

December 19, 2011

# University of Toronto

## Policy on Academic Continuity

### Preamble

The University of Toronto is committed to fulfilling its core academic mission of educating students. It recognizes that events such as pandemic health emergencies, natural disasters, prolonged service interruptions, and ongoing labour disputes are potential threats to academic continuity. Good stewardship requires that the University undertake appropriate planning and preparation to promote continuity. At the same time, the University must be prepared to respond to extraordinary circumstances in which the normal academic operations of the University may be disrupted.

### Scope

The purpose of this document is to provide a policy framework that will guide the University in enhancing its ability to fulfill its academic mission in the face of potential threats to academic continuity. It is intended to apply to circumstances and events that are potential threats to the continuity of the academic operations of the University and relates entirely to the principles and processes that should guide the University in this context. It applies to instances when the academic continuity of one or more programs, one or more departments or faculties, one or more campuses, or the whole University is disrupted and changes need to be made to the normal academic operations of the University. Additional related policies and guidelines are the *Code of Student Conduct* (Feb. 2002), *Policy on Crisis Preparedness and Response* (Feb. 2005), and the *Emergency Preparedness and Crisis Management Plan* (May 2009).

### Principles

The following principles will guide the university in its preparation and planning for academic continuity and in its response to any potential disruption.

#### *Primacy of the Educational Mission*

The University is committed to taking appropriate steps to maintain the continuity of its academic programs and activities and to provide students with a reasonable opportunity to continue learning and complete academic requirements.

#### *Integrity of Academic Programs*

The University is committed to maintaining the integrity of all academic programs. Although steps may be taken under this policy which result in changes to academic programs and the educational experience of students, those changes must maintain the integrity of the academic program.

#### *Fairness to Students*

In seeking to maintain academic continuity, the University is committed to treating students in a fair and equitable manner. It recognizes that students have the freedom of choice to attend classes or not during a declared disruption without academic penalty insofar as the circumstances of the disruption make this practicable. However, where students have not attended classes that are meeting, they remain responsible for the course work and for meeting course requirements. A student who considers that a disruption has unreasonably affected his or her grade may appeal the grade following the divisional procedures.

### *Timely Information*

Students, staff, and faculty need to be informed in a timely manner of changes to the academic program including altered course requirements, rescheduled academic activities, and procedures that will take effect at the end of any officially declared disruption to academic continuity.

### **Ensuring Academic Continuity in the Event of Disruption**

The University, through resilient course and program design and other preparedness, will aim to minimize the potential for disruption of the University's academic mission. In certain instances, however, extraordinary measures may be required in an effort to maintain or restore academic continuity.

### *Authority to declare a state of disruption*

The Vice-President and Provost or the Academic Board have the responsibility and authority under this Policy to declare that a state of disruption has occurred. The state of disruption will continue until the Vice-President and Provost or the Academic Board formally declare it at an end. The purpose of such a declaration is to serve notice that the academic operations of the University will not proceed as normal. It provides the authority for the University to make changes to any aspect of its academic activities including the delivery of courses and programs, course and program requirements, modes of evaluation, and the length of the academic term, etc. consistent with the principles set out in this policy.

### *Declaration of a state of academic disruption*

A state of disruption may be declared to affect one or more programs, one or more departments or faculties, one or more campuses, or the whole University. In the context of a declaration of a state of disruption, the *University Assessment and Grading Practices Policy* may not be practicable and may not apply.

### *Coordination of University response*

The Office of the Vice-President and Provost is responsible for working with the dean's offices of every division to co-ordinate the University's response during a declared state of disruption. This co-ordination may include joint decision-making with affiliated institutions and field Placement / training sites.

### *Communication of decision*

In the case of a declaration of a state of disruption, the Vice-President and Provost shall take steps to inform the University community at large of the changes being implemented and will ensure that Governing Council and its committees are kept informed of the steps being taken to support academic continuity.

### **Responsibilities**

All members of the University of Toronto community share in the responsibility to enhance and maintain the continuity of academic programs.

The University has a responsibility to:

- Oversee the implementation of this policy
- Provide education and support to students, instructors and academic administrators regarding strategies for ensuring academic continuity
- Coordinate activity in the case of a state of disruption
- Inform all members of the community about a disruption, in a timely fashion and issue communication regarding procedures to help ensure academic continuity

Divisions/Faculties<sup>1</sup> have a responsibility to:

- Develop guidelines in line with the institutional framework
- Communicate with staff, faculty, students, and field placement/training sites regarding division-specific plans

Academic administrators are responsible for:

- Ensuring that proactive measures have been taken to ensure academic continuity
- Overseeing changes to course procedures in the division in the case of a declaration of a state of disruption
- Where an instructor is not available during a disruption, the relevant academic administrator will assume responsibility for all essential administrative activities associated with the course and, when appropriate, identify an alternate instructor.

Instructors are responsible for:

- Preparing course syllabi in a manner that supports academic continuity
- Altering course procedures, requirements and methods of evaluation in consultation with academic administrators to help ensure academic continuity
- Making reasonable accommodations for students who are unable to attend classes or complete academic requirements due to a disruption

Students have a responsibility to:

- Complete all coursework and academic requirements
- Keep informed of a state of disruption and changing academic requirements and procedures

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<sup>1</sup> The School of Graduate Studies is responsible for graduate programs and can delegate that responsibility to other Divisions where this is appropriate, consistent with this policy.