

## ACADEMIC BOARD – MEETING 8/02 (19 SEPTEMBER 2002)

### SPECIAL CONSIDERATION

#### A. BACKGROUND

In July, 2001, the APC formed a Working Group on Special Consideration to develop appropriate procedures for implementing recommendations made in the “Report on Changes to and Delays in Results” prepared jointly by the APC and TALQAC and presented to the Academic Board June 2001. This report arose from the work undertaken by both the APC (through an earlier working group on Special Consideration, supplementary exams and student progress) and TALQAC in 2000 and 2001 in response to concerns from within the University, and expressed by Heads of Colleges, over changes to academic results and recognized that:

- There was a wide range of practices among the faculties in the processing of applications for Special Consideration and granting of additional assessment, resulting in confusion and a proliferation of late changes to results and
- There was inconsistency of practices concerning student requests for a revision of marks on academic grounds.

The “Report on Changes to and Delays in Results” was accepted by the Academic Board in July 2001 with support for recommendations 1 to 5 to be implemented. The APC working group recognized that the recommendations were generally supported by the faculties and should be implemented providing that

- Current faculty processes which worked well were not disrupted and
- Confidentiality of information about students is ensured.

Furthermore, the working group acknowledged that a variety of practices might continue, subject to the development of a central database and consistent policies.

*Recommendation 5* of the “Report on Changes to and Delays in Results” was that a working group of APC be established to develop the appropriate procedures for implementing these recommendations (corresponding to the first four recommendations in this Report). The key features embedded in these recommendations were:

- Applications for Special Consideration should be made *via* an on-line system
- This process would include students making a judgement on the severity of the circumstances and that claims be validated *via* later submission of documentation to the relevant faculty
- A central database accessible *via* the web should be established to enable examiners to call up a complete list of applications for their subjects
- Administration responsibility for Special Consideration should remain with the faculties but with clear guidelines for decisions to accept or reject applications
- The University develop a standard impact form for use by health practitioners (*e.g.* doctors, psychologist)
- Decisions regarding the validity and outcome of applications for Special Consideration are made by the department delivering the subject, subject to review by the Board of Examiners in the Faculty.

Recommendation 6-11 in the “Report on changes to and delays in results”, which dealt Supplementary Assessment and Changes to Academic Results, were not to be dealt with by the proposed working party.

The Working Group on Special Consideration was established by APC in mid-2001. The draft final report was prepared following extensive consultation with academic staff, Associate Deans (Academic) and Faculty Managers, members of administrative staff (including counselling services) and MUSU.

#### B. OUTCOMES

The original intent of the recommendations from the APC/TALQAC report was to move to an electronic system for tracking and recording submission and action on applications for Special Consideration. However, the current electronic student administration system, Merlin, has limited capacity to maintain the number of fields needed for this purpose. The APC Working Group on Special Consideration dealt with implementing changes in the procedures for submitting and evaluating applications for Special Consideration. The key features of these changes are:

- **New guidelines for students applying for Special Consideration**

The major changes describe

- The student's role in assessing the severity of the nature of impairment or cause of disadvantage and how this affected their ability to perform
- What the student needs to do to substantiate their assessment, including arranging for a health practitioner, counsellor or appropriate professional to provide a confidential report to the nominated faculty
- How applications for Special Consideration and supplementary information, are submitted
- What the student needs to do when an application is late, where this is submitted and what supplementary information is needed to explain why the application is late.

Further alterations to the Guidelines and Application form will inform students:

- About what services are available to the student to provide support (such as medical, counselling, MUSU)
- That reports from relevant professionals can only be submitted on the forms provided
- That the forms must be filled out by the professional and not by the student on behalf of the professional
- That they may need to arrange a "long consultation" with medical practitioners to facilitate the preparation of the report
- What constitutes an appropriate "professional" for the purpose of the Special Consideration application (such as a health practitioner, counsellor, minister of religion, member of the police force or other professional qualified to evaluate the severity of disadvantage claimed)
- That submission of the application will be acknowledged by a receipt
- That the outcome of consideration of the application will be notified to the student, whether it is accepted or rejected
- That late applications for Special Consideration will only be approved if there is evidence that exceptional circumstances existed which precluded a timely submission of the application

A new question on the Application form will invite students to indicate what they are applying for: extension of time for submitting assignments and reports, further examination due to missing a formal examination or other action.

In view of the importance of respecting the privacy of individuals, the guidelines for students will also need to emphasize the confidentiality of the information provided by the nominated professional and that all documentation will be stored appropriately prior to disposal in line with requirements of the University's records disposal system, the Privacy Act and Health Records Act.

- **The development of "Guidelines to Academic Staff for Reviewing Applications for Special Consideration"**

Staff will have access to support material available across the University to assist in evaluating applications for Special Consideration, including "Guidelines to Academic Staff for Reviewing Applications for Special Consideration" that outline:

- General principles that can be used when considering applications for Special Consideration
- Examples of circumstances that may be considered to cause "severe" disadvantage, the major reason why Special Consideration is approved and
- Examples of circumstances that would not lead to approval of applications for Special Consideration.

The "Guidelines to Academic Staff for Reviewing Applications for Special Consideration" will also be available to students so that they are better aware of the decision framework.

- **Development of a new form "Report by Health Care or Appropriate Professional"**

The appropriate professional will be provided with a form by the student applying for Special Consideration that will:

- Provide consent by the student for the professional to provide the information to the University on a confidential basis,
- Specify that the professional should return the form to the nominated address
- Request the professional to provide an evaluation on the severity of the condition leading to potential disadvantage
- Identify the relationship between the professional and the student, to determine whether this is a casual or on-going relationship in caring, for example, for the student's health or well being and whether there is familial relationship.

These documents provide an overarching framework for decision-making and a single set of forms plus submission procedures that can be used by all faculties, obviating the need for each faculty to design forms, produce guidelines for staff and minimizing the diversity in information obtained. The intent is to obtain more robust information from professionals able to provide a judgement of the severity of impairment suffered and the impact of this on the student's performance. The "Guidelines to Academic Staff for Reviewing Applications for Special Consideration" support this process by providing examples of what would constitute reasonable grounds for approving an application for Special Consideration. By asking the student what they are applying for (extension of time for submitting assignments, further examination if an examination was missed, reconsideration of final mark), it will be clear whether immediate action is necessitated (an important consideration for subjects with continual assessment) or whether performance over a semester is affected. The role of both the subject coordinator, in taking immediate action and noting this on the student's record, and the Board of Examiners in overseeing Special Consideration are clarified.

Matters which remain unresolved and will need further administrative action are:

- Inclusion of appropriate words on all forms regarding confidentiality and privacy, to conform with University policy on these matters
- How the reports by health care or appropriate professional will be returned to the University/faculty
- How these reports will be match up with the electronically-submitted application submitted by the student and
- How the reports will be stored securely in line with compliance to storing medical records.

## **C Recommendations**

It is recommended that the Academic Board

- Approves the recommended changes in "Special Consideration – Guidelines" for students procedures, the contents of "Guidelines to Academic Staff for Reviewing Applications for Special Consideration" and format of the "Report by Health Care or Appropriate Professional"
- Endorses the implementation of the procedures for the 2003 academic year
- Endorses a review of the new forms and procedures within 18 months of their introduction to seek feedback on content, utility and application and
- Refers the report to the office of the Academic Registrar for revision of the forms and procedures surrounding the above changes in applying for Special Consideration