



# VCU

## Grade Appeals in the Clerkship Phase Policy

### Policy Statement and Purpose

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The Liaison Committee on Medical Education (LCME) has established standards regarding the requirement of medical schools to follow a single set of core standards for the advancement and graduation of all medical students. The LCME further requires these standards include a formal process for actions that may affect the status of a medical student including: timely notice of any impending actions, disclosure of any evidence upon which actions are based, and a formal process by which students may respond and appeal any adverse decisions related to advancement, graduation, or dismissal from the program.

### Stakeholders

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The faculty, staff, and students of the VCU School of Medicine are responsible for knowing this standard operating procedure, its contents, and provisions.

### Definitions

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**VCU SOM:** Virginia Commonwealth University School of Medicine.

**LCME:** Liaison Committee on Medical Education. The group with authority to accredit medical education programs leading to the MD degree in the United States and Canada.

**OME:** Office of Medical Education.

**CD:** Clerkship Director/Co-Director/Assistant Director/Associate Director.

**ADCME:** Assistant Dean for Clinical Medical Education.

**GC:** Grading Committee.

**GAP:** Grading Appeals Panel.

**Grade:** A student's grade is defined as the final grade, including the individual components and associated summative, narrative comments.

### Responsibilities

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**Students:** Students have a right to appeal their grade or component of their grade, including summative comments, they feel have been awarded unjustly, in a biased or arbitrary manner. Students are



# VCU

School of Medicine

responsible for following the procedures below to submit an appeal, and are responsible for accepting grade feedback from the CD, as well as accepting the final decision of the GC.

**CD:** Clerkship Directors are responsible for the assignment of final grades and grade components for each student, including assignment of the final summative narrative comments. CD's are also responsible for participating as members of a GC.

**GC:** The clerkship grading committee is tasked with using their professional judgement, both subjectively and objectively, in determining a student's grade base on academic performance. They are responsible for ensuring grades are awarded in a uniform manner based on established expectations and criteria. They also hold responsibility for reviewing all grade appeals, reviewing submitted information, and making a final recommendation to the CD on any grade changes they suggest should be executed as part of an appeal.

**GAP:** The grade appeals panel is responsible for reviewing all second-level grade appeals, reviewing submitted information, and rendering a final decision on any grade changes executed as part of a second-level appeal. The decision of the GAP is final and no further appeal of their outcome may occur.

## Procedures

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### Grade Feedback

- Students who have questions about their final grade must solicit feedback about the grade from the CD prior to pursuing a grade appeal. Students must:
  - Contact the CD within seven (7) calendar days of the date of email notification that their final grade has been posted to schedule this meeting
  - Meet with the CD to review the final awarded grade within twenty-one (21) calendar days of the date of email notification that their final grade has been posted
  - Discuss the students' progress throughout the clerkship and how the awarded grade was achieved
  - Upon conclusion of the meeting, students who decide to continue with the grade appeal process must follow the procedures outlined below in the Grade Appeals section
  - University recognized holidays during which the university is closed will not count toward the established timelines

### Grade Appeals

#### *Basis for Appeals*

- Students may appeal a grade in instances where one (1) or more of the following has occurred:
  - *Basis Not Related to Performance:* The student must demonstrate that their grade was awarded based on factors other than academic or clinical performance.



- *Deviation from Established Criteria or Guidelines:* The student must demonstrate that the grade awarded was not calculated according to the grading criteria outlined in the clerkship syllabus.
- *Calculation/Factual Error:* The student must demonstrate that the grade awarded was calculated using false or erroneous information, excluded pertinent information that would have otherwise impacted the grade awarded, or demonstrate narrative comments that are not representative of the student's actual performance.

### ***Appeal Submissions***

- Students have the right to appeal their grade and/or a component of their grade. Appeals must:
  - Be submitted via email to the CD within twenty-one (21) calendar days of the date of email notification that their final grade has been posted
    - University recognized holidays during which the university is closed will not count toward the established timelines
  - Be submitted using the Grade Appeal Form
  - Be no more than five-hundred (500) words maximum
  - Provide evidence to support the appeal, including:
    - Reason(s) why the grade or grade component should be changed
    - Information that was previously unavailable or not considered as part of the original grade assignment
- Appeals that fail to meet the criteria as outlined above will be considered incomplete and the appeal will not be considered.
- Students are not permitted to contact individual faculty to ask for additional comments in support of their appeal.
  - Reaching out to individual evaluators is considered a violation of professional standards and students may be subject to adverse action.

### ***Review of Appeals***

- Appeals will be reviewed by the respective clerkship GC. The GC will:
  - Meet and review the submitted appeal
    - GC's will have twenty (20) calendar days from the conclusion of the initial twenty-one (21) day window for student appeal submissions to review any appeals received, and provide a recommendation regarding the outcome of the appeals to the CD
      - The CD will consider the recommendations of the GC and render a decision regarding any appeals within one (1) calendar day of receiving recommendations from the GC
        - CD's will notify the ACDME and the student of the outcome of the appeal no later than the conclusion of this one (1) day window

- In instances where the CD renders a decision that does not align with the recommendation of the GC, the CD must provide a rationale explaining their decision
- University recognized holidays during which the university is closed will not count toward the established timelines

### ***Second Appeal***

- If the student does not agree with the decision of the GC after their review of the appeal, the student may submit a second level appeal
  - Students seeking a second-level appeal must submit an email to the ADCME within seven (7) days of receipt of notification of the GC's review of the original appeal and rendered decision.
    - Emails must contain the original appeal, supporting documentation, and why the rationale provided by the GC warrants further review
- Second level appeals will be reviewed by a Grading Appeals Panel (GAP) comprised of three (3) individuals who are familiar with clerkship grading procedures at the VCU SOM, and who are not involved with teaching or assessment activities in the clerkship for which the student is appealing their grade.
- GAP participants will include:
  - One (1) Vice Chair for Education
  - Two (2) clinical faculty members
  - These participants must not have their primary faculty appointment in the department/division in which the clerkship grade appeal is occurring
- The GAP will:
  - Meet and review the second level appeal, including a review of all supporting documentation provided by both the student submitting the appeal and the CD for the clerkship in which the grade/component is being appealed
    - The student and the CD are responsible for submitting a summary narrative statement that may not exceed 500 words, in addition to their supporting documents
  - Render a decision regarding the appeal within thirty (30) calendar days
  - Notify the ADCME by email with the final decision, including the rationale for the rendered decision
    - The ADCME will notify the student of the final decision within three (3) calendar days of receipt of the final decision of the GAP
- University recognized holidays during which the university is closed will not count toward the established timelines

### ***Final Decisions***

- Decisions of the second level appeal to the GAP are final, and are not appealable.



### **Grade Changes**

- In instances where an appeal results in a change in grade for the student, the CD will complete a Change of Grade Form
  - The Change of Grade Form will be submitted via email to both the Registrar and the ADCME
  - The Registrar will change the grade in the LMS to reflect the change and certify the new grade

### **Discrimination**

- VCU prohibits unlawful discrimination as outlined in the VCU Preventing and Responding to Discrimination Policy, located here:  
<https://vcu.public.doctract.com/doctract/documentportal/08DA32A740D317171538135833B28B2F>
  - Forms for reporting concerns are located on the VCU Office of Institutional Equity, Effectiveness and Success website: <https://equity.vcu.edu/>

### **Related Policies**

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Promotions and Advancement Committee Policy  
Medical Student Performance Evaluation (MSPE) Policy  
Confidentiality, Maintenance, and Amendment of Student Educational Records  
VCU Preventing and Responding to Discrimination Policy

### **Review Cycle and Revision History**

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The policy is reviewed and may be revised by the Curriculum Council as necessary, but at least every three years.

**Current Revision Approved: 03.23.2023**

### **Applicable Laws, Regulations & Standards**

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LCME Standards for Accreditation of Medical Education Programs Leading to the MD Degree:

- LCME Standard 9, Element 9
- LCME Standard 11, Element 6