

Academic Modifications

What is Counselling?

If you're struggling to complete University coursework or meet deadlines as a result of your experience of sexual violence, it is important for you to know that you have options.

According to the U of A's Sexual Violence Policy, *"...Regardless of where or when it took place, any person who discloses and/or makes a complaint of sexual violence can expect to be offered options for academic, recreational, University residence and/or workplace modifications to prevent further unwanted contact with the subject of the disclosure and ameliorate, to the extent possible, the negative impacts of the sexual violence on the person's working, study or student residence environment."*

This means that as someone who has experienced sexual violence, it is within your right to ask for support from your instructors if you feel your studies have been, or are, being impacted by your experience. The experience does not have to be a recent one—it may have happened as far back as childhood—and does not need to have taken place on campus to disrupt your academic life. This means a request for academic modifications is not limited to instances on campus or recent incidents. While it is dependent on your particular course, program, and faculty, there are many options that you can explore with your instructors such as shifting the weight of assignments, deferring due dates, etc.

Below is a list of steps you can take to access the academic modifications you require.

Step 1: Contacting Instructors

As the Sexual Violence Policy applies to everyone at the U of A, you are encouraged to reach out to your instructors to ask for the modifications you need, and they should support you. It is best to think about what kind of modification you would need in order to be successful so that you can suggest some alternatives to your instructor when contacting them. For example, you may request the:

- Deferral of a midterm or exam;
- Shifting of the weight of an exam, midterm, or assignment;
- Extending the due date for an assignment.

According to the University of Alberta Sexual Violence Policy, you do not need any documentation to prove that you require these modifications beyond saying that you've had an experience of

sexual violence, and as such require their support in this way. You are also not required to provide them with any details about your experience. Very often, reaching out to your instructors yourself is the only step that you need to take in order to get the academic modifications you need. Many instructors will even get creative with their suggestions for what might be possible for modifications in their course! You are also able to connect with your Faculty Student Services Office, or your Department Chair/Associate Chair if you would prefer to not speak directly to your instructor.

All of that being said, any academic modifications remain the decision of your instructor—but you are able to appeal their decision through your Faculty or the Office of the Dean of Students if you do not believe your instructor is in line with the Sexual Violence Policy.

Academic Modifications

Step 2: Reaching out to the Assistant Dean—Student Life in the Dean of Students Office

Unfortunately, it is not *always* the case that instructors will provide you with the modifications you require. If you reach out to your instructors/your Department Chair/your Associate Chair, and your instructor does not grant your request for modifications, do not respond to your email, or if you are extremely uncomfortable with disclosing that you have had an experience of sexual violence, your next option is to reach out to the Assistant Dean - Student Life in the Office of the Dean of Students. This individual will be able to meet with you, hear about your academic concerns, brainstorm some possible alternatives, and reach out to your instructors/department/faculty etc. to advocate on your behalf. They are also able to determine

who else in your Faculty may be a good support in this process. The Assistant Dean - Student Life will check in with you to see how much information you are willing to share with a Professor or Faculty, to ensure that you remain in control. The Assistant Dean - Student Life is also able to inform instructors of their responsibilities under the Sexual Violence Policy if they refuse to accommodate you, demand some form of documentation, or inquire about further details regarding your experience. Although these circumstances are not incredibly common, it is important to know you have support if they happen to arise. Please know that you are welcome to bring a representative from the UASAC for support in any meetings with the Assistant Dean.

I Am Concerned About Final Exams/Missed a Final Exam, or am Failing a Class Because of an Experience of Sexual Violence

If you are concerned about being able to write a final exam, it is best to connect with the Assistant Dean - Student Life as early as possible. Unfortunately, Final Exams are not coordinated by instructors, but rather the department—so the Assistant Dean will be able to connect with the relevant individuals to see if there are options for you such as a deferred exam.

That being said, if you missed a final exam, do not worry! In fact, it is often easier for the Assistant Dean to advocate on your behalf when you have missed an exam, rather than when you have written it and received a low grade. As soon as you've missed a final exam, you are welcome to get in touch with the

Assistant Dean and they will work with you to see if there are any options that you can explore.

Failing a class can be an incredibly stressful experience, especially when you're already struggling with an experience of sexual violence. If you are failing a course, or have received a failing grade in a course, there may be options for you. As mentioned previously, often connecting with your instructor during the semester about what is going on for you is the first and only necessary step—instructors are often willing to work with you to determine what might help you to be successful in their course moving forward.

Academic Modifications

I Am Concerned About Final Exams/Missed a Final Exam, or am Failing a Class Because of an Experience of Sexual Violence (continued)

If you have received a failing grade, however, connecting with the Assistant Dean - Student Life will be the best option for you. They will be able to connect with the relevant faculty and department,

and potentially get you a backdated withdrawal in the course. It is important to know that this can be difficult and is not guaranteed—but the Assistant Dean will do their best to advocate on your behalf.

I'm Being Required to Withdraw from the University of Alberta

If a student's average obtained in any review period on a minimum *12 falls below a 1.7, the student will be assigned unsatisfactory standing and will normally be required to withdraw (RTW). If this has happened for you, there are options for you moving forward!

Your first RTW may be appealed. If you have received a RTW, you can connect with either the Assistant Dean - Student Life or the Office of Student Ombuds, who will be able to explain the appeal process and support you during that process as your advocate. This process generally involves communicating with the Associate Dean of your faculty about the situation and how your experience of sexual violence has negatively impacted your academics. The RTW letter you receive should include information on how to appeal and the appeal deadline.

Unfortunately, if you receive a second RTW this is no longer up for appeal and you will need to withdraw from the University of Alberta. That being said, you are able to be readmitted to your program by:

- taking *18 of transferable credit with a GPA of at least 2.7 or *24 of transferable credit with a minimum GPA of 2.0 at another post-secondary institution or at the University of Alberta;
- By remaining out of the University for at least one calendar year following the RTW, and documenting that academic success is now possible for you.

Taking a Leave from Studies

There are times when taking a break from your academics may feel like the best option for you. This is a possibility regardless of what level of study you are at (ie. Undergraduate, Graduate, etc.)

While there are not clear guidelines for Undergraduate students on taking a leave, it is encouraged that you connect with an academic advisor in your Faculty to ensure you are aware of the length of leave you may take without academic penalty or having to re-apply to

Academic Modifications



UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA
SEXUAL ASSAULT CENTRE

2-705 Students' Union Building
780-492-9771 | www.sac.ualberta.ca

Taking a Leave from Studies (continued)

your program. If you require a leave longer than your program allows for without penalty, you are able to explore that as an option under the Sexual Violence Policy with the Assistant Dean - Student Life.

If you are considering taking a leave from your studies, it also may be helpful to consider what you'd like your return to look like after a leave—for example, if you are in a program that is cohort or practicum based, how would this best be managed for you?

Below are some helpful links for Graduate Students and International Students, who have more well defined leave options:

www.ualberta.ca/graduate-studies/about/graduate-program-manual/section-7-administration-of-graduate-programs/7-11-approved-leave-of-absence

www.ualberta.ca/international-student-services/prepare-for-ualberta/immigration-documents/leave-of-absence

**Note: International students also need to be aware of impacts to their study permits.*