Academic Policy Changes: What is new for 2018/19?

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Over the past year, Academic College Council undertook a review of the existing Academic Policy, separating the large policy document into separate policies which are now posted on Seneca's new policy hub, under the "Academic and Student Services" tab. You can find the link to the hub from the My.Seneca home page under "College Services" to the right of the screen.
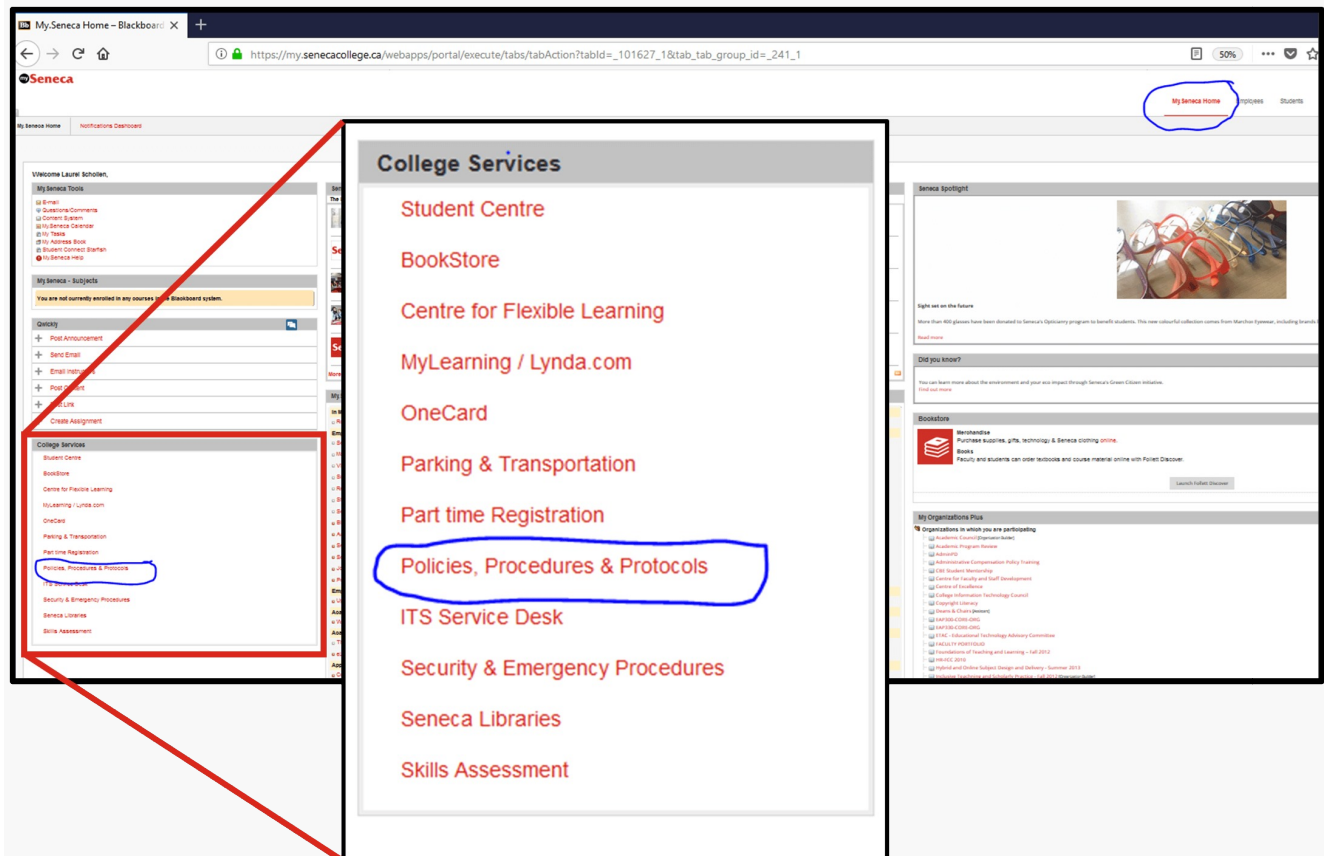
The purpose of this article is to highlight some of the major and minor changes to academic policies effective this year. Please refer to the Policy Hub to access these and other policies along with supporting documents (available through links in the policy document).

Student Assessment Policy

This new policy was referenced in the June 2018 issue of Academic Newsletter and introduced at each of the "Welcome Back" meetings. Grounded in the principles of fairness and transparency regarding assessment and feedback already practiced by faculty, this policy codifies these expectations, providing clarity to students and faculty regarding timely assessment and assessment variety and weights. The policy requires faculty to provide students with timely feedback, well enough in advance of any follow-up assignments, thus enabling students to incorporate the feedback into their next assignment. There is a requirement for students to have received 30% of their grade in advance of the final date to drop a course without academic penalty, allowing students to make an informed decision about continuance in the course. The policy also places a limit on "high-stakes" assessments, with a limit of 40% for a single assessment. Further, it clarifies that grades will not be assigned for attending classes. Seneca has a wide range of credentials and programs. Recognizing this diversity, there is provision for exceptions. These do need to be approved and noted to students so they are aware of the exception.

My. Seneca Minimum Requirements Policy

The My.Seneca Minimum Requirements policy is a new policy; however, it references guidelines that were put into place in 2012. Many faculty may recall the "Getting Started with My.Seneca" workshops being offered prior to and just after every semester start to assist faculty in learning the essentials of Seneca's LMS, Blackboard. These workshops were designed for faculty to meet the minimum requirements. The principle behind the policy is to provide all students with the ability to access essential course material, grades, and resources regardless of program and course section. The Teaching & Learning Centre have created a "Learn@Seneca Essentials" online module to further assist faculty (see the New: Learn@Seneca Online Modules article in this issue).

Student Progression and Promotion Policy

This policy replaces the "Student Promotion and Status" section (Article 12) of the previous Academic Policy. The revised policy outlines the minimum requirements for students to progress and graduate from a Seneca program. The policy notes that "program areas will have a comprehensive review of the students' academic progress." This reference is meant to respect the diversity of promotion processes used by programs/schools. A minimum GPA of 2.0 is now required to graduate from diploma and certificate programs; degree requirements remain the same at 2.5. This policy also identifies the acceptable duration for completion of a program, the number of course

attempts, and full disclosure on transcripts.

Academic Appeal Policy – Major revisions, including a change to process
A working group of the Academic College Council, including faculty, students, and administrators, reviewed feedback from the Appeal Assessment Review Panel, suggestions from stakeholders, and an environmental scan of the policies and procedures from other institutions. Their work resulted in an updated policy with the following revisions: The purpose of the policy is now clearly stated, along with the grounds for appeals, which were not part of the previous policy. The grounds, along with the updated process and a flow chart, are presented in the "supporting documentation" section. The timeline for students to launch a Level 1 – Informal Academic Resolution Process is now within ten business days of final grades being published. If the issue is not resolved through the informal process, the student has five business days to initiate the Level 2 – Formal Academic Appeal Process. Shorter timelines for the formal process serve to provide students with a timely decision.

The optional Formal Academic Appeal Assessment Process remains intact.

The $25.00 appeal fee remains the same; however, it is no longer non-refundable in the event the student's appeal is successful.

We are working on updating forms and providing guidance documents for staff and students.

Academic Integrity – Major revisions to approach, procedures and sanctions
We've reported on the work of the Academic Integrity subcommittees in previous issues of the Academic Newsletter. The Academic Integrity Policy, which replaces the Academic Honesty policy and procedures (Article 9 and Appendix E of the old policy document), reflects the emphasis on a teaching and learning approach to academic integrity which is grounded in literature and the best practices of the member institutions of the International Center for Academic Integrity (ICAI) and the Academic Integrity Council of Ontario.

Our previous policy and procedure were more reflective of a "rules and compliance" model. Procedures for addressing breaches of the policy have been updated, as have the sanctions. This approach enables faculty and Academic Integrity committees to consider the context and severity of the offence when applying a sanction, such as the level of the student's academic experience (first semester of a diploma program versus an upper-semester student), extenuating circumstances, and prior/multiple incidents. It is anticipated that reporting of violations may increase, as there may be more willingness to report if the sanction is more closely aligned with the severity of the offence; there is an opportunity to have the student correct and learn from their error and be penalized accordingly.

Workshops and resources in a variety of formats, focusing on information about the policy and the updated procedures, will be available for all members of the Seneca Community. The SSF is engaged and is working to support the Academic Integrity program. For example, they will be participating, along with schools, Seneca Libraries, and the Learning Centre in the 3rd International Day of Action against Contract Cheating on October 17. The ICAI has produced a tool kit for educators to combat contract cheating.

Grading Policy
The working group recommended to the Academic College Council a number of minor revisions to update the policy. References to promotion committees, good standing, and minimum acceptable performance have been removed as these are now captured in the new "Student Progression and Promotion Policy."

View the September 2018 issue of the Academic Newsletter.

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