



MEMORANDUM

To: Faculty Council of October 24, 2024

From: Professor Donald Kirk
Chair, Academic Appeals Board (Undergraduate)

Date: September 24, 2024

Re: **Annual Report of the Academic Appeals Board (Undergraduate) for the Period of September 1, 2023, to September 1, 2024**

REPORT CLASSIFICATION

The Academic Appeals Board (Undergraduate) reports directly to Faculty Council. This is a routine matter for Faculty Council's information.

ACADEMIC APPEALS BOARD RESPONSIBILITIES

To hear appeals of U of T Engineering 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(U) shall report annually to the 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 2023-2024 academic year, the AAB(U) considered 39 appeals on decisions made by the Undergraduate Assessment Committee (UAC), which is up from the 26 considered during the previous cycle.

In addition to the 39 appeals considered by the AAB(U), 15 appeals (up from 13 in the previous cycle) were resolved at the UAC level (each appeal is first sent back to the UAC for a second review before proceeding to the AAB(U) if the UAC's original decision stands).

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

Academic Year	2015-16	2016-17	2017-18	2018-19	2019-20	2020-21	2021-22	2022-23	2023-24
Number of appeals	24	13	10	20	18	10	23	26	39

Table 1 – Number of Appeals Per Academic Year

The appeals considered during the 2023-2024 academic year can be further categorized as the following:

- 15 for considerations on final examinations. An increase compared to the 12 considered in the previous cycle.
- 24 for special consideration regarding Faculty policies. An increase from the last cycle that heard 12 special consideration cases.
- No appeals for consideration on term-work. A decrease compared to the last cycle that considered 2 term-work cases.

In 13 of the 39 appeals, many of which introduced new documentation or elicited additional information during the hearing, the AAB(U) found cause to intervene. The specific remedies granted were:

- Retroactive withdrawal (“WDR”) from a course or session (5).
- Assessed mark for a missed final exam (3).
- Deferred exam for a missed final exam (2).
- Allowed to take a summer session course during a mandatory withdrawal period (1).
- Re-grade of a course project (1).
- Weight redistribution of a missed midterm exam to the final exam (1).

The AAB(U) found insufficient grounds to intervene in the remaining 26 appeals and rendered decisions of “no action” in these instances.

In the last academic year, four appeals to an AAB(U) decision were considered by the University’s Governing Council Academic Appeal Committee (AAC).

UPDATES, TRENDS & OBSERVATIONS WITHIN ACADEMIC APPEALS

Overall Upward Trend in Number of Appeals

Over the past few years, the AAB(U) has observed an increasing trend in the volume of appeals submitted for Board deliberation. Most notably, the recently concluded 2023-

2024 cycle marked a new peak in the appeals reviewed by both the UAC and AAB(U), as indicated in Table 1. To accommodate for this rise in cases, the AAB(U) has increased its frequency of hearings. As the AAB(U) handles appeals after the UAC has completed a second review of the case, the Board now holds monthly rounds of hearings following the UAC's full committee meetings to review appeals.

Membership Turnover Timelines

Due to the increased frequency of hearings needed, the Board has faced difficulty in scheduling timeslots that achieve a quorum, primarily due to conflicting availability during busier periods of the term and the summer session. We greatly appreciate the participation of Professors Francis Dawson (ECE), Harry Ruda (MSE) and Roger Carrick (EngSci). Additionally, we appreciate the active engagement of the 2023-2024 student representatives, including Julianne Attai (Year 4 EngSci), Matthew Du (Year 3 MechE), Amy Huang (Year 4 EngSci), Kat Jia (Year 4 MechE) and Mike Le (Year 4 CivE).

The membership turnover date for the AAB(U) is September 1 each year. Faculty members and student representatives were identified earlier in the summer, allowing the Board to host the onboarding session for new members earlier, facilitating a smooth transition period between membership cycles. We are excited to welcome the new 2024-2025 members to the Board.

Special Consideration Appeals and the Requirement of Documentation for Final Exam Petitions

This past cycle, the AAB(U) noticed an increase in the number of special consideration appeals received compared to the previous cycle and no major change in the number of appeals relating to final exam petitions. The Board notes that the stable final exam appeals could be in part due to the faculty's implementation of required documentation for all petitions. Notably, there was an increase in medical documentation submitted for missed final exams.

Continued Increase in Case Communication & Complexity

Similarly to previous updates, there is an increase in case complexity. The AAB(U) notes that these are likely due to the efforts of the UAC to resolve student appeals within their committee. As a result, the cases forwarded to the AAB(U) have become subjectively more complex, impacting the time needed for hearings and the amount of preparation undertaken by the Secretary and the Registrar's Office.

To accommodate for the complexity, the Board requests more supporting documentation from the appellant, including their course syllabus and grading details, to provide further context to the attending AAB(U) members and help the appellant be better prepared for questions that may arise during their hearing. Additionally, the Board requests the term-work report from the Registrar's Office for cases pertaining to a specific course or a

missed final exam. These requests are communicated by the Recording Secretary. The additional documents are provided to the attending members as part of the case's documents folder.

Virtual Hearings

The AAB(U) continues to conduct virtual hearings that each last for a one-hour period. Hearings are held via Microsoft Teams meetings (using both audio and video). Decisions are being communicated to students via PDFs delivered by email.

Sensitivity to Cultural and Gender Issues

As per the AAB(U)'s consultation with Marisa Sterling, Assistant Dean & Director, Diversity, Inclusion and Professionalism in 2023, the Board has put into practice enhancements to support appellants who experience discrimination, harassment, or sexual violence. The Board includes onboarding material to emphasize the importance of sensitivity toward the type of questions asked to the appellant and the importance of ensuring these questions do not make the appellant uncomfortable. Furthermore, during the hearing, the Board discusses the university resources to include in the AAB(U)'s decision letter. If necessary, advice and recommendations on these university resources are sought from the appropriate staff to best direct the appellant.

RECOMMENDATION FOR FACULTY COUNCIL

For information.