



Appealing a College Level Decision

Description

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You are seeking to appeal a grade, refusal to provide disability related accommodations, dismissal or disciplinary sanction. Your first instinct might be to march straight to the University President. Though this idea might help you blow off some steam, it will likely not get you anywhere in your appeal. Here are these six simple steps to maximize your chances of a favorable appeal:

Step 1: Prevention Strategies

If you have a disability, then well before school starts, you should contact the disability office in writing. The higher education institution will require background information on your disability and supporting documentation from your physician before providing accommodations. Thus, receiving disability related accommodations can be time consuming and should be dealt with as soon as possible.

Before the first day of classes, all students should read the academic handbook for requirements for maintaining good academic standing and maintaining financial aid awards. Also, students should be aware of the time periods to drop classes, to take a leave of absence, or to take a medical leave. Potentially, these temporary withdrawals from academia could prevent students from falling out of good standing with the institution.

Step 2: Locate the Official Procedure for Appeal

Every higher education Institution should have an official policy as part of their student handbook with deadlines and steps to take regarding an appeal. Once you locate the policy, make sure you familiarize yourself with all possible avenues that could be explored. Additionally, make sure you locate the handbook sooner rather than later because often times these matters are time sensitive.

Step 3: Follow the Correct Procedure

In reviewing the student handbook, most appeals will outline the appropriate individuals to speak to for your particular dilemma. Additionally, the student handbook will likely outline the order in which you are

to speak to each person. Usually, the first person to contact is your professor, followed by the department chair or panel, and then maybe the President or dean of academic affairs.

Start with a written request for appeal. [See this letter for a suggested format.](#)

Step 4: Make a Paper Trial

When you are trying to prove your case, it is important to have physical evidence to reference. For example, in a grade dispute, it might be useful to have old exams, rubrics, or a syllabus so you can point to exactly where the discrepancy can be found. Additionally, make sure you keep notes of any conversations that you have with faculty during your appeals process for further evidence. The best way to keep these conversations and meetings documented is usually in an email or word document that can be easily referred to if needed.

Step 5: Be Civil throughout the Process

Despite wanting to win your appeal, keep in mind what your end goal. Likely your end result would be to win the appeal, but also to stay enrolled in your institution. In dealing with these appeals, remember to be civil in corresponding with the institution and the faculty because at the end of the day that person that you quarreled with in the Dean's office could end up being your professor the next semester. In the end, it's important that when you are taking action to appeal your case that you be respectful and communicate professionally.

Step 6: Consult with an Attorney

If you are not satisfied with results after going through steps 1-5 or believe that you require additional assistance to take those steps, then perhaps it's time to consult with an attorney. First, locate an attorney that has experience with higher education related issues. Second, provide your selected attorney with all facts, records, paper trail, and procedures related to your issue. Once an attorney has been provided with all the important information, then they can help you by representing you at a hearing (if permitted), draft letters to the institution, cite relevant case law that supports your position, negotiate with the institution, or file a discrimination complaint against the institution. Lastly, an attorney, who is helping appeal your issue, can provide you with a peace of mind which allows you to remain focused on your life inside and outside academia.

If you believe that you have been discriminated against or have been unfairly dismissed, you may be able to file a lawsuit in court or a complaint against the university with a government agency. There are strict deadlines for this and if you miss them, you may lose your ability to pursue an action. Law Offices of Hirji & Chau provides free 30 minute consultations and can give you further direction.

[Sample college level appeal letter](#)

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