

Student Advisor Term End Report
Summer 2004

Clients

I have dealt with three clients in the summer term.

- 1) Student who was having funding difficulties because of confusion regarding the source of her funding. This was resolved through the graduate office and her supervisor.
- 2) Student who had failed a primary course and was appealing the departmental recommendation to withdraw
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Recommendations

The recommendations that I would like to make in this report fall under two sections:

I – Recommendations for appeal procedures

II – Recommendations for the student advisor program

I – Recommendations for appeal procedures

My primary experience this term has been dealing with two clients, both of whom appealed a departmental recommendation to withdraw based on the failure of a primary course. During my involvement in the division meetings and appeal proceedings I made the following observations:

- 1) The department has 4 options when a student fails a primary course; they can recommend 1) that the student withdraw from the program 2) that the student re-take the examination 3) that the student re-take the course or 4) that the student substitute another course to meet the academic requirement. There appears to be a lack of literature/policy stipulating the grounds upon which this decision should be based and who should be involved in making the decision.
- 2) The different divisions (my experience is with Division III and IV) have a different view on how to handle a departmental recommendation to withdraw and there appears to be a lack of literature/procedure detailing the grounds upon which the division decision should be based.
- 3) The University Grievance Coordinator (currently Douglas Morrow) and the SGSR seem to have disparate views on the definition of *procedural grounds* as it pertains to the Academic Appeal Board.
- 4) The Academic Appeal Board runs very differently with regard to the questioning and the issues deemed relevant for discussion depending on the chair of the meeting. (i.e. Each chair had a different concept of what constituted a procedural ground for appeal)

Given the preceding observations I recommend:

- 1) The institution of clearly defined procedures outlining who should participate in the departmental decision following the failure of a primary course including acceptable grounds upon which this decision can be made.

- 2) The institution of a clearly defined procedure outlining the grounds upon which division should decide to support or not support a departmental recommendation to withdraw following the failure of a primary course.
- 3) The reasons (grounds) for the decision should be provided to the student at both the departmental and division level. Without knowing the grounds upon which these decisions were based it is very difficult for the Academic Appeal Board to assess whether “procedure” (including the broader notion of natural justice) was followed properly.
- 4) It would be very helpful if the “grievance advice” side of the appeal process (University Grievance coordinator (currently Douglas Morrow), the Senate Appointed UDRA’s (Faculty who advice students on matters of grievance) and the SGPS student advisors) and the “administrative/ judgment” side of the appeal process were uniform in their interpretation of appropriate grounds for appeal. This would ensure that students get the best advice and know what to expect both while they are deciding whether or not to launch an appeal and when they are participating in one. A meeting between an SGSR representative and the University Grievance coordinator might help to unify the concept of how an appeal should be evaluated.
- 5) I am unaware of the instructions that appeal board members receive regarding how the appeal board meeting should be conducted and what information should be considered relevant. However, as I mentioned above the appeals that I have attended have were quite distinct in terms of what topics were considered relevant to procedural grounds. It therefore seems that more detailed instructions for appeal board members might help to ensure that each student receives the same consideration for their appeal.

II- Recommendations for the student advisor program

The majority of these issues were already raised in the presentation to the SGPS executive on July 26th, 2004. The document that accompanied the presentation provides further recommendations from the 2004 student advisors.

- 1) The role of the student advisor should be more clearly defined. In dealing with very serious cases where the future of a student is at stake it is very important that the role we take as advisors is appropriate given our fairly limited training and the part time nature of our contracts. I feel that being the primary source of support, advice and advocacy at the level of the academic appeal board is inappropriate as it goes well beyond the scope of our training and the time demands far exceed what is outlined in our contract. Enlisting a UDRA (Senate appointed faculty member who provides grievance advice to students) or other representative (e.g. legal council) as the primary advisor at this stage should become normal practice should a case go to formal appeal.
- 2) The student advisors should have an official link to the university grievance coordinator in order to seek assistance on cases that are headed towards formal appeal.

- 3) The hours allotted to advisors should be flexible such that during slow periods where there are few clients hours can be banked and saved for periods where the client load is more demanding.
- 4) Given the increasing client load, rather than being in a supervisory role, the role of the SGPS should move to take over the administrative and promotional side of the advisor program leaving the advisors with more time to devote to cases.
- 5) This year all of the advisors have exceeded the number of hours allotted in the contract. It is very important that the role defined for the advisors and what it dictates regarding the level of involvement in student cases is reasonable given the number of hours allotted in the contract.