

Student fairness in the classroom, know your rights!

Often, students may be too intimidated to complain when a fairness issue has arisen in class. The purpose of this document is to help students understand what a student fairness issue is and how to deal with a student fairness issue if it arises.

What is a fairness issue?

-All students have the right to be treated equally. That means that exam make up policies etc need to be the same for all students.

-You have the right to know how you are doing in a class. This means that feedback on homework and exams etc needs to be given back within a reasonable time. This also means that the grading policy needs to be straightforward and explained in the syllabus.

-The syllabus is a contract. Students and professors are both expected to stick by what is written in the syllabus. This means that professors are not allowed to change how much exams are worth etc unless it is to everyone's benefit. For example, a final exam that was worth 20 % cannot be changed to 50 % later in the semester. The grading scale cannot be changed. For example, if it is stated that 93% in the class is an A, it cannot later be changed to 95%.

-Classroom Environment. You have a right to be treated with respect in the classroom. The classroom environment should facilitate learning. Any unprofessional behavior on part of either the student or the professor is not allowed. This includes yelling or swearing at a student in class or telling a student they are stupid for asking a question etc. The chair of the department should be informed immediately if this happens.

-Students cannot be graded on attendance. If classroom participation is part of the grade, it needs to be clearly defined how that will be calculated.

*****Often, professors are unaware that they are in violation of policy.**

How to deal with student fairness issues:

1. If you notice there is a fairness issue with the syllabus and the class is offered through the Biology department, you may email Elizabeth.skovran@sjsu.edu and she will notify the professor that their syllabus needs to be fixed to avoid a future student fairness complaint. Your name will be kept confidential.
2. Any student fairness issues should first be discussed with the professor. It may be that the issue can be resolved informally.
3. If you cannot resolve the matter with the professor or you are too intimidated to talk to the professor, you should make an appointment with the department chair through the biology office.
4. If the matter cannot be resolved at the level of the Biology department, you should contact the associate dean of the college of science, Elaine Collins (Elaine.collins@sjsu.edu).

5. If the matter still cannot be resolved, contact the university Ombudsman, Demerris Brooks (Demerris.brooks@sjsu.edu) to file a student fairness complaint or a grade dispute. Your complaint will be reviewed by the Student Fairness Committee which is made up of faculty, students and staff.

If you have any questions along the way, you may contact Demerris Brooks for advice in the matter or contact Elizabeth Skovran directly for more information.