Introduction

I am required by the terms of reference that delineate the responsibilities of the Ombudsperson and the Ombudsperson Committee (www.ryerson.ca/ombuds/more-aboutouroffice/terms.html) to report annually to the Ryerson community on the activities of my Office. I do so with great enthusiasm as I see the circulation of the annual report as an excellent opportunity to:

- Engage community members in a discussion about general fairness and effective dispute resolution principles (see p. 1, Making Decisions Fairly);
- Provide statistical information on the type and volume of concerns and complaints that are brought to my attention so that all members of the community have the opportunity of ‘listening and learning’ about the issues brought forward (see p. 2); and
- Provide recommendations for consideration of system-wide improvements (see p. 4 – 6).

Making Decisions Fairly

In the course of my work I am often asked how I determine that decisions are made fairly, My practice is to refer the questioner to the ‘Administrative Fairness Checklist for Decision Makers’ which was published in the 2004/2005 Ombudsperson’s report and which can also be found on our website. I also have discussions about specific standards contained in the aforementioned checklist like: Has the decision been reached objectively, with due respect for relevant facts without bias? These kinds of discussions will often move into the genesis of the principles of natural justice that are the underpinnings of any fairness standards. I’m providing a brief summary of what natural justice looks like in practice to provoke broader discussion of these principles.

What Does ‘Natural Justice’ Mean?

‘Natural justice’ is a concept that was developed in England in the 19th century to define the rules for decision-making. The concept of natural justice has evolved over time and is now often described as ‘procedural fairness’ or just ‘fairness’. The U.S. concept of ‘procedural due process’ has a similar meaning. As a result, the terms natural justice, procedural fairness, and fairness are often used interchangeably.

The two basic components of natural justice are:

Component One

That the person affected by a decision:
- Will receive notice that his or her case is being considered;
- Will be provided with the specific aspects of the case that are under consideration so that an explanation or response can be prepared; and
- Will be provided with the opportunity to make submissions (written or oral) relating to the case

Component Two

That the decision-maker(s) will be unbiased:
To be unbiased is to be and to be seen as objective or impartial about the matter you are considering. The best way for decision-makers to be unbiased is:
- To understand what bias is, i.e. if you have a firmly held, favourable or negative opinion about a matter or an individual. Therefore, if you cannot be objective about a matter that is within your purview, you should remove yourself from the decision-making process.
- If you are part of a committee of decision-makers, each member must feel free to make his or her own decision. Therefore, each member of the committee must be free of influence from other committee members, from outside third parties, or from the influence of those who have designated them as decision-makers.
- Sometimes bias is alleged because it is believed the decision-maker knows too

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1 The information regarding ‘bias’ was adapted from: H. Finlay & R. Corbett (2000). “So you’ve got a complaint…The Hearing Process From Start to Finish”. Centre for Sport and Law.
much about the matter under scrutiny. A well-informed decision-maker is not biased if she or he has an open mind and is open to persuasion by the information provided through the decision-making process.

It is my firm belief that if all decision-makers abided by these basic principles when forming conclusions and making decisions there would be very few complaints about the fairness of decisions other than from those for whom any answer other than the one they want is unacceptable.

### Statistical Information

#### Types of Concerns

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<tr>
<th>Types of Concerns</th>
<th>05/06</th>
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</tbody>
</table>

¹ This category includes concerns about being unable to easily access academic advice from a knowledgeable person in the relevant School/Department or Faculty.
² Including Academic Standing
³ Including Advanced Standing
⁴ Including Transfer Credits (as of 2005/2006) and Challenge Credits.
⁵ Including Late Withdrawals.

### Information: Providing information on policies and procedures

### Advice: Providing information and discussing possible options with students

### Intervention: Taking action, with the students’ permission, to assist in some way to resolve the concern, e.g. clarifying information, facilitating, mediating, conducting investigations etc.
The Ombudsperson’s Annual Report 2005/2006

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Action Taken</th>
<th>05/06</th>
<th>04/05</th>
<th>03/04</th>
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<td>Advice &amp; Referral</td>
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<td>Information</td>
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<td>Intervention – Shuttle Diplomacy</td>
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<td><strong>535</strong></td>
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Constituency 2005-2006

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<td><strong>535</strong></td>
<td><strong>480</strong></td>
<td><strong>513</strong></td>
<td><strong>364</strong></td>
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Method of Initial Contact (%)

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<th>03/04</th>
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<tr>
<td>Appointment</td>
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<tr>
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<td><strong>535</strong></td>
<td><strong>480</strong></td>
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Highlights of Statistical Information

This year I have observed a number of changes in the volume of complaints in particular categories that deserve comment.

Decreases and Increases Observed:

Decreases

Academic Appeals (Includes appeals of grades and academic standings)

For the past four years the number of complaints related to appeals of grades and standing has increased by a high of 78% in 2002/2003 and an average of 11.5% for 2003/2004 and 2004/2005, whereas this year the number of complaints has decreased by 18%. I am hoping that the reason the number of complaints related to academic appeals has decreased is because students and instructors are resolving issues informally which in previous years would have resulted in appeals being launched at the end of the term. For example, medical and compassionate circumstances have been discussed with professors and/or Chairs/Directors at the time they have arisen and the student has completed the term successfully without further incident or the student has voluntarily withdrawn from his or her courses prior to the final deadline for doing so without incurring an academic penalty.

Admissions

This year I have seen a slight decrease in complaints after the change in responsibilities in this area has been taken into account, while the number of external and internal applications handled by this area increased by approximately 11%. I am aware of a number of enhancements the Admissions staff implemented last fall to increase the clarity of communication regarding due dates for taking certain actions, (e.g. an Applicant’s Check List is now sent along with the letter of acceptance), and the letters of decline have provided more detailed and personalized explanations for why an applicant was not admitted. I am speculating that these initiatives have resulted in fewer applicants believing their applications were not handled fairly.

Instructor Conduct

This year I have seen a 37% decrease in complaints for this area. It is difficult to determine what the reasons for this decrease are as there

¹ Includes part-time degree students.
² Includes special students.
³ The numbers of complaints under scrutiny in some categories are not large so movement in the data will result in a large percentage increase or decrease.
are no readily identifiable trends in the data. However, in general terms, this is a positive development.

**Increases**

**Student Fees and Cashier’s Office**
*(This office is identified as ‘Fees’ in the accompanying chart.)*

This year complaints related to the Student Fees and Cashier’s Office increased by 200%. It is important to note, though, that in the previous year, the number of complaints declined by 44%. The most common complaint received related to individuals encountering difficulty in communicating with the Office to make arrangements for resolving a problem with their fees account. We are frequently told by individuals who have a complaint that it has not been possible for them to contact the Office by telephone as the lines ring busy constantly and that emails sent to a general address or to specific personnel are not responded to in a timely way, or at all. In addition, complaints have arisen when after having had an error corrected by Student Fees staff, the original error appears again on the student’s financial record and the student has to start all over again to see that the error is corrected for a second time. When I contact Student Fees personnel myself about these types of issues they have always been resolved in a satisfactory manner.

**Recommendation 1:** In an effort to reduce frustration and improve service, my recommendation is that the personnel within the Student Fees Office explore means for ensuring telephone calls and emails are responded to in a timely fashion. It also seems reasonable to determine and publicize guidelines for response times for emails, telephone messages, faxes and letters. If this kind of information is provided to students in advance it may build understanding of what is a reasonable time frame for the provision of a detailed response.

**Enrollment Services**
*(This office is identified as ‘Registration and Records Services’ in the accompanying chart.)*

Complaints related to Enrollment Services increased by 96% over the past year. It is not surprising that there would be a substantial increase given this unit of the University implemented Ryerson’s Administrative Self Service (RAMSS) system in 2005. The bulk of the concerns raised related primarily to errors in the information showing in students’ files and their inability to get to the right person to have the errors corrected in a timely fashion. In addition, a number of complaints related to the quality of service were received, such as students indicating that they could not get through on the telephone lines or that their emails were not responded to; or the queues for making inquiries in person were very long and on some occasions, the Student Registration Office would have to be closed and the lines dispersed before everyone waiting in line was seen given the lateness of the hour. Given the difficulty associated with implementing a new comprehensive system, it is not surprising that the implementation would strain the resources of many aspects of the system. I am assuming that well in advance of this massive change, provision was made for additional resources for communicating with users who encountered difficulties in a timely way to buffer the inevitable difficulties that arise when a new system is launched. Nonetheless, many students, staff and faculty encountered difficulty when interacting with RAMSS.

As I hear from all sides on disputes, I understand why Student Enrollment/Registration staff expected users to be patient when they encounter difficulties with RAMSS. I also understand why users will say: “The fact that it’s a new system is not my problem. I have limited time available and I can’t be expected to reduce my expectations indefinitely for timely and accurate information because ‘it’s a new system.’” In these kinds of situations I think we all have to demonstrate some patience and respect. For example, it’s not reasonable to blame the bank teller for the fact that the ATM isn’t working when you desperately need cash; nor is it reasonable for the bank teller to expect the user not to be upset about being extremely inconvenienced. The solution seems to be for the people providing the service to apologize and explain that the difficulty the user is encountering is the result of a system malfunction or temporary backlog, etc. However, it should not be an ongoing refrain. If a problem cannot be fixed on the spot it should be the responsibility of the person the user encountered the stumbling block when the problem has been corrected. It would also seem reasonable to assess whether additional resources are required in order to ensure that users are not inconvenienced on an ongoing basis.

I also understand how difficult it is for people who have worked very hard for a long time to customize and launch a system to be further criticized for not responding to the additional queries and complaints created by their attempt to improve service and access to information. I think the Registrarial staff deserves congratulations for providing ‘full disclosure’ to the University community – as was done at Academic Council early in 2006 – on the type of problems that were encountered with the implementation of RAMSS and the plans that were being developed to address them for the future. I have been advised that the number of technical issues have decreased as time has passed and staff experience with the new system grows. I am hopeful that the increased capacity of the new system will provide considerable benefit for all concerned in the future. However, as I continue to be contacted about issues with RAMSS I believe there is continued need for vigilance with respect to the operation of what is no longer a new system.

**Recommendation 2:** As the RAMSS implementation process concludes and experience with the system increases, it also seems reasonable for this unit to determine and publicize guidelines for response times for emails, telephone messages, faxes and letters.

**Reinstatement/Readmission**

Complaints related to Reinstatement/Readmission increased by 92% this year. In the majority of situations I have been involved with, the complaints have related to applicants not knowing how their applications have been evaluated, by whom or when a decision will be provided. The students I see fall into two categories:

1) students who have been suspended after a poor showing in their first semester and are very keen to get started again on an academic career. They are often in a state of shock as it never occurred to them that they would find themselves in this kind of situation or
2) students who are very close to completing their degrees and often have familial (either parents and spouses, or both) pressure to complete their degrees as soon as possible. In the latter case, these students have invested a great deal of time and money; feel a tie to their department or school and the University and their instructors, and are anxious to return so they can move into the next phase of their life.

Regardless of the category they fall into, I think it’s very important for all concerned to be
made aware of how their reinstatement or readmission application is being assessed. Some of the different approaches that I am aware of are: one decision-maker reviews all applications and then issues his or her decision; in other situations, a committee of faculty and staff reviews all applications and issues a committee decision. Either approach is reasonable in my mind if the decision-making process employed is a fair one.

In my view applicants should be advised of the criteria that will be taken into account in order to determine whether or not they will be reinstated or readmitted. Examples of possible criteria include: is there sufficient space available; have they provided demonstration of their ability to handle the academic work by meeting the requirements outlined in the Statement of Understanding issued by their department; have they addressed any personal issues which contributed to their lack of academic success previously, or whatever else is relevant given the program involved.

When an application is declined, applicants should also be provided with a detailed rationale for why they were not successful. For obvious reasons, the criteria for determining acceptance or rejection should be as objective as possible and should be readily shared with the applicants in order to ensure that they have sufficient information to conclude that their applications have been handled fairly. In some situations a detailed explanation is provided by the department or school or individual decision-maker. This is a fair approach.

**Recommendation 3:** My recommendation is that the decision-making process for all reinstatement and readmission applications be made as transparent as possible by the relevant School/Department or Faculty providing the following information: how reinstatement and readmission applications will be evaluated; when decisions will be released; and when an application is declined, the rationale for doing so along with advice on how to proceed with their academic planning from that point forward.

**Curriculum Advising (Now Called 'Academic Advising')**

Complaints relating to Curriculum Advising, now known as Academic Advising, increased by 130%. It is important to note that this increase is largely due to complaints relating to transfer credits now falling under this area of responsibility whereas they were handled by the Admissions department in previous years. The theme that is most evident in these complaints is the processing of transfer credit applications. About half of the complaints relate to the length of time it takes for a transfer credit application to be processed (the current transfer credit application form indicates that it takes 10 weeks to process.) The other half of the complaints about transfer credits relate to students not understanding the reason for their application being declined, or feeling the decline was unfair.

My understanding is that the RAMSS system will soon be able to provide virtually immediate responses for on-line transfer credit applications that relate to courses that have already been evaluated via previous applications. The availability of this service should reduce the waiting time dramatically. In addition, deadlines have been set in advance of each semester to ensure applicants know the outcome of their application prior to the registration period for the next semester; and that in the future all transfer credit applications will be handled on an anonymous basis so only the content of the course and its equivalency will be taken into account. In addition, technical enhancements are being made so that the academic evaluator will be able to access the application and supporting documentation from his or her own computer so that a trip to the Academic Advising Office will no longer be required. I’m hopeful that these enhancements will result in considerably faster and more consistent decision making using easily understood rationale.

In addition, I am very pleased to see the availability of the automated, online ‘graduation audit’ entitled ‘Academic Advising Report’ which can now be initiated by any student who is registered in a full-time program via RAMSS. The report is generated at the request of the student and provides a list of courses that the student must still complete in order to graduate. I anticipate that the easy access to this report which is now available on a ‘24/7’ basis will result in many less students complaining about only becoming aware in what they thought was their last semester that they are ineligible to graduate and subsequently having to make alternate plans for employment, re-location, etc.

**Academic Advice (Concerns include finding an academic advisor and/or ability to acquire timely and accurate academic advice within a program or department)**

Complaints relating to the inability to get academic advice increased by 20%. In addition, this area has been in the ‘top three’ with respect to overall volume of complaints for the past three years. This is a disturbing trend for the following reasons:

The University is a large, complex organization with a rapidly increasing number of new undergraduate and graduate programs. As a result, students have more options to choose from which may generate more queries for academic advice. In addition, I have been told that Ryerson is the most transferred into university in Ontario and that more than fifty percent of students are ‘out of phase’. These two criteria suggest there are many students who have experience at other post secondary institutions who will have to ‘learn the ropes’ at a new institution and that over half the student population is not taking a full course load each semester which may lead to pre-requisite, co-requisite and anti-requisite issues.

The type of queries we often receive relate primarily to students not knowing to whom they should speak in order to get academic advice, or believing they were given short shrift, or inaccurate information when they did consult with someone for academic advice. Many of the issues brought to our attention are serious ones and if not resolved in a timely way will result in students not graduating in the usual time frame, or making decisions about course selection and/or selection of minors, without enough information. While I am aware that many departments and programs have identified specific individuals to provide academic advice and promote the availability of that person on their websites and in their student handbooks, there are some areas where it appears to be difficult for students to determine to whom they should speak and/or to spend sufficient time with the advisor to get the kind of personalized information they need in order to take the most appropriate action given their unique circumstances. An example of a proactive approach already in place in the First Year and Common Engineering Office and the First Year Science Office in the Faculty of Engineering and Science is the ‘early warning system’ where students in first year who have done poorly in their mid-term exams are contacted via email to invite them to meet with an advisor to discuss options on how to proceed in order to address the issues that have contributed to their academic performance. The anecdotal evidence is that the students who have made use of these invitations have found the consultation to be helpful and they are appreciative of the outreach.

**Recommendation 4:** In addition to providing information on who the ‘resident’ academic advisors are, how to contact them and hosting orientations for first-year students, there is a continuing need for more proactive approaches for connecting with students as they move through their programs in order to ensure they are getting the information they need in order to make best use of the University’s academic resources and expertise. As I raised this issue in my 2002/2003 report and the complaints...
in this area have continued to rise, I am recommending that the University take another look at developing additional ways and means to support this important function at all stages of the students’ progression.

Recommendation 5: As I have observed situations where students have received different and sometimes conflicting advice from professors, Chairs/Directors, and Academic Advising staff, I would recommend that twice-yearly meetings be held with the relevant staff (e.g. academic staff who are providing advice and guidance) with their colleagues in ‘Academic Advising’ who are communicating with all students about pre-requisites, graduation requirements, and other related matters to ensure all concerned are on the ‘same page’.

Graduate Students
In the statistics presented it is evident that the number of graduate students who have lodged complaints with this Office has risen by 40%. This is not surprising given that the number of graduate students overall is increasing steadily as well.

The dominant trend in the type of complaints received over the past five years will also likely be no surprise as the issue most frequently raised with this Office is ubiquitous throughout graduate school environments, that being communication difficulties between some students and their supervisors. In the cases I have consulted on, the inability of students to communicate effectively with their supervisors has resulted in these students believing that they will not be able to complete their degrees because they doubt they will be able to work with their supervisor and/or committee members to produce an acceptable thesis or dissertation. In the majority of instances when these types of concerns are raised we typically consult with students on how to raise contentious issues with supervisors in a respectful and effective fashion. In all instances, the graduate students’ primary concern was confidentiality. In addition, the majority of graduate students interviewed were uncomfortable with any suggestion that they contact their Program Director as they did not want to be seen to be a troublemaker or ineffectual. In many cases they had great respect from the Program Director and did not want to lose credibility as a result of acknowledging the existence of interpersonal difficulties.

The Ryerson University School of Graduate Studies (SGS) Handbook (2006) indicates that the ‘Office of Grad Studies’ has the responsibility to “Establish university wide graduate student dispute-resolution policy and procedure. With the Dean, School of Graduate Studies should provide mediation in disputes about supervision and related issues, apart from the students’ progression. If this kind of information is provided to the students in advance it may build understanding of what is a reasonable time frame for the provision of a detailed response.

Response: A detailed review of Student Fees & Cashiers unit is already underway to determine staffing and standards requirements for prompt telephone and e-mail response during both peak and non peak periods, the answers to student Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) that need to be available on the Web, and the appropriateness of Call Center message choices and instructions. The intent of this review is to help us address the concerns expressed in the report.

Recommendation 2: As the RAMSS implementation process concludes and experience with the system increases, it also seems reasonable for this unit to determine and publicize guidelines for response times for emails, telephone messages, faxes and letters.

Response: All areas within the Registrar’s Office will be developing service standards and these standards will be publicized.

Recommendation 3: My recommendation is that the decision-making process for all reinstatement and readmission applications be made

Response of the Vice President, Administration and Student Affairs and the Provost and Vice President Academic to the Ombudsperson’s Annual Report July 1, 2005 – June 30, 2006

Once again we would like to thank Nora Farrell, the Ombudsperson, for her annual report and for the work she does on behalf of Ryerson and its students. As she has noted, concerns that were raised in previous reports have been addressed by the University and we believe that the changes made have provided significant improvement. The appointment of an Academic Integrity Officer has dramatically affected the way that academic integrity is approached at Ryerson, and the process of addressing incidents of academic misconduct has been improved. The Ombudsperson reports that there are concerns about the appeals process. We share these concerns and are addressing the issues. Training of Appeals Committees is ongoing, and will improve over time. The University is also addressing the concern from last year’s report on increasing opportunities for the Ryerson community to develop skills in respectful conflict resolution.

We are pleased to note that the number of inquiries regarding academic appeals has decreased, as both students and faculty become more aware of the need to deal with academic issues as they arise during the semester. We are also pleased that the number of complaints about instructor conduct has dramatically decreased, and that complaints about the admission process have also declined despite increases in the number of students admitted.

This year the Ombudsperson has made recommendations mainly related to service-related issues. The University has been aware of some of these issues, and in most cases, has already been working to address them.

Recommendation 1: In an effort to reduce frustration and improve services, my recommendation is that the personnel within the Student Fees Office explore means for ensuring telephone calls and emails are responded to in a timely fashion. It also seems reasonable to determine and publicize guidelines for response times for emails, telephone messages, faxes and letters.

Response: As the RAMSS implementation process concludes and experience with the system increases, it also seems reasonable for this unit to determine and publicize guidelines for response times for emails, telephone messages, faxes and letters.
The 2004/2005 Recommendation of Recommendations from Update on Implementation

Response: We agree that the reinstatement process for suspended students should be transparent and fair. As per University policy, some students are given letters by their Departments/Schools which outline conditions that must be met in order to be considered for reinstatement. It is agreed that if these conditions have been met and the decision is not to reinstate the student, an explanation should be given. Students should be given a realistic appraisal of their chances for reinstatement. The policy and procedure for student suspension and reinstatement will be reviewed with an eye to addressing the concerns expressed in the Ombudsperson’s report.

Recommendation 4: In addition to providing information on who the “resident” academic advisors are, how to contact them and hosting orientation for first-year students, there is a continuing need for more proactive approaches for connecting with students as they move through their programs in order to ensure they are getting the information they need in order to make best use of the University’s academic resources and expertise. As I raised this issue in my 2002/2003 report and the complaints in this area have continued to rise, I am recommending that the University take another look at developing additional ways to support this important function at all stages of the student’s progression.

Response: It is essential that issues surrounding academic advising be addressed. We thank the Ombudsperson for bringing this concern to our attention, and we are disappointed that the number of complaints has continued to rise. One of the priorities of the newly created position of Vice Provost, Student Affairs will be to develop strategies and supports to improve the ways that students receive academic information and advice.

Recommendation 5: As I have observed situations where students have received different and sometimes conflicting advice from professors, Chairs/Directors, and Academic Advising staff, I would recommend that twice-yearly meetings be held with the relevant staff (e.g., Academic staff who are providing advice and guidance) with their colleagues in “Academic Advising” who are communicating with all students about pre-requisites, graduation requirements, and other related matters to ensure all concerned are on the “same page”.

Response: We accept this recommendation, which we see as intrinsically related to the concerns expressed in Recommendation 4.

Ryerson University is dedicated to the continuous improvement of the student experience and strives to improve its processes as needed and we thank the Ombudsperson for raising our awareness of the above issues.

Errol Aspevig
Provost and
Vice President Academic

Linda Grayson
Vice President, Administration and Student Affairs

Update on Implementation of Recommendations from Previous Reports

The 2004/2005 Recommendation

“I am recommending that the University offer increased opportunity for professional development and student development in the area of effective and respectful conflict resolution using a wide variety of communication skills and dispute resolution techniques. In making this recommendation I am aware that the Department of Human Resources and the Learning and Teaching Office have already provided opportunities for in-service training in this important area of professional development. My recommendation is to increase the availability of both basic and advanced conflict resolution skill building opportunities and that they be structured in such a fashion that they are easily accessible to all staff and faculty. In addition I am aware that Student Services offers some conflict resolution training modules for students in its Learning Success Service, Leadership Series and mentoring programs. While these initiatives are beneficial I am recommending that Student Services also increase the number and diversity of workshops on effective communication and conflict resolution that students who are not already associated with a specialized developmental program.” The Vice Presidents, Academic and Administration and Student Affairs indicated in their response that “…A team of representatives from Human Resources, Student Services, the Learning and Teaching Office, Office of the Vice Provost, Faculty Affairs and the Ombudsperson’s Office will be invited to collaborate in the further development of workshops on civility and alternative dispute resolution (conflict resolution) in the coming academic year…”

Update: I have been advised that the objective articulated above continues to be a priority for the Human Resources Department. Specifically, three (3) members of the Employee Relations Unit have attended Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR) training. Based on this knowledge, the specific goals for this year are to conduct focus groups, develop relevant guidelines and the framework for appropriate training and development workshops. A professional development session on ‘The Theory and Practice of ADR’ for new Chairs/Directors is scheduled for January 2007.

In addition, the team referred to above which will collaborate on additional initiatives for promoting civility and effective conflict resolution is scheduled to be in place by late Fall of 2006. Student Services is continuing its current training on effective communications and conflict management with the student staff in Housing, Leadership training and the other service areas in Student Services. However, this fall, tailored training programs and modules for the course unions and other major student campus group are also being offered.
The 2003/2004 Recommendation

In an effort to reduce the incidence of procedural errors and increase the level of proactivity regarding the handling of academic appeals and charges of academic misconduct, I am recommending that in conjunction with the upcoming 2005/2006 review of the Undergraduate Academic Consideration and Appeals Policy and the Student Code of Conduct that consideration be given to exploring alternatives for providing ongoing support and advice to individual decision-makers and hearing panels with respect to the handling of appeals and suspicions of academic misconduct and non-academic misconduct.

Update: An Academic Integrity Officer position and a complementary educational program designed to promote an ethos of academic integrity have been established. In addition, the Academic Integrity Seminar has evolved into an individualized tutorial lead by a number of different Student Services' Learning Strategists. As well, the Student Code of Academic Conduct has been revised to include an option for students and instructors to participate in a 'Facilitated Discussion' about the suspicion of academic misconduct with the assistance of the Academic Integrity Officer. These are positive developments. However, I am concerned about how the appeals of charges of academic misconduct have been handled in a number of instances. For instance, I am aware of situations where faculty level hearings have not been held until many months after the student has been charged. From anyone’s perspective the time frames I have been apprised of are untenable. As the University is responsible for ensuring issues of this nature are handled expeditiously, steps must be taken to guarantee hearings are scheduled in a timely manner.

In addition, I am concerned about situations I have observed where individual instructors and panels of decision makers were not aware that the ‘burden of proof’ for demonstrating that academic misconduct had taken place is on the University and is clearly articulated as such in the Student Code of Academic Conduct. I recognize that this gap in knowledge may not be pervasive. However, as determining whether or not misconduct has occurred is the cornerstone of the Student Code of Academic Conduct. I recognize that the inquirers who approach the Ombuds office for information only is steadily decreasing. This is a much desired trend and has been supported by the development and maintenance of a comprehensive website. Our aim is to assist individuals to acquire information and to determine how to access the resources they need on a 24/7 basis in order to address problematic situations themselves. In 2005/2006, 5510 individuals visited the Ombuds website. This represents approximately 459 visitors/month. In comparison in previous years, 5117 visitors used the website (approximately 426 visitors/month) and prior to that 4253 (354 visitors/month). It is our hope that individuals who require information on how to address administrative and academic concerns will continue to use www.ryerson.ca/ombuds to educate themselves in a preventative manner and to use the links provided to contact relevant faculty and staff as soon as issues arise that require consultation and/or collaboration.

In Appreciation

I would like to acknowledge the positive response I have encountered when I have contacted University personnel to discuss issues informally, or when I am investigating an allegation. Through these types of interactions I am sometimes in a position to make recommendations for improvement or for addressing an error made on individual cases. The degree of cooperation I have met is high. I would also like to note that when reviewing the outcomes of the twenty cases where I conducted an investigation, in fifty percent of the cases I found that the University had made an error and the situation was corrected by the appropriate University personnel in a timely manner. In the other half of the cases I found that the University had made its decision fairly and no recommendation was warranted. In these instances the students involved accepted the outcome of my evaluation as being a reasonable one as the reasons provided demonstrated that the University had behaved fairly. These outcomes are very positive and worthy of acknowledgement for all who were involved.

I would also like to acknowledge the establishment of the President's Task Force on Student Engagement in December 2006. The final report was issued on August 2, 2006 and provides seven recommendations for ways and means of building higher levels of student engagement. The President's response to the Commission's recommendations demonstrates that the input provided by students through this process has been given serious consideration.

The Ombudsperson Committee is essential to the operation of the Ombudsperson service. The members' commitment to the service and their wise counsel is very much valued. In addition I would like to thank Heather McGhee Pegg, the Assistant Ombudsperson, for her creativity and professionalism.

In Memorium

This past year the first Ombudsperson for Ryerson University, Ms. Elizabeth Hoffman, passed away after an illness of several months. Liz, as she was known to all who worked with her, occupied many Ombuds roles prior to her untimely death:

- Ombudsperson for Carleton University
- Ombudsperson for the University of Toronto
- Ombudsperson for Ryerson University
- Ombudsperson for the Ontario College of Art and Design
- Senior Investigator for the Canadian Ombudsman
- Department of National Defence (DND)

In recognition of her work, the Ombudsman for the DND has initiated the Elizabeth Hoffman Staff award to recognize staff of that office who have made extraordinary efforts in their work.

In recognition of Liz's contribution to the broader Ombuds community, the Forum of Canadian Ombudsmen (FCO) has established the Liz Hoffman Ombudsperson Research Award. Each year for five years the author of an essay inquiring into the impact of Ombuds work in Canada will receive a financial award.

In addition, Liz was very active as a volunteer to support and expand access to information through membership in innumerable federal, provincial and local committees as well as serving on the Board and chairing the Ontario Library Association Board. In recognition of her volunteer work, a school and library in Kenya that is being built by the Ontario Public Library Association, has been named in her honour.

Respectfully Submitted by
Nora Farrell
Ombudsperson