

UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO

THE GOVERNING COUNCIL

REPORT NUMBER 155 OF THE ACADEMIC APPEALS COMMITTEE

September 1st, 1992

To the Academic Board,  
University of Toronto.

Your Committee reports that it held a hearing on Tuesday, September 1st, 1992 at 9:30 a.m. in the Board Room, Simcoe Hall at which the following were present:

Professor A. Weinrib, Vice-Chairman  
Professor C. C. Brodeur  
Professor B. Brown  
Ms P. Haist  
Mr. W. Robinson

Ms L. Snowden, Secretary

In Attendance:

Ms S.P.  
Mr. J. Kalina, counsel for the appellant  
Professor D. G. B. Boocock, Associate Dean, Faculty of Applied Science and  
Engineering

On September 1st, 1992 the Academic Appeals Committee of the Governing Council heard the appeal of Ms S.P., a student in the Faculty of Applied Science and Engineering. In the Spring Term of 1992, Ms S.P. failed the second term in Mechanical Engineering. Her average over the term was 59.1%. Had she had 59.5% her mark would have been rounded up to 60% and she would have passed.

The appellant asked for her marks to be rechecked and also appealed to the Ombudsman Committee of the Faculty. Her marks were rechecked and confirmed, and the Ombudsman Committee denied her petition.

At the hearing before this Committee, the appellant, through her counsel, accepted the results in ECO100Y and MEC343S. The appellant said that she had no information to check as to whether her mark in MEC303S was correct, and she challenged her marks in MEC322S, MEC371S and MEC413S.

The appellant had objections to the way in which marks were computed in the Faculty. She also objected to the appeal process and the difficulty in obtaining information about the components of her grades.

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First, in objecting to one of her marks the appellant argued that the examiner paid too much attention to "mechanical errors", and gave relatively little weight to the conceptual underpinnings of the answer. The Committee rejects the idea that it should tell examiners how to mark. As long as there is a rational basis for a marking scheme, and as long as all papers were marked the same way, the Appeals Committee will not interfere with the marks.

Secondly, the appellant objected to the way in which adjustments were made to the "raw mark" obtained in any examination. In order to meet the grade requirements of the Faculty, examiners adjust examination scores in order to obtain a final mark. This is a process which is found in other divisions of the University as well. The appellant objected to the scheme which is in use in the Department. Examiners in the Department multiply the raw marks of all students by a common factor. The appellant argued that it would be fairer and more beneficial to students with lower marks if examiners simply added onto each student's raw mark a number appropriate for the examiner to reach the mandated average in the course. In the view of the Committee, an adjustment system which raises (or lowers) all raw marks the same way is a fair and rational system. It may increase the difference between good examinations and bad examinations, but this only produces the results which should have been produced had the examiner applied exactly that standard necessary to produce the average mark.

On the process side, the appellant argued that some of the examiners did not make the grading scheme as it applied to her papers sufficiently clear. The Faculty has no requirement that marks be placed on students' answer papers when students wish to see their examination booklets for rechecking or other purposes. There is no question but that students are entitled to this information. Students should not have to take it on faith that the total examination mark is correct. Adjustment factors should also be routinely disclosed. Students are entitled to this information before an appeal reaches the level of this Committee.

The appellant also complained that the Faculty's appeals procedure is deficient in that the rechecking procedure deals only with potential mechanical errors in computing the mark, but does not involve a true rereading of the paper during which the examiner considers whether the marks awarded in the first place were reasonable. The Associate Dean of the Faculty, Professor Boocock, informed the Committee that examiners would correct obvious errors based on the content of the exam in the course of the rechecking process.

The appellant is already on academic probation. In Term 3S she received 414 out of 700 potential marks in the equivalent of seven half-courses. Had she received 417 total marks she would have passed. In the circumstances, the Committee has decided that her final examinations in MEC303S, MEC322S, MEC371S and MEC413S should be reread by the original examiners. That is, the papers should be read as if they were being marked for the first time, and the same multiplier, if any, should be applied in order to produce a grade. If the rereading produces a higher mark in any of these four courses, the transcript of the student should be changed appropriately. If the student's overall average after the rereadings is above 59.5%, she should be allowed to register in Term 4F according to the Faculty regulations. The Committee is confident that the Faculty will initiate and complete this process without delay. In order to safeguard the appellant's position, she should be allowed to register provisionally in Term 4F until the rereading process is complete, and the Faculty has determined whether or not her average is sufficiently high to allow her to continue. If her average is not sufficiently high after this process for her to register in Term 4F, then the usual Faculty regulations will apply.

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The Appeals Committee will retain jurisdiction over this matter to deal with any problems that might arise in the implementation of this decision.

Secretary  
September 4th, 1992

Vice-Chairman