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OFFICE OF THE VICE-PRESIDENT AND PROVOST
Vice-Provost, Faculty

TO: Committee on Academic Policy and Programs

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DATE: January 27 for February 5, 2003 meeting

AGENDA ITEM: 4 a,b,c

ITEM IDENTIFICATION:

School of Graduate Studies, General Regulations concerning Academic Appeals Procedures

JURISDICTIONAL INFORMATION:

The terms of reference of the Committee state that the Committee has authority for approval of changes to academic regulations and other matters affecting divisional calendars, for example, but not limited to, appeal procedures.

PREVIOUS ACTION TAKEN:

General regulations of the School of Graduate Studies are amended periodically. The terms of reference of the Graduate Academic Appeals Board were approved by the Committee in October, 2001.

HIGHLIGHTS:

An executive summary explaining the changes to the regulations and the amendment to the terms of reference is attached. The summary also provides information about the Guidelines for Chairs (5.b), which although presented for information, completes the changes proposed in this area.

The proposed changes will provide graduate students with greater clarity about appeals processes and ensure that issues are dealt with in a timely manner. They will also allow for a mediation stage to resolve issues earlier where feasible.

The proposed changes have been reviewed by the Provost's Office legal advisor and Governing Council Judicial Affairs Officer and are consistent with the Governing Council *Guidelines for Academic Appeals Within Divisions*.

RECOMMENDATION:

It is recommended that the Committee on Academic Policy and Programs approve

The SGS General Regulations, as amended, and
The terms of reference of the Graduate Academic Appeals Board, as amended, effective July 1, 2003.

January 2003

Revisions to the Graduate Academic Appeals Policies and Procedures

Rationale

- At its meeting in October 2002, SGS Council approved, with minor editorial changes, the proposed new policy on graduate academic appeals and new guidelines for chairs.
- Those changes were made in early November and the documents were submitted to Governing Council Committees for approval.
- The Vice-Provost requested that one of the University solicitors review the documents.
- As a result, changes were proposed. Many were editorial in nature and have been incorporated. However, some proposals for changes were more substantive. SGS has considered these recommendations carefully and, after some debate, has decided to recommend to Council that the following changes be adopted. These have been incorporated into the text before you today:

1/ Mediation: Rather than have mediation as a required step in the process, informal mediation with the SGS Associate Dean is proposed as an option at any stage prior to the launching of an appeal with the SGS Graduate Academic Appeals Board. Reference to formal mediation has been removed, although there is nothing to preclude the parties from pursuing this avenue if desirable.

2/ Timelines: A note has been added to the “Timeline for student action at each stage” in the Steps and Timelines table for the SGS Calendar. The note provides wording that allows for consideration for an extension of time for the student due to exceptional circumstances. The word “normally” has been removed from the Timeline for decision/action by University body at each stage” – see the Steps and Timelines table for the SGS Calendar. A second note provides wording that allows the University to extend time limits for compelling reasons.

3/ GDAAC: Wording has been altered in the GDAAC Guidelines for Chairs to reflect the changes noted above and to incorporate a few minor editorial alterations. Changes were made to remove the deadline for the GDAAC to convene, although the Committee remains urged to convene as quickly as possible.

4/ Date of Decision: Wording has been altered throughout to clearly identify the “date of decision” as the date by which appeals deadlines at each stage are identified.

- Overall goal is to move an appeal forward to resolution as quickly as possible. The changes to timelines do not detract from that goal. Adjudication must be conducted carefully with time for each appeal body to arrive at a proper decision. It is not unusual for an appeal body to request additional information. It is also not unusual to encounter unavoidable delays in scheduling meetings in order to accommodate a variety of situations including, for example, the time for a student to consult a lawyer. Flexibility on both sides should allow for a fair and fully considered appeal decision.
- Mediation works best if it is consensual. SGS will consider providing appropriate training for the SGS deans who will be performing the informal mediation role. Formal mediation remains available if desired by both parties.
- With SGS Council’s agreement, these revised documents will proceed through the appropriate Governing Council committees for approval.

Revised January 2003

School of Graduate Studies
University of Toronto

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

CHANGES TO GRADUATE ACADEMIC APPEALS POLICIES AND PROCEDURES

A graduate student affected by an academic decision has a right to appeal that decision. The current procedures for such an appeal are found in the General Regulations of the 2002-2003 SGS Calendar, under Graduate Grading Procedures, section II.5, on page 34.

During the past eighteen months, the SGS deans have conducted broad discussions with graduate unit chairs and graduate coordinators in order to create a set of guidelines and procedures for graduate academic appeals that can be consistently used across the University. Early drafts for a revised policy benefited greatly from these discussions, as new ideas were incorporated. Also, the four Executive Committees debated drafts of the new appeals policy on two different occasions. As well, input was received from the Graduate Students' Union. All documentation was revised in January 2003 to incorporate the useful suggestions put forward by the Provost's Office. These alterations were presented to the SGS Council on January 28, 2003. The SGS Council at its meeting in October 2002 approved the original version of these documents.

The three motions and related attachments set out together the proposed revised policy for Graduate Academic Appeals. The first motion relates to the Calendar revision and the proposal for an overall academic appeals policy and set of procedures. The second motion deals with fairly detailed guidelines for graduate unit chairs regarding the Graduate Department Academic Appeals Committee (GDAAC). The third motion concerns the necessary "timeline modification" to the current Graduate Academic Appeals Board (GAAB) terms of reference. These changes are proposed to take effect July 1, 2003.

The proposed revisions are intended to add clarity on details and sharpen the timelines, which currently are quite lengthy. Both the existing policy and the new proposed policy contain a maximum of four steps for the graduate student appeals process. It is hoped that with the detailed specifications and clearer guidelines to the graduate unit chairs, most academic appeals would be resolved within the first two steps.

The first step is an informal consultative step in which an attempt is made to resolve the dispute between the student and the instructor or the academic who was responsible for the academic decision at issue. If not successful, it is followed by a discussion between the student and the graduate coordinator.

If the issue is not resolved at step one, then step two follows in which the student formally appeals to the GDAAC. While the department level appeal is a required step in the current appeals process, SGS has observed that there has been wide variance amongst departments in handling the appeal along with elements of dissatisfaction in various quarters. This step is now organized in much greater detail through the guidelines to the graduate unit chairs. In these guidelines, potential conflicts of interest are explicitly addressed. Since the maximum academic expertise exists at the graduate unit level, it is likely that many appeals would be resolved at step two.

At any stage prior to filing an appeal with the Graduate Academic Appeals Board, a student may consult the relevant SGS Associate Dean for advice and/or informal mediation. Timelines are not affected by mediation.

The final two steps involve formal appeals to the Graduate Academic Appeals Board (GAAB) at the SGS level and the Governing Council's Academic Appeals Committee. These two steps are also the only steps relevant to appeals regarding either termination of a student's program or a student's failure at the final Ph.D. oral examination. These are exceptions because the decisions are academic decisions of SGS that cannot be altered at the graduate level.

The timelines at each of the first three steps are streamlined in the proposed policy in the order of one calendar year, so that resolution of an academic dispute occurs expeditiously. While SGS would like to expedite the timeline at the Governing Council's academic Appeals Committee level as well, SGS Council does not have the authority to make such a change.

SGS is requesting Governing Council committee approval of the overall graduate appeals policy and procedures (the first motion and document entitled "Text for 2003-2004 SGS Calendar including Revisions to the Graduate Grading and Evaluation Practices Policy" is attached). We are submitting the Graduate Department Academic Appeals Committee Guidelines for Chairs, for information. The revisions to the Graduate Academic Appeals Board Terms of Reference are submitted for approval. These changes are minor but required to make consistent any reference to earlier appeals steps and to bring timelines in line with the new policy.