



UNDERGRADUATE STUDENT APPEALS COMMITTEE (USAC)

PRACTICE PRINCIPLES & CONSIDERATIONS

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A. Preamble

The Undergraduate Student Appeals Committee (USAC) has developed this document to serve as a guide and resource for the Committee's operations. It is a living document that will be revised and updated regularly as the Committee encounters new situations that reveal new/different considerations that should be more fully represented.

B. Terms of Reference

Excerpt from the Brandon University Senate Bylaws (approved September 19, 2017)

1. There shall be an Undergraduate Student Appeals Committee consisting of:
 - a. the University Registrar, or designate, who shall be Chair;
 - b. the Dean of Students;
 - c. one faculty representative elected by and from each Faculty or School; and
 - d. two undergraduate students appointed by the BUSU Council (see Section VIII 1.c)
2. The committee shall:
 - a. hear undergraduate student appeals relating to admission;
 - b. hear undergraduate student appeals relating to academic regulations; and
 - c. make final decisions on appeals as appropriate.

C. Statement of Guiding Principles

In fulfilling its mandate, the USAC founds itself upon the following guiding principles:

1. The USAC acknowledges and respects that the Brandon University Senate has established general and specific admission criteria with a view to balancing the University's commitment to broad post-secondary education access with the value it places on student success.
2. The USAC acknowledges and respects that the Brandon University Senate has established specific degree/program requirements, academic performance criteria, academic policies, and academic dates with a view to ensuring the integrity of Brandon University's academic programming and corresponding credentials.
3. The USAC recognizes that unusual circumstances may occasionally adversely affect a student's performance such that their official academic record does not accurately reflect their past performance and/or future potential.
4. The USAC affirms that unusual circumstances may occasionally adversely affect a student's ability to recognize accurately their need for a Voluntary Withdrawal (VW) or Authorized Withdrawal (AW) and/or their ability to request such in respect of published deadlines.
5. The USAC recognizes that, on very rare occasions, catastrophic circumstances outside the student's control may create a situation in which a student cannot complete their program's basic graduation requirements (i.e., minimum GPA, minimum credit hours, Liberal Education requirements, etc.) without suffering undue hardship.

D. Acknowledgement of Responsibility

In fulfilling its mandate, the USAC is mindful of its responsibilities, as outlined below:

1. In each case, the USAC will assess whether an individual's circumstances warrant granting an exception to published University policy, centering debate and decision on the Decision-Making Considerations outlined in Section F below.
2. Where the USAC does not have all of the information or expertise required to make a well-reasoned decision on a case, the USAC will seek additional knowledge and expertise from appropriate sources. If, in order to obtain the necessary knowledge/expertise, the USAC must reveal to a third party any information that might violate the student's right to confidentiality, the USAC will obtain the student's authorization prior to contacting the third party.

3. Where the USAC deems that an individual's circumstances do warrant exception, the USAC will specify the parameters of the exception as well as any associated recommendations, conditions, and/or restrictions and communicate this information clearly to the student.
4. Where the USAC deems that an individual's circumstances do not warrant exception, the USAC will communicate to the student the principles and considerations upon which the denial of appeal was founded.
5. When the USAC encounters appeals that raise issues of significance that may justify a formal review of University policies/procedures, the USAC will communicate with appropriate Deans, faculties/schools, and/or departments as appropriate. If such communication would violate the student's right to confidentiality, the USAC will obtain the student's authorization prior to undertaking such communication.

E. Confidentiality

The Committee will treat as confidential all materials and information submitted in relation to appeals. If, in order to obtain additional knowledge/expertise required to adjudicate an appeal responsibly, the USAC must reveal to a third party any information that might violate the student's right to confidentiality, the USAC will obtain the student's authorization prior to contacting the third party. All discussion related to appeals will remain confidential within the Committee.

F. Conflicts of Interest and/or Bias

Brandon University is a small community and the USAC's membership is broadly representative of all academic areas across the University. As a result, it is very likely that individual members of the Committee will find themselves, from time to time, in a position where they have involvement with or knowledge of, to a greater or lesser degree, appeals that come before the Committee.

Whenever a USAC member is aware of being in such a position, they are obligated to disclose the potential conflict of interest and/or potential bias to the Committee in advance of Committee discussion of the appeals in question. The member may choose to recuse themselves from discussion and/or decision-making on the case. If the member is unsure whether their involvement/knowledge warrants recusal, they should state their level of involvement with and/or knowledge of the case without disclosing details that may prejudice the Committee in its decision-making. The remaining Committee members shall then determine whether the involved member is obligated to recuse themselves from discussion and/or decision-making on the case.

G. Frequent Appeal Types

The USAC will receive and consider appeals from students related to any academic policy/regulation at Brandon University. This section outlines common features of the appeals received most frequently.

Admission Appeals

First-time admission appeals

These appeals come from students who have applied for admission to Brandon University and whose cumulative GPA on past post-secondary studies was lower than the required admission minimum of 2.00.

Appeals for readmission

These appeals come from Brandon University students who have been put on Academic Withdrawal (or Academic Suspension in the case of Mature status students) and who wish to return to Brandon University once their withdrawal (or suspension) has expired or at any time thereafter.

Students readmitted after withdrawal (or suspension) are always readmitted on academic probation, in accordance with University policy.

Academic Performance Appeals

Appeal of Academic Suspension/Academic Withdrawal

These appeals come from Brandon University students who have been put on Academic Suspension or Academic Withdrawal and who are requesting permission to return to studies immediately as though they had not been put on suspension or withdrawal.

Appeals for early return from Academic Suspension/Academic Withdrawal

These appeals come from Brandon University students who have been put on Academic Suspension or Academic Withdrawal and who are requesting permission to return to studies prior to expiry of the full suspension or withdrawal period.

Academic Regulation Appeals

Appeal for Retroactive Course Withdrawal

These appeals come typically from students who believe that their performance on a course/courses was not reflective of their academic potential due to extenuating personal circumstances at play at the time during which they were registered in the course(s).

Appeal of Residency Requirements

These appeals come typically from students who find themselves in circumstances where it would be difficult/impossible to complete the appropriate number of credit hours at Brandon University.

Appeal of Graduation Requirements

These appeals come typically from students who believe they will be unable to complete their program's basic graduation requirements (i.e., minimum GPA, minimum credit hours, Liberal Education requirements, etc.) without suffering undue hardship.

H. Decision-Making Process

When adjudicating and making decisions on appeals of all types, each case will be evaluated on its own merits with reference to precedent and with consideration of the following:

- Material submitted by the student as part of the appeal package;
- Verification, clarification, and/or corroboration information provided by third parties from whom the student has authorized the USAC to solicit such information.

Using the balance of probabilities as its standard, the Committee will seek earnestly to reach consensus on every appeal. In the rare event that the Committee deems it impossible to reach consensus on a particular appeal, a majority vote will be taken. The Chair will vote only in the event of a tie.

I. Decision-Making Considerations

Not all of the considerations below will apply to each appeal case. The numbering system used in this section is for reference purposes only and does not reflect the relative weight of any particular consideration.

1. Previous academic performance

- 1.1 Has the student shown academic performance that would be suggestive of potential for post-secondary success at any point?
- 1.2 Was poor academic performance demonstrated over a short time (just one term or one year) or over an extended period (multiple consecutive terms/years)?

- 1.3 Was the student's past field of study similar to or different from that to which they have currently applied for admission?
2. Time lapse
 - 2.1 Did the student's poor academic performance occur recently or many years in the past?
3. Content and veracity of the personal letter
 - 3.1 Does the student clearly specify the circumstances that led to their previous performance and/or their current situation?
 - 3.2 Would the contributing circumstances described be considered as having been within the student's control or outside the student's control?
 - 3.3 Does the student's explanation of their situation line up with information contained in transcripts and other supporting documentation?
 - 3.4 Does the student provide plausible confirmation that the circumstances contributing to the past academic performance are no longer present?
 - 3.5 Does the letter contain clearly defined goals for the student's proposed/continued studies at Brandon University?
 - 3.6 Has the student engaged in recent activities that are likely to increase their chances of achieving academic success?
 - 3.7 Does the student express a concrete plan for achieving academic success if admitted to/permitted to continue at Brandon University?
 - 3.8 Does the letter provide evidence of realistic self-reflection and self-evaluation?
4. Quality and veracity of medical documentation
 - 4.1 Do the timelines specified in the medical documentation line up with information contained in transcripts, the student's personal letter, and any other supporting documentation?
 - 4.2 Does the medical professional's assessment affirm the level of impairment/incapacity implied by the student's past academic performance?
 - 4.3 Does the medical professional's assessment confirm that the medical situation has resolved or is well-managed at present?
5. Quality and veracity of reference letters
 - 5.1 Is the letter written by an appropriate referee (i.e., a professor, academic advisor, employment supervisor, etc. rather than a family member or friend)?
 - 5.2 Does the letter of support corroborate the material contained in transcripts and the student's personal letter?
 - 5.3 Does the referee provide specific and appropriate reasons for supporting the student?
 - 5.4 Does the referee provide specific information regarding the suitability of the student's selected program choice?
6. Competitiveness of selected program choice
 - 6.1 Does the selected program have competitive entry requirements and/or limited capacity?
 - 6.2 Where a student desires a competitive entry/limited capacity program, does the student have a reasonable chance of attaining a seat in the program if admitted to the University?
7. Probability of achieving academic success
 - 7.1 Based on the accumulated answers to the questions above, does the student have a reasonable chance of being academically successful at Brandon University?
8. Student responsibility
 - 8.1 Has the student taken a proactive approach to making this request?

- 8.2 Has the student shown evidence of having adhered to the University's academic regulation(s) to the best of their ability?
- 8.3 Could and/or should the student have addressed this situation earlier and/or in a different way?

9. University responsibility

- 9.1 Is there evidence that the student received incorrect and/or misleading information from a University employee in relation to this appeal matter?
- 9.2 Does the wording of the academic regulation(s) in question contain plausible ambiguity?
- 9.3 Has the University followed its approved policies and/or procedures in relation to this case?

10. Decision outcomes

- 10.1 How serious are the likely consequences to the student of not granting this appeal? Alternatively, how significant is the likely benefit to the student of granting this appeal?
- 10.2 If similar cases were presented in future, would the Committee feel comfortable granting more admissions/exceptions of this type on the basis of precedent?
- 10.3 Is there a reasonable possibility that granting this appeal could diminish the quality and credibility of the University or the program with which the student is/will be affiliated? Alternatively, is there a reasonable possibility that granting this appeal would assist the University in fulfilling its goals as outlined in its Academic Plan?
- 10.4 Is the Committee confident that the circumstances warranting an exception to published policy in this case are compelling enough to withstand scrutiny by the internal campus community and external stakeholders?

J. Additional Statements of Practice

In order to facilitate decision-making consistency across time, the USAC notes the following:

- Where retroactive VW or AW notations are granted to a student, unless the extenuating circumstances that led the USAC to grant a retroactive withdrawal are related to a specific course/courses, the retroactive VW or AW will apply to all courses taken in the affected term(s).
- Unless a student's extenuating circumstances are extremely unusual and/or serious, residency appeals shall be granted to a maximum of 6 credit hours.
- Only the rarest and most serious of extenuating circumstances would warrant the USAC granting an exception to "core" degree requirements (minimum credit hours required for major, minor, and/or degree and minimum GPA required for major, minor, and/or degree).