



UNIVERSITY of TORONTO

Student Rights & Responsibilities Series



Your Grades

Including information on petitions, appeals, extensions, exemptions, re-writes, and re-checks, for undergraduate and graduate students

Your Grades

Even the best students encounter difficult circumstances from time-to-time. The University of Toronto has several policies and procedures in place to ensure that grading and evaluation is fair, consistent and reflects your true abilities. This booklet provides a general overview of those policies as well as advice on how to address a concern over your marks or grades.

The best advice for any student experiencing academic or personal difficulties that affect your grades is to be pro-active: act early, communicate with your instructor(s) and your Registrar's Office, get help, seek information and follow the timelines outlined in the relevant policies.

This booklet will help if you...

- ▶ are unable to complete some course requirement(s) because of an illness or personal emergency; or
- ▶ have an illness or serious personal problem that is affecting your performance; or
- ▶ have a conflict with an instructor about the delivery of a course; or
- ▶ believe an assignment or test was unfair; or
- ▶ think you have been graded unfairly on a piece of term work; or
- ▶ think someone has made a mistake in calculating your mark or grades; or
- ▶ made an error with respect to registration or another administrative matter that has affected your standing.

The full text of the relevant policies are normally found in your academic Calendar or can be obtained from your Registrar's Office. Many are available on-line at www.utoronto.ca/govcncl.

Please note that this booklet applies only to undergraduate and graduate students; students in non-degree or continuing education courses are subject to different policies and procedures.

Terms & definitions

Appeal: A formal request to have a decision that has been made by an instructor or departmental official reconsidered.

Department: An academic unit within a Faculty responsible for offering courses. For example: the Department of Sociology, the Department of Electrical and Computer Engineering.

Division: For the purposes of this booklet, the term “Division” is used to mean the academic division of the University in which you are registered. For most undergraduate students, that means the Faculty of Arts and Science, the Faculty of Applied Science and Engineering, the University of Toronto at Scarborough or the University of Toronto at Mississauga. The Faculty of Arts and Science on the St. George Campus is further divided into Colleges, each which has a Registrar’s Office (see below).

Examination: A final examination is the final piece of coursework, written during the formal examination period established in your division. Some instructors may include a final **test**, written during the last week of term, in their course outlines. These are not final exams.

Instructor: For the purposes of this booklet, the term “instructor” is used to mean the person responsible for teaching the course — usually a professor.

Mark or Grade: The number, percentage or letter grade you receive from your instructor for a piece of work, a test or exam.

Petition: A formal request for some kind of special consideration or exemption from academic regulations.

Registrar: Your Registrar’s Office is responsible for maintaining your records and is your main source of information for administrative, academic and financial matters. For Faculty of Arts and Science (St. George) students, your College Registrar is your main source of information for most of the policies and procedures outlined in this booklet.

YOUR REGISTRAR'S
OFFICE IS YOUR MAIN
SOURCE OF
INFORMATION FOR
ADMINISTRATIVE,
ACADEMIC AND
FINANCIAL MATTERS.

The Policies

It is important to obtain and read the policies that apply to your Division and to your particular situation. These policies are normally found in the course outline for your course, the academic calendar for your division, or can be requested through your Registrar's Office. Some of the relevant policies include:

The University Grading Practices Policy: This policy applies to all programs, graduate and undergraduate, and ensures that students' work is evaluated fairly and consistently across the University. For example, the *Grading Practices Policy* requires that instructors outline how students will be assessed in the course and that they return to their students at least one piece of graded work prior to the deadline for withdrawal from courses without academic penalty.

Grading Procedures: Each division has its own set of grading procedures which must conform with the *University Grading Practices Policy* and outlines the responsibilities of an instructor in meeting certain standards in the design of the course and in the evaluation of students' work.

The Policy on Access to Student Academic Records: This policy applies to all programs and gives students the right to view the contents, with only a few exceptions, of their official student record.

Regulations on Course Marks: These vary by division and describe the responsibilities of both instructors and students in assigning, completing and grading course work.

Regulations on Final Examinations: These vary by division and describe how examinations are conducted.

Rules for Departmental Appeals: These vary by division and outline the procedures for appealing the decision of an instructor with respect to the delivery of a course, marks received on term work and other matters concerning course requirements.

The **course outline** for a course is a very important written articulation of how your instructor plans to apply these policies and her or his expectations of you.

Whenever you encounter a problem with respect to a mark or grade, the process to follow will differ depending on:

- Whether it is a piece of term work, an exam or the final grade at issue;
- Whether your concern relates to your own performance or the conduct of the instructor; and
- The policies and procedures for your division.

Term Work

The best practice is to notify your instructor in advance if you will be unable to meet course deadlines. Discuss with your instructor options such as make-up tests, rewriting or dropping the course.

Extensions

Departmental Requests

In most cases, your instructor has the authority to grant you an extension or allow a make-up of a term test (as long as the extension does not go beyond the end of the final examination period). However, your instructor must do so according to the rules and regulations of her or his division. Therefore, you may be asked to submit medical documentation before you will be granted an extension or other special consideration. Extensions of time are normally given to compensate for the number of days off (for illness). It is in your best interests to get a specific deadline, rather than leave it ambiguous; this reduces the possibility of miscommunication issues later. If your instructor denies an extension request that is within his or her authority to grant, you may appeal the decision through the departmental appeal process.

Formal Petitions

If your request for an extension goes beyond the end of the examination period for the term, you will have to petition through your Registrar's Office. These petitions are made in writing and must give compelling reasons for the request, as well as supporting documentation (a detailed medical certificate, for example.) In most divisions, the petitions are considered by a committee — sometimes called the Committee on Standing. There are very strict **time limits** on petitions and departmental requests. In most divisions, for example, petitions for missed tests or assignments must be submitted within seven days of the missed test or due date. Check your Academic Calendar or consult with your Registrar.

Fairness in Marking

If you think you have received an unfair mark on a piece of term work, the first step is always to discuss the problem with your instructor. Use your judgment, but it is usually a good idea to submit your concern or request in writing to the instructor and to keep a copy for yourself. This will help if the problem must be pursued further.

If you cannot resolve the problem with the instructor, the next step is to bring your concern to the attention of the Department offering the course. The person to whom you should direct your concern is usually called the “undergraduate coordinator”, “undergraduate secretary”, “undergraduate counsellor” or “program director”. Again, it will help if you document your concern in writing.

If the problem remains unresolved, bring it to the attention of the Chair of the Department offering the course.

If it is still unresolved, you can appeal, in writing, to the Dean of your division, or depending on where you are registered, to an appeal committee. Check your Academic Calendar or consult with your Registrar to confirm your next step.

Administrative Errors

Issues arising from term work are normally dealt with by the instructor and the Department offering the course. If your instructor has posted something you believe to be incorrect (even if the grade seems to high!), address it as soon as possible with your instructor.

Examinations

Exemptions to the rules regarding final examinations are quite rare and, in most divisions, are granted only with proper documentation of an illness or a serious personal emergency.

Petitions

If you know ahead of time that you will not be able to write an examination at the prescribed time, see your Registrar’s Office to file a petition to seek guidance and/or special arrangements. Normally, petitions are not granted for travel, employment or personal plans.

Missed Exams

If you missed an examination because of illness or serious personal emergency, you must notify your Registrar quickly and make arrangements for writing the exam. Time limits in most divisions are strict, **usually five days** from the missed exam or before the end of the examination period.

Illness

In general, it is better to follow the procedures, above, for missed exams if you are ill, rather than write the exam and risk a poor grade. Granting re-writes due to illness is not common practice in some divisions. If you feel your performance on a final examination was been affected by an illness, you need to speak to your Registrar's Office as soon as possible.

Re-Reads

Most divisions have an explicit process for obtaining a copy of a final examination you have written and for having an exam re-read. These procedures differ by division but in general:

- There are fees involved in obtaining a copy of the exam (normally refunded if the mark is changed after the re-read).
- There are fees for clerical re-checking and re-reading (normally refunded if the mark is changed).
- You must submit academic justification for the re-read.
- You run the risk of having the mark lowered rather than raised, if the exam is re-read.
- There are time limits involved in requesting a copy of an examination.

(See also, Grade Re-checks, page 7.)

Course Grades

If you are concerned that an illness or personal problem is affecting or has affected your overall performance in a course, you should speak first to your instructor to see whether resubmission of work is possible.

One solution may be to petition to rewrite an examination or resubmit a piece of work. Depending on your situation, you may need to deal directly with your instructor and the Department offering the course or you may need to petition your division. Ultimately, any

petition will have to be filed in writing with your Registrar's Office, with the appropriate documentation, within the time limits set out by your division.

Administrative Errors

If you have made an administrative error that affects your final grade and/or your ability to graduate, file a petition through your Registrar's Office. For example, if you stopped attending a course early in the year but did not formally drop it, you may be able to have that course removed from your transcript by going through the petitions and appeals process. (Given the explicit statements in academic calendars and in registration documents about the need to withdraw formally from courses, this kind of petition, if granted, will normally only be permitted once per student.)

ULTIMATELY, ANY
PETITION WILL HAVE
TO BE FILED IN
WRITING WITH YOUR
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WITH THE
APPROPRIATE
DOCUMENTATION,
WITHIN THE TIME
LIMITS.

Grade Re-checks

Some divisions have an explicit process for having your final grades reviewed.

Normally, you would only want to do this if you think there has been a clerical error in adding up all your course marks. Again, procedures differ by division, but in general:

- There are fees involved in having a re-check of your course grade and marks, and in obtaining a copy of your final examination (normally refunded if the grade is changed after the re-check).
- There are time limits involved.
- These requests are normally handled by the Faculty Registrar's Office.

Undergraduate Student Petitions & Appeals: Step-by-Step

- 1** If the problem involves term work and it is prior to the exam, **contact your instructor**. He or she may have some discretion to resolve your difficulties without any further steps.
- 2** **Tell the appropriate office as soon as possible.** Your Registrar's Office (Arts & Science divisions) or Department Undergraduate Counsellor (Engineering) routinely deals with students who encounter problems beyond their control. The worst thing to do is to wait until you are up against a deadline. Your Registrar/Counsellor will provide you with the appropriate advice and forms.
- 3** **Review the Petitions and Appeals Procedures.** They are normally found in the Policies and Regulations section of your Academic Calendar.
- 4** **Gather the necessary documentation.** If you are or were ill, get your doctor to complete a University of Toronto Student Medical Certificate, which you can find at your Registrar or Health Service. If your problem is not medical, get the appropriate professional to attest to your condition — a counsellor or social worker, for example. You must provide compelling evidence that you should receive special consideration.
- 5** **Submit the petition** and supporting documentation **within the stated time limit.** Petitions will not be considered if they are submitted late or are not accompanied by the required documentation. Your petition and documentation will be reviewed in confidence by a committee or by an officer of the division. You do not attend the meeting. You will receive a written response from the committee or officer that considered your request.
- 6** If your petition is denied and you do not agree with the committee's judgment, **you have the right to an appeal.** You must first resubmit your original petition to the Committee on Standing, via your Registrar's Office, along with any further

explanation you may have for not being able to comply with the regulation being appealed and any response you may have to the Committee's reasons for decision.

7

If your resubmission is turned down, **you can appeal to your division's Academic Appeals Board** (the name of the appeal body varies from division to division.) Be sure your appeal request responds to any reasons given by the original committee for denying your petition. Be aware of **time limits** for filing an appeal, as set out in your Academic Calendar. For this level, you may wish to secure legal advice and/or representation for the preparation and presentation of your case. (See Downtown Legal Services, p.15.) Students in professional faculties whose programs have practicum components should consult with their Registrar about petitioning or appealing matters with respect to the practicum.

8

At the divisional Academic Appeals Board level, you may be entitled to **attend the hearing** and to be represented by legal counsel. You should consult with the appeal body's secretary about this. Once you have filed your appeal, the appeal committee's secretary will inform you of the date of the hearing and of any rules of procedure. Note that if you are entitled to attend the hearing and choose not to attend the hearing, it may proceed in your absence. At the hearing, you will be given an opportunity to present your case or answer the members' questions.

9

If you are unsatisfied with the divisional Academic Appeals Board decision, and there is no further level of appeal open to you within the division, **you may wish to appeal to the highest level possible within the University — the Academic Appeals Committee of the Governing Council.** You must do so — in writing — within 90 days of receiving the decision of the Faculty appeals committee. Obtain the required form and a copy of the *Academic Appeals Handbook* from the Office of the Governing Council. The Handbook outlines the procedures for the hearing and gives examples of past cases.

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Attend the hearing. Again, you have the right to legal counsel. The decision of the Academic Appeals Committee of the Governing Council is **final**.

Graduate Student Petitions & Appeals: Step-by-Step

The appeals process established by the School of Graduate Studies is different from that followed by undergraduate students. Graduate students use the same appeal process regardless of whether they have a personal or health problem and require special consideration or whether they are disputing a grade or a decision made by their instructor, supervisor or department. Informal mediation is available as an option at any point up to Step 3, below.

- 1 Informal:** The first step in the process is to discuss the matter informally with your instructor. If the issue is not resolved, you should refer it to the Graduate Co-ordinator for your program or Associate Chair for the Department.
- 2 Department Appeal:** The next step is to take your case to your unit's academic appeals committee. This is done in writing. The Graduate Co-ordinator should be able to give you information about the membership of that appeal committee and its procedures.
- 3 SGS Graduate Academic Appeals Board:** If you are not satisfied with the departmental appeal committee's decision, you may file an appeal to the Graduate Academic Appeals Board (GAAB) of the School of Graduate Studies.
- 4 Governing Council Appeals Committee:** Finally, you may take the GAAB decision to the Academic Appeals Committee of the Governing Council.

Details of the process, including deadlines for the various steps, can be found in the School of Graduate Studies Calendar. Details of the procedures of the Graduate Academic Appeals Board can be obtained from the School of Graduate Studies. The appeals form for the Academic Appeals Committee of the Governing Council and its procedural *Handbook* can be obtained from the Office of the Governing Council.

Writing a Petition or Appeal Letter

The success of your petition or appeal will depend largely on how you present your case. At the initial stages, this is done mainly through writing. A good, clear letter of request is, therefore, very important.

Letter of Request Checklist:

- Put the date, your address, phone number and the name, title and address of the person to whom you are writing, as well as the subject, at the top of the letter. Include your student number and program of study in the letter.
- The first sentence of the letter should explain clearly what regulation you are seeking exemption from or what work is the subject of the petition: an exam, a test, or a final grade, and in what course, with which professor.
- The second sentence should state the reasons for the request. Include dates whenever applicable.
- Note any documentation which will be attached to the letter.
- Stick to the facts and be specific. Explain the precise nature of your illness or problem and how it affected you. Do not try to manipulate or emotionally appeal to the reader of the letter. Do not criticize the rules; simply ask for an exemption from them.
- Be brief. Most letters of request should be, at most, two 8.5x11 pages, in 12 pt type.
- Be polite. Thank the person or committee for their time and consideration of the matter.

Sample Petition Letter

Your Name
Address
City, Province
Postal Code

Date
Name
Title
Faculty of _____
The University of Toronto
Address
Toronto, ON POSTAL CODE

Subject: Request for Extension Beyond the End of Term

Dear _____,

I am writing to request an extension beyond the end of the 2001-2002 spring term for the completion of the course History 301 with Professor Jane Smith. My father died on March 5, 2002 and it has taken me several weeks to recover and apply myself to my studies. I was therefore unable to submit on time the final paper for the course. I now feel that I can complete it by June 1, 2002.

I am attaching a letter from a counsellor who has been assisting me in overcoming my grief.

Thank you for taking the time to consider my request. Please contact me if you have any further questions.

Sincerely,

Your Name
Your Student Number

Sample Cases

The case descriptions below are based on real cases heard by the Academic Appeals Committee of the Governing Council. They illustrate the ways in which the policies of the University have been interpreted by various levels.

Time Limits Enforced

A student failed a first-year course. Five years later, she wished to apply for admission to a graduate program and realized that the failing grade on her transcript could affect her application. She petitioned to withdraw without academic penalty from the course. Her reason was that she had suffered from personal and medical difficulties during the examination period for the course but was not aware that she had the option to appeal the grade at the time. She admitted that in the following five years, she had not considered the matter important enough to pursue. She took the case all the way to the Academic Appeals Committee of the Governing Council but they dismissed it. In their view, she did not present sufficient justification for them to waive the time limit on petitions.

SHE TOOK THE CASE
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ACADEMIC APPEALS
COMMITTEE OF THE
GOVERNING COUNCIL BUT
THEY DISMISSED IT.

Missed Drop Date

A student in a professional faculty petitioned the Faculty to withdraw from a course after the formal drop date. She was failing the course and did not want her grade in that course to affect her overall standing. Her petition was refused. She appealed on the ground that the Faculty had failed to outline clearly that some courses had earlier drop dates than others. She had stopped attending the class, intending to drop it by the regular deadline — not realizing the deadline for dropping that particular course had already passed. The Academic Appeals Committee of the Governing Council granted her appeal; she was allowed to withdraw without penalty from the course, and to enter second year.

Sample Cases, Cont'd

Suspension Lifted

A student had been suspended from taking further courses because her grade point average had fallen below the required level. She appealed the decision on the grounds that she had performed poorly because of financial and personal difficulties, including protracted legal proceedings related to her employment. While she agreed that she should have withdrawn from her courses, she had not because she had hoped her situation would improve. She submitted a letter from a physician as evidence of the strain she had been under. While the divisional appeals committee had denied her request to lift the suspension, upon appeal to the Academic Appeals Committee of the Governing Council, she was successful. The Committee found that she had a record of satisfactory university achievement before entering the program and that she should be allowed to re-register for another session.

THE COMMITTEE FOUND
THAT SHE HAD A RECORD
OF SATISFACTORY
ACHIEVEMENT BEFORE
ENTERING THE PROGRAM
AND THAT SHE SHOULD
BE ALLOWED TO RE-
REGISTER.

Repeated Year

A student in a professional faculty failed his fourth year and was required to repeat it. He appealed to the Academic Appeals Committee of the Governing Council on the grounds that the Faculty had failed to use adequate and fair procedures in evaluating his work and informing him of his progress during the year. The student told the Committee that he had not been given appropriate help and did not receive enough feedback on his work. The Academic Appeals Committee, however, found that the Faculty had followed normal procedures in assessing the student and had made it clear that his work was not up to standard. The Committee dismissed his appeal.

Useful Contacts

First and foremost, you should seek advice and assistance from your Registrar's Office. As well as providing you with direct assistance, your Registrar's Office can tell you what other resources may be available to you. Some other sources of information, advice and assistance are:

Accessibility Service

(advising and accommodations for students with a documented disability)

St. George Campus:

1st Floor, 130 St. George St.

416-978-8060

www.studentlife.utoronto.ca/accessibility

UofT - Scarborough:

Room S302 (Science Bldg)

416-287-7560

www.utsc.utoronto.ca/ability

UofT - Mississauga:

Room 1113, South Building

905-569-4699

www.utm.utoronto.ca/access

Counselling Services

(for help coping with personal problems)

St. George Campus:

Room 111, Koffler Student Services Centre,

214 College St.

416-978-7970

UofT - Scarborough:

Student Centre, SL-270

416-287-7065

UofT - Mississauga:

Room 1123, South Bldg.

905-828-5255

Downtown Legal Services

720 Spadina Avenue, Suite 418

416-934-4535

www.dls.utoronto.ca

—legal assistance; staffed by U of T Lw students.

Office of the Governing Council

(Academic Appeals Committee)

Room 106, Simcoe Hall

27 King's College Circle

416-978-6576

On-line policies and procedures:

www.utoronto.ca/govncnl

Graduate Students' Union

16 Bancroft Avenue

416-978-2391

www.gsu.utoronto.ca

Health Services

St. George Campus:

2nd Floor, Koffler Student Services Centre

214 College Street

416-978-8030

UofT - Scarborough:

Student Centre, SL-270

416-287-7001

UofT - Mississauga:

Room 1123, South Bldg.

905-828-5255

The University Ombudsperson

222 College St., Suite 161

416-978-4874

ombuds.person@utoronto.ca

www.utoronto.ca/ombudsperson

— provides confidential advice and assistance if you have exhausted all procedural avenues open to you in a complaint against the University.

The Student Rights & Responsibilities Publication Series

With over 70,000 students and 10,000 academic and administrative staff, the University of Toronto is the size of a small city — one with a distinct mission of expanding knowledge through teaching and research. As such, the University has developed a set of rules, policies and procedures which governs behaviour here, and has staff to administer those rules. The Student Rights & Responsibilities series is intended to help students understand the rules and the resources available to them.

The booklets provide general information. Sources of additional information are identified in each booklet. Please remember that, often, the best initial sources of advice are:

- the staff or faculty member who is familiar with, or has been directly involved in your problem, or
- the staff in your Registrar's Office or departmental office who may regularly deal with problems similar to yours.

Other titles in this series:

- ▶ **Academic Integrity:** Including information for students involved in cases of cheating and plagiarism
- ▶ **Student Conduct:** Including information on the University's Code of Student Conduct and its procedures



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