

FOR RECOMMENDATION

PUBLIC

OPEN SESSION

TO: UTSC Academic Affairs Committee

SPONSOR: Prof. Karin Ruhlandt, Vice-Principal, Academic and Dean
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DATE: April 30, 2025 for May 7, 2025

AGENDA ITEM: 4

ITEM IDENTIFICATION:

Proposed Changes to Academic Policy: Petitions for Deferring Final Examinations

JURISDICTIONAL INFORMATION:

The University of Toronto Scarborough Academic Affairs Committee (AAC) “is concerned with matters affecting the teaching, learning and research functions of the Campus (*AAC Terms of Reference*, 2022, section 4).” Under section 5.5 of its *Term of Reference*, “major amendments to divisional practices and policies regarding examinations and grading policies, including those which require an exception to some aspect of the University-wide policy and those that have a major impact on the division.” would require an approval by the Committee on Academic Policy and Programs of the Academic Board following recommendation by the AAC.

GOVERNANCE PATH:

1. **UTSC Academic Affairs Committee [For Recommendation] (May 7, 2025)**
2. Committee on Academic Policy and Programs [For Approval] (May 13, 2025)

PREVIOUS ACTION TAKEN:

No previous action in governance has been taken on this item.

HIGHLIGHTS:

This proposal aims to revise the academic policy outlined in the ["Petitions and Appeals > Deferring Final Examinations" section](#) of the *UTSC Academic Calendar* to align with similar changes being proposed by the Faculty of Arts & Science (FAS) and the University of Toronto Mississauga (UTM).

In recent years, UTSC, UTM, and FAS have seen a notable rise in petitions for exam deferrals, except during the pandemic period when in-person final exams were not held. Additionally, there has been an increase in the number of students who, after having their petitions for deferred exams approved, fail to attend the rescheduled exam.

Currently, UTSC students who miss their original exam due to extenuating circumstances may submit a petition for a deferred exam. If they miss the first deferred exam, they may submit a petition for a second exam deferral, and a third exam deferral. After a third missed deferred exam, students can petition for the course to be withdrawn from their record if they have significant extenuating circumstances. As a result, many students have had four opportunities to write an exam for the same course, which can result in the exam being written more than a year after the course was taken, negatively impacting student success.

The proposed policy change would limit students to a maximum of two opportunities to write a deferred exam for the same course (in addition to the original exam sitting), resulting in a total of three opportunities to complete the final exam. Each deferral would require a petition with supporting documents. Additionally, the proposed change will remove the option for students to write deferred exams at an external centre, as this is not a practical remedy given the volume of deferred exam requests. While this option will no longer be promoted, serious circumstances (i.e., safety reasons) that require external writing of an exam would be accommodated as necessary.

The goals behind these proposed changes are to:

- Support students in resolving exam deferrals in a timely manner, ensuring they can progress in their studies.
- Provide students who miss exams due to extenuating circumstances with a clearer and more timely understanding of their academic standing and CGPA, enabling them to make informed decisions about future course enrollment.
- Allow students to focus on their current coursework without the added burden of preparing for exams from previous terms or sessions, particularly when those exams have been deferred multiple times.
- Simplify the petitions process for students by ensuring consistency in policy across UTSC, UTM, and FAS.

Upon University governance approval of this academic policy change, at the time of approval for a second exam deferral, the student will be notified in their petition approval notification that this is their second and final deferral exam for the course. Additionally, students granted a first or further deferred exam from a previous term scheduled to be written in September 2025 or later and miss that exam, would have, if granted by petition based on supporting documentation, one additional opportunity to write the exam (provided that the additional opportunity does not exceed the current policy of three deferred exam attempts).

Extensive consultation has taken place in developing this proposal. Stakeholders across UTSC, including the Scarborough Campus Students Union (SCSU), the Academic Advising & Career Centre, AccessAbility Services, and chairs of academic departments, have been consulted. Additionally, consultations have been held with the Registrar's Offices at UTM, FAS, the John H. Daniels Faculty of Architecture, Landscape, and Design, and the University Registrar's Office.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS:

There are no significant financial implications to the campus operating budget.

RECOMMENDATION:

Be It Recommended:

THAT the proposed changes to the UTSC academic policy concerning petitions for deferring final examinations, as detailed in the accompanying proposal, be approved, effective September 1, 2025.

DOCUMENTATION PROVIDED:

1. Proposal - UTSC Academic Calendar, Deferring Final Examinations: Modifying policy regarding petitions for deferred final examinations (April 24, 2025)

2024-25 Curriculum Cycle

Changes to UTSC Academic Regulations

Proposed Change	UTSC Academic Calendar, Deferring Final Examinations Modifying policy regarding petitions for deferred final examinations
Division	University of Toronto Scarborough (UTSC)
Proponents	Office of the Registrar, University of Toronto Scarborough
Contact	Shelby Verboven, Registrar and Assistant Dean, Strategic Enrolment Management (shelby.verboven@utoronto.ca)
Version Date	April 24, 2025
Effective Date	September 1, 2025

Governance Route

- UTSC Academic Affairs Committee [For recommendation] (May 7, 2025)
- Committee on Academic Policy and Programs [For approval] (May 13, 2025)

Summary

In recent years, the University of Toronto Scarborough (UTSC), along with the University of Toronto Mississauga (UTM) and the Faculty of Arts & Science (FAS), has experienced a notable rise in petitions for exam deferrals. This trend has been observed consistently, with the exception of the pandemic period when in-person final exams were not held. Additionally, there has been an increase in the number of students who, after having their petitions for deferred exams approved, fail to attend the rescheduled exam.

Currently, UTSC students who miss their original exam due to extenuating circumstances may submit a petition for a deferred exam. If they miss the first deferred exam, they may submit a petition for a second exam deferral, and a third exam deferral. After a third missed deferred exam, students can petition for the course to be withdrawn from their record, if they have significant extenuating circumstances. As a result, many students have had four opportunities to write an exam for the same course, and these opportunities can result in the exam being written more than a year after the course was taken, which has a negative impact on student success. This practice of up to three deferred exams for the same course has contributed to extended periods of uncertainty for students and academic delays. When a deferred exam is approved, the course is temporarily assigned a [Standing Deferred \(SDF\) notation](#). While the SDF remains in place, the course is excluded from [grade point average \(GPA\) calculations and academic standing assessments](#), which can significantly affect students' ability to:

- Accurately monitor academic progress
- Meet requirements for Program of Study admission and progression

- Undergo timely cumulative GPA evaluations
- Receive up-to-date academic standing reviews (in good standing, on probation, suspension)
- Meet intended graduation timelines
- Make fully informed decisions about their current and future course enrolment, particularly when the course is a pre-requisite for other courses.

Furthermore, when an SDF is eventually replaced with a final grade, it may retroactively alter the student's academic standing in previous sessions, creating additional administrative and academic complexities.

The proposed policy change would limit students to a maximum of two opportunities to write a deferred exam for the same course (in addition to the original exam sitting), resulting in a total of three opportunities to complete the final exam. Each deferral would require a petition with supporting documents.

UTSC students enrolled in a course in another U of T division who miss a final exam in the course and choose to petition for a deferred exam do so through UTSC. In order to align policies for petitions for deferred exams for students registered in FAS, UTM, or UTSC, irrespective of the division in which students are taking courses, FAS and UTM will also be moving ahead with similar proposals.

This proposal also removes the option of allowing students to write deferred exams at an external centre. This is being removed as this is not a practical remedy given the volume of deferred exam requests.

The goals behind these proposed changes are to:

- Support students in resolving exam deferrals in a timely manner, ensuring they can progress in their studies.
- Provide students who miss exams due to extenuating circumstances with a clearer and more timely understanding of their academic standing and CGPA, enabling them to make informed decisions about future course enrollment.
- Allow students to focus on their current coursework without the added burden of preparing for exams from previous terms or sessions, particularly when those exams have been deferred multiple times.
- Simplify the petitions process for students by ensuring consistency in policy across UTSC, UTM, and FAS.

Calendar Copy Showing All Changes

Current Text	Proposed Text
<p>https://utsc.calendar.utoronto.ca/petitions-and-appeals#DeferringFinalExaminations</p> <p>Students who miss a final examination can petition through the Office of the Registrar online service portal for a deferred exam. Complete information regarding how to submit a petition is available in the Petitions section of the Office of the Registrar's website.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Petitions will be considered only for cases of illness or extreme emergency at the time of an examination. Petitions based on vacation, employment, or personal plans will not be considered. <li>• Petitions must provide supporting documentation. <li>• Petitions and all supporting documents are to be submitted within 3 business days from the date of the missed examination. While documents are submitted online, the Office of the Registrar may request to see the original documents and may validate the authenticity of the documents. <li>• Late petitions will not be accepted. <p>Students who choose to write an examination may not petition to rewrite it, except in circumstances such as a significant illness that suddenly manifests itself during an examination. In this instance, the claim of illness requires both corroborations from the examination invigilator and documentation from a health care professional.</p>	<p>https://utsc.calendar.utoronto.ca/petitions-and-appeals#DeferringFinalExaminations</p> <p>Students who miss a final examination can petition through the Office of the Registrar online service portal for a deferred exam. Complete information regarding how to submit a petition is available in the Petitions section of the Office of the Registrar's website.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Petitions will be considered only for cases of illness or extreme emergency at the time of an examination. Petitions based on vacation, employment, or personal plans will not be considered. <li>• Petitions must provide supporting documentation. <li>• Petitions and all supporting documents are to be submitted within 3 business days from the date of the missed examination. While documents are submitted online, the Office of the Registrar may request to see the original documents and may validate the authenticity of the documents. <li>• Late petitions will not be accepted. <p>Students who choose to write an examination may not petition to rewrite it, except in circumstances such as a significant illness that suddenly manifests itself during an examination. In this instance, the claim of illness requires both corroborations from the examination invigilator and documentation from a health care professional.</p>

<p>Deferred examinations may be held within the same session or in the subsequent session.</p> <p>Students must pay a fee by the given deadline to write a UTSC deferred examination. The payment deadline and instructions are indicated in the petition decision message in the Office of the Registrar online service portal. Failure to pay the fee will result in a loss of privilege to sit the examination.</p> <p>Students writing deferred examinations are strongly advised not to exceed a credit load of 2.5 credits in the session leading up to the deferred examinations.</p> <p>Students are given only one opportunity to sit a deferred exam and are expected to be available for the entire deferred examination period.</p> <p>Students who miss a deferred examination will receive a mark of zero for the examination. Only under exceptional circumstances (e.g., hospitalization or severe personal emergency), which are supported by strong and compelling evidence, will a petition for a second deferral of the examination be considered. After a third missed deferred exam, students will not be permitted to write the exam and may receive a WDR for the course.</p> <p>Under truly exceptional circumstances, students who are unavoidably outside the Toronto area during the deferred examination period may petition for permission to write their exam at an outside centre. The petition must detail the reasons for the request and must be submitted at least three weeks prior to the beginning of the deferred examination period. Late requests cannot be</p>	<p>Deferred examinations may be held within the same session or in the subsequent session.</p> <p>Students must pay a fee by the given deadline to write a UTSC deferred examination. The payment deadline and instructions are indicated in the petition decision message in the Office of the Registrar online service portal. Failure to pay the fee will result in a loss of privilege to sit the examination.</p> <p>Students writing deferred examinations are strongly advised not to exceed a credit load of 2.5 credits in the session <u>in which the deferred examination is scheduled.</u>leading up to the deferred examinations.</p> <p>Students are given only one opportunity to sit a deferred exam and are expected to be available for the entire deferred examination period.</p> <p><u>Students have at most two opportunities to write a deferred examination for the same course.</u> Students who miss a deferred examination will receive a mark of zero for the examination. Only under exceptional circumstances (e.g., hospitalization or severe personal emergency), which are supported by strong and compelling evidence, will a petition for a second deferral of the examination be considered. <u>After a second missed deferred exam, students will not be permitted to write the exam and should seek advising to discuss their situation and engage in academic planning. The SDF (Standing Deferred) notation for the course on their transcript will be replaced by a final grade that includes a mark of zero for the examination.</u>After a third missed deferred exam, students will not be permitted to</p>
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accommodated, and fees in addition to the fee to write a deferred examination will apply.

Notes:

- Deferring a final examination may affect students' ability to gain access to courses and/or limited enrolment programs since they may not enroll in any course listed as a prerequisite in the course for which they have deferred the examination.
- Deferred examinations in the other arts and science divisions of the University may be scheduled at times other than those for UTSC.

~~write the exam and may receive a WDR for the course.~~

~~Under truly exceptional circumstances, students who are unavoidably outside the Toronto area during the deferred examination period may petition for permission to write their exam at an outside centre. The petition must detail the reasons for the request and must be submitted at least three weeks prior to the beginning of the deferred examination period. Late requests cannot be accommodated, and fees in addition to the fee to write a deferred examination will apply.~~

Notes:

- Deferring a final examination may affect students' ability to gain access to courses and/or limited enrolment programs since they may not enroll in any course listed as a prerequisite in the course for which they have deferred the examination.
- Deferred examinations in the other arts and science divisions of the University may be scheduled at times other than those for UTSC.

Implementation

Upon University governance approval, the change will be implemented through the following means:

- UTSC Academic Calendar: this change will be included on the 'New for 2025-2026' webpage designed to highlight new program, policy and regulation changes. The 2025-26 UTSC Academic Calendar will take effect as of September 1, 2025.
- UTSC Academic Handbook: change will be included in the handbook over the summer so that faculty can include information in their Fall term syllabi.
- UTSC Office of the Registrar website: once approved, a notice announcing the update will be posted on the Exams webpages and Petitions webpages to ensure students are notified as promptly as possible of the change to take effect September 2025.

- At the time of approval for a second exam deferral, the student will be notified in their petition approval notification that this is their second and final deferral exam for the course.
- Communications to academic units and other UTSC offices: once approved, stakeholders will be notified in writing of the academic regulation change to keep academic advisors and departmental leadership and administrators informed. Colleagues will be asked to direct questions from students to the Office of the Registrar.
- Students granted a first or further deferred exam from a previous term scheduled to be written in September 2025 or later and miss that exam, would have, if granted by petition based on supporting documentation, one additional opportunity to write the exam (provided that the additional opportunity does not exceed the current policy of three deferred exam attempts).

Rationale

In recent years, UTSC, like FAS and UTM, has observed a significant increase in petitions for first exam deferrals and further exam deferrals (that is, subsequent deferred exams beyond the first deferral) for the same course, as shown in **Table 1** below. This trend has been observed consistently, with the exception of the pandemic period when in-person final exams were not held. Additionally, there has been an increase in the number of students who, after having their petitions for deferred exams approved, fail to attend the rescheduled exam. Examples of this are provided in **Table 2** below.

The introduction of a policy to state that students have at most two opportunities to write a deferred exam for the same course will help to:

- Support students in resolving exam deferrals in a timely manner, ensuring they can progress in their studies.
- Provide students who miss exams due to extenuating circumstances with a clearer and more timely understanding of their academic standing and CGPA, enabling them to make informed decisions about future course enrolment.
- Allow students to focus on their current coursework without the added burden of preparing for exams from previous terms or sessions, particularly when those exams have been deferred multiple times.
- Create alignment with FAS and UTM who are making similar changes to their deferred exams policies

Table 1
Number of Deferred Exam Petitions

Considerations	Sept 2019 - Aug 2020	Sept 2020 - Aug 2021	Sept 2021 - Aug 2022	Sept 2022 - Aug 2023	Sept 2023 - Aug 2024*	Sept 2024 - March 2025
Write deferred exam	1133	795	1292	2182	69	N/A
Write deferred exam - First Deferral	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	2352	1260
Write deferred exam - Further Deferral	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	570	536
Total	1133	795	1292	2182	2991	1796

** Prior to September 2023 deferred exams were not distinguished as first or further.*

Table 2
No Show Rate for Deferred Exams

Deferred Exam Period	Number of approved deferred exam petitions	Number of students scheduled to write a deferred exam*	Number of students who did not write*	Percentage of students scheduled to write a deferred exam that did not write*
2025 January-February	1274	1225	471	38.45%
2024 September	707	723	309	42.74%
2024 May-June	913	866	382	44.11%
2024 January-February	805	744	247	33.20%
2023 December	331	244	92	37.70%
2023 August	728	526	198	37.64%
2023 April	648	386	106	27.46%
2022 December	287	113	48	42.48%
2022 August	589	276	101	36.59%

** Data does not include accommodated deferred exams.*

Additionally, the proposed removal of the option allowing students to write deferred exams at an external centre reflects the reality that, given the volume of deferred exam requests received by the Office of the Registrar each term, this is no longer a practical remedy due to the amount of coordination required. While this option will no longer be promoted, serious circumstances (i.e., safety reasons) that require external writing of an exam would be accommodated as necessary.

Impact

Students who miss a second opportunity to write a deferred exam for the same course are advised to contact an advisor to discuss their situation and engage in academic planning. Depending upon each student's individual circumstances and any supporting documentation that they provide that speaks to the timeframe of the missed deferred exam, the options that might be available to them following a missed second deferred exam would vary and might include a [Late Withdrawal after the Drop Date \(LWD\)](#) from the course or a [Late Withdrawal Without Academic Penalty \(WDR\)](#) from the course. Only in exceptional extenuating circumstances, supported by appropriate documentation, would a petition for a third deferral of an exam be considered. In the absence of appropriate documentation to support a student missing a second opportunity to write a deferred exam, it may be possible for the student to receive a mark of zero on the final exam.

Resource Implications

No additional resource implications. Resources will be part of the regular Academic Calendar production process. Resources required to communicate changes to stakeholders as well as implement changes to the different UTSC websites and systems will be supported by the Office of the Registrar.

Consultation

- Scarborough Campus Students Union (April 2025) – Supports the proposed policy change.
- Academic Advising & Career Centre, UTSC (April 2025) – Supports the proposed policy change.
- AccessAbility Services, UTSC (April 2025) – Supports the proposed policy change.
- University Registrar's Office (April 2025) – Supports the proposed policy change and suggested minor editorial changes.
- Office of the Registrar, U of T Mississauga (April 2025) – Supports the proposed policy change and suggested adding information for students who have further deferred exams in September 2025.
- Office of the Faculty Registrar, Faculty of Arts & Science (April 2025) – Supports the proposed policy change and provided clarifying points and language that more closely match the FAS proposal. Based on feedback from FAS, UTSC incorporated some of the suggested language to explain the goals of the proposed policy change, as well as to state the maximum number of opportunities for students to write a deferred examination for the same course.
- Office of the Registrar and Student Services, John H. Daniels Faculty of Architecture, Landscape and Design (April 2025) – Supports the proposed policy change.
- Academic department chairs, UTSC (April 2025) – Supports the proposed policy change.