



# UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO OMBUDSPERSON

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(416) 946-3485 [www.ombudsperson.utoronto.ca](http://www.ombudsperson.utoronto.ca)

# Background

The Office of the Ombudsperson has been offering confidential advice and assistance to students, faculty and staff on all three U of T campuses since **1975**.

The Ombudsperson must be a retired academic, with significant governance and/or administrative experience.



# Scope

- I report only to Governing Council, in the form of an Annual Report. It and the Administrative Response to the Report are posted online in the Fall of every year.
- Our funding comes from Governing Council.
- Our community includes >80,000 students and >17,000 faculty and staff on 3 campuses.



# How We Work

- The Assistant Ombudsperson handles the front-line work, from initial request for assistance to resolution.
- The Ombudsperson's role is to identify systemic and policy issues, and to consult on complex cases.



# Aims and Authority

- Aims: to ensure procedural fairness, just & reasonable outcomes.
- No authority to over-rule decisions. We consider complaints, make informal enquiries, carry out formal reviews, draw conclusions and recommend changes to decisions and to University policies and procedures.



## Authority (cont'd)

- Our influence comes from moral suasion, and rational argument, not through the exercise of formal power. However it would be naïve to conclude we have no power.
- Thus our informal relationships with administrators are key.
- We can only make recommendations, but our recommendations are taken seriously.



## We can help by...

- analyzing the problem and identifying options
- explaining relevant policies, procedures
- providing neutral confidential advice
- expediting matters that have been unduly delayed
- investigating problems when regular channels have been exhausted
- assisting the parties in resolving disputes



## We are unable to...

- deal with matters outside the jurisdiction of Governing Council (i.e. landlord/tenant dispute)
- make decisions on behalf of the University
- make/ over-rule UofT policies/procedures (we may comment and recommend change)
- intervene if complaint can be pursued as a grievance under a collective agreement





## We are unable to...

- intervene if the regular processes provided by the University have not been used
- accept notice on behalf of any party, including the University
- consider complaints that are before the courts of law
- give legal advice



# Confidentiality

- Matters are dealt with in strict confidence and not discussed with anyone without complainant's written approval.
- Contacting our office is protected information.
- Confidentiality subject to disclosure only as required by law, or where we believe there is imminent danger to health or safety.



# Principles

- Impartial - Advocating for fairness rather than for any person or party
- Unlimited access to University files and offices.
- Independent - of all administrative offices and accountable only to Governing Council to which Ombudsperson submits annual reports.
- Accessibility – contacts are by phone, email, or web. Meetings are held in person, by phone or via Skype.



# Types of Problems Brought to Us

Problem	# of Cases 2014-15
Academic Issues	105
Employment/Workplace Issue	29
Fees/Financial Aid	28
Graduate Supervision	21
Administrative/Bureaucracy Issue	19
Academic Integrity Issue	19
Harassment/Discrimination	13



# The Complainants

Category	# in 2014-15
Student	227
Undergraduate	133
Graduate	94
Administrative Staff	31
Faculty	8
Other	48

