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. 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 (only for thesis work); will not be recorded on transcript
- P: Pass; unacceptable for graduate credit
- 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

Academic Standards
Students must maintain high academic standards in all their program activities. After attempting 12 credit hours, all students must maintain an overall grade point average (GPA) above 2.75 to be considered as making satisfactory progress. If a student’s overall GPA falls to 2.75 or below, the student and advisor are notified by the Registrar that the student is not making satisfactory progress.

If the overall GPA of any student falls below 2.65, the Registrar will inform the student that all future registrations will be given grades only on a pass/fail basis unless the department Graduate Committee intervenes.

If the overall GPA of any student falls below 2.5, the student is removed from the program unless the department Graduate Committee intervenes.

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 most recent 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 overall 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 or CR 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 as soon as possible, preferably no later than one week after the start of the next regular academic semester after receiving the grade. 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 Faculty Committee for Appeal of a Grade.

The Provost 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 FRC, in consultation with the Provost, will select the members of the ad hoc committee. The Chair of the FRC will convene 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 Department Chair, Program Coordinator or Department Graduate Coordinator from the instructor’s Department will be chosen as one member of the ad hoc committee. The other two appointees to the ad hoc committee may be any other faculty member as long as there are 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, or faculty members with close research collaborations or project advising relationships with the instructor. The ad hoc committee will examine available written information on the dispute, will be available for meetings with the student, instructor, or others as it sees fit.

4. Through its inquiries and deliberations, the ad hoc committee is charged with determining whether the grade was assigned in a fair and appropriate manner, or whether clear and convincing evidence of unfair treatment such as arbitrariness, prejudice, and/or error might justify changing the grade. The ad hoc committee will make its decisions by a majority vote. If the committee concludes that the grade was assigned in a fair and appropriate manner, this decision is final and not subject to appeal. The ad hoc committee will report this conclusion in writing to the student and the instructor, and the matter will be closed.
5. If the ad hoc committee determines that compelling reasons exist for changing the grade, it will request that the instructor make the change, providing the instructor with a written explanation of its reasons. If the instructor is willing to voluntarily change the grade in view of the ad hoc committee’s recommendations, he or she submits a grade change form to the Registrar, and sends copies to the ad hoc committee. Should the instructor decline to change the grade, he or she must provide a written explanation for refusing. The ad hoc faculty committee, after considering the instructor’s explanation, and upon concluding that it would be unjust to allow the original grade to stand, 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 faculty 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-advice 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.)

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.