

Welcome...

50 | YEAR
ANNIVERSARY
CELEBRATION
1975 - 2025

The Office of the
University Ombudsperson
welcomes you to our

Fifty Year Anniversary

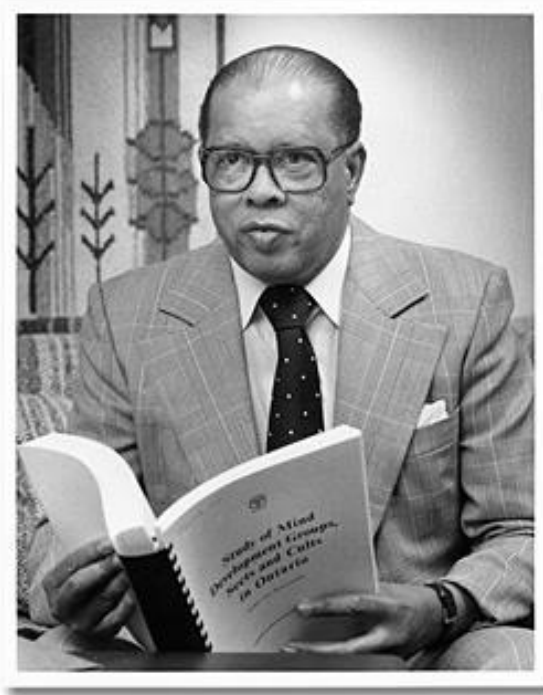
The Early Years

- In 1974, John H. Parker (Manager, Labour Relations), an administrative staff member of the Governing Council, recommended the exploration of an ombudsman office and appointment.



The Early Years

- In March of 1975, a proposal for “Constituting an Office of the University Ombudsman,” was developed.
- Dr. Daniel G. Hill prepared the proposal. He was Advisor to the U of T President on Human Rights Matters, the first Director of the Ontario Human Rights Commission, and served as the third Ombudsman for the Province of Ontario.



“To me, an Ombudsman’s office is the incarnation of **human rights**. To me, this is the court of last appeal about injustice and injustice is about human rights.”
Daniel G. Hill, 1985

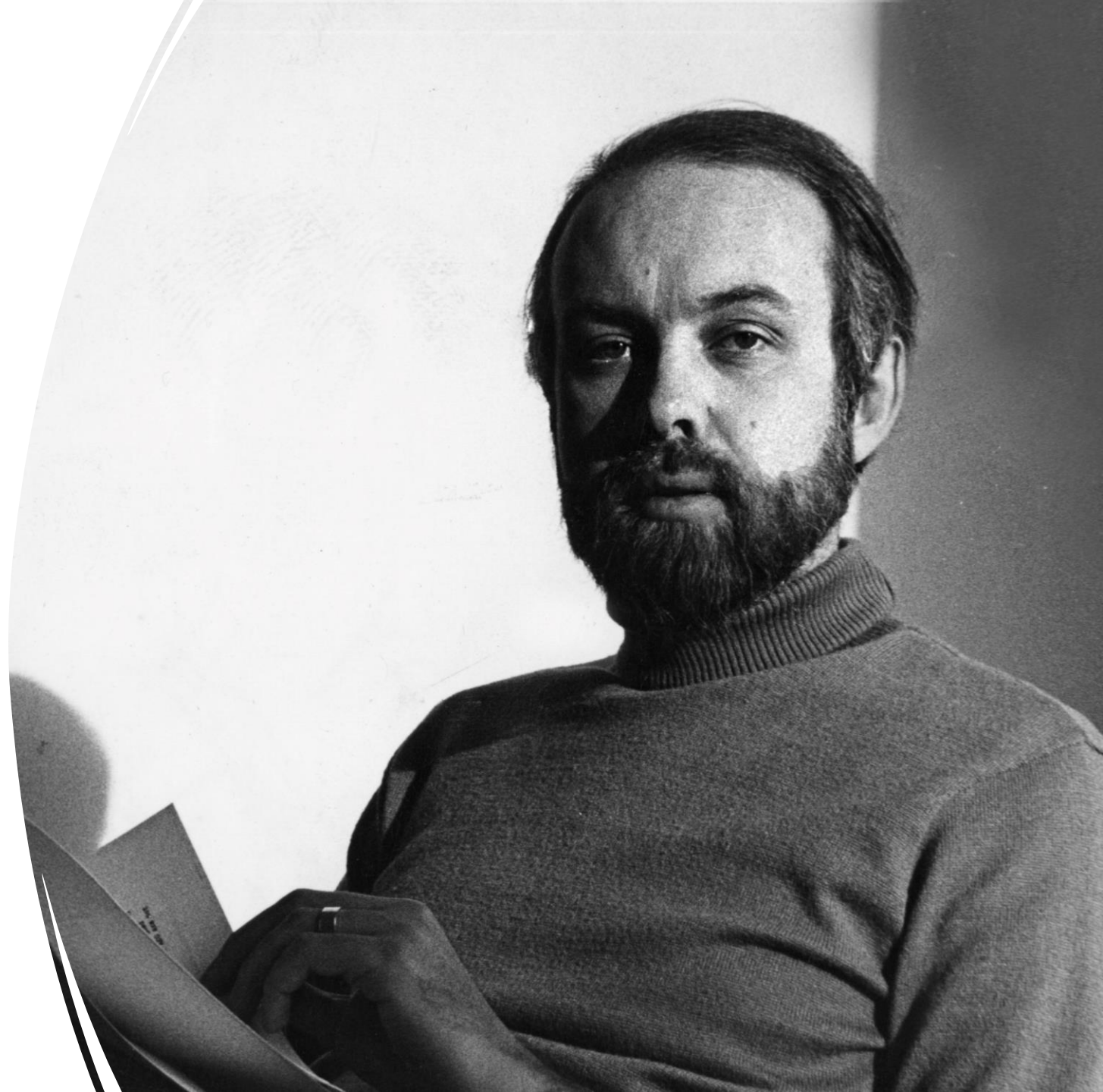
Approval

- The Office of the University Ombudsman was approved by the Governing Council on March 20, 1975.



Inaugural Ombudsman Appointed

- Eric A. McKee was appointed by the Executive Committee of the Governing Council, as U of T's inaugural Ombudsman, with an 18-month term (effective October 1, 1975, until March 31, 1977).
- McKee was the candidate proposed by the Students' Administrative Council.



Eric A. McKee, Ombudsman (1975 – 1981)

- McKee, a U of T alumnus himself (BA, Philosophy; MA, English) moved to the position of Ombudsman from his role as Director of the International Student Centre (1971-1975).
- McKee's appointment was announced at the Governing Council meeting on September 18, 1975.



The Varsity –

Monday, September 13, 1976

Ombudsman on tap

The University of Toronto will finally have an ombudsman, the Governing Council agreed Thursday.

The ombudsman is described as a “catalytic agent, a mediator with the ability to hear out and resolve both simple and difficult situations in the university community.”

The ombudsman will be chosen by a seven-member committee, chaired by Governing Council member Sydney Hermant, late of last year’s Imperial Optical scandal.

The initial appointment will be for 18 months.

UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO THE UNIVERSITY OMBUDSMAN

- investigates grievances or complaints against the University, or anyone in the University exercising authority, from any member of the University— student, faculty or administrative staff
- assists in any way he can in resolving grievances or complaints, and recommends changes in academic or administrative decisions where this seems justified
- reviews existing University policies and procedures for the purpose of identifying any inadequacies which might jeopardize the rights of members of the University
- reports his findings and recommendations to those in authority, and to the University community at large to the extent this seems appropriate
- provides information to members of the University community about their rights and responsibilities, and the procedures to follow in order to pursue whatever business or complaint they may have
- handles grievances and complaints in a confidential manner unless the individual involved approves otherwise
- has access to all relevant files and information
- is independent of all existing administrative structures of the University, and is accountable only to the President and the Governing Council.

Office of the University Ombudsman—temporarily located at the International Student Centre, 33 St. George Street. Telephone 928-4874

Members of the University at the Scarborough and Erindale Campuses should telephone the St. George Campus office for an appointment to meet with the Ombudsman at their respective campuses.

The Varsity –
Monday, September
13, 1976

CORRIDORS OF POWER

Prominent But Powerless *McKee tackles Ombudsman's job*

By CHRISTOPHER DU VERNET
Problems, problems. They're all that U of T
Ombudsman Eric McKee ever sees.

But that's his job to sort out everything
from personality conflicts to unfair marking
— all over campus.

Appointed as an experimental ombudsman
in October 1975, McKee's 18-month term is
fast drawing to a close, but his workload
shows no sign of terminating. In fact, McKee
anticipates anything up to double the 260
cases of last season in the coming year.

But McKee is non-committal about
assessing the need for an Ombudsman. He
asserts that many university officials
including counsellors, registrars and
departmental advisors do an ombudsman's
job anyway and candidly admitted that many
cases are not successfully solved.

Other people are not so guarded in their
assessment of McKee's operation. As McKee
explained, he has made a lot of friends, and a
lot of enemies.

"There are people who don't agree with
what I say," he conceded, adding "some
officials see me as a nuisance, a thorn in the
institution's side." But McKee emphasized
that successfully solved cases have earned
him immeasurable appreciation from
students, university employees, and even
administrators.

Because the ombudsman has to come down
in favour of one side or the other in every
dispute, this appreciation is hard to come by.
To achieve it he says "I see and talk with
everyone who comes." With complete access
to every university official and all known
documents, the cases he accepts are often the
subject of intense investigation.

The Henry Fong case of last year, in which
a medical student claimed professors' racial
bias had prevented him from receiving fair
grades, took weeks of negotiation and
research. Other cases last year might have
taken just as long, but secrecy requested by
complainants prevented anyone else from
knowing.



Other cases may only take a phone call,
however. "Red tape" and administration
sluggishness McKee claims are responsible
for a high proportion of student difficulties,
much of which can be bypassed with a gentle
push by telephone.

No matter how long a problem takes to
solve, though, its solution never ceases to
satisfy McKee. The job's greatest reward is
simply "sorting out problems that posed real
obstacles to individuals involved."

Whether the administration receives a
similar satisfaction is difficult to judge, but
opinions on the matter are so extreme that an
outside commission independent of the
university will be appointed to assess the
office next March. The outcome of this
investigation "is strictly up in the air" and
McKee refused to comment on governing
Council attitudes or even his own attitudes on
continuing ombudsman work.

McKee knows, and admits, that he is
technically powerless, without legal or
administrative thunderbolts with which to
strike down offenders. But he sees a moral
power coming from his impartiality. "I have
a certain amount of stature just by virtue of
the title, but for the most part I expect the
strength of my voice to come from the
rationality of my arguments and the
information and background I provide," he
said.

As well, McKee believes there is a current
acceptance of his role among the university's
population in general. "The whole idea is one
whose time has come. It's in vogue, I
suppose."

Office Milestones



1990 - On February 13, 1990, the University Affairs Board approved the office title change from Office of the **Ombudsman** to **Ombudsperson**.

"Ombudsman" becomes "Ombudsperson"

BY ROSE PACHECO
Varsity Staff

Liz Hoffman is no longer an Ombudsman.

In response to concerns within the university community about gender specific terminology, the office of the University Ombudsman has recently been changed to Ombudsperson.

"Society brought about the change," said Hoffman. "Terminology is important to people because of what (the term) stands for."

Hoffman's office, which deals with the majority of complaints by university members on university issues, recently made changes to their mandate. During these

step towards equal status for women, it does not affect the work they do.

"Every human being is treated equally in the office," Hoffman said.

Lois Reimer, U of T's Status of Women officer, said she is all for the change. Changing titles to gender neutral terminology is a way to educate society, in terms of making people aware of changes occurring in society and bringing about changes in attitudes about gender differences, she said.

"Words reflect attitudes and can influence attitudes," Reimer said. "By having people think in definitive terms you hope thinking will change."

Reimer said there has been



Steven Leung

The signs, they are a-changing: Ombudsman becomes Ombudsperson.

Office Milestone - On May 18, 2018, the Governing Council approved expansion - the Ombuds Office becomes '**tri-campus**' with an office and Ombuds Officer appointed on each campus.

"In recognition that campus culture matters, and to promote more visibility of the Office across all three campuses, it seems timely to consider whether it would be appropriate to offer Ombuds services on each campus."

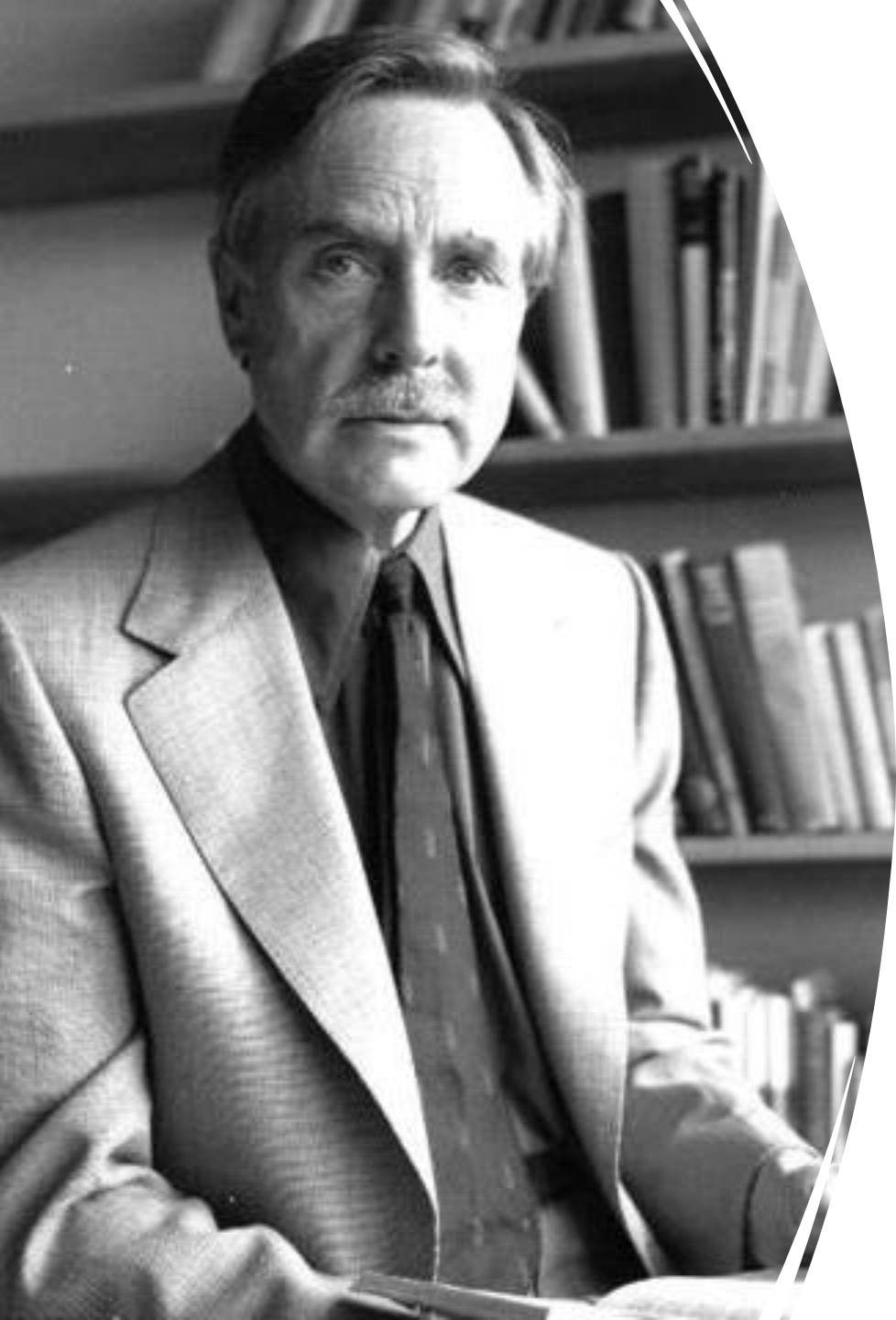
*Professor Ellen Hodnett,
Ombudsperson, 2018*



Examples of University Policies and Practices influenced by the Office of the Ombudsperson



- Code of Student Conduct
- Policy respecting the Appointment of a President
- Supportive Leaves Policy (previously UMLAP)
- Grading Practices Policy
- Code of Behavior on Academic Matters
- Appeals Policy
- Access to Student Records
- Admission practices
- Sexual Harassment
- SGS Leave of Absence Policy



Professor S. John Colman

Acting Ombudsperson
Appointment: 1981 - 1982

Liz Hoffman

Ombudsman /
Ombudsperson
Appointment: 1982 - 1998



University staff stressed out by cutbacks

BY JIM BRIDGES
Varsity Staff

Not only is the recession bad for people's pocketbooks, it's bad for their health, says the university's ombudsperson.

According to the ombudsperson's report, released last month, the office received more complaints relating to cutbacks last year than in previous years and its effects, especially on university workers, are taking their toll.

Liz Hoffman, U of T's ombudsperson, said that she received complaints from a number of university staff about being over-worked as the university tries to do more with less.

"People say they are at their desk by 7 o'clock in the morning, they can't remember the last time they didn't take a briefcase home, they are coming in on week-ends," she said. "They feel such responsibility that they are giving up a lot of personal time to keep the environment running as well as they can. Ultimately it's not only their personal time, but their health they are giving up."

She said, however, that as a result of the poor economy people have been reluctant to complain.

"When jobs are limited, people think twice about rocking the boat," she said. "People ask, 'Is it more to my advantage to indicate to the university about my supervisor or stay in the good favour of

the supervisor and pay my mortgage?'"

"Even if the individual has concerns, the concerns are viewed as more positive than not having a job at all."

She said students are also being affected by university cutbacks.

"Students are affected by shorter office hours, time lines of decisions, and are the receivers of the universities' error rates with information," she said.

The report recommends that the university should give better training academic and administrative staff in receiving and resolving complaints.

Hoffman said better training would not cost the university a lot to implement and would improve the atmosphere for staff and students.

"If people felt better about how to receive a complaint, I hope that would make for a better environment."

She said that although the university has acknowledged the validity of the problem, little has actually been done to implement a solution.

She added that the university should place more value on complaints as a way of gauging its performance.

"If students and staff don't complain, the system is not being assessed properly," she said.



Ombudsperson Liz Hoffman.

Photo by Mimi Choi

The Varsity, December 1992

Irene Birrell

Acting Ombudsperson
Appointment: 1997 - 1998





Professor Ian R. McDonald

Interim Ombudsperson
Appointment: 2006 - 2007

Mary Ward

Ombudsperson

Appointment: 1998 - 2006



Professor Joan Foley

Ombudsperson
Appointment: 2007 - 2015



Joan Foley, U of T
Ombudsperson with
then President, Robert
Birgeneau, visiting the
old faculty lounge of
Scarborough Campus.



University of Toronto Scarborough Library, *UTSC Archives Legacy Collection, F.1. Photographs - Box 4 (File 5). o2011002F1-4-5_16.tif*

Professor Ellen Hodnett

Ombudsperson
Appointment: 2015 - 2021



Professor Bruce Kidd

Ombudsperson
Appointment: 2021 - Present






Office Locations

- **1975** - Simcoe Hall, Room 115
- **1975** - 16 Hart House Circle
- **1998** - 222 College Street, Suite 161
- **2008** - 2 Queen's Park Crescent West (McMurrich Building, first floor)
- **2018** - The Office becomes 'tri-campus' with an Ombuds Officer appointed on each campus.
- **2022** - The Office gives up its space in the McMurrich Building – shifts to fully remote!

Advertisements – The Varsity



ADVICE
INFORMATION
ASSISTANCE

OMBUDSMAN

The University Ombudsman is available
to all members of the University of Toronto:
Student, Faculty or Administrative staff.

Office of the University Ombudsman, Room 115, Simcoe Hall,
University of Toronto, Toronto, Ontario M5S 1A1 928-4874

Members of the University at the Scarborough
and Erindale Campuses may arrange to meet with
the Ombudsman at their respective campuses.

UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO

OMBUDSMAN

New temporary location—Room 115, Simcoe Hall

928-4874

Members of the University at the Scarborough and
Erindale Campuses should telephone the St. George
Campus office for an appointment to meet with the
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UNIVERSITY
Ombudsperson

Confidential advice and assistance with problems unsolved through
regular university channels is available to all students, faculty and
administrative staff of the three U of T campuses.

Office of the University Ombudsperson, University of Toronto
16 Hart House Circle, Toronto, Ontario M5S 1A1 Telephone: 978-4874

Outreach & Service



- **1983** - Liz Hoffman (Ombudsman 1981-1998) becomes founding member of ACCUO (Association of Canadian College and University Ombudspersons).
- **2001** - Liz Hoffman awarded 'Distinguished Service Award' from the ACCUO.
- **2003** - Mary Ward hosted the 2003 Conference of the Forum of Canadian Ombudsman (FCO) at U of T
- **2020** - Emma Thacker elected Member of the Executive Committee of ACCUO (2020 – Present)

Ombuds Team - over the years

- Garvin De Four, Assistant Ombudsperson (2008 - 2018)
- Rena Prashad, Ombuds Officer (2018 - 2019)
- Kristi Gourlay, Ombuds Officer (2019 - 2024)



2025 Ombuds Team

- **Cindy Ferencz-Hammond**, Ombuds Officer, UTM (2018 - Present)
- **Emma Thacker**, Ombuds Officer, St. George (2019 - Present)
- **Miranda Edwards**, Ombuds Officer, UTSC (2025 - Present)
- **Stephanie Goldner**, Secretary to the Office of the Ombudsperson (2012 – Present)



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- Slide 2 – Image of Governing Council Chamber - Emma Thacker
- Slide 3 – Daniel Hill photo-Daniel G. Hill with study he authored, 1980-Daniel G. Hill
fonds Reference Code: F 2130-9-2-13, Archives of Ontario, I0027959
([The Freedom Seeker: The Life and Times of Daniel G. Hill](#))
- Slide 4 – Simcoe Hall – Diana Tyszko
- Slide 5 – University Archives
- Slide 6 – University Archives
- Slide 7 – The Internet Archives – The Varsity March 26, 1975 and November 7, 1975
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- Slide 9 – Ombuds Office Photo Archive
- Slide 10 – The Internet Archives – The Varsity, August Edition, 1990
- Slide 11 – DUA's standard tri-campus triptych provided by David Lee
- Slide 13 – S. John Colman - [UTSC Archives Legacy collection - Discover Archives](#)
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- Slide 15 – The Internet Archives, The Varsity, December 10, 1992
- Slide 16 – Advance HE
- Slide 17 – Professor Ian R. McDonald - Allison Funeral Home, [Obituary photo](#)
- Slide 18 – Mary Ward – Baycrest Annual Report 2007-2008
- Slide 19 – Joan Foley – University of Toronto Digital Media Bank – Johnny Guatto
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- Slide 26 – Office of the Ombuds photo collection
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