

**FOR ENDORSEMENT AND
FORWARDING TO THE
GOVERNING COUNCIL**

PUBLIC

CLOSED SESSION

TO: Executive Committee

SPONSOR: Meric Gertler, President
CONTACT INFO: president@utoronto.ca

PRESENTER: Trevor Young, Vice-President and Provost
CONTACT INFO: provost@utoronto.ca

DATE: October 21 for October 28, 2023

AGENDA ITEM: 3(a.)

ITEM IDENTIFICATION:

2023-24 Annual Report of the Office of the Ombudsperson, and the Administrative Response

JURISDICTIONAL INFORMATION:

Section 5.1 of the *Terms of Reference of the Office of the Ombudsperson* state that the Ombudsperson shall make a written annual report to the Governing Council, and through it to the University community, as well as such other special reports as may be required from time to time by the Governing Council.

GOVERNANCE PATH:

- 1. Executive Committee [For endorsement and forwarding to Governing Council] (October 28, 2024)**
2. Governing Council [For Information] (November 7, 2024)

PREVIOUS ACTION TAKEN:

In 1994, the Executive Committee decided that Council should receive the *Report* and the *Administrative Response* simultaneously so that members of the Governing Council could comment on particular issues with full knowledge of both documents.

HIGHLIGHTS:

The *Report* and the Administrative Response are enclosed.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS:

There are no implications for the University's operating budget.

RECOMMENDATION:

Be It Resolved

THAT the *Report of the University Ombudsperson for the period July 1, 2023 to June 30, 2024* and *Administrative Response* be endorsed and placed on the agenda of the Governing Council meeting of November 7, 2024.

DOCUMENTATION PROVIDED:

2023-24 Annual Report of the Office of the Ombudsperson
Administrative Response to the Office of the Ombudsperson 2023-24 Annual Report



**UNIVERSITY
OF TORONTO
OMBUDSPERSON**

**A N N U A L
R E P O R T**

2023-24

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Executive Summary	3
Message from the Ombudsperson	4
Who We Are, Who We Help, and How We Help	6
Reflections and Observations About Cases and Trends	8
Case Stories.....	11
Request for Updates on Previous Recommendations.....	13
Review of the Office of the Ombudsperson 2023-24.....	14
Updates on Initiatives of the Office of the Ombudsperson	15
The Office of the Ombudsperson Plans for 2024-25	16
Acknowledgments	17
APPENDIX A: Who Sought Our Assistance, Why Did They Contact Us, & How We Helped Them	18
Who Sought Our Assistance?	18
Why Did They Contact Us?.....	22
How Did We Help?.....	29

Executive Summary

The University of Toronto Ombudsperson is appointed by the Governing Council and is accountable to the Governing Council. The Office of the Ombudsperson (the Office) operates under [Terms of Reference](#)¹ approved by the Governing Council and reports annually to the Governing Council and the University community. Per the *Terms of Reference*, the role of the Office is 1) to provide an independent, impartial, and confidential service to assist members of the University who have been unable to resolve their concerns about their treatment by University decision makers; and 2) to alert the University authorities to issues of broader significance (systemic issues) that merit review. In this latter role, the Ombudsperson functions as a catalyst for improvements in University and divisional policies, processes, and procedures.

This is my third annual report as Ombudsperson since my appointment effective July 1, 2021. Previous Annual Reports of the Ombudsperson and Administrative Responses from 1999-2022 can be found on the [website](#) of the Office of the Ombudsperson.²

Between July 1, 2023 and June 30, 2024, the Office received 320 new requests for assistance (RFAs). The concerns shared with the Office were similar to those in past years; they covered a wide range of issues and came from all campuses and estates.

Recommendations

I am pleased to report that no new systemic issues were identified and therefore I have no new recommendations for this year.

I do, however, request that the Administration provide an update on the status of the recommendations from my previous two Annual Reports which relate to ongoing concerns.

¹ <https://governingcouncil.utoronto.ca/secretariat/policies/ombudsperson-terms-reference-office-january-21-2010>

² <https://ombudsperson.utoronto.ca/annual-reports-and-administrative-responses>

Message from the Ombudsperson



The Office of the University Ombudsperson was established in 1975 during a time of rapid growth on all three campuses, the demographic transformation of the student body, faculty, and staff, and ongoing innovation in policies and programs. The idea was to ensure that the rights of students, faculty, and staff were protected, that policies and procedures were respected, and that members of the University had access to an impartial source of information about opportunities, policies and processes, and members' rights. Recognizing that all units of the University were committed to good policies and fairness in decision-making, in keeping with its aspirations to excellence in research, teaching,

and the provision of opportunity, the Office of the Ombudsperson was not to duplicate other forms of communication and assistance, but was designed as a confidential, impartial appeal of last resort, a place to turn when all other avenues were deemed unsatisfactory or unsuccessful. The Office was not to be a determining body - it can only make recommendations - but its *terms of reference* entitled it to virtually unlimited access to decision-makers and information and encouraged it to examine any matter that it felt affected the well-being, integrity, and effectiveness of the university. Its recommendations were expected to be based upon the best possible information.

During the intervening 50 years, the University has continued to grow and change, in the context of dramatic changes in society and the political economy of higher education in Ontario and Canada. While it has always remained a small compact unit, the Office of the Ombudsperson has steadily, innovatively, served as a beacon for members' rights, a source of information about university services, and an advocate for constant improvement, equity, and procedural fairness in policy and decision-making.

It has been an honour for me to serve as University Ombudsperson during the last three years and play a role in ensuring that the University's commitment to equity and procedural fairness is realized. I am grateful for the review committee's confidence and Governing Council's extension of my term for one additional year. Of course, the realization of sound policy and procedural fairness in decision-making requires the work of many people across the entire tri-campus university, and in countless daily decisions. I respect and admire the careful, thoughtful commitment to fairness of administrators, educators, researchers, service personnel, and others across the three campuses. That is one of the great strengths of the University of Toronto.

What constitutes 'procedural fairness' has changed significantly during the last 50 years, as the rights revolution — the growing awareness of human rights and the urgent imperative to protect and realize them — continues to extend into more and more areas of public life; research, tribunal and court decisions have elaborated on meanings; and members of equity deserving groups have successfully fought for more inclusive procedures. The Association of Canadian College and University Ombudspersons (ACCUO), of which the University of Toronto Ombudsperson Office is a member, defines '[fairness](#)' in terms of three broad requirements — procedural (how was it decided?), relational (how was I treated?), and substantive (what was decided?)³. In the highly porous environment of the University of Toronto, where the student body and faculty and staff cohorts are continually changing, it is a constant challenge to ensure and strengthen a culture of procedural fairness. But that's what my colleagues and I in the Office of the Ombudsperson are determined to do.

³ ACCUO, 'What is Fairness', in *Fairness is Everyone's Concern* (May 2015), <https://accuo.ca/wp-content/uploads/2017/07/FairnessGuide2015.pdf> (accuo.ca) p.6

Who We Are, Who We Help, and How We Help

In October of 1975, the Governing Council approved the establishment of the Office of the Ombudsperson (the Office), including its [Terms of Reference](#), as an independent and impartial office to assist the University in protecting the rights of students, faculty, and staff; in fulfilling its obligations to students, faculty, and staff; and in achieving its mission to be an internationally leading public teaching and research university. The Office is independent of the University administration, and accountable solely to the Governing Council. The Office has a two-part mandate:

1. To consider complaints about the University from individual members which they have been unable to resolve through established processes, or have encountered unreasonable delays in established processes, or are unable to follow the usual processes.
2. To draw to the attention of the appropriate University authorities any deficiencies in the University's policies or procedures. Specifically, these include:
 - a. any situations where the rights and responsibilities of members of the University community are not adequately defined and publicized; and any situations where information on proper procedures for problem-resolution is not readily understandable and readily available;
 - b. any gaps and inadequacies in existing University policies and procedures that affect the ability of individuals to function as members of the University community or that might jeopardize their human rights and civil liberties;
 - c. any situations in which the problems of members of the University community are not addressed with reasonable promptness; and
 - d. any deficiencies in procedures used to reach decisions or in criteria and rules on which the decisions are based.

In exercising this mandate, the Office strives to help community members resolve their concerns at as early a stage as possible. Should there be concerns about policies and procedures, the Office will raise those concerns informally with the administration with the goal of addressing the concerns early and eliminating the potential need for a formal recommendation.

The Office is comprised of the Ombudsperson, an Ombuds Officer on each of the three campuses, and one support staff member. Its services are confidential and impartial – so that in considering complaints, the Office acts neither as an advocate for the individual members of the University nor as a defender of the University Administration. It seeks procedural fairness and reasonable outcomes.

Who We Help

The [Terms of Reference](#) also stipulate who can access the services of the Ombudsperson. We serve any member of the University whose relationship with the University is under the jurisdiction of the Governing Council and where resolution of the member's complaint is within the authority of the Governing Council – this includes students, members of the teaching staff, members of the administrative staff, and postdoctoral fellows. This year, for the first time, following consultation with the Office of University Counsel regarding an interpretation of our [Terms of Reference](#), we have included learners in the School of Continuing Studies as being within our jurisdiction.

Former students and former members of the teaching and administrative staff fall under the Office's jurisdiction, but only in respect to matters arising out of and crystallizing during their former student or employment status.

The services of the Ombudsperson are not available to applicants for admission to the University, alumni/ae or former staff with current complaints about the University, family members, or members of the public. Despite these exclusions, the Office is committed to responding to all requests for assistance (RFAs). Those who contact the Office receive an automated response confirming receipt of their request for assistance, and typically receive a more detailed response within twenty-four hours.

How We Help

Per the [Terms of Reference](#), the Office does not usually intervene in complaints unless existing University processes have been exhausted and then only with the written consent of the complainant. As such, the Office acts as a resource to assist community members in finding the appropriate process or office to address their concerns. We seek to respond to all complainants in an equitable, accessible, and trauma-informed way.

The Office provides more than one type of assistance to the individuals who contact us. In line with our [Terms of Reference](#), individuals who seek our assistance are often referred to seek resolution and follow processes at local and informal levels first. As such we provide policy and process information and refer many complainants to campus support resources or to the appropriate staff person.

Other individuals require more in-depth assistance. These cases require the detailed examination of policies and practices, multiple points of contact with the individual, the review and analysis of large quantities of documentation and communications, and often several meetings or consultations with University offices. Coaching, and helping the individual to develop a plan to resolve their own conflict, continues to be a part of support offered by the Office, commonly involving a reframing of the issue/s, finding language and questions for productive conversations, and what to do if matters escalated.

This approach helps to build the individual's capacity through gaining some insight on the conflict and developing tools to address it.

We advise individuals who are not under our jurisdiction where they might get the assistance they are seeking. In the case of parents of students, we encourage the students to contact us directly.

Reflections and Observations About Cases and Trends

Overview

Note: the following commentary refers to the concerns that were raised with the Office in 2023-24. Detailed statistics can be found in [Appendix A](#).

We received 320 requests for assistance in 2023-24; 268 cases from individuals within our jurisdiction and 52 who were not (in 2022-23, we received 266 cases within jurisdiction and 84 not). We received more complaints this year from undergraduate students, administrative staff, and postdoctoral fellows and fewer complaints from teaching staff and graduate students. The overall numbers were slightly lower than last year (i.e., 350 requests in 2022-23).

Two hundred and sixty-eight cases as a proportion of the University community is very small, and we continue to wonder if this is an appropriate number for a tri-campus university the size of U of T. While this remains a difficult question to answer, we strive to broaden and enhance awareness of our Office, instill trust in our services, and ensure that the University offers robust processes for addressing conflicts and concerns.

The types of complaints we received were similar to those of past years, with one concerning addition: a spike in concerns about personal safety and discrimination following the October 7 Hamas attack on Israel, the Israeli response, the resulting war, and the ensuing protests, including the encampment at King's College Circle.

Communications

I am pleased to report that cases related to communication were down considerably at 53 from the 82 cases last year. Similar to last year, the majority (34) related to reports of administrative or teaching staff not responding in a timely manner (or at all by the time we received the request for assistance). The rest (13) involved reports of incorrect information being provided or were general complaints. We intervened in several of these cases after reviewing the student's attempts to contact a staff or faculty member and assessing that the delay was not reasonable. In other instances, we encouraged the student to be patient and wait a reasonable time for a response.

Twenty-five individuals (mainly students, but also staff and members of the public) contacted us in the days immediately after the October 7 Hamas Israel conflict and we referred them to the appropriate resources. Unfortunately, we learned that several offices tasked with providing support to University community members were overwhelmed with the volume of inquiries generated by a crisis of this magnitude. Complainants relayed to us that they were not getting timely responses to their concerns about their safety and did not feel supported by the University. While we recognized and appreciated that the volume of communications after serious events can be overwhelming, and that prompt comprehensive responses might not always be possible, we thought this was something that needed to be addressed. We contacted the relevant offices to discuss the complaints we had received, and to discuss options to enhance support and response time. We can report that our colleagues in these services have undertaken measures to improve response times and we had far fewer complaints of this nature during the winter term. We were also encouraged by the news that in January 2024, Dr. Shari Golberg joined the Division of People Strategy, Equity & Culture in the new role of Assistant Director, Faith & Anti-Racism in the Institutional Equity Office. This role was developed in response to Recommendation #2 of the [Report of the University of Toronto Antisemitism Working Group⁴](#). We welcome Dr. Golberg and her work with key partners across the tri-campus to support the University's commitment to foster an inclusive environment for faith-based communities at U of T.

Graduate Students

I am pleased to report that for a second year in a row, the number of requests for assistance from graduate students fell again to 61 from 78 in 2022-23 and 98 in 2021-22. This decline in cases hopefully reflects an improvement in the culture of graduate studies at U of T, and enhancements to graduate student supports developed by the School of Graduate Studies. The RFAs we did receive represented a range of perennial concerns including difficulty navigating termination and challenges with supervisors.

Incivility/Bullying

Many incivility concerns (14) were related to the Israel-Hamas war. Note that we also assigned most of these cases other categories: discrimination/equity (20), freedom of speech (17), safety (17) and, where appropriate, communications-delay (3), which accounts for the higher than usual numbers in those issue categories. If these 14 incivility cases are considered an anomaly in response to a specific situation and excluded from the case count, we actually received fewer incivility cases this year (46) compared with the 56 in 2022-23 and 48 in 2021-22.

Other forms of uncivil conduct (i.e., rudeness/bullying/harassment) remained a concern across all constituencies. We referred most of these complainants to the appropriate established process for

⁴ <https://people.utoronto.ca/wp-content/uploads/2021/12/Report-of-the-Anti-Semitism-Working-Group.pdf>

reporting their concerns. In one egregious and sensitive situation, reported by multiple individuals, we helped facilitate the initiation of a formal complaint and requested that the administration update us about the progress of the investigation.

Many of the teaching and administrative staff who contacted us had complaints related to uncivil conduct in the workplace (12, similar to last year) and we referred most to the appropriate processes. I again recognize and commend the Administration for the expanded information now available to staff on the website for [workplace complaints](#),⁵ which clarifies the process to initiate a complaint easily and directly to the office of Workplace Investigations (WPI). We hope this might encourage staff to come forward earlier so that issues can be dealt with before they escalate.

Once again, this year, students raised concerns about uncivil conduct by teaching and administrative staff. We continue to find it challenging to advise them in the ongoing absence of a robust and transparent process to review formal complaints about incivility/bullying from students directed at faculty and staff. I have requested an update on this issue, as it was raised in the 2022-23 Ombudsperson Annual Report, under recommendation #2.

For the previous two years, we had noticed what seemed to be an increase in complaints about student services; this year we decided to track it more closely. In 2023-24, seventy-two students came to us because they believe they have been treated unfairly or inappropriately by a student service. Based on what the student shared with us, we referred 30 students to the appropriate process to address their concern. Of the 25 cases which we explored in more detail, we concluded that the complaint was substantiated in 14 cases and unsubstantiated in 11 cases. We were unable to fully assess the remaining cases because the complainant did not respond to our request for more information. We are not currently in a position to bring forward specific systemic concerns regarding any student service providers because so many of the complaints were either unsupported by evidence or were unjustified. That said, given the number of general complaints we will continue to track this information internally to determine if there are any noteworthy patterns for the administration to consider.

Finally, we were pleased to see that the University has appointed Professor Randy Boyagoda Provostial Advisor on Civil Discourse. As reported in the [U of T News](#),⁶ in this new position, Professor Boyagoda will, 'establish a working group that will lead community consultations and develop a plan for tri-campus events, resources and other initiatives for students, faculty and librarians to engage in and promote productive and respectful dialogue on all kinds of topics. The group will also learn from other institutions around the world that are pursuing their own efforts with respect to civil discourse'.

⁵ <https://people.utoronto.ca/employees/workplace-complaints/>

⁶ <https://www.utoronto.ca/news/randy-boyagoda-appointed-u-t-s-provostial-adviser-civil-discourse>

Case Stories

This is a new section in the Report, designed to highlight examples where our involvement extended beyond referrals or advice. We thought readers would appreciate seeing instances where we took further action based on the information shared by complainants. With their permission, we reviewed these situations to gain a comprehensive understanding from all perspectives. In some cases, after consulting with the relevant administrative office, we identified fairness issues and collaborated to resolve them. In other cases, although the community member felt they were treated unfairly, we found that the University had adhered to established processes. These latter situations can be the most challenging, as individuals may not always agree with our findings. Here are a few examples of both types of cases.

Flexible Collaboration Leads to Timely Graduation

Situation: A student was on track to graduate but missed the deadline for confirming degree requirements due to a missing course grade. Despite efforts by the student and student services on both campuses, the instructor, based at a different campus, did not respond to requests to grade the work submitted late per a petition decision and post the final grade. With convocation just days away, some administrative offices were slow to respond, further complicating the situation.

What we did: We contacted the relevant student support services on both campuses to gather information, and then engaged with the appropriate administrative offices to address the issue. By working collaboratively, we ensured the grade was released and expedited the approval process for a late addition to the graduate list under the special circumstances.

Outcome: The grade was posted the day before the convocation ceremony, allowing the student to graduate as planned.

Why this matters: Timely and coordinated support can significantly impact a student's educational journey and future opportunities. By ensuring prompt resolution of issues, we help students achieve their academic goals without unnecessary delays, reinforcing the University's commitment to student success and fairness.

Coaching on Effective Communication Leads to Positive Academic Experience

Situation: A student reported that a course instructor delayed providing a syllabus and starting the course. They also expressed concerns about the instructor's behavior towards students, which led the student to drop the course.

What we did: We informed the student of the *University Assessment and Grading Practices Policy* and recommended they contact the undergraduate chair of their department. When follow-up revealed no response from the undergraduate chair and a generic reply from the Registrar's Office, we reached out to the undergraduate chair directly and coached the student on how to seek more specialized support.

Outcome: The oversight was acknowledged, and the student's concerns were addressed in a meeting with the undergraduate chair.

Why this matters: Prompt and effective communication is essential for a positive academic experience. By ensuring students' concerns are heard and addressed, we help maintain a supportive and fair learning environment.

Transparency Leads to Trust

Situation: A student reported being charged for damages in their residence, which they maintained were caused by another resident. They felt they were mistreated when they attempted to contest the charge.

What we did: We asked the student to provide all correspondence related to the matter and, with their permission, contacted the relevant office to gather more information.

Outcome: We determined that there was no evidence of unfairness in the charge. However, we recommended that the office clarify information on their website to prevent future misunderstandings.

Why this matters: Ensuring transparency and clear communication about policies helps build trust and understanding between students and administration. By addressing and clarifying concerns promptly, we support a fair and supportive living environment for residence students.

Request for Updates on Previous Recommendations

This year, I am pleased to report that I have no new recommendations. Our Office is tracking any potential issues that could become systemic in nature by observing and monitoring them over time for longer-term data.

I am also pleased to report that over the past year, we have seen progress on some of the concerns that led to our past recommendations. However, some issues remain unresolved, or we are unclear as to the progress that has been made. Therefore, instead of presenting new recommendations, I will revisit my past recommendations on ongoing issues and request an update from the administration on progress made in implementing them.

Recommendations from the [2021-22 Ombudsperson Annual Report](#)

1. Communications
2. Academic Integrity and Misconduct

Recommendations from the [2022-23 Ombudsperson Annual Report](#)

1. Communications
2. Strengthening the Culture of Civility
3. Academic Integrity

Policy Currency

Last year, in keeping with our mandate related to identifying possible gaps in policies and procedures, we expressed a concern about the expectations for currency of [University policy and related procedures](#).⁷ Whenever we direct individuals to appropriate University policies for their situations, knowing that some of them are decades old and contain out of date information, we are reminded of this.

I was encouraged that the Administrative Response to the 2022-23 Ombudsperson Annual Report acknowledged a need to review existing policies and that the University Secretariat, which administers the policies library, was undertaking the development of a Policy Management Framework for the University, efforts which I heartily endorse and support. I note that some policies have been updated and/or reviewed this year, but I have received no updates on the status of the development of the Framework or sign of its implementation. I would appreciate an update on this initiative and look forward to seeing some progress made on a plan for updating or retiring some of the University's older policies.

⁷ <https://governingcouncil.utoronto.ca/media/31350>, p. 5.

Review of the Office of the Ombudsperson 2023-24

2023-24 was the final year of my first three-year term as Ombudsperson. Per the Office's [Terms of Reference](#), in the fall of 2023, the Executive Committee of the Governing Council commissioned a review of the Office that was presented to the Governing Council through the Executive Committee in June 2024. I welcomed this review and the opportunity to speak with the Chair and members of the Review Committee. I thank them for their interest in the Office and commitment to the University.

I was pleased to read that the Review Committee received no complaints about the case work conducted by the Office. Since case work constitutes the bulk of our activity, and drives all our systemic inquiries and interventions, this was a reassuring statement. I was also pleased to read that 'a tri-campus presence had been established in the Office's operating model and that its continuation remained important.' As a former principal of the University of Toronto Scarborough who had pressed hard for an Ombuds office on all three campuses, this conclusion was most satisfying.

I appreciate the Review Committee's recommendations, respect the spirit in which they were made, and commit to considering how we might implement them. Recommendation #1 'realizing more effective and strategic communications', is very much in keeping with our current work with U of T Communications (UTC) aimed at building community awareness about our existence and our role.

Recommendation # 2 urged the Office to 'focus on the Office's mandate when identifying issues in the University's policies and procedures' and reported that 'the Committee heard a desire from the Administration for promoting collaboration, respect for mandates, and a shift towards data-driven, aspirational recommendations from the Office.' I fully agree and have thought all along that that is what we are doing. Most of our recommendations are case driven, stemming from our analysis and responses to the Requests for Assistance (RFAs). Other inquiries or interventions stem from Section 4 of the Ombudsperson's [Terms of Reference](#) that direct us to consider and make the University authorities aware of 'possible deficiencies in the University's policies or procedures.' In every case, we make a special effort to communicate informally our concerns about 'possible deficiencies' to the responsible University authorities as soon as possible. To be sure, some such communications, suggestions, and recommendations are not always welcomed. (They are not always welcomed by complainants, either.) While we make every attempt to initiate conversations in a collaborative manner, sometimes this informal approach is unsuccessful; it should not be surprising that there may be differences of opinions or occasionally a reluctance to accept feedback or engage in discussion. We do not see this as a lack of collaboration but an intrinsic part of being impartial and independent and following our mandate. Should the Administration have any concerns about the way in which we draw issues to their attention, we trust that they would speak directly to us so that we could work collaboratively in finding a solution.

Updates on Initiatives of the Office of the Ombudsperson

In this section, I will reflect on the other activities of the Office during the past year.

Outreach

Over the past year, the Office continued to meet with stakeholders around the University to encourage them to publicize the Office in their communications, promote procedural fairness in decision-making, and canvass their views on how the services of the Office can be strengthened. As part of our efforts to raise awareness about the Office, this year we met with the School of Continuing Studies and Accessibility Services. Meetings were also held with several new administrators and campus leaders, across all three campuses, to advise them of the Ombudsperson services and to clarify our role.

We also sought the advice and guidance of the University of Toronto Communications office in developing a more robust and effective communications plan for the Office. We were making progress until, regrettably, other significant events at the University required their focus. We have now resumed these discussions.

We also continue to use social media for the purpose of outreach and to spread awareness of our services.

Professional Development

The Ombudsperson and members of the staff took several professional development courses (e.g., Trauma Informed Care, EDI related workshops), engaged in conferences (e.g., ACCUO and FCO (Forum of Canadian Ombudsman)), and met with colleagues from other universities and ombuds offices.

Planning for our 50th Anniversary

2025 will be the 50th anniversary of the establishment of the Office. We are planning a commemorative publication and a celebratory event.

Technology

Recommendation #8 of the [*Report of the Review of the Office of the Ombudsperson 2020-21*](#)⁸ had recommended that ‘the Office undertake a review of the ways in which technology could enhance operations and service delivery.’ I am pleased to report on an initiative that supports this recommendation.

Case Management System (CMS)

After years of exploring various case management systems (CMS), our Office investigated third-party options to improve case tracking, analysis, and secure storage. We concluded that these systems were

⁸ https://governingcouncil.utoronto.ca/system/files/agenda-items/20210513_GC_12.pdf

more complex and costly than needed, and our team successfully developed an in-house solution using MS365 tools. Launched in January of 2024, the new system has enhanced the user experience, streamlined data entry, and expedited our reporting process. Our team is also in the process of testing a cost-effective email management system to further improve our document storage and record-keeping.

The Office of the Ombudsperson Plans for 2024-25

Outreach

The Office will continue to meet with stakeholders on all three campuses to encourage them to publicize the Office in their communications, promote procedural fairness in decision-making, and canvass their views on how the services of the Office can be strengthened. In the coming year, I intend to further expand our outreach to other portfolios, including other Vice-Provostial portfolios, Workplace Investigations, the Institutional Equity Office and its partner offices, Accessibility Services on the UTM and UTSC campuses, the Registrars offices who are often the first point of contact for students facing challenges, the student unions with whom I met in 2021-22, and other student-facing groups. To facilitate this outreach, we are working on developing targeted strategic presentations aimed at different audiences.

Ombudsperson Website

We will continue to work on updating and enhancing content with a focus on providing clear, helpful, and accessible information. We continue to welcome suggestions for further enhancements. We plan to consult with the AODA Office regarding best practices and compliance with AODA. We also are planning to develop new content on the meaning and importance of procedural fairness in decision making, together with resources aimed at supporting administrative and academic units who would like to confirm that their processes are fair. Updates to resources and information are ongoing, and will no doubt increase as our communications strategy is realized.

We encourage and welcome any suggestions from the community about information they would like to see in the annual report. If you have suggestions, please email us at: ombuds.person@utoronto.ca.

Ombudsperson Community Engagement

Representatives of the Office will be attending the Forum of Canadian Ombudsman/ Association of Canadian College and University Ombudspersons (FCO-ACCUO) conference in Fall 2024. In addition, Emma Thacker (Ombuds Officer) continues with her role with the Journal of the International Ombuds Association (JIOA) - <https://www.ombudsassociation.org/JIOA-Editorial-Board>. We are also increasing engagement with ACCUO during a period of renewal and new initiatives.

Acknowledgments

Finally, I would like to thank Ombuds Officers Cindy Ferencz-Hammond (UTM), Kristi Gourlay (UTSG), Emma Thacker (UTSC), and Secretary Stephanie Goldner for their outstanding dedication and contributions.

I would also like to acknowledge and thank the many members of the administrative and teaching staff, whose responses to our inquiries were invariably prompt and thorough, and who were supportive of our mandate to assist the University in protecting the rights of members of the community and ensuring procedural fairness and just and reasonable outcomes.

Finally, a sincere thank-you to those who brought their concerns to our Office. While we couldn't always resolve your concerns, we hope that the advice we offered was helpful.

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Bruce Kidd". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Bruce Kidd, O.C., OLY, PhD., LL.D.
Ombudsperson, University of Toronto
September 4, 2024

APPENDIX A: Who Sought Our Assistance, Why Did They Contact Us, & How We Helped Them

The following section describes the various constituent groups who sought our assistance in 2023-24, why they contacted us, and how we helped them.

No Jurisdiction (NJ) refers to those groups which are outside the Office’s jurisdiction according to its [Terms of Reference](#). Even though the Office cannot be directly involved in RFAs from individuals outside its jurisdiction, we assist by providing general advice and referrals to appropriate University resources. We continued the practice we started last year and have included the issues of these groups in our overall issues count, rather than presenting them in a separate table, to give a more holistic overview of why individuals contact the office.

Note that this year, we considered all types of learners as within our jurisdiction.

This year, we did not include in our case count two groups:

- twelve individuals who copied us on correspondence directed at other offices, and with whom we had no interaction beyond acknowledging that they had copied us.
- fifteen Requests for Assistance (RFA) that originated in the 2022-23 reporting year and which we continued to work on in 2023-24, as these were included in the new case statistics for last year.

Who Sought Our Assistance?

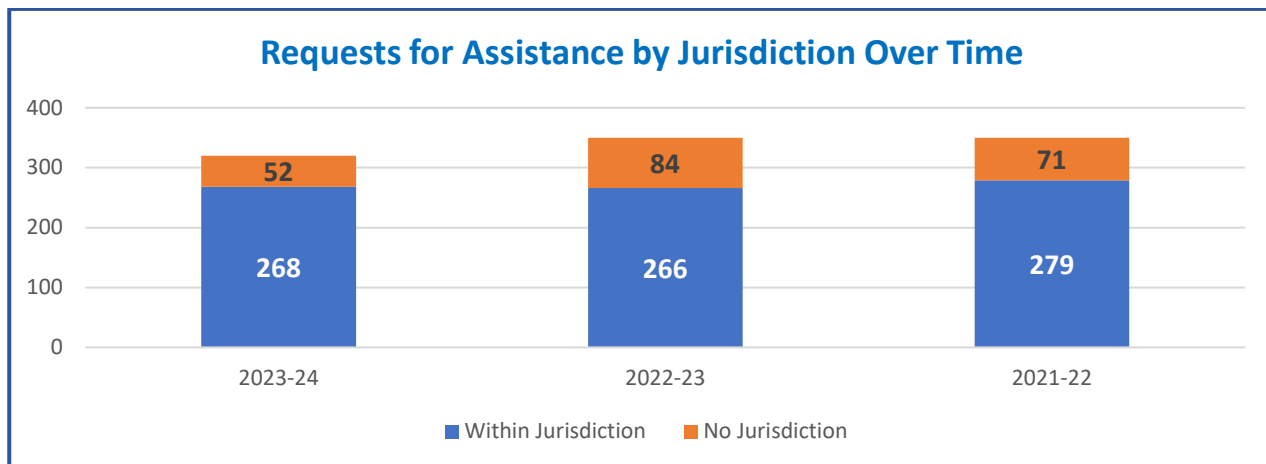


Figure 1 – Requests for Assistance Received Over Time by Jurisdiction

In 2023-24, the Office was contacted by 320 individuals who requested assistance. This is a decrease from the 350 cases received in both 2022-23 and 2021-22. Most of this difference can be attributed to the decrease in NJ RFAs in 2023-24 to 52 from the 84 in 2022-23 and 71 in 2021-22 (note that the number from previous years included 12 and one continuing education learners whom we had understood were not under our jurisdiction).

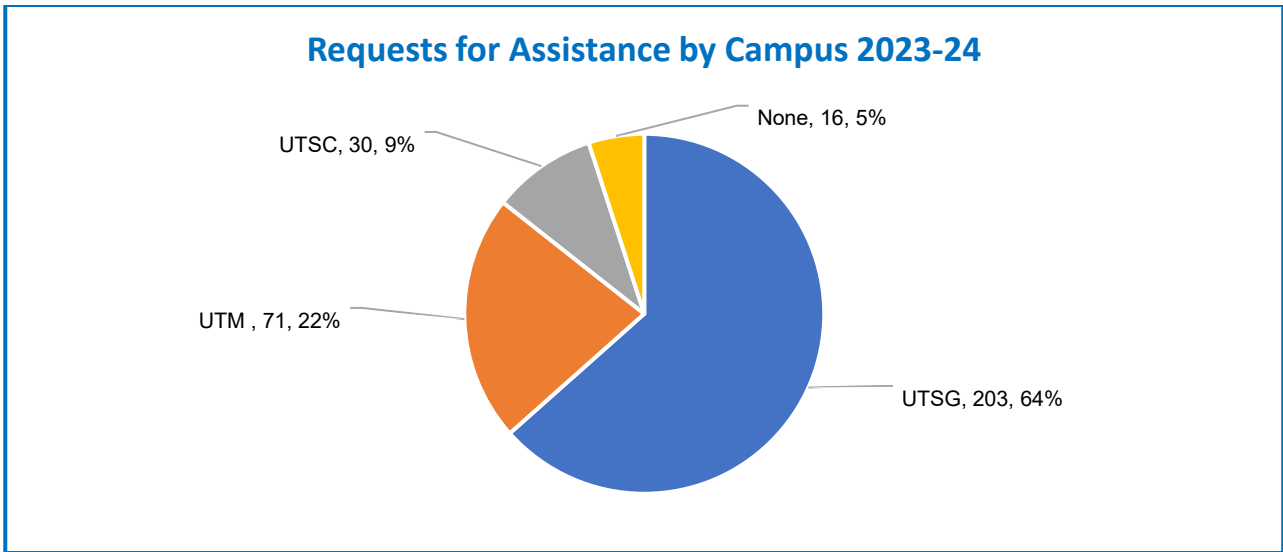


Figure 2 – Requests for Assistance by Campus 2023-24

Consistent with previous years, the majority of RFAs involved constituents from the St. George Campus (203) of which 174 were within jurisdiction and 29 were not. There were 71 RFAs (68=J and three=NJ) from the University of Toronto Mississauga (UTM), 31 (26=J and four=NJ) from the University of Toronto Scarborough (UTSC), and 16 RFAs for which the complainant’s campus was either unknown or irrelevant to their concern.

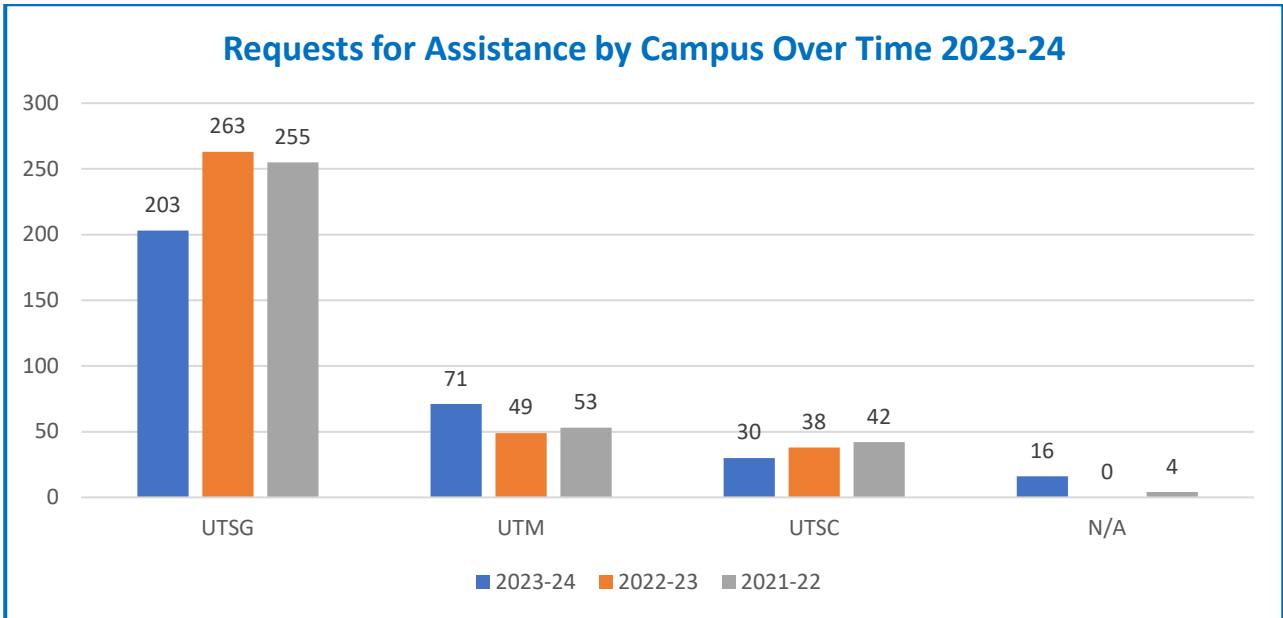


Figure 3 – Requests for Assistance by Campus Over Time

Requests for Assistance by Constituency 2023-24

The following section describes the various constituent groups who sought our assistance in 2023-24.

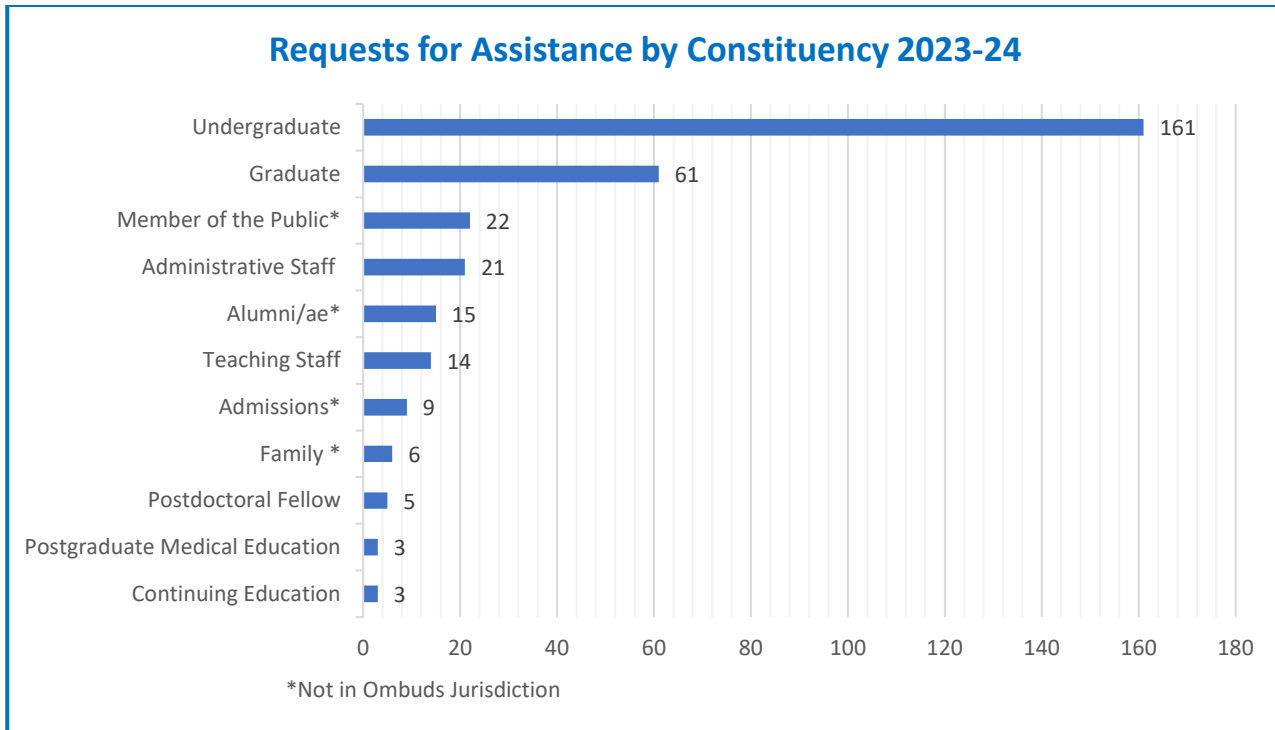


Figure 4 – Requests for Assistance by Constituency 2023-24

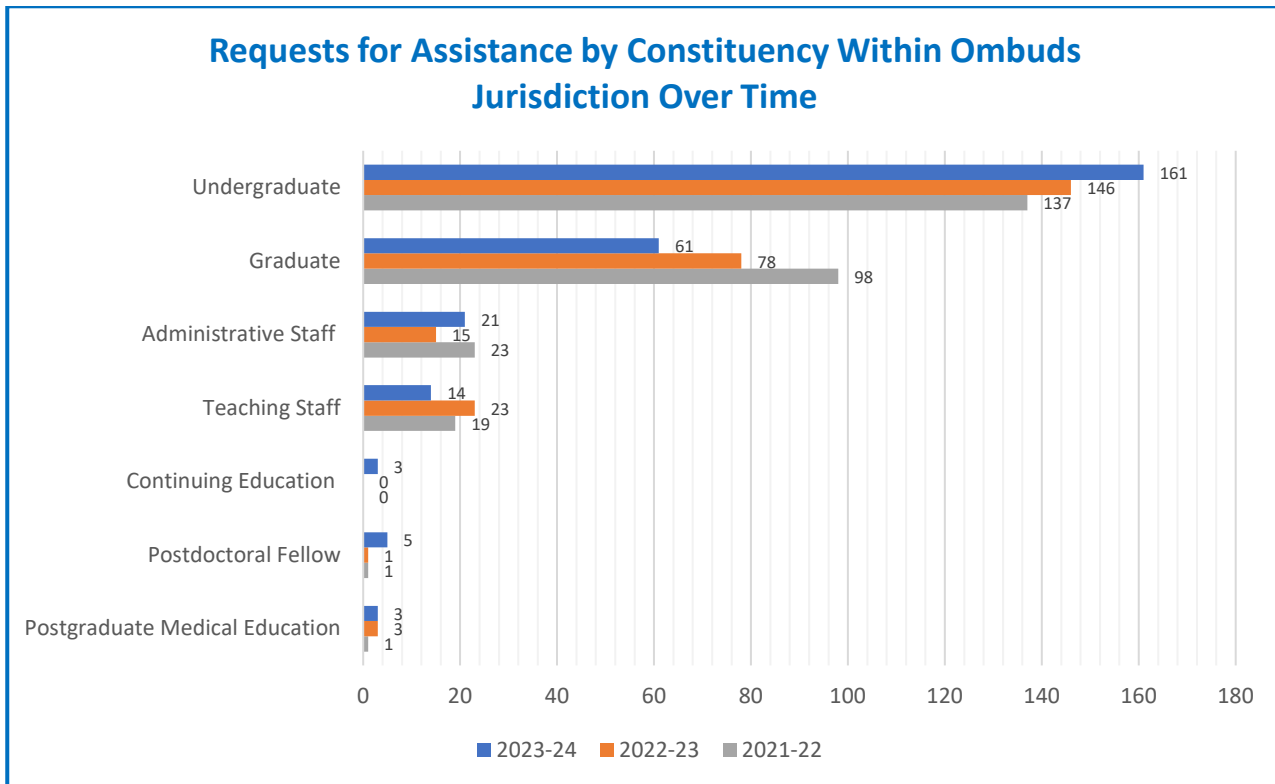


Figure 5 – Requests for Assistance by Constituents Within Ombuds Jurisdiction Over Time

The breakdown of new RFAs by constituency in 2023-24 differed in some ways from last year. Cases involving graduate students, teaching staff, and continuing education learners were all fewer in number, while we saw increases in RFAs from administrative staff, postdoctoral fellows, postgraduate medical education (PGME) learners, and undergraduates. Note that as of this year, all learners are considered within our jurisdiction; the three continuing education cases were all related to the School of Continuing Studies. The continuing education numbers for past years reflect the fact that we did not consider the 12 learners in 2022-23 and one learner in 2021-22 to be under our jurisdiction at that time.

Undergraduate Students:

One hundred and sixty-one undergraduates contacted us this year, 15 more than in 2022-23 and 30 more than in 2021-22. Of those 161 RFAs, 82 were from UTSG (2022-23 = 87, 2021-22 = 82); 59 were from UTM (2022-23 = 38, 2021-22 = 32), and 20 from UTSC (2022-23 = 21, 2021-22 = 23).

Graduate Students:

Sixty-one graduate students sought our assistance (notably fewer than the 78 in 2022-23 and 98 in 2021-22). Of the graduate students, 56 identified as being located within a UTSG graduate unit, three from UTM, and two from UTSC. Three PGME learners contacted us in 2023-24 (vs three and one for the last two years).

Of those who indicated their School of Graduate Studies (SGS) division, ten were in Division 1 (Humanities), 21 were in Division II (Social Sciences), 15 were in Division III (Physical Sciences), and 15 were in Division IV (Life Sciences).

Administrative Staff:

Twenty-one administrative staff contacted the Office for assistance in 2023-24, an increase from the 15 RFAs in 2022-23 (2021-22 = 23). Sixteen were from UTSG (2022-23 = 9, 2021-22 = 17), two were from UTM (2022-23 = 2, 2021-22 = 4), and three were from UTSC (2022-23 = 4, 2021-22 = 2).

Teaching Staff:

Fourteen members of the teaching staff contacted the Office in 2023-24, a decrease from the 23 in 2022-23 and 19 in 2021-22: eleven were from UTSG (2022-23 = 20, 2021-22 = 15), two were from UTM (2022-23 = 1, 2021-22 = 1), and one was from UTSC (2022-23 = 2, 2021-22 = 3).

We also received five cases from postdoctoral fellows compared to one case in each of the previous two years.

Constituents Outside Ombuds Jurisdiction Over Time

In 2023-24, we received 52 RFA's from individuals outside the Office's jurisdiction, considerably fewer than we received in 2022-23 and 2021-22. If the 12 continuing education cases in 2022-23 and one in 2021-22 are excluded to be consistent with current practice, we received 72 NJ cases in 2022-23 and 70 cases in 2021-22. Of the 52 NJ cases received in 2023-24, 21 were from individuals with no affiliation to the University, 15 were from alumni/ae with concerns about the University that arose after they had left the University, nine were from applicants to the University, six were from family members of undergraduates, and one was from a former staff member. We received no cases this year from students or staff at the federated Colleges/Universities with issues related to their College/University which are outside Ombuds jurisdiction. Even though the Office cannot be directly involved in RFAs from individuals outside its jurisdiction, we assist by providing general advice and referrals to appropriate University resources.

Why Did They Contact Us?

Individuals contact the Office for a wide range of reasons. Often, they are looking for confidential advice or information on what they should do in a situation, other times they have a complaint about how they have been treated by the University and would like us to intervene. The statistics include concerns raised by all constituencies in recognition that concerns about the University are equally relevant regardless of who raises them even if we are not able to assist directly.

RFAs were categorized in two steps: first into broad categories, which were reduced from four to two this year (academic and non-academic) for simplicity, and then into specific sub-categories. New sub-categories have been introduced to better track emerging issues.

This year, in addition to tracking the subject of the complainant's concern, we also tracked the primary reason individuals contacted us. Twenty-five individuals contacted us because they wanted information. The remaining 295 individuals believed that the University had mistreated them in some way: 160 believed that there had been an error in a process or that another community member was mistreating them; 99 believed that they had been treated unfairly (this also applied to most of the previous category); and 36 reported a delay in a process.

Note that the statistics presented in this section refer to concerns as reported by individuals who contacted us, and not what we may have concluded after reviewing the case.

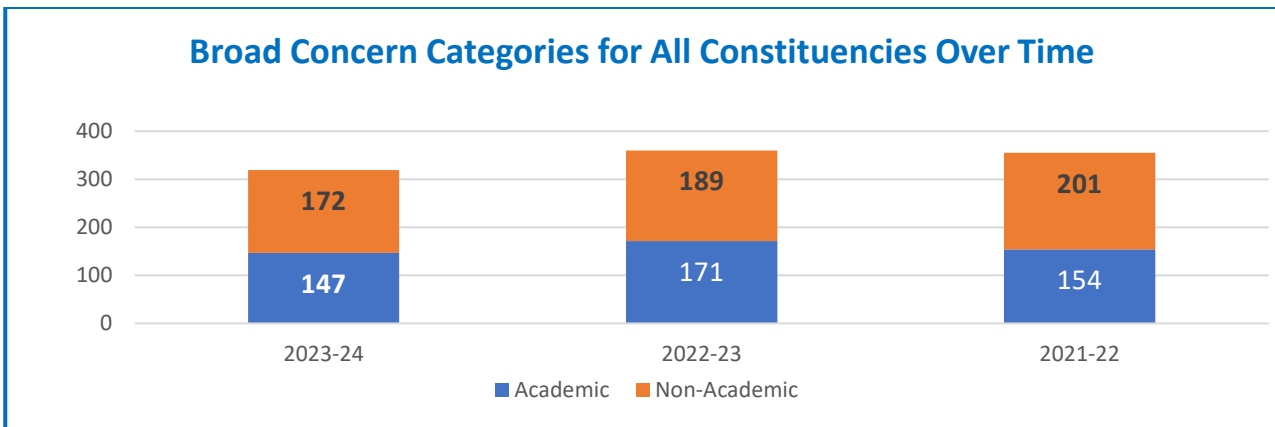


Figure 6 – Broad Concern Categories for All Constituencies Over Time

Like past years, when considering concerns across all constituencies, there were more non-academic concerns than academic concerns.⁹

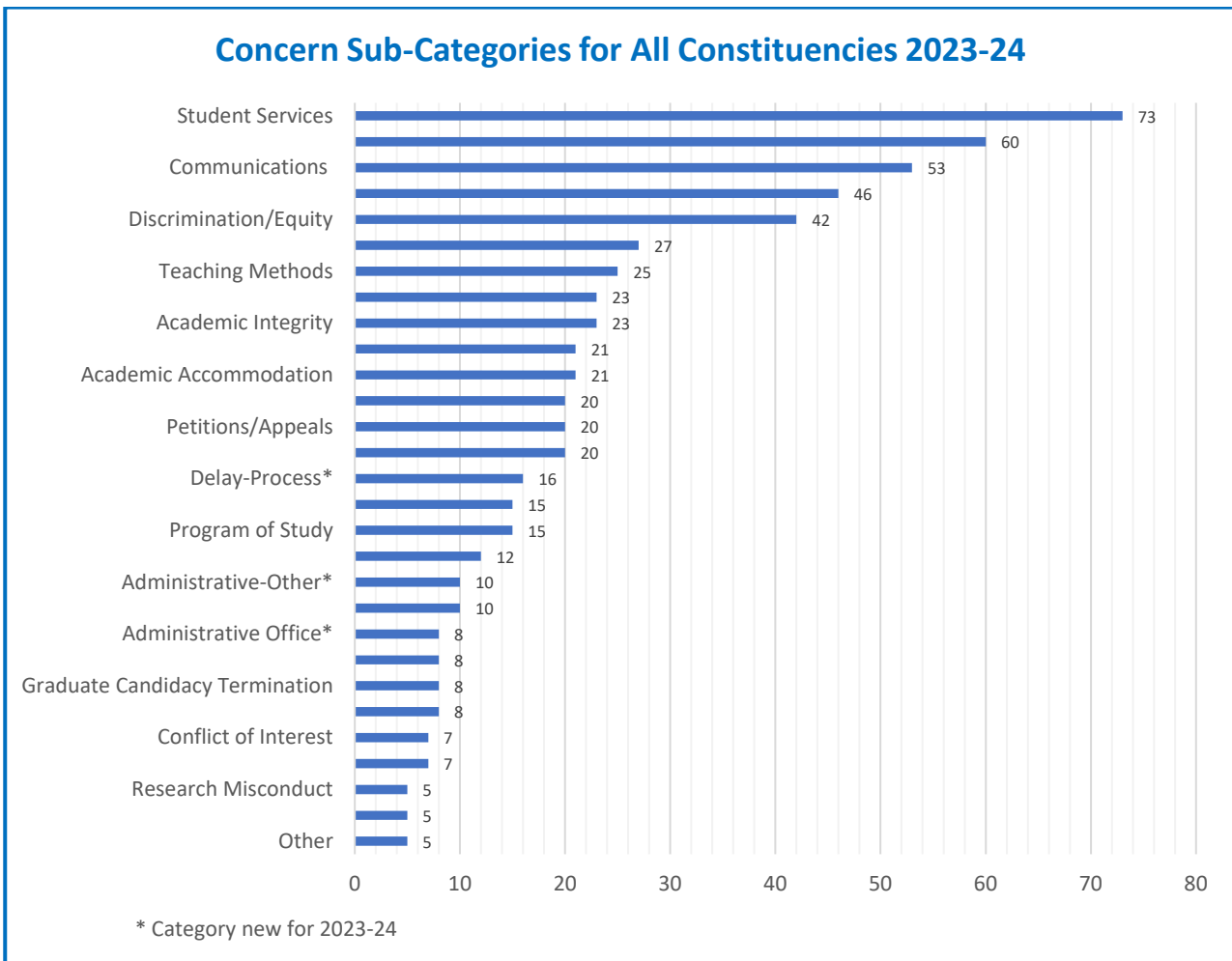


Figure 7 – Concern Sub-Categories for All Constituencies 2023-24

⁹ Note that for the comparative statistics, in past years, we sometimes assigned more than one “main” category to a complaint if appropriate with the result that those numbers will be somewhat higher than this year, but proportions remain roughly the same.

We will comment on the concerns associated with a specific constituency in the section for that group. Of the concerns that were raised by multiple constituencies, there was an increase in concerns about incivility, discrimination/equity, safety, freedom of speech, and campus safety; many of these were related to the 25 cases we received related to the Israel-Hamas war and the encampment of the field on King’s College Circle (incivility 13, discrimination/equity 21, freedom of speech 17, safety 17). We received 53 complaints related to communications, considerably fewer than the 82 in 2022-23 when we first started tracking it. This year, 34 of the communications complaints were related to delays or lack of response, 13 related to misinformation, and six were general.

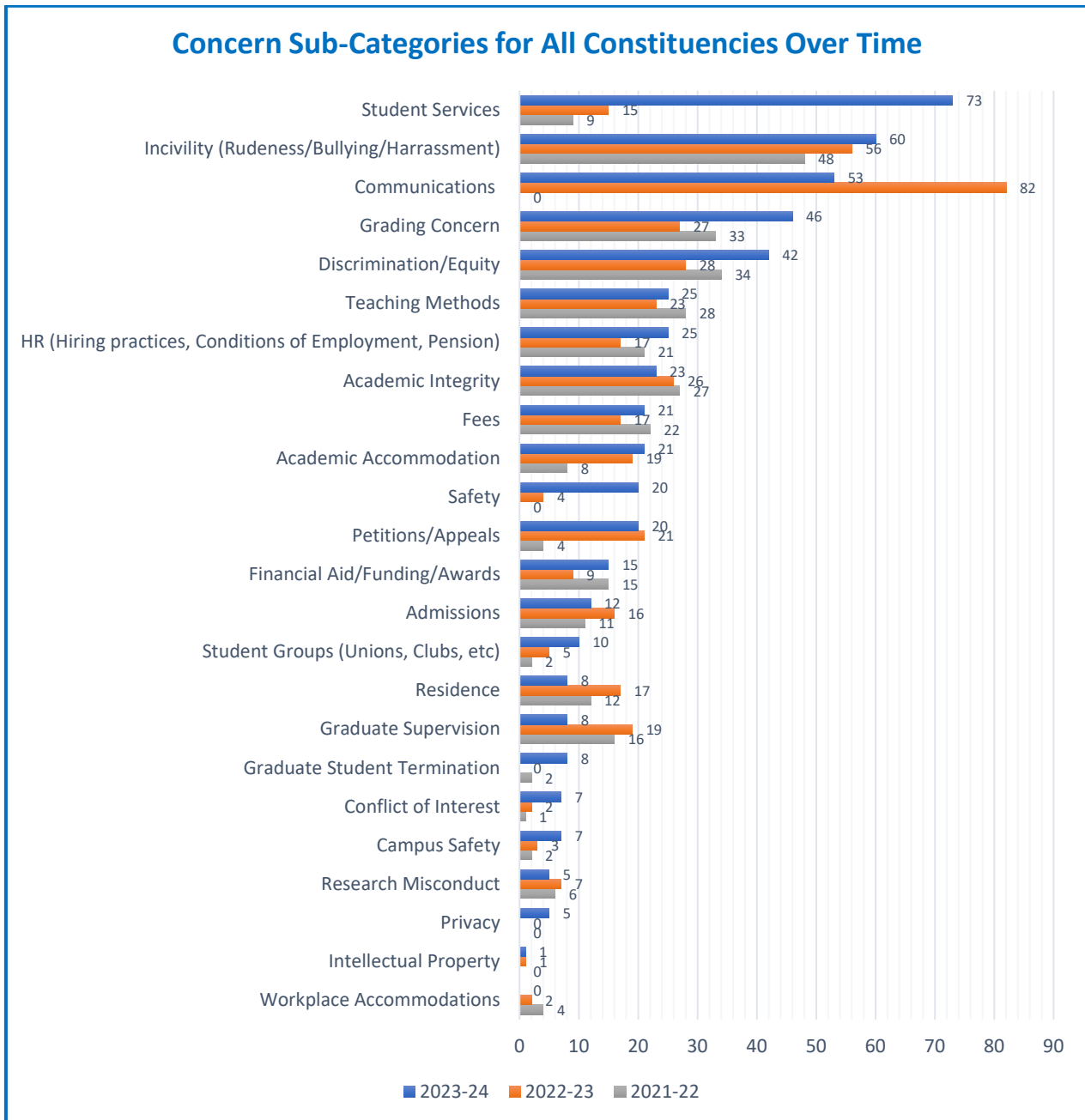


Figure 8 – Concern Sub-Categories for All Constituencies Over Time

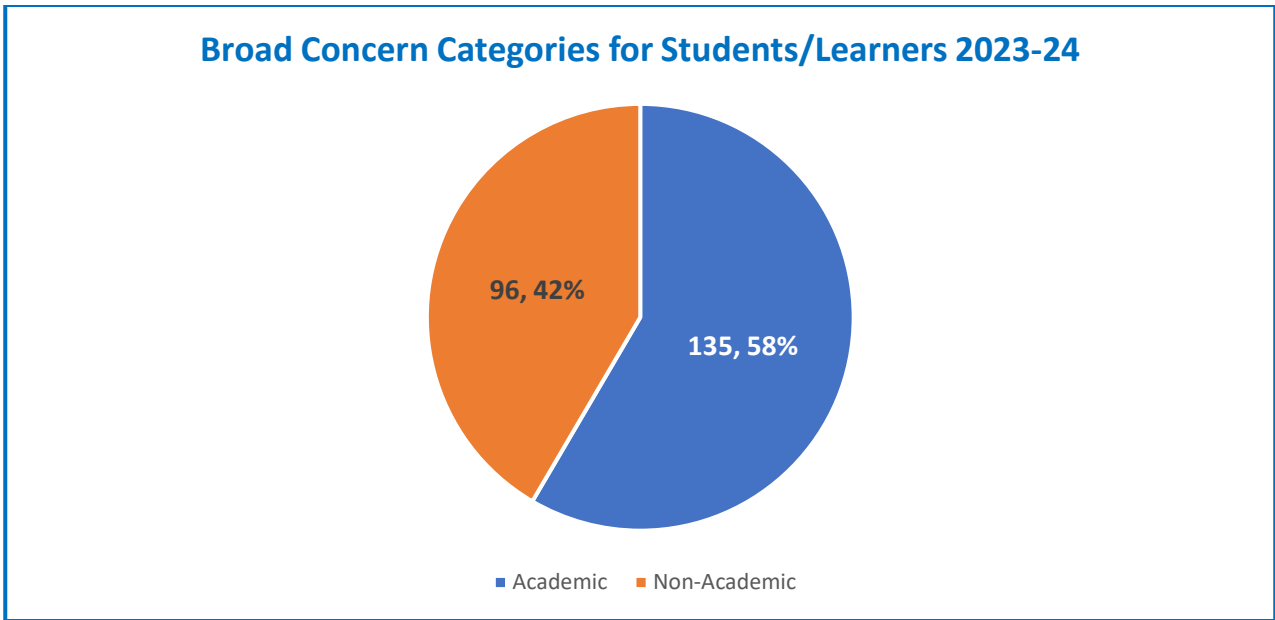


Figure 9 – Broad Concern Categories for Students/Learners 2023-24

Our student/learner statistics include concerns raised by all 232 students/learners who approached us for assistance (160 undergraduate students, 61 graduate students, three PGME Trainees, four family members of undergraduate students who did not contact us independently, three continuing education learners, and one non-degree student). Academic concerns are unsurprisingly more common for students/learners (135) than non-academic concerns (96) when compared with other constituencies.

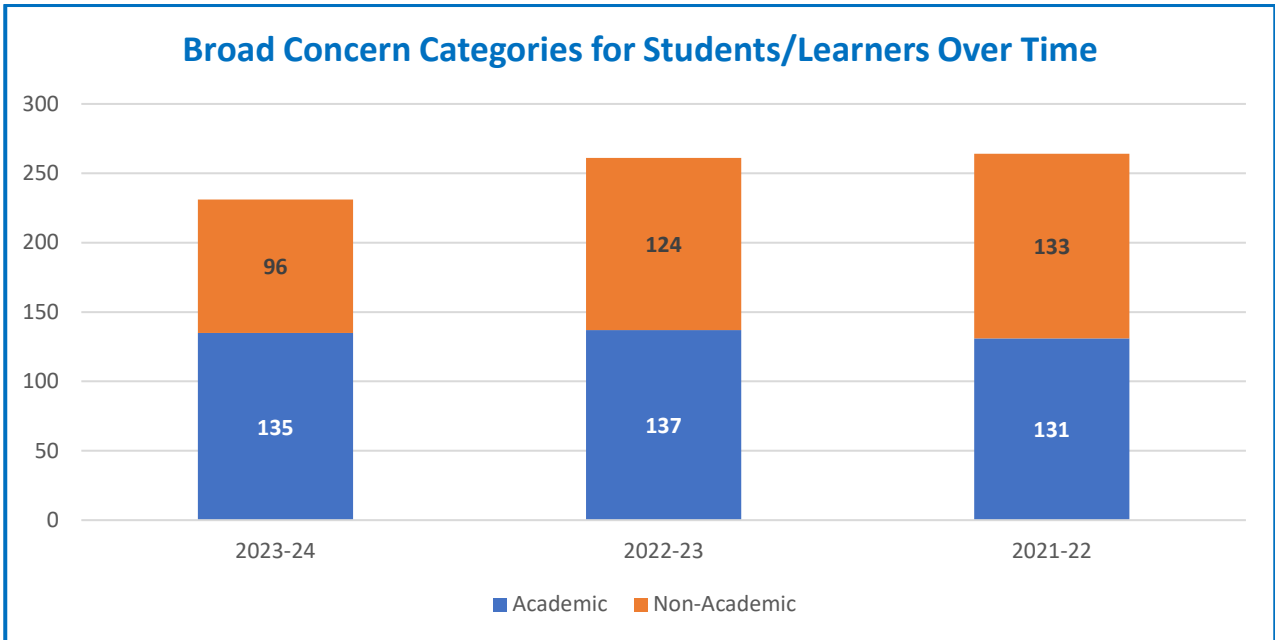


Figure 10 – Broad Concern Categories for Students/Learners Over Time

Concern Sub-Categories for Students/Learners 2023-24

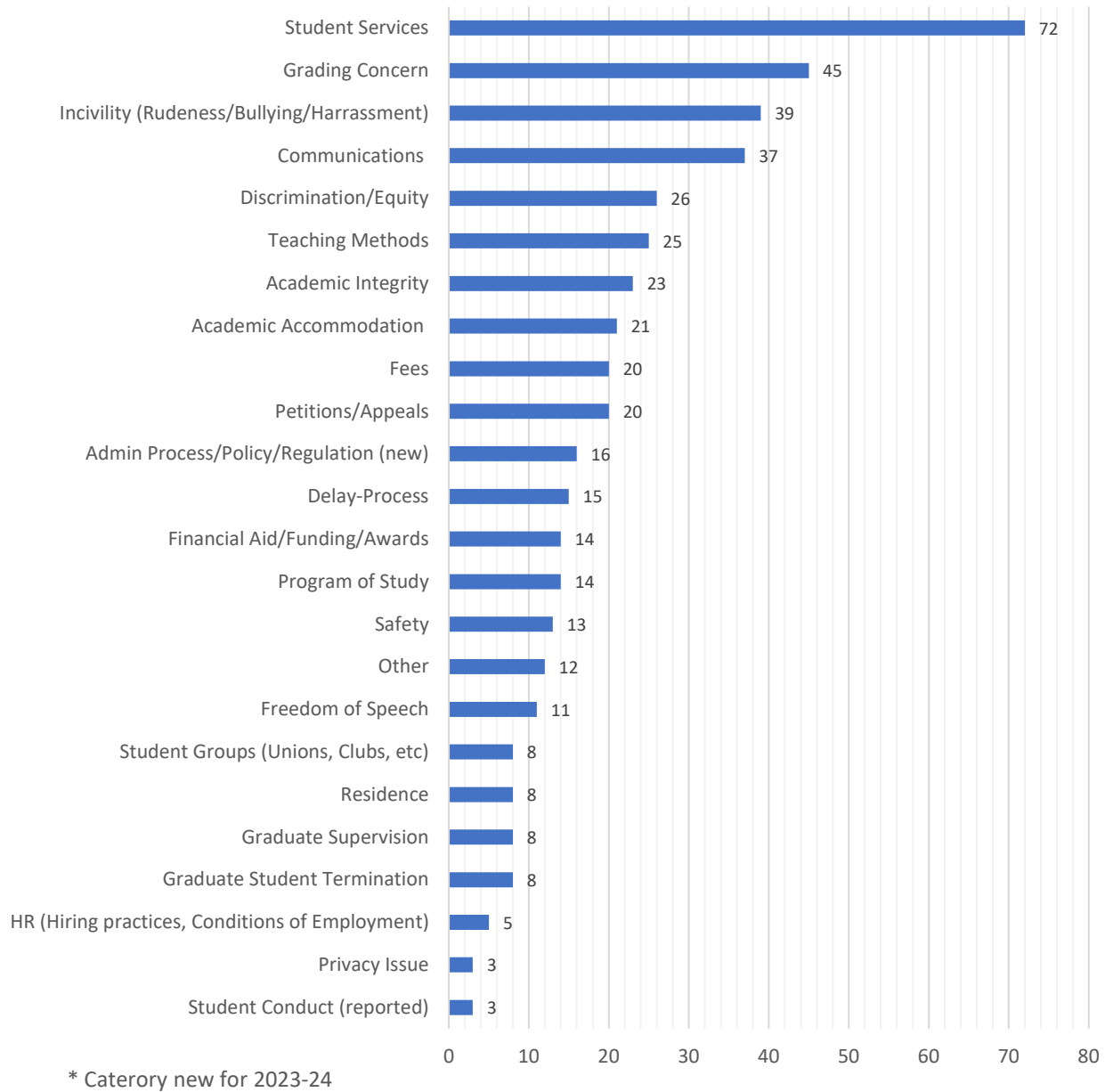


Figure 11 – Concern Sub-Categories for Students/Learners 2023-24¹⁰

¹⁰ Student safety includes one complaint related to sexual violence/harassment. Student other includes one academic other, two academic process, one admin office, two admin other, one admissions, two conflict of interest, one research misconduct.

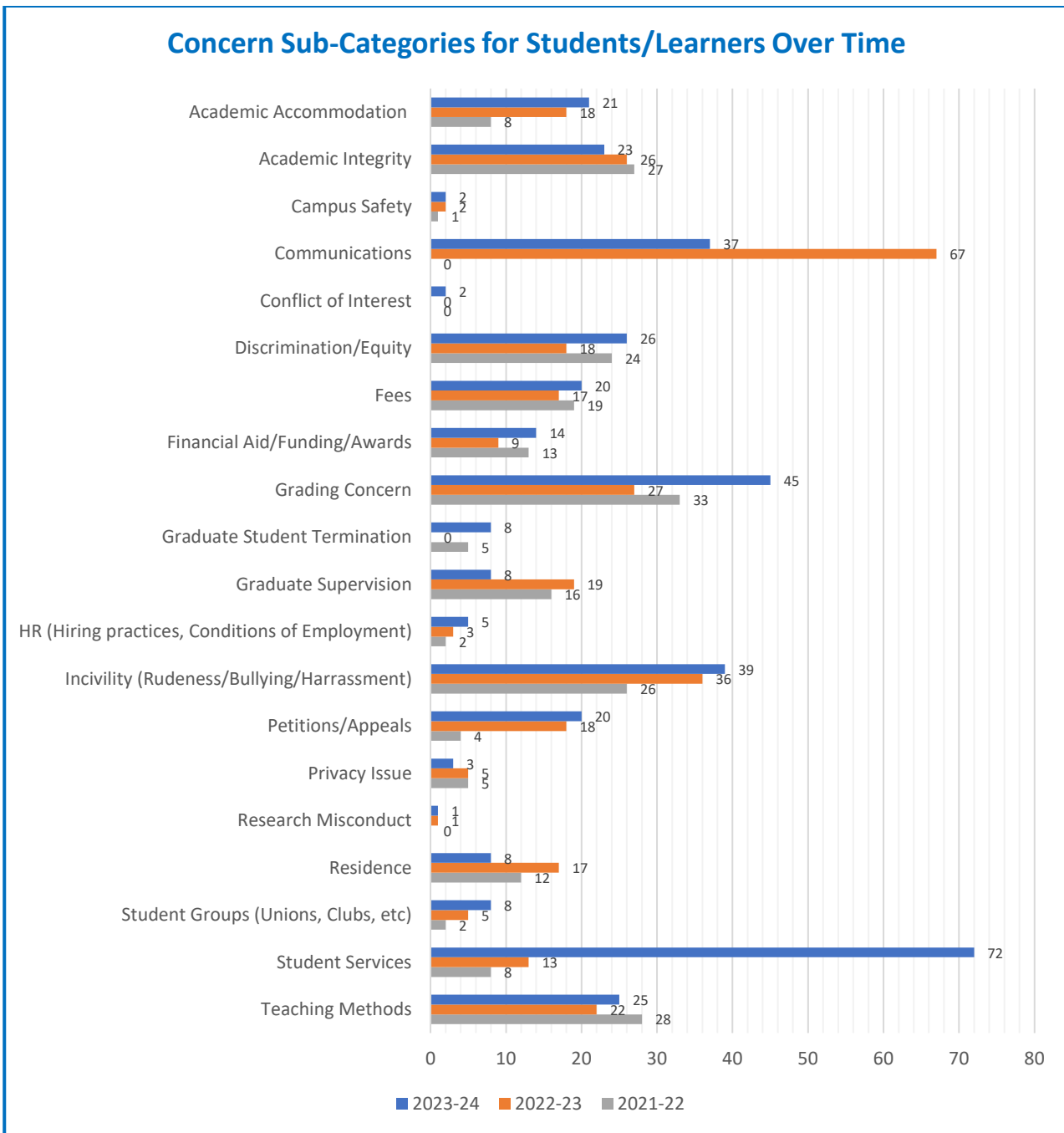


Figure 12 –Concern Sub-Categories for Students/Learners Over Time

We had noticed what seemed to be an increase in complaints about student services over the past two years, so this year we decided to track it more closely. We were surprised to learn that 72 students/learners complained about student services (30.8%), considerably more than the 45 who had concerns about grading, typically the highest student complaint category. Given that this does seem to be an increasing trend, next year we will track more closely which student services are receiving the most complaints and how many of those complaints we determine to be substantiated. Students also raised more concerns than previous years about academic accommodations, fees, financial aid/funding/awards, grading, petitions/appeals, student groups, and teaching methods. Thirty-seven students/learners had concerns related to communications (24 non or delayed response, 11

misinformation, two general), fewer than the 67 in 2022-23 when we started tracking this category. RFAs related to academic integrity were fewer than last year; contrary to what we had seen in past years, almost all involved requests for assistance in dealing with an academic misconduct allegation, rather than concerns about undue delays. Concerns about student residences were down considerably.

Of the graduate students who contacted us, concerns about graduate supervision continued to be common but were significantly fewer than last year. There was, however, an increase in complaints related to termination of registration. We will continue to keep an eye on these concerns.

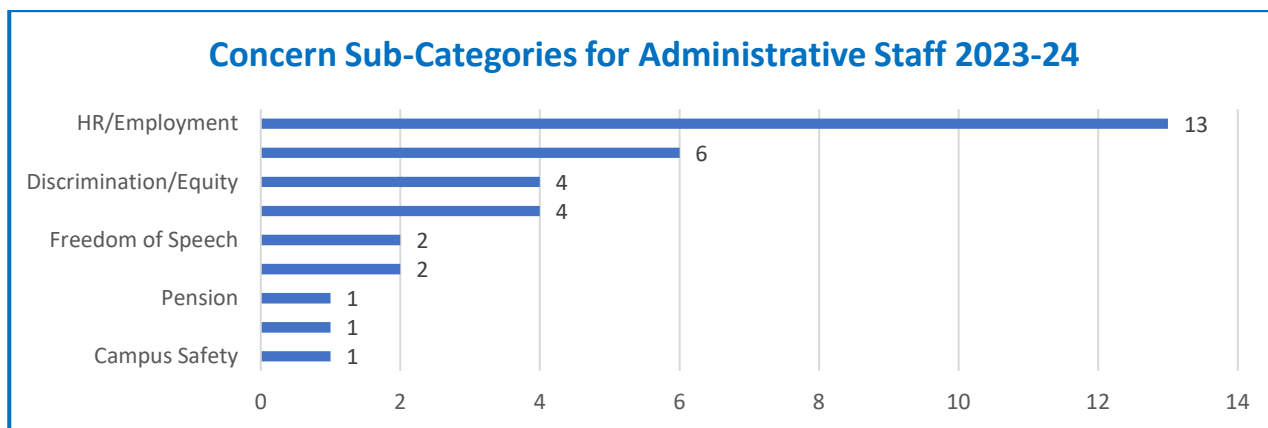


Figure 13 – Concern Sub-Categories for Administrative Staff, 2023-24

Of the 21 administrative staff and one former administrative staff who contacted us in 2023-24, many had concerns related to hiring practices or the terms of their employment.

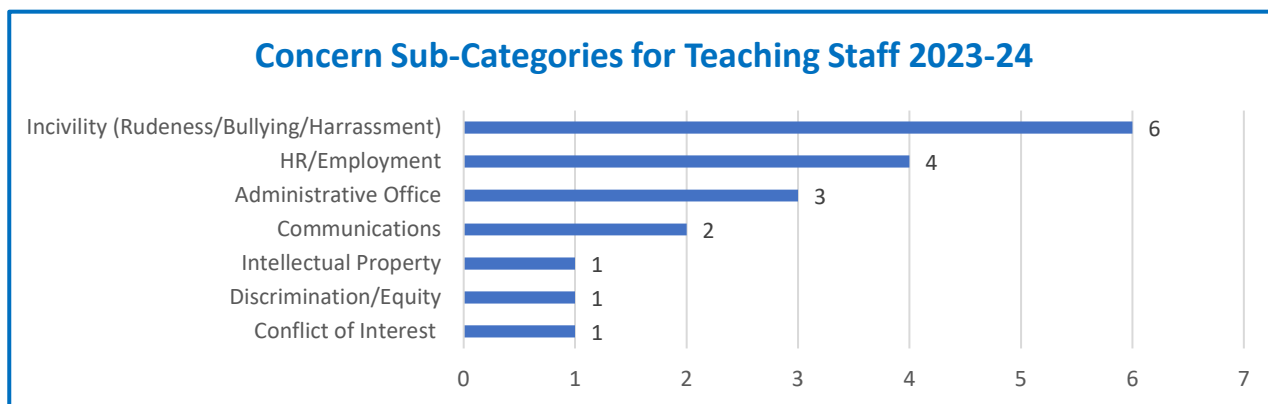


Figure 14 – Concern Sub-Categories for Teaching Staff 2023-24

The concerns of the 14 members of the teaching staff who contacted us in 2023-24 were wide-ranging. Consistent with past years, incivility and terms of employment were the most common concerns.

How Did We Help?

This year, in addition to tracking how we helped the individuals who contacted, we also tracked how they hoped we could help them to get a sense of how well community members understood the role of the Office. While most individuals were looking for multiple types of assistance, we tried to identify the primary type; 95 individuals were looking for advice or information, and 21 individuals were not clear on how they hoped we could assist. Two hundred individuals wanted us to intervene in their situation.

For some, we directed them to our *Terms of Reference* and explained that the Office does not normally become involved in situations until all existing processes have been exhausted and we have reason to believe that the process was not followed appropriately or was unfair. If, based on what a complainant had shared with us, we assessed that their complaint required further exploration, we followed up with them to ensure their issues had been resolved with our advice and a referral to the appropriate process.

Administrative Response to the *Office of the Ombudsperson* 2023-2024 Annual Report

October 2024

Overview

The *Terms of Reference* of the Office of the Ombudsperson (the Office) state that the Ombudsperson shall “make a written annual report to the Governing Council, and through it to the University community.” The Governing Council also requests a response from the University Administration to each of the Ombudsperson’s annual reports. The *2023-24 Annual Report (the Report)* is Professor Emeritus Bruce Kidd’s third report as University Ombudsperson.

Response

Professor Emeritus Kidd continues to serve the University of Toronto and its broad community with distinction. His term as Ombudsperson has been characterized by sensitivity, institutional knowledge, and a remarkable breadth and depth of expertise. In this difficult year, Professor Emeritus Kidd and his team have provided invaluable support to the community. The President, Provost, and U of T Administration are grateful and thank Professor Emeritus Kidd for his dedication to the role of University Ombudsperson.

The Administration notes that the *Annual Report* makes no formal recommendations this year. Instead, Professor Emeritus Kidd has requested an update on the recommendations he made as Ombudsperson over the past two years. It is a rich and important annual report, and the Administration hopes that it is read widely. With that in mind, and before turning to updates on the recommendations from the past two years, the Administration wishes to make several general observations.

First, as the *Report* notes, the number of cases the Office sees continues to represent a very small percentage of the overall University community population (and, indeed, the number was slightly lower in 2023-24 than it was in 2022-23). In one sense, the Administration is reassured that the number of cases has remained consistently low. At the same time, the Administration applauds the efforts Professor Emeritus Kidd and his team have taken to increase awareness of his Office and its mandate. These efforts include consultations with University of Toronto Communications and updates to the Office website and social media presence, initiatives that the Administration welcomes and is keen to see continue in the coming year.

Second, the *Report* mentions that roughly 16% of the Requests for Assistance (RFAs) received by the Office were ones in which the Office had ‘no jurisdiction’ (52 of 320). (This is down appreciably from the figure of 25% in 2022-23.) As in the past, it is notable and commendable that, even in such cases, the Office continued to assist “by providing general advice and referrals to appropriate University resources.”

Moreover, on the question of jurisdiction, the Administration welcomes the Office's efforts to clarify its remit. Adding learners from the School of Continuing Studies explicitly to its jurisdiction – and thus expanding its reach within the University community – is a positive development.

Third, the section "Case Studies" which debuts in the *2023-24 Annual Report*, is a fascinating and helpful addition. It guides readers - and by extension, possible clients - in understanding the role of the Office, what it can do, and, importantly, why the Office and its interventions matter. This is a useful section for every reader of the *Report* and the Administration hopes to see it return in 2024-25.

Fourth, the *Report* includes helpful observations about case trends. The Administration is gratified to see that the number of RFAs pertaining to communications has declined by over a third. (This is a point to which this *Administrative Response* will return in the Updates section.) Similarly, the Administration welcomes the news that the number of RFAs from graduate students continues to decline. The Administration joins the Ombudsperson in acknowledging the improvements "in the culture of graduate studies at U of T, and enhancements to graduate student supports developed by the School of Graduate Studies."

On the topic of case trends, the Administration notes that the data – helpfully provided again this year – indicate a concerning rise in the number of RFAs regarding student services, which could include matters ranging from academic advising to registrarial support, from co-curricular opportunities to counselling, and more. Such matters could involve services offered at the institutional and local levels due to U of T's decentralized nature. The Administration is grateful that the Office has committed to tracking these RFAs closely and acknowledges the challenges such tracking likely entails (particularly when, as the *Report* mentions, many of the complainants did not respond to requests for information and many of the complaints themselves were found to be either unsupported by evidence or unjustified). Excellence in student services remains one of the University's top priorities, and we welcome further insights from the Office of the Ombudsperson on this.

Updates on Recommendations from 2021-22

Recommendation 1: Communications

Develop an institutional best practice guide to enhance transparency of communication across all areas of the University, with particular attention to the accuracy of website content and hyperlinks, and the clarity of contact information and area of responsibility of those University staff who support student issues and inquiries.

As the *Administrative Response to the 2021-22 Annual Report* noted at the time, the recommendation to improve aspects of the University's communications reiterates and builds upon a recommendation made in the *2019-20 Annual Report*. In response to both year's recommendations, the Administration noted the difficulties associated with centrally managing decentralized communications in a federated institution as large, diverse, and administratively

independent as the University of Toronto. Nevertheless, the Administration agreed that, despite these challenges, the Ombudsperson's Office had identified an important issue. The Provost had committed in the *2022-23 Administrative Response* to bringing the issues of website accuracy, transparency, reliability, and clarity of contact information to a meeting of Principals and Deans and a meeting of Principals, Deans, Academic Directors, and Chairs again in 2022-23, as she had in 2021-22.

This year, as the *Report* notes (and as mentioned above), RFAs pertaining to communications have declined by over a third. There is also evidence that improved internal communications may have helped in other areas as well (e.g. RFAs pertaining to graduate studies). These results are gratifying.

The *2023-24 Administrative Response* wishes to add that University of Toronto Communications (UTC) is presently developing strategies to enhance our communications outreach in many areas, including by providing a better digital user experience at U of T.

UTC's brand hub is focused on enhancing digital support to campus, divisional and Faculty colleagues. Through consultations and by promoting resources for website redesign projects at the divisional level, the brand hub is driving University-wide digital excellence, helping ensure a consistent brand experience and strong usability for web visitors.

In another area of interest, UTC's content innovation team is partnering with Information Technology Services to establish a framework for the creation and maintenance of website URLs. This protocol will help staff better manage the proliferation of website addresses, bring clarity and legitimacy to authorized U of T domains, and protect the University's reputation from the use of unauthorized, abandoned or mis-used domains.

As mentioned earlier, UTC is also working with the Office of the Ombudsperson to help raise the office's profile within the University. The partners are developing a robust tri-campus communications plan that aims to, as noted in the annual report, "reflect the importance of procedural fairness in decision making, together with resources aimed at supporting administrative and academic units who would like to confirm that their processes are fair." The plan is being informed by community consultations and an environmental scan of other university websites and will include key messages for U of T's various internal community stakeholders and a website refresh. The communications strategy will also include tactics to improve website accuracy, contact information and accessibility as well as metrics to measure communication effectiveness.

Recommendation 2: Academic Misconduct and Integrity

All divisions should examine the timelines associated with academic misconduct case resolution and consider what supports and practices are needed to ensure that cases are administered with procedural fairness (i.e., without undue delay; notice of potential timeliness issues).

All divisions should strengthen the transparency and accountability of their processes through annual reporting to their divisional governance bodies (e.g., divisional annual report which include statistics, case resolution timelines, educational efforts, and initiatives). With broad consultation, the University should develop an institutional academic integrity strategy, to be overseen by the Tri-campus Provostial Advisory Group on Academic Integrity.

The Administration continues to pay close attention to timelines associated with academic misconduct case resolution and has taken several steps to address delays. At the divisional level, strengthened staffing and the dedication of faculty members involved in facilitating the academic integrity process has contributed to significant increases in each of the past two years in cases resolved at the divisional level within six months of the date of the offence.

In addition, the University has instituted a pilot project in which minor cases are held in abeyance where the student accused of academic misconduct is no longer registered at the University and is unlikely to return. This enables resources to be redirected to more serious allegations and faster resolution of cases involving current students.

For cases referred to the University Tribunal but appropriate for divisional resolution, the Administration seeks to resolve those cases without a hearing where possible (i.e. where the student is engaged in the process and admits to having committed an offence). This helps to address some of the timeliness and resource issues associated with these cases while maintaining procedural fairness. More information is below regarding academic integrity.

Updates on Recommendations from 2022-23

Recommendation #1: Communications

That the University develop a comprehensive, tri-campus communications strategy that includes expectations for website accuracy, accessible contact information, and the prompt and effective response to questions and requests for information, with coordinated monitoring for compliance and correction.

Responded to above.

Recommendation #2: Regarding civility, dignity, and respect

That the University continue to give high priority in its efforts to ensure that all members of the community are treated with civility, dignity, and respect, within a culture of open inquiry and learning.

That the University develop a clear and transparent process for students to make complaints against administrative or teaching staff.

As the *2022-23 Administrative Response* noted, treating others with civility, dignity, and respect is a fundamental expectation of members of our University community. This expectation is reflected in many of our policies, protocols, and statements. The 2023-24 year raised many

challenges in this respect, particularly as the expectations of civility, dignity, and respect seemed at times to be in tension with the University's fundamental commitment to free expression. The University's *Statement on Freedom of Speech* makes the point clearly:

[T]he University's primary obligation is to protect the free speech of all involved. The University must allow the fullest range of debate. It should not limit that debate by preordaining conclusions, or punishing or inhibiting the reasonable exercise of free speech. ... [T]he values of mutual respect and civility may, on occasion, be superseded by the need to protect lawful freedom of speech.

The commitment to free expression does not diminish the importance of civility, dignity, and respect on University campuses. The Division of People Strategy, Equity, and Culture has highlighted numerous pathways that U of T employees can follow if they have workplace complaints related to civility or bullying. Similarly, the Vice-Provost, Students has created a website that more clearly articulates the processes for students to follow when they have complaints about student services or discrimination.

Moreover, in January 2024, the University created the position of Provostial Adviser on Civil Discourse (as noted with approval in the Annual Report). The Adviser has established a working group to lead community consultations and develop a plan for University events, resources, and other initiatives for students, faculty, and librarians to engage in and promote productive and respectful dialogue on a wide variety of topics. The Adviser will also provide an additional point of contact for community members with questions or concerns about free expression.

Furthermore, in April 2024, the Provost and the Vice-President, Communications issued a Memo on Institutional, Divisional, and Departmental Statements. The Memo was issued in response to questions from leaders within various faculties, departments, and schools regarding the unregulated practice of issuing statements. Such statements often raised challenges with respect to civility, dignity, and respect. This Memo augments the University's free speech policy framework and provides additional resources to the community.

Finally, the University's Workplace Investigations Office, Office of the Vice-Provost Students, the Office of the Vice-Provost, Faculty & Academic Life and the Institutional Equity Office are partnering to ensure greater clarity and transparency in the process by which students can raise concerns or complaints regarding the conduct of administrative or teaching staff. This will be completed by January 2025 in line with legislative directives.

Recommendation #3: Academic Integrity

That the University further develop and articulate its institutional strategy regarding academic integrity. It should enhance academic integrity literacy for all students, with a particular focus on first-year undergraduates and others new to the University of Toronto.

That the University initiate a comprehensive, consultative review and update of the Code

of Behaviour on Academic Matters to reflect the current realities of the academic world, the ever-increasing size of the institution, and the prevalence of resources to assist students in academic dishonesty. The revised Code should ensure procedural fairness, the protection of student rights, and the timeliness of decisions.

That the membership of the Tri-Campus Provostial Advisory Group on Academic Integrity be reviewed and expanded to ensure that it includes those with experience and expertise in all matters related to academic integrity, including the new Artificial Intelligence tools, prevention of academic dishonesty, and the administration of the Code.

That the Provost's Annual Report on Cases of Academic Discipline include the following as standard components:

- **The number of cases resolved by the divisions in three months or less;**
- **The time between receipt of a case and the decision how to proceed—(i.e. time of closure or to time sent forward to the subsequent stage, should one exist)— in each of the stages of the process: at the departmental level, at the divisional level, within the Provost's Office, and at the University Tribunal.**

The Administration will be reporting the number of cases resolved in three months or less in the Provost's Annual Report on Cases of Academic Discipline. These statistics are being tracked by divisions as of July 1, 2024, the beginning of the reporting cycle. Due to cut-off timelines for data reporting in the annual report, we plan to report these data in the next statistics report in the Fall of 2025. With respect to reporting on the time between receipt of a case at each stage of the process and the decision of how to proceed at that stage, the Administration has determined that it is not currently practicable to collect and present these data. To do so would require the development of new collection processes, likely calling for a uniform tool or shared technology services or procedures across the divisions. In U of T's decentralized environment, this is currently not available, but the Administration will continue to review possible improvements and solutions in this regard.

As part of the Provost's Task Force on Artificial Intelligence (AI), Provostial Advisor Professor Susan McCahan has been leading discussions with the task force and in broader consultations about the intersections between AI and academic integrity. Work also continues in line with previous years' efforts to educate students on the importance of integrity in their academic work. Professor McCahan is also a member of the Provostial Advisory Group on Academic Integrity.

The Provost will soon announce that Professor Heather Boon, Vice-Provost, Faculty & Academic Life, will be leading a consultation towards changes to the *Code of Behaviour on Academic Matters* (CBAM), with the support of the Office of University Counsel (OUC). This review will focus on principles of procedural fairness, timeliness, clarity of roles and responsibilities, and upholding fairness and honesty in the academic work of students. Vice-Provost Boon will be reaching out for feedback on these and other principles foundational to academic integrity at U

of T, and – in a later phase – regarding proposed changes to the language of the policy, through targeted meetings and an open online consultation form.

As noted in past years, the Provostial Advisory Group on Academic Integrity is comprised of the Vice or Associate Deans with responsibility for academic integrity in each of the academic divisions. Other members include the Director of the Centre for Teaching Support & Innovation (CTSI), Vice-Provost, Innovations in Undergraduate Education (VP-IUE), and legal counsel, as well as the Vice-Provost, Faculty & Academic Life and the Vice-Provost, Students, who co-chair the group. The Advisory Group's next meeting will be in November 2024. The membership of the Advisory Group has been reviewed and it was felt that the academic nature of the roles represented in the group is an important component to retain so that expansion was not necessary. However, staff from the OUC meet regularly with staff representatives from FAS, UTSC and UTM, collectively, to discuss new developments, concerns and procedural queries. The OUC is also in regular contact with staff in the largest divisions regarding emerging issues.

Policy Currency

On the topic of policy currency, the 2022-23 Administrative Response noted its agreement with the Ombudsperson: the University's policies and procedures need to be considered on a regular basis and reviewed, revised, or updated when appropriate. This was also a recommendation of the Provostial Advisor on University Resilience in 2023. The University Secretariat has completed the development of a Policy Management Framework and an annual policy assessment process will begin by the end of the 2024 calendar year.

Concluding Observations

The Ombudsperson's *Annual Report* provides an opportunity to examine and address some of the complex and systemic issues at the University. The Administration also benefits from a collegial and collaborative relationship with the Ombudsperson throughout the year, as noted in the *Report*. As Professor Emeritus Kidd notes, the Review of Office of the Ombudsperson highlighted the importance of "collaboration, respect for mandates, and a shift towards data-driven, aspirational recommendations from the Office." The relationship between the Ombudsperson's Office and the Administration has been collegial and occasional disagreements are always treated thoughtfully, considered carefully, and take place in the context of mutual respect and a shared commitment to improving the University of Toronto.

The Administration is grateful to the Ombudsperson and his Office for their dedication and excellence in service to the University of Toronto and its broad community. The Administration offers its appreciation and thanks to all involved in the preparation of this report and all those involved in the underlying matters noted within it. Finally, the President and Provost extend their sincere gratitude to Professor Emeritus Kidd for agreeing to extend his term as Ombudsperson for another year. We look forward to another year of collegial collaboration towards making the University of Toronto an even more outstanding institution for all members of our community.