

# **Ombudsperson's Annual Report**

for the period

**July 1, 2001 – June 30, 2002**

## **Listening and Learning: The Value of Student Complaints**

**Submitted by:**

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Ryerson University**

*September 2002*

## **OMBUDSPERSON'S ANNUAL REPORT – July 1, 2001 – June 30, 2002**

### **Listening and Learning: The Value of Student Complaints.**

I have adopted the title 'Listening and Learning' for the Ombudsperson Office annual report as it's an excellent description of what we do and demonstrates how the Office contributes to Ryerson's ongoing development. In order to understand what is causing concern, to determine what steps have already been taken to resolve the matter and to determine what role, if any, is appropriate for our Office to play in the resolution of the concern presented, we have to listen carefully. By following this type of framework in our discussions, we are well prepared to facilitate the fair and timely resolution of problems. As we are always hearing about new issues, problems or individuals' views on how a policy should be interpreted or applied, we are constantly in a learning mode. Given that the University itself is a community of learners and many members have expressed great interest in addressing concerns early and fairly, "Listening and Learning", is a good description of what all community members can do to contribute to fair process and ongoing institutional development.

Many organizations who have adopted the position of Ombudsperson see the feedback provided through the complaint and dispute-resolution process as not only a cost efficient and effective means for ensuring complaints are handled in a fair and timely fashion, but also as an 'early warning system'. While there are many means for students to raise concerns and solve problems within the university community, the Ombuds office is singularly well-positioned to use the information we have received to identify indicators of the existence of or the potential development of systemic and system-wide problems. My approach to 'ombudsing' is to be responsive to current concerns as well as attempting to anticipate what may be problematic in the future.

I am hoping that this report will be helpful to those in the community who create policies and procedures, those who implement them and to those who are profoundly affected by how they are constructed and executed.

### **Concerns**

For this reporting period, I have focussed on two major issues that I believe deserve attention based on the information I have received and collected in my capacity as Ombudsperson. I have developed recommendations based on the principles of procedural fairness, effective dispute resolution and pro-activity.

### **Professionalism & Civility**

As you will see from reviewing the accompanying statistics, complaints regarding conduct represent 20% of the concerns raised this year. The type of concerns that are brought forward most frequently in this area are:

1. Lack of professionalism, e.g. not responding to e-mails or voice mails at all or in a timely fashion; not being available during posted office hours; not meeting commitments made; not providing feedback or criteria for decisions made when making administrative decisions or assessing assigned work.

When it has been appropriate for me to follow up on concerns of this nature, in some instances, I have been told by the person who is the subject of the complaint that he or she did not have enough time to follow-up and regret has been expressed for the delay which has occurred. In some cases apologies have been issued and the matter resolved.

Others have been responsive to concerns raised regarding extensive delay in providing a response, in that a deadline has been established for the provision of advice or a decision. However, it has also been implied that given the many competing priorities for the advisor or decision-maker's time, the student should simply have waited until someone got back to him or her, regardless of how much time had already elapsed. Or in some cases, I have been advised that the subject of the complaint simply does not, or rarely, responds to notes, voice or e-mail messages. In a number of cases this behaviour has been verified.

It is understood that situations will occur where individuals are not able to respond immediately to all queries made to them. However, it should not be the 'norm' for queries to go unanswered for a number of days or weeks. In addition, when individuals are away for an extended period of time, their voice mail message should make it clear when they will return and their e-mail should be set up to advise all senders that the individual will not be responding until a specific date, (e.g. due to vacation, at a conference, on extended leave, etc.)

When complaints are received stating that an administrative or academic decision was unfair, through discussion, it is often found that the essence of the complaint is that the student does not understand why the decision was made. When this type of complaint is discussed in more detail, it becomes apparent that the student has not been told or has not understood the criteria that were used to determine the final outcome whether it be for a grade or an administrative matter. In a number of circumstances when students have been provided with the criteria used to arrive at how a decision was made, they have viewed the situation in a much different light. In some instances it has been found that specific criteria were not used in the decision-making process and the process was reviewed accordingly.

2. Uncivil interpersonal interaction – e.g. shouting, sarcasm, disrespectful or disparaging comments, tirades. It is rare that I have the opportunity to discuss these concerns with the person who has been alleged to have behaved this way as the student usually fears reprisal or retaliation if the

complaint is brought to the attention of the person involved. However, when I have had the opportunity to raise concerns of this nature with administrative and academic personnel, in some instances, the individual whose behaviour has created concern, has explained what happened from his or her perspective and apologies have been issued.

There have been a number of public discussions throughout the university this year on what the institution should be doing to contribute to students being better prepared for their ongoing responsibilities as contributing citizens. A basic responsibility of any citizen is to behave in a manner that demonstrates respect for others and a willingness to engage in a dialogue about a legitimate concern. It follows that one of the ways the institution could be very influential in assisting students with respect to assuming or enhancing their roles as effective, contributing citizens is to model the type of behaviour that we expect of all members in a civil society.

I witnessed an example of an appropriate response to a barrage of complaints regarding the February 14, 2002 edition of the EyeOpener. The Women's Centre hosted a community meeting to provide an opportunity for individuals to raise their concerns directly with the Editor-in-Chief. In addition, a number of panellists were recruited to speak to issues related to community standards for media content. When the Editor was asked to explain what he had been thinking when determining what would be included in this edition, he expressed regret for the hurt that was caused and offence given by the subject matter. He noted that he had made significant errors in judgment. He also described the reasons why some of the errors had been made and the changes he was proposing be made to the organization's by-laws so that future Editors-in-Chief would be required to pay attention to the diverse opinions of those who served in various editorial portfolios. This situation was an excellent demonstration of the value that can be derived by discussing controversial issues in a respectful fashion and the remedial impact of taking responsibility for an error in judgment and providing a sincere apology.

In the 1999 – 2000 Ombudsperson Annual Report the issue of 'rudeness' was raised. The previous Ombudsperson indicated that she had been advised by some students who had raised situations with their programs that they were told that "this is just the way that person is"; others reported that they "are advised that the person involved is senior and influential in the department and the student would be wise not to pursue the complaint". If only 50% of what was reported is an accurate reflection of the situation, we as a community have reason to be concerned.

In addressing issues of allegations regarding uncivil behaviour with managerial staff in administrative units, I have been advised that 'good customer service' is a very high priority and that the importance of customer service is discussed

frequently with all staff. It would also be useful to discuss what steps could be taken to measure and increase the level of 'customer' satisfaction.

In addition, I have observed disrespectful behaviour initiated by students and staff-to-staff interaction which would not be described as collegial. We all know how difficult it is to maintain a polite and helpful posture when you are being treated improperly. However, it is our individual and collective responsibility to meet a higher standard of behaviour rather than fall to the level that has been initiated by the other party.

I am pleased to acknowledge the initiative taken by the University and its various employee groups in mobilizing a committee to work toward the development of a policy related to civility in the workplace. I understand that committee participation is being confirmed in September of 2002. Research on civility policies and 'best practices' from a wide variety of workplaces will be initiated shortly thereafter and the knowledge gained will be used to inform the drafting of a Ryerson specific policy.

### **Recommendation 1:**

**Administrative service areas which handle a high volume of transactions with students, academic departments and schools should discuss with their members, mutually acceptable standards of behaviour for:**

- 1. Addressing concerns in a manner that meets community standards for respect and timeliness**
- 2. Providing adequate reasons for decisions made**

### **Inconsistent Application of Policies**

The statistics for this year show that the most commonly raised concern is matters related to academic appeals, that is - grades and standing. In a university community it would be surprising if the 'currency of the realm', a.k.a grades and standing, were not major issues for some part of the student body. The reason I am bringing this matter forward is not because this type of concern is increasing; in fact as a percentage of our overall caseload, it has decreased by 8% this year. What concerns me is the considerable inconsistency that I see with respect to how academic issues are handled within departments and schools; and from faculty to faculty. It is not uncommon for me to see very similar appeals on compassionate grounds being accepted in one department and declined by another.

I have also seen very similar circumstances relating to probationary contracts where one department has said that under no circumstances can a probationary contract be amended, whereas another department has allowed students to drop

a course or make other arrangements to address an unanticipated situation through a mutually agreed to amendment. I have also seen it written in responses to appeals and in probationary contracts that 'no more compassion' will be allowed. It seems odd to me that a decision-maker and advisor would say from the outset that she or he will not take into account the fact that a student may have a serious accident, health problem, a death or serious illness in the family during the remainder of his or her time at university.

In another instance I was told by a departmental representative that their department did not give aegrotat (AEG) standings for exams missed due to medical or personal reasons. I explained that it was my understanding that it was not up to the department to say whether or not the existence of the AEG was appropriate. It is the department's role to determine whether or not the student's petition for the AEG meets the criteria set by the University, e.g. applies only to an exam or final assignment, (if there is no exam in the course); the work done in the course must be at an acceptable level, and the completion of the final exam or assignment was prevented by medical or other personal reasons. Interestingly enough, some individuals have said that a 'C' is what the University means by an "acceptable level"; others have been more equivocal in their definition of what "acceptable level" means.

I have also observed a number of instances of inconsistent application of the procedures contained in the Student Code of Conduct with respect to Academic Misconduct. I have reviewed and verified a number of cases where due process was not followed. In each instance the errors in process, which could have had a significant impact on the final determination, were corrected before a final decision was made. However, the anxiety created by various University personnel in not following proper procedure was enormous.

While the University is currently dedicating significant resources to the revision of the current Student Code of Conduct, we have a responsibility to ensure the existing policy is being implemented properly. There are basic elements of procedural fairness:

- proper notification of a suspicion of academic misconduct,
- the conduct of a meeting in which the allegation or suspicion of misconduct is presented and the student provides his or her response or perspective and
- the appropriate weighting of evidence

that should remain constant regardless of whether the current policy or a new policy is in effect.

When making decisions there are occasions when discretion must be exercised as the situation presented is anomalous and does not fit within the parameters of existing policy and procedure. When a decision-maker is confronted with

situations of this nature, he or she is required to use a transparent process for arriving at a decision whereby the specific criteria that were used are readily evident. The decision-maker must also be able to justify and explain any inconsistency with decisions made previously on similar matters.

## **Recommendation 2:**

**The University should undertake an orientation program for academic and advisory personnel that ensures all decision-makers are aware of:**

- 1. the basic principles of fairness which require that decision-makers look at the individual circumstances of each case presented, from an unbiased perspective**
- 2. the importance of ensuring decisions made on straightforward matters are consistent from case to case**
- 3. the requirement to use specific criteria and to provide a rationale for the exercise of discretion so that it can be demonstrated that a fair decision-making process was employed**
- 4. the policies and procedures which apply to matters which are frequently matters of contention, e.g. the standard that has to be met when assessing reasons given for medical or compassionate circumstances; the necessity of advising of the existence of a mechanism for appealing a decision, if available; the requirement for maintaining due process as articulated in the Student Code of Conduct for addressing suspicions of academic misconduct**

## **Office operations for 2001-2002**

- The Ombuds web-site was updated to provide students with more opportunities for accessing information 'instantly'. As the web-site has been 'hit' thousands of times in the past twelve months, it is our belief that the availability of this resource has contributed to the 13% decrease in the number of matters we have handled which related solely to the provision of information. We believe that it is very important for students to have access to the information they need on how to solve a problem at the time they need it, rather than being restricted to the times we are available for either in person or telephone consultation. As a result, we have added new resources and links to our website.
- The number of complaints overall has increased by 20%. I don't believe this increase is cause for concern. If you review the

comparative figures for the past five years you will see that the numbers of complaints increased for two years, and then dropped by 16%, and are now back up at a similar level to previous years.

### **Contributing to Fair Process**

The Ombuds participated in a Group to Review and Enhance Effective Teaching (GREET) seminar sponsored by the Learning and Teaching Office in January 2002 at which the topic was “What does Fairness look like when assessing and evaluating students’ work”. Three articles describing various points of view on how to achieve fairness when assessing student work were circulated in advance of the session. The discussion was moderated by Frances Gunn, Associate of the Learning and Teaching Office; the Ombudsperson served as a resource person to the discussion; and provided her views on fairness principles with respect to assessment practices. An article on the same subject was included in the GREET newsletter.

The Ombudsperson has served as a consultant to three committees which are working on the revision of policies which are key elements of the University’s operations: The Student Code of Conduct, The Academic Appeals Policy and the Student Complaint Policy.

When consulting to these committees I do so with the following interests in mind:

- ensuring adequate attention is paid to issues of procedural fairness for all participants in a process
- encouraging consistency in decision-making, while maintaining the ability to exercise discretion when appropriate
- articulation of concepts and principles that guide the policy so that those who are bound by it and those that apply it understand its rationale and foundation
- development of simply stated procedures which describe the logistics involved in the application of the policy
- use of language and format that is easily understood by all members of the community
- incorporation of opportunities for informal dispute resolution where appropriate

### **Publicity and Promotion**

In an effort to ensure the availability of the Ombuds office is widely known, we have participated in the following activities:

Orientation of RyeSAC Board Members (May 2001)

Orientation of International Students Peer Supporters (May 2001)



Orientation of Residence Advisors (August 2001)  
Discover Ryerson (parents of first year students orientation session) August 2001  
U101 (orientation session for 1<sup>st</sup> year students) August 2001  
U201 (sessions for students on probation, suspended and withdrawn status)  
January and May 2002  
CE Student Orientation (September 2001 and January 2002)  
Student Appreciation Day (February 2002)  
Produced a new brochure and distributed approximately 4000 copies

### **In Appreciation**

The Ombudsperson Committee membership has been unfailing in its support for the service, and its individual members have given freely of their time and expertise over the past year. The Committee also engaged in a long-term planning exercise that we hope will serve the community well as we approach what will likely be potentially more demanding time periods, e.g. the arrival of the double cohort and steadily increasing enrolment generally. The seven members of the Committee are:

**Andrew Noble** – Chair, RyeSAC Student Issues and Advocacy Coordinator,  
**Keith Alnwick** – Registrar, **Odelia Bay & Ken Marciniec** – Former RyeSAC  
President and Current RyeSAC Vice-President, Education, respectively, **Frank  
Cappadocia** – General Manager of CESAR, **Pat Corson** – Faculty member, **Liz  
Devine** – Manager, Skills Development, Student Services, **Nazmin Zaver** –  
CESAR President

In addition, I would like to address those staff and faculty who responded promptly and openly to my calls for clarification. I have worked in the Ombuds field for some time in both the public and private sectors and I am aware that some people find it worrisome to see 'Ombuds Office' appear on their call display. It's important to remember that I'm usually calling for information, for clarification or to discuss options for addressing a problem. I don't come to any conclusions about how a matter has been handled or the person who has made the decision based on hearing one side of the story. It would be impossible for me to form an opinion on a matter until I hear from a decision-maker what has happened from his or her perspective.

I am grateful for the calls I receive from faculty and staff who are interested in discussing what kinds of steps need to be taken in order to ensure a fair process is followed and a fair decision is made. As I noted in last year's report, responding to my queries "...promptly from a problem solving perspective.." are hallmarks of an effective dispute resolution system. Another hallmark is the fact that various members take the time to discuss what fairness should like in a given situation before they decide upon a course of action.

For many of us who have become accustomed to the position of privilege we occupy in our community or our profession, it is often difficult to appreciate how intimidating or overwhelming it can be for people without such privilege to come forward with a complaint. Many students I see are very reluctant to complain as they think they will be seen as ungrateful or as a trouble-maker. I have also encountered a number of situations involving students who have come from countries where it is considered not only wrong but dangerous to complain. In a number of instances they have told me that the reason they came forward is they heard it said that in this community “complaining is okay; it’s how problems are solved; it’s a means for ensuring people are being treated fairly, etc.”. These individuals deserve special recognition for having the courage to come forward with their concerns.

I would also like to thank Diane Dyson (Assistant Ombudsperson) for her commitment to providing high quality Ombuds service to the Ryerson community.

In the report presented to the Ryerson community for 2000 - 2001, there were eight recommendations made. The following passage shows the recommendations made in bold print and the University's progress in each area follows. The responses detailing progress made were provided by: Errol Aspevig – Vice-President, Academic and Linda Grayson – Vice-President, Administration and Student Affairs.

**Progress made by the University in response to the RECOMMENDATIONS - 2000-2001 Ombudsperson Report.**

**Recommendation 1: A system should be devised for those programs or departments which have not already established academic advisor roles, which requires that the provision of academic advice be given high priority. Specific individuals with the requisite skills, knowledge and time should be designated to provide academic advice.**

The University has responded to this recommendation by saying that “the need for appropriate student advisement has been discussed in many forums over the past year. Most notably, the Task Force on Student Success and Retention has verified, both through meetings with departments and schools, and through literature research, that advisement is one of the core factors in student success and retention. The report of this Task Force, due to the Vice President, Academic in September, will have recommendations specifically addressing advisement issues.” I look forward to reviewing the Task Force's report.

I have been advised that the probationary contract which was developed in the summer of 2001, has become the standard, and has recently been slightly modified so that advisors are asked to specifically indicate the courses students are to take for the probationary semester. In addition, I have been told that the contract and its application seem to be consistent and seem to have improved student awareness of their obligations while on probation. In addition, I am told that letters to students on conditional standing have become standard practice, and departments/schools have been encouraged to provide advisement to such students.

The actions taken with respect to the use of a standard probationary contract and the contact made with students on conditional status are important first steps. I am hoping that the Task Force recommendations will address the more fundamental aspects of advising; namely, accessible, knowledgeable staff and faculty who have both the time and interest in speaking with students about their current academic situations and how to strategize so as to avoid potentially ruinous situations in the future.

I understand from my research on academic advising that many university personnel across North America do not identify the provision of academic advice as a high priority. Given the importance of academic advising to student success

and higher retention rates, it will be necessary to implement the Task Force's recommendations so that the traditional obstacles which have made academic advising a low priority, can be overcome.

**Recommendation 2: Given the technology that exists within the University, a user-friendly data base, which can be accessed by Ryerson users only, e.g. an Intranet site, should be developed that allows users to type in 'key words' and bring up all existing policy on the particular subject that concerns them regardless of whether it has been approved by the Board of Governors, Academic Policy or administrative units.**

I have been advised that "Academic Council has developed a website where policies, forms and other items of academic interest can be found. This includes all of the policies of Academic Council, the Student Code of Academic and Non-Academic Conduct, the Academic Appeals Policy and the forms and procedures for Academic Appeals, Medical Certificates, and the form and procedures for requesting consideration for a religious observance. In addition, the registration and records website also includes many of these items. As the university system is upgraded, this site and the search function will be improved."

The senior directors of administrative units have reported that all policies which are relevant to students are posted on their individual websites or contained within the Registration and Records website. In addition an Administrative Information Technology Committee is reviewing the content of all administrative websites. This committee has expanded its mandate to ensure that all administrative web sites are up-to-date with regard to appropriate materials being available to students.

### **Recommendation 3: Student Handbooks**

**The programs and departments which do not produce a 'Student Handbook' should be encouraged to do so as to provide students with department or program specific information which will assist them to make maximum benefit of the resources available. A Student Handbook is also an excellent means for ensuring students are aware of the expectations and standards they will have to meet when studying in a particular program or department. The development of this kind of resource does not have to be costly in time or money given the ease with which existing printed material can be posted on a web-site.**

I am advised that all departments/schools have been encouraged to produce a student handbook, and that this will be an ongoing process. Copies of such handbooks have been requested by the Secretary of Academic Council and there will be follow-up undertaken with those departments/schools which have not developed them.

#### **Recommendation 4: Decision Making Standards**

**All decision-makers should be oriented to the standards they have to meet in order to have been seen to have made a decision fairly.**

I am aware that the Secretary of Academic Council met with each School or Department and the Departmental Assistants to provide a face-to-face orientation to the expectations contained within the Academic Appeals Policy. This is an important step toward developing greater consistency in decision-making across the University. However, it will require ongoing attention.

I have been advised that a group has been established to train members of the Academic Appeals Committee of Academic Council about the fair conduct of a hearing. This will also be done for members of the Student Discipline Committee. The University has also encouraged the Ombudsperson to share such standards with the community either through workshops or through written guidelines which may be applied in general circumstances.

#### **Recommendation 5: Response to Academic Misconduct**

**All academic staff should be oriented on a regular basis on to how to respond to situations which raise suspicions of academic dishonesty with respect to: the range of acceptable means for investigating or determining if academic misconduct has occurred; the importance of maintaining the student's confidentiality when making an allegation of academic misconduct and the types of situations which, if founded, would likely attract a particular penalty.**

It was noted that a group is working on the development of a revised Student Code of Academic Conduct. If this revised Code of Conduct is approved, there will be an educational campaign designed to increase awareness of its implementation.

In addition, I am told that the university is planning to sponsor a year long Academic Integrity Campaign where all members of the community will be made aware of the issues surrounding academic dishonesty. It is hoped this will help to decrease offences.

As well, the University has advised that it will be subscribing to an electronic database which will allow faculty to determine if students have plagiarized.

### **Recommendation 6: Forms for Misconduct**

**Appropriate forms should be produced by the University or each department for use by academic staff with students when dealing with suspicions or allegations of academic misconduct.**

I have been told that once the new Student Code of Conduct has been approved, forms for its implementation will be developed.

### **Recommendation 7: Course Management and Misconduct**

**Instructors should provide verbal and written notice, e.g. course outlines should describe what academic misconduct is; that plagiarism and cheating will not be tolerated; and the range of penalties that may be imposed for committing various forms of academic misconduct.**

I have been advised that the Faculty of Arts is now distributing a blanket statement on plagiarism to students in all of its courses. When the new Code of Academic Conduct is approved, there will be policy elements applied to course management.

### **Recommendation 8:**

**Students should make themselves familiar with what constitutes academic misconduct and ensure they conduct their research and complete their work in a manner that precludes the possibility of being accused of such behaviour.**

As this recommendation was directed specifically at students, it is not reasonable to expect the University to comment on what it has done to address this matter.

Respectfully submitted,

Nora Farrell, Ombudsperson  
September 20, 2002

### **Background Information**

#### **What does the Ombudsperson do at Ryerson?**

The Ombudsperson is an impartial, independent resource who assists with the resolution of disputes, usually in an informal fashion, using a variety of problem solving strategies. When all avenues of appeal have been exhausted, and it is believed that a decision was made unfairly, the Ombudsperson may investigate the decision-making process. The Ombudsperson may also conduct an

investigation on his or her own initiative. The Ombudsperson may make recommendations, which are equitable to all parties, when appropriate. In addition, the Ombudsperson hosts discussions and forums about matters that may be of interest to any member of the Ryerson community and reports annually to the community on the activities of the Office.

### **The History of the Ombudsperson Role at Ryerson**

The position of Ombudsperson was put into place in 1997. A committee composed of students, faculty and staff spent the previous year detailing the terms of reference for the operation of the service. Prior to that, a number of members of the Ryerson community researched the operations of long established university Ombuds offices across the country and made suggestions for best practices and organizational structure. The office is funded via student levy which was authorized by a referendum held in 1996. It is worthy of note that a large percentage of the universities in Canada have had Ombuds offices for many years. For example, Carleton University, University of Toronto, University of Victoria and the University of Western Ontario have had Ombuds offices in place for more than 20 years. Increasingly, community colleges are establishing Ombuds offices as well. By comparison, in the U.S., the first University Ombuds office was established in the 1960's.

### **Terms of reference for the Ombudsperson and the Ombudsperson Committee**

The manner in which the Ombudsperson is required to operate is explicitly defined in the terms of reference for the position. In addition, the requirements established for the Ombudsperson Committee which provides support to the Ombudsperson is also defined in a separate set of terms of reference. The full text of this material can be easily accessed on our website at [www.ryerson.ca/ombuds](http://www.ryerson.ca/ombuds). Some of the more salient points that everyone should be aware of are:

- a) the Ombudsperson will not act as an advocate for any party during the investigation of a complaint
- b) the Ombudsperson may not investigate a matter until all levels of appeal have been exhausted
- c) the Ombudsperson has unrestricted access to all records held by the University and her requests for information must be given priority.
- d) the Ombudsperson committee has financial oversight responsibilities and provides advice and guidance on marketing and promotion. However, the members have no involvement in the handling or review of cases. All case work is completely confidential to the Ombudsperson's office.

**Vice Presidents, Academic and Administration & Student Affairs**  
**Response to the**  
**Ombudsperson's Annual Report**  
**July 1, 2001 - June 30, 2002**

The two issues on which the Ombudsperson has focused her annual report, *Professionalism and Civility* and *Inconsistent Application of Policies*, are both of vital concern to the University. It is essential that students are treated with respect and civility and that they, in turn, treat faculty and staff in the same way. A large part of the respectful treatment of students lies in the consistent application of University policies. Policies are developed very carefully so as to be as effective and fair as possible. When they are inconsistently applied their very nature is compromised.

**Recommendation 1:** It is clear that the issues surrounding mutually acceptable standards of behaviour and rational decision making are essential both in university service areas, and in academic departments. In fact, respect is essential in all interpersonal relationships at the University.

Ryerson is currently working to establish a policy related to civility in the workplace which supports and enhances its commitment to creating and maintaining a work environment characterized by civility and respect. Ultimately this committee will represent members from all areas of the faculty and staff, and report to the Vice President, Administration and Students Affairs. The Vice President, Academic's office will be represented on this committee. Although work was scheduled to begin this semester, it has been delayed until the RFA and CUPE make decisions on participation. Once the work of this committee has been completed, the Vice Presidents will work together to implement its recommendations and any policy which may be developed.

**Recommendation 2:** This recommendation is about the respect shown to students by University academic and administrative personnel, and the provisions of reasons why decisions are made. The report asserts that there is inconsistency in the way decisions on grades and standings are made. Departments and Faculties seem to apply the policies differently when making decisions about appeals, particularly on compassionate grounds. The requirements for and execution of probationary contracts also seems to vary.

As is noted in the Ombudsperson's report, this is an area which is being addressed in the form of revisions of both the Academic Appeals Policy and the Student Code of Conduct. The groups working on these policies consist of the Associate Registrar, the Secretary of Academic Council, the RyeSAC Student Advocacy Coordinator, the Chairs of the Student Discipline Committee and Academic Appeals Committee, and representative faculty. This group represents a wide range of experience and wisdom in these areas. The policies are being reviewed with an eye toward streamlining and making the processes more fair, and toward providing training to those who make the decisions. The Ombudsperson has also provided information to these groups on fair process. The revision of these policies is, however, not a solution for the near term.



In order to promote better decision making based on the current policy, there will be a training session for the members of the Academic Council Academic Appeals Committee. A later session for members of the Student Discipline Committee is anticipated. The Secretary of Academic Council, when possible, has been providing policy and implementation guidance to Chairs/Directors and Deans. Staff is being informed of proper procedures in the acceptance of appeals, the guidelines for appeals, the appropriate process for the waiving of deadlines, and the appropriate use of probationary contracts. There has been an attempt to clarify and standardize the interpretation of the policy. A presentation to new Chairs and Directors on the appeals process is scheduled as part of their orientation program. Administrative Directors will be reminded of the importance of proper procedures and explanations in their dealings with students. Each one will be asked to provide appropriate guidance to staff who work directly with students.

These initiatives, of course, do not reach all academic decision makers. There will be further discussion of how to best disseminate information and guidance in this area. When the new Academic Appeals Policy and Student Code of Conduct are approved and implemented there will be a widespread education campaign designed to assure that the policies are well understood and consistently applied.

We would like to thank the Ombudsperson for her exceptional work in the area of student complaints, and her willingness to serve as a consultant on the review of University policies. She has provided a valuable service to both the students and the institution.

Respectfully submitted,

Errol Aspevig, Ph.D.  
Vice President, Academic

Linda Grayson, Ph.D.  
Vice President, Administration & Student Affairs