Date: December 11, 2006

To: College of Engineering and Applied Science

From: Robert H. Davis, Dean

Re: College Policy on Grade Appeals

One of the fundamental responsibilities of every faculty member in the College is to evaluate the academic performance of our students fairly, consistently and conscientiously. The grades that our students earn form part of their permanent academic records, and can have far-reaching impacts on their future endeavors. As individual faculty members, and collectively as a college, it is our duty to ensure that these grades represent an accurate assessment of performance.

I take the prerogative of faculty members to assign grades very seriously, and I am extremely reluctant to interfere in this basic aspect of our academic lives. At the same time, both the courts and the American Association of University Professors (AAUP) have recognized the need for a well-designed appeals process to provide remedies on those rare occasions when a student appeals a final grade, asserting that this final grade was assigned in an unprofessional manner, or that grading may have been improperly influenced by prejudice or other inappropriate factors. This process, reviewed by the Undergraduate and Graduate Education Councils, and the Administrative Council, is provided below.

College of Engineering and Applied Science Department/Program Grade Appeal Process

The following shall be the official policy of the academic units of the College, unless an academic unit submits an alternative procedure to the Dean for approval. This policy shall apply to all grade appeals, whether at the graduate or undergraduate level. The Graduate School Academic Grievance Policy specifically excludes individual grade challenges to the Graduate School regarding graduate courses, so such appeals are heard by the College.

1) Individual faculty members have primary authority and responsibility in all aspects of evaluating student course performance and assigning grades, and are charged with carrying out these responsibilities in a professional manner. The Dean’s office has the
authority and responsibility to deal with changes of grades in special and unusual cases such as those that might involve unprofessional faculty conduct in assigning the grade. Students should be aware, however, that neither Chairs nor Deans can require an instructor to change a properly assigned course grade. Issues of disagreement about whether, for example, a given assignment was worth a B or an A are decided solely by the individual instructor in charge.

2) When a student believes that a course grade has been improperly or unprofessionally assigned, and discussions between the instructor and the student have not led to a resolution, the student shall have the option of making a formal written appeal to the Department Chair (or Program Director) for the instructor’s unit. The appeal must detail the basis for the appeal, and should state the specific remedy desired by the student. Any relevant written documentation should be included with the appeal. The appeal must be submitted within 60 days of the end of the academic term in which the course was taken. The instructor will be provided the opportunity to respond in writing to the student’s appeal. In exceptional circumstances, such as a student or instructor being out of touch for an entire summer, the 60 day deadline may be extended, at the discretion of the Department Chair or Program Director.

3) In cases where the Department Chair or Program Director is also the involved instructor, the Chair will notify the Dean (or a designee), who will appoint an Associate Chair or other senior faculty member to perform the duties of the Chair as called for in this policy.

4) The Chair or designee will meet (together or separately) with the student and with the instructor who taught the course. If the Chair/designee is unable to secure a solution mutually acceptable to both student and instructor, then the following procedures will be followed:

   a. The Chair shall appoint a departmental ad hoc Grade Appeals Committee, which will review the dispute. This Committee shall consist of at least three impartial faculty members competent in the subject matter of the course in question. Members of this committee need not be from the Chair’s department. The Chair will provide the Committee with the student’s appeal, a written response from the faculty member, and such other materials as may be considered relevant.

   b. Within 30 days of receiving the appeal, the Committee will submit a report and recommendation to the Chair, and the Chair will recommend to the instructor either (1) that the originally assigned grade stand; or (2) that a revised final grade be assigned.

   c. In cases where the instructor or student does not agree with the Committee’s recommendation, the Chair shall forward the written materials associated with the appeal, together with the recommendation of the Committee and the recommendation of the Chair, to the Dean of the College of Engineering and Applied Science (or a designee), who will make the final decision on the student’s grade appeal within 30 days of receipt. There is no appeal of the decision of the Dean or designee.