

Resolution 2021-22O
Resolution to Establish an Academic Relief Policy

Recommended for approval by the Commission on Undergraduate Studies & Policies:

First Reading: March 14, 2022

Faculty Senate:

AP Faculty Senate:

Staff Senate:

Graduate and Professional Student Senate:

Undergraduate Student Senate:

Second Reading:

Approval by University Council:

Approval by the President:

Effective Date: Fall 2022

WHEREAS, the University has established academic policies that assist students with navigating common academic tasks in order to attain their academic goals as effectively as possible; and

WHEREAS, undergraduate students can encounter extenuating circumstances beyond their control that negatively impact their physical and mental health as they move through their academic career and thus inhibit meeting academic responsibilities for an extended period of time; and

WHEREAS, in these situations, students often need support outside of what is typically allowed through academic policy, and

WHEREAS, Virginia Tech has a long history of offering support to these students, commonly referred to as Academic Relief; and

WHEREAS, despite the practice of offering Academic Relief, an academic policy does not currently exist to govern this practice, and

WHEREAS, a policy is needed to provide uniform and consistent application of Academic Relief,

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the following policy be established effective Fall 2022 and a summary to be included in the Undergraduate Catalog.

Academic Relief Policy

1.0 Purpose

The purpose of this policy is to provide a uniform and consistent process for undergraduate students to seek a revision of academic records when extenuating circumstances inhibit a student from meeting academic responsibilities for an extended period of time during a semester and other forms of redress are not practical. Academic relief affords students experiencing events beyond their control an opportunity to seek resignation from all courses in a given term or, in unique circumstances, withdraw from particular courses without academic penalty or use of the three withdraw grade options allotted to each undergraduate student (Presidential Policy Memorandum No. 196).

Nothing in this policy limits a student's ability to request an accommodation through Services for Students with Disabilities (see Policy 4075). The process for students to request and receive an accommodation through Services for Students with Disabilities is separate from the process for academic relief. The Academic Relief Committee shall not require any student who has an approved accommodation to follow the procedures contained herein in order to receive approved accommodations. Similarly, this policy does not create new procedures for remedying a found violation of discrimination or harassment under Policy 1025 or Policy 1026. Furthermore, the policy contains protections that limit the sharing of a student's medical, disability, and other private information in accordance with federal and state laws, and university policy and procedures associated with privacy.

2.0 Policy

Undergraduate students may seek academic relief when extenuating circumstances beyond the student's control prevent a student from attending classes and completing coursework such that their performance is highly compromised. Broadly, a student may be eligible for academic relief with a recommendation verifying the need for such relief from an appropriate campus entity, such as Dean of Students Office, Cook Counseling Center, Schiffert Health Center, Services for Students with Disabilities, and the Office for Equity and Accessibility/Title IX Coordinator. Reasons a campus entity may issue a recommendation for academic relief generally include extenuating circumstances and events affecting a student's physical and mental health and well-being and range from involvement in an official university investigation under Policy 1025 or Policy 1026 to the death of, or providing extended care for, an immediate family member. Because unexpected events can occur at any time during a student's academic career, there shall be no limitation on the number of times a student can apply for academic relief. However, a student's failure to meet required stipulations of prior academic relief may impact eligibility for relief under this policy. Students who have completed their undergraduate studies and graduated from Virginia Tech are ineligible for academic relief.

The university committee charged with approving or declining academic relief requests shall be referred to as the “Academic Relief Committee.” Voting members of the Academic Relief Committee shall be composed of associate deans for undergraduate academics from each college and one representative from the Office of the Vice Provost for Undergraduate Academic Affairs. *Ad hoc*, non-voting members of the committee shall include one representative from each of the following campus entities: Office of the University Registrar; Dean of Students Office; Cook Counseling Center; Schiffert Health Center; and Services for Students with Disabilities. *Ad hoc* members will be invited to participate during the review of academic relief requests recommended to the committee by their specific office. The Academic Relief Committee will meet regularly to provide students with timely responses.

It is expected that the norm for academic relief will be consideration for a complete resignation from all courses in a particular semester. All applications for academic relief require detailed and credible supporting documentation and/or consultation with the campus entity through whom the student is seeking support, as deemed appropriate by the supporting campus entity. Academic relief requests for withdraw from selective courses require the inclusion of more detailed documentation justifying the selective nature of the request (i.e., how the event negatively impacted performance in one course versus another). Private and sensitive information that may be submitted as part of the application process will only be viewed by representatives of the campus entity through whom the student is seeking support and not by the Academic Relief Committee (see Section 3.1 for additional information).

An approved academic relief request will result in a student’s unofficial and official transcript reflecting a notation for academic relief (designation as deemed appropriate by the University Registrar) in place of a letter grade. No courses shall be temporarily or permanently removed from a student’s transcript in association with an approved academic relief request.

Students may apply for academic relief during an ongoing semester or after a semester has been concluded (retroactive request). Retroactive requests for academic relief are typically limited to one year from the last day of class associated with the semester for which relief is being requested. It is in the student’s best interest to seek relief as soon as possible after the initiating event. However, the committee charged with evaluating academic relief requests may extend the timeframe for academic relief submissions if a student adequately demonstrates good cause for being unable to file a request within a one-year period of time.

The campus entity (Dean of Students Office; Cook Counseling Center; Schiffert Health Center; Services for Students with Disabilities; and the Office for Equity and Accessibility/Title IX Coordinator) supporting a student’s relief request may establish expectations related to an academic relief request. Expectations may include requiring students to use particular campus resources to enhance well-being and academic success, and prohibiting students granted relief from enrolling in the next academic semester if, in their professional judgement, it is determined that the student would be best served by time away from their academic studies. In such instances, the Academic Relief Committee shall inform the University Registrar of the need to place an administrative hold on the accounts of specific students approved for relief.

Students seeking readmission to the university or enrollment in coursework after the receipt of academic relief with an administrative hold must provide a written action-plan describing their capability to return to school. Supporting documentation may also be submitted, but not in lieu of the action-plan. The action-plan and ancillary documentation shall be submitted to and reviewed by the campus entity that supported the student's relief request. If the campus entity concurs that the student is ready to resume their studies at Virginia Tech, the campus entity shall contact the University Registrar and request removal of the administrative hold from a student's account.

Academic relief is not an accommodation for a person with a disability under the policy on University Accommodations for Persons with Disabilities (Policy 4075).

3.0 Procedures

3.1 Relief Request Form and Submission of Request

The Office of the Vice Provost for Academic Affairs and Office of the University Registrar shall develop and maintain an electronic academic relief request form for student use that captures relevant student information (e.g., name, student number, and college) and information pertinent to the academic relief request (e.g., semester and courses for which relief is being requested, explanation for the request, and campus entity most appropriate for reviewing the request). Importantly, the form shall require the student to affirm understanding that requests for relief apply to all courses in a given semester and that limited relief (i.e., relief for specific courses) will only occur under exceptional circumstances. Furthermore, the Office of the Vice Provost for Academic Affairs and Office of the University Registrar shall develop an electronic process for student submission of the form that meets all necessary compliance requirements (e.g., FERPA, HIPPA, and university policy and procedures associated with privacy) and appropriately routes the request through the process described in **Section 3.2** of this document. Importantly, the process shall limit the sharing of medical, disability, and other private information to only the campus entity selected by the student to review their academic relief request. Requests filed later than one year require additional justification and explanation for delayed action.

3.2 Comment, Review and Approval Process

Steps in the Comment, Review, Approval, and Notification Process

1. The following three sub-steps shall occur in parallel.

College comments. The request for academic relief should be sent to the student's associate dean for undergraduate academics for comments related to academics, to provide additional information about the student's challenges as available, and to acknowledge the college's awareness that the student is seeking relief by e-signature.

Office of University Scholarships and Financial Aid. The Office of University Scholarships and Financial Aid should review records and provide the student seeking

relief, and their associate dean for undergraduate academics, with a report articulating financial impacts that may arise if the relief request is granted. (This step can be omitted if a student is not receiving scholarship or financial aid support from the university.)

Cranwell International Center. The Cranwell International Center should review records and provide the international student seeking relief, and their associate dean for undergraduate academics, with a report articulating challenges that may arise if the relief request is granted. (This step should be omitted for domestic students.)

2. *Dean of Students Office, Cook Counseling Center, Schiffert Health Center, Services for Students with Disabilities, or the Office for Equity and Accessibility/Title IX Coordinator.* The campus entity determined most appropriate for reviewing a request (see **Section 3.1**) shall gather additional information from the student and meet with them as needed, review the student's case, and make a recommendation on the student's request to the Academic Relief Committee. This recommendation need not include details relating to the student's particular extenuating circumstances that justify the recommendation if providing details is outside the normal procedures and practices of the campus entity making the request. The recommendation should also stipulate additional expectations of the student (i.e., required or recommended use of particular campus resources) and if there is a need to place an administrative hold on a student's account should the relief request be granted by the Academic Relief Committee. If a student is unable to obtain a recommendation in support of their request for academic relief from an appropriate campus entity, then the student's request is effectively denied. The electronic system developed for the academic relief process shall automatically inform a student if their request is supported by the campus entity and forwarded to the Academic Relief Committee or not recommended to the committee (i.e., the request is denied).
3. *Academic Relief Committee.* The Academic Relief Committee will review requests, the campus entity's recommendation, and associated materials, ***excluding*** medical, disability, and other private information, followed by a vote to approve or deny the student's request. The Academic Relief Committee shall also review recommendations from the campus entity supporting the student's relief request to determine the need to prohibit a student from enrolling in an upcoming semester and placement of an academic hold on the account of students granted relief.
4. *Office of the University Registrar.* The Office of the University Registrar shall take action on the accounts/records of students granted relief in accordance with the Academic Relief Committee's final decision.
5. *Student Notification.* The student's associate dean for undergraduate academics shall inform the student of the Academic Relief Committee's decision.

3.3 Appeals Process

Students may appeal a decision made by the Academic Relief Committee by submitting a written request to the Vice Provost for Undergraduate Academic Affairs within 30 days of decision

notification. Appeals must be based on (1) documented evidence that procedural requirements of this policy were not followed or (2) new information that was not available when a decision was rendered. Dissatisfaction with outcome of the review process shall not be grounds for appeal. A different representative from the Office of Vice Provost for Undergraduate Academic Affairs than the individual who participated in the original committee decision shall be designated to review the appeal.

3.4 Removal of Holds Associated with Academic Relief

The Office of the Vice Provost for Academic Affairs and Office of the University Registrar shall develop an electronic action-plan form to be completed by students who previously received academic relief and are seeking readmission to the university or enrollment in coursework. The action-plan form shall capture relevant student information (e.g., name, student number, and college) and include questions that reflect the student's concrete plans to return to academic study (e.g., activating an approved accommodation from SSD; securing a mental health counselor for continued support). Furthermore, the Office of the Vice Provost for Academic Affairs and Office of the University Registrar shall develop an electronic process for student submission of the action-plan and upload of ancillary documentation that meets all necessary compliance requirements (e.g., FERPA, HIPPA, and university policy and procedures associated with privacy) and appropriately routes the request through the process described below.

The procedure to remove academic holds on student accounts that are associated with the approval of academic relief is provided below. Not all students receiving academic relief will have a hold placed on their accounts (see Section 3.2); thus, the following steps should only be used as needed.

1. Completed action-plan forms and any ancillary documentation shall be sent to the campus entity (Dean of Students Office, Cook Counseling Center, Schiffert Health Center, Services for Students with Disabilities, or the Office for Equity and Accessibility/Title IX Coordinator) that originally supported the academic relief request and required placement of the academic hold.
2. The campus entity shall review the action-plan form and ancillary documentation to determine if a student is prepared to resume their academic studies.
3. If the campus entity determines that the student is ready to resume their studies, they will contact the University Registrar and request the removal of an administrative hold associated with the granting of academic relief from a student's account. The campus entity requesting removal of the hold shall also inform the student's associate dean for undergraduate academics of hold removal.

4.0 Definitions

5.0 References

Presidential Policy Memorandum No. 196, “Revision to Course Withdrawal Policy (“W” Grade Policy.” [https://policies.vt.edu/assets/196-revision-to-course-withdrawal-policy-\(w-grade-policy\)-.pdf](https://policies.vt.edu/assets/196-revision-to-course-withdrawal-policy-(w-grade-policy)-.pdf)

University Policy 1025, “Policy on Harassment, Discrimination, and Sexual Assault.” <https://policies.vt.edu/assets/1025.pdf>

University Policy 1026, “Policy on Title IX Harassment and Responsible Employee Reporting.” <https://policies.vt.edu/assets/1026.pdf>

University Policy 4075, “University Accommodations of Persons with Disabilities.” <https://policies.vt.edu/4075.pdf>.

6.0 Approval and Revisions