

An Essay on the Re-Examination Petition for Final Exams

Background: The process by which a student may be granted a ‘re-examination’ of their final exam in a particular course is specified in the General Information Catalog (GIC) under Chapter 4 “Academic Policies and Procedures” relating to the appropriate use of the “X” (incomplete) symbol. Since there is occasional confusion as to who is eligible, how the re-exam is to be conducted, etc., this essay has been generated to help clarify the more common sources of confusion.

Policy: To start with, the GIC specifies the following as the official University policy:

Re-examination petition: Only a student who has a grade average of at least *C* on all classwork and laboratory work submitted before the final examination may request a temporary delay of the final course grade because he or she failed the final examination, which is the examination given during the final examination period as printed in the official examination schedule. If the petition is denied by the instructor, the student's final course grade will remain as originally determined. If the petition is granted by the instructor, the grade on the re-examination will be substituted for the grade on the original examination in determining the student's final course grade, provided the student earns at least a *C* on the reexamination. If the grade on the reexamination is less than a *C*, a final course grade of *F* must be recorded.

Discussion: Two discussion points help to substantially clarify this policy. First, historically, this was referred to as the re-examination *privilege*, and was more recently changed to the re-examination *petition* to reflect the fact that this is a *request* to the faculty member, *not* an entitlement. It is the prerogative of the faculty member to decide, on a case-by-case (petition) basis, or as a uniform policy for their entire course (with no petitions required), whether eligible students (according to the criteria specified in the University policy) will be allowed to take a re-exam. Thus, it is perfectly legitimate for a faculty member to decide that one student will be allowed to take a re-exam, while another student with the same performance would be denied (depending on the justification each of these two students provided in their petition). As another example, it may be that one of these students is repeating the class, and so the faculty member does not feel a re-examination for that specific student is warranted. Conversely, it is also perfectly legitimate for a faculty member to state in their first-day handout as their course policy that *all* eligible students will be allowed to take the re-exam at a specified date (in fact, if that is the faculty member's intent from the start of the semester, we encourage them to include such a statement on the first day handout).

A second point of clarification is that this is really considered the “*I just had a bad day*” policy. That is, the student has to have been making satisfactory grades (“*C*” or better in all work) prior to the final exam (an eligibility stipulation in the University policy), and simply had a ‘bad day’ on the day of the final examination that now jeopardizes their course grade. Note that this could apply to a “*C*” student who fails a course because they earned an “*F*” on the final, but could equally apply to an “*A*” student who earns a course grade of “*B*” because of failing the final!

With this as a background, the following points become clear:

- The faculty member should register a grade of incomplete (“X”) for students who are eligible and will be participating in a re-examination, since their coursework is not yet completed. Faculty should *not* record a letter grade for these students and then send in a grade change to cover this process. Recall that this University policy is listed under “Appropriate Uses of the “X” (Incomplete) Symbol.” One note of caution for that “A” student who got a “B” and chooses to take the re-exam. Since they are accepting an “X” (incomplete) to take the re-examination, they will not be eligible for University Honors for that semester (“X’s” aren’t allowed in Honors determination by University rule).
- The policy is *not* intended to cover students who performed poorly simply because they did not study for the exam. Rather, it’s for those who were prepared, but “*just had a bad day.*” Therefore, it would be perfectly legitimate for a faculty member to notify students on short notice that the re-exam will be given. “But I won’t have time to study” does not apply, since the intent is not to give the student more time to study; the assumption is that the student has already studied. Rather, this process provides the opportunity to demonstrate that the initial results really were just the results of a ‘bad day’.
- Likewise, it is perfectly legitimate for a faculty member to deny the student permission to view their previous final exam to see what they missed in preparation for the re-exam. Again, the intent is to provide the student the opportunity to take the final exam, for all intents and purposes, for the first time. Questions would certainly arise if students were allowed to see the results of their first exam, and then take the exam again, in terms of fairness to the other students in the class (who only had one ‘shot’ at the exam).
- It is the faculty member’s prerogative as to the nature of the re-examination. He/she could give the original final examination again, a revised exam, or an exam of any format deemed appropriate.
- As stated in the University policy, a student who is successful in the re-examination will have that grade simply replace the grade earned on the original final examination. Faculty members are allowed *no* other options (e.g., “Gosh, you did so well on the repeat final, we’ll forget the poor grade on your second exam as well”).
- It is important to make sure that the student acknowledges on the front of the re-examination the final statement in the University policy; i.e., that if the grade on the reexamination is less than a *C*, a final course grade of *F* **must** be recorded (the faculty member has no latitude in this regard). Thus, with the College progression policy, a student earning a final grade of *D* needs to weigh the potential of ultimately earning a course grade of *F* if they do not do well in the re-examination. The easiest way to secure this acknowledgement is to simply place the entire University policy (included at the top of this document) on the front of the exam and have the student(s) sign it.