

DISPUTING AN ANNENBERG GRADE

OVERVIEW

The Annenberg School, in line with USC policies regarding disputed academic evaluations, has a grade appeals policy which ensures that students have a right to petition whenever they have concerns about their graded work. This policy follows [USC's Student Handbook](#).

If a student has a concern that faculty might not have fairly evaluated their work or may have made an error in their evaluation, they can submit a grade appeal. This right to appeal is available to students in any Annenberg degree program or Annenberg course.

Students should utilize the following appeal process.

FIRST – COMMUNICATE WITH THE FACULTY MEMBER

The first stage in this process is a dialogue between the faculty member and the student about the process and product of that grading evaluation. In the interest of preserving the very important student-faculty member relationship, the student and faculty member should try to resolve the grade dispute by direct communication. A useful process is for students to reflect on the issue and then reach out to their faculty. Students should provide a summary of the concern through email and include any relevant documentation. Students should provide the faculty member a reasonable period of time (approximately two weeks) to provide their perspective. Many grade concerns can be resolved at this point in the process and negate the need for a formal appeal.

SECOND – REVIEW BY THE ANNENBERG SCHOOL

If the above dialogue cannot resolve the issue, the dispute should move to the next level of review and become a grade appeal. Students will submit an appeal petition that should include a brief (one to two page) summary of the dispute and all relevant documents, including but not limited to the course syllabus, graded work in question, email/text/slack exchanges with faculty, screenshots of other online materials, all the academic work about which there are concerns related to evaluation. The student should also provide evidence of the inability to resolve the matter with the faculty member.

NOTE: All grade appeals must be brought no later than the end of the semester following the semester for which the student received the disputed grade.

The two levels of appeal beyond the faculty discussion are to the School Directors and the Annenberg Grade Appeal Committee.

A) School Director Review

If a student selects a review by their School Director, they should email their grade appeal to the director of their respective school.

Students should contact Dr. Hector Amaya at hectoram@usc.edu for all courses and degree programs offered by the Communication school.

Students should contact Dr. Gordon Stables at stables@usc.edu for all courses and degree programs offered by the Journalism school.

For all classes offered as Communication and Journalism (ASCJ) courses, students should contact the Annenberg Associate Dean for Student Affairs, Vince Gonzales, at vince.gonzales@usc.edu.

NOTE: Students may consult with the Associate Dean for Student Affairs about the process and any questions they may have before they submit their appeal to a School Director.

B) Annenberg Grade Appeal Committee Review

Students may also choose to first direct their appeal to the Annenberg Grade Appeal Committee. Students seeking a review by the Committee should contact the Annenberg Associate Dean for Student Affairs, Vince Gonzales, at vince.gonzales@usc.edu.

NOTE: A School Director may also decide the Committee is a better venue for any appeals submitted initially to their office and may ask that body to take up the matter first.

THIRD – REVIEW OF THE PETITION

Once a student has selected a review option, one of the following processes will take place:

A) DIRECT REVIEW BY THE DEPARTMENT CHAIR

The School Director will notify the faculty member of the appeal and personally review information from both the student and the faculty member. The School Director may ask for additional information and documentation from any of the parties.

B) REVIEW BY THE ANNENBERG GRADE APPEALS COMMITTEE

Once an appeal is received by the Associate Dean for Student Affairs, the faculty member will be notified of the petition and additional information and documentation may be requested from either of the parties. From the pool of available faculty members on the standing Annenberg Grade Appeals Committee, a Faculty Review Panel will be appointed that shall consist of:

- a) two faculty members from the student's Annenberg school (COMM or JOUR),
- b) a student representative, and,
- c) a faculty member from outside the involved department or academic unit.

The student may request a formal hearing during which they and the instructor may address the Review Panel. If the student does not request a hearing, then the Review Panel will consider the materials they have been given and render a decision. During those deliberations, the Review Panel may choose to send questions, through the Associate Dean for Student Affairs, to the student or the instructor. The Review Panel may also decide a hearing is necessary.

Should the student or the Review Panel call for a hearing then the Associate Dean for Student Affairs will schedule such a meeting (either in-person or via video conferencing software such as Zoom) and set time limits for it.

At the hearing, both the student and the instructor will be given the opportunity to speak separately. Neither can be required to do so and may choose to let their written statements speak for themselves. There is no penalty for not appearing at the hearing.

A student may also request that a faculty member of their choice join the proceedings. This person may be present for the questioning of all involved parties and may offer a verbal or written statement of their own to the committee. They do not take part in private committee discussions and do not vote on the appeal.

The goal of the hearing is to ensure that the Review Panel has the best possible information in order to reach a judgment. At the hearing, the student and faculty member will be given the opportunity to summarize their perspectives. The Review Panel may ask questions of all participants.

FOURTH – RESULTS OF THE REVIEW

When a decision on the appeal is reached by either a School Director or the Review Panel, the student and the faculty member will be informed via email. Normally a decision should be sent to the student within 15 days after the hearing. This time may be extended if necessary. The student and faculty member will be informed if the decision will be delayed.

FIFTH – APPEALS OF THE REVIEW

If a student wishes to appeal the decision of a School Director or the Review Panel, they must do so in writing within two weeks of receiving the emailed written decision. All appeals should be directed to the Annenberg Associate Dean for Student Affairs, Vince Gonzales, at vince.gonzales@usc.edu, who will assist the Annenberg Dean in reviewing the appeal of the previous decision.

As part of that process, the Annenberg Dean may also conduct a hearing and may ask questions of the School Director or Review Panel members who rendered the previous decision.

The Annenberg Dean will then make a final and binding decision. Normally a written decision will be sent to the student and faculty member via email within 15 days of the decision. This time may be extended if necessary. The student and faculty member will be informed if the decision will be delayed.