

**UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO
GOVERNING COUNCIL**

Report #447 of the Academic Appeals Committee

January 22, 2026

To the Academic Board
University of Toronto

Your Committee reports that it held a hearing on November 7, 2025, at which the following members were present:

Academic Appeals Committee Members:

Dr. Erika J Murray, Chair
Professor Andrew Petersen, Teaching Staff Governor
Kevin Li, Student Governor

Hearing Secretary:

Carmelle Salomon-Labbé, Associate Director, Office of Appeals, Discipline and Faculty Grievances

For the Student Appellant:

X.Z. (the “Student”)

For the Faculty of Arts and Science:

Professor Randy Boyagoda, Vice-Dean, Undergraduate

Overview

This appeal concerns the re-reading of the Term Test in PSY390 (the “Term Test”) during the Fall 2024 term. The Student appeals from a decision of the Division, Faculty of Arts & Science (the “Faculty”), dated March 14, 2025, finding that no further re-read of the Student’s Term Test in PSY390 will be conducted.

In summary, before this Committee the Student submitted that: (i) the grading within the Department of Psychology is unfair and arbitrary and that, despite receiving a grade increase, no actual re-read of her Term Test was conducted; and (ii) due to a conflict of interest, it was procedurally unfair that it was the Associate Dean, Student Affairs, in the Dean’s Office who determined that no further re-read of the Term Test would be conducted.

The Student seeks a remedy that her Term Test in PSY390 be re-read and that substantive reasons be provided for any changes to the Term Test grade.

For the reasons set out below, the Committee finds that a re-read of the Term Test was conducted, that the absence of written comments in Quercus does not, in itself, establish procedural unfairness, that the Faculty's decision not to conduct a further re-read was fair and reasonable, and that there was no actual or reasonably perceived bias or conflict of interest affecting the Dean's Office determination. The appeal is therefore dismissed.

Chronology

The Student received a mark of 75 percent on the Term Test during the Fall 2024 term, which was posted in Quercus on October 20, 2024, the Faculty's standard online learning and grading system.

Within the permitted two-week period for grade inquiries, the Student contacted the course instructor, Professor Paul Whissell, on multiple occasions requesting a re-read of the Term Test:

- October 26, 2024 – first email requesting a re-read;
- October 30, 2024 – follow-up email;
- November 2, 2024 – second follow-up email reiterating the request.

In early November 2024 (approximately November 5–8), the Student's Term Test grade was updated in Quercus from 75 percent to 81 percent. No written comments or explanation accompanied this grade change in the Quercus system.

At the hearing, the Student was self-represented and presented her submissions, including by reference to written materials. Her main points were as follows:

- The grading within the Department of Psychology is “severely unfair with arbitrary grade reductions.”
- “No re-read of my Term Test actually occurred. A re-read cannot be said to have occurred because no comments were added to Quercus, and I do not know who conducted it.”
- “Associate Dean Suzanne Wood works as an Associate Professor under the direct administrative leadership of Associate Chair Katherine Duncan, who makes salary and promotion decisions and exercises influence over her academic position. This is unfair, there is conflict of interest. Associate Dean Wood is ineligible to represent the Dean's Office, which decided there would be no re-read of the Term Test.”

The Student submitted that the initial 75 percent Term Test grade was unfair and that despite the grade being increased to 81 percent, no procedurally fair re-read was conducted. The Student's position was that the initial 75 percent was arbitrary or “wrong”, contending that her answers demonstrated correctness and that due to the absence of written comments or explanation accompanying the grade change in the Quercus system, the grade increase did not constitute a procedurally fair re-read. With respect to the initial 75 percent the Student received on the Term

Test, this Committee’s jurisdiction is limited to whether grading procedures were followed fairly, not to re-marking content or substituting its academic judgment for the instructor’s. With respect to the grade increase from 75 percent to 81 percent, the record supports that a re-read was conducted and completed (grade increase entered, consistent with standard practice). Lack of written feedback does not constitute procedural unfairness *per se* since this is consistent with departmental practice.

At the hearing, the Student was directly asked by this Committee whether she had observed the grade change in Quercus in early November. The Student confirmed that “yes” she had seen the revised mark and acknowledged that she did not contact the instructor or department in November or December 2024 to dispute the grade increase, to request clarification regarding how the additional six percent had been determined, nor to raise concerns about the absence of comments in Quercus.

In early 2025, after receiving her final course grade, the Student wrote to the Faculty with different requests, one of which was a re-read of the October Term Test, as well as other course deliverables. In that correspondence, the Student requested that the Term Test be re-read notwithstanding the grade increase entered in November 2024. In response to specifically the Term Test, the Faculty treated the requested re-read of the Term Test as already completed and duplicative, and denied the Student’s request, noting that a re-read of the Term Test had already been completed during the term and declining what the Faculty viewed as a second re-read request in respect of the same assessment.

It is this Faculty decision, treating the Term Test re-read request as duplicative and declining to conduct a further re-read, that is the subject of the present appeal. The Student appeals from that determination, submitting that no procedurally fair re-read occurred in November 2024 and that, on grounds of procedural unfairness, including a conflict of interest, it was unfair for the Faculty to refuse a further re-read.

The Student’s separate requests and any related appeal concerning the re-reading of the other course deliverables were not subject to this appeal hearing, which was limited to the issues of the re-reading of the Term Test and the Student’s submissions concerning an alleged conflict of interest at the Faculty level.

Issues

Accordingly, the issues before this Committee are:

1. whether the initial grading and subsequent November 2024 re-read of the Student’s Term Test were conducted fairly and reasonably; and
2. whether there was any actual or reasonably perceived bias or conflict of interest affecting the Dean’s Office determination that the November re-read had already been conducted and that therefore no further re-reading of the Term Test should occur.

Reasons for Decision

The function of this Academic Appeals Committee is to hear and consider appeals made by students against decisions of faculty, college or school councils (or committees thereof) in the application of academic regulations. Since each division of the University is required to have its own appeal processes, the Committee is in effect a reviewing body and not a forum for rehearing or *de novo* determination. Put simply, the Committee decides whether the Division's decision was reasonable.

In considering the reasonableness of the decision of the divisional appeal body, this Committee is to consider the facts as they were before the Division and whether the University's policies and procedures were applied consistently and fairly. This Committee will interfere with a divisional decision only where it finds that the decision was unreasonable, was reached through a demonstrably unfair interpretation or application of the relevant policies, processes, or procedures, or was affected by actual or reasonably perceived bias, including a conflict of interest.

1. Whether the initial grading and subsequent November 2024 re-read of the Student's Term Test were conducted fairly and reasonably

In October 2024, the Student initially received a 75 percent on the Term Test. Within the two-week permitted period per University policy, the Student emailed the course instructor, Professor Whissell, requesting a re-read of the Term Test. In early November, the Student's Term Test grade was updated to 81 percent in the Quercus system.

Before this Committee, the Student submitted that since there was a grade change of 6 percent, this effectively shows the initial grading of her Term Test was unreasonable and conducted unfairly. Furthermore, the Student submitted as the crux of her argument, that since there were no substantive comments or explanations showing where the additional 6 percent upon the re-read specifically came from, that "there was no re-read"; effectively the Student argued before this Committee that the change to the Student's grade was arbitrary and therefore procedurally unfair.

The Committee does not accept these submissions. A change in grade following a re-read does not, in itself, establish that the initial grading was unreasonable or unfair. Academic grading involves the exercise of professional judgment, and it is neither unusual nor improper for a re-read to result in a modest adjustment without implying error, arbitrariness, or unfairness in the original assessment. The Committee finds no basis to interfere with the initial grading of the Term Test, specifically whether the Student ought to have been afforded more marks or not. Further, the Committee finds no requirement in University policy, course materials, or established academic practice that a re-read must be accompanied by written comments explaining the precise allocation of additional marks. The absence of comments in Quercus does not mean that the re-read did not occur, nor does it render the re-read procedurally unfair. While the Committee acknowledges that written confirmation explaining how additional marks were awarded may be helpful, such documentation of the Term Test is not required in these circumstances under University policies or departmental practice. The Committee also notes that, after the revised grade was posted in early November, the Student did not request further clarification regarding the basis for the grade adjustment during the remainder of the term.

This Committee finds that it was reasonable for the Division to determine that both the initial grading of the Term Test and the subsequent November 2024 re-read were fair and consistent with academic standards, that no further re-read would be conducted, and this ground of appeal is dismissed.

2. Whether there was any actual or reasonably perceived bias or conflict of interest affecting the Dean’s Office determination that the November re-grade had already been conducted and that therefore no further re-read of the Term Test should occur

The Student appeals that it was procedurally unfair for Associate Dean Suzanne Wood to issue the Decanal-level decision finding that the November 2024 re-read was fair and consistent with academic standards and that no further re-read of the Term Test would be conducted. The Student submits that a conflict of interest existed because Associate Dean Wood, who issued the Decanal-level decision, works as an Associate Professor in the Department of Psychology and is therefore subject to the direct administrative authority of Associate Chair Katherine Duncan, who addressed the Student’s request at the academic unit level. Specifically at the hearing, the Student submitted that Associate Dean Wood, in her capacity as a faculty member, is subject to Associate Chair Duncan’s administrative oversight, including on matters involving evaluation, salary, and promotion, and that this alleged reporting relationship created improper influence and rendered the Decanal-level decision procedurally unfair.

The Division submitted that the two individuals hold parallel positions and that no formal reporting relationship or evaluative authority exists between them.

At the hearing, the Student further submitted that the Chair should not rely on or accept the Division’s representation of the reporting relationship as factual and that doing so would itself constitute institutional bias. The Student submitted that the Chair should independently seek to confirm the reporting structure and that acceptance of the Division’s submission without further verification would be procedurally unfair.

The Committee notes that, notwithstanding its findings under issue 1, it is appropriate to address the Student’s conflict-of-interest allegation directly, as it was advanced as an independent ground of procedural unfairness. Furthermore, while this Committee does not conduct its own fact-finding investigations and the Chair is entitled to accept the submissions of either party, the Chair determined that, given the Student’s allegations of institutional bias, it was appropriate in the circumstances to provide both parties an opportunity to clarify this narrow factual point through brief written submissions following the hearing. Accordingly, both parties were invited to address the following question: *What is the formal administrative reporting relationship, if any, between Associate Dean Suzanne Wood and Associate Chair Katherine Duncan within the Faculty of Arts & Science?*

The Student relies on publicly available University materials and excerpts from the Faculty of Arts & Science Academic Handbook for Instructors describing undergraduate administrative processes within a department, including consultation and approval functions performed by the Associate Chair, Undergraduate. This Committee finds that the Student mischaracterizes these functions as establishing a “direct departmental supervisor” relationship and asserts that this

created a personal interest on the part of Associate Dean Wood sufficient to amount to a conflict of interest under the University's Policy on Conflict of Interest – Academic Staff.

The Faculty's submissions further confirm that Associate Dean Wood and Associate Chair Duncan are peers within the Department of Psychology and do not operate in a hierarchical or evaluative relationship to one another. The Faculty confirmed that Associate Dean Wood does not report to Associate Chair Duncan, that Associate Chair Duncan does not exercise authority over Associate Dean Wood's salary, promotion, or employment status, and that both report to the Chair of the Department in their respective faculty roles.

The Committee finds that the materials cited by the Student do not establish the existence of a formal reporting or evaluative relationship of the kind alleged. The Handbook excerpts relied upon describe routine academic governance functions and administrative consultation processes within undergraduate education. They do not demonstrate that Associate Chair Duncan supervises Associate Dean Wood's employment, controls her salary or promotion, or exercises authority over her administrative role as Associate Dean. The Student's submission largely equates routine administrative interaction and consultation within a department. This Committee does not accept the Student's assertion that any such departmental interactions necessarily give rise to a personal interest sufficient to amount to a conflict of interest. A reasonable and informed observer, viewing the matter realistically and practically, would not conclude that Associate Dean Wood was in a position of conflict by virtue of these routine departmental governance relationships. The *Policy on Conflict of Interest – Academic Staff* requires more than generalized conjecture about collegial relationships or institutional proximity.

This Committee finds that as a faculty member in the Department of Psychology, Associate Dean Wood reports to the Chair of the Department. In her administrative role as Associate Dean, Student Affairs, she reports to the Dean of the Faculty. Associate Chair Duncan, in both her faculty and administrative roles, also reports to the Chair of the Department. This Committee does not find an actual or reasonably perceived conflict of interest or bias affecting the Decanal-level decision. Accordingly, this ground of appeal is dismissed.

Decision

The appeal is dismissed in full.