

# Talking With A Professor About Your Grade<sup>i</sup>

## A Guide For Students

Assigning grades is one of the most protected of faculty rights and responsibilities. Talking with your professor about a grade, particularly if you differ in your perceptions about what the grade should be, can be very difficult. The following guidelines are suggested to assist you in having a productive discussion with your professor about your grade.

### Consider the possibility that...

1. The professor made an honest mistake. This may be easy to fix!
2. You made mistakes you did not realize you made. In this case, the conversation is a learning opportunity for you. Also, by taking the time to have this discussion with your professor, you can convey to them that you are serious about learning.
3. You and the professor have an *honest* disagreement about the weight your professor gave to one or more aspects of your performance.

### When you decide to discuss your grade...

#### Do:

- Ask appropriate questions about how your grade was calculated.
- Ask for examples of what would have made your work stronger.
- Seek to understand what your professor thinks is missing or incorrect about your work.
- Focus on objective criteria (i.e., things that can be measured or valid and recognized standards for evaluating the merits of work).
- Use a flat, neutral, inquisitive tone of voice.

#### Don't:

- Accuse the professor of cheating you out of a proper grade, even if you believe they have done that. Making such an accusation is much more likely to cause the professor to *resist* hearing your point of view!
- Give up trying to gain a clear understanding of the professor's reasons for assigning you the grade.
- Use a tone of voice which conveys anger or disrespect.

### If you suspect...

If you suspect your grade is based on non-academic criteria, we recommend a consultation with the Ombuds Office. Please call 303-492-5077 to schedule an appointment.

### Suggesting alternatives...

If, after discussing the issue with the professor, you are convinced that your grade does not reflect the merits of your work, politely indicate that you and the professor appear to be in disagreement about how the grade should have been calculated (e.g., "It looks like we disagree about the calculation of my grade" rather than "I think you are wrong" or, worse, "You're being unfair!") Ask if they can suggest any alternative for resolving the disagreement. At this point, informal options to resolve the issue are limited to choices with which both you and the professor can agree. Be aware, however, that a professor who is convinced they are assigning a fair grade is unlikely to change the grade.

## When there seems to be no alternatives...

If the professor suggests no other alternatives and you still wish to pursue the matter, you will need to speak with the department chair in the professor's department. If the chair is unable to help you resolve the matter informally, you may initiate an appeal through the department's grade appeal procedure.

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