

SMC ETHICS

Continuing a Dialogue on What We Do and How We Do It

Avoiding Unappealing Appeals

No matter how deep our commitment to helping each student to the greatest possible extent, it is safe to say that all instructors also want to avoid the burden and stress of facing grade appeals or even administrative sanctions. Unfortunately, well-intended actions aimed at assisting a student with a special situation can easily and often rightly be perceived by other students as unfair and grounds for official complaint. Moreover, even when instructors strictly hold to their policies and deadlines, some students will seek out any opportunity to change a grade with which they are unhappy.

As SMC's Ombuds Office advises, there are steps faculty can take to minimize the risk of winding up sitting in their office or someplace even more unpleasant. First of all, instructors should maintain clarity from the start about what is expected for each assignment and how it will be graded. Then, they should exhibit transparency and responsiveness whenever students ask for feedback or an explanation of a grade.



Cartoon by Erlein Tacastacas

Students' Personal Lives

Many of us would like to exist in a world of clear definitions, clear boundaries where everything is far simpler. At the beginning of each semester, we distribute a syllabus that establishes quite a few expectations, quite a few boundaries, and then hope the semester will run like a well-oiled machine. We tell our students what to expect: what are their responsibilities and what are ours. We've all learned from experience that deviations are almost always complications. And yet...

Santa Monica College has set out to build a diverse student body, and we are proud of this. However, with that diversity also comes a variety of personalities, limitations, backgrounds, and challenges. So what are we to do as faculty when we face a student that is looking to us for help with something outside the boundaries of the classroom? This question can be reduced to a simple answer, but often times this question leads to a series of additional

Making oneself readily available to go over in detail the calculation of the grade can keep student confusion or discontent from unnecessarily getting out of hand. Next, being organized by maintaining detailed records of attendance and grades as well as keeping these essays and exams for the recommended period will leave faculty in the position to quickly deal with any grade challenges, both informal and formal.

Ultimately, perhaps the best thing faculty can do is communicate with students in a way that avoids all appearance of favoritism and that demonstrates to them that they are being treated in a respectful, fair, and equal manner. There is no perfect solution, but following the Ombuds' advice can leave faculty free to spend their weekends and breaks on what matters most to them, not haggling over grades.

On a Related Note...

As mentioned in the main piece, below are some links to crucial services and resources on campus. If you are not already familiar, please take the time to learn what they provide. (Links are live in the downloadable PDF.)

[The Center for Wellness & Wellbeing](#)

[Crisis Prevention Team](#)

[Disabled Student Programs & Services](#)

[Tutoring Services](#)

[Ombuds Office](#)

questions with a whole lot of grey area and not too many definitive lines. Let's start with the simple.

The simple answer (but an *extremely* important one) is know your resources. SMC has established multiple points of intervention to help our students and protect our student body. (If you check the bottom of the sidebar, you will see a number of links.) Know where to send your students when they need specialized assistance, and make sure that you understand exactly what these resources provide. Let the trained professionals do what they're trained to do. And that's a really good strategy. But often, it is not that simple.

The fact is many students are not looking for one thing, or rather, they're not sure what they're looking for. First, when they approach a faculty member, it is probably for some assistance specifically with that course: an extension on an essay, a make-up exam, leniency on expectations, forgiveness for absences. Perhaps the student has not even identified the barrier, but rather we see a manifestation of an undisclosed personal hurdle or learning disability that is difficult to address, but clearly hindering that student's success. What is our role? Do we get involved, or remain clinical? How do we make necessary accommodations for one student while feeling we have kept the classroom fair for all?

Often times, we face these questions with no real answer, and not many of us feel comfortable improvising semester by semester. Sometimes we overlook the valuable resource of colleagues who can provide guidance or even just act as a sounding board. Not only are we unsure of how to appropriately involve ourselves, but we are concerned about managing our emotional capital. We also worry about unforeseen consequences; the road to Academic Affairs is paved with good intentions, as the popular saying goes.

In addition to understanding and knowing the available resources, it is our job to know ourselves. Signing up for emotional baggage we can't carry isn't going to help us and it certainly isn't going to help our students.

CONTACT US!

If you have any ideas or issues you would like to submit to the Professional Ethics and Responsibilities Committee for future consideration, get in touch with us through the links below.

[PERC website](#)

[email](#)