



# Office of the Ombudsperson for Students

## Fairness Checklist for Decision Makers

Basic rules of fairness apply to good decision-making. “Procedural fairness” is the legal term that encompasses fundamental and commonsense concepts that decision makers need to incorporate into their processes. The extent to which each concept applies in any case will depend on both the nature and seriousness of the outcome of the decision. For example, a decision that results in a student’s suspension from the university will require adherence to the highest levels of procedural fairness, while a decision that results in a student having to pay a late fee would require less.

The headings below describe concepts of fairness within a university setting. You can use the questions under each heading to establish best practices for your unit. We are happy to offer our assistance in developing fair decision-making processes.

### ACCESS TO INFORMATION

- Are your unit’s physical facilities accessible and easy to find?
- Is information about your unit’s policies, procedures and applicable deadlines sufficiently detailed, accessible and written in plain language?
- Can students access information about your unit and its policies and procedures in different ways – website, phone, email and print material?

### RESPONSE TO INQUIRIES

- Has your unit established guidelines about acceptable timeframes to respond to telephone, email and in-person inquiries?
- Are response times monitored?

### NOTICE OF PROCEEDINGS

- If a student may be adversely affected by your unit’s decision, is she or he given adequate and clear notice of the proceeding and potential outcomes?
- Does your unit have clear and accessible rules about the steps in such proceedings?

### DISCLOSURE

- Does your unit adequately inform the student about the information that will be considered by the decision maker?
- Are there reasonable and adequate timelines for that information to be provided to the student before the decision is made?



#### OPPORTUNITY TO RESPOND

- Is the student given an adequate opportunity to respond and to provide her or his side of the story?
- Are there steps to ensure that the decision maker is provided with the entirety of the student's response?

#### IMPARTIALITY

- Do decision makers in your unit understand their duty to be unbiased and objective so that students perceive the process to be fair?
- Are there guidelines for decision makers to maintain impartiality?

#### TIMELINES

- Does your unit provide students with timely decisions?
- Are there guidelines that indicate when decisions should be made and communicated to students?
- If delays occur or are expected, are students notified?

#### REASONS

- Does your unit provide adequate reasons for its decisions and communicate them clearly to students?
- Is there a template for decision makers to use that prompts them to provide reasons for each decision?

#### CONSISTENCY

- Are decisions affecting students made consistently with reference to established criteria?
- At the same time, do decision makers give consideration to the unique facts and circumstances in individual cases?
- Are previous decisions and reasons maintained so that decision makers can have access to them?



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### APPEALS

Does your unit provide the student with information on how to appeal the decision and where she or he can obtain further details about appeal processes?

### TRAINING

Are decision makers in your unit provided with training and support for their decision making responsibilities?

Do they receive education about procedural fairness in general?

Would your unit benefit from a workshop to review your processes and answer some of the questions asked here?