

Administrative Response to the *Report of the University Ombudsperson for the Period 1 July, 2011 to 30 June, 2012*

October 2012

Overview

The Terms of Reference for the Office of the University Ombudsperson stipulate that the Ombudsperson shall “make a written annual report to the Governing Council, and through it to the University community”. In addition, the Governing Council requests an administrative response to each annual report.

The *Report of the University Ombudsperson for the Period 1 July, 2011 to 30 June, 2012* is Professor Joan Foley’s fifth annual report as University Ombudsperson. Once again, her understanding of the University of Toronto, her respect for the role of Ombudsperson, and her expertise, sensitivity, and sense of fairness in handling complex and often difficult situations are much in evidence.

Response

The *Report of the University Ombudsperson for the Period 1 July, 2011 to 30 June, 2012* makes no formal recommendations. Instead, the *Report* describes an increasingly discernable pattern of constructive and effective catalysis, involving improvements to both process and policy, led by the Ombudsperson’s work with stakeholders and diverse parts of the University’s administration. As Professor Foley herself notes in her report:

A core role of the Office is to identify and address *systemic issues*, those issues that potentially affect many members of the institution, not only an individual complainant. In this way, the Ombudsperson functions as a catalyst for improvements in policies, processes, and procedures. Such improvements are often stimulated through informal discussion without need of formal investigations and recommendations.

In this context, the 2011-12 *Report* offers detailed consideration of a number topics that came to the Ombudsperson’s attention in the past year, and it follows up on several subjects from previous annual reports. It recounts instances in which the Ombudsperson’s counsel contributed to the Administration’s decision to establish working or advisory groups; to undertake revisions and improvements to websites and other sources of information; or to draft new guidelines.

To take two examples: The Vice-Provost, Students is pleased to report that the *Student’s Companion to the Code of Student Conduct* and a guide to assist students and others in directing concerns about prohibited discrimination and discriminatory harassment (among other concerns) are in draft form and under review by various administrative and advisory groups. As anticipated in the Ombudsperson’s *Report*, they will be published this fall. Both of these documents have benefitted from feedback contained in previous annual reports from the Ombudsperson and from direct consultations with the Ombudsperson herself.

Without reviewing the various matters covered in the 2011-12 *Report* individually, the Administration commends the Ombudsperson for her characteristically thoughtful, objective, and constructive consideration of the issues.

The Administration also welcomes the Ombudsperson's collaborative work this past year with several student unions.

The statistics presented in the report's appendices are helpful. They show both a consistent (if proportionately small) number of requests for assistance and an efficient and responsive reply from the Office of the Ombudsperson.

It is therefore not surprising that, as the *Report* notes, the Office has been approached for training assistance and advice from other universities and jurisdictions. From the Administration's perspective, the University of Toronto has been well-served by our Ombudsperson and her team, and by their balanced approach to addressing individual cases while setting them in a wider, system-focused context.

The Administration extends its sincere thanks to Professor Foley and her team – Garvin De Four, Linda Collins, and Stephanie Ellul – for their dedication to the University of Toronto and for their service to the University's faculty, staff, and students.