

## 06 January 2021 Version:

### CPE Appeal Policy for the Department of Physics

A student who wishes to appeal a failing grade in the Comprehensive Placement Exam (CPE) notifies in writing the Physics Department Chair or the Director of Graduate Studies in Physics, explaining in detail the basis of the appeal. The Physics Department Chair and Physics Department Graduate Committee determine if the complaint is reviewable; if so, the Physics Department Chair appoints three faculty who were not on the original exam subject committee (which prepared and graded the exam), nor are the student's advisor, to evaluate the appeal. The appeals committee may review the graded exam, other students' exams, and interview the student and faculty as needed. Within one month, it is to present a written decision to the student and Physics Department Chair.

If the appeal is approved, the student is permitted to retake the exam when next offered. In extreme circumstances, a special exam can be arranged, though it is preferable to have exam conditions as normal as possible, and to have results from other students on the same exam for comparison.

If the appeal is not approved, the student may appeal in writing to the entire faculty, who will review the conclusions of the appeals committee and vote. The new appeal should respond specifically to the summary of the appeals committee. Valid appeals are described below in Section A. The requirements and process of the appeal are described in Section B.

#### DESCRIPTION OF VALID APPEAL CRITERIA:

A valid reason must be consistent with the nature and purpose of the CPE. Such criteria include:

1. Irregularities in the administration of the exam: This might include abrupt changes in, inaccuracies, or very late posting of exam rules, inappropriate levels or ranges of questions, and physical abnormalities in the testing site such as noise or heating problems.
2. Inadequate accommodations for **SMU-certified disabilities**: For more information on certification and possible accommodations, please contact the DASS office.
3. **Unforeseen health problems** which include illness or injury that precludes a student from taking the exam or would otherwise impair the student during the exam. This impairment includes health problems that would prevent adequate preparation for the exam in the 3 days prior to the exam. These conditions require certification after the exam.
4. Inequities in the treatment of comparable students: This might include differences in information given for preparation or in the test-taking environment.

5. Overly harsh, inaccurate, or inequitable grading: a reasonable standard is that a student passes if he or she shows a mastery of the subject one might expect from a typical, well-prepared student with a BS Physics degree.

Conversely, reasons that are independent of the purpose of the CPE are invalid criteria for an appeal. These include:

1. Validity or effectiveness of the CPE to predict student success in future research.
2. Performance in courses or research to this point. Faculty assess these separately from the CPE.

#### **REQUIREMENTS FOR QUALIFYING DISABILITIES OR HEALTH APPEALS:**

An appeal based on inadequate accommodations for a **SMU-certified disability** should include a letter from the DASS office specifying the recommended accommodation(s). In addition the appeal should include a description of the failings of the accommodation and include any evidence that may exist.

To appeal based on an **unforeseen medical problem** the student must provide an affidavit signed by the student within 48 hours of the end of the exam attesting to the validity of the medical problem. If the student is hospitalized or otherwise incapacitated, the affidavit should be provided as soon as the student is able. In addition, the student should provide details of how the medical problem impacted their ability to take or prepare for the exam.

If in either the case of the certified disability, or the unplanned medical problems, the CPE committee cannot agree on how to implement the accommodations, open questions will be transferred to the Physics Graduate Committee to resolve the conflict. The CPE committee will implement the exam following this decision. If the Physics Graduate Committee cannot decide on the proper implementation, the implementation will be decided by the Director of Graduate Studies in Physics.