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MEMORANDUM

ATTENTION	Senate	DATE	April 19, 2022
FROM	Tom Nault	PAGES	3
RE:	Secretary, Senate Appeals Board Senate Appeals Board Annual Report for 2021		

The Senate Appeals Board (SAB) hears appeals from students on matters involving the application of academic policies and requirements relating but not limited to:

- withdrawal under extenuating circumstances
- admission or re-admission to the University, where special circumstances are present

The SAB normally meets once a month but will convene more frequently when necessary. In 2021, the SAB met 11 times and reviewed a total of 30 student appeals.

In June 2014, the terms of reference for the SAB were revised to address, in part, the marked increase in appeals over the previous 5-6 years. A time limit for appeal was introduced, and clearer guidelines regarding grounds for appeal and documentation requirements were implemented. These revisions to the terms of reference led to a reduced number of appeals in both 2015 and 2016. The number of appeals, however, increased again in 2017 primarily because of an unusual surge of requests for retroactive withdrawals under extenuating circumstances.

In 2018 and 2019, the number of appeals declined significantly. At the same time, a higher proportion of appeals was approved. These statistics are a direct result of further revisions to the SAB procedures, most notably more guidance for students from both the appeals coordinator and the Ombudsperson prior to submitting the application. These changes have led to fewer applications overall; fewer applications with insufficient evidence; and more applications with stronger documentation and, in some cases, more persuasive explanations that have led to approvals on compassionate grounds.

In 2020, the university's switch to emergency remote instruction in March had little bearing on the number and nature of appeals reviewed by the SAB in that calendar year. Although the SAB had anticipated an increase in the number of appeals after March 2020, the extended deadline for withdrawals (with a WD designation) and the one-time modification of grading practices in Spring 2020 helped to keep the number of applications at "normal" levels. In fact, all but one of the appeals reviewed by the SAB in 2020 involved WE requests for pre-pandemic semesters.

The number of appeals in 2021 – 30 in total – was comparable to that in the previous year. The SAB observed, however, an increasing number of students who had been advised to apply for a WE for administrative rather than medical, compassionate, and/or employment reasons. In nearly a quarter of the SAB's cases in 2021, students applied for a WE principally because a department/program declined to grant them an opportunity to exceed the normal limit of five course repeats.

Although only three students initially applied for WEs on compassionate grounds, 17 appeals were approved on that basis usually because medical (or other) evidence was insufficient to support otherwise compelling cases. In a handful of those cases, the SAB decided in favour of the applicant when there was sufficient evidence to demonstrate that instructors offered no accommodations, extensions, or deferrals on exams/assignments despite the university's revised policies on academic concessions during the pandemic.

Student appeals were submitted on the following grounds:

Medical	23
Employment	4
Compassionate	3
Total appeals	30

Students appealed for the following reasons:

To remedy required to withdraw (RTW) or academic probation status	8
To increase their GPA for graduation requirements	6
To retake a course beyond the normal five-repeat limit (or to remove one or more repeated courses from a transcript)	7
To retake a course that required a C-minus or better to continue in a degree program	6
To resolve cases in which instructors offered no concessions or accommodations	3
	30

In light of the rising number of cases involving course repeats, the SAB observed that the online SFU Calendar language on repeated courses omits critical information and, in turn, is inconsistent with the current university policy as specified by the Senate in 1982: *“That... the number of courses a student can duplicate in his/her degree program be limited to five; the limit of five duplications may be extended by the Faculty Dean. No course may be duplicated more than once except with the permission of the Department.”* [Minutes-19820111.pdf \(sfu.ca\)](#)

The following is a list of appeals by degree:

Degree	Number of appeals	Degree	Number of appeals
Bachelor Arts Health Sciences	1	Bachelor Science Biomedical	2
Bachelor Arts Criminology	3	Bachelor Science Biological Science	1
Bachelor Arts International Studies	1	Bachelor Science	1
Bachelor Arts History	1	Bachelor Business Administration	2
Bachelor Arts Psychology	1	Bachelor Arts Communications	2
Bachelor Arts Economics	7	Undeclared	2
Bachelor Science Computing	3	2 nd degree	1
Bachelor Science Math	2	Total appeals	30

Procedure:

Each appeal is initially screened to determine whether or not it meets the grounds for appeal as outlined in the terms of reference. All appeals are heard in-camera (written form only). In rare cases, if the SAB is unable to make a decision because of insufficient information, students may be asked to appear in person if they have indicated their willingness to do so on the application. The case then proceeds to an in-person hearing, at which time the student may present further evidence and answer questions. These hearings typically last 15 – 20 minutes.

Summary of Appeal Decisions 2021:

	Withdrawal Under Extenuating Circumstances	Appeals for Admission Re-admission	Total
Approved	27	0	27
Denied	3	0	3
Cancelled (no further action by student)	0	0	0
Did not hear (no grounds for appeal)	0	0	0
Tabled to the next year	0	0	0
Total Appeals:		0	30

Summary of Appeal Decisions, 2008-2021:

	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014 New Tot R	2015
Approved	27	22	30	39	31	45	53	35
Denied	4	15	19	16	26	18	24	21
Cancelled (no further action by student)	0	0	2	2	1	9	3	0
Did not hear (no grounds for appeal)	4	3	1	0	0	1	3	3
Tabled to the next year	6	0	1	2	0	6	5	0
	41	40	53	59	58	79	88	59

	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
Approved	33	57	32	31	28	27
Denied	17	13	6	3	5	3
Cancelled (no further action by student)		0	2	0	1	0
Did not hear (no grounds for appeal)	1	0	0	0	0	0
Tabled to the next year	0	2	0	1	0	0
	51	72	40	35	34	30

Dates of meetings in 2021:

January 21, February 25, April 22, May 20, June 30, July 29, August 26, September 23, October 21, November 25, and December 16.

Current SAB Membership:

Paul Garfinkel, Faculty Member, Chair
Veselin Jungic, Faculty Member
Holly Hendrigan, Faculty Member
Cathy D'Andrea, Faculty Member
Alexandra Wesolek, Graduate Student (Alternate)

Tom Nault, Secretary
Shafik Bhalloo, Faculty Member
Arshdeep Bhullar, Undergraduate Student
Abdul Zahir, Graduate Student
Vacant, Undergraduate Student (Alternate)
Tina Edmundson, Recording Secretary



Paul Garfinkel, Faculty Member, Chair



Tom Nault, Secretary, SAB