



## MEMORANDUM

**To:** Faculty Council of October 23, 2017

**From:** Professor Jason Foster  
Chair, Academic Appeals Board

**Date:** September 26, 2017

**Re:** **Annual Report of the Academic Appeals Board to Faculty Council for the Period of September 2016 to September 2017**

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### REPORT CLASSIFICATION

This is a routine matter for Faculty Council's information.

### ACADEMIC APPEALS BOARD RESPONSIBILITIES

To hear appeals of undergraduate students against decisions of the standing committees of Council relating to petitions for exemptions from the application of academic regulations or standards and to make rulings on such appeals.

The Academic Appeals Board (AAB) shall report annually to Council at the regular fall meeting indicating the number of appeals brought in the previous year and the disposition of those appeals. No information identifying appellants may be included in the annual report.

### SUMMARY OF APPEALS AND DISPOSITIONS

In the 2016-2017 academic year, the AAB considered 13 appeals on decisions made by the Examinations Committee. The Board received 45% fewer appeals than in the 2015-2016 academic year. The appeals considered can be further categorized as:

- Six (6) for special consideration regarding Faculty policies
- Seven (7) for considerations on final examinations

In eight (8) of the appeals, many of which introduced new documentation or elicited additional information during the hearing, the AAB found cause to intervene. The specific remedies granted were:

- Standing deferred exams for five (5) appellants;
- Retroactive withdrawal (“WDR”) for three (3) courses for one appellant;
- Expunging the WDR notation for a Fall Session course from the appellant’s transcript upon successful completion (50% or higher) of the course in following the Winter Session; and,
- Replacing a midterm grade and a final exam notation of “did not write” (“DNW”). The midterm grade will be replaced by the equivalent grade from the same course audited in the 2017 Winter Session. The final exam grade will be replaced by the grade earned in a deferred exam for the course to be written in April 2017.

The AAB found insufficient grounds to intervene in the remaining five (5) appeals and rendered decisions of “no action” in these instances.

In the past year, the AAB also received one appeal to its decisions through the University’s Governing Council Academic Appeal Committee. In this case, the Faculty, as represented by Professor James Davis, in consultation with the Faculty Registrar, Don MacMillan, attended the hearing. The student’s appeal was denied.

## **EMERGING TRENDS WITHIN APPEALS**

### *Membership*

In the past academic year, the Board struggled to schedule hearings that achieved quorum due to the limited availability of its members. In response to these challenges, the AAB engaged in discussions with the Office of the Dean and the Engineering Society with the goal of increasing the number of AAB members. The Board is looking to permanently expand both its pool of members and the diversity of its membership with the goal of being able to schedule more timely and diverse hearing panels.

### *Reduced Number of Cases*

We do not believe the reduction in appeals heard in 2016-17 was due to a lack of communication to students regarding the availability of the appeals process. Close collaboration between the Board and the Registrar Office’s Communication Coordinator resulted in the following outreach to students:

- A link to information on petitions and appeals was included in the September 2016, November 2016, December 2016 and March 2017 issues of the Engineering Student e-News. The e-News is sent once a month between September – April.
- The Current Engineering Undergraduates website ([undergrad.engineering.utoronto.ca](http://undergrad.engineering.utoronto.ca)) was redesigned and moved to a new platform the first week of January 2017. As part of the redesign, “Petitions” was broken out into a top-level navigation item on the homepage. Sub-headers under “Petitions” include “Term-Work Petitions,” “Final Exam Petitions,” “Special

Consideration Petitions” and “Appeals.” The “Petitions” and “Appeals” page are also linked to on the Office of the Registrar’s page on the site.

Notwithstanding this outreach, during hearings some appellants did claim ignorance of Faculty policies regarding petitions and appeals.

## **PLANS AND GOALS FOR 2017-2018**

### *AAB Manual*

The current AAB Manual has been in place since 2010. During the 2017-2018 academic year the Board will review the manual and propose revisions as appropriate.

### *AAB Decision Substantiation*

The Board received several requests from appellants seeking additional details on the rationale behind the decisions rendered by the AAB on their appeals. AAB decision letters are largely templated — with the notable exception of any specific remedies — with the goals of consistency and preserving the non-legal nature of the Board. The perceived lack of details — specifically regarding cases where appeals are denied — in the AAB decision letters has been critiqued in decisions published by the more legally-oriented Governing Council Academic Appeal Committee (AAC). In response to these critiques, the Board commits to reviewing its response process and communications over the coming year, while maintaining its focus on compassion and the exercise of engineering judgement.

Respectfully submitted,

Prof. Jason Foster  
Chair, Academic Appeals Board  
Associate Professor, Teaching Stream