

LISTENING & LEARNING

OMBUDSPERSON'S ANNUAL REPORT FOR 2004/2005

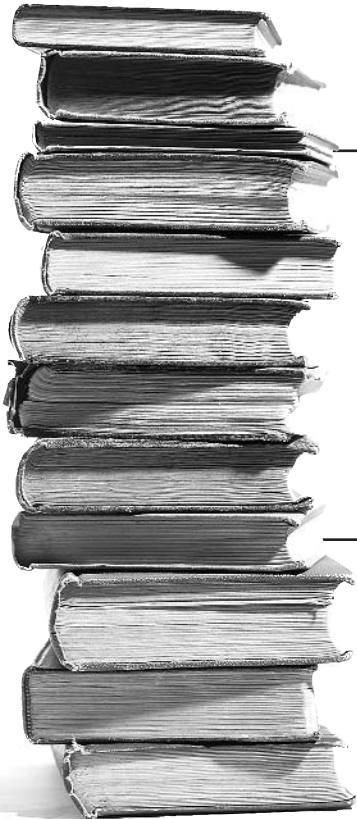


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Introduction

I am required by the terms of reference which govern the Office of the Ombudsperson and the Ombudsperson Committee (www.ryerson.ca/ombuds/moreaboutouroffice/terms.html) to report annually to the Ryerson community on the activities of my office. I do so with great enthusiasm as I see it as a valuable opportunity to:

- engage the community in discussion about general fairness and dispute resolution principles,
- provide statistical information on the type and volume of concerns and complaints that are brought to my attention so that all members of the community can have the benefit of 'listening and learning' about these issues, and
- provide recommendations for consideration of system-wide improvements.

Essential Characteristics of Ombudsperson Role

In this report I would like to encourage discourse on the essential elements that determine how the Office of the Ombudsperson deals with concerns and complaints. As it is impossible, in my view, to have a useful discussion about principles of any kind and/or their implementation without understanding each discussant's definition of the subject matter under scrutiny, I will begin by articulating the definitions I use for these underlying principles.

The cornerstones of an ombuds' practice whether it be established in a university, college, for-profit corporation, professional association, not-for-profit organization or in the public sector are: impartiality, independence and confidentiality. In the Ryerson Ombudsperson Terms of Reference the specific wording that applies to these principles in the order in which they appear is:

"THE OFFICE OF THE OMBUDSPERSONS SHALL: BE INDEPENDENT; OF ALL EXISTING UNIVERSITY AND STUDENT ADMINISTRATIVE STRUCTURES...[PARAGRAPH 1] AND...INVESTIGATE IN AN IMPARTIAL FASHION...[PARAGRAPH 1(B)] AND...RESPECT THE NEED FOR

CONFIDENTIALITY AS MUCH AS POSSIBLE; OPERATE UNDER STANDARDS OF CONFIDENTIALITY." [PARAGRAPH (E)]

The definitions I use for each of these terms are: **Independence** is achieved via **the autonomy of the Office of the Ombudsperson from the constituents² served and the lack of any personal benefit for the Ombudsperson to be derived from any interaction with constituents.**

For example, the type of relationships I have with the complainant and the respondent are such that I will not gain any personal benefit from any conclusions reached, and/or recommendations made, if any are appropriate in the circumstances. I have no personal interest in a particular outcome for any person involved in the conflict or dispute as a result of a past or current relationship with either the respondent or the complainant. My only interests are fairness and timeliness. One of the consequences of maintaining my independence is that it is not appropriate for me to serve in any decision-making role for the University community. Therefore, I do not sit on hiring committees or

¹ I will use the words 'ombuds' and 'ombudsing' as an adjective and verb, respectively, for ease of reading.

² Constituents include: complainants, respondents [the individuals I speak to about a concern or complaint] and all members of the specific community served.

any committee or task force that is responsible for adjudication or allocation of resources. On request, I do consult to committees that are developing policies for the purpose of providing input on fairness principles and appropriate dispute resolution and communication mechanisms. However, I do so in a consulting capacity rather than in a decision-making capacity.

Impartiality is based on how I review the concern or issue brought to my attention. I look at the facts of the case **without any bias for or against the issue under review or toward any party to the conflict or dispute**. If it is appropriate for me to make a determination on the fairness of a decision made or an action taken, I use the principles of natural justice and administrative fairness standards, to determine whether the relevant fairness standard has been upheld or violated. The questions I use to make determinations are posted on the Office of the Ombudsperson website and can be accessed through the ‘hot topics’ menu at www.ryerson.ca/ombuds. They are also included on page 8 of this document and have been circulated to University decision-makers on various occasions for their use as a framework for ensuring a fair decision-making process. In addition, I also endeavour to take whatever steps are necessary to ensure that there is no appearance of positive or negative bias toward any person involved in the complaint or dispute.

In developing these definitions I have specifically separated the way in which an Ombudsperson reviews a complaint, that being, impartiality, from the type of relationship she or he has with the respondent or the complainant, and/or any personal benefit that could be derived from coming to a particular conclusion, that being, independence. My rationale for doing so is to correct the mistaken notion that impartiality which is often equated with the term ‘neutrality’ means having no values or opinions or working relationships. The distinctions have been made between these terms to demonstrate that disciplined individuals can handle matters dispassionately and approach contentious issues analytically when their roles require them to do so.

Confidentiality is based on the premise that individuals who raise concerns or complaints with me are assured that **I will not divulge their identity and the specific details of their concern to anyone without their explicit permission, unless they give me cause to believe that they intend to harm themselves or someone else**. This provision allows individuals to speak freely about what is troubling them and to use the ombuds resource to determine what avenues are available for addressing their concern. In addition, my adherence to this principle results in me saying to anyone who approaches my office for information about topical matters: “I can not con-

firm or deny the existence of complaint as all individuals who contact this office are assured of confidentiality.” I also explain that my annual report is where I comment publicly on the type of concerns and complaints raised and that the issues are presented in aggregate form so that individual complainants and respondents can not be identified. When I have determined that it is appropriate for me to approach a member of the University community to clarify or gather additional information prior to forming an opinion about the fairness of a final decision or an alleged violation of a policy, I remind complainants who want to remain anonymous that while I will not reveal their identity without their permission, the circumstances of their case may be sufficiently idiosyncratic that it may be possible for the person who receives my inquiry to determine the complainant’s identity without knowing their name. Once again, my intent in providing this additional warning is to ensure complainants are fully informed that the possibility exists that while I may bring a matter forward for discussion on an anonymous basis, the identity of the complainant may be obvious to the recipient of my call.

I have posited the foregoing definitions for the community’s review to assist all constituents to understand how I approach my work and to inspire discussion regarding these essential characteristics of an ombuds practice and the Ryerson Ombudsperson role.

Statistical Information

Types of Concerns	04/05 535	03/04 480	02/03 513	01/02 364	00/01 303	99/00 363	98/99 327	98/97 302
Academic Advice ³	59	61	60	34	--	--	--	--
Academic Appeals ⁴	168	152	136	76	88	96	77	70
Academic Misconduct	34	23	19	15	9	--	--	--
Accessibility	5	6	6	5	0	7	9	13
Advanced Standing	Included with Admissions				0	2	6	3
Advancement & Development	3	0	1	1	--	--	--	--
Admissions ⁵	34	31	27	18	24	27	16	17
Ancillary Services	0	2	8	3	--	--	--	--
Campus Planning & Facilities	1	2	1	2	--	--	--	--
Challenge Credits	Included with Curriculum Advising				0	4	3	6
Conduct - Instructor	82	57	59	44	44	--	--	--
Conduct - Staff	15	16	16	27	18	--	--	--
Conduct - Student	12	4	8	3	7	30	31	25
Confidentiality	1	2	2	2	--	--	--	--

³ This category includes concerns regarding not being able to easily access academic advice from a knowledgeable person. It includes Course Requirements, Prerequisites and Transfer Credits.

⁴ Including Academic Standing.

⁵ Including Advanced Standing.

Types of Concerns	04/05 535	03/04 480	02/03 513	01/02 364	00/01 303	99/00 363	98/99 327	98/97 302
Course Requirements	Included with Academic Advice				0	15	0	12
Curriculum Advising ⁶	10	9	15	10	13	--	--	--
Exchange Programs	2	0	1	--	--	--	--	--
Fees	10	18	17	21	13	32	38	35
Financial Assistance	10	8	11	15	12	24	21	15
Information Requests - no complaint	20	17	29	22	5	--	--	--
Late Withdrawals	Included with Registration & Records				0	3	4	0
Library	0	3	2	1	0	13	10	8
Non-Academic Complaints	Category Omitted					30	23	27
Outside Jurisdiction	7	7	14	6	7	--	--	--
Pre-requisites	Included with Academic Advice				0	2	3	0
Practicum/Placement	4	5	7	5	5	--	--	--
Registration & Records ⁷	28	25	29	22	17	--	--	--
Reinstatement/ Re-admission	13	16	26	15	20	26	34	30
Residence	3	3	1	0	4	18	24	18
Safety & Security	4	4	3	6	8	--	--	--
Sports & Recreation	0	0	2	0	0	7	0	0
Student Media	1	0	1	3	--	--	--	--
Student Services	1	2	3	2	--	--	--	--
Student Unions/Associations	7	3	5	5	4	--	--	--
Team work	1	4	4	1	0	20	15	12
Transfer Credits	Included with Academic Advice				5	7	13	11

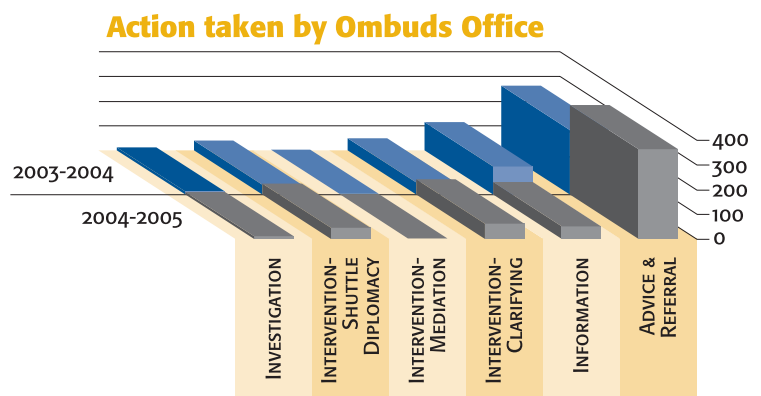
Action Taken	04/05	03/04	02/03	01/02	00/01	99/00	98/99	98/97
Information	51	114	159	85	110	15	18	21
Advice	364	262	228	138	83	227	213	199
Intervention	120	104	126	141	110	121	96	82
Total	535	480	513	364	303	363	327	302

Information: Providing information on policies and procedures

Advice: Providing information and discussing possible options with students

Intervention: Taking action, with the students' permission, to assist in some way to resolve the concern, e.g. clarifying information, facilitating, mediating, conducting investigations etc.

Action Taken	03/04	04/05
Advice & Referral	262	364
Information	114	51
Intervention - Clarifying	49	62
Intervention - Mediation	3	2
Intervention - Shuttle Diplomacy	40	45
Investigation	12	11
Total	480	535

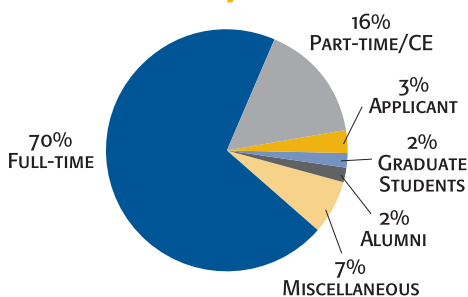


⁶ Including Challenge Credits.

⁷ Including Late Withdrawals.

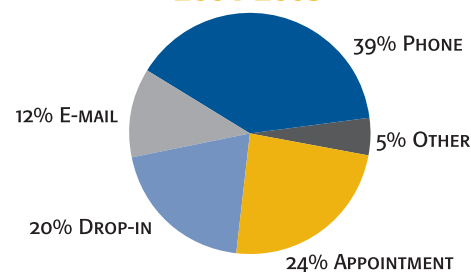
Constituency	04/05	03/04	02/03	01/02	00/01	99/00	98/99	98/97
Full-time degree	375	334	358	241	226	264	241	210
Part-time degree	Included With Continuing Education					17	18	14
Applicant	15	29	21	21	17	Unknown		
Graduate students	10	4	3	3	4	n/a	n/a	n/a
Continuing Education	85	79	84	58	38	52	44	49
Special Students	Included With Special Students					4	5	2
Alumni	10	7	7	11	3	Unknown		
Miscellaneous	40	27	40	30	15	26	19	27
Total	535	480	513	364	303	363	327	302

Constituency 2004-2005



Method of Initial Contact (%)	04/05	03/04
Appointment	24%	21%
Drop-In	20%	27%
E-mail	12%	10%
Phone	39%	38%
Other	5%	4%
Total Contacts	535	480

Method of Initial Contact 2004-2005



Highlights of Statistical Information

Number and type of complaints:

Since 2003/2004 there has been an 11% increase in the number of concerns and complaints brought forward during the period covered in this report, i.e. July 1, 2004 - June 30, 2005. This increase is not necessarily cause for concern as the overall number of students studying at Ryerson is greater than before and the Office of the Ombudsperson is now in its eighth year of operation. As the existence of the service becomes better known due to its increased longevity and word-of-mouth referrals from faculty, staff and students, it is not unexpected that more people would approach the Ombudsperson to request assistance in resolving their concerns.

Decrease in Volume of Complaints in a Particular Category

Academic Advice:

For the first time in three years I have seen a minimal decrease in the number of complaints regarding students' expressed inability to access academic advice. While it is impossible to give

a definitive explanation for this decrease, my speculation is that the increased emphasis many academic departments and programs, as well as Student Services, have placed on first year student orientation has resulted in students being encouraged to direct their queries to the appropriate personnel so that they acquire the type of information and academic advice they need in a timely and comprehensive fashion.

Increase in Number of Complaints in Particular Categories

Academic Misconduct:

Conversely, the number of complaints regarding charges of academic misconduct have risen by 48%. Based on the type of complaints I have received it is difficult to say what is at the root of this change other than that the increase in the number of charges laid by University personnel likely has had some impact. There are only two obvious trends in the content of the complaints I have received regarding the implementation of the Student Code of Academic Conduct. These trends are:

- Concerns have been raised regarding the method used for discussing suspicions of academic dishonesty or misconduct with

students. The most prevalent error described is students receiving notice that a meeting has been scheduled for a particular date and time with the instructor and a specific third party regarding a suspicion of academic misconduct. In issuing this kind of directive no provision has been made to give the student an opportunity to agree to the presence of a third party. The wording in the Student Code of Academic Conduct, C2(d) reads: "A mutually agreed upon, third party may be present for the session." In addition, some complainants have stated that the third party has played a major role in the content of the discussion as opposed to facilitating the discussion or taking notes as is intended by the policy. In other instances students have not been provided with a copy of the Summary of Discussion form at the end of the meeting.

- Concerns have been raised regarding incidents where students are charged for plagiarism for improperly referencing direct quotations in an essay or report. While in every instance I have reviewed it is readily evident that the student has made an obvious and serious referencing error, the student has asserted that they

were following the style guide they had used on previous occasions with no negative result, or they were following what they perceived to be APA requirements, or the style they had been taught to follow at another university or post-secondary institution. The students in these situations indicate that they had no intent to behave in an academically dishonest fashion and often provide a rationale or documentation for why they believed they were referencing various scholars' and practitioners' ideas correctly. As a result, they consider the consequences of this type of error, e.g. a zero in an assignment for a course which causes a failure of the entire course and a significant setback with regard to completing a degree or continuing with their cohort due to lacking a required pre-requisite course, as being disproportionate. While I am concerned about the lack of symmetry between some students' understanding of the University's expectations regarding referencing requirements, I have chosen not to make a recommendation on this matter as the University has recently established the 'Office of Academic Integrity' and the position of 'Academic Integrity Officer'. It is my hope that the Fall 2005 Academic Integrity campaign which includes print materials and a comprehensive website containing interactive tutorials will reduce the incidence of these types of concerns by orienting students to the importance of learning the proper method for referencing for particular disciplines. The additional support that is made available to University personnel by the existence of this role will also provide both faculty and administrative staff with feedback on the fairness requirements that are imbedded in the policy and must be adhered to by all parties to a discussion about a suspicion of misconduct or the preparation for and conduct of a hearing.

Academic Appeals of Grades and Standing:

The number of complaints in this category has risen at the same rate, i.e., 11%, as the overall number of complaints. Similarly, the percentage of complaints regarding academic appeals of grades and standing in comparison to all other complaints received has remained constant at 32% of the caseload as compared to the figures recorded for 2003/2004. As the Academic

Consideration and Appeals policy has recently been revised and the latest version is being implemented for Fall 2005, I will not make any further comment on these types of complaints until the community has had the opportunity to gain experience with the 2005 edition of the policy.

Conduct:

The number of complaints regarding staff conduct has stayed virtually constant (one less than the previous year), while the number of complaints regarding instructor conduct has increased by 44%. In addition, the number of complaints regarding student conduct has increased by 200%.

The types of issues that have been raised by students regarding conduct of instructors fall into four themes: lack of civility; difficulty contacting instructors, and once contact is made, a lack of timely response; a perception of unfair assessment practices; and a perception of unwillingness to abide by various University policies, e.g. the Course Management policy and the Academic Consideration and Appeals policy. For instance, with respect to the Course Management policy, the issues raised cluster around the lack of timely feedback, e.g. mid-term assignments and exams not being returned until the end of the semester; reducing class-time repeatedly without notice and deviating significantly from the evaluation system outlined in the course outline without giving the requisite verbal and written notice of planned changes. The issues raised that fall under the aegis of the Undergraduate Academic Consideration and Appeals policy revolve most frequently around: 1) difficulties encountered in making arrangements for writing deferred mid-term and final exams or arranging for extensions due to compassionate or medical circumstances, e.g. family illness or crises or personal illness, and 2) implementing the re-assessment process when it is believed an assignment or exam has been unfairly evaluated.

As it is not appropriate for me to contact all the individuals involved in the situations discussed with me I am not able to determine if what I have been told accurately reflects the scenarios that have been summarized above. However, as a result of reviewing case details with some instructors and reading scores of e-mail messages, it is my impression that some students and instructors find themselves taking adversarial positions from the outset of discussions regarding planned changes or changes required due to emergencies or logistical requirements, rather than attempting to listen carefully to each other's concerns to see if it is

possible to understand each other's points of view. It appears that positions are often taken prematurely that either one or both parties to the dispute are loathe to reconsider regardless of the reasonableness of a subsequent proposed solution or explanation. I also recognize how difficult it is for instructors to find the time to deal with a myriad of issues for a large number of students on an ongoing basis.

The type of complaints that are raised regarding staff conduct relate primarily to the difficulties had in communicating successfully in order to resolve administrative problems. In the vast majority of incidents I have been involved in the students have asserted that they were frustrated by what they perceived as some staff members' unwillingness to try to understand what had caused the administrative problem described by the student and their speed in referring them elsewhere incorrectly; and/or that they were given incorrect information; and/or the staff member became frustrated and refused to speak with them further, so the problem remained unresolved. In many instances when I have spoken to both parties to the discussion, I have observed that both people involved in these types of discussions found the communication either annoying, hurtful and/or disrespectful. In all instances it was entirely unproductive.

The large percentage increase in complaints made regarding student conduct is not easily explainable as the subjects of the various complaints received are unique in nature. However, all of the complaints received contain some of the same elements described earlier; that being, a perception of disrespectful and ineffective interpersonal communication which resulted in creating a negative environment or some form of unfairness.

Unfortunately, in circumstances involving concerns about poor communication with all the groups named, (e.g. staff, instructors and students), some disagreements escalated rapidly to a degree of negativity that was unacceptable and which was not easily de-escalated given what had been said in the interim.

Given that:

- conflicts are inevitable due to competing needs and priorities, and
- the manner in which we respond to those conflicts determines whether the outcome will be positive or negative, and
- there will always be a wide variety of interpretations and possible perceptions of the same situation,

The 2004/2005 Recommendation

I am recommending that the University offer increased opportunity for professional development and student development in the area of effective and respectful conflict resolution using a wide variety of communication skills and dispute resolution techniques. In making this recommendation I am aware that the Department of Human Resources and the Learning and Teaching Office have already provided opportu-

nities for in-service training in this important area of professional development. My recommendation is to increase the availability of both basic and advanced conflict resolution skill building opportunities and that they be structured in such a fashion that they are easily accessible to all staff and faculty. In addition, I am aware that Student Services offers some conflict resolution training modules for students in its Learning Success Service, Leadership Series and mentoring programs. While these initiatives are

beneficial I am recommending that Student Services also increase the number and diversity of workshops on effective communication and conflict resolution for students who are not already associated with a specialized developmental program.



Response of the Vice President, Administration and Student Affairs and the Provost and Vice President Academic to the Ombudsperson's Annual Report July 1, 2004 - June 30, 2005

We would like to once again thank the Ombudsperson, Nora Farrell for her annual report and for her work. This year's report notes that the University has made progress in a number of areas, including improved student access to academic advice, increased emphasis on first-year student orientation, and the establishment of an Academic Integrity Office and development of related print and web materials to educate students and faculty. She has also recognized the focus on group work over the past year, and noted that there was only one complaint to her office on "team work". The Ombudsperson's acknowledgement of this progress is appreciated, and the University is committed to making further progress in these areas.

The Ombudsperson has also expressed a number of concerns and makes one recommendation. These will be addressed below.

The first concern relates to the method of discussion of suspected academic misconduct/ dishonesty with students, particularly in regard to proper notice, the presence of a third party at discussions between an instructor and a student, and the provision of a Record of Discussion form. As noted in the report, the Code of Academic Conduct (the Code) is quite clear on these matters. To address these problems and clarify the process, a "check-list" for faculty, including templates of a notification letter that must be sent to students suspected of misconduct, has been developed. In addition, the Academic Integrity Officer is now providing assistance to both faculty and

students and is available as the "third party" in any discussion. The current Code is being revisited to see if a more effective procedure can be developed for these discussions.

The second concern relates to students being charged with plagiarism for improper referencing when it is not clear that the student intended to mislead. Plagiarism is a serious matter and the University is committed to dealing with it in a serious way. It is also recognized that some students may plagiarize without meaning to do so, and that they might, as a consequence, suffer a penalty which is disproportionate to their act. Like the Ombudsperson, the University hopes that the introduction of the Academic Integrity Office and its programs will address this issue. The revision of the Code will also take this issue into consideration.

The third concern is about the conduct of instructors. It has been noted that some students believe some instructors lack civility, are difficult to contact, do not provide timely responses to work, have unfair assessment practices and are unwilling to abide by University policies such as the Course Management Policy, and the Academic Consideration and Appeals Policy. While it is noted that there has been an increase of 44% (25 more complaints this past year) in this area, neither the number of individual instructors involved, nor the resolution of the complaints, has been reported. It should also be noted that there were over 21,000 individual students registered at Ryerson last year and that the number of students taught by each faculty member has risen over the past few years. This has made timely responses to individual students more difficult. That being said, however, this situation is not acceptable. The increase of student incivility to each other is also a matter of concern. More detailed information on these matters will be sought.

This year's recommendation is for an increase in the provision of opportunities for faculty, staff and student development in effective and respectful conflict resolution. It is agreed that there is a need in this area and initiatives are underway. In fact, a Guide to Civility was approved by the Board of Governors in April 2004 (see www.ryerson.ca/policyprocedure/3%20A%20Guide%20to%20Civility.pdf). The Guide not only defines civility and the University's values, it also provides means of dealing with incivility within the community and lists resources for students, faculty and staff. A team of representatives from Human Resources, Student Services, the Learning and Teaching Office, Office of the Vice Provost, Faculty Affairs and the Ombudsperson's Office will be invited to collaborate in the further development and delivery of workshops on civility and alternative dispute resolution (conflict resolution) in the coming academic year. It is important to note, however, that not every problem or complaint is a training issue or has a training solution. The maintenance of civility requires that both parties in a dispute act in a civilized way. Training one person does not mean that the other person will have the same level of understanding. Sometimes it will be necessary to invoke the University's policies and procedures to resolve an issue.

Ryerson University is committed to a civil and respectful environment and sees this as a core community value. We look forward to working together to ensure that enabling actions are taken to support and strengthen this core value in all the various relationships and interactions within the University community.

Errol Aspevig
Provost and
Vice President Academic

Linda Grayson
Vice President, Administration
and Student Affairs



Update on Implementation of Recommendations from Previous Reports

The 2003/2004 Recommendation

“IN AN EFFORT TO REDUCE THE INCIDENCE OF PROCEDURAL ERRORS AND INCREASE THE LEVEL OF PRO-ACTIVITY REGARDING THE HANDLING OF ACADEMIC APPEALS AND CHARGES OF ACADEMIC MISCONDUCT, I AM RECOMMENDING THAT IN CONJUNCTION WITH THE UPCOMING 2005/2006 REVIEW OF THE UNDERGRADUATE ACADEMIC CONSIDERATION AND APPEALS POLICY AND THE STUDENT CODE OF CONDUCT THAT CONSIDERATION BE GIVEN TO EXPLORING VARIOUS ALTERNATIVES FOR PROVIDING ONGOING SUPPORT AND ADVICE TO INDIVIDUAL DECISION-MAKERS AND HEARING PANELS WITH RESPECT TO THE HANDLING OF APPEALS AND SUSPICIONS OF ACADEMIC MISCONDUCT AND NON-ACADEMIC MISCONDUCT.” AN EXAMPLE PROVIDED OF SUCH AN ALTERNATIVE WAS “...A DEDICATED RESOURCE PERSON WHO WOULD BE SOLELY RESPONSIBLE FOR PROVIDING INDIVIDUAL CONSULTATION TO DECISION-MAKERS AND CHAIRS OF FACULTY HEARINGS AS WELL AS PROVIDING SPECIALIZED ADVICE ON UNUSUAL SITUATIONS TO ALL COMMUNITY MEMBERS.”

Update: The University has recently established the Office of Academic Integrity and the position of Academic Integrity Officer. The position description includes responsibility for both an educative function for students and a support function for faculty and staff. I believe this initiative will prove to be very valuable to the University community both in the short and long term.

2002/2003 Recommendation

As the six recommendations made in the 2002/2003 report have already been implemented, I would not normally comment on them again. However, I am highlighting additional progress that has been made on one of the recommendations since the report was released as it is particularly noteworthy.

The 2002/2003 recommendation was:

“THAT THE UNIVERSITY:

- DEVELOP GUIDELINES FOR INSTRUCTORS’ USE IN ORIENTING STUDENTS ON HOW TO WORK IN TEAMS OR GROUPS SUCCESSFULLY;
- DEVELOP GUIDELINES FOR INSTRUCTORS AND STUDENTS ON HOW TO DEAL EFFECTIVELY WITH NEGATIVE GROUP DYNAMICS WITHIN TEAM OR GROUP WORK SETTINGS;
- OFFER A WORKSHOP FOR INSTRUCTORS

ON HOW TO INTERVENE APPROPRIATELY WHEN CALLED UPON DUE TO NEGATIVE GROUP DYNAMICS

- DEPARTMENTS AND SCHOOLS OPERATE ON THE PREMISE THAT COMPLAINTS REGARDING INAPPROPRIATE BEHAVIOUR ON THE PART OF ANY GROUP MEMBER WILL BE ADDRESSED IN A TIMELY FASHION BY THE INSTRUCTOR.”

In the update to this recommendation in the 2003/2004 report I had noted that the University had revised the Course Management Policy to make group work less problematic, (e.g. an expectation was added that mechanisms would be available for dealing with dysfunctional groups; and the inclusion of a recommendation that the weight assigned for group work would not exceed 30% of the total evaluation). Since then the Learning and Teaching Committee has established a sub-committee which is dedicated to assisting faculty to develop additional strategies for effective collaborative learning. In addition, the Spring 2005 issue of the GREET newsletter focused exclusively on effective collaborative learning and various professional development sessions were organized by the Learning and Teaching Office on this topic throughout the year. In addition, the Learning Success Service posted information for students on how to work effectively in groups and teams. All of this effort on the part of the University is commendable. I would also like to highlight the fact that in 2004/2005 only one complaint regarding ‘team work’ was lodged with the Ombudsperson.

Publicity and Promotion

The Ombudsperson has participated in the following events:

- Co-hosting of a one-day workshop and lunch-time lecture lead by Michelle LeBaron, internationally recognized expert on effective inter-cultural communication and conflict resolution, in September 2004
- Eight U201 Sessions held in January and June 2005 (these workshops are designed to educate students who are in academic jeopardy)
- Eight CESAR Student Orientation sessions held in September 2004 and January 2005
- Two sessions on effective conflict resolution for the Student Services Leadership series (over 100 registrants for each session)
- Two sessions on effective conflict resolution for the CESAR Saturday services program

- Two panel discussions for the University of Toronto Certificate in Dispute Resolution program
- One panel discussion on Alternative Dispute Resolution at Osgoode Hall Law School at York University
- Two panel discussions on the role of an Ombudsperson for a survey course on Conflict Resolution offered as part of the Ryerson Bachelor of Arts in Contemporary Studies
- A meeting of the Association of Canadian College and University Ombudspersons was hosted at Ryerson in May of 2005 and the Ombudsperson assisted with the organization of the Forum of Canadian Ombudsman biennial conference hosted by the Office of the University of Toronto Ombudsperson in May 2005.

In Appreciation

- I would like to commend those who respond to my calls in a timely and constructive fashion. The good will that is expressed, the desire to resolve conflict fairly and expeditiously, and the interest in analyzing whether the issue raised has a systemic or system-wide dimension is a testament to all those involved.
- The Ombudsperson Committee meets on a regular basis to provide input and advice to the Ombudsperson on administrative matters. The seven-member committee is made up of a faculty member, a member of Student Services, the Registrar, two representatives (one elected and one staff member) of CESAR and RSU, respectively.
- Ms. Diane Dyson, who served as the Assistant Ombudsperson from 2001 - 2005 and in an administrative capacity in this office from 1998 - 2000, is now a Research Analyst and Allocations Manager for the United Way of Greater Toronto. She has set aside her doctoral studies at the University of Toronto in the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education to pursue full-time employment. In her six years of service Ms. Dyson demonstrated great commitment to the principles of ombudsing and to the well-being of the Ryerson community.
- Ms. Heather McGhee, who joined the Office of the Ombudsperson in January of 2005, is very well qualified for this position and has demonstrated great dedication and initiative in her new role as Assistant Ombudsperson.

Administrative Fairness Checklist for Decision-Makers

I - Prior to Decision Being Made

Fairness Standards			
The individual affected is aware of:	When advised?	By whom?	How?
the fact that a decision will be made			
why a decision is necessary			
how the decision will affect him/her			
the information that will be considered and any specific criteria to be used in making the decision			
the current rules that will be used in arriving at a decision			
Has the individual who is affected by the decision been provided with:	How was the opportunity provided, e.g. meeting, written submission?	Who provided the opportunity?	When was the opportunity provided?
the opportunity to present his/her point of view on the matter			
the opportunity to respond to the information presented by others which will be considered by the decision-maker			

II - While the Decision is Being Made

Fairness Standards	Yes	If "no", why?
Has an adequate & proper review of all relevant information been conducted, i.e., have all important facts been obtained, documented and considered before the decision is made?	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Has the decision been reached objectively, with due respect for relevant facts, and without bias?	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Has accommodation been made for new and/or changed circumstances during a period of delay or while the decision is being made?	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Has care been taken to require and use only that information which is relevant to the decision?	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Has the decision been made in a manner which is consistent with previous decisions on similar matters, by relying on existing policies, guidelines, procedures and rules?	<input type="checkbox"/>	
If discretion is exercised, can any inconsistency with previous decisions on similar matters be justified and explained?	<input type="checkbox"/>	

III - After the Decision Has Been Made

Fairness Standards	Yes	If "no", why?
Have adequate reasons been provided to explain how and why the decision was made?	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Has the decision been written in plain language?	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Has the decision been provided to anyone personally affected?	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Has a proper record of the process used been kept and will it be kept on file for a reasonable period of time?	<input type="checkbox"/>	

Assembled by Nora Farrell, Ombudsperson, Ryerson University, November 2002