

Interim Report of the University Ombudsperson 5 January 2009

The terms of reference for the University Ombudsperson provide for an interim report to the Executive Committee. It was agreed that this time the report would be for the January meeting of the Committee, rather than early in the fall as before. I will report briefly on activities from July through December 2008, and on some matters of policy and procedure that are emerging as priorities for the Office during the remainder of the academic year. My discussions with appropriate administrators relating to these various systemic issues are in some cases at a very early stage, and all are ongoing.

At the end of September, the Office moved to its new quarters on the first floor of the McMurrich Building at 12 Queen's Park Crescent. The move entailed a great deal of work for the staff, particularly for Linda Collins, who stick-handled the arrangements with the various offices and suppliers involved. The new facility is very satisfactory and will be even more so when renovations to the common areas on the floor have been completed. The move was managed with minimal disruption of services to complainants, and the case load for the first six months of the academic year was quite comparable to the same period in 2007.

The Executive Committee accepted my recommendation to shorten the retention period for records from seven to three years; the files have now been purged to comply with the new policy.

We have continued efforts to educate the University community about the services provided by the Office. Garvin De Four and I met with the entire staff of the Registrars' Offices at each of UTM and UTSC. Further workshops with other key groups are being arranged. We took booths at orientation events for both undergraduate and graduate students held at the St. George campus, and at Blue Zoo held early in the fall term at UTM. I also participated in an orientation for new women graduate students sponsored by the Status of Women Office. Approximately 9,000 information sheets and redesigned book marks have been distributed to students through student organizations and university offices, or directly to those attending orientation events.

New issues continue to arise in relation to the *Code of Behaviour on Academic Matters*. At least one professional division that issues a certificate of completion in a continuing education program is confused about the applicability of the *Code* to these students. Also, questions have arisen about jurisdiction under the *Code* in relation to alleged offences committed by individuals who are not members of the teaching staff as defined in the policy, but who teach or perform teaching-related functions.

The definition of teaching staff also impacts the application of other policies to various persons who teach in certain capacities, a case in point being the *Copyright Policy*, which assigns rights to material developed in connection with teaching (and research) to members of the teaching staff. In response to complaints, one division that hires

instructors who are not defined as teaching staff is currently reviewing the terms of its standard contract as they relate to intellectual property rights.

A complaint concerning the lack of an elevator to serve two floors of a building that was renovated in 2006 to house academic units has caused me to look into how priorities are established and funding provided for building access projects.

I understand that the Vice-President Human Resources and Equity is working towards the preparation of guidelines on complaints regarding prohibited discrimination and discriminatory harassment. My office would find such guidelines very useful in advising complainants whose issues include concerns of this kind.

In addition, I continue to monitor the status of other systemic issues identified in my Annual Report for 2007-08, such as progress in the provision of supports for graduate students with disabilities and their supervisors, the development of a *Policy on Off-Campus Activities*, practices concerning the issuing of diplomas, and policies governing the assessment and refund of incidental fees. We also have ongoing concerns relating to the potential for conflict of interest on the part of graduate supervisors to distort the direction they give to students in their research; when this occurs, the academic consequences for students can be extremely serious.

It is likely that these various matters, along with others that may emerge during the next six months, will be addressed in my annual report for 2008-09. At that time, informed by my talks with the relevant offices, I will be in a position to report on outcomes, and/or to make recommendations for consideration by the Administration.

Respectfully submitted,

Joan Foley