



MEMORANDUM

To: Faculty Council (December 2, 2020)

From: Professor Donald Kirk
Chair, Academic Appeals Board

Date: November 10, 2020

Re: **Annual Report of the Academic Appeals Board to Faculty Council for the Period of September 1, 2019 to September 1, 2020**

REPORT CLASSIFICATION

The Academic Appeals Board (AAB) reports directly to Faculty Council. 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 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 & DISPOSITIONS

During the 2019-2020 academic year, the AAB considered eighteen 18 appeals on decisions made by the Examinations Committee (EC).

In addition to the 18 appeals considered by the AAB, six appeals were resolved at the EC level (each appeal is first sent back to the EC for a second review before proceeding to the AAB if the EC's original decision stands). Two appeals were closed because there was no response from the students. One appeal was withdrawn by a student.

The table below shows the number of appeals heard over the past six academic years:

Academic Year	2014-15	2015-16	2016-17	2017-18	2018-19	2019-20
Number of appeals	20	24	13	10	20	18

Table 1 – Number of Appeals Per Academic Year

The appeals considered during the 2019-2020 academic year can be further categorized as:

- Four for considerations on final examinations.
- Fourteen for special consideration regarding Faculty policies.

In 16 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:

- Retake exam when next offered (2)
- Assessed grade (1)
- Probation relief; permitted to return to U of T Engineering studies (2)
- Probation relief; permitted to return to U of T Engineering studies; retroactive withdrawal (WDR) one course (1)
- Further deferral of missed standing deferred exam (SDF) (1)
- Further deferral of two missed SDFs (1)
- Further deferral of three missed SDFs (1)
- WDR notation for a course removed and replaced with SDF (1)
- WDR one course (1)
- WDR multiple courses (2)
- Probation relief; permitted to retain three credits for courses taken during a failed term; changed several earned grades to SDFs (1)
- Probation relief; permitted to return to studies at U of T Engineering; permitted to retain credit for passed course in a failed term (1)
- Removed final question in a final exam from grade (student's exam was missing the last sheet) (1)

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

In the last academic year, two appeals to AAB decisions were submitted to the University's Governing Council Academic Appeal Committee. Both are currently still in progress.

UPDATES, TRENDS & OBSERVATIONS WITHIN APPEALS

Remote Work Changes Due to the COVID-19 Pandemic

After the closure of U of T Engineering offices in March of this year to ensure the safety of our community, the AAB moved its hearings online. Hearings are currently held via Microsoft Teams meetings (using both audio and video). Decisions are being communicated to students via PDFs delivered by email instead of hard copies sent by mail.

Pre-closure, AAB hearings lasted a half-hour each, and, often, two hearings could be scheduled during a one-hour period. The AAB has found that it now needs a full hour to consider each case. This is likely the result of the change of process and technology and the complexity of the cases. As such, each case is scheduled for a one-hour period, which has increased the number of hearing dates.

Onboarding of Student Members

Last year, the AAB instituted a brief onboarding session for new AAB members. This practice was continued this year via an online meeting.

Membership Turnover Timelines

The Board continues to struggle to schedule hearings during the Summer Session. The membership turnover date for the AAB is July 1, 2020. Faculty members are often identified on or before that date. However, due to the nature of the academic year, the Engineering Society is often not able to confirm new student representatives until August or September.

In the past, the AAB has asked departing student representatives if they are able to serve on the Board throughout the summer to address the gap, however due to other obligations, understandably, students are not always able to participate through the summer months. The AAB is working with Faculty governance to determine a solution.

The Board continues to struggle to schedule hearings that achieve quorum due to conflicting availability and conflicts of interest. The AAB hopes to expand the number of Faculty members on the Board in the future and will discuss the matter further with Faculty governance.

Continued Increase in Case Communication & Complexity

In line with the update from last year, increases in case communication and complexity are likely due to the efforts of the EC to resolve student appeals within that committee. As such, the cases heard by the AAB have become subjectively more complex. This has

impacted the time taken at hearings and the amount of preparation undertaken by the Secretary and the Registrar's Office.

Revisions to the AAB Manual

In recent years, the AAB had planned to overhaul the Board's manual; however, the work remains on hold. The Board hopes to turn its attention to work on the manual this year should time and availability allow.

RECOMMENDATION FOR FACULTY COUNCIL

For information.