

Fair Grading

Fair and equitable grading reflects values to which all members of the Plymouth State University community commit themselves. Grades are used to assess the relative extent to which students achieve course objectives in all for-credit courses at PSU.

Academic freedom allows instructors (1) to determine course objectives, within the bounds of established curricula, and the means by which a student's mastery of those objectives will be evaluated, and (2) to evaluate the quality of work on individual exams or assignments.

Students have the right to challenge evaluations of their work, and hence instructors are accountable with regard to providing and explaining all relevant grades and grading criteria. Grading challenges are of two kinds. Those that question the accuracy of grades are resolved by means described under Grade Appeals. Questions related to the policy or process of making assignments and determining the final grade are addressed by Standards for Fair Grading.

Standards for Fair Grading

To achieve fair and equitable grading, instructors shall inform students, in writing, e.g., via a syllabus, of the course objectives and the means by which student mastery of those objectives will be determined. Instructors are expected to share this information with students during the first class meeting and to provide this information, in writing, no later than the second class meeting. These arrangements cannot be altered after the class has met for one quarter of its scheduled class meeting time if the changes disadvantage a student. The grade of a student shall be based solely on the criteria known to all students in the class, and all such criteria shall apply to mastery of stated course objectives.

Examples of violations of the fair grading policy include, but are not limited to, the following:

1. Allowing alternate work to substitute for coursework assignments, for a particular student or group of students, when that option has not been stated in the syllabus as available to all students
2. Allowing a student to perform extra work, over and above that described in the syllabus, to influence her or his grade, when that same opportunity has not been made available to all students
3. Allowing any student to perform extra work after final grades have been submitted to improve their grade

Exceptions to the above example violations may be allowed in cases related to documented learning disabilities when alternative testing arrangements have been made through Plymouth Academic Support Services (PASS) and in cases where there are documented serious extenuating circumstances.

When a member of the Plymouth State University community believes that fair grading practices are not being followed in a particular course, they must raise the issue in the following way.

- I. Raise the issue with the instructor of the course to consider whether the suspected violation of the fair grading policy did occur. If the facts of the matter are disputed, without resolution, the chair of the instructor's department shall be consulted; if unresolved, the associate vice president for undergraduate studies shall be consulted; and if unresolved, the Faculty Academic Affairs Committee shall hear the facts and reach findings. If it is determined that a violation of the fair grading policy did occur, either through the above process or through the instructor saying so at the outset, and the instructor can and does make suitable arrangements to come into compliance with the policy, the matter will be considered resolved.
- II. If a violation of the fair grading policy is shown to exist via step I, and the instructor cannot or will not take immediate remedial action, he or she shall be guided, by the Academic Affairs Committee, as to how to correct the problem and as to how to ensure that such a situation does not occur in the future. The most extreme case would result in the placing of a letter in the personnel file of the instructor involved, stating the nature of the matter and the conclusion reached by the Academic Affairs Committee. A copy of this letter would then be sent to the appropriate department chair and the vice president for academic affairs.

Barring matters related to the just administration of the fair grading policy above, final grades submitted to the registrar may only be changed due to an error in determining the grade or an error in recording the grade. Students may challenge the accuracy or completeness of their semester's academic record for a period of one year from the

end of the semester in question. After this period the University shall have no obligation to alter a student's academic record except to correct an error in transferring grades from the official grade roster to the transcript.

Grade Appeals

Students who challenge a grade should begin by talking with the instructor of the course involved. If the situation cannot be resolved by that means, or if the nature of the problem precludes discussion with the instructor, students may bring the matter to the attention of the chair of the individual's department. The chair will attempt to resolve the matter either through discussion with the instructor alone or jointly with the student. If these meetings do not provide a solution satisfactory to all parties, the question may be taken to the associate vice president for undergraduate studies, where the matter will be reviewed. Regardless of the outcome of these discussions, only the instructor of a course, using her/his professional judgment, can change a student's grade. If the associate vice president is not satisfied with the proceedings, the associate vice president can ask the Academic Affairs Committee to hear the matter as described in I and II under Standards for Fair Grading.

Faculty Grade Change Procedure

All grades are considered final when grade rosters are turned off by the registrar. The circumstances and procedures outlined in the Fair Grading and the Grade Appeal policies described above represent the only means by which a final grade may be changed. When a final grade change is warranted an instructor requests a grade change by submitting a course grade change form to the associate vice president for undergraduate studies for approval. Grades of Incomplete (IC) are submitted to the registrar in accordance with the university's Incompletes policy. Change of IC grades to letter grades are subsequently submitted through a course grade change form to the associate vice president for undergraduate studies.