

GBC Academic Standards Committee**Written Report**

September 18, 2015

9:30 a.m. – 12:00 p.m.

Locations: Battle Mountain - GBC BM, Elko - GBC GTA 118, GBC PVC 109,
Winnemucca - GBC 122

Committee members present: Susanne Bentley, Chair; Barbara Conton, Danny
Gonzales, George Kleeb, Scott Gavorsky, Steven Scilacci, Jan King

Not Present: Mike Elbert (excused), Doug Hogan (abstained)

The meeting was called to order at 9:30 a.m.

The meeting was held to address a request of a Step Three Grade Appeal initiated by the student in response to a Step Two grade appeal decision. Since the origin of the grade appeal was a course taught in Spring 2015, the procedure followed was that in effect during Spring 2015, in the GBC General Catalog 2014-2015, pages 54-55.

- Due to FERPA regulations, the student cannot be identified in this public report.
- Due to GBC personnel regulations, the identity of GBC personnel has also been withheld from this public report.

The following documents were consulted by the Committee one week prior to, and during, the review:

- The request for the Grade Appeal from the student, dated 23 June 2015.
- The decision of the Step Two Grade Appeal by the Chair of the Arts and Letters Department dated 21 August 2015.
- The Final Paper submitted by the student.
- An Annotated Bibliography Assignment, verified by the student as a preliminary assignment for the Final Paper.
- Comments on the “Annotated Bibliography” assignment by the instructor from the spring 2015 semester.

- Rubric used for the Final Paper, showing a grade of 0 with a comment stating that “You have not marked your boundaries, and you have not documented all of your ideas! Much of this seems to be taken from a single source. This is not an acceptable college paper.”
- E-mail messages from the student to the Arts and Letters Department Chair.
- An e-mail message from the instructor to the Academic Standards Committee chair acknowledging the grade appeal.

The Committee (in quorum) interviewed both the instructor and the student and advocate separately, in accordance with established policy.

Based on the review of this evidence, the Committee determined the following:

- No policy is stated in the instructor’s syllabus, nor anywhere in the assignment, regarding awarding the grade of zero (0) for failure to show what the instructor calls “boundaries” in the assignment.
- The term “boundaries” was not familiar to the members of the Committee, was not clearly defined in the course materials provided to the Committee, nor could the student express the meaning of the concept during the interview. In the Committee’s view, these factors may indicate some confusion existed about the use of the term to students in the class.
- The decision to award students a grade of zero (0) was sent to students in an e-mail a few days prior to the final paper due date.
- The failure to state the grade of zero (0) for complications regarding said “boundaries” in either the syllabus or the assignment, and sending this new policy to students in an e-mail message late in the semester, and which some of them may not have read is a questionable practice. In the Committee’s opinion, professional practice would dictate that such policies with such significant grade consequences be explained to students at the beginning of the project and noted in core course materials, including the syllabus, which students are expected to consult.
- In the grade appeal hearing, the instructor raised the issue that the paper might be an example of plagiarism. When questioned, the instructor indicated that there was no documentation of plagiarism and that he or she did not use the plagiarism protection software,

Turnitin.com, that is available to all GBC faculty, and that he or she did not have a Turnitin.com report that indicated plagiarism.

- The instructor indicated that students “worked with” a high school English teacher on their assignments, but the instructor did not elaborate on what this meant.
- After discussions from school administrators, the instructor gave the high school students who were awarded a zero (0) grade a “make-up” assignment that enabled them to pass the class to graduate from high school.
- In the grade appeal interview with the student, the student stated that the students in the class from the student’s high school met Monday through Thursday in a regularly scheduled class with a high school English teacher at their school. The teacher took attendance, interpreted the various assignments for the students, and worked individually with students giving them feedback on their papers.
- The student stated that he or she did not recall any quizzes or assessments to determine if the students in the class were learning how to cite sources. She only recalled one lesson on paraphrasing during the entire class.
- The student stated that the student had completed the preliminary assignment before the final paper, and had that assignment returned by the instructor with a grade of 200 points out of 200 possible points. This assignment, which the student forwarded to the committee, is the “Annotated Bibliography.”
- When questioned about whether or not the student had completed the “Page Check” assignment, the student indicated that this was an optional assignment, and she thought that since she had earned 100% on the “Annotated Bibliography,” that the “Page Check” was not necessary to turn in. The high school English teacher was also unclear about whether or not the “Page Check” assignment was required and contacted the instructor through e-mail. The student stated that the instructor did not respond to the teacher’s e-mails in time for students to understand the assignment. It is not clear if the instructor ever did respond to the e-mails. The high school teacher was also unfamiliar with the term of “boundaries” used in the assignment.

- When asked who was in charge of the class, the student thought that the high school teacher was in charge with the college instructor issuing the final grade.
- The student indicated students in the class discussed how the assignments were “confusing” and the “expectations unclear.” Students in the class commented that the instructor was “always late responding to e-mails,” taking “at least six days” to respond to students.
- The student also discussed that the high school English teacher told the student to take out some of the citations in the final paper and there “were too many.”
- During the instructor’s interview, the instructor indicated that the "Page Check" assignment was intended by the instructor to address “these issues.”
- The Committee could not locate any requirement for the “Page Check” assignment in the materials provided to the Committee
- The committee did not determine any accusation of plagiarism as defined by GBC policies in the 2014-15 catalog in the instructor’s original assigning of the grade.
- While the committee considered the concerns raised by the instructor during the grade appeal hearing that the student may have plagiarized portions of the paper, the Committee is of the opinion that the student’s failure to cite information properly was the result of technical errors rather than a violation of the Student Code of Conduct, sections (a) (1) or (a)(3) (see the GBC General Catalog 2014-2015, page 28).

Based on the review of this evidence, the Committee unanimously recommends the following:

- The grade of zero (0) initially assigned for the paper be withdrawn.
- The Committee recommends that the final paper be re-graded by another ENG 102 instructor, using the original instructor’s assignment directions

and rubrics. The chosen instructor should not have been involved with this case previously and will be acceptable to the Chair of the Arts and Letters Department, the student, and the instructor.

- The re-graded assignment score should be substituted for the original assignment grade of zero ("0"), and the student's Final Course grade be changed to reflect the substituted Final Paper grade.
- If either the instructor or the student wishes to appeal this recommendation or the re-assigned grade, a Step Four Grade Appeal would be initiated following the procedures outlined in the GBC General Catalog 2014-2015, page 55.
- The Chair of the Committee will inform the student and the instructor of this decision within fifteen (15) days of this meeting, as required by the policy.
- The Committee will schedule further meetings as required.

Respectfully submitted by Susanne Bentley

Chair, Academic Standards Committee

ADDENDUM 1 – 19 September 2015

Copies of the final letter of the Committee's decision were sent to the Arts and Letters Department chair, the student, and the instructor in this case via e-mail. Included were recommendations for an alternative grader, who was agreeable to the student, the instructor, and the Chair of the Arts and Letters Department.

ADDENDUM 2 – 1 October 2015

Copies of the committee's decision and graded rubric were sent to the student, the instructor, and the Arts and Letters Chair.

ADDENDUM 3 – 1 October 2015

The Arts and Letters Department chair indicated in an e-mail message to the Academic Standards Committee chair that he is in agreement with the committee's decision.

ADDENDUM 4 – 2 October 2015

The instructor communicated via e-mail on 2 October 2015 that the instructor will be appealing the Academic Standards Committee's decision and proceed to a Step Four Grade Appeal following the procedures outlined in the GBC General Catalog 2014-2015, page 55.

ADDENDUM 5 – 3 October 2015

The Academic Committee Chair forwarded the instructor's e-mail decision to appeal to all committee members.