A Student's Right to Challenge

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Abstract

- **When a university's syllabus is not clear students may feel they have every right to challenge a final grade and/or often dictate to the professor the terms by which they are to be graded!**

  – Purpose and Rationale: "A well written Syllabus is a contract between the University and the student(s)" (Keough, 2010).

  – Presentation Outcome: How to prevent student(s) challenging final grades by creating clear parameters for grading.

Clear Course Syllabus

- A course syllabus is a contract between the University and the student!

  - Contract: A meeting of the minds!

  - Therefore a syllabus is a meeting of the minds, whereby a student understands the instructor's grading process, what is to be expected (rubrics) and what assignments must be completed to pass the course.

Theoretical Framework

- Steps to Clear syllabi
  - Universal template: "the intellectual identy of the larger Academic institution...(Fawson, nd)
  - Common repository
    - NU-FAST, a creation of national University that is organized by schools and then by specific courses
    - Access by all faculty and students (separately)
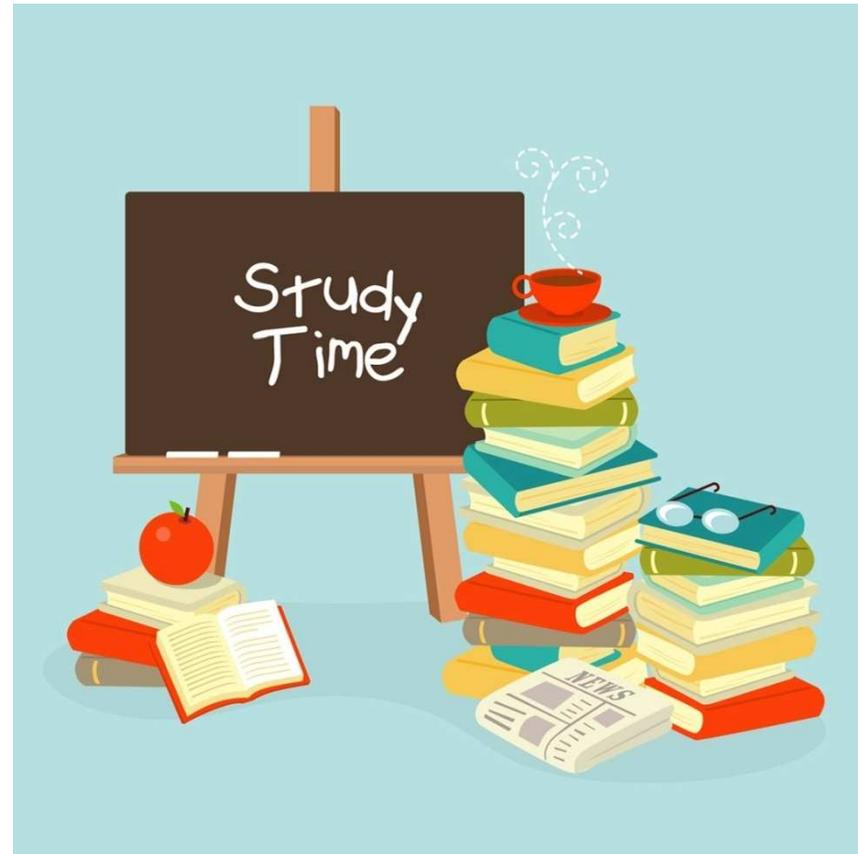
Rubrics (Threaded Discussions)

"Rubrics make assessing student work quick and efficient, and theyhelp teachers justify to parents and others the grades that they assign to students" (Andrade, 2005 as cited in Kohn, 2006).

- **TARGET**
- **(3 points)**
- 1. Attends all class sessions.
- 2. Makes a minimum number of two postings per each threaded discussion, posted on different days within the same discussion.
- 3. Meets recommended length of 100-120 words for each posting.
- 4. Includes explicit references to the required texts and to authentic experiences of the student (related to the topic), in each of the responses.
- 5. Reads what the instructor and other students have written, and responds.
- 6. The quality of input will also be assessed by relevance to the topic, clarity of understanding the issue and expression of your opinion, depth of knowledge of the subject, exactness and fullness of responses, participation in the group discussion, and language correctness.
- 7. Exhibits positive, supportive attitude toward course and class members. Consistently contributes to class discussion.
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- **SATISFACTORY**
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- **(1.5 point)**
- Participation is as good as one receiving an excellent rating, but one or two elements are not quite at the target level.
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- **UNSATISFACTORY**
- **(0 points)**
- Does not attend class on a consistent basis.
- Never prepared for class.
- Evident that individual has not completed reading assignments prior to class.
- Exhibits negative attitudes toward course and class members.
- Does not contribute to class discussions or in-class activities.
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Course Outlines
Content must be CLEAR and CONSISTENT

- Content includes:
  - Course desciption
  - Learning outcomes: must align with Institutional Learning Outcomes (ILO's), Program Learning Outcomes (PLO's) and Course Learning Outcomes (CLO's) that reflect the content standards, i.e. credential programs have specific standards of professionalism for the teaching profession.
  - Instructor contact information
  - Required text
  - Assignments and values
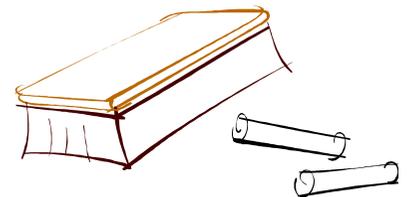
Course Maps
Adapted from National University, SPD 19
(M/S) Caywood, K., author
Life Skills and Transition Course (draft)

- ***Related Program Learning Outcome(s)***

- PLO 2   Candidates will demonstrate knowledge of typical and atypical development and characteristics of students with disabilities, including those specific to Moderate/Severe disabilities (EDSP 3 & 11, MS1)

- PLO 6   Candidates will demonstrate the skills needed to transition students between educational environments and programs as well as into successful post school experiences (EDSP 7 & 8; M/S 7)

- ***Course Learning Outcome(s)***

- Candidate will write a Case Study that includes a legally compliant Individual Transition Plan which covers development from birth through current age level (at least 16 years old.), showing characteristics of disability and how they developed/ matured to date.

- Candidate will develop transition plan that shows how an individual will move from the classroom to the world of post secondary education and the world of work.

COURSE NUMBER AND TITLE

Insert an "X" under each assessment instrument or activity used to assess the learning outcome. Substitute headings as necessary

CLO's	Means		of		Assesment	
	Participation	Final Exam	Research Paper	Written assignment	Presentation	Case Study
CLO 1			X			
CLO 2						X
CLO 3		X				

Catalogue Description

- "In keeping with the clarity and organization for a clear syllabus and outline to inform the student/candidate properly, the catalogue description must be well organized that clearly identifies program specific requirements and expectations which are directly connected to the course syllabus"
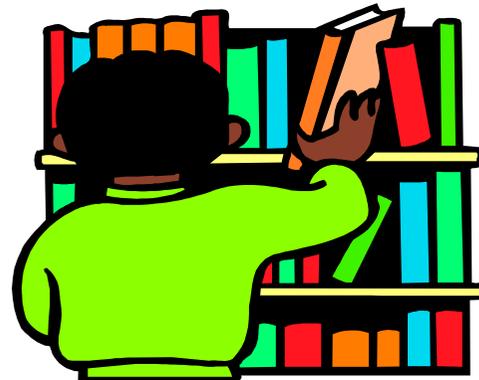
Course Descriptions

- Similar to catalogue description
- Pertinent to each course in the program
- Must have a rationale for why students must enroll

# National University: EXAMPLES OF TYPLICAL APPEAL NUMBERS IN 1 Year

- 54 GRADE APPEALS

  – 32 ONLINE – 21 ONSITE – 1 PLAGIARISM

  – 22 CHANGED -11 ONLINE 11 ONSITE

  – 31 UNCHANGED -21 ONLINE 10 ONSITE

Cuniff, D, How to Avoid a Grade Appeal, National University, 2010

Percentages for Categories of Grade Appeals in One Year

14.2% **CE - Calculation Error**

0.0% **CNU - Criteria Not Used**

45.7% **FOTA - Factors Other Than Achievement**

18.6% **IIAS - Inconsistent/Inequitable Applied Standards**

1.0% **UNP - Unclear**

21.4% **UNPC - Unclear/Not Prompt Criteria**

Cuniff, D., National University, How to Avoid a Grade Appeal, 2010

Breakdown by Schools

Research conducted by Cuniff, D., National University

ECD, 4

EDA, 6

TED, 26

EXC, 8

ILD, 4

MAT, 4

PED, 2
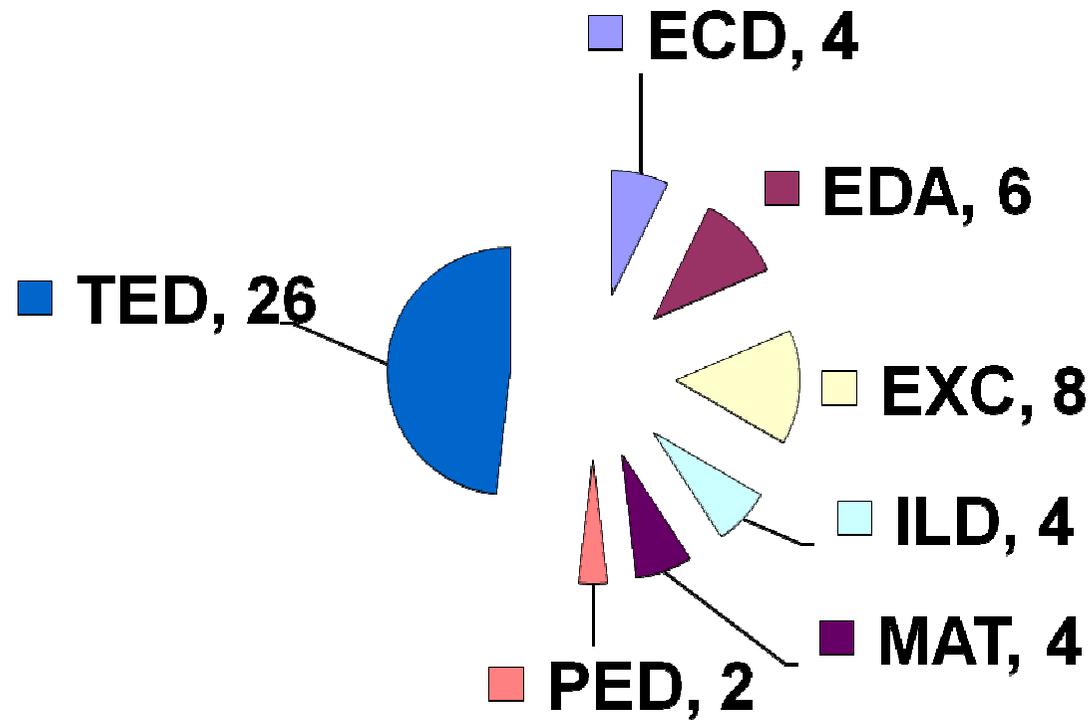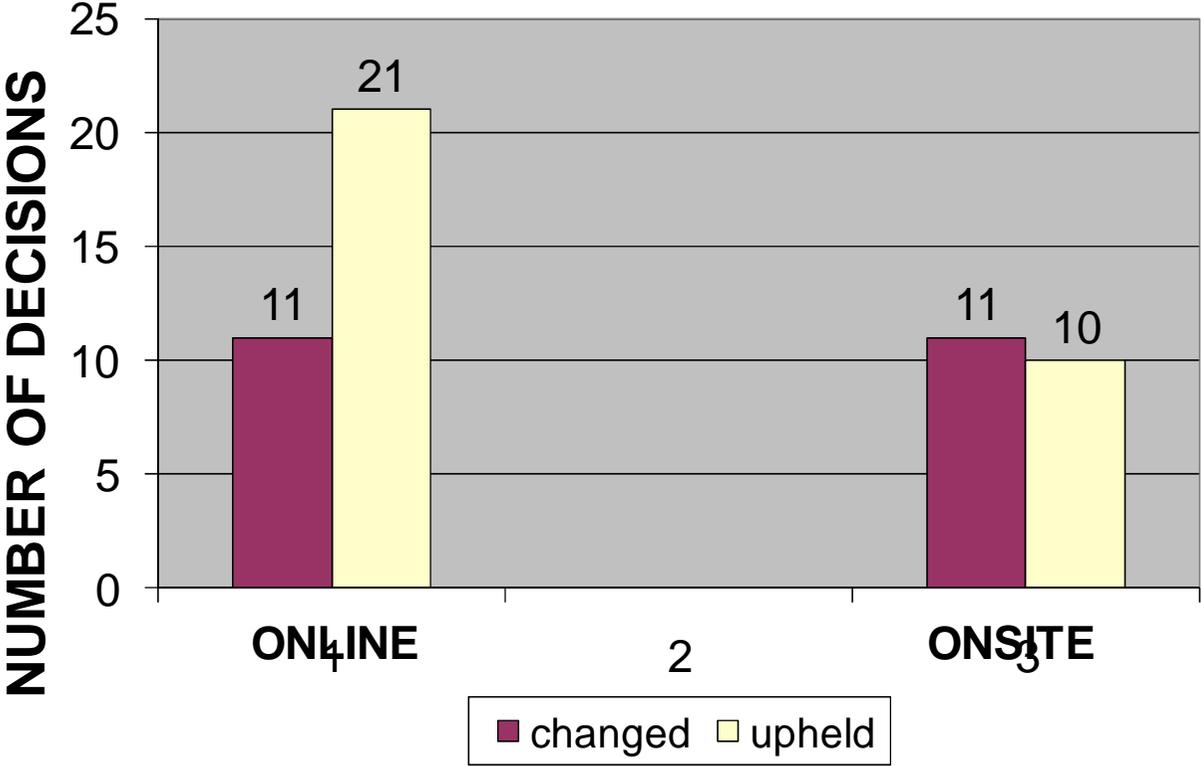
Strategies to Clear Understanding of Grades Earned

- Clear syllabus and course outline

- Journaling (Cuniff, D)

  1) can be used online

  2) can be used on site

  3) Improves daily/weekly communication as to what was said, read, and expected in the class.

4) Provides 2 way personal communication and answers any lingering questions.

5) Offers, "no surprises at the end of the course, reducing grade appeals (Cuniff, D., 2010)

Additional Strategies

- Grading standards that align with ILO's, PLO's and CLO's (along with content standards).
- Online course coaching (Schwartz, S, 2010).
  1) Provides instructor awareness to technical/content errors based on 3rd party

2)Not evaluative
- Course team discussions (NU-FAST, National University, 2010)
- Course editing

  1) 3rd party is allowed to view online course for suggestions for improvement at the discretion of the course author.
- Continued communication

Dispositions: Values and experiences that provide a framework for dealing with classroom ethical dilemmas" (Sockett, 2006, np)

- Personal issues are difficult to "tease" from specific, required criteria in a "student's right to challenge".

- "Certainly, one can point to the dilemma of a student understanding he/she has 'entitlement' to challenge a grade when the grade posted by the instructor was different from the one the student clearly believes he/she earned" (Keough, 2010, p. 5).

To File or Not to File – That is the Question in a "Student's Right to Challenge

- Global economy creates pressure on private universities to draw incoming students
- Clear syllabi, outlines, rubrics, expectations and methods to recognize dispositions must be clear: which make a good basis for a student's right to challenge!