

UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO
University Ombudsperson



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**Administrative Response to the Report of the
 University Ombudsperson: 2000-2001
 (October 12, 2001)**

Overview:

The Ombudsperson's 2000-2001 Annual Report continues the trend of recent reports illustrating clear progress on many issues that were of past concern. This is evident from the greatly reduced number of recommendations.

The overall report is thorough and transparent in the way that it presents the caseload and ongoing operations of the office. Among the highlights of these sections of the report are:

- The Ombudsperson's observations on the recommendations of the Committee on the Office of the Ombudsperson. The Administration is assisting the Ombudsperson in realizing these recommendations. Most significantly, in response to the Committee's recommendation, the position of Ombudsperson has been restored to full-time.
- The growing importance of the Ombudsperson's website as a means of communication with the University community, and the growing emphasis on accessibility and awareness of the Office on the Scarborough and Mississauga campuses. The Administration sees these as important points, especially with regard to the suburban campuses as they enter an era of rapid enrolment growth.

RESPONSE TO RECOMMENDATIONS

The following administrative responses to specific recommendations from the Ombudsperson are made in accordance with the direction made by Governing Council that the University Administration provide an annual response to the Ombudsperson's Report.

3. (a) Graduate Students' Supervision

Response to Recommendation 1: The Higher Education Data Sharing Graduate Student Survey (HEDS) was administered as a pilot project to 1,400 graduate students in 11 graduate departments during the 2000-2001 academic year. The Dean of SGS reports that the primary analysis of the results, though extremely interesting, was not usable because of the low response rate (13.3%). In an effort to obtain more reliable results, SGS have revised the survey and will be using a different methodology in administering it to graduate programs during the coming academic year. SGS hope to have reliable results available this spring. When these results are available, the Dean of SGS will undertake to distribute them to the appropriate offices, including the Ombudsperson's. In addition, graduate students are to be surveyed as part of the Vice-Provost, Student's annual surveys of the student body, the results of which are reported to the Committee on Academic Policy & Programs.

Response to Recommendation 2: The Provost's office continues to work with Divisions in reviewing and updating Divisional Guidelines for the Assessment of Teaching Effectiveness in Promotion and Tenure Decisions. Graduate student input is one important aspect in the determination of teaching effectiveness. Divisions are expected to have processes in place for eliciting and considering such input.

3. (b) Timeliness: Petitions, Appeals and Code of Behaviour on Academic Matters

Response to Recommendation 3: Timeliness continues to be an issue of concern. As the Ombudsperson notes, the appointment of the new Judicial Affairs Officer should serve to decrease delays at the Tribunal level. Workshops for staff at the Departmental and Divisional levels are being planned on the administration

of the Codes and the academic appeals process. Procedural guidelines will be considered in order to help ensure consistent processes across the Divisions. As noted in last year's administrative response, circumstances of individual cases vary considerably, and thus uniform timeliness guidelines are not easily developed. The Provost's Office will work with the Judicial Affairs Officer, Discipline Counsel and the Divisions to assess how such guidelines might be structured.

In Conclusion

The Administration would like to thank the Ombudsperson, Mary Ward, on her very high standard of work and her concern for bettering our institutional standards to the benefit of all members of our community.

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SUMMARY

Introduction (pages 1 - 3): Our central mandate at the Office of the University Ombudsperson is to seek early resolution of individual issues which are brought to our attention by students, staff or faculty members of the University, and to call attention to patterns of problems that might be developing across various divisions. The recent report of the Governing Council's Committee on the Office of the University Ombudsperson highlighted the importance of this mandate with its series of recommendations, and its restoration of the position of Ombudsperson to full-time status.

Committee on the Office of the University Ombudsperson Report (pages 3 - 6): The Committee recommended that the Office increase its profile at the Mississauga and Scarborough campuses where significant enrollment expansion is anticipated over the next few years. The Committee emphasized the importance of the Office's early involvement in complex issues with its recommendations related to the Office's provision of information about process, and to the Office's facilitation and expedition of that process toward conflict resolution. The Committee anticipates that the Office's effectiveness and efficiency can also be increased through special interim reports to the Governing Council by the Ombudsperson, whenever necessary, and through the participation of a consulting committee to the Ombudsperson on operational issues, whenever appropriate.

Caseload and Case Management (pages 6 - 11): The Office of the Ombudsperson handled 358 complaints and inquiries this year, representing a 7% increase over last year, and a 26% increase over the previous year. The number of undergraduate and graduate students who approached the Office for assistance was similar this year compared to last year. The number of administrative and academic staff members increased. We are introducing numerous changes to our information collection and database management to more effectively identify potential gaps in service and any deficiencies in policy/procedural implementation across the campuses, divisions and departments. We anticipate that our new reporting format will better demonstrate the demand for, and performance of, this Office.

Action Taken (pages 11 - 15): A summary of some of the "expedited" and "resolved" cases highlights the Office's success in facilitating conflict resolution through early involvement and consultation with responsive faculty and staff.

Recommendations:

- (1) That the School of Graduate Studies provide an update to the information included in last year's Administrative Response regarding its progress with the administration of the HEDS and 'exit' surveys and the gathering and analysis of important new information about students' graduate experience at the University of Toronto.
- (2) That for the purposes of the Administrative Response this year, the Provost's Office include an update to the information it provided last year regarding the matter of students' evaluation of graduate student teaching and supervision within the context of proposed changes to the "Guidelines for the Assessment of Teaching Effectiveness in Promotion and Tenure Decisions."
- (3): That the Provost's Office provide an update to the information included in last year's Administrative Response about its proposed divisional review, analysis of administrative resources, and consideration of feasibility of timeliness guidelines with respect to the administration of the Code of Behaviour on Academic Matters and the petition process.

Additional Areas of Concern (pages 18 - 20):

- (4) International students: This Report highlights the importance of the University's communication and referral network about academic and social support resources available on campus.

- (5) **Assessment in Clinical and Field Settings:** This Report highlights the importance of clear communication by departments and programs of their practicum requirements, rules and regulations including appeal mechanisms to students and to clinical and field instructors.
- (6) **Admissions Appeals Process:** This Report highlights the importance of clear communication by departments and programs to prospective students about admissions requirements including experiential and academic equivalencies.
- (7) **Admission Restricted to Part-time Student Status:** The Office will give further consideration to this issue through ongoing consultation with the administration.

Conclusion (pages 20 - 21): This Report highlights a few areas of University policy and procedure where improvement is needed, and others where improvement is occurring. The good will, information and advice that so many individuals from the University community continue to provide is vital to the accomplishment of the Office's mandate.

U n o f f i c i a l C o p y