

# **Administrative Response to the “Report of the Interim University Ombudsperson, July 1, 2006 – June 30, 2007” and to the “Interim Report of the University Ombudsperson, September 28, 2007”**

**October 2007**

## **Overview**

This administrative response is made in accordance with the Governing Council's direction that the University Administration respond to the Ombudsperson's Annual Report.

## **Background**

Professor Ian McDonald was appointed Interim University Ombudsperson in November 2006, stepping in to fill the vacancy left by the departure of Ms Mary Ward, the University's Ombudsperson since 1998. Professor Emeritus Joan Foley was appointed University Ombudsperson effective July 1, 2007. Accordingly, the Administration has before it both the “Report of the Interim University Ombudsperson” prepared by Professor McDonald, covering the period from July 1, 2006 to June 30, 2007, and the “Interim Report of the University Ombudsperson” prepared by Professor Emeritus Joan Foley consistent with section 5.2 of the new Terms of Reference for the Office of the University Ombudsperson.

## **Response**

The Administration offers sincere thanks to Professor McDonald for his continued dedication to the University and for his exceptional commitment to the role of Interim University Ombudsperson. The Report clearly reflects Professor McDonald's characteristic professionalism and integrity.

The Administration welcomes Professor Emeritus Foley to the role of University Ombudsperson and thanks her for her first three months of service and for her ongoing role in leading the reorganization of the Office.

The Reports before the Administration provide a summary of the work of the Office of the Ombudsperson over the past year and three months. This Response provides an update on the University's response to several of the issues raised in these Reports.

## **Statistics**

Professor McDonald, the Interim Ombudsperson, reports that the number of cases dealt with in 2006-2007 by the Office of the Ombudsperson declined by roughly 30% from 2005-2006. Professor McDonald notes that the current number of cases handled by the Office “may appear so small as to be trivial” in a community of over 80,000 (less than a third of 1% of the community). While we are encouraged that effective policies, processes and personnel are contributing to a positive trend in caseload, the Administration also firmly agrees both with Professor McDonald's assessment of the

value, usefulness and importance of the Office of the Ombudsperson and with his reasons for this assessment.

### **Communications**

In his report, the Interim Ombudsperson makes a specific recommendation around the need for strong, effective and user-friendly communication of policies, regulations and procedures, especially as they apply to students. In September 2005, the Student Web presence available on the home page was redesigned to provide students with essential information and resources related both to academic and non-academic issues across the University. Included in this redesign was the placement of policies, procedures and guidelines in accessible locations on the Web ([http://www.students.utoronto.ca/The\\_Basics/Rights\\_and\\_Rules.htm](http://www.students.utoronto.ca/The_Basics/Rights_and_Rules.htm)).

Furthermore, the Students site will also provide on-line versions of the print publication series entitled “Student Rights & Responsibilities”. This series presently includes the two titles “Academic Integrity” and “Your Grades”; another piece entitled “Student Conduct” is also soon to be added.

In print, in addition to the “Student Rights & Responsibilities” series, the University also provides “Intuit: A Student Guide to the University of Toronto”

While these initiatives speak to the steady progress being made, the Administration also supports the importance of Professor McDonald’s recommendation and reaffirms its commitment to continuing to enhance communications.

### **Academic Integrity**

The Report also makes specific reference to student issues in relation to the *Code of Behaviour on Academic Matters* (1995). An administrative review of the *Code of Behaviour on Academic Matters*, was undertaken by the Office of the Vice-President and Provost during 2006-07. This involved wide consultation with divisions across the university to identify recurring issues with the administration of the Code, including timeliness, consistency and other process concerns. The next stage of the process is now underway. It is concerned with addressing the issues raised through the divisional consultation process and includes the development of best practice guidelines and additional training for those responsible for the administration of the Code at divisional levels.

The Administration believes firmly in proactive promotion of the institutional value of academic integrity. Part of the current consultation involves discussion of the need for integrating education and discussion of academic integrity issues as a fundamental and intrinsic part of our academic programs at all levels of the institution. The Office of Teaching Advancement hosts both an on-campus resource centre and an Academic Integrity web site providing an overview of academic integrity issues and resources for faculty, teaching assistants and students. The OTA also runs a variety of workshops and information sessions on a range of topics related to the promotion of academic integrity. Faculty, departments, and divisions are encouraged to reference this site on course outlines, in departmental handbooks and web sites, and in any other materials developed for students and faculty (<http://www.utoronto.ca/academicintegrity>). These efforts are augmented by a wide variety of educational initiatives within the divisions that

are designed specifically to raise awareness of the importance of academic integrity and to help promote the divisions' commitment to prevention.

The Office of the Vice-President and Provost organizes a number of workshops each year to assist those responsible for administering academic policies including the *Code of Behaviour on Academic Matters*, the *Code of Student Conduct*, and the *Policy on Academic Appeals within Divisions*. The content and format of the workshops are specifically targeted to different groups including faculty and staff, divisional officers, dean's designates and tribunal members. The Council on Student Experience has also provided a broader forum to raise awareness and disseminate best practices across the institution, particularly in relation to academic integrity issues.

### ***Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy***

The Office of the Vice-President and Provost has worked closely with the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Office (FIPP) to develop best practices for student-faculty interactions that occur in the course of normal university business. These were developed in light of the U of T's *Policy on Access to Student Academic Records*, the *Grading Practices Policy*, and the *Policy on Official Correspondence with Students*. The information may be found on the Provost's website:

<http://www.provost.utoronto.ca/policy/fippa.htm>

### ***Safety Abroad Policy***

The Ombudsperson's Interim Report refers to her predecessor's recommendation for the creation of a "Safety Abroad Policy." We reported previously that an initial draft of this policy had been produced by the International Student Exchange Office and that the Office of the Vice President Research had also conducted a review recommending amendments to the *Policy for Safety in Field Research* (1988). As a result of consultation on the draft policy and the recommendations from the review process, it was determined that a single overarching policy should be developed. This policy should address off-campus research and study activities whether domestic or international since many of the risk management, training and support issues were not limited to students studying abroad. A working group has been formed which is collating the necessary information and expert advice and will recommend a more general policy for off-campus activities as well as appropriate accompanying guidelines and templates. In addition, in order to address safety abroad issues, and as recommended by the Ombudsperson, detailed guidelines in the form of a Safety Abroad Manual have been developed by the Safety Abroad Office, are currently in use and are available on their website. These guidelines provide extensive assistance and best practices relating to risk management, planning, training and support for students studying abroad. Recommendations for a consolidated policy relating to off-campus activities are anticipated to be brought through governance during 2008.