

ADMINISTRATIVE REGULATION 5530

SOUTH ORANGE COUNTY
COMMUNITY COLLEGE DISTRICT

STUDENT SERVICES

GRADE GRIEVANCE

The purpose of this regulation is to provide a prompt and equitable means of resolving student grade grievances that takes into consideration the rights of both students and faculty to a fair and equitable process.

I. GENERAL PROVISIONS

A. Grade Grievance

By law, the instructor is solely responsible for the grades assigned; no instructor may be directed to change a grade except in certain narrow circumstances authorized by the California Education Code.

B. California Education Code

When grades are given for any course of instruction taught in a community college district, the grade given to each student shall be the grade determined by the instructor of the course and the determination of the student's grade by the instructor, in the absence of mistake, fraud, bad faith, or incompetence, shall be final.

This regulation provides the procedures for challenging grades given in any course of instruction offered in the District. This regulation does not apply to the following:

1. The challenge process for prerequisites, corequisites, advisories, and limitations on enrollment;
2. Student discipline;
3. Employee discipline;
4. Challenges to established district policies and administrative regulations; and
5. Financial claims against the District.

C. Student Rights

All students have the right to participate fully in the educational process, free from discrimination and harassment.

II. DEFINITIONS

A. Mistake: An unintentional act, omission, or error by the instructor or the college.

B. Fraud: A deception deliberately practiced in order to secure unfair or unlawful gain.

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- C. Bad Faith: An intent to deceive or to act in a manner contrary to law and/or a grade assigned because of a student’s protected characteristics contrary to Education Code and Title 5, California Code of Regulations. If, pursuant to the discrimination and harassment complaint procedure, it is determined that a grade was the result of discrimination or harassment, the grade may be changed as a remedy for the discrimination or harassment.
- D. Incompetence: A lack of ability, legal qualification, or fitness to discharge a required duty.
- E. Day: Unless otherwise provided, day shall mean any day on which the District administrative offices are open for business. The deadlines contained herein may be modified by mutual agreement of the parties or if the grade grievance complaint is based on alleged unlawful discrimination.
- F. Grievant: A currently enrolled student or a former student who has filed a grievance. Former students shall be limited to grievances relating to course grades to the extent permitted by Education Code and the provisions herein.
- G. Respondent: Any person claimed by a grievant to be responsible for the alleged grievance.
- H. The College President: The President for the college or a designated representative of the College President.
- I. Grievance Officer: The Vice President of Instruction or designee shall serve as the Grievance Officer. The Grievance Officer may not serve on a Grade Grievance Hearing Panel for a grievance arising in their own supervisory areas.

III. INFORMAL RESOLUTION

Any student who believes they have a grade grievance shall be assigned a Grievance Officer, shall make a reasonable effort to resolve the matter on an informal basis prior to requesting a grievance hearing, and shall attempt to resolve the problem with the faculty member with whom the student has the grievance. If informal resolution of the problem is not possible, the student may elect to pursue a formal grievance pursuant to the procedures herein.

A. Informal Resolution Process

- 1. The Grievant must notify the faculty member with whom they have the grievance in writing and may schedule a meeting (online, phone, or in person) in an effort to resolve the matter informally.
- 2. If the matter is not resolved in step “1”, the Grievant must notify the Dean of the respective instructional area in writing and may schedule a meeting in an effort to resolve the matter informally. The Dean may involve or rely upon the department chair in an attempt to resolve the grievance. The Dean will notify the faculty member if this occurs.
- 3. If the matter is not resolved in step “2”, the Grievant may elect to file a Formal Grade Grievance. In the case of a Grade Grievance at Irvine Valley College, students may elect to contact the Office of Student Rights and Grievances for support.

IV. FORMAL GRIEVANCE PROCESS

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A. Written Statement of Grievance

Any student who believes they have a grade grievance shall file a written, signed Statement of Grievance form stating the basis for the grade grievance with the Grievance Officer or designee no later than 45 days after the student knew or should have known of the grade in the course. The Grievance Officer or designee shall provide a copy of the written Statement of Grievance form to the affected faculty member within five (5) days after the form has been filed. The Statement of Grievance must be filed whether or not the student has initiated efforts at informal resolution, if the student wishes the grievance to become official. The faculty member shall not engage in any conduct that may be construed as retaliation for filing the grievance. Filing a grievance is a protected activity.

B. Request for a Grievance Hearing

The student may request a grievance hearing after the written Statement of Grievance form has been filed. A request for a grievance hearing shall be filed with the Grievance Officer on a Request for Grievance Hearing form within 30 days after filing the Statement of Grievance.

The student may withdraw their written Statement of Grievance and/or Request for a Grievance Hearing at any time. The notice of withdrawal shall be in writing and filed with the Grievance Officer. The Grievance Officer shall notify the affected faculty member in writing within five (5) days that the student has withdrawn the grievance and no further action may be taken.

C. Grievance Hearing Panel

1. The Grievance Hearing Panel shall consist of a dean appointed by the Office of Instruction (if the Grievance Officer is a dean via designation, it must be another dean), a representative appointed by the Associated Student Government, and a faculty member appointed by the Academic Senate.

No person shall serve as a member of a Grievance Hearing Committee if that person has been personally involved in any matter giving rise to the grievance or could not act in a neutral manner.

2. Within 15 days following receipt of the Request for Grievance Hearing, the Hearing Panel shall meet to select a Chair and to determine on the basis of the Statement of Grievance whether there is sufficient grounds for a hearing. During the summer, given that many faculty and most students are not on campus, it may not be possible to convene a Hearing Panel in 15 days, but it will be scheduled no later than 15 days after the first day of fall semester instruction.
3. The determination of whether the Statement of Grievance presents sufficient grounds for a hearing shall be based on the following:
 - a. The Statement of Grievance contains facts which, if true, would constitute a grievance under these procedures;
 - b. The grievant is a student as defined in these procedures;
 - c. The grievant is personally and directly affected by the alleged grievance;
 - d. The grievance was filed in a timely manner; and

- e. The grievance is not, based on the allegations contained in the written grievance, frivolous, without foundation, or filed for the purposes of harassment. In determining whether a grievance is frivolous, without foundation, or filed for purposes of harassment, the panel shall not at this phase, consider facts outside the grievance.
4. If the Grievance Hearing Panel determines that the written Statement of Grievance does not meet each of the aforementioned requirements, within five (5) days of the Hearing Panel decision, the Chair shall notify the student in writing that the Request for a Grievance Hearing has been rejected. The notice shall contain the specific reasons for the rejection of a hearing and the procedures for appeal (See Section V.A.5 herein).
5. If the Grievance Hearing Panel determines that the written Statement of Grievance meets each of the aforementioned requirements, the Chair shall schedule a grievance hearing no later than 45 days from the decision of the Hearing Panel. All parties to the grievance shall be notified in writing by the Chair of the date, time, and location of the grievance hearing 10 days prior to the grievance hearing. During the summer, given that many faculty and most students are not on campus, it may not be possible to convene the grievance hearing within 45 days. In that case, it will be scheduled no later than 30 days after the first day of fall semester instruction, or 45 days after the first panel, whichever comes later.

D. Hearing Procedures

1. The decision of the Grievance Hearing Panel Chair shall be final on all matters relating to the conduct of the hearing unless there is a vote of a majority of the other members of the panel to the contrary.
2. Each party to the grievance may call witnesses and introduce oral and written testimony relevant to the issues alleged in the grievance. Formal rules of evidence shall not apply. Any relevant evidence shall be admitted. The parties shall exchange exhibits and lists of witnesses five (5) days prior to the hearing.
3. Unless the Grievance Hearing Panel determines to proceed otherwise, each party to the grievance shall be permitted to make an opening statement. Thereafter, the grievant shall make the first presentation, followed by the respondent. The grievant may present rebuttal evidence after the respondent's evidence. The burden shall be on the grievant to prove by a preponderance of the evidence that the facts alleged are true and that a grievance has been established as specified above.
4. Each party to the grievance may represent themselves or may be represented by a person of their choice. A party shall not be represented by an attorney unless notification is presented to the Chair 10 days prior to the date of the hearing. If one party is permitted to be represented by an attorney, any other party shall have the right to be represented by an attorney. The Chair of the Hearing Panel may continue the hearing in order to accommodate counsel upon a showing of good cause. The Hearing Panel may also request legal assistance through the College President. Any legal adviser provided to the Hearing Panel sits in an advisory capacity but shall not be a member of the Panel nor vote with it.

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5. The hearing shall be closed and confidential. Witnesses shall not be present at the hearing when not testifying.
6. The hearing shall be recorded by the Hearing Panel Chair by recording or stenographic recording and this document shall be the only recording made of the proceedings. No witness who refused to be recorded may be permitted to give testimony. At the onset of the hearing, the Chair shall ask each person present to identify themselves by name and thereafter shall ask witnesses to identify themselves by name. The recording shall remain in the custody of the college at all times, unless released to a professional transcribing service. Any party may request a copy of the recording at their own expense.
7. All testimony shall be taken under oath administered by the Chair. Written statements of witnesses under penalty of perjury shall not be used unless the witness is unavailable to testify. A witness who refuses to be tape recorded shall be considered to be unavailable.

E. Hearing Panel Decision

Within 15 days following the close of the hearing, the Grievance Hearing Panel shall prepare a written decision, which shall include specific factual findings regarding the grievance and the specific conclusions regarding whether a grievance has been established as defined above. Where appropriate, the decision shall articulate the factual basis for any credibility determinations necessary to the panel's decision. The Hearing Panel decision shall also include a specific statement regarding the relief to be afforded the grievant, if any. The Hearing Panel decision shall be based only on the record of the hearing, and not on matters outside the record. The record consists of the written Statement of Grievance, any written response by the respondent, and the oral and written evidence produced at the hearing.

V. APPEAL PROCESS

A. Written Statement of Appeal

1. Within 10 days following the Grievance Hearing Panel decision regarding the merits of the grievance, any party to the grievance may file a written Statement of Appeal with the College President. The written Statement of Appeal shall state the specific basis for the appeal and shall be sent to all parties.
2. All parties may submit a written response to the appeal to the College President within 10 days of the filing of the written Statement of Appeal.
3. The College President shall review the record of the hearing and the documents submitted in connection with the appeal but shall not consider any matters outside the formal record. The College President may decide to sustain, reverse, or modify the decision of the Grievance Hearing Panel. The College President's decision shall be in writing and shall include a statement of reasons for the decision. The College President's decision shall be final.

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4. The decision on appeal shall be reached within 20 days after receipt of the appeal documents. Copies of the College President's decision shall be sent to all parties.
5. Within 10 days following the Grievance Panel's decision regarding whether the Statement of Grievance warrants a formal Grievance Hearing, any party to the grievance may file a written Statement of Appeal with the College President. The College President shall review the Statement of Grievance and the Request for a Grievance Hearing in accordance with the requirements for a grievance provided herein but shall not consider any other matters. The College President's decision whether to grant a grievance hearing shall be final and not subject to further appeal. The filing of an appeal pursuant to this provision shall stay all proceedings on the underlying grievance until a decision is reached by the College President. If the College President's decision is that the matter shall proceed to a hearing the timelines shall be extended by the period of time the matter was under consideration with the College President.

References:

California Education Code, Sections 66250 et seq., 66270, and 76224(a)
Title 5, California Code of Regulation, Sections 59300 et seq.
ACCJC Accreditation Eligibility Requirement 20
ACCJC Accreditation Standard 2.4

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