



MEMORANDUM

To: Executive Committee of Faculty Council (January 20, 2015)
Faculty Council (February 10, 2015)

From: Professor Peter Herman
Chair, Examinations Committee

Date: January 19, 2015

Re: New Online Term Work Petition Process

REPORT CLASSIFICATION

This is a major policy matter that will be considered by the Executive Committee for endorsing and forwarding to Faculty Council for vote as a regular motion (requiring a simple majority of members present and voting to carry).

BACKGROUND

Currently, when a student needs to submit a term work petition, he or she obtains the Term Work Petition form, completes it, and submits it directly to his or her instructor. The instructor determines whether or a not an accommodation is in order, and if it is, what the accommodation should be.

Chemical Engineering has used a centralized term work petition system since 2011-12; students submit their term work petitions to the undergraduate department office. The First Year Office adopted a similar system for first-year Engineering students during the 2013-14 academic year.

Chemical Engineering and first-year students submit their term work petitions through their respective academic advisors. The academic advisors review the petitions, and, if the petitions are deemed valid, they are forwarded to the appropriate instructor who then determines the accommodation. While professors are still required to review the petitions forwarded to them by the academic advisors and render an accommodation, the administrative work is streamlined and reduced.

One benefit of the centralized system is that academic advisors can identify students who may be struggling earlier on in the session and thereby provide more timely recommendations and guidance. Otherwise, academic advisors are unaware of the number of term work petitions, the resulting accommodations, and the personal circumstances of

individual students when their petitions are handled exclusively by the instructors. Moreover, the Examination Committee believes a centralized term work petition system will reduce the number of petitions by permitting advisors to intervene and assist students earlier in each term.

It is acknowledged that a centralized term work petition system will result in slightly higher work levels for academic advisors; however, the process should not take up a significant amount of time. The benefits are a reduction of the over workload across the whole Faculty, and improvement in the timeliness and the quality of guidance to students. Further, the term work petitioning process will move onto our current Engineering Portal, with secure UTORID login that is now widely used for petitioning of Final Examinations.

PROPOSED STRUCTURE

Basic review and approval process:

- 1) The role of the academic advisors, undergraduate offices, and First Year Office is to ensure all petitions submitted meet the requirements set out by policy and best practice, and that they are supported by valid reasoning and the required documentation. They will then facilitate, through the online system, the instructor's accommodation. The accommodation is solely at the instructor's discretion; however, the decision to accommodate a petition or not is guided by policy, guidelines and best practice – not individual discretion.
- 2) The instructor or course coordinator will have the sole responsibility of deciding upon and carrying out the appropriate accommodation. They will not normally be involved in determining if the petition is valid or not and cannot "override" the advisors/undergraduate office/First Year Office's decisions on this. However, the instructor will be notified by email of each pending petition, and be invited to provide additional information through the Portal that will be made available to the advisor and office for consideration in the determining the validity of the petition.

By strategically separating these two aspects of the term work petition process, we anticipate the following advantages:

- 1) Standardization of the term work petition process that benefits staff, faculty and the student experience.
- 2) Ability to centrally monitor repeat petitioners, so proactive measures can be undertaken to assist students in trouble.
- 3) Creation of common practices for accommodations across the Faculty to ensure consistency.
- 4) Timeliness of petition processing and a reduction in petition workload for instructors.

- 5) Improved access to the petition history, where instructors will receive a petition and accommodations summary at the end of each session.

The centralized petitioning process does not replace pro-active accommodation requests made directly by the student to an instructor where a time sensitive accommodation may be available. Examples include rescheduling a missed lab or quiz where an alternative lab or quiz may be available in another section of the course. Alternatively, students with time conflicts should also be accommodated as best as possible, for example, by writing midterm exams earlier or later than scheduled. Such examples or similar situations should be reasonably accommodated by the instructor in parallel with the official submission process of a term work petition by the student through the Faculty system. Because of the possible delay in receiving official approval for the accommodation, the instructor should proceed forward with the appropriate accommodation. Once the Department/Faculty has made the official decision on the petition, the instructor must follow accordingly on applying or removing the appropriate accommodation that was tentatively put in place.

Another benefit of the proposed system is the confidential manner in which sensitive documents are handled. It will ensure student records remain private and remove the burden on the instructors of ensuring the current paper documents are properly stored and destroyed by the instructors.

The centralized petitioning process aims further to remove the subjectivity in the petition system and make the process more equitable for all. For example, the Examination Committee members are aware of highly dissimilar accommodations arising for students in very similar situations. Favourable accommodations appear to be made more frequently to students with strong communications and/or good grades than to those who do not possess those skills.

PROCESS AND CONSULTATION

The Examination Committee has consulted broadly with academic advisors, chairs and directors, and several instructors, as well as sought feedback at an ECE departmental meeting.

RECOMMENDATION

The Committee recommends that the new online term work petition process described in this report be adopted and implemented for all of the Summer 2015 Engineering courses. This includes the introduction of an electronic work-term report into the current Engineering Portal, together with new links to communicate the decisions of petitions to the appropriate course instructors, who will carry out the accommodations.

References to the new process will be updated accordingly on the website and in the undergraduate calendar.

MOTION

THAT the new online term work petition process described in this report be adopted and implemented starting with the Summer 2015 Engineering courses.