



UTM STUDENTS' UNION DEMANDS FOR

ACADEMIC POLICY CODE AMENDMENT

UTMSU LOBBY WEEK

INTRODUCTION

The academic year of 2020-2021 saw a disproportionately higher number of academic integrity violation allegations compared to previous years, particularly amongst first-year students. While we believe that The Code of Behaviour on Academic Matters is representative of the high ethical standards expected of students at the University of Toronto, we maintain that it no longer reflects the changes that students underwent during the pandemic.

Through the Academic Advocacy Centre, which supports students facing violations allegations, we have been made aware of the various concerns that students express – in particular, the extended processing times for resolving cases that have increased since the shift to distance learning and the return to in-person classes. Thus, we believe that the Code of Behaviour on Academic Matters should be amended to better reflect both the issues that were exacerbated by distance learning and the challenges faced as a direct result of the pandemic to lessen the burden on students.

The University of Toronto Mississauga Students' Union takes an active stance in ensuring students adhere to the Code of Behaviour on Academic Matters and therefore we must make a disclaimer to ensure clear intentions of this lobby document. We are not, in any way, condoning the violations of the Code of Behaviour on Academic Matters or any form of academic dishonesty. We are providing recommendations to the Code which are merely a reflection of our members' concerns.

SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS

- 1** Students have the right to view and review the evidence against them at least 4 weeks prior to their Departmental, Decennial and Tribunal Meeting
- 2** For a student's first offence, 10 % (or under) of their final grade falls under B.I. (b), (d), (e), sanctions outlined in section C.i.(b) 2 (a), (b) to be the primary sanction applied.

**One or more of the following sanctions may be imposed by the dean when a student admits to the commission of an alleged offence:

 - (a) an oral and/or written reprimand;
 - (b) an oral and/or written reprimand and, with the permission of the instructor, the resubmission of the piece of academic work... where the student has committed no previous offence;
- 3** A set time limit should be allotted for resolving cases in Department (2 months), the Decennial (2 months) and Tribunal meetings (6 months).
- 4** To Increase the department threshold to 25%, to alleviate the pressure at The Office of the Dean
- 5** To reinforce the instructor's duties (outlined in section C.i.(a), 2 of the Code of Behaviour on Academic Matters) when submitting an allegation, to ensure students are treated in a just manner.

ACADEMIC INTEGRITY

According to UofT Mississauga's Academic Integrity Unit's Database charts below, academic integrity violations remained relatively steady between the academic years 2011 and 2019, with an average of 590 cases per year.

Contrastingly, the academic year of 2020-2021 saw an **all-time high of 1,418 cases** – a **105% increase** from the following year. 2020-2021 saw a further increase of 26%, with 1,799 cases. Compared to the 2018-2019 year, case numbers increased by **162% in 2020-2021**.

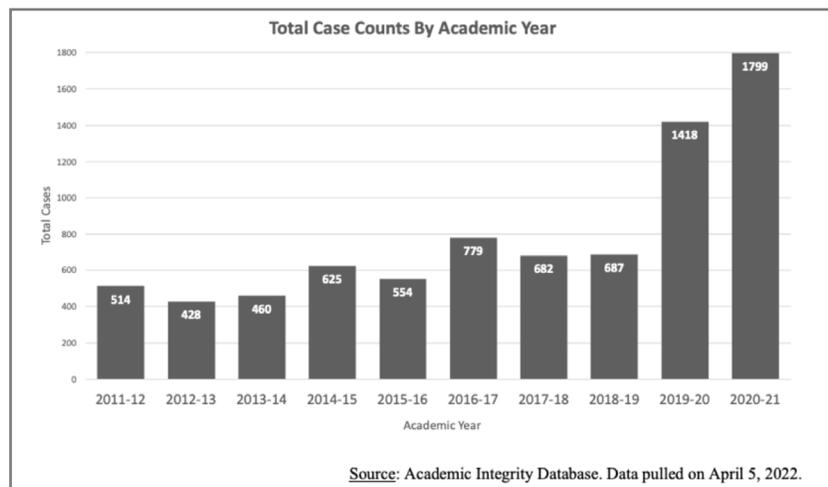


Figure 1

The 2020-2021 report compiled by the AIU notes that unauthorised aid (1364 cases) and plagiarism (303 cases) were the most common academic integrity violation allegations.

It further states that first-year students had a disproportionately higher number of academic integrity violation allegations compared to students from other years, with 820 cases in the academic year of 2020-2021 - an increase of 76% compared to allegations against first-year students in the academic year of 2019-2020 (figure 2).

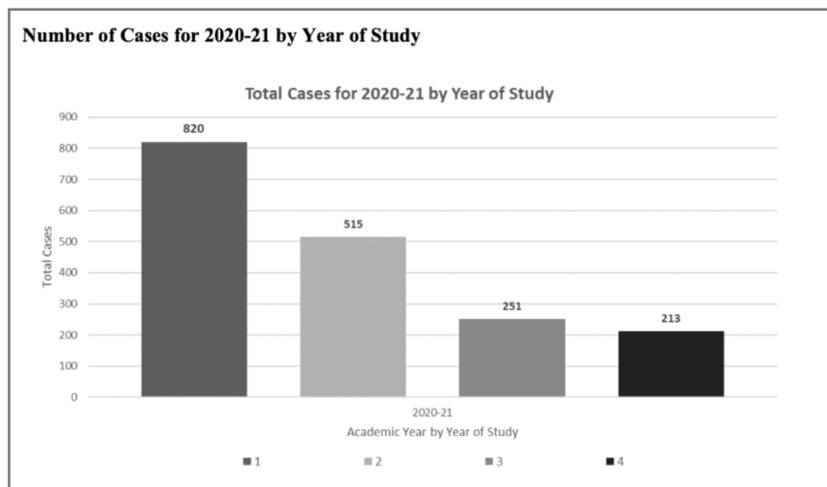


Figure 2

CONTEXT

Although it is a student's responsibility to read and understand the Code of Behaviour on Academic Matters, we find that many students are only made aware of the Code after committing an offence. We find that this is a result of the inaccessibility of the Code; specifically, the legalistic terminology and the lack of translations in the Code.

Academic integrity violations may be more consequential for some populations, such as first-generation and international students. Research suggests that international students are more susceptible to committing an academic offence in North American institutions because the education system "may differ substantially from theirs" (Bertram Gallant, Binkin, & Donohue, 2015, 220). This may either be because some educational systems prioritise verbatim recall of material rather than the student's interpretation which makes it more likely that these students will plagiarise, or because students from non-English speaking countries may be unprepared to study and write in English resulting in "students' academic abilities [being] significantly diminished as a result" (Bertram Gallant, Binkin, & Donohue, 2015, 221).

Their recommendation was to "pay particular attention to educating and providing academic integrity socialisation experiences to international... students" (Bertram Gallant, Binkin, & Donohue, 2015, 227).



RECOMMENDATIONS

1

Students have the right to view and review the evidence against them at least 4 weeks prior to their Departmental, Decennial and Tribunal Meeting.

As in any court of law, students should have the right of defence in an academic offence investigation. Furthermore, students should be given the appropriate time to prepare the defence and gather supporting documents prior to the Departmental, Decennial, and Tribunal meetings to better facilitate the process. The UTMSU proposes that the Academic Offence Process be extended to a period of 4 weeks, thereby allowing students to consult the necessary counsel and support (such as the UTMSU, legal representation, etc.).

2

Ensure students receive an oral/written warning following the first alleged offence.

Cultural and educational backgrounds may result in different interpretations of academic offences, particularly in the case of first-years who are likely to be unaware of the Code of Behaviour on Academic Matters. The UTMSU proposes that the Academic Offence Process include a pre-Departmental meeting step consisting of an official warning from the instructor, upon the “reasonable grounds to believe that the student has committed an academic offence,” which would provide the student with an opportunity to learn from the offence and avoid detrimental consequences.

3**Establish a time limit for Departmental, Decennial, and Tribunal Meetings.**

According to the Productivity report in the Report on Academic Integrity 2020-2021, the AIU has closed 80% of the cases submitted in the last five years (since the academic year of 2016-2017). While this is a notable percentage, it leaves 20% of the cases unresolved past the average degree timeline of 4 years.

The UTMSU proposes that a timeframe be created for the resolution of academic offence cases: namely, 2 months to resolve Departmental meetings, 2 months to resolve Decennial meetings, and 6 months to resolve Tribunal meetings

This would ease both the detrimental effect of a drawn-out investigation on students' mental health, as well as interruptions to students' academic journeys and/or post-graduate ventures. Furthermore, the establishment of clear timelines will ease the pressure to employ costly private legal counsel in response to unreliable/ unorganised timelines and the consistent unavailability of Downtown Legal Services (DLS).

4**Increase the department threshold to 25%, to alleviate the pressure on the Office of the Dean.**

The UTSMU proposes that the departmental threshold for an offence be increased to 25%, thereby alleviating processing times, increasing efficiency, and reducing the workload for the Office of the Dean. This will also apply to more courses as there are courses with high-grade distributions for assignments (10% >) - and providing students with reasonable wait times for their cases.

5**To reinforce an instructor's duties when submitting an allegation to ensure students are treated in a just manner.**

Students deserve a fair process based on the Code. Students find it extremely frustrating that they have to strictly abide by the code when the faculty does not always respect and adhere to it.

WHO ARE THE RECOMMENDATIONS FOR?

Our recommendations aim to support students who have been accused of academic offences, especially those in the first and second years. We recognize that incoming and international students do not have a standard, foundational understanding of academic integrity nor are they aware of and have an understanding of The Code of Behaviour on Academic Matters. As a result, our less punitive sanctions provide students with a learning opportunity without significantly affecting their academic career and mental and emotional well-being.

REFERENCES

Bertram Gallant, T., Binkin, N., & Donohue, M. (2015). Students at risk for being reported for cheating. *Journal of Academic Ethics*, 13(3), 217-228.

University of Toronto Governing Council. (2019, July 1). Code of Behaviour on Academic Matters
Retrieved from <https://governingcouncil.utoronto.ca/secretariat/policies/code-behaviour-academic-matters-july-1-2019>.



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