Memorandum

To: Teaching Staff at UT Scarborough

From: Rick Halpern, Dean and Vice-Principal Academic

Date: September 2, 2009

Re: Grade Distributions and Marks Review

At UTSC we have guidelines for the distribution of final grades in courses, and an end-of-term marks review process whose purpose is to ensure fair and consistent marking across all our courses.

In the past couple of years we have been engaged in extensive discussion within the Arts & Science divisions of the University (including our counterparts at UTM and the St. George Faculty of Arts and Science) regarding these guidelines and processes. These discussions indicated that to continue meeting these goals of fairness and consistency, the guidelines needed to be updated and the review process made more effective.

Last winter we adopted a new marks review process, which fits well with the requirements of the University’s Grading Practices Policy. Starting in September, we are adopting new Marks Distribution Guidelines. A description of these and of the marks review process can be found at:


and in the Academic Handbook (September 2009):

http://www.utsc.utoronto.ca/~vpdean/info_faculty.html

It is important for all instructors to be aware of these changes as they conduct their courses this year. In particular, please take the following elements of the new Marks Distribution Guidelines into account as you monitor your assessment of student performance over the term.

- We expect that in larger first- or second-year courses, the proportion of A’s could reasonably vary from 15% to 35%, and the proportion of F’s generally should not exceed 10%.
- We expect student marks in upper year courses to shift towards the higher end of the scale (with more A’s and many fewer failures), as students adapt to university-level work and consolidate their interests.
- Marks should be monitored during a course to ensure that assessments are on track to accurately reflect student learning outcomes in the final marks assignment. Instructors should review final marks outside the expected ranges to ensure that the assessments used in the course were both fair and scaled appropriately.
- Instructors will no longer be asked to write a letter explaining why course marks fall outside the stated expectations. Instead, the Chair of each department is expected to ensure that all course marks in the department are fair and consistent with practice in the discipline. It should be emphasized that the Marks Distribution Guidelines are guidelines only, not a requirement for course marks to fit into a pre-defined distribution (which is in fact prohibited by the University’s Grading Practices Policy).
- Nevertheless, the Guidelines do serve to indicate reasonable expectations, given both our academic standards and the high quality of students we admit. If the grade distributions in a course over a number of terms are often outside the expected ranges or consistently near the limits of those ranges, then the course should be reviewed to determine whether changes are needed to the course content, prerequisites, assessments, or student support mechanisms.

Should you have questions about the Guidelines and processes, you can refer them to your Chair, or to John Scherk, the Vice-Dean, Undergraduate.