



FOR INFORMATION

PUBLIC

OPEN SESSION

TO: Governing Council

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DATE: October 17 for October 24, 2019

AGENDA ITEM: 3

ITEM IDENTIFICATION:

2018-19 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 15, 2019)
2. **Governing Council [For Information] (October 24, 2019)**

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:

For information

DOCUMENTATION PROVIDED:

2018-19 Annual Report of the Office of the Ombudsperson

Administrative Response to the *Office of the Ombudsperson 2018-19 Annual Report*

Office of the Ombudsperson

2018-19 ANNUAL REPORT



UNIVERSITY OF
TORONTO

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Executive Summary

The University Ombudsperson is appointed by the Governing Council (GC) under the Terms of Reference it developed and reports annually to Council and the University community. The Office of the Ombudsperson has two responsibilities: 1) to respond to requests for assistance from individual members of the University community who fall under the responsibility of the GC, and 2) to alert GC and the University administration to those issues of broader significance (systemic issues) that merit review.

In 2018-19 we handled 310 cases, including 288 new contacts who expressed concerns about 381 issues.¹ Of the 289 new cases, 210 met the criteria for constituencies under the responsibility of Governing Council, i.e. undergraduate or graduate students, faculty, administrative staff, or alumni whose problems occurred while they were students. The remaining 79 who did not fall under the responsibility of GC included family members of a constituent, students enrolled at a Federated College/University, alumni whose issues were unrelated to their time as students, members of the public enrolled in continuing education courses or were clients of a Faculty-run clinic or had no affiliation to the University.

While the number of new cases received was 18% lower than the 351 new cases received by the Office in 2017-18, the complexity of the problems brought to the Office increased markedly, as evidenced by the 33 investigations and inquiries which were conducted. The total number of cases from the University of Toronto Mississauga (UTM) and the University of Toronto Scarborough (UTSC) Campuses continued to be very low (30 and 21 respectively).

Based on problems brought to the Office during 2018-19 and in prior years, I offer three recommendations:

1. When an external investigator produces a report and recommendations, the summary of the report and recommendations should be written by someone who was neither directly nor indirectly the focus of the complaints.
2. Consider offering an option for undergraduate students which is similar to that offered by the School of Graduate Studies, whereby students, who are on approved leaves of absence or whose registrations have been suspended because of poor academic performance, can continue to access services which will help them to succeed when they return to their studies.

¹ The concerns of most clients fell into multiple categories of issues, so this number does not represent distinct issues.

3. The School of Graduate Studies should consider developing and implementing a strategy which identifies, celebrates, and effectively communicates the characteristics of optimum learning environments for students in basic science laboratories.

During the year, the restructuring of the Office was completed. As of April 1, 2019, there are Ombuds Officers on each of the three campuses. Progress was also made in the development and implementation of a multi-faceted communication plan, tailored to the unique features of each campus, and the new and substantially improved website, part of the new Governing Council website, should make it easier to search for and understand our services. Major changes have been made to how we conduct our business. The coming year will be one of consolidation, ongoing evaluation of our services, and implementation of new and updated communication strategies.

Introduction

In October 1975, Governing Council established the Office of the University Ombudsperson, including its Terms of Reference, with a mandate to support the University's commitment to fairness in dealings with its members. The Office is independent of the University administration, and accountable solely to Governing Council.

As mandated by the Terms of Reference, the Office of the Ombudsperson reports annually to Governing Council and through it, to the University community. The purpose of the Annual Report is twofold: 1) to report on the requests for assistance from individual members of the University community, and 2) to alert Governing Council and the University administration to those 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.

The Office does not normally intervene in complaints unless regular channels provided by the University have been exhausted, and then only with the written consent of the complainant. The Terms of Reference require that, in responding to these requests, the Ombudsperson act in an impartial fashion, neither as an advocate for a complainant nor as a defender of the University. The role is to assist informally in achieving procedural fairness and reasonable outcomes. The Annual Report allows the Ombudsperson to make formal recommendations, but all decisions remain in the hands of the University administration.

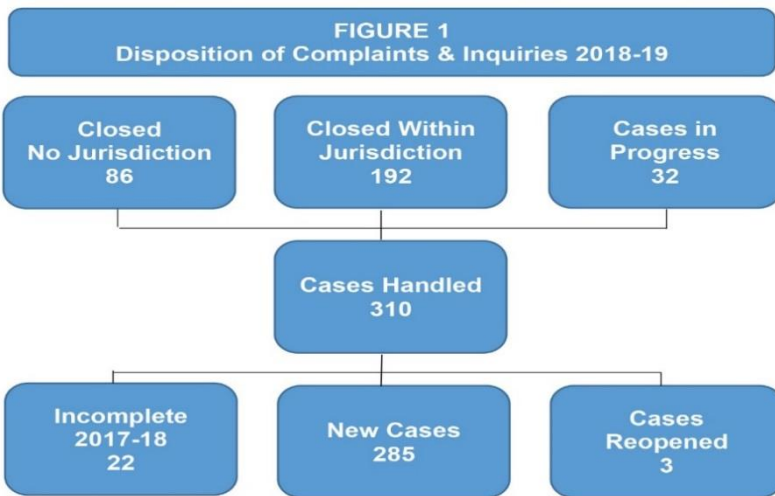
This Report to Governing Council covers my third year as University Ombudsperson. The Report is presented in five sections:

- I. Who sought our assistance, why they came, and how we assisted them;
- II. Update on last year's recommendations;
- III. Systemic issues and recommendations;
- IV. Other activities of the Office; and
- V. Looking ahead.

I. Who Sought Our Assistance, Why They Came, & How We Assisted Them

The Office dealt with 310 complainants: 288 new and 22 in progress from the previous year. The number of new cases received was notably lower (18%) than the 351 new cases received by the Office in 2017-18. By June 30, the Office had closed 278 cases, leaving 33 in progress (see Figure 1). In order to give a picture of the workload of the Office, Figure 1 and the section on the assistance we provided makes reference to the Office's total caseload in 2018-19, i.e. both new and continuing cases. To enable tracking of trends over time, when discussing who contacted us and why, I will make reference to only new cases opened during the year.

Figure 1. Disposition of Complaints and Inquiries 2018-19



WHO CONTACTED US

The following section describes the various constituent groups who sought our assistance. Some were part of the University of Toronto community, but their concerns were not within our purview. “NGC” refers to those individuals who did not fall within the Terms of Reference for our Office, set by the Governing Council. Throughout this Report, our statistics reflect what we were told by complainants. We asked for but did not require complainants to complete every item in our Request for Assistance form.

Figure 2a. New Cases by Constituency 2018-19

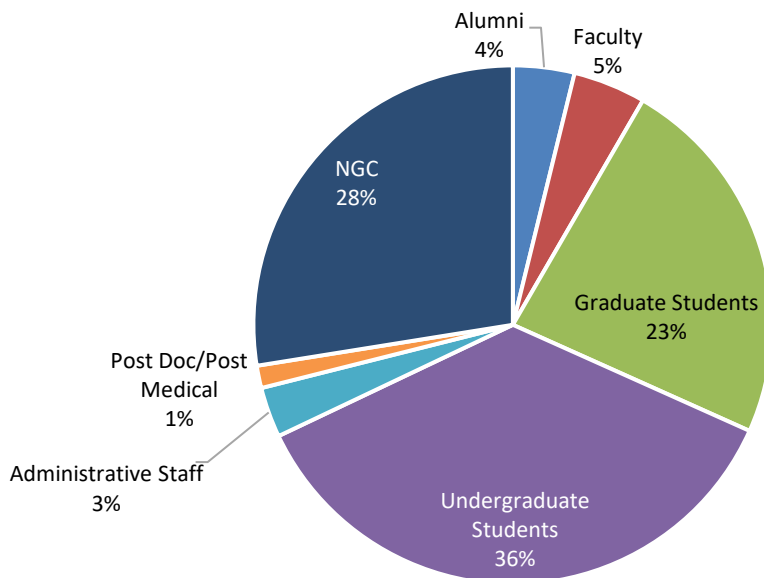
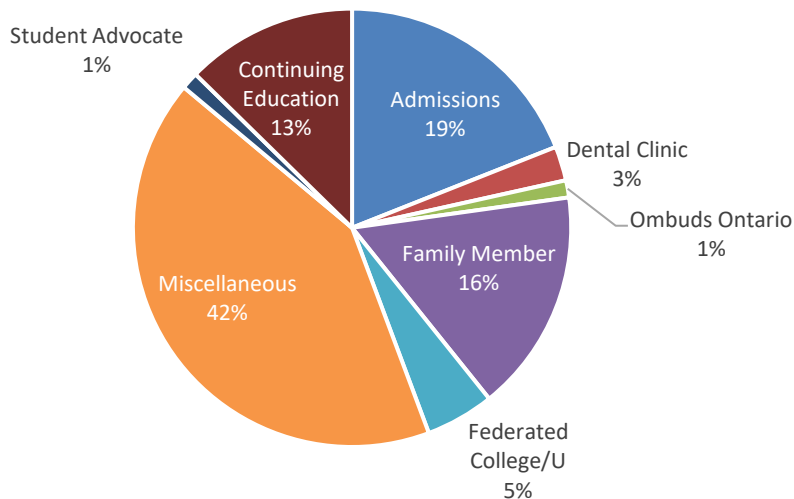


Figure 2b. New Cases by NGC Constituency 2018-19



Undergraduate students: Of the 104 undergraduate students, 91 indicated the academic unit in which they were enrolled. Of these, 14 stated they were from the UTM, 9 from the UTSC, and the remaining 68 were from the University of Toronto St George (UTSG). Of the latter, (51 were from Arts & Sciences, 6 from Applied Science & Engineering, 3 from Medicine, 2 each from Architecture, Landscape & Design, and Kinesiology & Physical Education, and 1 each from Nursing, Dentistry, Law, and Pharmacy.

Graduate students: The 67 graduate students came from a wide variety of academic units within the four Divisions. The proportions from each Division were very comparable to last year's. Of the 63 who indicated their academic unit, 8 stated they were from Division I (Humanities), 26 from Division II (Social Sciences), 9 from Division III (Physical Sciences), 19 from Division IV (Life Sciences), and 1 was from the Master of Divinity program. In addition, we were contacted for help by two postdoctoral fellows and two physicians in post-medical specialist programs.

Administrative staff: Nine administrative staff members from UTSG contacted us.

Faculty members: Thirteen faculty members contacted the Office. Ten were from UTSG, 2 were from UTSC, and 1 was from UTM.

Alumni: Eleven alumni contacted our Office concerning problems which had occurred while they were students.

No jurisdiction: Of the 78 complainants over whom our Office had no direct jurisdiction, the majority were connected in some fashion to the larger University of Toronto community, but they were not within our ability to directly assist. These included family members, students enrolled in one of the Federated colleges or universities or in a continuing education course, alumni whose concerns did not relate to their time as a student, and a student advocate. The remainder were members of the general public or individuals applying for admission to the University.

WHY THEY CONTACTED US

This year, we classified the reasons why individuals contacted us in a different way than previous years, in order to provide a better overview of the issues of concern. We categorized issues into four broad categories, each including a wide range of sub-categories. In many cases, concerns were complex and fell into multiple categories. The four main categories are:

Academic: academic integrity, grading concerns, graduate candidacy termination, intellectual property, teaching methods, research misconduct, and academic policy.

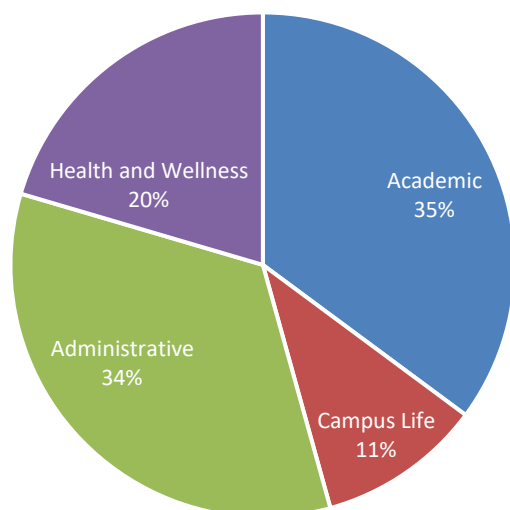
Campus Life: campus police, student conduct, privacy, student groups, and student services.

Administrative: administrative policy/procedure, admissions, fees/financial aid, and human resources.

Health & Wellness: accessibility, civility, classroom environment, dental clinic, discrimination, health/dental plan opt-out, employment/workplace, environmental safety, harassment/bullying (non-sexual), sexual violence/harassment.

Figure 3a shows the breakdown of all new cases received by the broad category into which the client's issue fit.

Figure 3. All New Cases by Category of Issue: 2018-19



STUDENT ISSUES

Figure 4a shows the broad reasons students gave for seeking our assistance during 2018-19. No remarkable differences were noted in the types of issues in 2017-18 and 2018-19.

Figure 4a. New Student Cases by Issue, 2018-19

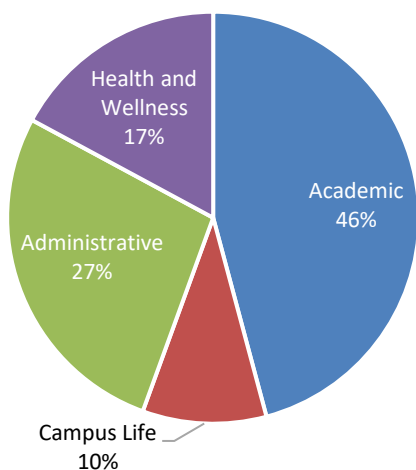
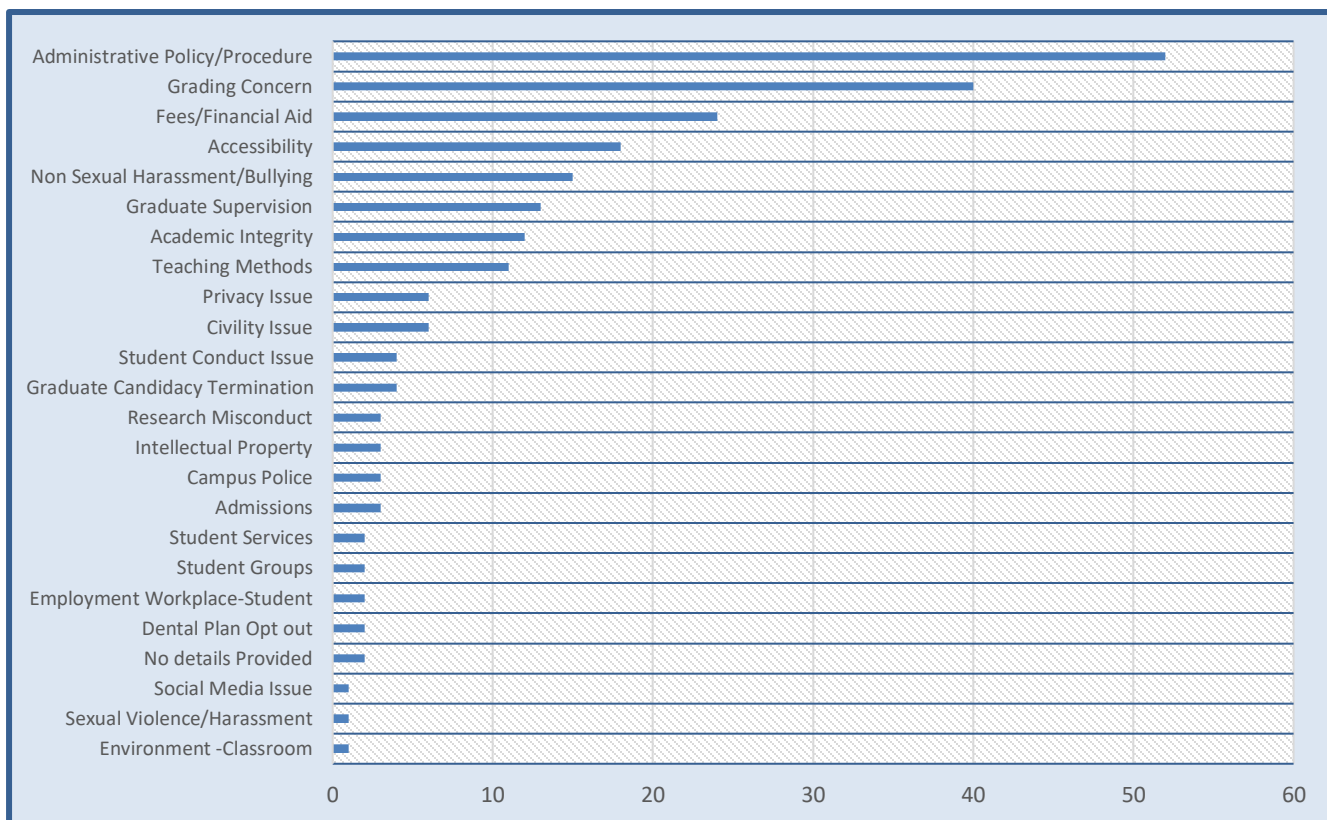


Figure 4b shows the sub-categories into which student concerns fell. While most students had only one concern, that concern could fall into a number of sub-categories. As in the previous year, academic issues predominated in the undergraduate group, while academic issues, graduate supervision difficulties, and policy/procedure issues predominated in the graduate group.

Figure 4b. New Student Cases by Sub-Category, 2018-19



ISSUES BROUGHT BY OTHERS

The following paragraphs describe the issues brought to the Office by the administrative staff, faculty members, alumni, and non-constituents who contacted the Office.

Administrative Staff: Reasons for contacting us included various workplace/employment issues, including discrimination, harassment/bullying, and job loss.

Faculty members: Reasons for contacting us included allegations of racism, bullying/harassment, employment issues, privacy concerns, and questions about policies.

Alumni: Alumni contacted us regarding a variety of issues which occurred while they were students including administrative policy/procedure, graduate supervision, harassment/bullying/discrimination.

No jurisdiction: Of the contacts from individuals not under our jurisdiction, 15 were complaints about admissions decisions (which are not appealable), 2 were complaints by clients about a Faculty clinic, some were wholly unrelated to the University, and the remainder included complaints about public statements by a professor, trespass issues, social media posts, a rally on campus, queries about scholarship opportunities, perceived inappropriate use of campus facilities, and a wide variety of other issues beyond the scope of the Office. In almost all cases we were able to refer the individuals to the appropriate office or agency.

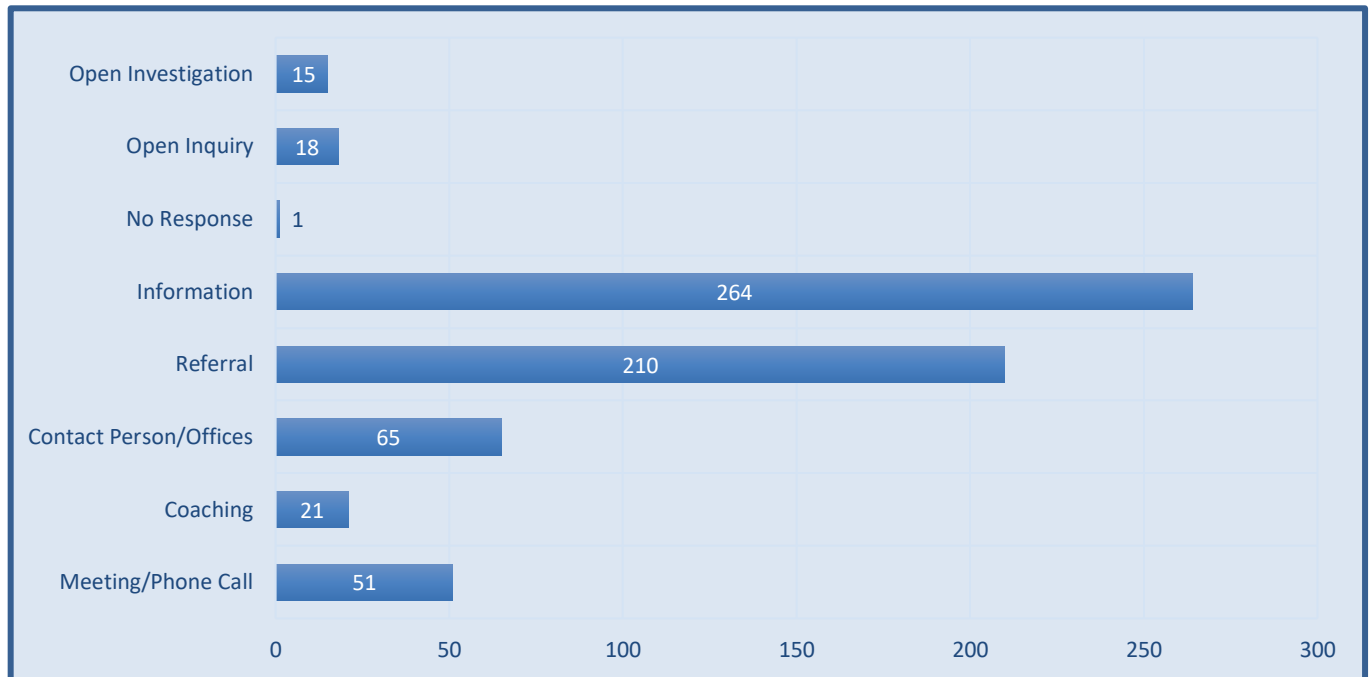
In addition, the Office had one brief inquiry from Ombudsman Ontario with respect to a complaint registered against our Office. We had no further contact from Ombudsman Ontario.

HOW WE ASSISTED THEM

Figure 5 summarizes the types of assistance the Office provided for the 278 cases which were closed during 2018-19. We offered more than one type of assistance for most cases. In December 2017, we opened a multi-faceted inquiry into several major issues in one academic unit. At my request, the Administration launched an internal investigation, which was completed in the Spring, 2019. Most issues were resolved promptly, while the very complex ones sometimes took months and occasionally have persisted over years.

This year, we created a new category of assistance, “inquiry”, which includes cases in which our contact with other offices goes beyond a single call and for which we ask for documentation from the complainant. “Investigations” include cases which require extensive information gathering from multiple sources, and often involve mediation or negotiation on the part of the Ombuds Officer.

Figure 5. Types of Assistance Provided



KEY FINDINGS

The total caseload was somewhat lower than the previous year. However, while numbers were lower, there was a large increase in the complexity of the cases. We restrict the term “investigation” to activities which require extensive information-gathering from multiple sources, often accompanied by mediation or negotiation. Only one investigation was conducted in the previous 3 years, and it was conducted by senior administration, at my request. In contrast, in the past year, our Office conducted 15 investigations and 18 inquiries, a new category of assistance which reflects the more complex cases that do not require a full-blown investigation. In my view, the dramatic increase in investigations and inquiries is partly attributable to the depth and breadth of the activities of the new Ombuds Officers (who have good relationships with the administrative staff on their campuses and are very familiar with usual practices and norms), and partly related to the increasing complexity of campus life. There is no question in my mind that the quality of services we offer has improved as a result of our new tri-campus model.

II. Update on Last Year's Recommendations

While implementing recommendations which have been accepted is the business of University Administration, I will make a few comments on the implementation of 2 of the 3 recommendations I made last year:

1. Investigating Serious Allegations Within an Academic Unit

I was provided with a copy of the investigator's report and recommendations in the early Spring, and later the response of the senior academic administrator of the academic unit, in which the administrator indicated acceptance of the investigator's recommendations. The report and recommendations dealt with all but one of the allegations. When I pointed this out, I was assured that appropriate action would be taken by the senior administrator of the academic unit. I am satisfied that the process of investigating was fair. Subsequently the complainants received a brief summary of the investigator's report and recommendations, which had been prepared by the senior academic administrator of the academic unit. Those who contacted me afterward expressed both disappointment that they had not received the full report, and disillusionment, in part because of some wording in the summary, but mainly because it was written by the administrator whose failure to act when they complained led to their contacting our Office.

2. Responsiveness of Campus Police to our Inquiries

I am pleased to report that the problem has been resolved, and the relationship between our Office and the UTSG Campus Police is now one based on mutual understanding and good communication.

III. Systemic Issues and Recommendations

My **first recommendation** concerns reports from external investigators and methods to ensure that internal administrative summaries are bias-free.

RECOMMENDATION #1

When an external investigator produces a report and recommendations, the summary of the report and recommendations should be written by someone who was neither directly nor indirectly the focus of the complaints. For the summary to be accepted by those who were courageous enough to bring forward their complaints, it should be both free of bias and appear to be free of bias.

My **second recommendation** concerns undergraduate students who have requested and been granted leaves of absence, or whose registrations have been suspended for one or more sessions because of poor academic performance. At present, since they are not registered as University of Toronto students, these students have no access to University services such as Health and Wellness, the health and dental plans, and the library. Continued use of such services could enhance their likelihood of success when they return to academic studies, and the absence of access could be a detriment for some. The process could be modelled on the School of Graduate Studies leave of absence policy, which already offers an “opt-in” option (<https://www.sgs.utoronto.ca/policy-guidelines/leave-of-absence-policy/>).

RECOMMENDATION #2

Consider offering an option whereby students, who are on approved leaves of absence, or whose registrations have been suspended because of poor academic performance, can continue to access services which will help them to succeed when they return to their studies.

My **third recommendation** concerns longstanding problems in some basic science laboratories. While the University has many outstanding supervisors and laboratory environments for graduate students in the basic sciences, the students in these excellent learning environments are not the ones who bring complaints to our Office. Students who seek our help because of harassment, bullying, and intimidation, have come from a variety of laboratories. Many if not most students are justifiably reluctant to pursue formal complaints, knowing they could be putting their funding, their graduate work, and their future careers in jeopardy.

While our experience shows that poor supervisory behaviour and lack of administrative oversight occur across all four divisions of SGS, the unique environment of the laboratory, where students and supervisors often work side-by-side in relatively closed settings, is fertile ground for the development and maintenance of unique sub-cultures, which are influenced by the leadership styles and personalities of the supervisors, as well as formal and informal laboratory customs, and relationships among staff and students. Supervisors and students operate within the context of entrenched disciplinary cultures, high institutional expectations, and fierce competition for resources. Lack of institutional oversight allows bullying and harassment to flourish.

Over the years our Office (and to a much greater extent, the School of Graduate Studies)

has dealt with many complaints by graduate students about poor behaviour by their supervisors in some laboratories. In the rare cases in which students pursue formal complaints, charges against individual faculty members are very difficult to prove, and there is little or no evidence that sanctioning individuals leads to significant positive, systemic changes in the laboratory settings. I am well aware that this problem is not unique to the University of Toronto, but rather is found in universities worldwide. (For an excellent description of the scope and magnitude of the problem worldwide, see the article in *Science Magazine*, August 15, 2018, titled “Q&A: Doctoral students at Germany’s Max Planck Society say recent troubles highlight need for change”: <https://www.sciencemag.org/news/2018/08/qa-doctoral-students-germany-s-max-planck-society-say-recent-troubles-highlight-need>).

While continuing to address individual student/supervisor conflicts remains an important activity for SGS, I recommend the addition of a strategy which focuses on the positive rather than the negative, and shifts the focus to the entire laboratory environment, rather than the individual supervisor. The goal would be to identify and disseminate the common characteristics of the best laboratory learning environments. There are a variety of methods which could be used, including focused ethnography and other observational and survey methods. The resulting report could be used as part of a communication strategy by the School of Graduate Studies, in partnership with the University’s Office of Communications, and as part of the orientation of new faculty who will be supervising graduate students. (Typically, new faculty have only their own experiences as graduate and postdoctoral students --which may not have been optimal-- on which to rely as they develop their own supervisory styles.) An added benefit would be that all graduate students would be made aware that there are excellent laboratories which promote their learning and their well-being, and they may be more empowered to complain if their experiences are sub-optimum.

RECOMMENDATION #3

The School of Graduate Studies should consider developing and implementing a strategy which identifies, celebrates, and effectively communicates the characteristics of optimum learning environments for students in basic science laboratories.

iv. Other Activities of the Office

Review of the cases managed under the new University-Mandated Leave of Absence Policy. At the request of Sandy Welsh, Vice-Provost, Students, I reviewed the cases which were managed in the first year since the adoption of the new Policy. I was extremely impressed by the sensitivity, compassion, and fairness with which each case was handled. After reading the case reports, I concluded that the Vice-Provost and the staff managing the cases should be congratulated for doing outstanding work, which benefited the students as well as the University community.

Restructuring the Office. I am delighted to report that the restructuring was completed, and we now offer on-site Ombuds services on all three campuses. Cindy Ferencz-Hammond assumed the role of Ombuds Officer at UTM in August 2018, Kristi Gourlay assumed the role at UTSG in November 2018, and Emma Thacker took on the UTSC role in April 2019. All three are doing outstanding work, both individually and as team members.

Communications plan. The development and implementation of a communications plan remains in progress. Our new website, part of the wider initiative to revise the entire Governing Council website, was launched in late Summer, 2019. During the 2019 Fall term, a UTM student intern enrolled in CCT410HS (Communications, Culture, Information & Technology) will be assisting us in developing content and materials to promote awareness of the Office and our services. We are excited about the improvements and additions he will be making to our outreach activities.

A new database. Heather Postill, SharePoint Online Administrator, and student intern Jian Quay, have developed a new database/data management system which will improve the ease and accuracy with which we can collect and analyze our data.

v. Looking Ahead: Plans for 2019-20

Major changes have been made to how we conduct our business. The coming year will be one of consolidation, ongoing evaluation of our services, and implementation of new and revised communication strategies.

Acknowledgements

I would like to acknowledge the outstanding work of the Ombuds Officers –Kristi Gourlay, Cindy Ferencz-Hammond, and Emma Thacker—and the Secretary, Stephanie Goldner. We greatly appreciate the cooperation from front-line administrators and members of the senior administration, who respond to our inquiries with diligence and patience. In addition, I am very grateful to the support provided by and those who work in front of and behind the scenes of the Office of Governing Council -- including but not limited to Sheree Drummond, Anwar Kazimi, Christina da Rocha-Feeley, and Angelo Poretta.

Administrative Response to the *Office of the Ombudsperson 2018-19 Annual Report*

October 2019

Overview

The Office of the Ombudsperson's Terms of Reference 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 *2018-19 Annual Report* is Professor Ellen Hodnett's third report as University Ombudsperson.

Response

The Administration congratulates Professor Hodnett on her reappointment as University Ombudsperson for a second two-year term. The Administration is grateful to Professor Hodnett for her continued service in this vital role, which enables the University of Toronto as a whole to benefit from her deep knowledge of our institution. Sincere thanks are due to Professor Hodnett for preparing another wide-ranging report that keeps the best interests of all University community members squarely in focus.

Professor Hodnett is also to be congratulated for the successful restructuring of the Office of the Ombudsperson into a tri-campus entity, with new Ombuds Officers now located on each of the three U of T campuses. This restructuring resulted from a recommendation of the Committee to Review the Office of the Ombudsperson. The new tri-campus model will further strengthen the supports that the Office is able to provide to all members of the University community, and the Administration agrees with Professor Hodnett that this new model has no doubt further improved the quality of services that the Office is able to offer. When combined with a new communications plan, website, and database, as well as a new category of assistance, it is obvious that the Office has undergone a number of very positive changes this year.

The Administration extends its thanks to the Ombudsperson for conducting a review of the first year of cases managed under the *University-Mandated Leave of Absence Policy*. Having a neutral party with deep expertise on University matters as well as a clinical background review these sensitive initial cases was most helpful to the University. In addition, given that it was the Office of the Ombudsperson that specifically recommended the development of the *Leave of Absence Policy* (see Recommendation 1 in the Office's 2014-15 Report), it is fitting that the same Office has been able to assess the first year of implementation of that policy.

The Administration was heartened to read Professor Hodnett's view that she was "extremely impressed by the sensitivity, compassion, and fairness with which each case was handled."

The Vice-Provost, Students and her staff in particular appreciated the Ombudsperson's acknowledgment that they were "doing outstanding work, which benefited the students as well as the University community" in managing each of the eight complex student cases brought in the first year of implementation of the Policy. (The number of these cases was noted in the President's Remarks to Governing Council on June 25, 2019).

The *Office of the Ombudsperson 2018-19 Annual Report* indicates that in 2018-19, the Office handled 310 cases, which were brought forward by undergraduate students, graduate students, administrative staff, and faculty members from all three campuses. The new format of presenting the case statistics this year, incorporating pie charts and graphs, further assists in the understanding of the Office's work, and the sources and types of cases that it handled. The Administration found the new analysis of categories of cases (eg. academic, campus life, health and wellness) to be particularly helpful.

The Administration also notes that nearly one-third of new cases brought to the Office were ones over which it had no jurisdiction. Nonetheless, the Office made concerted efforts to refer those bringing these cases to other offices or agencies, thereby ensuring that those seeking assistance also received a form of useful guidance from the Office of the Ombudsperson. We appreciate these efforts.

The Office of the Ombudsperson's recommendations, based on its work this year, are provided below together with the Administration's responses.

Recommendation 1: When an external investigator produces a report and recommendations, the summary of the report and recommendations should be written by someone who was neither directly nor indirectly the focus of the complaints.

The Administration agrees that summaries of human resources, workplace, or student conduct investigations undertaken at the University should be written by an individual who was not the focus of the complaint. Additionally, correspondence with complainants and other individuals affected by a complaint should be considered from the point of view of the intended recipient, with concern taken to avoid any perceptions of possible bias.

Recommendation 2: Consider offering an option whereby students, who are on approved leaves of absence, or whose registrations have been suspended because of poor academic performance, can continue to access services which will help them to succeed when they return to their studies.

In offering this recommendation, the Ombudsperson references the SGS leave of absence policy, which applies to graduate students in programs that require continuous registration; under the SGS policy, graduate students with serious personal or health issues or who are on parental leave may apply for a one to three-session leave during their program of study. During an approved leave, graduate students may opt in to services from Student Life, Hart House, and

Faculty of Kinesiology and Physical Education by paying the non-academic incidental fees for the terms of the leave.

The Administration agrees that it will consider whether or not some institutionally-administrated services may be offered to undergraduate students on leaves in appropriate circumstances, but there are important factors that need to be considered in any future discussion.

Most undergraduate programs at U of T (with the exception of the J.D. and M.D. programs) do not require students to request a leave of absence when they would like to step back from their studies. Most U of T undergraduate students are able to take breaks from their programs simply by not registering, without requiring any sort of permission. This is in contrast to many graduate programs that require continuous registration, and that ask students to seek approval for personal leaves.

The other type of situation that the Ombudsperson references is academic suspension, where students whose grade point averages do not meet a certain threshold while on academic probation are placed on a suspension for a period of time, usually between eight months and a year for a first such suspension, and ranging up to three years for a subsequent suspension in some faculties.

The services that the Ombudsperson lists as being of likely value to undergraduate students who are on leave of absence or academic suspension are Health and Wellness services, health and dental insurance plans, and library access. In reviewing whether access to these three types of services should be granted to undergraduate students on academic suspension, the University will need to consider a number of factors. These would include the impact on registered, fee-paying students if we were to offer services to students who are on academic suspension. In addition, it is not the Administration, but rather the five representative student committees (the University of Toronto Students' Union, the Scarborough Campus Students' Union, the University of Toronto Mississauga Students' Union, the Association of Part-Time Undergraduate Students, and the Graduate Students' Union) that manage the relationships with student health insurance providers. Any consideration of extending health insurance to students on leave would therefore need to include the student committees who negotiate the terms of those plans.

Recommendation 3: The School of Graduate Studies should consider developing and implementing a strategy which identifies, celebrates, and effectively communicates the characteristics of optimum learning environments for students in basic science laboratories.

The Administration fully endorses this suggestion and accepts this recommendation, which aligns with its own views on the vital importance of healthy laboratory environments for student and faculty life, and for the quality of research that stems from our labs. Workshops on

creating optimal laboratory environments have recently begun to be offered by the Administration, and have been well attended.

To advance the goal of creating optimal laboratory environments still further, the School of Graduate Studies (SGS) and the Division of the Vice-President, Research & Innovation are developing a U of T Healthy Labs Initiative. This initiative is set to be led by a special advisor, who will first identify global best practices in laboratory management. The Initiative may lead to the development of a Healthy Lab 'Charter', which individual laboratories at the University could adopt. Additional programming will outline best practices in human resources management and workplace environment, ethics, safety, and research supervision, and would most likely be offered through the new Centre for Research and Innovation Support (CRIS), with other institutional offices including the Office of the Vice-Provost, Faculty & Academic Life and SGS involved. Laboratory management tips could be further integrated into the University's new faculty orientation, where general principles in this area are already discussed; related sessions could also become part of our graduate student offerings through SGS's Graduate Professional Skills (GPS) program.

In summary, the Administration's strong support for this recommendation is evidenced by the fact that it is committed to launching an important new initiative in this area this year.

Concluding Observations

The Administration appreciates the regular opportunity that the Ombudsperson's Report provides to examine and address some of the more complex or systemic issues at the University. The Office of the Ombudsperson continues to serve the University extremely well in offering responsive, knowledgeable, nuanced assistance to those who seek out its services. The Administration thanks all of those within the Office, including its talented new Ombuds Officers, for their work on this most insightful report.