



CONFIDENTIAL  
INDEPENDENT  
IMPARTIAL

# ANNUAL REPORT

# 2023- 2025



OFFICE OF THE  
**OMBUDSPERSON**  
AT TORONTO METROPOLITAN UNIVERSITY



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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The 2023–2025 Annual Report highlights the Office of the Ombudsperson’s continued commitment to fairness, accountability, and equitable resolution at Toronto Metropolitan University. Throughout this period of significant transition, the office strengthened its capacity, deepened collaborative partnerships, and responded to increasingly complex student concerns across academic and non-academic domains.

This reporting period reflects our office’s expanding role in supporting procedural fairness across a rapidly evolving academic environment. With new leadership, an expanded team, and growing student demand, our office addressed rising complexities in academic integrity, graduate supervision, international student concerns, and access to accommodations. Through shuttle diplomacy, procedural reviews, and collaboration with academic and administrative units, our office worked to resolve individual concerns while identifying systemic issues that impact student well-being and academic progression.

Our recommendations focus on strengthening graduate supervision processes, clarifying funding protections for graduate students, and improving the accuracy and accessibility of departmental communication channels. Alongside these recommendations, emerging issues, such as the use of artificial intelligence, changing fee structures for international students, and gaps in harassment and accommodation processes, underscore the need for continued institutional alignment. As TMU enters a new chapter of growth, our office remains dedicated to fostering a transparent, equitable, and supportive environment for all members of the university community.

**PREPARED BY**

Jessica Shabtai,  
Edmun Natkunarajah &  
Jemmy Erhiaganoma

**PREPARED FOR**

Toronto Metropolitan University

# LAND ACKNOWLEDGEMENT AND COMMITMENT TO RECONCILIATION

We acknowledge that our work takes place on the traditional territory of the Mississaugas of the Credit, the Anishinaabe, the Chippewa, the Haudenosaunee, and the Wendat peoples. We recognize the enduring presence of Indigenous peoples on this land and commit to engaging in meaningful reconciliation efforts. This includes actively listening to Indigenous voices, supporting Indigenous-led initiatives, and integrating Indigenous perspectives into our practices. By honouring the land and its Indigenous stewards, we strive to contribute to a more just and inclusive university community.



# INTRODUCTION



## OAKHAM HOUSE

63 Gould Street

As the Office of the Ombudsperson at Toronto Metropolitan University, our commitment to promoting fairness, transparency, and conflict resolution drives our endeavors to enhance awareness, accessibility, and engagement with our services throughout the university community. With the recent renaming of our institution to Toronto Metropolitan University, we embark on a new chapter of inclusivity and innovation in higher education. Rooted in a rich history of advocating for fairness since 1997, the Ombudsperson has long served as a beacon of impartiality and support for students, faculty, and staff alike. Originating from the Scandinavian model of conflict resolution and governance, our office embraces the principles of independence, confidentiality, and advocacy, ensuring that every member of our diverse community has a voice and a pathway to resolution.

We recognize the transformative impact of the Ombudsperson’s Office in fostering a campus culture characterized by fairness, equity, and respect. Through the implementation of our comprehensive Outreach and Engagement Plan, we reaffirm our commitment to promoting awareness of the Office of the Ombudsperson services, enhancing accessibility for all individuals, and fostering meaningful engagement with the university community.

**1997**

since

**3 PILLARS**

Confidentiality, Impartiality,  
and Independence

# MESSAGE FROM THE OMBUDSPERSON

I assumed the role of Ombudsperson at Toronto Metropolitan University (TMU) in October 2024, taking on the position full-time in January 2025. Much of the information reviewed in this report reflects the work and dedication of my predecessors, Maureen Helt and Gemma Kerr. I am grateful for the work they put into setting this office up for success and look forward to continuing the initiatives that they started. I want to thank Jemmy Erhiaganoma, Assistant Ombudsperson, and Edmun Natkunarajah, Assistant Ombudsperson and Outreach Officer, for their dedication and hard work in keeping the office operational during some challenging transitions. I would also like to recognize Lyndall Musselman, Chair of the Ombudsperson Committee, for providing additional support to the office while the Ombudsperson role was temporarily vacant.

In moving back to Toronto after over a decade in Nunavut, I was wary of finding my footing in the big city again. The TMU Community has made me feel welcome and helped me settle back into my hometown. Since arriving on the TMU campus in early 2025, I have had the opportunity to meet with several members of the TMU community who are committed to supporting student success. I continue to learn about TMU's unique culture, policies and procedures.

Our office works directly with members of the University community, outside of TMU's reporting structure. Instead, this office reports to a committee of students, faculty and staff. This reporting structure allows us to maintain independence and impartiality in reviewing procedural fairness concerns. Although we are an office of last resort and do not represent any party to a dispute, our team tries to be proactive in addressing fairness concerns. We are often able to address these concerns through shuttle diplomacy.

Given the change in staffing in the Office of the Ombudsperson over the last two years, this Annual Report covers a two-year period. Our office has seen an increase in complex cases, resulting in fewer files that remain open for more extended periods. We have also noticed an increase in cases related to graduate studies and supervisor relationships, international students, and requests for time span extension.

In this report, as in previous years, we outline three recommendations for changes that, if adopted, will enhance fairness in TMU policies and practices and proactively address student concerns. We thank the TMU administration for considering our feedback and recommendations.

As we move into the 2025-2026 reporting year, we plan to continue promoting fairness, enhancing our outreach and engagement and evaluating the office's governance structure. With TMU opening its School of Medicine in the Fall of 2025, we have had some initial discussions about how to remain accessible to TMU's satellite campus. We have also initiated conversations with TMU about policies and procedures for responding to allegations of harassment and bullying against instructors and faculty members.

We look forward to continuing to promote procedural fairness in the coming year.

Kindly,  
Jessica Shabtai



## WHO WE ARE

Since 1997, the Office of the Ombudsperson at TMU has been dedicated to upholding the principles of fairness, integrity, and impartiality. Our team plays a crucial role as an independent, impartial investigator of complaints and an advisor to the university community on issues of fairness. We are primarily concerned with ensuring that everyone involved in a dispute experiences procedural fairness and that the university makes decisions affecting students fairly and promptly. Our office has expanded since our previous reporting period and now has three new staff: Jessica Shabtai (Ombudsperson), Jemmy Erhiaganoma (Assistant Ombudsperson), and Edmun Natkunarajah (Assistant Ombudsperson and Outreach Officer).

### JESSICA SHABTAI



Jessica brings a wealth of experience in advocacy, policy development, and leadership, with over 10 years of service in Nunavut's public sector. She has extensive expertise in addressing complaints, conducting systemic reviews, and fostering fairness and equity. Jessica is a graduate of the University of Saskatchewan with a Juris Doctor degree and holds a Master of Social Work from the University of Toronto.

Before joining the TMU community, Jessica was the Director of Child and Youth Advocacy Services at the Representative for Children and Youth Office in Nunavut. In this role, she oversaw individual and systemic advocacy programs, conducted reviews of critical injuries and deaths, collaborated with interest groups, and drafted reports for the Legislative Assembly of Nunavut.

Jessica is committed to improving access to justice. She has contributed to equity initiatives through her work on the Law Society of Nunavut's Task Force for the Nunavut Statutes Exam and other professional committees. She has also been appointed to Nunavut's first Mental Health Review Board in 2025.

## JEMMY ERHIAGANOMA



Jemmy joined the Office in 2024, bringing a strong foundation in political science and law, complemented by two legal degrees: a Juris Doctor and a Bachelor in Civil Law. As a bilingual professional, Jemmy handles a wide range of ombudsperson processes from intake to fairness reviews.

As the Assistant Ombudsperson, Jemmy plays a crucial role in ensuring a thorough and fair examination of concerns raised within the University community. With a commitment to upholding justice and transparency, she leverages her legal expertise and strong communication skills to support individuals navigating complex issues, making a significant impact on the Office's operations.

## EDMUN NATKUNARAJAH



Edmun has been a member of the TMU community since 2021 and joined the Office of the Ombudsperson in 2023, bringing a background in Urban and Regional Planning, Policy, and Communications. He applies his expertise in project leadership, community engagement, and administrative management to support the Office's day-to-day operations. His responsibilities include managing intake processes, conducting thorough case assessments, coordinating follow-up actions, and ensuring accurate case documentation.

As an Assistant Ombudsperson and Outreach Officer, Edmun leads the creation and implementation of dynamic outreach strategies and communication initiatives that promote fairness, equity, and transparency across the university community.

Beyond his work at TMU, Edmun has volunteered with the Association of Canadian College and University Ombudspersons (ACCUO) since September 2023. He has served as an Executive Member since November 2024. Currently, he co-chairs the Professional Development Committee, where he supports national-level programming, including webinars, water cooler chats, and professional development initiatives that strengthen the ombuds community across Canada.



## HOW WE WORK TO PROMOTE FAIRNESS

### \* INDEPENDENCE

We operate independently of the university, including all administrative and academic structures and the student government.

### \* CONFIDENTIALITY

We maintain the confidentiality of all information unless we have explicit permission to share identifying information or are subject to a legal duty to disclose it.

### \* IMPARTIALITY

We consider all the information we receive with the highest degree of objectivity. We do not advocate for individuals or represent individual students, faculty or staff. Rather, we consider ourselves representatives and advocates for fairness.

For more details, visit [torontomu.ca/ombudsperson](https://torontomu.ca/ombudsperson)



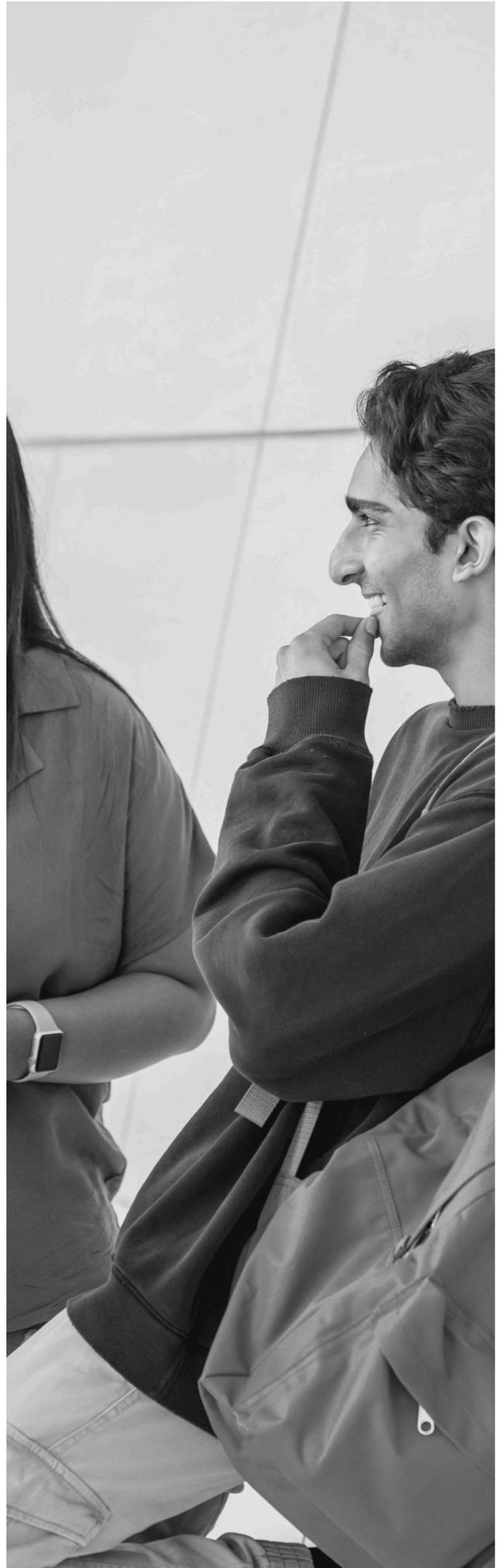
## WHAT WE DO

The Office of the Ombudsperson is an independent and effective voice for fairness at TMU.

- We listen to students' concerns about TMU services, policies, processes and administration.
- We look at both academic and non-academic issues that students experience at TMU.
- We provide detailed information on how students can resolve their concerns, including providing clarifying information, referrals to other University resources and intervening on their behalf when they provide their consent and we deem it appropriate.
- We investigate by asking questions, gathering information and analyzing evidence.
- We explore ways to resolve individual cases without taking sides.
- We shine a light on problems and recommend improvements.
- We advise the TMU community about university processes and procedures, conflict resolution, and provide referrals to other services.
- We analyze complaints annually and year-over-year to identify trends and systemic issues.
- We investigate and make recommendations in the interests of fairness.
- While we do not provide legal advice or counselling services, we may refer people to the appropriate on-campus offices for such services.
- We serve as a resource for the university, providing consultation as TMU develops new policies and procedures and offering advice and feedback on fairness.
- We lead training sessions for faculty and students.

# WHAT WE DON'T DO

- The Office of the Ombudsperson is funded through student levies. We do not address complaints about issues faced by faculty and staff.
- We do not review complaints about the student unions.
- We do not overturn University decisions.
- We do not replace existing university processes for students to resolve disputes. Our office is an office of last resort. That does not mean students cannot speak to us about concerns before they complete all appeal processes. Our office can help refer students to TMU resources or provide intervention through shuttle diplomacy. However, we cannot conduct investigations or review complaints until all avenues of appeal at TMU have been exhausted.
- As an impartial office, we do not advocate for individuals.
- We do not appear on behalf of any party in a legal dispute.
- We do not disclose information to any party without express consent from the person to whom the information pertains.
- We do not provide copies of our internal documents to any party unless required to do so by law.



# 2 STATISTICS

## \* TORONTO METROPOLITAN UNIVERSITY

Toronto Metropolitan University (TMU) is a vibrant academic institution located in the heart of one of Canada's most dynamic cities. As of 2025, TMU boasts a diverse and growing community of students, faculty, and staff, contributing to a rich tapestry of perspectives and experiences within the university.

Student Population **+48K**

Programs **+125**

Faculty & Staff **+1.4K**

## \* OMBUDSPERSON'S OFFICE

From 2023 to 2025, covering two academic years, our office responded to more than 700 inquiries and cases, many of which were resolved through early consultation, information, and facilitated resolution, while completing 10 formal investigations and delivering 16 outreach events to support fairness, accountability, and student success at Toronto Metropolitan University.

Number of Cases **795**

Number of Investigations **10**

Number of Outreach Events **16**



Student Unions

**3**



Student Associations

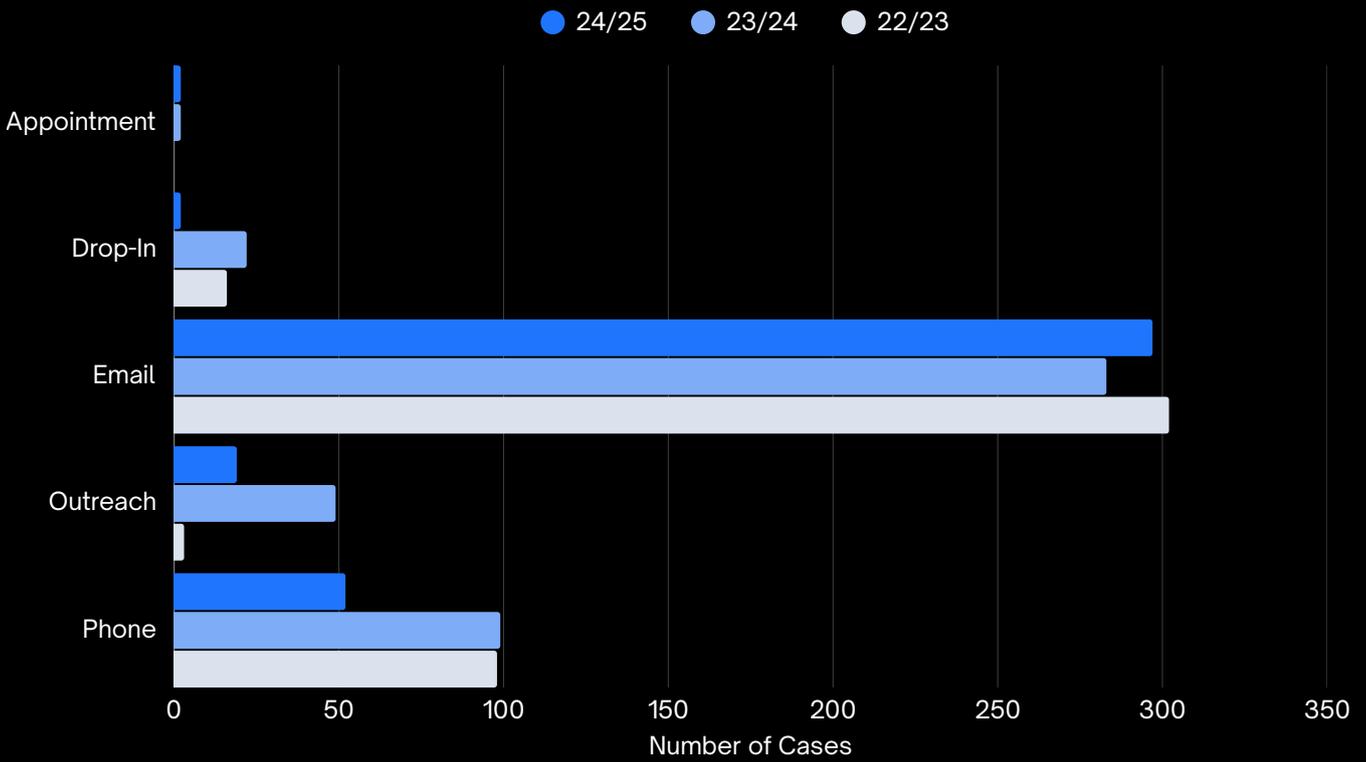
**+18**



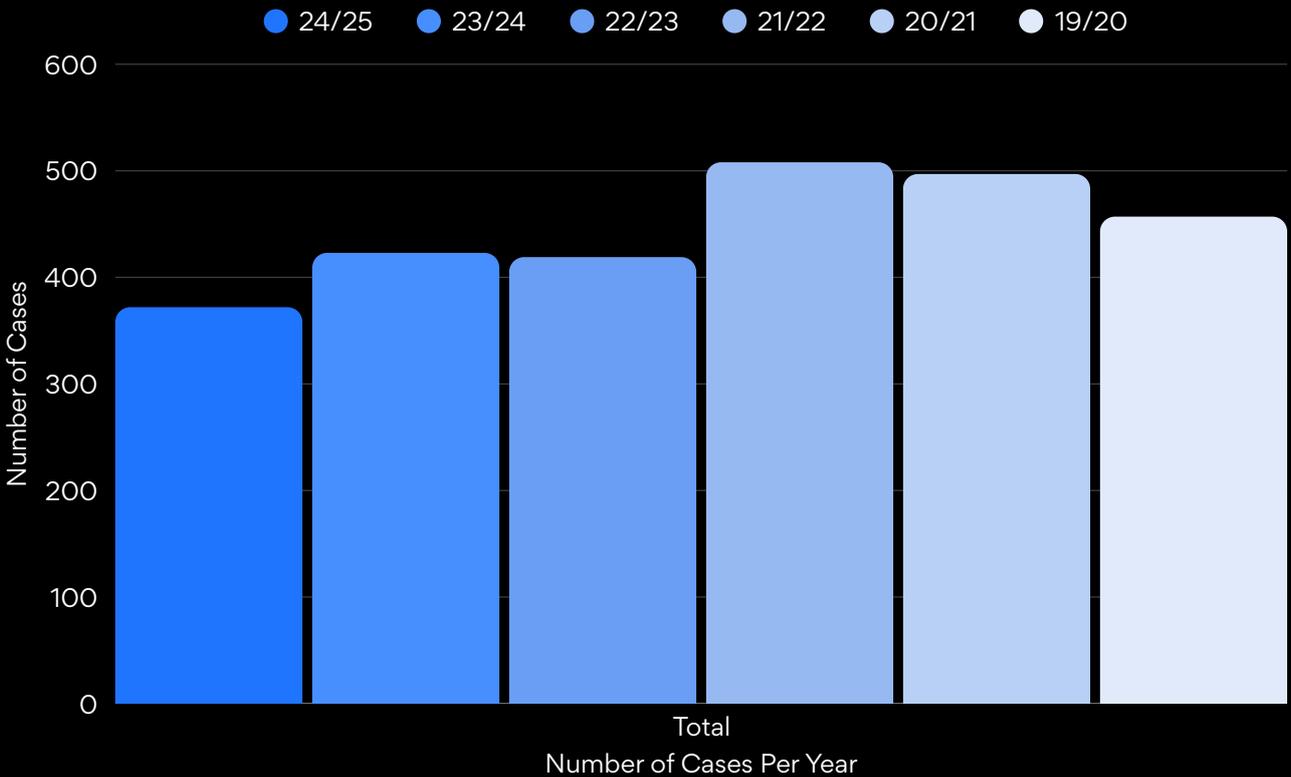
Course Unions

**+53**

# HOW PEOPLE CONTACTED US?



# TOTAL NUMBER OF CASES



## GROUPS WHO BROUGHT FORWARD CONCERNS AND COMPLAINTS

The following table describes the various stakeholder groups that sought our assistance. Groups Who Brought Forward Concerns and Complaints: Comparison Over the Last Decade.

YEAR	24/25	23/24	22/23	21/22	20/21	19/20	18/19	17/18	16/17	15/16
Alumnae	9	10	15	10	16	8	9	9	19	15
Applicant	14	12	8	15	14	8	16	14	13	13
Continuing Education/ Part-Time Degree	8	15	37	28	31	32	45	61	55	45
Undergraduate Students	304	315	292	354	338	304	306	325	308	348
Graduate Students	18	31	38	36	30	39	67	54	75	32
Miscellaneous (parents, staff, etc.)	19	40	29	65	68	66	59	70	71	68
<b>Total</b>	<b>372</b>	<b>423</b>	<b>419</b>	<b>508</b>	<b>497</b>	<b>457</b>	<b>502</b>	<b>533</b>	<b>541</b>	<b>521</b>

## ACTION TAKEN

The following table outlines the steps taken by the Office of the Ombudsperson to assist students with their complaints, facilitating a comparison of actions taken over the past decade.

For the majority of students, we provided advice and referrals to other university supports to help them pursue a resolution to their issue. Our office does not normally intervene in complaints unless:

1. all other internal avenues have been explored,
2. the student explicitly requests our involvement and provides consent, and
3. we determine that our intervention is appropriate.

YEAR	24/25	23/24	22/23	21/22	20/21	19/20	18/19	17/18	16/17	15/16
Advice & Referral	257	372	340	444	432	382	429	461	469	424
Information	86	3	3	2	11	10	2	0	0	2
Intervention – Clarifying	17	26	31	32	34	37	27	33	28	38
Intervention – Mediation	1	0	2	2	0	2	1	0	0	1
Intervention – Shuttle Diplomacy	3	16	32	19	15	7	35	29	36	37
Investigation	2	8	11	9	5	19	8	10	8	19
Student Withdrew Complaint	6	N/A								
<b>Total</b>	<b>372</b>	<b>423</b>	<b>419</b>	<b>508</b>	<b>497</b>	<b>457</b>	<b>502</b>	<b>533</b>	<b>541</b>	<b>521</b>





# COMMENTARY AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR 2023-2025

The Ombudsperson makes the following commentary and recommendations through a lens of fairness. At the organizational level, our office has collaborated with many of TMU's academic and administrative leaders to address student concerns. In making formal recommendations, we aim to highlight systemic issues that we have observed in policies and procedures. Our office provides recommendations to support TMU in enhancing fairness by promoting clear and consistent policies and procedures for university staff, faculty, and students.

## OUR COLLABORATION WITH TMU LEADERS

At the core of the Office of the Ombudsperson's mandate is promoting fair and equitable processes across the university. This year, we deepened our collaborative efforts with leaders across Toronto Metropolitan University to resolve student concerns through principled and respectful dialogue.

### APPEAL RIGHTS

A student contacted our office after being advised that they were unable to appeal a standing variation withdrawal (SVW). The student gave our office permission to speak with the Senate Office regarding their concern. The calendar included language that was introduced a few years after the program started, stating that no more than three attempts at specific courses were allowed. The Senate did not approve this change.

Our office reviewed Policy 168 and noted that it does not explicitly mention the absence of a right to appeal SVWs. Our office also reviewed minutes from Senate meetings at the time the program was proposed and introduced. We were unable to find any clear statements that appeals would not be allowed.

Several TMU teams collaborated on resolving this issue, including the Senate, the Registrar's Office, and the relevant Faculty. They took significant steps to address this, including:

- giving students with an SVW an opportunity to take the course a third time, at the end of this semester,
- advising students who were previously discontinued from the program due to an SVW standing of their options to take a course for a third time,
- addressing issues identified with how the SVW standing was applied on their systems,
- agreeing to change the calendar to accurately reflect program requirements for students, which we suggest should be approved by the Senate, and
- committing to a scan of all programs which have SVWs in place to ensure that no other programs have similar issues and to address any problems they identify.

We want to commend the university for its collaboration in addressing this concern.

## CHANGES IN COURSE DELIVERY

A student residing outside of Ontario was working towards a certificate in coding. The program was changed from remote delivery to in-person classes, leaving the student unable to continue. The student was unable to transfer the credit they received to another program.

Our office contacted the Dean of the relevant Faculty. They agreed to a partial refund to the student for the completed course since the student could not apply it to a new program.

## ACCOUNT HOLDS & COURSE ENROLLMENT

A student nearing the end of their program was unable to enroll in courses due to a financial hold on their account. While the student had taken steps to resolve the issue, including paying their outstanding balance, delays in payment processing prevented the timely removal of the hold, preventing them from registering for courses by the deadline. The student was concerned about graduating on time and reached out to our office in a state of distress.

With the student's consent, we collaborated with the Registrar's Office, the faculty advising team, and Faculty leadership to clarify the timeline of events, assess the student's circumstances, and ensure that TMU adhered to applicable policies. Through this collaborative approach, we were able to:

- confirm that TMU had respected procedural fairness,
- clarify the next steps the student would need to take, and
- Identify improvements in communication that could benefit the TMU community in the event of similar cases in the future.

By partnering with TMU leaders to address both systemic and individual concerns, we continue to advance our commitment to fairness, transparency, and student-centred resolution.

## INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS

A graduating international student contacted our office after experiencing a delay in an academic integrity decision. They had a job offer following graduation and were concerned because this matter prevented them from accessing the confirmation of graduation they needed for their application to remain in Canada. They were also concerned that if they were unable to obtain a work permit, they would be required to leave Canada before their graduation ceremony. The student gave us consent to speak to the Academic Integrity Office and the Registrar. Both offices were very responsive. They advised us that the delay was due to unexpected concerns and assured us that the student would receive a response promptly, allowing them to access the documentation for their work permit. The student confirmed that they received the decision in time to file paperwork to remain in Canada.

## GRADUATE STUDIES

The breakdown in the relationship between a supervisor and a graduate student had significant repercussions, ultimately leading to the termination of the student's research stipend. This development not only disrupted the student's academic progress but also triggered serious concerns regarding their financial stability.

Without the stipend – a primary source of income that supported essential living expenses and academic costs – the student faced increased difficulties in managing basic financial responsibilities. The abrupt loss of support underscored the economic vulnerability of graduate students. It also highlighted the far-reaching consequences of personal conflicts for a student's livelihood and academic success.

The student consented to our office's collaboration with TMU leadership. With the student's participation, the Faculty formulated a constructed plan to ascertain the cause of the breakdown in the supervisory relationship, determine whether reconciliation was possible, identify a new supervisor, and reinstate the student's stipend. As a result of this collaboration, TMU also compensated the student for lapsed payments.

Our annual report also features recommendations for the University and addresses emerging trends and issues:

### **\* Recommendation 1-Graduate Student-Supervisor Issues**

### **\* Recommendation 2-Graduate Student Funding**

### **\* Recommendation 3-Channels of Communication**

### **\* Emerging Trends & Issues**

- International Students
- Delays in Grade and Standing Appeal Process
- Artificial Intelligence
- Collections Process
- Harassment
- Challenges in Accessing Accommodations

The subsequent sections of this section address each Recommendation in turn.



# RECOMMENDATIONS

## Recommendation 1

### GRADUATE STUDENT-SUPERVISOR ISSUES

In our 2021-2023 Annual Report, we shared concerns about issues between graduate students and their supervisors. We understand that TMU updated the Graduate Student-Supervisor guidelines in 2023. We continue to have concerns regarding graduate student-supervisor conflicts and the processes in place in the event of a relationship breakdown. Any breakdown in a relationship has profound implications for students, as they may no longer be able to use research, which is the Intellectual Property of their former supervisor. In some cases, there may not be another supervisor with expertise in a similar field of study available to take on students. The time required to transfer to a new supervisor and start a new area of research may extend the time it takes to complete academic programs.

In addition to the academic impact and delay, conflict can be an extremely stressful experience for both students and faculty members, especially if it leads to a breakdown in their relationship. We continue to worry that the process for conflict resolution outlined in the Student-Supervisor Guidelines is not comprehensive. There is room for additional detail to outline all the steps a student and faculty member must take to attempt to repair their relationship. If the relationship is beyond repair, the process should allow them to conclude it in a way that provides sufficient notice to all parties.

It is critical to ensure that the Graduate Program Director and, where appropriate, the Associate Dean provide input in any conflict between a student and their supervisor. Other universities, including the University of British Columbia, have adopted this practice.<sup>1</sup> Decision-makers should give consideration to ensuring that sufficient time is allowed for students or supervisors who raise concerns to discuss them in detail, first with the Graduate Program Director and then with the Associate Dean, to seek support in implementing a remediation plan. In the case that this is not a possibility, the policy should consider:

1. providing a student with written communication outlining any unmet expectations;
2. putting remediation plans in place;
3. whether the supervisor is empowered to decide to discontinue supervision independently or whether they must make decisions in conjunction with an Associate Dean, Dean or Graduate Program Director;
4. implications for a student's academic standing and transcript, including protection from being withdrawn if the university terminates the supervision relationship; and
5. providing an avenue of appeal or remediation if a supervisor decides to discontinue supervision

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[1] The University of British Columbia, "9.0 Supervisors, Supervisory Committees, and Graduate Program Coordinators," *Policies & Procedures: Graduate Policy & Procedure Manual*, <https://gradstudies.ok.ubc.ca/policies-procedures/supervisors/>

A transparent process is in the best interest of both students and faculty members. Additional details will provide greater clarity, transparency, and accountability for students and faculty. It is a general principle of procedural fairness that as consequences become more severe, the parties involved are owed a higher degree of formal process. In making these recommendations, we consider implications to students, including:

- the time they have invested in their studies,
- the challenges of finding a new supervisor,
- the lack of ownership of research or other intellectual property they contributed to,
- financial implications relating to stipends, and
- the impact on their well-being

## Recommendation 1

- [1] TMU should develop a more detailed process that sets out detailed steps for both students and supervisors to follow when they are experiencing a conflict or a breakdown in the student-supervisor relationship.
- [2] TMU should incorporate this process into a policy to ensure that requirements are binding and enforceable.

## Recommendation 2 GRADUATE STUDENT FUNDING

In the past year, we have seen an increase in graduate students who have advised us that they are struggling with the increased costs of living. We have heard from students struggling to make rent payments and keep up with the increased costs of everyday necessities. We frequently have conversations advising students to explore grants, bursaries, and scholarships available to them through Award Spring. In some cases, we also inform students about food banks and credit counselling services.

For Graduate Students, stipends are critical to ensuring they can cover their essential expenses. Therefore, TMU should provide clear information about a student's stipend entitlements throughout their studies. The following information should be required by Policy 139 and set out in the student's offer letter:

- (a) **when** a change can be made,
- (b) **who** is entitled to make such a change, and
- (c) the **process** that faculty must follow when making changes.

The Graduate Student Stipend Form states that a student must remain "under the supervision of [their] Faculty Supervisor" and that their "performance must be deemed to be satisfactory." Students are in a more vulnerable position within the power dynamics of the supervision relationship.

The university has not established a policy that outlines rights, protections, or transparent processes, leaving students vulnerable to arbitrary changes in their funding without notice. The University of British Columbia has addressed this problem by requiring funding to continue for the lesser of six weeks or until a new supervisor is secured.<sup>2</sup> Similarly, the University of Alberta requires that funding continue for "at least 30 days from the date on which the graduate coordinator determines that the supervisor-student relationship is beyond repair."<sup>3</sup> Both schools require input from administrators before the relationship may be terminated.

## Recommendation 2

- [1] TMU should update Policy 139 and the Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies Terms and Conditions outlining the circumstances under which a student's funding may be modified or rescinded. In particular, it should clarify:
  - [i] who is entitled to make changes to a student's funding
  - [ii] criteria for making changes
  - [iii] sufficient details about the process that must be followed
  - [iv] whether modifications can occur mid-cycle or are restricted to the annual renewal period
  - [v] notice periods in the event of a discontinuation of supervision of a student that allows stipends to continue for a reasonable, specified period.
- [2] TMU should entrench the Guidelines in policy to ensure that requirements are binding and enforceable.
- [3] TMU should amend Policy 139 to include specific remedies and grounds of recourse for students in the event of policy violations.
- [4] TMU should amend Policy 139 to require that letters of offer and any other agreements which set out the terms of a stipend include detailed timelines of the funding period.

## Recommendation 3

### CHANNELS OF COMMUNICATION

Many students approach our office because they are unsure where to direct their concerns. When guiding students to the appropriate channels for escalation, we have encountered outdated contact information. The lack of clarity regarding the chain of command frustrates the process and, at times, leads to delays in meeting required timelines.

## Recommendation 3

- [1] TMU should ensure that contact information for Program Chairs, Directors and other administrators is available and up to date for all programs.
- [2] TMU departments should ensure the contact information for key department staff, including advising staff, department administrators, placement coordinators, and other key contacts are easily accessible on each departmental website. Departments may wish to adopt the format used by the School of Nursing as it is easily accessible and current.

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[2] UBC, "9.0 Supervisors, Supervisory Committees, and Graduate Program Coordinators."

[3] The University of Alberta, "Resolving Conflicts in Supervisor-Student Relationships," <https://calendar.ualberta.ca/content.php?catoid=44&navoid=13569#resolving-conflicts-in-supervisor-student-relationships>

# Emerging Trends and Issues

In addition to the systemic concerns highlighted in our recommendations, we have noted some emerging issues. While we are not making recommendations regarding these matters at this time, we believe it is important to bring them to the attention of the TMU Community.

## INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS

International students have unique vulnerabilities. Many of them are far from their families and social support networks. With changes to federal student visa and work permit processes, Universities across Canada have had to make some difficult decisions. During the reporting period for this annual report, TMU made changes to the fee structure for International Students with open work permits. The impact of changes to fee structures can be devastating. We appreciate the Provost's and the Office of the Registrar's willingness to hear from students and to reevaluate the timelines for making changes so that students who entered a program with the expectation of paying domestic fees can continue to do so through the expiration date of their open work permit at the time of their admission. However, we understand that some students who accepted enrollment at TMU in reliance on information that they would be able to pay domestic fees will be transitioning to incurring much higher costs than anticipated. As TMU is continuing to evaluate these processes, we are not making formal recommendations at this time.

Maintaining a high standard of Academic Integrity is crucial to the success and reputation of postsecondary institutions. Unfortunately, due to the circumstances of international students, disciplinary decisions, including temporary holds and delays in the appeals process, may result in disproportionate consequences compared to their domestic peers. These penalties may result in difficulties maintaining or renewing visas and work permits, jeopardizing the student's ability to remain in Canada. In assisting students in navigating these issues, we have typically been able to resolve them through shuttle diplomacy. We greatly appreciate the willingness of TMU Departments, including the Office of the Registrar and the Academic Integrity Office, to collaborate in mitigating the disproportionate impact of consequences on international students. However, we remain concerned that there is an absence of policy and formal processes to support equity and proportionality in decisions that impact international students.

## DELAYS IN GRADE AND STANDING APPEAL PROCESS

Over the past academic years, students have approached us with concerns about delays in grade and standing appeals. While most students can continue their studies throughout the process, that is not always the case. For students in the Nursing program, a delay in reaching a decision can result in delaying their coursework by a full calendar year because of the program's regimented structure. These delays raise fairness concerns for students whose appeals are ultimately granted in their favour.

As noted earlier in this report, delays may also disproportionately impact International students who may require confirmation of coursework or degree completion to extend or apply for visas and work permits.

## ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE

Around the globe, postsecondary institutions are grappling with how to utilize artificial intelligence (AI) effectively in coursework and how to approach allegations of academic misconduct related to its use. Unfortunately, technology has developed faster than our ability to detect it, and tools for detecting AI are unreliable and raise privacy concerns. The Academic Integrity Office highlights these concerns and does not endorse their use.

In the 2023-2025 reporting years, several students approached our office after being found to have engaged in academic misconduct by using AI, but insisted that they either did not use AI or used it only as a study aid, not for completing assessments.

Moreover, students have reported that instructors have penalized them without bringing their suspicions of academic misconduct to the attention of the Academic Integrity Office. In several cases, students have reported that instructors expressed reliance on personal experience in their independent determinations of academic misconduct. However, there have been instances where instructors do not follow the TMU process outlined in the [Artificial Intelligence FAQs](#) and Policy 60 by initiating a Facilitated Discussion, leaving little opportunity for the student to defend their position.<sup>4</sup> In bypassing TMU policies and procedures, there is no assurance of a consistent approach to evaluating the use of AI. As these tools continue to evolve, TMU, along with other educational institutions, will need to develop clear guidelines for incorporating, assessing, and responding to the use of AI in coursework.

## COLLECTIONS PROCESS

Several students approached the Ombudsperson, reporting that they had not received notification from Collections before their debt was sent to an external debt collection agency. TMU employs the same [Collection Policy](#) in addressing all debtors, including students.<sup>5</sup> This policy may not be as accessible and understandable for students.

Students are often in a vulnerable financial position, and the implications of having a debt sent to an external debt collection agency are significant. External debt collection processes can significantly impact credit scores, leading to an inability to access financing for academic and personal needs, as well as high interest rates, which contribute to long-term financial strain.

Although Collection Services attempts to contact students before sending debt to external agencies, some students who have left TMU or are suspicious of telephone and internet scams may not receive these notifications properly. A distinct policy and process for collections from academic debts that considers the unique needs of students relative to other debtors may support TMU's debt collection efforts.

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[4] Toronto Metropolitan University, "Artificial Intelligence FAQs," *Academic Integrity Office*, <https://www.torontomu.ca/academicintegrity/ai/#!accordion-1677615447915-what-should-an-instructor-do-if-they-suspect-a-student-may-have-used-unauthorized-ai-when-completing-an-assessment>.

[5] Toronto Metropolitan University, "Collection Policy," *University Administrative Policies*, <https://www.torontomu.ca/policies/policy-list/collection-policy/>.

## HARASSMENT

Our office is receiving an increasing number of complaints about bullying and harassment by TMU faculty. TMU's Discrimination and Harassment Prevention Policy defines harassment as:

*"a course of vexatious comments or conduct based on one or more personal characteristics connected to a protected ground(s) (e.g. age, sexual orientation, creed, etc.) where the person responsible for the behaviour knows or ought reasonably to know that the comments and/ or conduct is unwelcome."*<sup>6</sup>

TMU's approach to responding to student reports of harassment by faculty is limited. Where students report experiences comparable to discrimination but do not infringe upon the grounds enumerated in the Ontario Human Rights Code, the current process is to refer the student to their program chair to escalate concerns. This approach raises concerns for our office about the impartiality of decision-makers who work closely with the person alleged to have engaged in harassment. We are particularly concerned about the impact of the inherent power imbalance between faculty and students. TMU has developed a Student Code of Non-Academic Conduct, which provides a process for members of the TMU community to follow when allegations of improper conduct arise. No such corollary exists where a student alleges that a faculty member has engaged in similar behaviours, leaving students vulnerable to the decisions of the alleged harasser's colleague. Even if the decision maker is impartial, students may still not report due to a perception of bias.

Many Ontario postsecondary institutions have broader definitions of harassment that allow for more responsive procedures for making a report:

- Brock University's Respectful Work and Learning Policy includes bullying within its definition of personal harassment, defining personal harassment as "one or a series of objectionable and unwelcome comments or conduct directed toward a specific person or group of persons which diminish the dignity of the recipient(s) and serve no legitimate work or academic related purpose, and/or have the effect of creating an intimidating, humiliating or hostile work or learning environment."<sup>7</sup> Individuals who believe they are experiencing personal harassment can make a disclosure to the Human Rights and Equity Office.<sup>8</sup>
- Queens University's Harassment and Discrimination Prevention and Response Policy defines harassment as "a vexatious comment or conduct that exceeds the bounds of free expression or academic freedom as these are understood in University policies, which is known or ought reasonably to be known to be unwelcome. [...] While it might be, Harassment need not be connected to a ground protected by the Ontario Human Rights Code."<sup>9</sup> The Reporting Procedure instructs individuals to report harassment and bullying to the Office of Vice-Principal (Culture, Equity, and Inclusion).<sup>10</sup>

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[6] Toronto Metropolitan University, "Discrimination and Harassment Policy," *University Administrative Policies*, <https://www.torontomu.ca/policies/policy-list/dhp-policy/>

[7] Brock University, *Respectful Work and Learning Environment Policy (PDF)*, <https://brocku.ca/policies/wp-content/uploads/sites/94/Respectful-Work-and-Learning-Environment-Policy.pdf>

[8] Brock University, "Disclosure Form," *Human Rights and Equity*, <https://brocku.ca/human-rights/contact-us/make-a-disclosure/>

[9] Queen's University, "Harassment and Discrimination Prevention and Response Policy," *University Secretariat and Legal Counsel*, <https://www.queensu.ca/secretariat/harassment-and-discrimination-prevention-and-response-policy#5.%20ALTERNATIVE%20RESOLUTION%C2%A0>

[10] Queen's University, "Reporting Procedure," *University Secretariat and Legal Counsel*, <https://www.queensu.ca/secretariat/reporting-procedure>

- Western University's Non-Discrimination, Harassment and Sexual Misconduct Policy defines harassment as "conduct and/or behaviours which create an intimidating, demeaning or hostile working or academic environment whether or not it is based on the prohibited grounds."<sup>11</sup> The policy specifically prohibits reprisal or retaliation. Individuals with concerns about harassment may report their concerns to the Human Rights Office.<sup>12</sup>

Our office has initiated discussions with the university regarding this concern and looks forward to collaborating with them on possible solutions during the 2025-2026 reporting year.

## CHALLENGES IN ACCESSING ACCOMMODATIONS

Our office receives several complaints about the university declining to offer specific accommodations they believe are necessary to their circumstances. While our office acknowledges that some requests may exceed the university's capacity to accommodate, considerable discretion is afforded to individual instructors. Instructors often decline accommodations without providing reasons. In particular, we have observed a trend of denying remote learning requests for students who cannot attend campus due to medical challenges and family emergencies, as well as denials of accommodations for space modifications to support students in writing exams. We also note that students find navigating accommodation requests very challenging, which creates a significant burden on them in addition to their other academic and personal responsibilities.

The current process places some students in the difficult position of having to disclose sensitive personal or medical information multiple times to different university actors without clear outcomes or consistent standards. A lack of transparency in decision-making can exacerbate students' confusion and distress, particularly when instructors reject accommodation requests without explanation or alternative solutions.

Some colleges and universities have implemented stronger frameworks to address these concerns. For example, the University of Toronto's Policy on Academic Accommodation for Students with Disabilities requires instructors to consult with Accessibility Services before denying any accommodations and to provide a written rationale for refusals.<sup>13</sup> This process supports decisions that are informed, documented, and accountable. We recognize the need to balance academic integrity with compassion, trauma-informed service delivery, procedural fairness and duty to accommodate. As requests for equitable learning environments continue to grow, we look forward to collaborating with TMU to refine policies and procedures that enhance support for these principles.

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[11] Western University, *MAPP 1.35 – Non-Discrimination/Harassment/Sexual Misconduct Policy* (London, ON: University of Western Ontario, February 6, 2025), [https://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/policies\\_procedures/section1/mapp135.pdf](https://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/policies_procedures/section1/mapp135.pdf)

[12] <https://www.uwo.ca/hro/discrimination/help/index.html>.

[13] University of Toronto Governing Council, "Disabilities, Statement of Commitment Regarding Persons with Disabilities," February 25, 2021, Office of the Governing Council, <https://governingcouncil.utoronto.ca/secretariat/policies/disabilities-statement-commitment-regarding-persons-february-25-2021>

# 4 TMU'S RESPONSE TO OUR 2023-2025 REPORT



Dear Ms. Shabtai,

Please find below an overview of the university's responses and commitments to the recommendations set forth in the 2023-25 Ombudsperson Annual Report. We extend our sincere appreciation for your careful observations, which continue to advance the integrity and effectiveness of Toronto Metropolitan University's policies and processes.

## Graduate Student-Supervisor Issues

The Toronto Metropolitan University ombudsperson's report recommends the following regarding issues between graduate students and supervisors:

- [1] TMU should develop a more detailed process that sets out detailed steps for both students and supervisors to follow when they are experiencing a conflict or a breakdown in the student-supervisor relationship.

*We agree that it would be beneficial to have more explicit guidelines about shared responsibilities and more detailed steps in the event of conflict or a breakdown of the student-supervisor relationship. The Yeates School of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies (YSGPS) will be revising the YSGPS Graduate Student-Supervisor Guidelines to include more clear and explicit detail on steps to take in case of potential conflict or breakdown in this working relationship, roles and responsibilities, who individuals should consult with, and how any relevant decisions should be undertaken.*

*Our goal is to develop a more user-friendly document that explicitly addresses common supervisory challenges and clearly outlines the shared responsibilities in helping to avoid student-supervisor relationship conflict or strain, and clear steps that must be taken in cases where there is a breakdown of the relationship. Particular attention will be given to situations where the student-supervisor relationship is strained or has broken down, with an aim to clarify roles and responsibilities that we can subsequently also reflect in policy, to ensure consistent, coordinated and supportive responses.*

*As part of this revision, we will use the new Ontario Graduate Supervision Resources Guidebook (released in summer 2025). We will review the resources within the guidebook to help us revise our Guidelines. The development of this guidebook was driven by the recognition that universities across Ontario are facing similar challenges related to conflict and breakdowns in graduate student-supervisor relationships.*

*We are also committed to ensuring that policies will be subsequently revised to include best practices, and roles and responsibilities in such situations.*

*The updated guidelines will be released in the winter 2025/26 semester.*

- [2] TMU should incorporate this process into a policy to ensure that requirements are binding and enforceable.

*We agree that there should be policy governing specific aspects of the student-supervisor relationship, and that roles and responsibilities should be developed.*

*Policy 170(b) can be revised to include this information.*

To that end, we will work collaboratively with the graduate community, Toronto Metropolitan Faculty Association (TFA), the Office of the Vice-Provost, Faculty Affairs, the Vice-Provost, Academic, the Office of the General Counsel and Board Secretariat, and the Office of the Vice-President, Research and Innovation, as well as Student Care and Conduct, as appropriate, in revising Policy 170(b) to include more detail regarding the student-supervisor relationship.

Revisions to Policy 170(b) will be completed in fall 2026. The guidelines will be revised first as this can be done more quickly, while policy review will require purposeful and comprehensive consultation that we anticipate will take more time.

## Graduate Student Funding

The Toronto Metropolitan University ombudsperson's report provided the following four recommendations regarding graduate student funding:

- [1] TMU should update Policy 139 and the Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies Terms and Conditions outlining the circumstances under which a student's funding may be modified or rescinded. In particular, it should clarify:
  - [i] who is entitled to make changes to a student's funding
  - [ii] criteria for making changes
  - [iii] sufficient details about the process that must be followed
  - [iv] whether modifications can occur mid-cycle or are restricted to the annual renewal period
  - [v] notice periods in the event of a discontinuation of supervision of a student that allows stipends to continue for a reasonable, specified period.

*In response to these recommendations, YSGPS will commit to the revision of Policy 139 and the funding terms and conditions related to particular aspects of the student-supervisor relationship. This includes ensuring detailed direction on commitments to and modifications of graduate student funding.*

- [2] TMU should entrench the Guidelines in policy to ensure that requirements are binding and enforceable.

*We agree that Policy 139 and the YSGPS terms and conditions should be revised to reflect these guidelines, and should include specific information about who can make changes to a student's funding, what the criteria are for doing so, along with details about the process, who should be involved, and when a change can occur. The terms and conditions will also be updated to reflect the revised names for the tri-council graduate scholarships.*

*We are committed to updating the YSGPS Graduate Student-Supervisor Guidelines to include explicit detail on the circumstances under which a student's funding may be modified or rescinded, who should be involved, criteria for making changes and steps that should be followed. These guidelines will offer steps towards a modified process, while policy revision requires a longer timeline.*

- [3] TMU should amend Policy 139 to include specific remedies and grounds of recourse for students in the event of policy violations.

*We are undertaking a comprehensive revision of the YSGPS Graduate Student Supervisor Guidelines. We agree that the guidelines should include information about remedies and recourse, when best practices are not followed. In addition, Policy 139 and the YSGPS terms and conditions can be revised to reflect this information.*

*The revised guidelines will be released in winter 2025/26 semester while we will aim to have Policy 139 revisions completed and approved in fall 2026.*

- [4] TMU should amend Policy 139 to require that letters of offer and any other agreements which set out the terms of a stipend include detailed timelines of the funding period.

*At YSGPS, we continue to work closely with graduate programs, graduate program directors, and faculty associate deans, to ensure that letters of offer/funding letters are clear, explicit and include as much important details as reasonably possible, including timelines. Over time, these funding letters have become clearer and we are continuing work in this area. We agree that additional detail can also be provided in revisions to Policy 139 to ensure that there is more consistency and appropriate detail in all documentation outlining graduate student funding.*

## Channels of Communication

The Toronto Metropolitan University ombudsperson's report recommended the following regarding channels of communication:

- [1] TMU should ensure that contact information for Program Chairs, Directors and other administrators is available and up to date for all programs.

*Ensuring that contact information for program chairs, directors, and other administrators is available and up-to-date for all programs is essential. TMU has regular updates with Chairs, Directors and Deans through various avenues, including through Chairs, Directors and Deans' (CDD) meetings. We are committed to sharing updates with them at CDD.*

*At our recent CDD, Chairs, Directors, Deans, and Associate Deans were specifically asked to ensure that websites with contact information are up to date. This simple action can help ensure that students and other members of the TMU community can reach the correct individuals, leading to more efficient and effective resolution of their concerns.*

- [2] TMU departments should ensure the contact information for key department staff, including advising staff, department administrators, placement coordinators, and other key contacts are easily accessible on each departmental website. Departments may wish to adopt the format used by the School of Nursing as it is easily accessible and current.

*University Relations, including the provost's comms team in UR, has no access to the information listed in 3 [1]. As for 3 [2], the administrative rights and content for academic program and department websites are held locally within each faculty.*

*In order to move forward with this recommendation, the best approach would be for:*

- [a] *Faculty marketing and communications staff be advised to work with their dean's office to confirm contact information for program chairs, directors and other administrators is up to date*
- [b] *Local web administrators work with Computing and Communications Services (CCS) to replicate the format used by the School of Nursing (where possible) on their respective websites*
- [c] *Faculty marketing and communications staff make the appropriate updates once the webpage design work is completed*

## EMERGING TRENDS & ISSUES

Thank you for bringing these emerging issues to our attention. TMU acknowledges the importance of these matters, and we are already addressing some of them proactively.

### International Students

International students have unique vulnerabilities. Many are far from their families and social support networks. With changes to federal student visa and work permit processes, universities across Canada have had to make difficult decisions. The university has made updates to the fee structure for International Students with open work permits. The impact of changes to fee structures can be devastating. The ombudsperson's office appreciates the university's willingness to hear from students and to reevaluate the timelines for making changes so that students who entered a program with the expectation of paying domestic fees can continue to do so through the expiration date of their open work permit at the time of their admission.

Some students who accepted enrollment at TMU in reliance on information that they would be able to pay domestic fees will be transitioning to incurring higher costs than anticipated. We also remain concerned that there is an absence of policy and formal processes to support equity and proportionality in decisions that impact international students. As TMU is continuing to evaluate these processes, we are not making formal recommendations at this time.

Maintaining a high standard of Academic Integrity is crucial to the success and reputation of post-secondary institutions. Unfortunately, due to the circumstances of international students, disciplinary decisions, including temporary holds and delays in the appeals process, may result in disproportionate consequences compared to their domestic peers. These penalties may result in difficulties maintaining or renewing visas and work permits, jeopardizing the student's ability to remain in Canada.

In assisting students in navigating these issues, the ombudsperson's office has typically been able to resolve them through shuttle diplomacy. We greatly appreciate the willingness of TMU Departments, including the Office of the Registrar and the Academic Integrity Office (AIO), to collaborate in mitigating the disproportionate impact of consequences on international students. However, the office remains concerned that there is an absence of policy and formal processes to support equity and proportionality in decisions that impact international students.

*The administration of Senate Policy 60: Academic Integrity, is an important component for ensuring academic rigour and validating issued credentials. The Academic Integrity Office (AIO) continues to fulfill its mandate to implement this policy and apply it fairly and consistently. This is in the interest of all TMU students and alumni who hold a credential from TMU. Failure to maintain rigorous academic integrity undermines the value of the certificates, diplomas, and degrees that we issue and thus erodes trust and value for all students, including our international students.*

*The AIO will continue to work to support student success and the needs of all students, including the unique needs of international students. The AIO provides insight and advice on how the policy concerning academic integrity affects students and can apply its processes in a way that mitigates disproportionate effects on equity-deserving students and other categories of students whose unique circumstances may result in a compound effect on them from policy 60 application.*

*In alignment with other Ontario universities, TMU updated the criteria for international fee exemptions related to work permit holders. Eligibility for the domestic Ontario fee rate and exemption from international tuition is available to students holding a closed work permit or the dependent of a closed work permit holder, rather than to those with open work permits.*

*We recognize that the timing created challenges for some students who had begun their studies with the understanding they would continue to pay domestic fees. In response, we committed that these students would retain the domestic tuition exemption until the expiry of their original permit. For students admitted after the policy change, TMU has provided one year of international fee exemption to support their transition.*

## **Delays in Grade and Standing Appeal Process**

While most students can continue their studies throughout the grade and standing appeals process, that is not always the case. For example, for students in the nursing program, a delay in reaching a decision can result in delaying their coursework by a full calendar year because of the program's regimented structure. These delays raise fairness concerns for students whose appeals are ultimately granted in their favour. As noted earlier, delays may also disproportionately impact International students who may require confirmation of coursework or degree completion to extend or apply for visas and work permits.

*The senate office oversees the automated appeals submission process and will regularly contact the responsible area when they have outstanding appeals that need to be addressed. As per Policy 168, these areas are asked to inform students via email if an extension is required.*

*Concerns over the past year are primarily due to volume, and in particular one department with a disproportionately high volume, receiving 63 appeals within 10 days with only one decision maker adjudicating them. The time needed to fairly evaluate and consider the merits of each student's individual circumstances, in combination with the ongoing workload responsibilities of the decision maker, made it impossible to address this number of appeals within the period available. Decision makers were trained to assist in adjudicating the appeal workload, however the process of recruitment and delegation took a significant amount of time.*

*We continue to work to ensure any delay in the decision-making process is communicated to students, addressed and resolved in a manner that minimizes long-term impacts on students.*

## **Artificial Intelligence**

Around the globe, post-secondary institutions are grappling with how to utilize artificial intelligence (AI) effectively in coursework and how to approach allegations of academic misconduct related to its use. Unfortunately, technology has developed faster than our ability to detect it, and tools for detecting AI are unreliable and raise privacy concerns. The AIO highlights these concerns and does not endorse their use.

Reports have been received that instructors have penalized students for the use of AI without following the TMU process outlined in the AI FAQs and Policy 60. This leaves little opportunity for the student to defend their position. As these tools continue to grow, TMU, along with other educational institutions, will have to grapple with developing clear guidelines for how to assess and respond to the use of AI in coursework.

*The university is actively engaged in the response and adaptation to the disruptions caused by the emergence of new generative AI tools. This has included the establishment of formal guidelines to provide clear instructions for faculty and contract lecturers as well as students about the use of generative AI in learning and teaching at TMU. Changes to Senate Policy 60 have also been approved to bolster the policy and procedures concerning academic misconduct involving AI. We continue to support the implementation of this policy and encourage all faculty and contract lecturers to engage in the policy process for suspected cases of academic misconduct, regardless of the technologies involved.*

*We do not endorse the application of penalties for academic misconduct outside Policy 60. Should this occur, students may request a grade appeal during which a referral can be made to the Academic Integrity Office to ensure that the appropriate processes are followed.*

## **Collections Process**

Several students reported not receiving notifications from collections before their debt was sent to an external debt collection agency. TMU employs the same Collection Policy in addressing all debtors, including students. This policy may not be as accessible and understandable for students.

Students are often in a vulnerable financial position, and the implications of having a debt sent to an external debt collection agency are significant. External debt collection processes can significantly impact credit scores, leading to an inability to access financing for academic and personal needs, and high interest rates, which contribute to long-term financial strain.

Although Collection Services attempts to contact students before sending debt to external agencies, some students who have left TMU or are suspicious of telephone and internet scams may not receive these notifications properly. A distinct policy and process for collections from academic debts that considers the unique needs of students relative to other debtors may support TMU's debt collection efforts.

*In adherence to Policy 157, and the collection policy, emails are sent to both the student's TMU email address and the personal email address on file. Follow-up email reminders and phone calls follow. Efforts are made to accommodate students by providing additional grace periods, payment plans including, at times, late payment and interest waivers before accounts become non-collectible and get sent to external collection agencies. The hand off to external agencies is a last resort and generally happens after 181 days or more from the payment due date. This timeline is generous compared to other non-student loan collections practices in for profit sectors.*

*The university will work with the ombudsperson to address any outliers and welcomes any data that would help determine due course of action for those students impacted.*

*In response to students' lack of awareness and understanding of the policy, a user-friendly table has been added to the collections services webpage that details the different consequences of overdue payments. For high-balance accounts or repeated payment plan breaches, the collection team provides reminders regarding the potential involvement of external collections agencies. Financial services has also identified ways to further improve the collection webpage and welcomes collaboration with the ombudsperson's office.*

*The team's approach to collections is centred on student retention and the acknowledgement of financial hardship as well as mental health. The collection team proactively collaborates with partners across the university to resolve these matters for the students. External agencies are only engaged after all internal efforts have been exhausted.*

*The university has selected agencies that understand the unique challenges students face and will continue to utilize only agencies that are able to appreciate the unique context of students. In addition, protocols have been put in place to ensure university communications are verifiable via secure log-in to official student information system accounts. Students can also call MyServiceHub or the collections phone line. Collections has been working with the student care office on cases that require immediate attention and if preferred, can include the ombudsperson's office to this process.*

## Harassment

The Ombudsperson's Office is receiving an increasing number of complaints about bullying and harassment by TMU faculty. TMU's Discrimination and Harassment Prevention Policy defines harassment as: "a course of vexatious comments or conduct based on one or more personal characteristics connected to a protected ground(s) (e.g. age, sexual orientation, creed, etc.) where the person responsible for the behaviour knows or ought reasonably to know that the comments and/ or conduct is unwelcome."

TMU's approach to responding to student reports of harassment by faculty is limited. Where students report experiences comparable to discrimination but do not infringe upon the grounds enumerated in the Ontario Human Rights Code, the current process is to refer the student to their program chair to escalate concerns. This approach raises concerns about the impartiality of decision-makers who work closely with the person alleged to have engaged in harassment.

We are particularly concerned about the inherent power imbalance between faculty and students. TMU has developed a Student Code of Non-Academic Conduct, which provides a process for members of the TMU community to follow when allegations of improper conduct arise. No corollary exists where a student alleges a faculty member has engaged in similar behaviours, leaving students vulnerable to the decisions of the alleged harasser's colleague.

Even if the decision maker is impartial, students may still not report due to a perception of bias. Many Ontario postsecondary institutions have broader definitions of harassment that allow for more responsive procedures for making a report. The ombudsperson's office has initiated discussions with the university regarding this concern and looks forward to collaborating on possible solutions during the 2025-2026 reporting year.

*TMU's human rights policy framework is designed so that all discrimination, harassment and sexual violence-related complaints within the university are addressed by the specialized and expert office of Human Rights Services (HRS). This area manages all human rights complaints in relation to students, faculty, staff and any other members of the TMU community under the Discrimination and Harassment Policy (DHP) and Sexual Violence Policy (SVP).*

*Where complaints fall outside of the scope of human rights policies, TMU designates alternative policies and offices to oversee the matters based on the identities of the parties involved. For example, matters involving students are handled under the Student Code of Non-Academic Conduct (the Student Code) and matters involving faculty and staff are handled under the Respectful Workplace Policy (RWP). These policies cover issues of general bullying and harassment when they are not connected to human rights protected grounds and therefore do not fall within the specialized mandate of HRS and the DHP.*

*The issue that the Ombuds office has identified relates to the fact that the RWP focuses on issues/complaints between employees in the workplace. As a result, there is no direct avenue under the RWP (or the Student Code) through which students can make complaints against faculty/contract lecturers. However, the RWP Procedures do provide an option for the university to address disrespectful behaviour by instructors when it is experienced or witnessed by members of the university community who are not employees. In such cases, the university may proceed as the complainant under the RWP and the community member raising the concern (e.g. student) would be permitted to participate as an affected witness in the review of the complaint under the policy.*

*In addition to this indirect avenue for the university to address student complaints against faculty/contract lecturers under the RWP, when students raise such concerns about their instructors, the university typically facilitates follow up by referring students to the associate dean, students and/or dean within the relevant faculty.*

*Such escalation is recommended within the faculty because instructors report into the dean's office and it is the dean who has managerial authority to provide direction to an instructor about their professional and classroom behaviour, and/or discipline an instructor for professional misconduct, which would include general bullying and harassment of students. This is consistent with applicable collective agreements.*

*Deans do not operate as a colleague or peer, but rather as a member of the university's academic administration with managerial authority over instructors. As such, the involvement of the dean's office should serve to counteract concerns around real or perceived bias. Deans also regularly serve as impartial decision-makers as part of complaint resolution processes under university policies, such as the DHP, SVP and RWP.*

## **Challenges in Accessing Accommodations**

The Ombudsperson's Office has received complaints about the university declining to offer specific accommodations that students believe are necessary. While some requests exceed the university's capacity to accommodate, discretion is afforded to individual instructors who may decline without providing reasons.

A trend is evident in denying remote learning requests for students who cannot attend campus due to medical challenges and family emergencies, as well as denials of accommodations for space to write exams. Navigating accommodation requests can be challenging, placing a burden on students, and they are asked to disclose sensitive personal or medical information multiple times without clear outcomes or consistent standards. A lack of transparency in decision-making can exacerbate students' confusion and distress, particularly when requests are rejected without explanation or alternative solutions.

Some colleges and universities have implemented stronger frameworks, for example, policies to consult with accessibility services before denying accommodations and to provide written rationales for refusals. This process supports decisions that are informed, documented, and accountable. As requests for equitable learning environments continue to grow, the ombudsperson's office looks forward to working with TMU to improve policies and procedures to improve support for these principles.

*The university continues to work to ensure any delays in decision-making are communicated to students, addressed and resolved in a manner that minimizes long-term impacts as per the Principle of Fair Process as outlined in Policy 168: Grade and Standing Appeals.*

*It is essential that academic accommodation processes remove barriers, promote an accessible educational environment, and uphold procedural fairness, while also maintaining academic integrity. The university has established procedures and processes to support these commitments. For example, Academic Accommodation Support (AAS) facilitators are available to meet with students who need support navigating the accommodation process, exam accommodations are coordinated centrally through the test centre, and procedures are in place to support the consistent application of Policy 159.*

*The university acknowledges that transparency and communication of decisions related to academic accommodations can be further strengthened and is committed to reducing unnecessary burdens and promoting clarity in the application of Policy 159. This year, AAS will launch onboarding modules to provide students with a centralized place to access resources, templates, and supports in utilizing their accommodations.*

*Two modules will be available: (1) a pre-registration module for students considering registering with AAS, and (2) a module for registered students, offering more in-depth resources and guidance for navigating the accommodation process. These modules are being developed in consultation with students and stakeholders across the TMU community. Multiple stakeholders are participating in a joint TMU-faculty association task force on accommodations that will inform commitments going forward.*



# TMU'S PROGRESS ON OUR 2021-23 REPORT

Dear Ms. Shabtai,

Please find enclosed an overview of the University's responses, commitments, and progress updates regarding the recommendations set forth in the 2021–23 Ombudsperson Report. The progress detailed in this year's report reaffirms the University's ongoing commitment to accountability and the continual strengthening of its policies, systems, and processes.

We acknowledge and value your role in supporting fairness and constructive engagement across the University community, and appreciate your leadership and commitment to fairness.

## **Timeliness of Academic Appeals with Related Human Rights Appeals**

The Toronto Metropolitan University ombudsperson's report provided the following suggestion to address the recommendation regarding academic appeals related to human rights appeals, which has been progressing as follows:

- [1] An increase in resources to match the increase in caseload and complexity would help reduce some of the current timelines; however, we recommend that consideration be given to reviewing the current processes to determine if greater efficiencies can be achieved without diminishing the level of procedural fairness required. Having matters that take several months to reach a decision not only creates undue stress for the complainant and respondent but also takes up resources available to Human Rights Services (HRS).

A further recommendation concerning cases that require a formal investigation is to establish a timeline for the completion of an investigation. For example, the Discrimination and Harassment Prevention (DHP) Procedures, which now requires the HRS to complete its review in a timely manner could include the further qualification that completion be "no later than six months after receiving the complaint, unless extenuating circumstances justify a delay." When an extension of time is required, the parties will be advised of any such extension and the reasons for the extension.

In some cases, the delay may occasionally result from the actions or inactions of the parties to the dispute. However, including a timeframe should be a paramount consideration in managing each parties' expectations and obligations regarding timelines.

*In response, HRS agreed that it is important for human rights related matters to proceed in a timely and efficient manner while maintaining procedural fairness to those involved in a complaint process. Since then, HRS continues in its commitment and efforts to improve timelines for the review of prejudice claims raised in student Academic Appeals.*

The team have implemented operational changes so that the office's intake and support administrator now oversees the review and triage of all academic appeals, and has developed process guidelines and templates in order to increase consistency and efficiency in the review process. The administrator maintains a shared tracking document with the senate office in order to streamline communication regarding status updates on such cases. These operational improvements have decreased timelines for HRS to complete its review of such matters, while the volume of academic appeals relying on the ground of prejudice remains high.

HRS is also pleased to report that in 2024 the office hired its current director (who previously served in an acting/interim role) and also filled the vacant manager position. Further, a new case management system has been procured and will be implemented in 2025. It will further streamline and improve the office's internal practices with respect to case management, tracking and reporting.

In 2024/2025, the Office of the Vice-President, Equity and Community Inclusion and HRS also undertook a DHP review, which resulted in the introduction of a new and improved discrimination and harassment policy and procedures in June 2025. Among many other updates, the procedures now include timelines to support the efficiency of the complaint resolution process, including confirmation that HRS will typically complete a preliminary assessment within 25 business days of receiving all the relevant details of a complaint, and also endeavour to address complaints and communicate the outcome of the complaint to the parties within 12 months from the date the complaint was received.

## **Review of the Discrimination and Harassment Prevention (DHP) Policy and the DHP Procedures**

The Toronto Metropolitan University ombudsperson's report provided the following suggestion regarding the DHP policy and procedures, which has been progressing as follows:

- [1] The DHP and associated procedures should be reviewed to allow for greater transparency in both the investigative and decision-making process. At minimum, DHP Procedures should include a step that ensures each party has been made fully aware of the evidence the other party relies upon and is given an opportunity to respond. In addition, parties should be made aware of any and all evidence and submissions relied upon by the decision-maker and have an opportunity to respond.

*In response, TMU agreed that transparency and clarity are important goals of the process that HRS administers under the DHP policy and shared that HRS remains committed to considering additional ways to keep parties informed about the complaint process in a transparent and clear manner.*

*The new and improved DHP policy and procedures released in June 2025 highlight the importance of procedural fairness in the complaint resolution process. Procedures specifically state, "principles of procedural fairness also require that a respondent be aware of the allegations against them, be provided with a full and fair opportunity to respond to the allegations, and that both the complainant and the respondent have a full and fair opportunity to respond to relevant evidence presented in an investigation."*

## Delay of Academic Integrity Appeals

The Toronto Metropolitan University ombudsperson's report provided the following suggestion regarding academic misconduct in a prerequisite course, which has been progressing as follows:

- [1] Policy 60 and its related procedures provide that the Academic Integrity Council (AIC) panel shall be composed of two faculty members and one student member. When Policy 60 is under review we recommend that consideration be given to rethinking the composition of the panel and also to having a one-person panel, someone who is specifically trained (and perhaps hired) for the purpose of hearing appeals to the AIC.

As both the AIC and Senate Appeals Committee (SAC) members adjudicate on these appeals, but at different levels of appeal, consideration should be given to the creation of a single roster of members who can sit on either the AIC or SAC. This can be put in place permanently, or be used as a measure to deal with periods of increased AIC cases or to help reduce the delay in having cases heard and decided.

*The university agreed that utilizing members of both the AIC and SAC to hear appeals and penalty hearings under Policy 60, at the level of the AIC makes sense during busy periods.*

*The review of Policy 60 has continued and is nearing completion for fall 2025 and the university hopes to bring a revised policy to senate in the fall semester. Revisions are based on the extensive feedback and consultations that the policy review committee engaged in over the course of the past two years.*

*In addition to the revised policy, the university has also updated the procedures for Policy 60 concerning AIC hearings to improve administrative processing and efficiency. This will reduce wait times for hearings.*

*Finally, the Academic Integrity Office (AIO) has initiated the process to establish a new staffing structure to address administrative backlogs, including wait times for hearings. This effort will rebalance resources and provide improved service levels.*

## Graduate Student Supervision

The Toronto Metropolitan University ombudsperson's report provided the following suggestion regarding the DHP policy and procedures, which has been progressing as follows:

- [1] The university clearly recognizes that "parties must in all cases be mindful of the power differential in the student/supervisor relationship" and has taken steps to help facilitate healthy relationships between a student and supervisor. This includes programs offered by the graduate learning institute, as well as guidance set out in the Graduate Student Supervisor Guidelines (Guidelines) and the Student Supervisor Discussion Checklist (Checklist).

These are very positive proactive tools and the university should consider further expanding on what is currently in place to foster as much transparency in the relationship as possible. This could include providing additional detail to the current Checklist to set out in more detail and in writing what was agreed to in the discussions about regular consultation, feedback, program expectations, etc., and also to make this checklist a requirement rather than a guideline.

In addition to the above, the university should consider creating a process to ensure that a student, who experiences a breakdown in the relationship with a supervisor, is afforded an opportunity to continue with their graduate program. Training could be provided in conflict resolution to maintain healthy relationships. This could help avoid a situation where there is a complete breakdown in the relationship.

In addition, the university could conduct an environmental scan to see what is the best practice in managing and supporting graduate student-supervisor relationships.

*In response, the university agreed that the Guidelines and Checklist are both supportive and proactive tools that can help provide structure to the student-supervisor relationship, and committed to continue to revise the Guidelines as well as Policy 170(b) to clarify the use of the Plan of Study and the Progress Review.*

*Since then, revisions to Policy 170(b) were approved in May 2024 and implemented. These clarify the purposes of the Plan of Study and Progress Reviews to promote more consistent use across programs. Clear definitions were added to the policy, and TMU has since observed increased uptake of the Plan of Study as an important tool for student progress. When used consistently, alongside performance designations each semester, this tool helps ensure graduate students receive timely, and helpful feedback.*

*As part of these updates, the university also introduced a new performance designation on the Plan of Study form template. Previously, students were assigned either "In Progress" (INP) or "Unsatisfactory" (UNS). We have now added a third option: "INP with note." This designation enables faculty supervisors to express concerns about a student's progress or specific aspects of their work, without assigning an UNS. It provides a constructive opportunity to engage in supportive discussions aimed at addressing challenges and fostering progress, while maintaining an INP designation. Feedback on this change has been positive; it is viewed as a compassionate and constructive approach to identifying concerns without being punitive.*

*In terms of training in conflict resolution and on healthy communication and productive student-supervisor relationships, TMU continues to enhance our offerings in this area, for both graduate students and supervisors. In 2024–25, the Enhancing Your Supervisory Toolkit was launched, a five-session workshop series for faculty supervising graduate students. Open to all faculty supervisors, the series focused on emotional intelligence, feedback strategies, navigating conflict, student well-being, stress and performance, and navigating university resources.*

*Participation and engagement were high, reflecting strong interest in strengthening supervisory skills. Based on this success, the series will continue in 2025–26, alongside the launch of a faculty supervisor community of support to foster peer learning and promote best practices in graduate supervision.*

*In alignment with the Council of Ontario Universities principles for graduate supervision, TMU was part of a provincial working group to conduct an environmental scan of supervision-related policies and practices across Ontario universities. A key outcome was the graduate supervision resources guidebook, completed in August 2025 and now publicly available on the Yeates School of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies (YSGPS) website.*

*Over the next year, YSGPS will use this resource to inform a major revision of the graduate student supervisor guidelines. While recent updates have addressed equity, diversity, and inclusion, the university aims to develop a more user-friendly, thematic document that clarifies roles, addresses common challenges, and supports early and effective resolution of challenges or conflicts.*

## Policy 60 Issues

The Toronto Metropolitan University ombudsperson's report provided the following three recommendations with respect to Policy 60, which have been progressing as follows:

- [1] When Policy 60 is under review, that consideration be given to having someone other than the professor who alleged the academic misconduct be the decision-maker at the facilitated discussion.

*The review of Policy 60 has continued and is nearing completion in fall 2025. Key stakeholders across the university have been extensively consulted and the committee engaged on the decision-maker model under the policy. The revised policy will be presented for consideration by Senate in fall 2025.*

- [2] That academic integrity decisions be made public with anonymization: that is, referring to the "student" and the "respondent" or the "university" throughout the decision. All published decisions should include a detailed description of the facts of the case, the decision-makers' written rationale and the assigned penalty.

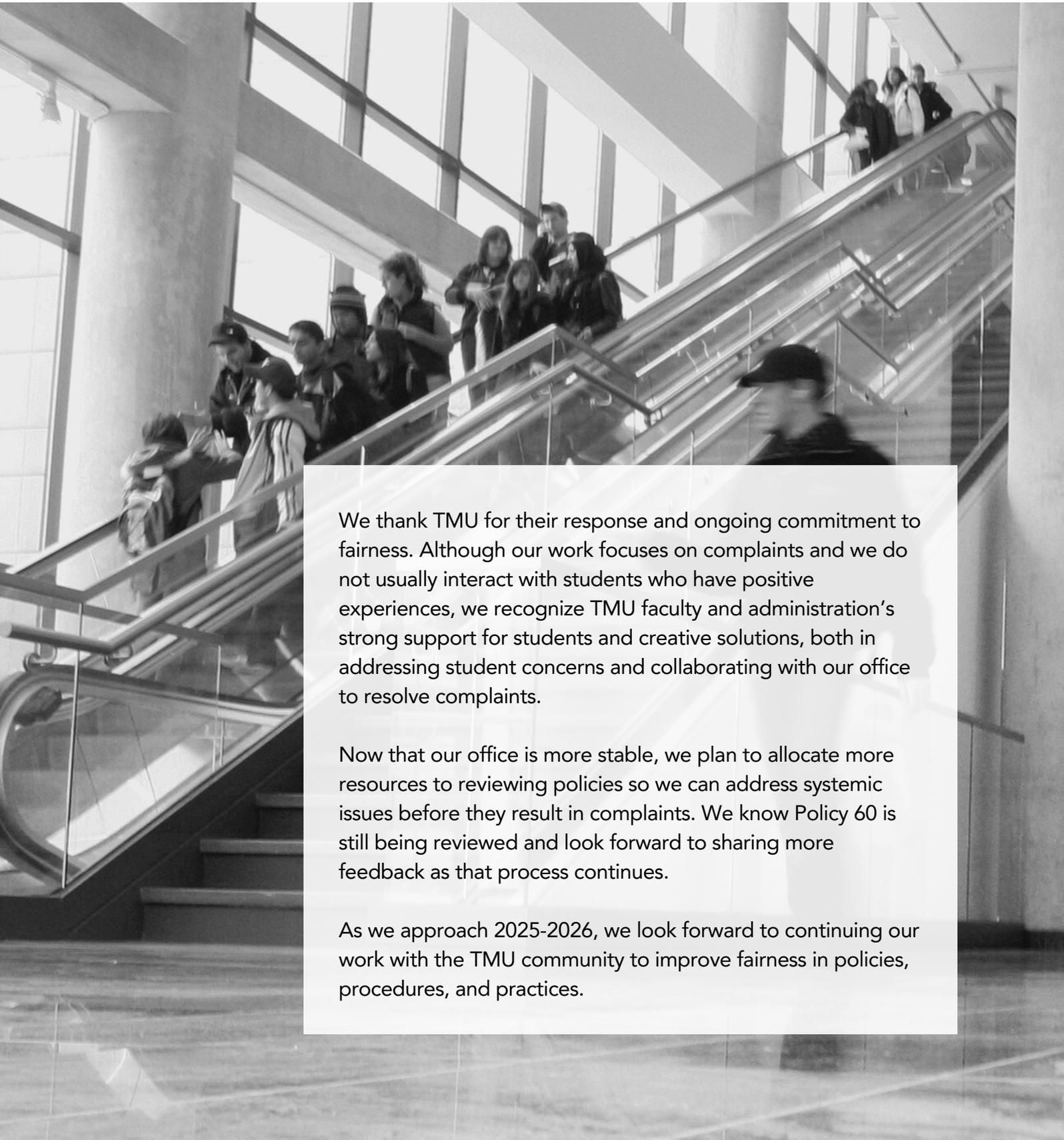
*The review of Policy 60 has continued and is nearing completion in fall 2025. Key stakeholders were consulted extensively across the university. The revised policy will be presented for consideration by Senate in fall 2025.*

- [3] That TMU reconsider its position regarding the permanency of a Disciplinary Withdrawal (DW). Specifically, that students who receive a DW be given the option to request a hearing after a period of three to five years. In their request the student would explain why they believe it is appropriate for the university to reinstate them. These reasons could include the context surrounding their DW, what has changed since that time, any continuing barriers the DW poses for them, and other factors deemed relevant by TMU.

*The review of Policy 60 has continued and is nearing completion in fall 2025. Key stakeholders were consulted extensively across the university. The revised policy will be presented for consideration by Senate in fall 2025.*



# LOOKING FORWARD



We thank TMU for their response and ongoing commitment to fairness. Although our work focuses on complaints and we do not usually interact with students who have positive experiences, we recognize TMU faculty and administration's strong support for students and creative solutions, both in addressing student concerns and collaborating with our office to resolve complaints.

Now that our office is more stable, we plan to allocate more resources to reviewing policies so we can address systemic issues before they result in complaints. We know Policy 60 is still being reviewed and look forward to sharing more feedback as that process continues.

As we approach 2025-2026, we look forward to continuing our work with the TMU community to improve fairness in policies, procedures, and practices.



