



MEMORANDUM

To: Faculty Council (October 18, 2021)

From: Professor Donald Kirk
Chair, Academic Appeals Board

Date: September 23, 2021; revised October 7, 2021

Re: **Annual Report of the Academic Appeals Board to Faculty Council for the Period of September 1, 2020 to September 1, 2021**

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 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 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 2020-2021 academic year, the AAB considered 10 appeals on decisions made by the Examinations Committee (EC), which is down from the 18 considered during the previous cycle.

In addition to the 10 appeals considered by the AAB, two appeals (down from six the previous cycle) 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).

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

Academic Year	2014-15	2015-16	2016-17	2017-18	2018-19	2019-20	2020-21
Number of Appeals	20	24	13	10	20	18	10

Table 1 – Number of Appeals Per Academic Year

The appeals considered during the 2020-2021 academic year can be further categorized as the following:

- Three for considerations on final examinations.
- Seven for special consideration regarding Faculty policies.

In five of the 10 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:

- Further deferral of several final examinations
- Retroactive withdrawal (“WDR”) from a term (2)
- Grade penalty for late submission of final examination removed
- Two deferred exams (“SDF”) granted; late withdrawal (“LWD”) from one course granted

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

In the last academic year, two appeals to AAB decisions were considered by the University’s Governing Council Academic Appeal Committee (AAC). Both AAC appeals were dismissed.

UPDATES, TRENDS & OBSERVATIONS WITHIN ACADEMIC APPEALS

Remote Work Changes Due to the COVID-19 Pandemic

The AAB is continuing to conduct its hearings online as it has since March 2020. 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.

It is important to note that there has been an increase in the number of appeals received in August and September and an increase in the number of requests for expedited hearings/decisions, which strains the ability of the AAB to respond in a timely manner.

Membership Turnover Timelines

The Board continues to struggle to schedule hearings during the Summer Session and into September of the new academic year. The membership turnover date for the AAB is July 1 each year. 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 continues to work with Faculty governance to determine a solution.

Additionally, the Board has difficulties in scheduling 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

The Board met several times to prepare a draft of a revised operating manual for the AAB. Feedback from the Working Group on Standing Committees was obtained and a revised draft has been submitted to the Executive Committee.

RECOMMENDATION FOR FACULTY COUNCIL

For information.