

ACADEMIC INTEGRITY at Toronto Metropolitan University

An Information Package for students from your students' union.



TMAPS

Toronto Metropolitan Association of Part-time Students
Local 105 of the Canadian Federation of Students



TMGSU
**Graduate
Students' Union**

Revised: November 2022

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This is a free service offered by your students' union.

For more information visit:

<https://tmaps.ca/studentrights/appeals/academic-misconduct-appeal/>

Student Advocacy

The role of your students' union is to provide an extensive range of services and support to its members. This is why we offer a full-time advocate to assist you. The Toronto Metropolitan Association of Part-time Students (TMAPS) Student Rights Coordinator¹ and the Toronto Metropolitan Students' Union (TMSU) Student Issues and Advocacy Coordinator are knowledgeable of University policy and procedures and are able to offer you advice on how to handle your issue. If you end up proceeding with an appeal, an advocate can speak on your behalf and represent you at your appeal hearing(s) or to the University.

If you are a part-time undergraduate, continuing education or distance education student, or graduate student contact the Student Rights Coordinator at TMAPS.

Email: studentrights@tmaps.ca
Phone: 416-979-5000 Ext. 1 - 557056

If you are a full time undergraduate or law student, contact the Student Issues and Advocacy Coordinator at the TMSU.

Email: advocacy@yourtmsu.ca
Phone: 416-979-5255 Ext. 1 - 552322

1 The Toronto Metropolitan Graduate Students' Union (TMGSU)'s advocate is currently also the TMAPS Student Rights Coordinator.

Academic Integrity at TMU

TMU strives to maintain high standards of academic integrity and expects all students to be honest and fair in their scholarly pursuits. The Academic Integrity Policy, or Policy 60 as it is often called, sets out the principles and procedures for ensuring that the University's quality of education and value of its degrees, certificates, and courses, are legitimate.

You should be equally concerned about academic integrity because the reputation and regard for the University adds value to your degree/certificate and education, and in your future career aspirations this matters.

Policy 60: The Academic Integrity Policy

If you are suspected of committing academic misconduct, the first thing you should do is review Policy 60. The policy can be found at:

<https://www.torontomu.ca/senate/policies/pol60.pdf>

To better understand the rules and principles that determine what academic misconduct is and how it is investigated here at TMU, as well as the various penalties and tracking systems, it is important that you read and comprehend the policy. If you have questions, follow up with your Advocate (studentrights@tmaps.ca) or the **Academic Integrity Office** (AIO, aio@ryerson.ca)

According to the Academic Integrity Policy, students have the right to seek advice and support from an **Advocate** at any point in being investigated for academic misconduct or in the appeals process. An "Advocate" is a term defined in the policy and refers to specific employees of the recognized students' unions on campus who support and can represent students going through the academic misconduct investigation or appeals process.

The [Academic Integrity Office \(AIO\)](#) is another resource for students. They are a neutral office that can answer questions for both students and faculty members/instructors, or any TMU community member about the process of investigation or about the policy in general.

Investigation Process

What to do when you are suspected of academic misconduct?

If you are suspected of academic misconduct, you will receive an email formally notifying you of the suspicion, which will be sent to your TMU (at this time ryerson.ca) email address. This email correspondence sent from aio@ryerson.ca or your instructor should state the specific type of academic misconduct that is suspected, such as plagiarism, cheating, misrepresenting your identity or academic performance, submitting false information, contributing to academic misconduct, etc.

The first step to remember is to try to stay calm. It's also important to read the notice you received carefully and completely. It would be helpful to share this notice with someone you trust or with your Advocate to ensure you understand it clearly. Remember you can also follow up with the AIO if you have any questions.

At the beginning of the investigation process, **no judgement has been made**. You will have an opportunity to explain what happened from your perspective and to ask questions about the concern raised. Remember the investigation process is just beginning. An Advocate from your students' union can assist you in preparing for any meeting.

The second step is to reflect on the possible reasons why the instructor/faculty member, teaching assistant, or Designated Decision Maker (DDM), believes you may have engaged in academic misconduct. This is your time to gather your thoughts and clarify what happened.

A Designated Decision Maker (DDM) is a faculty member that is assigned by the Chair of the Designated Decision Makers' Council (DDMC) to follow through with investigating a suspicion of academic misconduct rather than the instructor from your course or teaching assistant.

The Discussion

Facilitated Discussion (FD) or Non-Facilitated Discussion (NFD)

In the Notice of Suspicion email your decision maker or the Academic Integrity Office (AIO) will put forward a date and time for the meeting to discuss the suspicion of academic misconduct. Typically, these meetings are Facilitated Discussions (sometimes referred to as FDs) where a facilitator from the AIO is present to take summary notes and initiate the discussion about the concern of suspected academic misconduct.

Sometimes instructors prefer to have Non-Facilitated Discussions (NFDs) with students. In these cases no one from the AIO is present at the meeting and the instructor is responsible for the summary of discussion notes. The AIO should still have a record of the NFD, however and AIO templates for the notice, summary of the discussion, and the decision letter should be used by your instructor. Be aware that your Advocate can attend NFDs as well as FDs.

With Facilitated Discussions (FDs) the role of the AIO is to provide a facilitator for the meeting who primarily takes notes and is there to assist with a fair and focused discussion.

If you are unable to attend the scheduled Discussion, you can ask to reschedule. It's important to attend this meeting; **failure to attend will result in your instructor or Designated Decision Maker making a decision without your input.**

NOTE:

Students can request to have a Facilitated Discussion (FD) rather than Non Facilitated Discussion (NFD), as this way there would be a facilitator and note taker present and it could make for a more objective process.

Do not hesitate to contact the AIO to reschedule your Facilitated Discussion.

How to prepare for a Discussion?

You have the right to request to have an Advocate present at a FD or NFD meeting provided you give 24-hours' notice prior to the meeting. Reply to the email notice you received about the meeting to give notice to the meeting organiser. Loop in the **TMAPS/TMGU Student Rights Coordinator** if you are a part-time undergraduate degree or continuing education student, or graduate student. Contact the **TMSU Advocate(s)** if you are a full-time undergraduate student or law student.

Students are allowed to bring a support person to the meeting to discuss the suspicion, but be aware that the support person is not allowed to speak or participate in the discussion.

Meet with your Advocate in advance, or any point in the process. You can meet with a TMAPS or TMSU advocate to discuss your case and help you prepare how best to explain yourself. A TMAPS or TMSU Advocate can attend the Facilitated Discussion or Non-Facilitated Discussion with you and can help you through the process.

If you opt to request an Advocate to attend your Discussion with you, it's important to remember that instructors expect the student to do most of the talking and it's the student, in this case you, who is most familiar with the situation and the facts of what happened or what your writing process was. This is your chance to demonstrate your credibility.

Did you submit your assignment using Turnitin.com?

If so, you can email a request to view the turnitin.com similarity report. Documentation of the issue or reason for the concern, should be provided to you in advance of the Discussion meeting.

Know what academic integrity is and what the various forms of academic misconduct are according to Policy 60, the Academic Integrity Policy.

Be prepared to discuss what happened or what you submitted and why you wrote what you did, or why you did what you did. Review your work and the exam or assignment instructions or the description in your course outline.

Bring any evidence you have that relates to the suspicion. This could include but is not limited to: study notes, rough drafts, sources (journal articles or books, emails back and forth from your group members, statements from witnesses, etc).

What happens at the Discussion? How is a decision made?

The meeting is typically a “question and answer” format, with your instructor asking questions or generally stating what the issue is and you answering questions or generally responding to the concern. You will have an opportunity to ask questions or make any statements that you want to make clear towards the end of the discussion. Take your time and answer each question with as much detail and honesty as you can. Being forthright is important and can resolve some concerns.

At the end of the discussion you will be asked to review the summary notes and asked to sign off on the notes if you agree that they accurately represent the discussion that was had. **If you have corrections you want made to the notes, you should say so immediately or as soon as you're able to.** You will receive a summary of the notes that were taken by the meeting facilitator (or instructor if the meeting is a NFD) via email. The first level decision maker (often the instructor or possibly a DDM, see above for explanation of DDM) is not supposed to make a decision at the Discussion meeting.

As stated in the Academic Integrity Policy, in section 6.3.1:

After the discussion, the decision maker will decide, based on the information available and applying a “balance of probabilities” standard of proof, whether academic misconduct has occurred.

Normally within 5 business days of the meeting, you will receive a decision letter that will be sent to your TMU email account stating whether there is a finding of academic misconduct or not. If there is a finding, the penalty will be stated and some educational workshops may be assigned. Educational workshops are not considered to be part of the penalty and there are no fees associated with these sessions.

Do not contact your decision maker or your professor about the suspicion, the investigation process, or the decision. If you have questions or concerns, you should

Appeals

If you disagree with the determination of academic misconduct and/or penalty, it is your RIGHT to appeal. A TMAPS or TMSU Advocate can help you prepare your appeal submission and attend your appeal hearing with you.

What is a Disciplinary Notation (DN)?

A Disciplinary Notation is an internal tracking mechanism that the University uses to monitor findings of academic misconduct. A Disciplinary Notice is placed on your internal academic record when you are found to have engaged in academic misconduct.

A **Disciplinary Notice** is NOT placed on your official academic transcript, which is the primary document that represents your academic performance at the various institutions you have attended.

Having one single Disciplinary Notice on your academic record is not a major hindrance to your academic status and should not be a block in progressing through your program's curriculum. Having more than one Disciplinary Notice on your academic record can however lead to serious penalties and consequences that can negatively affect your academic career.

If you were assigned the minimum penalty, you can only appeal the determination of academic misconduct. If your appeal is successful, the finding will be dropped, the Disciplinary Notice will be removed, and you should receive a grade for the work in question.

If you have been assigned a penalty greater than the minimum, such as an F on the course in question, a Disciplinary Suspension, Disciplinary Withdrawal, or Expulsion, and you agree with the determination of academic misconduct, you can appeal the penalty to be reduced to a more appropriate penalty.

Your appeal must include:

- A completed appeal form (which is now online, go to the [AIO Student Portal](#))
- A written statement (letter) explaining why you are appealing
- Evidence to support your appeal

Please refer to the template appeal letter on page 10 for tips on how to structure your appeal letter.

You have ten (10) working days from the time you received your Decision Letter to submit an appeal. An Academic Integrity Council (AIC) appeal is submitted to the Academic Integrity Office through the online submission system found in the [AIO Student Portal](#). There should be a link to this online system in the Decision Letter you were sent.

The person who made the decision you are appealing will have an opportunity to review the documents and submit a response. This first level decision maker will at this point be referred to as “the respondent” going forward in the appeal process. You will have access to the information submitted by the respondent before the hearing date for your appeal.

A panel of three people from the Academic Integrity Council (AIC) will now be the decision makers on your appeal.

You will be contacted through your TMU email account and informed of tentative dates and times for the hearing. If you are unavailable at the dates/times suggested, provide your availability in a timely manner to help with the scheduling process. You also will be notified via email about when your hearing package will be ready for pick-up.

Your appeal should be handled in a timely manner, as stated in section 4.4 “Fair Process”, in policy 60.

Remember to check your TMU email account regularly.

Template Letter for Academic Misconduct Appeals

<<Date>>

Academic Integrity Council
Jorgensen Hall, JOR-1201
Toronto Metropolitan University

Dear Members of the Academic Integrity Council,

I am appealing the decision of <<the name of decision maker>> and specifically I am appealing <<the type of finding of academic misconduct, eg. plagiarism>> OR <<the penalty of XXXXX associated with the finding of Academic Misconduct>> for course <<insert name of course>>, <<insert course code>>, taught by instructor <<insert name of instructor>> taken in the <<insert the term and year>>.

The reason for my appeal is ... <<describe the situation in detail>> This section could include:

- A very brief explanation of the assignment or allegation in question.
- What was your process for writing or completing the assignment or test? How did you study or prepare?

What is the context of the situation?

Provide a clear timeframe and mention exact dates

- What actually happened? This could be:
 - Miscommunication (misunderstanding) in the assignment/ exam instructions
 - Citation errors – not clear on proper citation procedures
 - Turnitin.com found similarities, but they can be explained...
 - Collaborated with friend(s) on assignment without realising this could be a problem.

- If you are appealing the finding of academic misconduct explain how you did not commit misconduct (refer to the section in Policy 60 that covers your alleged infraction, and explain why this is not what occurred from your perspective)

AND/OR

- Why the penalty recommended is inappropriate. Explain in detail.
- Deconstruct the decision notice email. Are there errors or points you disagree with? If so, address and clarify those points.

If applicable, elaborate on the notes from the Facilitated Discussion; if you feel the notes do not reflect your true perspective, explain how you misspoke or how your points were misunderstood. However, if you signed off on the summary of discussion notes, explain why you did and why you now see this as a problem.

Explain whether you sought assistance from anyone else or through other services, i.e., counseling, medical care, writing centre, etc.

Note anything else that you think is important to demonstrate that academic misconduct did not occur, and/or why the penalty is unfair.

****Supporting documentation will also be helpful to verify what happened****

Explain your supporting documentation.

As a result of the above stated incident, <<**I am requesting that the finding of academic misconduct be dropped and the penalty be removed.**>> OR <<**I am requesting that the penalty be reduced to (state what you feel would be a fair penalty).**>>

- **If relevant you could say,** “I would like to have the assignment in question graded and assigned a mark based on its merits <<**by a neutral third party (say this if you feel it’s necessary)**>>.”

Should you wish to contact me I can be reached at <<insert a phone number and/or email address that you can be contacted at>>.

Sincerely,

<<**Full Name**>>
<<**Student ID**>>

Appeals Procedure

The first level of appeal is to the Academic Integrity Council (AIC). If your appeal is denied you could appeal to the Senate Appeals Committee (SAC), but you should know that this second level of appeal is not guaranteed.

Appeals based on Policy 60 are heard by a panel of three people, two TMU faculty members, one of whom will be the Chair of the panel, and one student representative. This panel will make a decision on your appeal. A hearing date and time will be established and communicated to you, all parties should have at least ten business days' notice.

It's important to prepare for a hearing by reviewing the documents and working on an opening and closing statement.

Both you the student (the appellant) and the initial decision maker (the respondent) are expected to attend the hearing. If either party fails to attend, the Appeals Committee can proceed with the hearing and make a decision; however, if one of the parties is present, they will be asked if they would like to postpone the hearing or proceed without the other party present.

NOTE:

Since the COVID-19 pandemic began and protocols for remote operations were implemented, both AIC and SAC hearings have been hosted virtually online. AIC hearings run by the AIO have been through Google Meetings, while SAC hearings run through the Senate

Office have been through Zoom. Video is not required, however audio participation is required and is very important during a hearing. You can turn off your camera and that's not a problem at all, though it might be persuasive to have your camera on while you're speaking if you're comfortable with that.

Order of Hearing – Academic Misconduct Appeals

The Hearing Panel Chair introduces the proceedings and asks all of the persons at the meeting/hearing to introduce themselves. These will be the Panel members, the person who decided that academic misconduct had occurred (Respondent) and any witnesses, as well as the student (Appellant) and their Advocate, if any.

The respondent or appellant may bring witnesses which must be declared in advance of the hearing. If the witness(es) is (are) not declared in advance, the Panel will decide if the witness(es) will be heard or not.

Note: After being introduced at the very beginning of the hearing, witnesses remain outside the hearing room/virtual meeting room until they are called upon to make their statements. Witnesses who wish to leave the hearing as soon as possible may be accommodated and questioned by the Panel before they need to leave.

New Evidence

The appellant or respondent can share new evidence ahead of the hearing; however, it must be emailed to the AIO (for AIC hearings) or Senate Office (for SAC hearings) before 12 pm the business day prior to the AIC hearing. For details of this requirement see section 11.3.4 of the Procedures of the Academic Integrity Policy. At the start of the hearing it is up to the Chair of the Appeals Panel in consultation with the two parties (appellant or respondent can say whether they are open to considering the new evidence or not) to determine if new evidence should be accepted into consideration.

Always explain why your new evidence was not included in the original appeal submission and why it's relevant.

Order of Hearing

The Panel Chair will give an introductory summary of the purpose and procedures for the hearing. Everyone will introduce themselves. The Chair asks if anyone perceives a conflict of interest.

What is a conflict of interest?

This when you have prior experience with someone on the panel, who should be acting as impartial decision maker this could be perceived as a conflict of interest. Another way of thinking of conflict of interest is if you or another person are in a position to derive benefit or an advantage from decisions or actions made in an official capacity.

New evidence will be addressed and considered.

Opening Statements

First Speaker: The “respondent” in this case the instructor or Designated Decision Maker is asked to present the evidence they used to make the charge. The appellant and/or advocate can ask the respondent questions.

Witness for the First Speaker (respondent): The witness is only present while giving testimony and has to wait outside of the hearing room until they are called to make a statement. The student and/or advocate are given an opportunity to ask questions to the witness. The panel also has the opportunity to ask questions.

Questions from the Second Speaker (appellant and/or Advocate) to the First Speaker (respondent): It must strictly be questions rather than statements/comments or else the Chair will intervene. Comments can be included when statements are presented.

Second Speaker: The appellant is asked to present a summary/opening statement of his/her case and explain why they do not believe academic misconduct occurred. The respondent can ask the appellant questions.

Witness for the Second Speaker (appellant): The same rules apply as the witness for the respondent.

Questions from the First Speaker (respondent) to the Second Speaker (appellant and/or Advocate): Again, it must strictly be questions rather than statements/comments or else the Chair will intervene.

Questions from the Panel: Members of the Appeal Panel proceed to ask questions of the respondent and appellant.

Closing Statements

The appellant is asked to present a final summary of their case. Remember to clarify anything that might have been confused or mentioned by the respondent during the question period. This is your last opportunity to address the panel, who are the decision makers.

The respondent is asked to present a final summary of his/her case.

Everyone who is not a member of the appeals panel is asked to leave before the panel begins to deliberate and make their decision. For virtual hearings, a separate meeting “room”/link is created to ensure privacy for deliberations.

Decision of the Panel:

The Chair of the appeal panel is responsible for writing the decision letter that will be issued. Within ten (10) business days you should receive a decision letter emailed to you, the student, from the Academic Integrity Office.

Preparing Your Hearing Statement

Opening/Closing Statements: What to say in your Academic Misconduct Hearing

Opening statement:

Your opening statement is the first thing that you say to the panel, your new decision makers. Be sure to introduce yourself, state your program, and thank the panel members for being there. Remember that the tone you use and the way you present your arguments play a big role in whether or not the panel believes you are trustworthy. You want to be honest and sincere, not angry or shifty.

In the statement itself, do not just repeat what is already said in your appeal letter, but put emphasis on responding to what the respondent says you did wrong in the “Respondent’s Package”. Normally, the “respondent” who has found that you committed academic misconduct will have written a response to the appeal letter you submitted. Your opening statement should be a rebuttal to what the “respondent” to your appeal has written on top of the accusations you already responded to stemming from the Decision letter and the notes from the Discussion (FD or NFD) itself.

If facing a finding of plagiarism, in the hearing package, you may also have a copy of the turnitin.com report (if applicable). You should refer to this report in your statement.

Try to be concise. Remember that all of your strongest points and any new information should be included in your opening statement.

Statement tips:

- Address the specified passages from the assignment or test in question in your opening statement.
- Explain your perspective – share your writing process, or how you prepared for the test/exam. The panel needs to understand from your point of view what happened. This helps you show how well you know your paper, or that you studied for the test/exam.

- If the issue was a citation error, point out the reference for every questioned passage. Show the panel that even if you did not cite correctly, you still tried to give credit to the author.
- If you were found to have cheated on an exam or test, be sure to clearly describe the layout of the room and test taking environment.
- If you are arguing that you did not commit academic misconduct use the policy to explain the difference from what happened and academic misconduct.
- If you are only appealing the penalty, acknowledge that what you did was wrong and try to see it from the perspective of the University. Demonstrate your remorse and think about the value of your education.
- Explain any mitigating factors and why the penalty should be reduced.

If you are appealing a finding of academic misconduct, emphasise that you did not actively commit a violation of the academic integrity policy, so you should not be penalised. You can refer to the policy to explain that you did not do anything that the University would consider as academic misconduct:

<https://www.torontomu.ca/senate/policies/pol60.pdf>

If you are overwhelmed and do not know where to start. Take a deep breath and go through the Respondent's letter line by line. This will help you flag everything you don't agree with or is a misunderstanding. From there you have an outline of the points you want to raise with the panel without just repeating your appeal letter.

Closing Statement

Your closing statement is the final summary of your main points. No new information should be stated at this point, unless you are addressing points made by the respondent or questions/comments that came up through the questioning period, reiterate and summarise your strongest points.

In case you cannot think of anything to say at the conclusion of the hearing, now you have something written already. This is also a good place to put a strong emphasis on the policy and how it does not apply to your case. You could emphasise why you believe it is important to have academic integrity to show that you understand and appreciate why the panel members would take academic integrity seriously.

If you want to address points that were brought up during the hearing, or elaborate on something that was said during question period, simply say, “I’d like to respond to some of the statements and ideas brought up during the hearing and in the question period...” And then make your points. After you do this, end with the statement you had prepared so that you end looking organised and strong.

***A closing statement is normally much shorter than the opening statement. When a subject is discussed at length during the question period, or raised by your respondent, it is a good idea to mention your view on the topic again in your conclusion.**

Remember to be forthright and sincere. Saying anything that comes across as misleading or false can lead to another suspicion of academic misconduct and greater penalties. Just be yourself and stick to the facts.

More Help

Feel free to review your opening and closing statements with your Advocate, to refine your arguments and ensure you are putting your strongest ideas forward.

If you are a **Part-Time Undergraduate, C.E. student, or Graduate student** contact TMAPS:

Student Rights Coordinator
SCC301 – Student Centre, 55 Gould St.
studentrights@tmaps.ca
416-979-5000 x 1-557056

If you are a **Full-time undergraduate or Law student** contact the TMSU:

Student Issues and Advocacy Coordinators
SCC311 – Student Centre, 55 Gould St.
advocacy@yourtmsu.ca
416-979-5255 x 1-552322