



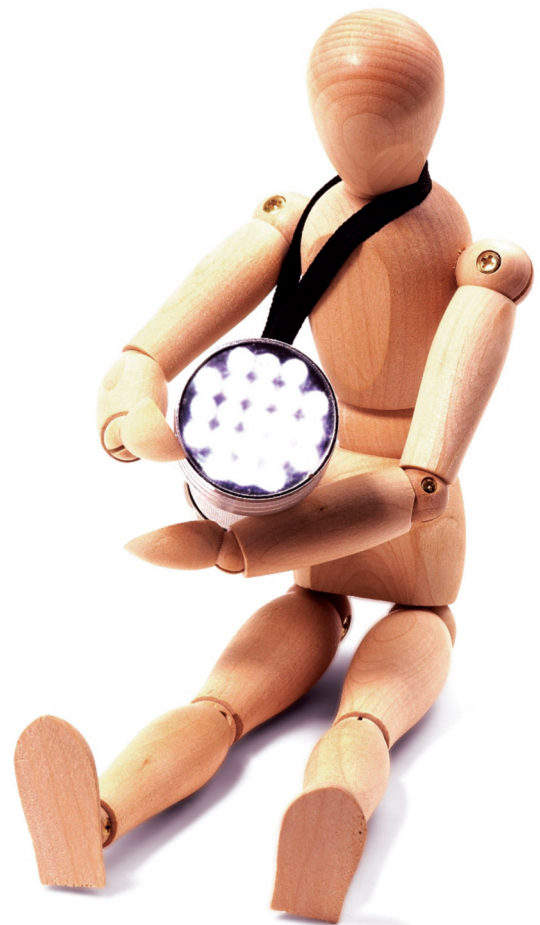
Listening & Learning

Annual Report for July 1, 2009 to June 30, 2010
for the Ombudsperson for Ryerson University

What is the reason for this report:

One of the measures of accountability for the Office of the Ombudsperson is the production of an annual report which lists the number and types of concerns and complaints received by the Office; how the issues raised were handled; and provides recommendations for system-wide improvements that flow from the discussion of complaints and concerns; the feedback provided by those who responded to inquiries and investigations; as well as research conducted about the issues raised with the Office.

It is my hope this report achieves two objectives: 1) assists new members of the community to understand the role of the Ombudsperson at Ryerson University so they can make best use of this service; and 2) the recommendations made and the University's response to these recommendations contribute to the ongoing development and improvement of the fairness of decisions made as well as the degree of civility of the interactions among community members.



Quick facts:

Essential Characteristics of the Office of the Ombudsperson at Ryerson University include:

Confidentiality
Impartiality
Independence
Informality

The Office of the Ombudsperson was established in 1997 via leadership from a community-wide taskforce.

Staffed by:

Nora Farrell, Ombudsperson
Ayesha Adam, Assistant Ombudsperson
Stephanie Lever, Administrative Assistant (part-time)

What we do:

The role and functions of the Ombudsperson at Ryerson University as defined by the Terms of Reference are:

- “a) To advise and/or refer members of the University student community as needed about all situations and University procedures concerning which grievances may arise; specifically, to advise students of their rights and responsibilities and of the proper procedures to follow in order to pursue whatever business or complaint they may have. Where such information exists in University offices or publications, the Ombudsperson shall direct enquirers to these sources and emphasize their responsibility for initiating the appropriate actions and for returning to the Ombudsperson if not satisfied with the results;
- b) To investigate, in an impartial fashion, student complaints that may arise against the University or against anyone in the University exercising authority. Complaints may be made by any member holding status as a student of the University community, by former members of the student body or by student applicants to the University (dependent on the discretion of the Office of the Ombudsperson), whether accepted or not at the time of the complaint. Investigations may also begin on the independent initiative of the Ombudsperson in respect of anyone of the above entitled to make a complaint....
- c) To bring findings and recommendations to the attention of those in authority by the most expeditious means possible.

2. It shall be the special concern of the Ombudsperson that:

- a) Decisions affecting members of the University student community are made with reasonable promptness;
- b) Procedures and policies used to reach decisions affecting students are adequate and consistently applied and that criteria and rules on which the decisions in question are based are appropriate;
- c) Any gaps and inadequacies in existing University policies and procedures that might jeopardize the principles of fairness and natural justice of members within the University student community be brought to the attention of those in authority. It is not the function of the Ombudsperson to devise the new rules and procedures, but to make recommendations and follow these up to the extent necessary for their formulation and/or improvements; and
- d) The complaints received by the Ombudsperson are analyzed on an annual and multi-year basis, to determine trends and identify potential for systemic or system-wide problems.”¹

¹ Source: Terms of Reference for the Office of the Ombudsperson (p.1)
URL: <http://www.ryerson.ca/ombuds/mainsubpages/Final%20Terms%20of%20Reference%20Office%20of%20the%20Ombudsperson%20Oct%202009.doc>

Types of Concerns



	09/10	08/09	07/08	06/07	05/06	04/05	03/04
TOTAL	579	586	558	606	573	535	480
ACADEMIC ADVICE ¹	104	103	92	106	71	59	61
ACADEMIC APPEALS ²	169	158	142	165	137	168	152
ACADEMIC MISCONDUCT	65	83	64	57	37	34	23
ACCESSIBILITY	10	12	11	5	8	5	6
ADVANCEMENT & DEVELOPMENT	0	0	0	1	1	3	0
ADMISSIONS (UNDERGRADUATE)	10	15	25	35	28	34	31
ADMISSIONS (GRADUATE)	5	6	5	4			
ANCILLARY SERVICES	1	0	1	1	2	0	2
CAMPUS PLANNING & FACILITIES	1	0	0	2	2	1	2
CONDUCT – INSTRUCTOR	78	43	42	45	60	82	57
CONDUCT – STAFF	14	12	11	12	21	15	16
CONDUCT – STUDENT	4	7	9	11	15	12	4
CONFIDENTIALITY	5	1	0	3	1	1	2
CONVOCATION & AWARDS	0	1	1	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
CURRICULUM ADVISING ³	7	11	18	17	23	10	9
ENROLLMENT SERVICES	37	41	35	44	55	28	25
EXCHANGE PROGRAMS	1	0	0	0	0	2	0
FEES	7	20	24	18	30	10	18
FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE	9	15	13	14	11	10	8
INFORMATION REQUESTS – NO COMPLAINT	7	4	9	7	10	20	17
LIBRARY	2	1	1	1	1	0	3
OUTSIDE JURISDICTION	8	13	9	7	10	7	7
PRACTICUM/PLACEMENT (ADMINISTRATION & AVAILABILITY)	2	7	9	11	5	4	5
REINSTATEMENT/RE-ADMISSION	17	15	26	25	25	13	16
RESIDENCE	7	4	3	2	3	3	3
SAFETY & SECURITY	1	2	3	5	3	4	4
SPORTS & RECREATION	0	0	1	1	0	0	0
STUDENT MEDIA	0	0	0	0	0	1	0
STUDENT SERVICES	1	2	2	2	3	1	2
STUDENT UNIONS/ASSOCIATIONS	5	8	2	4	9	7	3
TEAM WORK	2	2	0	1	2	1	4

¹ This category includes concerns regarding not being able to easily access academic advice from a knowledgeable person.

² Includes Grades and Academic Standing.

³ Including Transfer Credits and Challenge Credits.

Status of Individuals Bringing Forward Concerns & Complaints



	09/10	08/09	07/08	06/07	05/06	04/05	03/04
CONSTITUENCY							
ALUMNI	11	22	6	22	27	10	7
APPLICANT	13	25	27	40	29	15	29
CONTINUING EDUCATION/PART TIME DEGREE	106	95	82	87	92	85	79
FULL-TIME DEGREE	368	385	375	394	372	375	334
GRADUATE STUDENTS	41	25	32	31	14	10	4
MISCELLANEOUS (PARENTS, STAFF, ETC.)	40	34	36	32	39	40	27
TOTAL	579	586	558	606	573	535	480

Summary of Service Provided

Information:

Providing information on policies and procedures.

Advice:

Providing information and discussing possible options with students.

Intervention:

Taking action to assist in some way to resolve the concern, e.g. clarifying information, facilitating, mediating, conducting investigations.

	09/10	08/09	07/08	06/07	05/06	04/05	03/04
ACTION TAKEN							
INFORMATION	2	10	8	9	23	51	114
ADVICE	493	471	452	434	386	364	262
INTERVENTION	84	105	98	163	164	120	104
TOTAL	579	586	558	606	573	535	480

	09/10	08/09	07/08	06/07	05/06	04/05	03/04
ACTION TAKEN							
ADVICE & REFERRAL	493	471	452	434	386	364	262
INFORMATION	2	10	8	9	23	51	114
INTERVENTION – CLARIFYING	42	43	36	79	82	62	49
INTERVENTION – MEDIATION	0	1	1	1	0	2	3
INTERVENTION – SHUTTLE DIPLOMACY	25	31	42	61	62	45	40
INVESTIGATION	17	30	19	22	20	11	12
TOTAL	579	586	558	606	573	535	480

Selected Highlights of Statistical Information: Decreases and Increases Observed

Decreases in Numbers of Concerns Raised from 2008/2009 to 2009/2010:

It's often difficult to say why decreases in the number of complaints have come about in various areas as there are often many variables in play. My speculation is the decreases in the following areas are related to an increased emphasis on 1) the provision of detailed information on what to anticipate before a student becomes involved in a process coupled with 2) an expectation that problems will be addressed and resolved at the earliest opportunity.

Fees: 65%

Financial Assistance: 40%

Admissions (Undergraduate): 33%

Academic Misconduct: 22%

Increases in Numbers of Concerns Raised from 2008/2009 to 2009/2010:

Major Increase

Instructor Conduct: 81%

The area that has grown the most over the past twelve months is that of Instructor Conduct. In fact, the majority of other increases pale in comparison. In analyzing the issues brought forward in the area categorized as 'Conduct – Instructor' three common themes have emerged: lack of accessibility; disrespect and lack of impartiality when decisions are being made.

Specifically, the lack of accessibility is typically characterized by descriptions of students' inability to connect with instructors easily on a face-to-face basis to discuss concerns about assignments in process; or the students' poor performance and how to improve it. In addition, students indicate they have only received a one or two word answer to a detailed email asking for direction and advice. Or, that their emails requesting advice, consultation or assistance are not responded to in a timely manner or at all. Often students translate their difficulty in engaging in conversations with their instructors about these kinds of matters into a lack of interest in student success. In addition, students have raised concerns about some instructors' unwillingness to

communicate their expectations in a timely way. As a result, students have explained that they have not been able to plan their workload and manage their time accordingly. In addition, the practice of beginning classes late and ending them early as well as not being available for scheduled office hours is also a concern that has been raised by all manner of students.

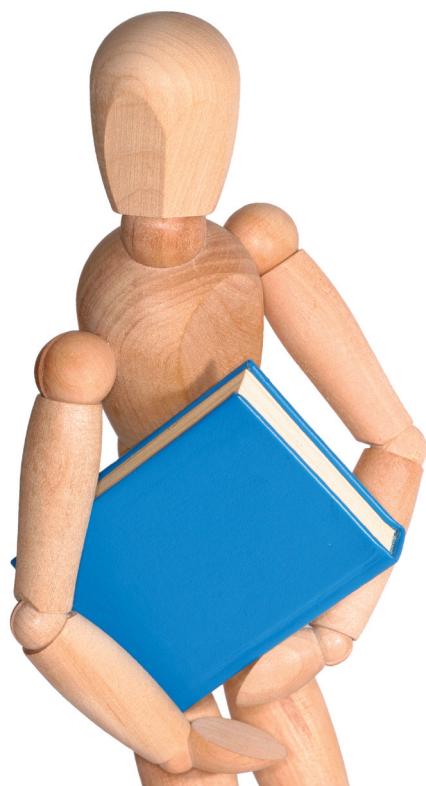
The issue of lack of respect, which is often described as disinterest, curt interaction, unwillingness to spend sufficient time in order to understand the complexity or idiosyncratic nature of the situation cuts through the vast majority of complaints about instructor and staff conduct. For example, students repeatedly describe interactions in which they feel they have no opportunity to provide input prior to a decision being made; that in order to maintain an amicable relationship they feel they should not query the reasonableness of a particular comment or decision when it does not seem to be congruent with the student's situation or when there is no willingness to provide the rationale for the criteria or method used for arriving at particular decisions. Others describe feeling humiliated or demeaned by comments made in class or via email and are afraid to take issue with the commentary for fear of a negative impact on their final grade and/or their ongoing relationship with an instructor.

Finally, a very strong trend that has emerged is the rigid interpretation and application of rules, a.k.a. as 'rulitis', which is defined as "slavish attention to the rules at the expense of common sense".² This modus operandi is confusing to me as University policies generally speaking are designed to be interpreted broadly since no policy or procedure can ever be written to anticipate and provide for every possibility or potential situation that can arise. For example, we have seen a dramatic increase in complaints about instructors not accepting valid medical notes. In a number of situations, students' medical certificates were rejected because the professors determined that 'a flu or cold', as noted by the physician, was not a serious enough illness to prevent someone from attending at the University. This point of view is surprising given that the population at large is routinely warned not to come to work or school if they have colds and flu. In other situations, the medical certificates students have brought forward to justify absence from a test or exam or to extend a deadline have been rejected

² André Marin, "The Ombudsman in the Justice System: as barometer, horsefly, oilcan and safety valve" (Summer 2007) *The Advocates' Society Journal* online at: <http://www.ombudsman.on.ca/en/media/articles-by-andre-marin/the-ombudsman-in-the-justice-system-as-barometer-horsefly-oilcan-and-safety-valve.aspx>.

for being too short; or too specific or not specific enough; or that the student doesn't appear to be ill; or that a letter from a physician has been provided rather than the Ryerson medical certificate being used, etc. I understand the frustration that some instructors (and/or departmental designates) may experience when receiving a large number of medical certificates or letters from physicians within a short period of time. However, as the bedrock of a fair environment is looking at each situation on its own merits, it is important to rise above these kinds of frustrations and not fall prey to what may be incorrect assumptions. For example, while it would be naïve to say that none of the students who present medical certificates do so in order to intentionally avoid their academic obligations, it is both unfair and disrespectful to assume that the majority of students who ask for academic consideration are not ill and their maladies are sufficiently innocuous so as to not interfere with the meeting of a deadline or attending at an exam.

The other issue that has emerged from our consultations is the presence of bias or lack of impartiality in the making of many different kinds of decisions. It is my view after speaking to hundreds of decision-makers and thousands of students over the years that many people do not understand what impartiality is and the type of behaviours that contribute to impartiality. The principle of impartiality is typically defined as a lack of bias, either negative or positive, toward an individual or issue and is often connected with fairness.



For example, in the University's Student Code of Academic Conduct 'Reduction of the Potential for Bias' is addressed by indicating that "No decision-maker in the process should have knowledge of previous charges of misconduct against the student. If such knowledge is unavoidable, it should be disregarded in the decision-making process..."³ Impartiality is defined in a similar manner in that it is indicated that "The instructor should not have information regarding any previous acts of misconduct before a meeting is held or a recommendation is made."⁴ Reference is also made to the prevention of 'conflict of interest' in the University's Code of Academic Conduct and its undergraduate and graduate academic consideration and appeals policies by stating that no decision-maker should have had previous involvement with the case⁵ that is being decided. In addition, in the preambles to the Student Codes of Academic Conduct and Non-Academic Conduct, the Undergraduate Academic Consideration and Appeals Policy and the Graduate Appeals Policy the expectation that all decision-making will be based on the principles of natural justice is also emphasized. Now that's a good start but it's not enough. So many of the issues that have been raised with me this past year and previous years, are directly related to a perception of and indicators of actual bias. If decision-makers, whether they be instructors (and staff or some members of Appeal Committees/Panels) had a more in-depth understanding of the principle and actualization of impartiality I believe there would be many less negative conflicts and many fewer complaints about bias, lack of respect and fairness. We can look to Beverly McLachlin, Chief Justice of the Supreme Court of Canada for direction in this area. Justice McLachlin has defined impartiality as: "... the capacity to entertain and act on different points of view; ... a mind that is vigorously engaged with particular perspectives, and capable of imagining itself into a variety of other perspectives."

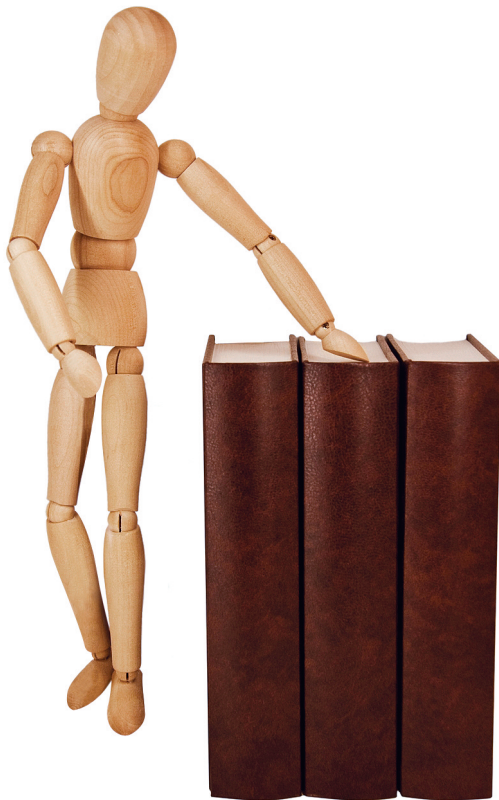
³ *Ryerson University Student Code of Academic Conduct, Policy, Section D5.*

⁴ *Ibid. Procedures, Section C1.*

⁵ *Ryerson University Student Code of Academic Conduct, Policy Section C4 & Academic Consideration and Appeals Policy, Section IIC4; Graduate Academic Appeal Policy, Section IID7.*

Justice McLachlin's prescriptions on how to develop and improve the capacity to be impartial include:

- Conscious objectivity: recognizing you bring certain predispositions and don't have an 'empty mind'
- Accepting good predispositions, i.e. fairness, objectivity, equality, protection of the weak and vulnerable
- Identifying the predispositions that prevent you from being impartial, i.e. negative beliefs, feelings about people, classes, races, ethnicities
- Cultivating introspectiveness – identifying your biases and confronting them
- Cultivating openness of mind – being open to ideas and values that are different than your own; truly appreciating the different attitudes and view points that you are hearing
- Cultivating empathy – by recognizing the legitimacy of differing experiences and truly hearing what you are being told before deciding⁶



While Justice McLachlin was explaining how judges should be making their decisions, it is readily apparent that her message is also applicable to all manner of administrative decision-making. Another important jurist, K.L. Karst, provided similar tutelage fifty-three years ago when he identified the importance of empathy to decision-making by saying:

“Empathy emphasizes the common humanity of us all...it is the ability to see the world from the perspective of others and become engaged in their experience.”⁷

Justice Huddart also provides useful commentary on the subject of impartiality. She says:

“It is to get into the skin of another. This capacity lets the decision-maker enter the minds and situations of those affected by her decisions. This is “decisional impartiality” for me. It goes beyond disinterest to what Madam Justice McLachlin calls “objective insight”. It is to listen, to understand, and then to decide.”⁸

The expectations as described so eloquently by Justices McLachlin, Karst and Huddart require the decision-maker to attempt to imagine and/or appreciate, and when possible, understand, what has transpired from the points of view of all concerned and only then should a decision be made.

⁶ Andrew Stockley and David Rowe, eds., *A Canadian Judgment: The Lectures of Chief Justice Beverley McLachlin in New Zealand* (Christchurch, New Zealand: The Centre for Commercial & Corporate Law Inc., 2003) at 7 – 10.

⁷ K.L. Karst, “Judging and Belonging” (1957) *South California Law Review* at 1966.

⁸ Madam Justice Carol Mahood Huddart, “Know Thyself: Some Thoughts About Impartiality of Individual Decision-makers From an Interested Observer” (1999-2000) *13 Canadian Journal of Administrative Law and Practice* at 158.

Recommendation 1:

→ That the University ensure that all orientation, ongoing training and professional development organized for professors/instructors, Associate/Assistant Directors/Chairs, Associate Deans/Deans, staff, members of Appeal Committees and Appeal Panels emphasizes the importance of impartiality and how it should be defined and understood for fair decision-making to prevail.

The other statistic that is notable for this twelve-month period is the increase in the number of graduate students who have brought forward complaints and concerns, that is, a 64% percent increase over the previous year. From a longitudinal perspective, the number of complaints from graduate students has risen from three (3) in 2002/2003 to forty-one (41) for 2009/2010. It would be easy to say the number of complaints is not 'significant' as it represents a very small percentage of the graduate students who are enrolled at the University. However, I would caution against taking such a view as the issues raised by the individuals who come to the Office of the Ombudsperson are so serious and typically so well documented that they deserve concerted attention. In addition, it would not be unexpected that graduate students would be like traditional adult learners who are pursuing continuing education courses and are less likely to bring issues forward to a third party as they often have more life experience in dealing with difficult situations than undergraduate students who only recently graduated from high school.

However, the issues that have come up with the greatest frequency from graduate students are: feeling helpless to deal with unfair or poorly informed decisions or derogatory or demeaning comments due to the fear of loss of funding or the inability to complete their degree after having already committed a significant period of time to conducting research and analyzing their results. Various senior academics have described the relationships between graduate students and their supervisors and departments as 'fraught', that is fraught with negative conflict. Some examples include: poor communication between student and supervisor to the extent that the student becomes afraid to ask questions or make appointments to seek advice on research or writing problems; the student believing the supervisor is not providing enough support and direction but is afraid to ask for more based on previous comments; or,

alternatively, the supervisor is so directive that the student feels the academic project has been taken over and there is no allowance for student input.

In the vast majority of cases I see graduate students are afraid to raise issues with the Graduate Program Director or the Dean of the Faculty or the Dean of Graduate Students. Typically, the student's fear is that the stakes are too high in the event reprisal ensues as a result of raising a complaint. Some students have concluded that while it is too dangerous to raise issues while they are in the process of completing their degree, they say they will bring issues forward after they graduate so that their experience will not be repeated with other students. However, my informal discussions suggest this rarely happens. Again, graduate students who have initially said they will bring the concerns forward after graduation will then say since it is a tough job market they need their supervisor's reference so they can't bring concerns forward until they are employed or have established their own academic credibility. I have observed this phenomenon repeatedly in terms of the intensity of the fear that prevents students from coming forward with their concerns even when their graduate Program Directors or Associate Deans or Deans have encouraged them to bring up their concerns in a timely manner so there is the potential for some form of resolution. In addition, I am also aware of students who have been advised by those they trust, that given particular circumstances, they should not advance their concerns to a higher level as the risks are too great. As I am aware of the potential for all kinds of personality conflicts and administrative issues and performance issues to arise, this increase is not unexpected and is not necessarily easily resolved. However, I am of the view there are some useful steps that can be taken. Let's look first at this excerpt from the Student Engagement and Success section of "Shaping Our Future: Academic Plan for 2008 – 2013" (the Academic Plan):

"The Ryerson community includes not only its faculty and students, but also all of the staff and support personnel. Without them, the University could not function. A culture of respect, where all members of the community are valued for the part they play in making the institution successful, requires constant nurturing and attention."

The information that I have received from many different sources demonstrates that attention needs to be paid to how the constant nurturing and attention referred to in the Academic Plan can be reflected in an informal dispute resolution mechanism customized for use by graduate students and their supervisors. This mechanism should take into account how difficult or 'fraught' the supervisor/graduate student relationship can be; the reputation risks for the supervisor and the fears of the graduate student. I am aware that the School of Graduate Studies has published a document entitled "Responsibilities of the Faculty Advisor; Member of the Supervisory Committee; and, The Graduate Student" which specifically addresses the potential for relationships to go awry. For example, under the heading of 'Responsibilities of the Faculty Advisor and Members of the Supervisory Committee Include' the two final criteria state: "Requesting permission from the Program Director to be replaced as the Faculty Advisor or Member of the Supervisory or Examining Committee when, for specific reasons, it is felt that withdrawal is in the best interest of the Graduate Student" and 'Conforming to principles of academic integrity in the development of a professional and objective relationship with the Graduate Student'. Similarly, under the heading of 'Responsibilities of the Graduate Student Include' the final criterion is: "Requesting of the Program Director replacement of a member of the Supervisory Committee or Examining Committees assigned by the Program when, for reasons of academic integrity, the student believes that the faculty member should withdraw." Unfortunately, there are no specific criteria included in this document or any mechanism identified for how to fairly and impartially address negative conflicts that may arise in the course of what is often a two year relationship for a master's student or a four or five year relationship for a doctoral student.

By comparison, some universities have developed a 'no blame' approach whereby supervisors and graduate students are encouraged to approach their Graduate Program Director when personality conflicts or concerns about lack of progress or direction arise. In some institutions, the Graduate Program Director will simply work with the parties to devise a mutually satisfactory and fair solution without determining who is primarily at fault for the problems; or if both parties have caused the problems, who is more responsible than the other. In

some situations, arrangements for finding a different supervisor are made; or both parties to the equation are coached on how they can work more effectively together. A great deal of the work my office does is to talk with graduate students about how they can raise their concerns in a constructive and respectful manner with an emphasis on attempting to increase their self-awareness and recognizing whether or to what extent their own behaviour may be contributing to the problems that have ensued. It is extremely important to recognize that there will always be differing opinions about how best to supervise a graduate student and personality conflicts will always exist. In addition, there is always the potential for abuse of power in supervisor/supervisee relationships wherever they exist. Therefore it makes sense to recognize these realities and make provisions both in policy and in practice for preventing and reducing their potential impact on the efficacy and quality of the supervisor/graduate student relationship.

Recommendation 2:

- That a mechanism be developed within the Faculty of Graduate Studies in consultation with Deans, Associate Deans, Graduate Program Directors, Supervisors (Faculty members) and graduate students on how to receive and quickly address supervisor/student issues in a way that provides for respectful, fair, confidential (when appropriate) and timely resolution of disputes whereby neither the supervisor nor the student is put at risk by raising a problem; and that whatever mechanism is chosen for resolving disputes within the supervisor/student relationship be widely publicized to all concerned on an ongoing basis.



Provost and Vice President Academic and Vice President, Administration and Finance's Response to:

Listening and Learning Ombudsperson's Report July 1, 2009 – June 30, 2010.

Dear Ms. Farrell,

The annual report from the Ombudsperson has provided many excellent insights and suggestions over the years which have brought about positive changes at Ryerson. We are pleased to take this opportunity to respond to your 2009 – 2010 Annual Report "*Listening and Learning*" and anticipate that this dialogue will again contribute to the improvement of communal life at Ryerson.

We are pleased that this year the number of students with concerns in many key areas such as admissions, academic advice, academic misconduct and fees/ financial assistance, has decreased somewhat or remained the same. We acknowledge and share your concern about the increase in the number of students flagging issues with instructor conduct between 2008/2009 and the reporting year. We agree that these concerns must be addressed.

Recommendation 1 (Training for impartiality in decision making):

Impartiality in decision making is a central tenet of fair treatment and of effective application of many of Ryerson's policies. A culture of impartiality will also have positive influence on student access to faculty and respectful faculty-student dialogue. The Office of the Vice Provost Academic and the Office of the Vice Provost Faculty Affairs commit to ensuring that the concept of impartiality, its definition and how it should be understood for fair decision making will be incorporated in all ongoing training and professional development for all academic decision makers. In fact, a discussion of bias and impartiality is already part of the mandatory training process for all members of the Senate Appeals Committee, Academic Integrity Council and the department/school and Faculty academic decision makers.

Recommendation 2 (Student/supervisor disputes in the Yeates School of Graduate Studies):

While the absolute number of complaints about instructor conduct raised by students from the Yeates School of Graduate Studies (YSGS) is modest, the *Listening and Learning* report raised concerns that the nature of the disputes can be complex with potentially negative consequences for both students and faculty. The YSGS

currently publishes the document "Responsibilities of the Faculty Advisor; Member of the Supervisory Committee; and, The Graduate Student" which specifically addresses the potential for relationships to become problematic.

The normal practice within YSGS is to require a progress report on each student taking a supervised project or thesis during each semester of their program. The report, completed by the student and the supervisor, is a tool to identify potential disputes at an early stage. The practice of such frequent reporting is rare in Ontario graduate schools and can be viewed as a best practice for early intervention in disputes. The Interim Dean of the YSGS will initiate a campaign to ensure 100% completion of progress reports.

While the progress report is a useful tool, the YSGS also recognizes that a clear definition of expectations on the part of faculty and students is also critical to avoid conflicts. The Interim Dean has therefore also committed to increasing awareness of the "Responsibilities" document among the relevant stakeholders (Chairs, Graduate Program Directors, Graduate Program Administrators, Supervisors/faculty members, and graduate students). The effort to raise awareness will include additional web-based materials, information sessions and the enlisting of graduate program directors to communicate proactively and confidentially with students and faculty about their expectations and responsibilities.

Again we would like to thank you for your thoughtful submission and for your commitment to Ryerson University.



Alan Shepard
Provost and Vice
President Academic



Julia Hanigsberg
Vice President,
Administration and Finance

Follow up on Recommendations and Commitments made in 2008/2009 report:

The text shown below in italics is the most current update on the progress made by the University on commitments made in 2009.

2008/2009 Recommendation 1:

“That instructors, Chairs/Directors be advised that the type of declarations and prohibitions described above and that have appeared in course outlines and student handbooks are not consistent with the Academic Consideration and Appeals Policy and, if they are still being used in 2009/2010 documents they should be revised to reflect the actual policy requirements. Similarly, instructors should be reminded they have the discretion to determine when and if documentation is required, and they also have the discretion to extend deadlines within the semester when circumstances warrant doing so. After the semester has ended the instructor in consultation with his or her Chair or Director also has the ability to extend deadlines when circumstances are such that doing so is fair and reasonable.

University Response:

(Academic Consideration and Appeals Policy)

The *Undergraduate Academic Consideration and Appeals Policy* does state that Instructors determine if medical documents are required in a particular situation and that if a Ryerson medical certificate is not available, students may submit a note that contains the same information with the affirmation portion of the medical certificate completed. Chairs and Directors will be reminded that Department and School policies and procedures must be consistent with the Policy. With regard to the concern about INC grades, there will be further discussion about policies and procedures related to the extension of the three month deadline, where warranted, for the completion of an INC.”

Ombudsperson’s Observations:

The Procedures for the Academic Consideration and Appeals Policy have been revised to include the ability of the Chair/Director to facilitate an appropriate resolution for situations when for verifiable reasons a INC designation can not be cleared within the usual three month time frame.

2008/2009 Recommendations 2 and 3:

Recommendation 2:

“That additional information be provided to decision-makers on all of the ramifications of a student being placed on RTW as well as encouraging that more detailed information be provided on the long term consequences of not fulfilling a probationary contract to students both at the beginning and the middle of the Winter semester (before the final deadline for dropping courses without academic penalty).

Recommendation 3:

That all schools and departments publish the criteria they will be using to determine whether or not students will be reinstated after RTW. If students are required to take courses elsewhere to demonstrate their academic ability, they should be apprised that it will likely be 18 months or 2 years before they will actually be in a position to apply for reinstatement. Similarly, if the attrition rate for students leaving the program is so low that students who have been placed on RTW can never expect to be reinstated, this information should be communicated to students before they enroll in courses elsewhere in an effort to demonstrate their academic ability.

University Response:

(Grading Promotion and Academic Standing (GPA) Policy)

There has already been significant clarification of procedures when students are Required to Withdraw (RTW). It is agreed that there needs to be more discussion about how the rules are applied and the students should be informed of the potentially dire consequences when they do not meet the requirements of a Probationary Contract. The Academic Planning Group (APG) will discuss these matters in the coming year. The communication strategy used by the Ted Rogers School of Management will be reviewed as a possible model. It should be noted that the policy allowing students who can change their standing from RTW to Probationary by completing one or two courses, normally in the Spring/ Summer term, has been very successful. Over 50% of the students who were given this opportunity were able to return to their program.”

Ombudsperson's Observations:

The University has published information on its website to explain to students how to apply for reinstatement via their school and department. In addition, in the letters that are sent to students indicating they have been assigned a RTW status, it is also explained that they may approach their school or department to request another opportunity to raise their CGPA to 2.0 if their CGPA is close to that number. My understanding is that the GPA Policy is also being reviewed in its entirety.

2008/2009 Recommendation 4:

"That individuals who respond to complaints and appeals be oriented to the importance of providing a detailed rationale including what information the decision-maker relied on and why it was considered to be important; that demonstrates all parties' views were taken into account, in an as unbiased manner as is possible, before a decision was made.

University Response:

Reasons for Decisions

Template response letters for academic and misconduct appeals have been developed. These require that all decision makers summarize the perspective of both the student and the Instructor (or other respondent), and that reasons for the decision be included in a separate section. The need for decision makers to specifically address the evidence considered and the reasons for the decision based on that evidence will be reiterated. The training of decision makers continues for academic decision makers (Chairs, Directors and Deans' designates), members of the newly implemented Academic Integrity Council and the Senate Appeals Committee."

Ombudsperson's Observations:

The vast majority of the decisions issued by Appeals Panels that I have seen over the past twelve months included clearly articulated rationales.



Office of the Ombudsperson Response Times

Every effort is made to respond to all contacts in a timely way. This year we are pleased to report the following performance statistics:



RESPOND ON THE SAME DAY (EXCLUDING WEEKENDS)	99.7%
RESPOND WITHIN ONE DAY	.3%

CASE CLOSURE TIMES

CASES CLOSED AFTER ONE WEEK	83.0%
CASES CLOSED AFTER TWO WEEKS	5.7%
CASES CLOSED AFTER THREE WEEKS	2.8%
CASES CLOSED AFTER FOUR WEEKS	1.4%
CASES CLOSED AFTER FIVE WEEKS	1.4%
CASES CLOSED AFTER SIX WEEKS	.5%
CASES CLOSED AFTER MORE THAN SIX WEEKS	5.2%



Website Activity

In the interests of increasing student awareness and capacity, we have set up the Office of the Ombudsperson website so as to assist users to acquire the knowledge they need to solve or prevent academic or administrative problems without ever having to contact our Office directly.

We are pleased to report that an average of 622 unique visitors viewed our website each month of this service year. Activity was greatest in the month of January 2010 when 880 individuals visited the site and in September 2010 when 820 different individuals viewed the site and a wide variety of different pages.

We track the pages visited and the links followed as well as the amount of time spent on each of them in order to analyze what viewers appear to be most interested in so as to increase accessibility to the most useful and relevant information.

We also ask individuals who have lodged a complaint or raised a concern with this Office to provide us with feedback on their experience via an anonymous online questionnaire.

In Appreciation

I recognize how difficult a task it is to make fair decisions in a fast paced environment on an ongoing basis. I congratulate those who attempt to do so in the manner described earlier by Justices McLachlin, Karst and Huddart. I would also like to commend the individuals who bring forward their concerns and complaints so that their experience can contribute to system wide improvements.

I would also like to thank the members of the Ombudsperson Committee for their input and support over the past year; and to recognize Ayesha Adam, the Assistant Ombudsperson and Stephanie Lever, our Administrative Assistant for their continuing dedication to high quality service.

Respectfully submitted,

Nora Farrell, Ombudsperson
Ryerson University

Listening & Learning

