



# University of Toronto

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OFFICE OF THE GOVERNING COUNCIL

TO: Executive Committee

SPONSOR: Dr. Alice Dong

CONTACT INFO: Questions may be directed to the Secretary of the Review Committee,  
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DATE: May 10, 2004 for May 17, 2004

AGENDA ITEM: 6

**ITEM IDENTIFICATION:**

Mid-Term Review of the Office of the Ombudsperson: Report

**JURISDICTIONAL INFORMATION:**

The Executive Committee mandated a mid-term review of the Office of the Ombudsperson at its meeting of December 2, 2003 and created a special committee to perform the review.

**PREVIOUS ACTION TAKEN:**

n/a

**HIGHLIGHTS:**

Following the major review of the Office of the Ombudsperson in Spring 2001, one of the recommendations arising out of that process was to conduct a mid-term review to assess the completeness of the implementation of the recommendations. The Special Committee found that the Office's operations are well-run and the incumbent ombudsperson has the respect of both students and administrators. It makes several recommendations to examine alternatives to current operational procedures.

**FINANCIAL AND/OR PLANNING IMPLICATIONS:**

The Special Committee did not recommend any new budgetary allocations; however, it does urge continuing close monitoring of caseloads in the Office.

**RECOMMENDATION:**

It is recommended that the Executive Committee receive the attached report.

**Report of the Special Committee to Conduct a Mid-Term Review  
of the Office of the Ombudsperson**  
May 2004

**Mandate**

The Executive Committee of Governing Council struck a Special Committee to conduct a mid-term review of the Office of the Ombudsperson in line with the recommendations of the 2001 Review of the Office. The mandate of the review was multifold: to examine the degree to which the recommendations of the *Report of the Committee on the Office of the Ombudsperson (April 2001)* had been implemented, and if they had not, to examine the reasons, re-examine the recommendations and, if necessary, to formulate new recommendations; to ensure that the effectiveness of the Office's operations is maintained or increased; and to provide advice to the staff of the Office that would result in improved methods of fulfilling the Office's mandate.

The review committee noted that, as it was conducting a mid-term review, its recommendations were largely monitorial in nature, and chose to pursue a course that would result in 'course corrections' (if they were needed) rather than a major overhaul of operations within the Office.

The Committee reviewed the April 2001 report and examined its recommendations carefully. It then requested submissions from a variety of on-campus sources who regularly had contact with the Office of the Ombudsperson. Lastly, it conducted a face-to-face interview with the incumbent.

**Comments Received**

In general, responses to the Review Committee's request indicated that there was general satisfaction with the fairness and impartiality of the Ombudsperson in handling cases. Administrative staff felt that issues brought forward in exchanges between them and the Office were well-handled and consistent with the mandate of the Office. Student groups were also satisfied, but were concerned that the general level of awareness of the Office of the Ombudsperson was too low.

**Commentary and Conclusions**

*Fulfilment of Recommendations from the April 2001 Review Report*

The Review Committee found that, of the recommendations of the 2001 Review Report, the Ombudsperson had fulfilled most of them. Two of them deserve special attention.

*Advisory Committee Establishment*

Recommendation 2 of the *Review Report* requested the establishment of an Advisory Committee which included, but was not limited to, representatives from the Office of the Vice-President and Provost, the Equity Offices, the Office of Student Affairs, the School of Graduate Studies, the Association of Part-Time Undergraduate Students (APUS), the Students' Administrative Council (SAC) and the Graduate Students' Union (GSU) that would meet at the call of the Ombudsperson.

The incumbent Ombudsperson has chosen to modify this recommendation, instead setting up an *ad hoc* advisory group from which she seeks advice concerning individual cases. The

Ombudsperson explained to the Review Committee that the Advisory Committee structure would compromise the confidentiality of individual cases that ensures the effectiveness of the Office itself. Instead, by enabling her to seek case-related as well as operational advice as necessary from key elements within the University administrative structure, the intent, though not the substance, of the recommendation has been fulfilled. In addition, the sort of Advisory Committee described was suitable for much smaller Universities that tended to have their Ombudspersons funded through the student governments in a way that did not occur at the University of Toronto.

The Review Committee endorses these actions, and recommends the *ad hoc* advisory group be the *modus operandi* of the Office.

#### *Capacity Planning Model*

The second recommendation that has not been fulfilled is one that requested that the University develop and implement a capacity planning model consistent with University practice to identify the extent to which resources may need to be adjusted in response to changing demand for services. Such a model, the report argued, could be used in evaluating not only requests for increased services for the Office, but for related services. The model would take into account the increased population of the University community as well as the appropriate presence on the Mississauga and Scarborough campuses.

The Review Committee felt that this recommendation is impractical to achieve; there is no standard number of cases that would go to the Ombudsperson. The number of actual cases could fluctuate given numerous variables, whether they are the conduct of individual members of the administration, the determination of those seeking remedies, the nature of potential complaints, or any number of other variables. Furthermore, there was no way to determine how many cases should proceed to the Ombudsperson but do not because of lack of knowledge of the Office's services. Nonetheless, the Review Committee did note that for the current level of caseload within the Office, resources were adequate. If the number of cases were to grow on a sustained basis, the Review Committee would advise that budgetary processes take those data strongly into account when determining the resources dedicated to the Ombudsperson function.

#### *Other Recommendations*

The Review Committee noted that the Ombudsperson felt that the level of support provided to her office – one half-time support staff member – was insufficient for proper planning and functioning of Office operations. Furthermore, the Review Committee noted that the Ombudsperson maintained a regular presence at the two suburban campuses on a weekly basis (consisting of one half-day at each per week), while using her St. George campus office as her base and, when she was in the St. George campus office, permitted 'drop-in' clients, which the incumbent estimated at 9% of her caseload. The Committee felt that there were options to explore for the more effective use of the Office, such as the following:

- Disallowing all drop-in clients, because no case the Ombudsperson dealt with was an emergent case, and require all clients to submit an intake form before any meeting could be scheduled.

- Enhance the web-based intake form so that it could be sent directly to the Office from the website.
- Eliminate the regularly-scheduled visits to the east and west campuses and, instead, visit them only when required by appointment. The website would indicate that the Ombudsperson is available and willing to provide this service.
  
- Continue to examine the Office's communications strategy, and maintain a careful balance between informing potential clients of the Office's services rather than 'advertising' for them.

### **Conclusions**

In general, the University continues to be well-served by the Office of the Ombudsperson; it handles cases professionally, and the incumbent holds the respect of both student organizations and the administrators who deal with her most regularly. While there is potential for some minor changes in the operations of the Office, the Review Committee believes that the system established is working well. The Review Committee would like to thank the incumbent for her assistance in this review, as well as the assistance of the student groups and administrators who submitted responses to the Committee's request for assistance.

Respectfully submitted,

Alice Dong  
Claude Davis

*From the report of the December 2, 2003 Executive Committee meeting*

### **Mid-Term Review of the Office of the Ombudsperson**

#### *Background*

In February 2001, the Governing Council undertook a review of the Office of the Ombudsperson, coincidental to the end of the Ombudsperson's term of office, as required by the Terms of Reference for the Office of the Ombudsperson. One of the recommendations of the review was that the Office should be reviewed in the middle of the incumbent's term. The Governing Council is now responsible for undertaking a mid-term review of the Office in a manner determined by the Executive Committee.

#### *Mandate*

The Mid-Term Review of the Office of the Ombudsperson is asked to:

1. Determine the degree to which the recommendations of the *Report of the Committee on the Office of the Ombudsperson (April 2001)* have been implemented, and, if they have not, to examine the reasons, re-examine the recommendations and, if necessary, formulate new recommendations.
2. Ensure that the effectiveness of the Office's operations is maintained or increased.
3. Provide advice to the staff of the Office that would result in improved methods of fulfilling the Office's mandate.

The intent of the mid-term review is to fulfill a monitorial role on behalf of Governing Council.

In fulfilling the review's mandate, the Reviewers will consult appropriately within the University community and beyond.

The reviewers will submit their report by March 31, 2004.

#### **Membership**

Two lay members of Governing Council, Dr. Claude Davis and Dr. Alice Dong, will constitute the review committee. Secretariat support will be provided by Mr. Andrew Drummond, Special Projects Officer in the Office of the Governing Council.