

**FOR INFORMATION**

**PUBLIC**

**OPEN SESSION**

**TO:** UTSC Campus Council

**SPONSOR:** Linda Johnston, Vice-President and Principal, UTSC  
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**PRESENTER:** Professor Bruce Kidd, Former University Ombudsperson  
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**DATE:** October 27 for November 11, 2025

**AGENDA ITEM:** 4

**ITEM IDENTIFICATION:**

*2024-25 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. The UTSC and UTM Campus Councils also receive this report annually for information.

**GOVERNANCE PATH:**

1. Executive Committee [For endorsement and forwarding to Governing Council] (October 27, 2025)
2. Governing Council [For Information] (November 6, 2025)
3. **UTSC Campus Council [For Information] (November 11, 2025)**
4. UTM Campus Council [For Information] (November 12, 2025)

**PREVIOUS ACTION TAKEN:**

The UTSC Campus Council received the *2023-24 Annual Report of the Office of the Ombudsperson* at its meeting of November 12, 2024.

**HIGHLIGHTS:**

The *Report* and the Administrative Response are enclosed.

**FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS:**

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

**RECOMMENDATION:**

For information.

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**DOCUMENTATION PROVIDED:**

*2024-25 Annual Report of the Office of the Ombudsperson*  
*Administrative Response to the Office of the Ombudsperson 2024-25 Annual Report*



UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO  
O M B U D S P E R S O N

2024-25

# ANNUAL REPORT



[HTTPS://OMBUDSPERSON.UTORONTO.CA](https://ombudsperson.utoronto.ca)

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

TABLE OF CONTENTS .....	2
Message from the Ombudsperson .....	3
Who We Are .....	4
Organizational Structure.....	5
Core Values and Responsibilities .....	6
Case Trends.....	7
Case Trends and Engagement with University Administration.....	7
Case Trends and Observations .....	8
Who Sought Our Assistance? .....	11
Why Did They Contact Us? .....	13
How Did We Help?.....	16
Activities of the Office of the Ombudsperson, 2024-25 .....	17
Institutional Policy Reviews.....	17
Communications and Outreach.....	18
Accessibility Review.....	18
Case Tracking Data .....	19
50th Anniversary – A Half Century of Service (1975-2025).....	20
Ontario University Ombudsperson Roundtable, April 23-24, 2025.....	21
Professional Development and Ombuds Community Engagement .....	22
Acknowledgments .....	23

## Message from the Ombudsperson



This is my fourth and final annual report as Ombudsperson since my appointment effective July 1, 2021.

Between July 1, 2024 and June 30, 2025, the Office received 357 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. While we have no formal recommendations this year, we highlight several ongoing concerns that we continue to monitor, in collaboration with the colleagues involved. We also note several steps the Administration has taken to strengthen policy, communication, and fairness.

It's been an extraordinary honour to serve as Ombudsperson during the last four years, and to have been able to contribute to the realization of good policy, openness and equity, and the protection of procedural fairness. At a divisive and challenging time for universities and liberal democratic institutions everywhere, it is vital that the University of Toronto have an office reporting to the highest level of governance to affirm those values and protect members' rights. I am proud to have contributed to that process. I am also proud of the fact that the Office of the Ombudsperson has a presence and plays an active role on all three campuses.

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 so many governors, administrators, educators, researchers, service personnel, and others across the three campuses. That is one of the great strengths of the University of Toronto.

I welcome the appointment of Professor Faye Mishna as Ombudsperson for the next three years. Having previously served with her in other roles, I know that she has the passion for social justice, the knowledge of the University, and the graciousness and tenacity to serve the University well.

## Who We Are

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, and in fulfilling its mission to be an internationally leading public teaching and research University.

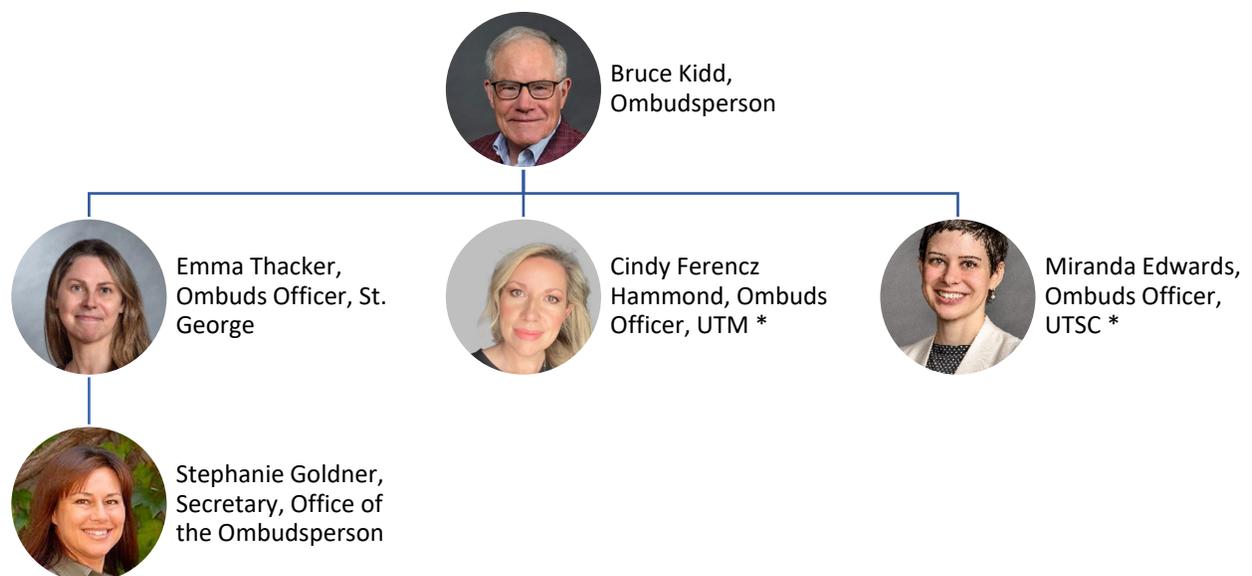
The Ombudsperson serves members of the University community whose concerns fall under the authority of the Governing Council - this includes students/learners, teaching staff, administrative staff, and postdoctoral fellows. Former students, and staff (teaching and admin) are eligible for assistance if their concerns relate to issues from their time at the University.

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.

## Organizational Structure

The Office of the Ombudsperson is independent of the University administration and accountable solely to the Governing Council. It is comprised of the Ombudsperson, an Ombuds Officer on each of the three campuses, and one support staff member. The Office's expansion to a tri-campus structure was [approved in 2018](#), and this model was affirmed in the most recent review of the Office of the Ombudsperson. The UTM and UTSC Ombuds Officer positions\* are dual-reporting roles: in addition to supporting the work of the Ombudsperson, they report to the Deputy Secretary of the Governing Council in their capacity as members of the University Secretariat.



On February 27, 2025, the Governing Council [approved](#) the appointment of Professor Faye Mishna as University Ombudsperson, for a three-year term effective July 1, 2025, until June 30, 2028. The Office looks forward to Professor Mishna's leadership and the positive impact her extensive experience, dedication, and commitment to fairness will have on the University community. Her appointment marks an exciting new chapter for the Office, now in its 51st year of operations, and its continued service to all members of the University community.

## Core Values and Responsibilities

Guided by our core values - Impartiality, Accessibility, Independence, and Confidentiality<sup>1</sup> - the Office carries out the following core responsibilities:

**Confidential Disclosure** - The Office provides a safe and confidential space where individuals can share their concerns without fear of reprisal. Information is kept confidential and is only disclosed with the individual's written consent, or in rare cases where required by law or necessary to prevent serious harm.

**Resolving Cases Informally** - Whenever possible, the Office seeks to resolve concerns and disputes through informal means. Informal resolution allows for responsive, and timely solutions that promote understanding and preserve relationships.

**Impartial Investigations and Interventions** - The Office may complete impartial assessments of University decisions, conduct inquiries, investigations, or interventions. The Office approaches each matter without bias, guided by the principles of fairness and reasonable outcomes.

**Recommending Actions** - Based on the findings of case trends, or investigations, the Ombudsperson may offer recommendations to improve policy, procedures, and practices. These recommendations are intended to support fair outcomes, strengthen institutional processes, and enhance the quality of relationships across the University.

**Policy Advice and Feedback** - The Office may provide input into the development, review, and/or revision of institutional policies by offering feedback that promotes clarity, fairness, and usability in policy design and implementation.

**Providing Guidance** - The Office assists individuals in understanding their rights, responsibilities, and options. The Office provides tailored guidance to help members of the University navigate complex systems and policies and identify constructive next steps.

**Encouraging Accountability** - The Office fosters a culture of shared responsibility, accountable decision-making and respectful communication. The Office's approach focuses on equitable, accessible, and trauma-informed service, aiming to build individual capacity to address conflict.

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<sup>1</sup> ACCUO Standards of Practice - <https://accuo.ca/resources/publications/standards-of-practice/>

## Case Trends

This year, I do not have any formal recommendations for the Administration; however, I would like to share several updates on constructive discussions that took place over the past year, particularly in relation to emerging case trends. I am also reporting on several observations based on the annual case data to help highlight the evolving concerns and experiences within the University community.

## Case Trends and Engagement with University Administration

### Policy Currency

In my 2022-23 Annual Report, I brought forward the matter of institutional policy currency. I am pleased to see that the Administration has been reviewing its policies, consistent with the Secretariat's Policy Management Framework. As noted below, this year, among others, the Administration had initiated reviews of the *Code of Behaviour on Academic Matters*, the *Policy on Sexual Violence and Sexual Harassment*, and the *Statement on Prohibited Discrimination and Discriminatory Harassment*.

There is also the matter of enhancing the accessibility and transparency of policy information. In discussion with the Secretariat of the Governing Council, there was agreement on the value of further enhancing the [policies](#) they oversee by ensuring that hyperlinks to listed related University policies and documents are consistently included. Providing direct links to related materials can help readers more easily access key information. This enhancement supports clarity and accountability within institutional frameworks and contributes to more informed decision-making.

### International Students

This year, the Office observed a small overall increase in cases received from international students (64 in 2024-25; 50 in 2023-24) and cases doubled related to complaints regarding International Fee Exemption (9 cases in 2024-25, compared to 4 in each of the previous two years). While our review found no evidence of unfairness in the application of International Fee Exemption practices or policies, discussion with the University Registrar's Office highlighted the opportunity to improve the way these decisions are communicated to students. We collectively recognized the value of enhancing communication resources available to divisional registrar's offices - particularly those tasked with explaining decisions to students in a clear, timely, and accessible manner. As a result of these discussions, enhanced guidance materials will be developed for the divisions to promote clarity and fairness in their communications with

students. Although we did not find any broad systemic issues for students with a study permit, we are mindful that both international students and the University staff who support them are operating within a highly complex and evolving context - one shaped by shifting regulatory frameworks, geopolitical tensions, and growing financial and housing pressures.

## **Case Trends and Observations**

### **Civility**

In my 2023-24 Annual Report, I noted a decline in cases that raised concerns about incivility - and I am pleased to report that this downward trend continued in the current reporting year, with 27 cases citing incivility-related issues (compared with 46 in 2023-24, and 56 in 2022-23).

While Ombuds cases concerning civil workplace conduct differ in focus from the University's concept of civil discourse in academic communities, the Office welcomed the release of Professor Randy Boyagoda's [Final Report and Recommendations](#) from the Working Group on Civil Discourse (May 2025). We were encouraged to see that the Administration accepted all of the Report's recommendations.

### **Transfer Credit**

This year, we received 7 requests for assistance concerning the application of undergraduate transfer credit policy. While we did not find evidence of unfairness or policy misapplication in any of these cases, we note the increase in the number of cases (7 in 2024-25; 2 in 2023-24 and 0 in 2022-23). We also recognize the recent updates to the institutional *Policy on Transfer of Course Credits* (approved in May 2024), along with related divisional regulations revised in 2025. We commend the tri-campus Transfer Credit Working Group for its efforts and acknowledge the broad consultation that informed these changes. We anticipate that the revised policy framework will help reduce the number of concerns in the coming year.

### **Petitions and Appeals**

We also commend the Faculty of Arts and Science, UTM, and UTSC for their work on the Petitions Policy Working Group. The number of requests for assistance related to petitions and appeals remained consistent with previous years (19 in 2024-25; 20 in 2023-24; 21 in 2022-23). The petitions and appeals processes can place considerable stress and strain on students. They also create significant workload for staff and faculty, especially those involving deferred examinations, complex supporting documentation, and extenuating circumstances. Individual cases can be extremely complex. We therefore appreciate the ongoing efforts to improve the clarity, fairness, and effectiveness of the petition regulations and processes.

## **Fees, Financial Aid, Funding, and Awards**

We observed an increase in student cases related to fees this year (27 in 2024–25, compared to 21 in 2023–24 and 17 in 2022–23), as well as cases concerning financial aid, graduate funding, and awards (25 in 2024–25, up from 15 in 2023–24 and 9 in 2022–23). Most cases were handled by either referring them to the appropriate registrar’s offices, providing relevant policy and process information, or reviewing divisional decisions to assess their fairness. While our review did not identify any systemic concerns warranting a formal recommendation, we will continue to monitor these issues and engage with the relevant offices as appropriate.

## **Graduate Students**

Eighty-eight graduate students sought our assistance in 2024-25, an increase from 61 in 2023-24, and 78 in 2022-23. Of these, 77 were affiliated with graduate units on the St. George campus, eight with UTM, and three with UTSC.

One of the most frequently raised concerns by graduate students in 2024-25 was related to graduate supervision and academic progress, with 14 cases reported - up slightly from 8 in 2023-24, though still below the 2022-23 total of 19. Graduate supervision remains a perennial issue in graduate education, often reflecting the individualized nature of research and supervision, and the duration of doctoral programs. While no systemic issues emerged this year that would warrant formal recommendations, our Office continues to monitor individual cases and liaise with the School of Graduate Studies and relevant graduate units as appropriate.

We strongly support the School of Graduate Studies and the Centre for Graduate Mentorship & Supervision (CGMS) for their efforts across the graduate landscape - not only in their direct support of students and supervisors, but also through the targeted training and education they provide. Their findings and observations, as outlined in the CGMS Annual Report, are well-positioned to inform and enhance future outreach, support, and training initiatives.

Another leading concern raised by graduate students in 2024-25 related to financial aid, funding, and awards, with 12 cases reported. Most of these concerns were resolved informally through information-sharing, referral, coaching, or informal inquiry. For more complex or unresolved matters involving graduate funding, the School of Graduate Studies provides an accessible, formal [complaint resolution](#) process.

## **Student Services**

The Ombudsperson 2023-24 Annual Report identified an increase in complaints related to the broad category of student services. I am pleased to report that in 2024-25, there was a

significant decrease in such cases (16, compared to 69 in 2023-24), with no overarching systemic trends for this category in the current year's data.

## **Communications**

In previous Annual Reports, I highlighted my concerns related to communications, with particular attention to website content. I am pleased to note a continued decline in the number of cases citing communications-related issues - 21 in 2024-25, down from 53 in 2023-24 and 82 in 2022-23. Our Office has observed a marked improvement in the ease of navigating University websites and locating relevant staff and contact information. We would especially like to acknowledge and commend the efforts of the University's Domain Operations Group (DOG) for their ongoing work to monitor and enhance the quality and accessibility of web content.

## **Other Case Category Trends (Academic Integrity, Privacy, and Student Conduct)**

Several other categories also saw a notable increase. However, after further analysis of the case data, we found no indication of a systemic issue. For academic integrity cases we saw a rise from previous years (35 in 2024-25, compared to 24 in 2023-24 and 26 in 2022-23), however note that the majority of students who sought our assistance were looking for advice on the process or to express concern with the sanction they received. Students were by and large provided with information referring to existing processes and offered resources to support them. This represents a shift from previous years, when increases in academic integrity cases were observed at the divisional level, often accompanied by a backlog of cases. We will continue to monitor requests for assistance as the implementation of the revised *Code of Behaviour on Academic Matters* unfolds in 2025-26.

Similarly, we found no systemic issues related to privacy (10 in 2024-25, compared to 5 in 2023-24 and 9 in 2022-23), and student conduct (16 in 2024-25, compared to 7 in 2023-24). Thirteen of the student conduct cases concerned a single student, and as the matter fell outside our jurisdiction, complainants were referred to the appropriate office to address their concerns.

## Who Sought Our Assistance?

In 2024-25, the Office was contacted by a total of 357 individuals who requested our assistance (RFA). This is an increase from the 320 cases received in 2023-24, and 350 cases in 2022-23. Consistent with previous years, the majority of Requests for Assistance (RFAs) involved constituents from the St. George Campus (252). There were 56 RFAs from the University of Toronto Mississauga (UTM), and 45 from the University of Toronto Scarborough (UTSC). There were 4 RFAs for which the complainant's campus was either unknown or not relevant to their concerns.

Table 1 - Requests for Assistance by Campus, 2024-25

Request for Assistance by Campus		
Campus	Cases	Percentage
UTSG	252	70%
UTM	56	16%
UTSC	45	13%
None	4	1%
<b>Total:</b>	<b>357</b>	<b>100%</b>

Each year, the Office of the Ombudsperson receives inquiries and requests that fall outside our mandate or jurisdiction. These may include matters that are brought to us by members of the public, or by members of the University community with issues unrelated to the University of Toronto. While we are not able to intervene directly in these cases, we provide appropriate referrals and guidance to help individuals access available resources.

Table 2 - Requests for Assistance by Jurisdiction, Over time

Requests for Assistance By Jurisdiction, Over Time			
Year	Within Jurisdiction	No Jurisdiction	Total
2024-25	307	50	<b>357</b>
2023-24	268	52	<b>320</b>
2022-23	266	84	<b>350</b>

The Ombudsperson serves members of the University community whose concerns fall under the authority of the Governing Council. This includes students and learners, teaching staff,

administrative staff, and postdoctoral fellows. The table below provides a breakdown of the different constituent groups who sought our assistance.

Table 3 - Requests for Assistance by Constituency, Over time

Constituency	2024-25	2023-24	2022-23
Undergraduate Student	175	161	146
Graduate Student	88	61	73
Member of Public	25	22	26
Alumni	13	15	26
Staff	13	21	15
Family Member	10	6	7
Teaching Staff	9	14	23
Applicant	7	9	13
Postgraduate Medical Education (PGME)	7	3	1
School of Continuing Studies	6	3	12
Toronto School of Theology	3	0	5
Student - Other (e.g., bridging)	1	0	0
Post Doctoral Fellow	0	5	3
<b>Total</b>	<b>357</b>	<b>320</b>	<b>350</b>

As in previous years, we have broken down the graduate student cases by division. Graduate units are grouped into four administrative divisions. We note the increase in cases from Division 2, with 18 cases from OISE this year, 7 from OISE in 2023-24 and this is an area that we will monitor in the coming year.

Table 4 - School of Graduate Studies, Request for Assistance by Division, 2024-25

School of Graduate Studies by Division			
Division	2024-25	2023-24	2022-23
Division 1 – Humanities	4	10	9
Division 2 – Social Sciences	37	21	26
Division 3 – Physical Sciences	23	15	15
Division 4 – Life Sciences	21	15	29

## 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. Some have received a decision from the University and believe it was unfair and ask us to review the decision.

Requests for Assistance (RFAs) were categorized in two steps: first into broad categories (academic and non-academic), and then into specific sub-categories of concerns.

This year, the Office received more academic related concerns than non-academic. A detailed analysis of the data presented in the tables below (comments on increases, decreases, and trends) can be found in the *Case Trends* section of the report (see page 7).

Table 5 - Broad Concern for all Constituencies, Over Time

Broad Concern Categories for All Constituencies Over Time			
Year	Academic	Non-Academic	Unknown
2024-25	187	168	2
2023-24	147	172	1
2022-23	233	127	0

It is important to highlight that the number of cases received by the Office does not equate to the number of cases that were ultimately found to involve procedural unfairness, non-compliance with policy, unreasonable outcomes, or an undue delay.

Table 6 - Concern Sub-Categories for All Constituencies 2024-25 and 2023-24

<b>Concern Sub-Categories for all Constituencies 2024-25</b>		
<b>Sub Issues</b>	<b>2024-25</b>	<b>2023-24</b>
Academic Accommodation	16	21
Academic Integrity	35	23
Academic - Other	12	1
Academic Process	1	8
Academic Progress (*new category)	22	N/A*
Accessibility - Physical	2	1
Admin Office	1	11
Admin Process/Policy/Regulation	26	22
Admin - Other	8	10
Admissions	11	12
Campus Police	10	6
Communications (delay/non-responsive/mis-info/other)	21	53
Conflict of Interest	0	7
Delay - Process	18	18
Discrimination/Equity	20	42
Federated College Issue	1	0
Fees	27	21
Financial Aid/Funding/Awards	26	15
Freedom of Speech	0	20
Termination from Program (SGS only)	2	8
Graduate Supervision	14	8
Grading Concern	44	46
HR (e.g. Hiring practices, Conditions of Employment)	18	24
Incivility (Rudeness/Bullying/Workplace Harassment)	28	60
Intellectual Property	4	1
None/Unknown	3	3
Pension	4	1
Petitions/Appeals	20	20
Privacy	10	5
Program Requirements	1	1
Program of Study	9	10
Research Misconduct	3	5
Residence	11	8
Safety	0	20
Sexual Violence/Sexual Harassment	5	1
Student Conduct (being reported)	16	7

Student Groups (Unions, Clubs, etc.)	8	10
Student Services	16	73
Teaching Methods	20	25

## How Did We Help?

As in previous years, the Office provided multiple forms of assistance to individuals who contacted us in 2024-25. In keeping with our Terms of Reference, individuals are generally encouraged to pursue resolution through local and informal processes first. Accordingly, a significant portion of our work involved providing policy and process information (264 instances) and making referrals or connections to appropriate staff or campus services (237 instances).

Meeting with clients (virtually, phone, or in-person) and coaching remained a central feature of our support model – coaching was offered in 68 cases. This included helping individuals reframe their concerns, discuss options, prepare for difficult conversations, and develop communication strategies to address issues constructively. In many cases, casework involved documentation review and assessment of University decisions (59 cases) or direct intervention (14 cases) when needed. Only one matter this year required a formal investigation.

While many concerns were resolved with light-touch engagement, others required more sustained involvement. In 12 instances, no specific intervention was provided, as we were not provided with enough information to proceed. Overall, the range of support types reflected the flexible, responsive nature of the Ombuds Office and its commitment to tailoring assistance to the needs of each individual.

## Activities of the Office of the Ombudsperson, 2024-25

### Institutional Policy Reviews

In 2023, the Office of the Governing Council Secretariat began implementing the University's Policy Management Framework. The Office of the Ombudsperson welcomes the University's continued focus on policy renewal and views policy review as a valuable opportunity for collaboration, education, and enhanced communication across the institution.

In 2024-25, the University launched reviews of several key policies. The Office of the Ombudsperson was pleased to be invited to provide input through consultations on the following policies:

- the *Code of Behaviour on Academic Matters*,
- the *Policy on Sexual Violence and Sexual Harassment*, and
- the *Statement on Prohibited Discrimination and Discriminatory Harassment*.

In the 2022-23 Ombudsperson Annual Report, it was recommended to the administration to initiate a review of the *Code of Behaviour on Academic Matters*. As such, we were especially pleased to be included in the consultation process and to see procedural fairness improvements reflected in the revised version, which was approved by Governing Council on June 24, 2025. We acknowledge and commend the contributions of all those involved in the review process, which has resulted in meaningful enhancements to both academic integrity and procedural fairness in this critical policy and procedure area.

In other support for institutional policy [accountability](#), the Office continued its review of anonymized cases managed under the *Supportive Leaves Policy*. At the request of the Vice-Provost, Students, a review was conducted of the 2024 cases. The handling of each case demonstrated notable sensitivity, compassion, and fairness. The Vice-Provost's Office clearly adopted a comprehensive and student-centred approach, with careful attention to students' accommodation needs, housing, financial circumstances, and immigration considerations. The Ombuds Office remains available to assist the University in future consultations related to policy development and review, and other initiatives aimed at fostering accountability in the application of policies.

## Communications and Outreach

In the Fall of 2024, the Office sought the advice and guidance of the University of Toronto Communications Office in developing a communications plan. Targeted communications, including media features such as [this article](#), and events were planned and rolled out over the course of the year.

Over the past year, the Office continued its outreach efforts by meeting with staff across the University to learn more about their roles and the work of their offices, and to share information about the mandate and services of the Ombudsperson. As part of our efforts to raise awareness, we connected with student unions, academic and administrative departments, and support units. We also met with several new administrators and campus leaders across all three campuses to introduce the Office and clarify our role within the University community. Meet and greets with various offices and new leadership will continue in the upcoming year.

Social media continues to play a role in raising awareness and promoting our services. According to our 2024-25 intake RFA form, 5% of respondents learned about our Office through social media platforms.

## Accessibility Review

In alignment with the University of Toronto's commitment to equity, inclusion, and compliance with the *Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (AODA)*, the Office of the Ombudsperson, supported by the Operations Team within the Office of the Governing Council, launched a comprehensive accessibility review in December 2024. This initiative aimed to ensure that our services - delivered across all three campuses - are inclusive and accessible to every member of the University community.

The review examined the Office's website, social media channels, documentation, and client engagement methods (e.g., virtual, in-person, and by phone), leading to targeted improvements in the following areas:

- Adherence to the principles outlined in the latest version of the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG 2.2);
- Responsive website design (e.g., layout and adaptation to various screen sizes);
- Enhanced website structure, navigation, fonts, colour contrast, and descriptive elements; and
- Staff training (e.g., Accessible Social Media Workshop).

In addition, the Office's website now features enhanced information about the various options to contact and meet with the Office staff, and accessibility and privacy information:

- [Accessibility Statement](#)
- [Privacy and Confidentiality](#)

Looking ahead, a survey of key stakeholders is planned for 2025-26. This will provide valuable insight into how the Office is perceived, with particular attention to inclusivity, accessibility, and our effectiveness in reaching and resonating with diverse members of the University community.

### **Case Tracking Data**

Beginning with the 2025-26 reporting cycle, the Office will implement minor but meaningful changes to how case data is tracked and categorized. The Office has been consulting with various units across the University to consider best practices in data collection.

Planned updates include clearer definitions for case types - such as inquiries, assessments, interventions, referrals, and investigations - to enable more accurate and consistent reporting on the nature of requests for assistance and the Office's corresponding responses. In addition, several complaint topic categories will be redefined to support more robust trend analysis, to align with University policy, and to better reflect the scope and complexity of the Office's work.

## **50th Anniversary – A Half Century of Service (1975-2025)**

On March 19, 2025, the University of Toronto community gathered at Hart House to mark the 50th anniversary of the Office of the Ombudsperson - celebrating five decades of promoting fairness, equity, and accountability. The event opened with remarks from Bruce Kidd, Ombudsperson, who reflected on the Office's founding on March 20, 1975. Initially launched as a pilot project approved by the Governing Council, the Ombudsperson Office was created during equally turbulent times, in response to rapid expansion and new expectations around equity, clear policy, and fair procedures. The establishment of the University's unicameral system of governance in 1972 had also sharpened demands for transparency and accountability. The pilot project was deemed a success.

At the celebration, Professor Kidd took the opportunity to acknowledge the contributions of past Ombudspersons and staff, recognized University leaders in attendance, and highlighted the Office's role in shaping key university policies over the years. He also emphasized the Office's independence and its role in fostering national associations and standards for post-secondary ombudspersons across Canada.

Additional remarks were given by Anna Kennedy (Chair of the Governing Council), Professor Meric Gertler (University President), and Professor Sandy Welsh (Vice-Provost, Students). Chair Kennedy spoke on the Office's relationship with the Governing Council, President Gertler highlighted the Ombudsperson's role in strengthening ties between the administration and the University community, and Vice-Provost Welsh provided examples of the Office's impact on policy review and reform.

As part of our 50<sup>th</sup> year Anniversary, the Office has created a webpage that documents the history and milestones of the Office.

Please visit: <https://ombudsperson.utoronto.ca/who-we-are/history>

## Ontario University Ombudsperson Roundtable, April 23-24, 2025

In response to needs expressed by ombuds in Ontario universities, the Office organized a two-day 'University Roundtable for Ontario Ombudspersons' in April 2025. The Roundtable was convened at the University of Toronto Faculty Club and aimed to share insights, explore emerging issues, and strengthen collegial networks among ombuds across the provincial higher education landscape.

The event opened with remarks from Professor Kidd, Ombudsperson, emphasizing the importance of the ombuds community and ongoing dialogue. A keynote was offered by Professor Randy Boyagoda (Provostial Advisor on Civil Discourse) focused on civil discourse and the need for locally informed approaches to rebuilding trust and civil discourse within universities.

Day two featured an address by Steve Orsini (COU President), who provided a provincial outlook on higher education. This was followed by a presentation from Archana Sridhar (Assistant Provost), who discussed how her office had collaborated with the Ombudsperson's Office to improve policy development and procedural fairness. Emma Thacker (Ombuds Officer), presented on the structural tensions ombuds professionals face when navigating university systems. Later in the day, Professor Susan McCahan (Associate Vice-President and Vice-Provost, Digital Strategies and Innovations in Undergraduate Education), offered a talk on artificial intelligence in the university context.

Roundtable discussions explored shared challenges, such as graduate supervision and systemic barriers. The event closed with reflections and a renewed commitment to collaboration across Ontario's ombuds offices.

Please visit: <https://ombudsperson.utoronto.ca/who-we-are/events/outreach>

## Professional Development and Ombuds Community Engagement

Ongoing professional development is an essential aspect of maintaining an effective and informed ombuds practice. Over the past year, the Ombudsperson and staff participated in several professional development activities to deepen their expertise, stay current with emerging best practices, and enhance their ability to support the University community with fairness, integrity, and skill.

- Workshop - Skills for Responding to Disclosures of Sexual Violence: Using a Trauma-Informed Approach (U of T)
- Workshop - Accessible Social Media (U of T)
- Workshop - Accessible Events (U of T)
- Course - Conflict Engagement (Mount Royal University)
- Course - People, Power, and Emotion (Mount Royal University)
- Webinar - Foundations of Trauma Informed Investigations
- Conference - ACCUO (Association of Canadian College and University Ombudspersons) and FCO (Forum of Canadian Ombudsman) Fall 2024, Victoria, BC
- Ontario University Roundtable (April 2025, hosted by U of T)
- Conference - International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (IDERD), March 21, 2025
- Artificial Intelligence and Future-Focused Learning (University of Calgary Distinguished Research Lecture with Dr. Sarah Eaton, Virtual, February 2025)
- Emma Thacker (Ombuds Officer) continues with her role with the Journal of the International Ombuds Association (JIOA) - <https://www.ombudsassociation.org/JIOA-Editorial-Board>
- Emma Thacker was elected as Executive Committee Secretary, to the Association of Canadian College and University Ombudspersons (ACCUO) for a two-year term, effective November 2024.

## Acknowledgments

Finally, I would like to extend my sincere thanks to Ombuds Officers Cindy Ferencz Hammond (UTM), Miranda Edwards (UTSC), Emma Thacker (St. George), and Secretary Stephanie Goldner for their outstanding dedication and contributions over the past year. We extend a warm welcome to Miranda Edwards, who joined the team on January 1, 2025. I would also like to express deep appreciation to Kristi Gourlay (UTSG), who retired on December 31, 2024, after six years of dedicated service as an Ombuds Officer. Her work has left a meaningful and lasting legacy.

I am also grateful to the many members of the administrative and teaching staff whose responses to our inquiries were consistently prompt and thorough, and who supported our mandate to assist the University in protecting the rights of community members and promoting procedural fairness, as well as just and reasonable outcomes.

Lastly, a sincere thank you to those who brought their concerns to our Office. Although we were not always able to resolve every issue, we hope the guidance we provided 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.  
University Ombudsperson, University of Toronto  
September 2, 2025

# **Administrative Response to the *Office of the Ombudsperson* 2024-2025 Annual Report**

October 2025

## **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 *2024-25 Annual Report (the Report)* is Professor Emeritus Bruce Kidd’s fourth and final report as University Ombudsperson.

## **Response**

Professor Kidd has served the University and its broad community with distinction as Ombudsperson since 2021. His term as has been characterized by sensitivity, wisdom, and a deep commitment to the University of Toronto community. He has brought exceptional institutional knowledge, and a remarkable breadth and depth of expertise. The Administration notes that Professor Kidd’s term spanned a period of extraordinary challenge and change. At every juncture, Professor Kidd and his team in the Office of the Ombudsperson have worked with compassion, understanding, and professionalism. The President, Provost, and U of T Administration are grateful and thank Professor Kidd for his superlative service in the role of University Ombudsperson.

Though the *Annual Report* makes no formal recommendations this year, it provides several important updates on matters the Ombudsperson’s Office continues to monitor as well as updates on the Office’s activities and initiatives over the past year. The Administration would like to highlight several of these.

## **Civility**

In his 2022-23 Annual Report, Professor Kidd noted an increase in the number of complaints his Office heard arising from incivility or bullying. This observation led to the following recommendation in that year’s Report:

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

The University accepted this recommendation and has taken several important steps in the intervening years to address the concern. For example, in January 2024, Professor Randy Boyagoda was appointed the University’s first Advisor on Civil Discourse and in May 2025, his working group released its Final Report and Recommendations. As the Ombudsperson’s report

notes this year, cases involving incivility have declined by approximately 50% since the 2022-23 Annual Report. This is a heartening trend, and one the Administration will continue to follow.

The Administration also notes that the newly launched complaints website (located at <https://people.utoronto.ca/inclusion/complaints/>), created in part to meet the University's obligations under Bill 166, will further improve the University's ability to respond to complaints of all sorts, including those arising from incivility.

## **Communications**

The Ombudsperson's report also shares positive news regarding complaints involving communications. In his 2022-23 Annual Report, Professor Kidd's first recommendation was for the University to...

...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.

Since that time, the University has made a concerted effort to improve the aspects of its communications infrastructure identified by the Ombudsperson as in need of repair. The Provost raised this as a priority at several meetings of the Principals, Deans, Academic Directors & Chairs group and, as noted in this year's Ombudsperson's Report, the University's Domain Operations Group devoted special attention to enhancing the quality and accessibility of the University's webspace. The result, as noted by Professor Kidd, is a decline of more than 75% in the number of complaints his office heard that pertained to communications.

In these two examples – civility and communications – the University of Toronto's performance has improved after systemic issues were identified and highlighted by the University Ombudsperson. The Administration is grateful to the Office of the University Ombudsperson for its role in seeing these improvements implemented and for the ongoing and productive collaboration.

## **Fees, Financial Aid, Funding, and Awards and Graduate Students**

The 2024-25 Annual Report identified a small but notable increase in complaints involving fees, financial aid, funding, and awards as well as complaints arising from the graduate student community. While the Ombudsperson did not identify any systemic concerns in these areas warranting formal recommendations, the Administration welcomes the extra attention the Ombudsperson's Office has placed on these issues. The Administration will continue to monitor them over the coming year.

## **Policy Currency and Institutional Policy Reviews**

The Ombudsperson has raised the matter of policy currency in successive Annual Reports, beginning in 2022-23. As the 2024-25 Annual Report notes, the Administration has been reviewing the University's policies consistent with the Governing Council Secretariat's policy management framework. Professor Kidd notes that after implementing the framework in 2023, the University in the past year has initiated or completed reviews of the *Code of Behaviour on Academic Matters*, the *Policy on Sexual Violence and Sexual Harassment*, and the *Statement on Prohibited Discrimination and Discriminatory Harassment*. Professor Kidd commends the University in this effort.

The University would also like to acknowledge the role the Ombudsperson's Office has played in a number of these reviews, not least in the review of the *Code of Behaviour on Academic Matters*. The Ombudsperson's Office has long taken a special interest in academic integrity, making several insightful observations and important recommendations over the years. It was natural and appropriate that the University would invite the Office to participate in the review of the *Code of Behaviour on Academic Matters*. The University is grateful for the helpful advice and feedback the Office provided and agrees with Professor Kidd's assessment that improvements to procedural fairness have enhanced the revised version of the *Code* adopted by the Governing Council in June 2025.

## **Supportive Leaves Policy**

On the recommendation of the Ombudsperson's Office – first articulated in 2015-16 – the Administration developed the *Supportive Leaves Policy*, most recently updated in March 2023. At the request of the Vice-Provost, Students, the Ombudsperson's Office reviews anonymized cases in which the *Policy* was employed. The 2024-25 Annual Report notes:

The handling of each case demonstrated notable sensitivity, compassion, and fairness. The Vice-Provost's Office clearly adopted a comprehensive and student-centred approach, with careful attention to students' accommodation needs, housing, financial circumstances, and immigration considerations.

The Administration is extremely grateful to Professor Kidd and his team for their reviews of these cases – invariably, some of the most difficult the University faces. The Office of the University Ombudsperson is to be commended for the sensitivity, wisdom, and compassion they bring to these reviews.

## **Outreach Efforts**

The Administration is pleased to see the continuing efforts made by the Office of the University Ombudsperson to raise its profile within the University community and beyond. In particular, the Administration welcomes the Office's efforts to engage the advice and guidance of University of Toronto Communications in developing a communications plan for the Office.

Similarly, the accessibility review undertaken by the Office in December 2024 is an important step in ensuring the Office's alignment with the University's commitments under the *Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (AODA)*.

Finally, the Administration wishes to congratulate the Office of the University Ombudsperson for organizing and hosting the two-day 'University Roundtable for Ontario Ombudspersons' in April 2025. The event, which brought representatives from nine Ontario Universities to the University of Toronto, built on Professor Kidd's excellent reputation as Ombudsperson and established the University of Toronto as a leader in the university ombuds space in Ontario.

### **Concluding Observations**

Throughout his term as Ombudsperson, Professor Kidd has used the Office's Annual Report as an opportunity to raise, examine, and address some of the complex and systemic issues his Office sees at the University of Toronto. As the Administration hopes will be evident from this Administrative Response, these Annual Reports have led to important improvements across all three of the University's campuses.

The Administration is grateful to Professor Kidd and his entire team for their open, thoughtful, and wise collaboration over the past four years. Indeed, Professor Kidd's extraordinary institutional knowledge, his sensitivity, and his unfailing dedication to the success of every member of the University of Toronto community have distinguished his term as University Ombudsperson. On behalf of the entire University community, the President and Provost extend their sincere gratitude to Professor Kidd for his exceptional service to the University of Toronto.