

Grading System and Academic Standards

Grading System

In order to assess progress throughout the graduate program, grades are assigned to the student's performance in course, project and thesis work, except in doctoral dissertation, which will be judged as ACCEPTED or REJECTED. Academic achievement in all other work is based on the following grading system:

- A** Excellent
- B** Good
- C** Pass
- D** Unacceptable for graduate credit
- F** Fail
- AU** Audit
- NC** No credit (not included in GPA; used in Spring/Summer 2020)
- P** Pass; (not included in GPA)
- I** Incomplete; transition grade only; becomes grade of F if not changed by instructor within 12 months
- W** Withdrawal
- SP** Satisfactory progress; continuing registration in thesis/dissertation/directed research
- CR** Credit for work at another institution
- UP** Unsatisfactory progress; this grade remains on the file transcript
- AT** Attended

Academic Standards

To be considered in good academic standing, graduate students must maintain a cumulative overall GPA of 3.0. Cumulative overall GPA includes all work taken since matriculation, and any coursework taken before matriculation as a graduate student, provided it has not already been counted towards another degree (exception: courses used for another WPI degree that are specifically authorized by the appropriate graduate committee to be double-counted will be included in the new degree's GPA once processed by the Registrar). Transfer credit approved from other schools is not counted in the GPA. Students are reviewed at the conclusion of each semester they are enrolled. Students who fall below the minimum standard of 3.0 cumulative overall GPA will be placed in Academic Warning.

If a student earns a grade lower than C in three or more courses, or if the cumulative overall GPA falls at or below 2.5 after attempting a minimum of 8 credits, the student is academically dismissed.

Academic Warning: Students have one semester of course work to raise their cumulative overall GPA. Students who do not improve their GPA upon the next review will move down to the next level of standing. Students who do not have a cumulative overall GPA of at least 3.0 will remain in Academic Warning.

Academic Probation: Students have one semester of course work to raise their cumulative overall GPA. Students who improve their GPA but still remain below 3.0 will be moved up to Academic Warning. Students who do not improve their GPA upon the next review will move down to the next level of standing.

Academic Dismissal: Students are academically withdrawn from the University. Students may appeal dismissal by submitting a petition to the University Registrar.

Academic standing appeal procedure: Student petitions will be reviewed by the Committee on Graduate Studies and Research. A representative from the student's home department will be present during the appeal process. This petition must be submitted with any supporting documentation no later than the date specified in the dismissal letter, typically two weeks after semester end.

Failure to complete degree milestones as specified by department/program: If a student is in otherwise good standing but fails to meet specified degree milestones, they may be dismissed from the program by the department graduate committee (see individual programs for specifics). Should this happen, the Dean of

Graduate Studies and the Registrar will be notified, and the student will be academically dismissed from WPI. The student may formally apply to another degree program, but they may not attend WPI unless they matriculate to another degree program. At the department's discretion, the student may be allowed to take a lesser credential (e.g. a PhD student may be allowed to take a master's degree, or a master's student may be allowed to take a graduate certificate) if not already conferred. In this case, if necessary, the student will be allowed to complete that credential before leaving WPI. There is no appeal process through the Committee on Graduate Studies and Research for students dismissed for failure to complete degree milestones.

Graduate Coursework Expectations: A student is expected to expend at least 56 hours of total effort (including classroom time) for each graduate credit. This means that a student in a 3-graduate credit 14-week course is expected to expend at least 12 hours of total effort per week. A student in a 2-graduate credit 7-week course is expected to expend at least 16 hours of total effort per week. Please note these expectations also apply to directed research, thesis research, and dissertation research credits. For those in RA or TA positions, hours spent on courses, research, thesis, and dissertation credits are in addition to RA/TA workload expectations.

Grade Point Average (GPA)

Grades are assigned the following grade points:

A = 4.0, B = 3.0, C = 2.0, D = 1.0 and F = 0.0. The grade point average is calculated as the sum of the products of the grade points and credit hours for each registered activity (including courses, independent studies, directed research, thesis research and dissertation research) in the average, divided by the total number of credit hours for all registered activities in the average. If a student takes the same course more than once, the course enters the GPA only once, the best grade received for the course being used in the average.

A student's overall GPA is calculated on the basis of all registered activities taken while enrolled as a graduate student at WPI. WPI graduate courses taken before a student had status as a degree-seeking graduate student are included in the over-all GPA. A student's program GPA is calculated on the basis of those WPI courses listed by the student on the student's Application for Graduation form. The transcript will report the overall GPA.

Courses transferred from elsewhere for graduate credit (for which a grade of CR is recorded on the WPI transcript), and courses taken to satisfy undergraduate degree requirements or to remove deficiencies in undergraduate preparation, are not included in either GPA. Registered activities in which the student receives grades of AU, NC, P, I, W, SP or UP are not included in either GPA.

Only registered activities in which a grade of A, B, C, CR, or P was obtained may be used to satisfy courses or credit requirements for a graduate degree.

Grade Appeal and Grade Change Policy

The Student Grade Appeal Procedure affirms the general principle that grades should be considered final. The principle that grades for courses, thesis credit and dissertation credit should be considered final does not excuse an instructor from the responsibility to explain his or her grading standards to students, and to assign grades in a fair and appropriate manner. The appeal procedure also provides an instructor with the opportunity to change a grade for a course or project on his or her own initiative. The appeal procedure recognizes that errors can be made, and that an instructor who decides it would be unfair to allow a final grade to stand due to error, prejudice or arbitrariness may request a change of grade for a course or project without the formation of an ad hoc committee. An instructor may request a grade change by submitting a course, thesis credit or dissertation credit grade change request in writing to the Registrar at any time prior to a student's graduation.

The purpose of the Grade Appeal Policy is to provide the student with a safeguard against receiving an unfair final grade, while respecting the academic responsibility of the instructor. Thus, this procedure recognizes that:

- Every student has a right to receive a grade assigned upon a fair and unprejudiced evaluation based on a method that is neither arbitrary nor capricious; and,
- Instructors have the right to assign a grade based on any method that is professionally acceptable, submitted in writing to all students, and applied equally.

Instructors have the responsibility to provide careful evaluation and timely assignment of appropriate grades. Course and project grading methods should be explained to students at the beginning of the semester. WPI presumes that the judgement of the instructor of record is authoritative and the final grades assigned are correct.

A grade appeal shall be confined to charges of unfair action toward an individual student and may not involve a challenge of an instructor's grading standard. A student has a right to expect thoughtful and clearly defined approaches to course and research project grading, but it must be recognized that varied standards and individual approaches to grading are valid. The grade appeal considers whether a grade was determined in a fair and appropriate manner; it does not attempt to grade or re-grade individual assignments or projects. It is incumbent on the student to substantiate the claim that his or her final grade represents unfair treatment, compared to the standard applied to other students. Only the final grade in a course or project may be appealed. In the absence of compelling reasons, such as clerical error, prejudice, or capriciousness, the grade assigned by the instructor of record is to be considered final.

Only arbitrariness, prejudice, and/or error will be considered as legitimate grounds for a grade change appeal.

Arbitrariness: The grade awarded represents such a substantial departure from accepted academic norms as to demonstrate that the instructor did not actually exercise professional judgment.

Prejudice: The grade awarded was motivated by ill will and is not indicative of the student's academic performance.

Error: The instructor made a mistake in fact.

This grade appeal procedure applies only when a student initiates a grade appeal and not when the instructor decides to change a grade on his or her own initiative. This procedure does not cover instances where students have been assigned grades based on academic dishonesty or academic misconduct. Academic dishonesty or misconduct are addressed in WPI's Academic Honesty Policy. Also excluded from this procedure are grade appeals alleging discrimination, harassment or retaliation in violation of WPI's Sexual Harassment Policy, which shall be referred to the appropriate office at WPI as required by law and by WPI policy.

The Grade Appeal Procedure strives to resolve a disagreement between student and instructor concerning the assignment of a grade in a collegial manner. The intent is to provide a mechanism for the informal discussion of differences of opinion and for the formal adjudication by faculty only when necessary. In all instances, students who believe that an appropriate grade has not been assigned must first seek to resolve the matter informally with the instructor of record. If the matter cannot be resolved informally, the student must present his or her case in a timely fashion in the procedure outlined below. Under normal circumstances, the grade appeal process must be started near the beginning of the next regular academic semester after the disputed grade is received.

Student Grade Appeal Procedure

1. A student who wishes to question a grade must first discuss the matter with the instructor of record within one week after the start of the next regular academic semester (fall or spring) or term (A, B, C or D) after receiving the grade. Late appeals will only be reviewed at the discretion of the Faculty Review Committee (FRC). In most cases, the discussion between the student and the instructor should suffice and the matter will not need to be carried further. The student should be aware that the only valid basis for grade appeal beyond this first step is to establish that an instructor assigned a grade that was arbitrary, prejudiced or in error.
2. If the student's concerns remain unresolved after the discussion with the instructor, the student may submit a written request to meet with the appropriate Department Head or Program Coordinator within one week of speaking with the instructor. The appropriate Department Head or Program Coordinator will meet with the student within one week and, if he or she believes that the complaint may have merit, with the instructor. After consultation with the appropriate Department Head or Program Coordinator, the instructor may choose to change the grade in question or leave the grade unchanged. The Department Head or Program Coordinator will communicate the result of these discussions to the student.
3. If the matter remains unresolved after the second step, the student should submit a written request within one week to the Provost's Office to request an ad hoc committee for Appeal of a Grade. The Provost's

representative (the Dean of Graduate Studies, or alternate) will meet with the student and will ask the Faculty Review Committee (FRC) to appoint the ad hoc committee for Appeal of a Grade. The Chair of the FRC will select the members of the ad hoc committee and serve as its non-voting chair. The ad hoc committee for appeal of a course, thesis credit or dissertation credit grade will be composed of three faculty members. The first member will be the Department Chair, Program Coordinator or Departmental Graduate Coordinator from the instructor's Department. If all three have a conflict of interest, the Provost's representative will serve on the ad hoc committee. The remaining two members will be two FRC members with no conflicts of interest with either the student or the instructor. Apparent conflicts of interest would include the student's thesis or dissertation advisor, members of the student's graduate committee, and faculty members with close research collaboration or project advising relationships with the instructor. The Chair of the FRC requests a written statement from the student and a written response from the instructor. The ad hoc committee examines the written information and may gather additional information as it sees fit.

4. Through its inquiries and deliberations, the ad hoc committee is charged to determine whether the grade was assigned in a fair and appropriate manner or whether clear and convincing evidence of arbitrariness, prejudice, and/or error might justify changing the grade. The ad hoc committee will make its decisions by a majority vote.
5. If the ad hoc committee concludes that the grade was assigned in a fair and appropriate manner, the ad hoc committee will report its conclusion in writing to the student and the instructor. The decision of the ad hoc committee is final and not subject to appeal.
6. If the ad hoc committee determines that compelling reasons exist for changing the grade, it would request that the instructor make the change, providing the instructor with a written explanation of its reasons. At this point, the instructor may change the grade. If the instructor declines to change the grade, he or she must provide a written explanation for refusing. If the ad hoc committee concludes that the instructor's written explanation justifies the original grade, the ad hoc committee will report this in writing to the student and instructor and the matter will be closed. If the ad hoc committee concludes that it would be unjust to allow the original grade to stand, the ad hoc committee will then determine what grade is to be assigned. The new grade may be higher than, the same as, or lower than the original grade. Having made this determination, the three members of the committee will sign the grade change form and transmit it to the Registrar. The instructor and student will be advised of the new grade. Under no circumstances may persons other than the original faculty member or the ad hoc committee change a grade. The written records of these proceedings will be filed in the student's file in the Registrar's Office.

Project, Thesis, and Dissertation Advising

A graduate project, thesis, and/or dissertation must include a faculty advisor-of-record at the time of initial registration.

The only faculty members who may, by virtue of their appointment, automatically be the formal advisors-of-record for graduate projects or independent study activities (ISGs, theses, dissertations, etc.) are:

1. Tenure/tenure track faculty,
2. Professors of practice, or
3. Others who have at least a half-time, full-year faculty appointment, with advising of independent work as part of their contractual load.

Individuals holding other faculty appointments, such as part-time adjuncts or non-instructional research professors, may co-advise and indeed are encouraged to do so where appropriate.

Department heads wishing to authorize anyone with appointments other than these three categories as an advisor of record for projects, theses, or independent studies must first obtain agreement from the Dean of Graduate Studies. (In their absence, please refer the request to the Associate Provost for Academic Affairs.)

Students may switch advisors-of-record with approval from their department or program. The Office of Graduate Studies can provide guidance and assistance to graduate students considering a switch.

Plan of Study

After consultation with and approval by the advisor, each admitted student must file a formal Plan of Study with the department within the first semester if full-time, and within the first year if part-time. Program changes are implemented by advisor and student. Copies of the revised Plan of Study will be maintained in department files.

Commencement Participation Policy

Master's degree graduate students who are planning to complete their final courses (maximum 6 credits) in the summer term and graduate in September are eligible to participate in the previous May Commencement ceremony. Students who have thesis requirements remaining are not eligible. Students must be registered for all remaining requirements in the summer term by April 1 of the year they will be participating in order to be approved. Students may only participate in one ceremony per degree level. Students approved to walk will not receive their diploma, nor will the degree be conferred, at the May ceremony. They will also not be listed in the Commencement program. PhD students must complete all requirements before participating in a Commencement ceremony and are not eligible to participate in an earlier ceremony. No exceptions will be made to this policy.