

**Report of the University Ombudsperson to the Governing Council
For the period July 1, 2003 to June 30, 2004**

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Office Operations and Resources:

The “Special Committee” of the Governing Council conducted its mid-term review of the Office and concluded in its May 2004 report that “there was general satisfaction with the fairness and impartiality of the Ombudsperson in handling cases,” and that “the University continues to be well-served by the Office.” The Special Committee’s report also stated that “if the number of cases were to grow on a sustained basis, the Review Committee would advise that budgetary processes take those data strongly into account when determining the resources dedicated to the Ombudsperson function.” The Committee members concluded that we had effectively implemented the recommendations made by the Governing Council’s previous review committee in 2001. In particular, they endorsed our establishment of an ‘ad hoc’ consultation network, and our scheduled visits to the east and west campuses as arranged by individual appointments.

Caseload and Case Management:

The Office handled 367 complaints and queries last year, representing a 13% increase over the previous year, and the highest number of cases in the last seven years. We experienced an 18% increase in our undergraduate student caseload (203 complaints and queries), and a 34% increase in our graduate student caseload (87 cases). Our combined caseload for University of Toronto at Mississauga (UTM) and University of Toronto at Scarborough (UTSC) was 62 complaints and queries, comprising a 15% increase over last year at UTM, and an 8% decrease at UTSC. Thirty-two part-time students (28 undergraduate and 4 graduate students) approached our office for assistance last year, whereas 20 part-time students (1 graduate and 19 undergraduate students) had done so the previous year. This is a notable increase in view of the decline in enrolment for the part-time student population, from about 11,000 to 7500 students last year when the definition of part-time was changed to those undergraduate students taking less than three as opposed to four courses. Members of the administrative and academic staff represented 8% of our total caseload. This statistic is at the low end of the continuum given the fact that their combined caseloads had varied, over the previous seven years, from between 8% to 13% of our total caseload.

As was the situation previously, the four most frequent topics of concern, in order of frequency, included: “policy interpretation/advice”, “academic concerns (e.g. classes/teaching)”, “administrative policy/procedure (e.g. access/bureaucracy issues)”, and “academic policy/procedure (e.g. petition denials)”. However, this past year, the issue of “fees/financial aid” has joined this grouping of the most frequent concerns/queries raised (with the same number of cases as the category “academic policy/procedure”). There were four issues for which we noticed a decline in cases from

the previous year, including: “academic policy/procedure”, “interpersonal dispute (e.g. supervision)”, “admissions”, and “library issues (book returns, fines)”.

With the increase in caseload we experienced last year (to 367 cases from 324), our response time to individuals’ initial contacts with our office, and to setting up our visitors’ initial appointments, is not as favourable as we were able to report for the previous two years. However, we have been able to maintain our previous service-delivery standard of case closure/resolution within seven days for one-half of our cases, and within one month for 80% of our caseload.

Recommendations:

That, for the purposes of its “Administration Response” to this year’s Annual Report, the Administration provide the Governing Council and the University community with an update on the status of the following six issues:

1. Its reviews of the University’s *Code of Behaviour on Academic Matters* (1995) and *Guidelines for Academic Appeals Within Divisions* (1977).
2. The health and safety policy/procedural framework for graduate students involved in field research/practicum placements.
3. The review and approval process for the revised *Policy on Student Housing*.
4. The review and approval process for the revised *Guidelines for the Appropriate Use of Information Technology*.
5. The development of, and approval process for, its new policy related to *Emergency Preparedness and Crisis Response*.
6. The revision of the University’s *Statement of Institutional Purpose* (1992) and its dissemination to the University community.

My Annual Report, this year, highlights a few areas of University policy and procedure where improvement is needed, and other areas where improvement is occurring. In this context, I have included, as an Appendix to this Annual Report (Appendix G), a listing of nineteen initiatives introduced by the Administration of the University serving to address and/or ameliorate issues and concerns as outlined by recommendations included in my previous six Annual Reports. I would like to express my appreciation to all of the University community members whom I have approached for assistance in resolving complaints and problems. The good will and advice that so many individuals continue to provide is vital to the accomplishment of the Office’s mandate.

Mary Ward
October, 2004