



University of Toronto

OFFICE OF THE VICE-PRESIDENT AND PROVOST

TO: Committee on Academic Policy and Programs

SPONSOR: Bonnie Goldberg, Chair, Subcommittee to Review the Guidelines for Appeals within Divisions

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DATE: October 16 for October 26, 2005

AGENDA ITEM: 5

ITEM IDENTIFICATION:

Policy on Academic Appeals within Divisions: Proposed New Policy

JURISDICTIONAL INFORMATION:

The Committee recommends to Academic Board for approval amendments to divisional academic policies or practices, or amendments to University-wide policy in academic matters. The Academic Appeals Committee advises the Committee on Academic Policy and Programs on policy with respect to academic appeals throughout the University and on divisional appeal procedures.

PREVIOUS ACTION TAKEN:

The University of Toronto's Governing Council approved the current *Guidelines for Academic Appeals within Divisions* ("Guidelines") in 1977. The *Guidelines* were intended to set minimum standards across the University and at the same time provide the academic divisions the ability to implement procedures according to local needs. The *Guidelines* remain almost exactly in their original form.

In January 2005, a Subcommittee to review the *Guidelines* was established by the Academic Board's Academic Appeals Committee. The Subcommittee was asked to assess the continued appropriateness of the minimum standards set out in the *Guidelines*; to review current practice within the University; and to consider specific issues such as the use of time-lines and the definition of an academic appeal. The Subcommittee included representation from students, faculty, staff, and alumni. Through February and March 2005, the Subcommittee undertook broad and extensive consultations throughout the University, outlined in the Report. In addition to these consultations, the proposed Policy and Framework for the Divisional Appeals Processes have been circulated to Principals and Deans for input.

On September 29, 2005, the Senior Chair of the Academic Appeals Committee convened a policy meeting of the Academic Appeals Committee. At this meeting, a motion was passed that the Academic Appeals Committee accepts the Report and proposed *Policy on Academic Appeals within Divisions* (Appendix 1) so that the policy can enter governance for approval this fall, for timely placement in 2006-2007 academic calendars.

HIGHLIGHTS

To begin its work, the Subcommittee undertook an analysis of the existing petition and academic appeal procedures from every division within the University. Next, over five weeks and eight meetings, the Subcommittee met with more than 50 individuals who have direct experience with divisional petitions and appeals processes, and received many written submissions. A further consultative stage at the request of the Provost's Office occurred through August and September 2005, when Principals and Deans were asked to review the working draft, proposed policy, and proposed Provostial framework. The details of the consultations are set out in the Report of the Subcommittee to Review the Guidelines for Appeals within Divisions (Appendix 2). In particular, the Subcommittee met with representatives (or received submissions from) almost every division of the University. To engage students, an extensive effort was made to consult with the leaders from the major student governments across all three campuses, a general outreach was done in the form of a student townhall, and students were invited to send written submissions to the Subcommittee. Other consultations included meetings with the Ombudsperson, Downtown Legal Services, Cassels Brock and Blackwell LLP, the Academic Appeals Committee and the accessibility coordinators from the three campuses.

The Subcommittee noted that it gained remarkable insight and information by consulting with those individuals closely concerned with academic petitions and appeals across the University of Toronto. The consultation process uncovered a whole range of best practices. The Subcommittee drew attention to the level of attention, care and detail afforded to students by University administrators in the petition and appeal process. The Subcommittee pointed out that the large divisions were to be commended for the care they take in responding to student appeals and the effort they make to communicate with student leadership despite the enormous volume of petitions.

Statistical information provided to the Subcommittee demonstrated that although there is perceived and real growth in the petition process, the 1977 *Guidelines* can be said to be working well because the majority of petitions appeals are still resolved locally. Yet, a system that is decentralized, even one that is working well at the local level, still needs guidelines to ensure that results are neither arbitrary nor inconsistent across divisions. This system must also be flexible and accessible. Thus, the adoption of the new *Policy*, which assessed and revised the 1977 *Guidelines*, is intended to improve administrative efficiency and to ease the administrative burden that the academic petitions and appeals process creates.

The 1977 *Guidelines* were also in need of an update in order to reflect the changing face of the University and the changing capabilities of technology. Although the 1977 *Guidelines* are rooted in excellent principles that still stand today, they lack critical details in other important areas. These areas include a clear definition of an appeal, guidance in area of timeliness, solutions involving informal mediation and earlier resolutions, and the *Guidelines'* relationship with other relevant and new institutional policies. The Subcommittee believed that a new policy must also explicitly address issues of diversity, equity, and accommodation. Finally, the Subcommittee spent time considering the issue of accessibility as it relates to the academic petitions and appeals process.

In sum, the proposed *Policy* is intended to modernize the guidelines in light of the ever-changing and expanding nature of the University, the increasing diversity of students, the advent of new forms of technology, and on-going commitments to and improvements in the overall student experience. The proposed *Policy* seeks to ensure that the consideration of issues of diversity, equity and accommodation are essential to the process. The goal of the new *Policy* is to provide improved consistency in the application of academic policies and regulations for all students,

while at the same time preserving the flexibility for divisions to implement processes that are appropriate to local needs.

The *Policy* delegates the authority for periodically revising and ensuring implementation of the *Policy*. The Office of the Provost is responsible for the creation and maintenance of a procedural *Framework for the Divisional Appeals Process* (Appendix 3). Changes to the *Framework* will be made as the need arises and based on consultation with principals and deans. Substantive revisions to the procedural *Framework* will be presented to the Committee for information.

We are seeking approval for the *Policy on Academic Appeals within Divisions*. The *Policy* replaces the *Guidelines for Academic Appeals within Divisions* (approved by Governing Council in May, 1977). The Report of the Subcommittee and Provostial Framework for the Divisional Appeals Processes are presented to AP&P as **For Information items only**. The Office of the Provost may continue to revise the *Framework* and some minor changes will be made to the documents themselves based on further feedback but we do not anticipate major substantive changes. The *Framework* will also be presented to Academic Board as For Information items when the *Policy* is presented for approval.

FINANCIAL AND/OR PLANNING IMPLICATIONS:

There are no new/additional financial resources required to implement the proposed *Policy*.

RECOMMENDATION:

The Committee on Academic Policy and Programs recommends to the Academic Board:

THAT the *Policy on Academic Appeals within Divisions*, hereto attached as Appendix 1, be approved, effective September 1, 2006; and

THAT the *Guidelines for Academic Appeals within Divisions* be rescinded, effective September 1, 2006.