phone, or virtual—but must be synchronous.

Clerkship grade reconsiderations should be reviewed by a clerkship’s grading committee. If members are not present, or if a clerkship director or designee is unable to meet with a student due to compelling extenuating circumstances (e.g., hospitalization), the Associate Dean for Clinical Education can delay the appeals timeline.

In the Foundations Phase, grades are issued via ExamSoft or AMP-UP. In the Clerkship & Bridges Phases, grades are issued via AMP-UP.

Level 1:

For Level 1 Appeals, a student must use the Level 1 Grade Appeal Process form to formally file an appeal. This form is available on Elentra. It outlines the course, grade, date of discussion with the course director, intent to appeal, and reason for appeal. The form is sent to

- the individual responsible for that phase of the curriculum (Assistant Dean for Foundations, or Vice Chair of Education for any departmentally administered course in Clerkships/Bridges phases, or Associate Dean for Clinical Education for centrally administered courses in the Clerkships phase, or Assistant Dean for Medical Education for centrally administered courses in the Bridges phase) -- who will have primary responsibility for Level 1 appeals

Phase	Course Type	Responsible Representative
Foundations	All	Assistant Dean for Foundations
Clerkships	Departmental (e.g., clerkship, elective)	Vice Chair of Education
	Central (e.g., non-departmental elective)	Associate Dean for Clinical Education
Bridges	Departmental (e.g., clerkship, elective)	Vice Chair of Education
	Central (e.g., ILS, Bootcamp, etc.)	Assistant Dean for Medical Education

- The student’s Advisory Dean and coach
- the course director(s) in whatever course that the grade is being appealed

A grade appeal may only be made on the basis of one or more of these three reasons:

1. Grade was assigned in error
2. Violated policy/procedure

3. Issued unfairly as a result of arbitrary, capricious, or discriminatory approaches as set forth by UPSOM academic policies

The student must provide information that was not previously available to the course director(s) or course grading committee for consideration, specifying how this new information justifies an appeal. This can include information about possible assessments that the student believes were not taken into account at the time the grade was determined. This information must be provided with the initial documentation of intent to appeal.

Level 2:

For Level 2 Appeals, a student must use the Level 2 Grade Appeal Process form to formally file an appeal. This form is available on Elentra. It outlines the course, grade, date of discussion with the course director, date of decision on the Level 1 Appeal, intent to appeal, and reason for appeal. The form is sent to:

- the Associate Dean for Medical Education—who will have primary responsibility for Level 2 Appeals with the Grade Appeals Committee
- the Dean responsible for that phase of the curriculum (Assistant Dean for Foundations, or Associate Dean for Clinical Education for Clerkships phase, or the Assistant Dean for Medical Education for the Bridges phase)
- the student's Advisory Dean and coach
- the Vice Chair of Education for the department (for appeals related to clerkships and electives)
- the course director(s) in whatever course that the grade is being appealed

As part of the appeals process, responsible faculty are empowered to investigate as necessary as part of the effort to determine the accuracy and fairness of a grade assignment. This could include review of written documentation, inquiries to involved individuals, and any direct assessment data applicable.

Recusal:

No faculty or administrator should be involved in the appeals process if there is any potential for bias or any relationship with the student that could influence decision-making. Individuals (e.g., Grade Appeals Committee faculty) must recuse themselves in such situations, include (but are not limited to):

- Health provider for the student (current or past)
- Provider of any assessment data for the curricular unit that is being appealed
- Advisor/mentor
- Past LE/CSP

- Family member or friend
- Directed a course that a student previously failed

If a student identifies a potential conflict with a faculty member, the student may request that faculty member to recuse themselves. However, the decision is the faculty's to make.

Written responses should be directed to the student with copies to the other individuals who were copied on the appeal request, to inform them of the outcome.

If at any point a reconsideration or appeal is granted, the course director must notify the UPSOM Registrar to update the student's academic record.

Exceptions to the timeline can be made by the Associate Dean for Medical Education if the student has unusual extenuating circumstances that prevent adherence to the deadlines (for instance, if they are hospitalized).

Sanctions:

Failure to comply with this policy may result in a delay in the appeal process or, if the appeal is not made according to the timeline, may be an automatic denial of the appeal.

Students will also have grade appeals denied if the student has any contact with educators to ask for a reconsideration of any assessments.

Failure to exhibit appropriate professional attitudes during the appeal process may result in a Code of Professionalism report being initiated by the reviewer at any level of appeals.

Any faculty delays in issuing appeal decisions will be a violation of this policy and should be reported to the Associate Dean for Medical Education. Exceptions to the timeline can be made by the Associate Dean for Medical Education if the faculty member has unusual extenuating circumstances that prevent adherence to the deadlines (for instance, if they are hospitalized); delays will become part of the appeal documentation.