



University of Toronto TORONTO ONTARIO M5S 1A1

OFFICE OF THE GOVERNING COUNCIL

TO: Members of the Governing Council

SPONSOR: Frank Iacobucci, Interim President

DATE: December 8, 2004 for December 16, 2004

AGENDA ITEM: 5

ITEM IDENTIFICATION:

Ombudsperson: Report and Administrative Response, 2003-04.

JURISDICTIONAL INFORMATION:

The Terms of Reference for the Office of the University Ombudsperson state that the Ombudsperson shall make an annual report to the University community through the Governing Council.

BACKGROUND:

In 1994, the Executive Committee decided that Council should receive the Report and the administration's response simultaneously so that members of the Governing Council could comment on particular issues with full knowledge of both the Ombudsperson's and the administration's response.

PREVIOUS ACTION TAKEN:

The Governing Council received the Report of the University Ombudsperson, 2002-03, with the Administrative Response, at its meeting of October 2003.

HIGHLIGHTS:

Structure and Format of the Ombudsperson's Annual Report:

With regard to the structure and format of the Annual Report for 2003-2004, the Ombudsperson has commented, in terms of historical context, that it is largely the result of the following factors:

- a continuation of her predecessors' approaches in terms of some tables and graphs in order to facilitate year-to-year statistical comparisons; and

Structure and Format of the Ombudsperson's Annual Report: (cont'd)

- a response to the two previous end-of-term Governing Council Review Committees' Reports. In 1998, the review committee emphasized both in terms of its recommendations and the resulting amendments to the Office's Terms of Reference that the Ombudsperson was to act as the final avenue of recourse for complainants on campus. It was the 1998 Review Committee's concern that the Office's resources had been overly focused on more general information and referral queries that other university resources were better-placed to address. The Governing Council Review Committee of 2001, however, concluded that in addition to being the final avenue of recourse, it was an effective use of the Office's resources to assist in early resolution of individuals' concerns and queries, whenever possible, and the Office's Terms of Reference were once again amended accordingly.

Given that more than three years has now passed since these fairly significant amendments to the Office's Terms of Reference, role and mandate (together with the Ombudsperson's communication to the campus community of those changes), the Ombudsperson anticipates that subsequent Annual Reports may be modified to have less focus on statistical reporting.

Systemic/Substantive Issues:

The Ombudsperson has noted that no major, new trends emerged from her caseload during the past year warranting the special attention of the Governing Council at this time. In terms of her Annual Report's six recommendations, she indicates that she has reviewed her annual reports and the administrative responses over the past several years in order to bring forward any remaining, general issues of concern. The administration's response confirms a shared view on these issues, and outlines, in the Ombudsperson's view, reasonable protocols and timelines for addressing all six recommendations.

Case Management Issues:

The Ombudsperson notes in her report that her Office's caseload increased in both size and complexity. She indicates that this is a result of the Office's successful communication to the community (through materials such as academic calendars, posters, bookmarks and the Ombudsperson's website) that while the Office remains responsive to visitors who are unsure about where else to go with their concerns, and to effective, early resolution of their issues, the Ombudsperson's major focus is on those situations in which her Office is not the initial avenue of recourse. She also notes that many individuals have approached the Office having been referred by previous visitors and/or by members of the university administration who are familiar with the role and mandate of the Ombudsperson. However, the Ombudsperson also acknowledges that, given limited resources, it remains an important, ongoing challenge to maintain awareness amongst community members across all three campuses of the existence, role and function of the Office of the University Ombudsperson.

FINANCIAL AND/OR PLANNING IMPLICATIONS:

n/a

RECOMMENDATION:

For information only.