



**To: Faculty Council**

**From: Professor Tom Coyle  
Chair, Committee on Examinations**

**Date: February 9, 2011 for March 8, 2011 Meeting**

**Item: Deferred Final Examinations**

---

Several issues were identified for consideration by the Committee on Examinations prior to the September Executive Committee meeting. A review and modification of the Manual and Terms of Reference have been completed, and the promotion and transfer rules for Engineering Science students transferring into the core 8 programs have been changed to address the number of failed courses that could be carried forward. We have continued to work on guidelines for the awarding of deferred final examinations to a limited number of petitioning students, and a review of grading practices and guidelines for the adjustment of course grades. Recently, we have been requested to consider the awarding of honours standing at graduation with the objective of simplifying the criteria.

**Background:**

The number of petitions and the percentage of students who submit petitions have generally increased over the past several years as shown in the table. The largest portion of these is from students who have missed one or more final examinations, for which the normal procedure is to assess a grade for the course based on the closely supervised term work. These data include a small number of students who submit a large number of petitions. As indicated previously, the committee is concerned that the cumulative effect of a relatively large number of assessed grades puts the validity of the student's academic record in question.

When students have appealed decisions of the Committee on Examinations involving assessed grades to the Academic Board's Academic Appeals Committee (AAC), the decisions of the AAC have been uniformly highly critical of the Faculty's reluctance to grant deferred exams. In almost all cases, the assessed marks were replaced by a retroactive withdrawal from the course or a grade of aegrotat, since at that point too much time had passed for the AAC's preferred accommodation of a deferred exam to be practical.

Term	Registered Students (Non PEY)	# Students submitted petitions	% Students petitioning	# DNW's (Did not write final exam)	# Assessed Grades Granted	# Deferred Exam Granted (courses)
2007-9	4202	278	6.6%	151	104	
2008-1	4115	340	8.3%	NA	135	
2008-9	4155	308	7.4%	168	120	
2009-1	4082	383	9.4%	NA	133	
2009-9	4392	369	8.4%	279	181	
2010-1	4314	439	10.2%	NA	165	4
2010-9	4374	305	7.0%	219	180	6

Although the practice of assessing course grades has worked well for the Faculty for a long time, and continues to do so in the vast majority of cases, APSE is the only faculty at the University to employ this practice. An informal survey of several other engineering faculties in Canada (Queen's, Waterloo, McMaster, U of Alberta and UBC) found that the practice in all cases was to offer deferred examinations when students missed final examinations under extenuating circumstances.

To address the concern regarding the large number of assessed grades accumulated by a small number of students and in response to the decisions of the AAC, the Committee on Examinations has been developing criteria to guide the awarding of deferred examinations. The objective is to minimize the number of deferred examinations, while identifying those cases similar to those which were the subjects of AAC decisions or of concern due to a large number of previously assessed grades. Trials of the guidelines were undertaken the past two sessions, resulting in decisions to grant deferred examinations in four courses in 2009 F and in six courses in 2010 W. The deferred examination should be held as soon as possible after the missed examination, especially when a student's academic standing may be affected by the result of the deferred examination. The preferred time is Reading Week for missed December examinations and May or June for missed April examinations.

The guidelines resulting from the considerations and trials described above are attached. These would be implemented for the April 2011 final examinations.

**Proposal/Motion:**

For information.

## **Guidelines for Granting a Deferred Examination (SDF)**

When a petition regarding a missed final examination has been accepted as valid and properly documented, assessment of a course grade based on closely supervised term work remains the preferred method of granting relief. In some situations alternatives to an assessed grade may be preferable. A deferred exam will be considered when a student meets one or more of the following criteria:

1. The student has a minimum of two previous terms with at least one assessed mark in each term, for example: 2008-9: 1 to 3 assessed grades + 2010-1: 1 assessed grade.
2. The assessed grade would result in failure of the course (unless failure would result regardless of the mark on the final examination).
3. The assessed grade would be higher than any earned grade in the term, and following current practice of capping the assessed grade at the level of the highest grade earned in a full-weight technical course would impact academic standing or status (such as honours).
4. The student has completed an insufficient amount of supervised term work to allow a valid assessment/calculation of an assessed grade. This is most appropriate when the student had valid reasons for missing supervised term work (a major test) and final exam. The Committee, in making its final decision, may take into consideration any additional comments provided on the Term Work Report from the Course Instructor regarding the student's ability.

If deferred exams are being considered for more than two courses as a result of missed final exams and insufficient term work, a grade of aegrotat (AEG) for those courses or a retroactive withdrawal from the term may be more appropriate accommodations. A retroactive withdrawal (WDR) from a single course would be considered only for exceptional circumstances.

5. The assessed grade results in a term average which places the student near the cutoff ranges (depending on previous academic status) of 53-54.4 or 57-59.4 for academic probation (PRO1/PRO2) or permanent suspension (RFRG).
6. Timetable misread: Assessed - 10% OR SDF – 10%, if assessing a grade is not a viable option.

### **General First Deferred Exam Procedure**

Once a student has been granted a deferred exam (SDF), the following activities will occur:

1. The student's current grade (DNW – Did Not Write) will be changed to SDF (Deferred Exam) on ROSI
2. A deferred exam period will be set by the Registrar's Office (OFR) and the Exam Committee
3. OFR will notify the student, Course Instructor and the student's Counsellor
4. Course Instructor to submit a NEW exam to the OFR by a stated deadline

5. OFR will notify the student of the date and time of the deferred exam (no location) and the student will be required to pay a deferred exam fee (\$70/exam, capped at \$210)
6. After the student has paid, the OFR will notify the student of the time, date, and location
7. If the exam was NOT written and no new petition has been submitted by the student, the OFR will insert the original earned course mark from the Term Work Report
8. If a new 2<sup>nd</sup> petition has been submitted regarding the missed deferred exam, the Exam Committee would have to decide on the new best course of action (see Second Deferral Procedure below)

### **Second Deferral Procedure**

The Faculty will not normally offer a student a third chance to write their missed exam. The student will be required to submit a new petition for special consideration for their missed deferred exam and the Faculty will decide on the most appropriate course of action - the Faculty may ask the student to repeat the course or write the regular exam when the course is next offered again.

In the event that the student missed their deferred exam, the original earned grade will be inserted to replace the SDF grade and the student's academic standing will be re-assessed based on the original earned grade. Should the student now fail the term (PRO2/RFRG) because of the original earned grade, the Faculty will have to decide on the most appropriate course of action.

### **Re-write or Supplemental Exam Procedure**

Students who wrote their original scheduled exam would not normally be considered for a make up exam. The Faculty will try not to penalize any students for trying their best to write the exam under sub-optimal conditions (mild-illness, unstable, distracted) but the Faculty will only consider granting a make up exam in very special situations. It would be reasonable for the Faculty to not provide any relief after the final exam when the student's performance in the final exam is highly consistent with term tests/quizzes or general performance in previous terms. When appropriate, the Faculty will take the student's entire academic performance into consideration.