



## MEMORANDUM

**To:** Executive Committee of Faculty Council (March 26, 2024)  
Faculty Council (April 15, 2024)

**From:** Professor Arthur Chan  
Chair, Undergraduate Assessment Committee

**Date:** March 12, 2024

**Re:** **Undergraduate Assessment Committee Update for the 2023-2024 Academic Year**

---

## REPORT CLASSIFICATION

This is a routine or minor policy matter that will be considered by the Executive Committee for approving and forwarding to Faculty Council to receive for information.

## BACKGROUND

In accordance with Procedures of Committees for Council of the Faculty of Applied Science and Engineering, this report is a brief summary of the activities undertaken by the Undergraduate Assessment Committee (UAC) during the current academic year.

## ACTIVITIES

From August 2023 to March 2024, UAC has met approximately 22 times, for a total of approximately 30–35 hours of meeting time. For most of each academic semester, UAC meets regularly to discuss policies and review full committee petitions on a bi-weekly basis, with the exception of end-of-term petition and grade review meetings. In addition, UAC maintains an active Teams site, which includes regular discussion and e-voting for certain time-sensitive matters. UAC members also spend time outside of meetings to develop new policy proposals and communications to the Faculty. Undergraduate advisors have also met numerous times outside of UAC to review petitions prior to UAC meetings. A more detailed accounting of key UAC activities is described in the sections below.

## RECOMMENDATION FOR FACULTY COUNCIL

For information.

### ***Faculty Grading Practices***

At the end of each term, UAC reviews undergraduate course grades for consistency and fairness across the Faculty and communicates with instructors about any concerns (see Report 3868 for more information about Faculty norms). For courses where grades fall outside of Faculty norms, departmental representatives work with course instructors to follow Faculty grading practices.

The committee also reviews proposed Composition of Final Marks (COFM) for all undergraduate courses, and adjudicates requests for deviations from the Faculty Grading Policies (Academic Regulations, Section XI). As a snapshot: in Winter 2024, approximately 80 out of 260 course codes deviated from the standard COFM, generally by exceeding 50% weight on not closely supervised work and/or by having no final exam. Sixty-two of these courses have either automatic or pre-existing exemptions from Faculty COFM rules – primarily design, seminar and laboratory courses. A majority of the COFM exemption requests were approved. UAC strongly encourages course instructors to discuss with their departmental curriculum committees and undergraduate associate chairs to ensure the proposed COFM exemptions are consistent with curriculum design.

### ***Policy Discussions***

Throughout the current academic year, UAC has discussed a number of policy items related to:

- Deferred Exams
- Composition of Final Marks (e.g., for design courses)
- Clarification of various existing Academic Regulations, including updates to Faculty approved calculator type
- Accommodations for participation in extra-curricular activities (e.g., Blue Sky Solar Racing, Skule Nite)

As relevant, policy proposals related to these topics have been / will be presented to Faculty Council.

### ***Petitions***

Adjudicating petitions for special consideration and for final exams constitutes a majority of the committee meeting time. Straightforward petitions are reviewed and accommodated in separate meetings of the undergraduate academic advisors. In complex cases, including any that may impact a student's academic standing, petitions are reviewed by the full committee. On occasion, especially during the end-of-term review period, petitions are reviewed by sub-committees. Note that Term Work Petitions are generally evaluated at the departmental level by academic advisors, and policies for these term work petitions are occasionally discussed and decided on by UAC. Term Work Petitions are seen by UAC only in the event of a dispute.

As noted in a previous UAC report (Report 3745), there has been a large increase in the number of petitions compared to historical averages. During the COVID pandemic (until September 2023), self-declaration of illness without verification of illness (i.e., medical documentation) was sufficient for medically related absences. A large increase of all types of petitions was observed, and this increase persisted even after the return to in-person learning. Anecdotally (such as through communications with other university registrars), such increase has also been observed in other Faculties and universities, pointing to a shift in cultural norms around accommodations.

At the beginning of this academic year in September 2023, the Faculty returned to the accommodation policy in place immediately before Winter 2020. Undergraduate students are able to file one term-work petition per term without documentation (i.e., self-declare their own illness) for a period of three days for assignments worth less than 15%. Verification of illness is required for final exam petitions. We have seen a general decline in all types of petitions after the return to this policy, with more notable declines in final exam and special considerations petitions. The number of petitions remains somewhat higher than immediately prior to the pandemic (e.g. there were 238 final exam petitions in 2023F, compared to about 160 in an average fall semester between 2016 and 2019). It remains to be seen if this downward trend will continue. It should be noted that the Faculty opted out of the University's ACORN declaration tool, which would allow for a period of up to a week with no limit on the weight of the assignment.

So far, in the 2023-2024 academic year, approximately 70% of requests for Special Consideration were deemed valid and received some type of accommodation. Approximately 82% of final exam petitions received were deemed valid. Valid petitions received some type of accommodation, most often either an assessed mark or deferred exam. Decisions for deferred exams are not taken lightly: while a student's demonstrating mastery of the material is always the top priority, considerations around instructors' time and effort to create additional exams are also taken into account.

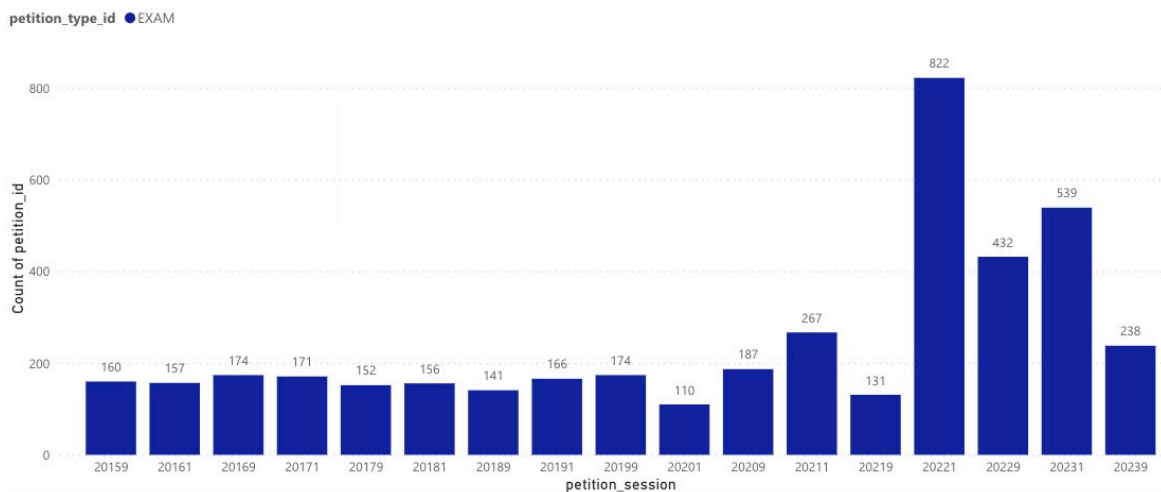


Figure 1. Petitions for Final Exams (e.g., missed exam, illness during exam). As of March 11, 2024.

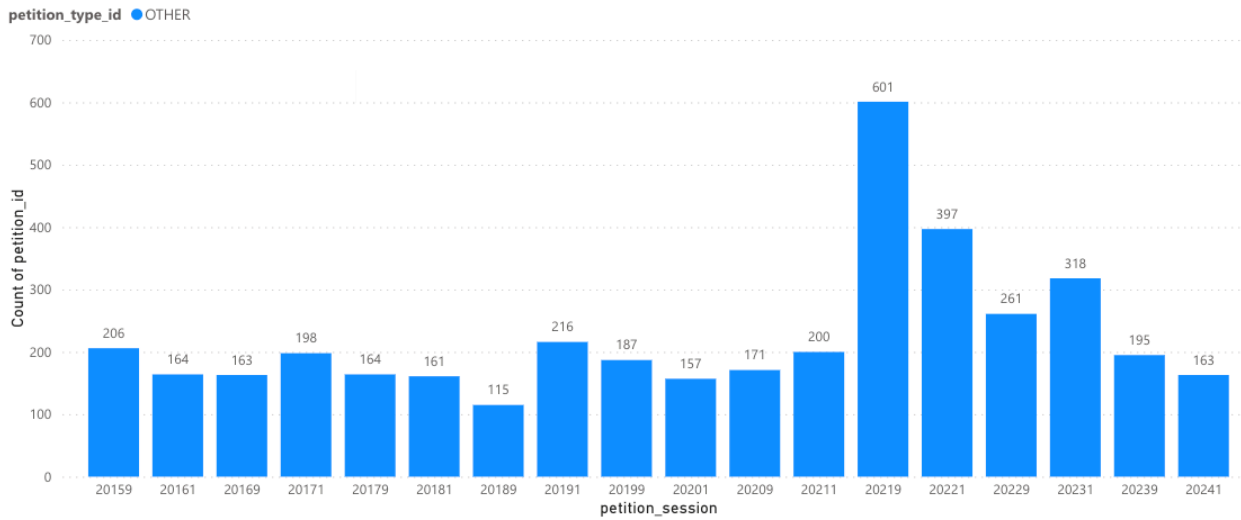


Figure 2. Petitions for Special Consideration. (e.g., retroactive withdrawals, probation relief, relaxation of nine-year rule for graduation). As of March 11, 2024.

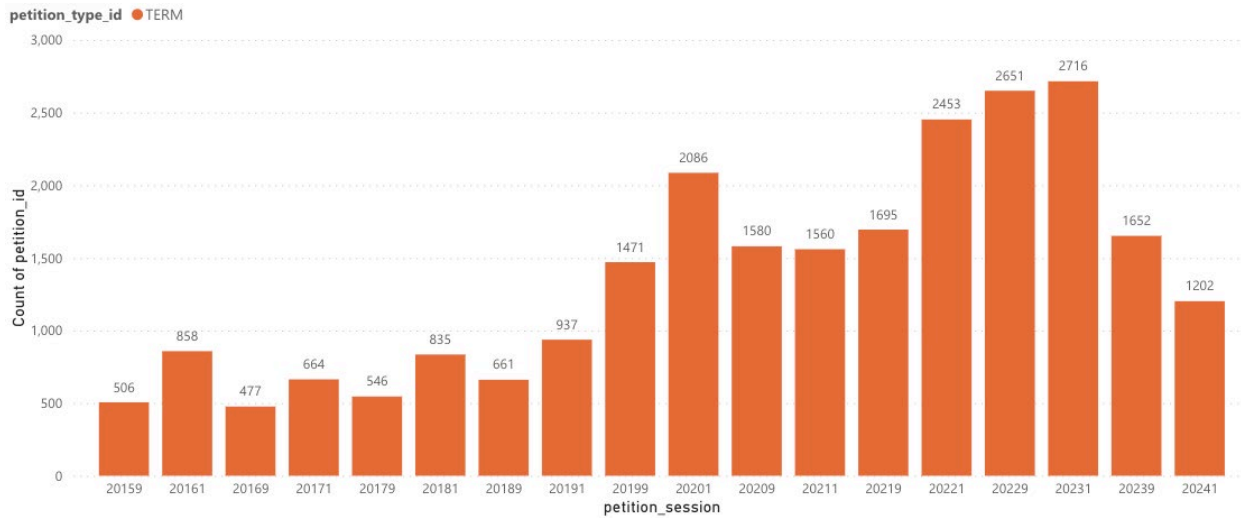


Figure 3. Petitions for Term Work Petitions (e.g. missed assignments, midterms). As of March 11, 2024

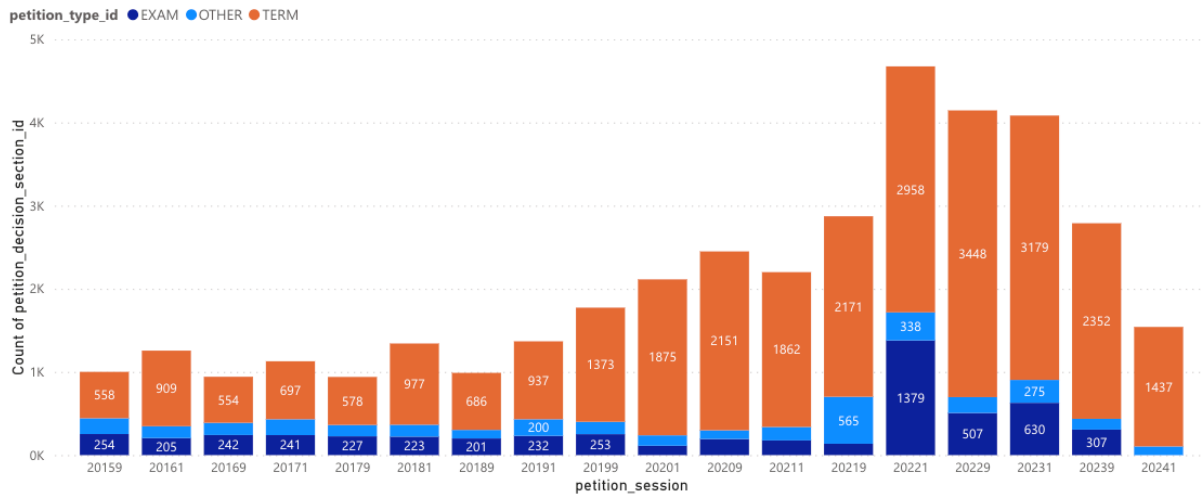


Figure 4. All Petition Types on a Common Scale. Dark blue = Final Exams; light blue = Special Consideration; orange = Term Work. As of March 11, 2024.