

Troubleshooting Tips

Save Everything

Keep copies of all official documents you send and receive [fee receipts, identification cards, advising worksheets, course syllabi, petitions, financial aid information, etc.]. Document everything that might come back to haunt you. If you're in doubt about whether you need to document your actions or conversations, keep track of it. It just might help you solve a big problem down the road.

Read Everything/Be Informed

Carefully read your Calendar, Student Handbook, Course Outlines, Course Schedule, receipts, and all other information you receive from the University regarding housing, registration, financial aid, loans, etc. You are responsible for knowing University policies and deadlines. These are generally available on-line as well as through University Departmental/Divisional websites.

Be informed about your debt. Keep track of what you owe and why. This may seem self-evident, but it is easy to forget. Losing track of the debt you owe, the deadlines, and the reasons for your debt are a good recipe for increasing the debt itself unnecessarily.

Ask Questions

Why was my request denied?

What rule or policy applies?

Are there exceptions to the rule?

Is there any appeal process?

Ask for the names and titles of employees you talk with.

Ask why the person or office acted as they did.

Ask for copies of policies or records that are relevant to your situation.

Ask questions until you understand what happened and why.

When checking your status with a University office, ask to have your particular file checked. This can help to catch problems that might otherwise go undetected.

Clarify the Problem/Be Prepared

Before you contact a university office, take some time to simplify your complaint, decide what the main issue is and what action you are seeking.

Write down your questions before contacting a university office.

Have the information and documentation available that you may need in your discussion.

Collect relevant information from a variety of sources [registrars' offices, counselors, instructors, Student Services].

Be sure you communicate your needs to instructors, staff, and administrators; they will not know unless you tell them, so be specific.

Save steps by calling ahead for walk-in hours or to make an appointment.

If you do not know who to ask or how to find what you are looking for, contact the Ombuds Office.

Know the Channels

The first employee to whom you speak may not have the authority to address all of your concerns or other matters which are out of the ordinary or which are particularly complex. If you cannot resolve the matter, ask to talk with a supervisor. It is important to understand university policies and the channels you must go through to resolve your problems.

For example, if you have a grade dispute with an instructor, discuss the matter with the instructor first. If your situation is not resolved at this stage, the next step is to talk with the department chair where the course is being taught. At this point, if nothing has been accomplished, you may consider filing a formal appeal. The appeals process is outlined in your Calendar and through various on-line resources.

Don't Procrastinate

"Oh I'll handle it at the end of the semester" is a common thought that many students have when a conflict arises with the university. In most cases, the longer you wait, the more difficult it will be to resolve your problem. The University places a strong emphasis on taking care of issues as they arise.

The University of Toronto's petition process requires that students inform their instructors as soon as possible when special circumstances arise.

Students should consult with their registrar's office or program director if more than one course is affected. Failure to do so can jeopardize your chance for academic accommodation.

Be sure you are aware of important University deadlines in terms of filing petitions and appeals.

Be Courteous and Persistent

Everyone appreciates being treated courteously. Getting angry or rude will not resolve your problem. It may only confuse the real issues. Don't give up if you do not immediately get the response you are seeking. Ask to speak to a supervisor, if necessary. Remember to remain civil and avoid blame and personal attacks.

With thanks to the Ombuds Office at Portland State University for their permission to use their webpage "Survival Tips" and to the Ombuds Office at Ryerson University for their permission to use their webpage "Troubleshooting Tips".