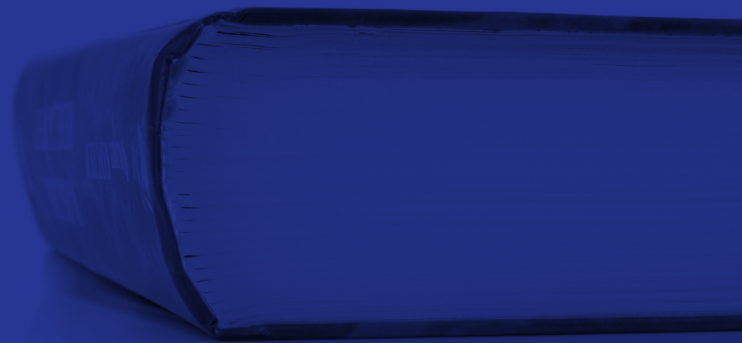


# Listening and Learning



Annual Report for July 1, 2008 to June 30, 2009 for the  
Ombudsperson for Ryerson University



“Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere.”

Martin Luther King Jr.

## THE CORNERSTONES OF THE OFFICE OF THE OMBUDSPERSON ARE:

### Independence

The Office of the Ombudsperson shall be independent of all existing university and student administrative structures.

### Impartiality

To investigate, in an impartial fashion, student complaints that may arise against the University or against anyone in the University exercising authority.

### Confidentiality

Shall meet with individuals or groups on a confidential basis and shall not intervene without their express consent. However, the Ombudsperson is not required to maintain confidentiality in cases involving the commission of a serious crime or where there is an imminent risk of physical harm to the complainant or others, and will clearly communicate this exception to complainants; and shall not release any confidential information.

### Principles

Services provided by the Office of the Ombudsperson are founded on a number of general principles including independence, impartiality, confidentiality, informality, the ability to investigate and accessibility.

### Authority to Act

The Ombudsperson shall require information from the University or from anyone in the University exercising authority, therefore:

Requests for information from the Ombudsperson must be given priority by every employee of the University.

In order to fulfill the function of the office, the Ombudsperson shall have access to all official university files, records and information as required in accordance with the University's Policy on Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy.

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.<sup>1</sup>

I am also required by the terms of reference that delineate the responsibilities of the Ombudsperson to report annually to the Ryerson community on the activities of my Office. I do so with great enthusiasm as the circulation of the annual report has proven to be an excellent means for:

- Providing 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 these matters (*p. 4 - 5*)
- Providing recommendations for system-wide improvements (*p. 6 - 12*)
- Provost and Vice President Academic and Vice President, Administration and Finance Response (*p.13*)
- Providing updates on progress made on recommendations put forward previously (*p. 14 – 15*)
- Engaging community members in discussions about fair and effective conflict resolution and providing information about 'ombudsing' in a broader context. (*p. 3*)

<sup>1</sup> <http://www.ryerson.ca/ombuds/mainsubpages/termsreference.html>

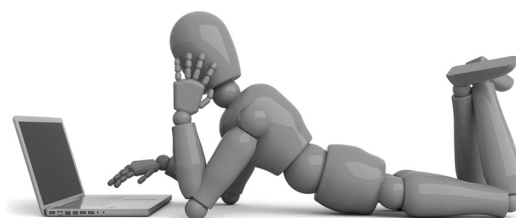
## HAPPY ANNIVERSARY...

The year of 2009 is particularly important in relation to the democratization of society and those who are engaged with the principle of accountability within administrative environments as it marks the 200th anniversary of the establishment of the 'modern' Parliamentary Ombudsman. Most historical accounts indicate that this role was first established by the Swedish Parliament in 1809 as the '**justitieombudsmanen**' (JO). Interestingly enough, though, the role of Ombudsman was established previously in Sweden as early as 1713, albeit in a different form. This Officer who was responsible for responding to complaints reported directly to the King Charles XII himself and was not established by legislation and did not report to the legislature. Therefore, this configuration could be more accurately described as an example of the first 'executive or organizational ombudsman'. In an October 2008 interview with Olli Rehn, the Member of the European Commission responsible for Enlargement, it was indicated that the Ombudsman institution was actually created by the Ottoman empire and was brought to Sweden by King Charles after he spent time in Turkey.

Other historical accounts say that "... in October, 1713 Charles XII, the King of Sweden signed an ordinance establishing the position of the "King's Highest Ombudsman". At the time Charles had been away from Sweden for 13 years fighting a war and he felt it was necessary to have someone back home monitoring the country on his behalf. The job of the King's Highest Ombudsman was to ensure that civil servants were following the laws of the country and abiding by the rules. The King's Highest Ombudsman, however, was not very independent of the King. That all changed with a new Swedish constitution in 1809 that established the office of the Ombudsman as an independent institution of Parliament."<sup>2</sup>

All this to say, 2009 is an important year for institutions, organizations and governments which place a high value on people being able to complain without fear of retaliation or reprisal; effective administrative oversight and the respectful and timely resolution of disputes. These characteristics are hallmarks of democratic and civilized societies.

<sup>2</sup> The 2008/2009 Annual Report for the Ombudsman for Saskatchewan.



## TYPES OF CONCERNS

	08/09	07/08	06/07	05/06	04/05	03/04	02/03
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>586</b>	<b>558</b>	<b>606</b>	<b>573</b>	<b>535</b>	<b>480</b>	<b>513</b>
ACADEMIC ADVICE <sup>3</sup>	103	92	106	71	59	61	60
ACADEMIC APPEALS <sup>4</sup>	158	142	165	137	168	152	136
ACADEMIC MISCONDUCT	83	64	57	37	34	23	19
ACCESSIBILITY	12	11	5	8	5	6	6
ADVANCEMENT & DEVELOPMENT	0	0	1	1	3	0	1
ADMISSIONS (UNDERGRADUATE)	15	25	35	28	34	31	27
ADMISSIONS (GRADUATE)	6	5	4				
ANCILLARY SERVICES	0	1	1	2	0	2	8
CAMPUS PLANNING & FACILITIES	0	0	2	2	1	2	1
CONDUCT – INSTRUCTOR	43	42	45	60	82	57	59
CONDUCT – STAFF	12	11	12	21	15	16	16
CONDUCT – STUDENT	7	9	11	15	12	4	8
CONFIDENTIALITY	1	0	3	1	1	2	2
CONVOCATION & AWARDS	1	1	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
CURRICULUM ADVISING <sup>5</sup>	11	18	17	23	10	9	15
ENROLLMENT SERVICES <sup>6</sup>	41	35	44	55	28	25	29
EXCHANGE PROGRAMS	0	0	0	0	2	0	1
FEES	20	24	18	30	10	18	17
FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE	15	13	14	11	10	8	11
INFORMATION REQUESTS – NO COMPLAINT	4	9	7	10	20	17	29
LIBRARY	1	1	1	1	0	3	2
OUTSIDE JURISDICTION	13	9	7	10	7	7	14
PRACTICUM/PLACEMENT (ADMINISTRATION & AVAILABILITY)	7	9	11	5	4	5	7
REINSTATEMENT/RE-ADMISSION	15	26	25	25	13	16	26
RESIDENCE	4	3	2	3	3	3	1
SAFETY & SECURITY	2	3	5	3	4	4	3
SPORTS & RECREATION	0	1	1	0	0	0	2
STUDENT MEDIA	0	0	0	0	1	0	1
STUDENT SERVICES	2	2	2	3	1	2	3
STUDENT UNIONS/ASSOCIATIONS	8	2	4	9	7	3	5
TEAM WORK	2	0	1	2	1	4	4

<sup>3</sup>This category includes concerns regarding not being able to easily access academic advice from a knowledgeable person.

<sup>4</sup>Includes Grades and Academic Standing.

<sup>5</sup>Including Transfer Credits and Challenge Credits.

<sup>6</sup>Including Late Withdrawals.

## STATUS OF INDIVIDUALS BRINGING FORWARD CONCERNS & COMPLAINTS

CONSTITUENCY	08/09	07/08	06/07	05/06	04/05	03/04	02/03
ALUMNI	22	6	22	27	10	7	7
APPLICANT	25	27	40	29	15	29	21
CONTINUING EDUCATION/PART TIME DEGREE	95	82	87	92	85	79	84
FULL-TIME DEGREE	385	375	394	372	375	334	358
GRADUATE STUDENTS	25	32	31	14	10	4	3
MISCELLANEOUS (PARENTS, STAFF, ETC.)	34	36	32	39	40	27	40
TOTAL	586	558	606	573	535	480	513

## 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.

ACTION TAKEN	08/09	07/08	06/07	05/06	04/05	03/04	02/03
INFORMATION	10	8	9	23	51	114	159
ADVICE	471	452	434	386	364	262	228
INTERVENTION	105	98	163	164	120	104	126
TOTAL	586	558	606	573	535	480	513

ACTION TAKEN	08/09	07/08	06/07	05/06	04/05	03/04	02/03
ADVICE & REFERRAL	471	452	434	386	364	262	228
INFORMATION	10	8	9	23	51	114	159
INTERVENTION – CLARIFYING	43	36	79	82	62	49	69
INTERVENTION – MEDIATION	1	1	1	0	2	3	0
INTERVENTION – SHUTTLE DIPLOMACY	31	42	61	62	45	40	50
INVESTIGATION	30	19	22	20	11	12	7
TOTAL	586	558	606	573	535	480	513

## SELECTED HIGHLIGHTS OF STATISTICAL INFORMATION: DECREASES AND INCREASES OBSERVED <sup>7</sup>

### Decreases

I am very pleased to report on a number of reductions in concerns and complaints in key areas:

The category of 'Admissions' has decreased again this year by the large percentage of 40%. I believe this continuing reduction is connected to the attention paid by this Department to communicating a great deal of relevant information to applicants via its website as well as through personalized communication with applicants. The website contains detailed information on what to do, when and how in order to keep track of the status of an application and it is updated frequently. Instead of individuals complaining that their application was not handled properly as has been the case in the past, the bulk of the complaints are now from individuals who were surprised they were not admitted due to their excellent qualifications. When applicants become aware of what is often intense competition for a limited number of spaces, the focus of the discussion with the University then turns to what their alternatives are for post-secondary education elsewhere, or what they can do to improve their chances for success when applying again.

This year we have also observed a 42% reduction in complaints in the category of 'Reinstatement/Re-admission'. While the downward trend is a positive development, in reviewing the data year after year in this area the most readily identifiable common thread is that students have not been able to find out the criteria that will be used to determine whether or not they will be reinstated and/or the process that will be used to make that determination.

In the area of Curriculum Advising, which relates to Transfer Credits and graduation audits primarily, we have observed a 39% decrease. This is a very positive development. I would also like to comment on the very informative website that has been set up on the subject of applying for Transfer Credits. The information provided is comprehensive and ordered in a logical manner and provides information on how to deal with a wide variety of potential variations or complications. In addition, it now allows students to put forward their applications for transfer credits on-line rather than in hard copy format.

### Increases

In the category of Academic Misconduct the number of complaints has increased by 30%. Based on statistics provided by the Academic Integrity Office (AIO), this increase is slightly less than the 37% increase in suspicions raised by instructors from 2007/2008 to 2008/2009. For the most recent year, the statistics from the AIO reveal that 50% of the suspicions raised resulted in no further action being taken. By comparison, 47% of the suspicions raised resulted in no further action being taken in 2007/2008.

A large percentage of complaints in this area relate to procedural errors with respect to the organization of appeal hearings; the timing and the manner in which information about the appeal hearing has been (or has not been) distributed and other related types of administrative and adjudication related complaints. The University has implemented an Academic Integrity Council (AIC) for appeal hearings at the Faculty level and a number of initiatives are currently in play:

- a methodology is being developed for triaging time sensitive appeals in order to ensure those appeals that require immediate attention are given priority in scheduling;
- the communication between Enrollment Services and the AIC is being streamlined so all parties are aware of when various designations should be input or removed;

<sup>7</sup>The number of complaints under review in some categories are not large thus, movement in the data will result in a large percentage increase or decrease.

- instructors and students who wish to serve on the AIC must now apply to be members and those who are appointed have been trained using a revised methodology; and
- a number of procedural issues have been evaluated and revised, e.g. it has been determined that witnesses must always be identified if their evidence is to be taken into consideration.

As a result of the latest developments I will not comment further on this general area of complaint until the new AIC has had an opportunity to operate for at least a one year period.

In the category of 'Academic Advice' which in this context is defined as 'concerns regarding not being able to easily access academic advice from a knowledgeable person', we have observed an increase of 12%. As this issue has been addressed many times before in this Report and the University has established the Student Information and Advisory Centre as well as publishing more detailed information about how to access advising resources in each department and school, I will not comment on this increase for this service year by way of a recommendation. Nonetheless, it is worth noting that one of the most frequent statements made by people who approach my office when they have not been able to acquire academic advice is they have found it to be difficult to speak to someone who has sufficient time to review their circumstances and to have an in-depth discussion about how best to proceed in order to meet their academic goals. It is very clear to me from reviewing thousands of concerns and complaints that the availability of basic and in-depth academic advising, in a timely manner, is a powerful prophylactic in relation to the prevention of serious problems at later dates.

## ACADEMIC CONSIDERATION AND APPEALS

The category of 'Academic Appeals' which relates to concerns with how academic grades and standing have been handled or calculated has increased by 11%.

A number of similar issues have emerged in this area of complaint and also cross into other related categories, e.g. Academic Information and Advice, Enrollment Services, Instructor Conduct, Staff Conduct:

For instance, the Academic Consideration and Appeals policy says that: *"Instructors will determine if (my emphasis) medical documentation is required for an alternate arrangement based upon the duration of the medical condition and the amount and type of work missed and affected."*

However, I have seen many course outlines that stipulate that a medical certificate must be provided to justify any absence and to be eligible for any academic consideration. Apart from this approach being inconsistent with the University's policy, it seems reasonable to ask: Is this expectation really what is in the best interest of the broader community and our shared health and medical resources? Given the number of course outlines that indicate that a medical certificate is required to justify any absence, I'm wondering if some instructors believe they are obligated to ask for documentation for every absence. However, the policy clearly indicates instructors may use their discretion to determine when documentation is required and when it is not, given the particular circumstances of the situation.

In the same vein, the University's Academic and Consideration Appeals policy indicates documentation for medical conditions can be provided in this fashion: *"Students must submit a fully completed Ryerson Medical Certificate, or a letter on letterhead containing all of the information required by the medical certificate, signed by an appropriate regulated health professional for the applicable period of time."*

However, I have seen many course outlines as well as emails sent by instructors which state: *"A Ryerson Medical Certificate must be submitted to document any absence"*. In addition, I have been consulted on a number of situations where students who have received detailed, signed letters on letterhead from their physicians have then been advised that only the Ryerson Medical Certificate will be accepted. In these instances I am aware of a number of students who then met with the attending physician a second time and were required to pay twice for this documentation, i.e. once for the detailed letter and again for the completion of the Ryerson University Medical Certificate. Clearly duplication of this nature is not appropriate in terms of best use of limited medical resources, and student and faculty time and is an unintended consequence of misunderstanding the University's expectation for how documentation can be provided.

Other issues have arisen where students have been told that their medical documentation will not be accepted because they did not advise the instructor before the test or the exam they would not be able to attend. Once again, the Academic Consideration and Appeals policy says "Students shall inform instructors (via email whenever possible) in advance when they will be missing an exam, test or assignment deadline for medical or compassionate reasons. **When circumstances do not permit this, the student must inform the instructor as soon as reasonably possible.** (my emphasis)

In circumstances where a student was involved in a car accident or had a sick child or parent attended to at an emergency department the day of the exam or the night before a morning exam, it may not be possible or reasonable to expect them to email the instructor to advise them of their unexpected calamity and resultant inability to meet their academic obligation as originally planned. Once again, I have seen course outlines and emails from instructors indicating that consideration can **only** be given if the student advises them in advance of the test or exam for which they are unavoidably absent. Clearly this message contradicts the policy and reasonable expectations for fairness. As the wording of the policy recognizes, inevitably,

circumstances will arise which preclude responsible people from sending an email or making a telephone call in advance of a test or exam.

Similarly, I have been consulted on situations where students have received consideration for a medical problem and an exam is deferred or a deadline extended. Unfortunately, prior to the re-scheduled date, the students fall ill again, or the illness is ongoing and has not been successfully treated and the students are still incapacitated. Surprisingly, in some instances, students in this situation have been told that no further consideration can be granted. Clearly, to any fair minded person this type of response makes no sense. When circumstances are beyond the control of the person it is not reasonable to say nothing further can be done. When a student presents valid documentation indicating he or she is still incapacitated, arrangements must be made to take that unexpected turn of events into account.

In the same vein, on occasion, individuals have been told via email and verbally that an INC (Incomplete Grade) can not be extended as the policy prohibits the instructor from doing so. While the GPA policy states the INC must be cleared within three months of the petition being granted, if circumstances are such that an extension is justified, this kind of amendment can be fairly implemented through consultation with the appropriate personnel. One can only imagine the kind of anxiety that is created for someone who is already extremely ill, (and for his or her family) to be told that even though they have not recovered, no further consideration can even be discussed when in fact there are options available that can be fairly applied, e.g. an extension for a reasonable period of time if the student will be healthy shortly; a petition for an AEG grade; a request for a retroactive drop of the course if the student will not be well enough to complete the final course requirements for the foreseeable future. Ironically, it is not uncommon for extensions of a few weeks for clearing an INC grade to be granted when a physician's estimate of when a student will be healthy has been off by a couple of weeks. Yet, in some instances, individuals have concluded or been advised that they have no flexibility.



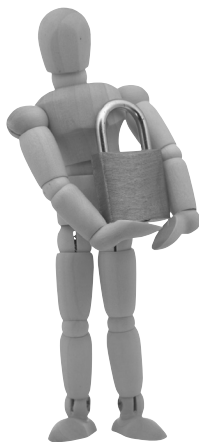
It is paramount that all decision-makers recognize that treating people identically is only fair when they are in exactly the same circumstance and have access to the same resources. It is vital to fair decision-making that the specific circumstances of an individual's situation be considered prior to any determination being made.

**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.

**"Hope will never be silent."**

Harvey Milk



## **POLICY ON UNDERGRADUATE GRADING, PROMOTION AND ACADEMIC STANDING (THE GPA POLICY) IMPLEMENTED IN SEPTEMBER 2008**

**Impact of Required to Withdraw (RTW) designation:**

The RTW designation is new to Ryerson as of September 2008. As a result, this year we observed the first go-round of RTW designations at the end of the Winter term that would require a student to be away from the University for a one year period. Perhaps this is the reason there was a great deal of misinformation floating around. For example, I saw emails and written appeal decisions saying that a student could take courses at the Chang School and other universities or colleges while on RTW status when in actual fact students are prohibited from taking any certificate or degree equivalent Continuing Education (CE) course at the Chang School (unless they are interested in Course Series offerings and special arrangements have to be made for them to do so). Also, I have been advised by Registrarial staff that the convention in place among universities and colleges across Canada is that they will respect each others' academic standings. As a result, the bulk of other Canadian post-secondary institutions will not admit students into individual courses as a special student or into a different undergraduate degree program that is better suited to their abilities, if they have a current RTW standing from Ryerson. In support of that view, we have also reviewed letters from other universities which state that the student was not offered admission because of being on RTW from Ryerson. It was also noted that until the academic status changes, the student could not expect to be offered admission.

## REINSTATEMENT

A further complication has also arisen in that some schools and departments at Ryerson University are saying to students: "You can not be reinstated unless you demonstrate the ability to get good grades elsewhere". However, as noted above, for the most part, students are not able to take courses elsewhere for a one-year period. In other instances, some students have been told to take courses in a different program at Ryerson or elsewhere, do well in that new program and then apply for re-admission to their original program. Given these divergent directions, it's not surprising that the reinstatement system could be seen to be a labyrinth to the uninitiated. In addition, other academic advisors are indicating that as the chance of being reinstated is 'slim to none', given the amendments to the promotion policy, students should focus exclusively on getting admitted into another institution in order to complete their degrees. However, I have also read documents issued by other departments that state that RTW students will automatically be reinstated at their request, after twelve months have elapsed, and be allowed to return to their program on a restricted probationary contract to take two courses only. If they are not successful they will be permanently withdrawn.

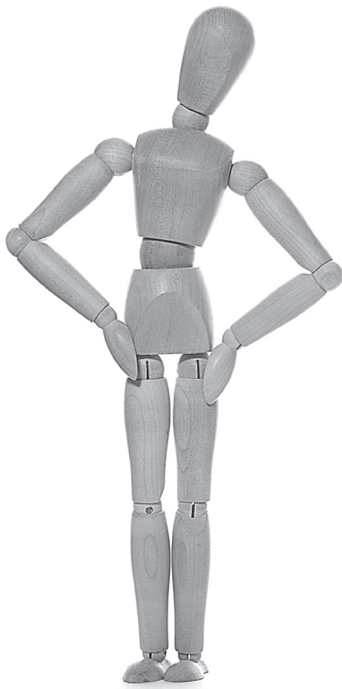
If it is true for some schools and departments that students can not expect to be reinstated once they have been placed on RTW, this information should be told to students who are signing Probationary Contracts. As the consequences of not fulfilling the terms of a probationary contract can be so far-reaching, the individuals laying out the contract should make that abundantly clear. We often hear from both parents and students that a first year student attended a group meeting and signed 'a paper' but didn't really understand what it meant. To sign a contract without understanding its terms is clearly unwise. It is also incumbent upon students to pay sufficient attention so as to comprehend the seriousness of the situation. Nevertheless, not being able to finish a degree once started and not being able to gain admittance to another post-secondary institution for a minimum

of twelve months, is a matter of such significance that this potential outcome should also be conveyed to students signing Probationary Contracts.

The Grading and Promotion policy also provides a final opportunity for students who performed poorly in the Winter semester to bring up their CGPA to 2.0. With the permission of the Program Director/Chair and the sign-off of the Registrar's Office, students who are close to a CGPA of 2.0 can take another course or two in order to bring their CGPA up to or above 2.0 by the end of the Spring/Summer term. However, I have been consulted on a number of situations where students were told this form of consideration did not exist even though the Grading and Promotion policy specifically provides for it; or, students were told while the provision was available, the student was not eligible even though they only needed an average grade, which based on their past performance, was doable in order to bring their CGPA up to 2.0.

In discussing these types of situations, I have often been told by students that the person they were talking to just wanted to say 'no' regardless of the circumstances. My response is to query why would someone 'want' to say 'no' when all that is required is a quick analysis to determine if the student's academic record is such that achieving a CGPA is viable, e.g. he or she doesn't have to get an A+ in order to get to a CGPA of 2.0 and in fact, a C+ or higher would result in the requisite change. Whether it be due to a misunderstanding or lack of information, it is profoundly unfair to say a form of consideration is not in existence when it clearly is, or, to make it more difficult for someone to make use of such consideration than it needs to be.

It is also unfair for students to misrepresent conversations had with others and that is why we are always very careful to ensure that all parties' points of view are heard on what transpired before an opinion is formed as to whether or not someone has been treated unfairly.



“Justice consists not in being neutral between right and wrong, but in finding out the right and upholding it, wherever found, against the wrong.”

Theodore Roosevelt

**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.

I would suggest that the clear mode of communication used by the Ted Rogers School of Management be emulated by others. For example, it is stated on the School of Business Management website: You are not allowed to attend classes at Ryerson for 12 months; you are eligible to take two courses on a Qualifying Probationary Contract after the twelve month period has elapsed and if you are not able achieve the minimum academic requirements set you will be Permanently Withdrawn. A very detailed and relevant set of FAQ'S has been posted on the Business Management School website that explains exactly what a student needs to do to be reinstated. In addition, helpful information related to OSAP eligibility and the need for financial planning is also included. This kind of approach is straightforward and fair in that it specifies what is automatic, i.e. you are eligible for a qualifying contract after twelve months has elapsed. It is then made very clear, what is within the student's control, i.e. if you meet the qualifications by doing well in the two courses prescribed for you, you will be able to continue in your original program. This approach has greatly reduced anxiety and allows students and their families to plan accordingly.

## REASONS FOR DECISIONS

This problem has been observed in responses to grade and standing appeals; appeals of decisions on determinations of a student engaging in Academic Misconduct; as well as written decisions issued by a variety of administrative units related to the denial of a request or benefit.

In my experience, it is not uncommon for some decision-writers to provide a list of agreed upon facts along with various individuals' opinions or observations and then conclude with: "...as a result your appeal is denied." It appears that the decision-maker was trying to list in full all of the information that was heard prior to coming to a conclusion. However, the requisite skill in writing a decision is in demonstrating what information was relied on and the weight it was given; why the weight given was determined to be fair; why some pieces of information were not considered to be relevant and how the information reviewed and weighed was applied to whatever policy or procedure is relevant to the matters under review.

Or, a decision-maker will write: "I have contacted the person who is the subject of the complaint and what you've said has been denied and the matter is closed." Or, individuals will say "You have been accommodated for compassionate reasons on a previous occasion and therefore no further consideration will be provided". Once again, it is a basic standard of fairness that the current circumstances put forward by the appellant be considered. It is not fair to rely on responses made in a previous situation that are not relevant to the current request. In addition, it is important to take into account that some individuals encounter many more difficulties in their daily lives than others, e.g. chronic medical conditions; minimal financial security; and/ or limited or non-existent family supports. As a result, some individuals may legitimately encounter more than one extenuating circumstance that will have a negative impact on their ability to cope with multiple problems. Both within the Ryerson community and the broader world it is well recognized

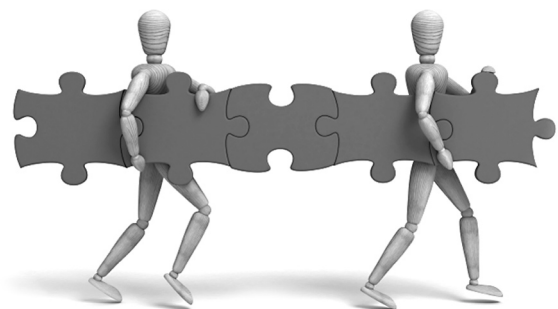
that an individual's social location will have a significant impact on their capacity to cope effectively with multiple instances of unexpected negative situations. As a result, individuals who are responding to complaints and appeals need to apply the most basic standards of investigation namely:

- Hear all relevant perspectives on the situation under discussion before forming an opinion.
- Carefully review any relevant documentation before forming an opinion.
- Determine what the appropriate response should be without a positive or negative bias toward either party in the dispute.
- Provide rationale for the decision which includes an explanation for what has been considered and if one person's view of what transpired has been accepted, how and why that decision was made.

The foregoing expectations would strike many readers as being the most basic of requirements. However, for those for who investigation of a complaint or concern, or responding to an appeal is a new experience, these minimal expectations may not be obvious. I would also like to point out that I have also seen exemplary decision letters which demonstrate with great clarity why a particular outcome is considered to be reasonable.

### 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 unbiased a manner as is possible, before a decision was made.



## PROVOST AND VICE PRESIDENT ACADEMIC AND VICE PRESIDENT, ADMINISTRATION AND FINANCE RESPONSE TO LISTENING AND LEARNING OMBUDSPERSON'S REPORT JULY 1, 2008 - JUNE 30, 2009

Dear Ms Farrell,

We are writing to offer a response to your 2008-2009 Annual Report, "Listening and Learning," which we received in our offices recently. Thank you for sending it.

The observations made by you in your annual reports provide important insights and suggestions, many of which have brought about positive changes at Ryerson. As mentioned in this year's report, several of the areas of concern last year have resulted in significant changes and the impact of those changes will be seen as this year unfolds.

We are pleased that, again this year, the number of students with concerns in several key areas has either decreased somewhat or remained almost the same. While there has been an increase in the number of complaints regarding academic misconduct you point out that the percent increase is less than the increase in the number of suspicions of academic misconduct, and that the institution of the Academic Integrity Council this year may well address the procedural matter that students are concerned about. The report also mentions that there have been initiatives to address concerns about "Academic Advice", and it is important to note that a review of advising processes has been undertaken by the University Committee on Student Success, which was established last year.

### Recommendation 1 (Academic Consideration and Appeals):

*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.

### Recommendation 2 and 3

#### (Grading Promotion and Academic Standing (GPS) 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 that 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 to change their standing from RTW to Probationary by completing one of 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.

### Recommendation 4 (Reason 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.

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

Regards,

Alan Shepard  
Provost and Vice  
President Academic

Linda Grayson  
Vice President,  
Administration and Finance



## FOLLOW UP ON RECOMMENDATIONS AND COMMITMENTS MADE

The text shown in italics below is the University's update on the progress made on each of the 2007/2008 recommendations:

### Recommendation 1 (Fee Statements):

That a consultative review of the format in which students' indebtedness and the amount of fees paid, when and for what purpose, be undertaken. This consultation would include soliciting input from individuals who are not already familiar with the Ryerson approach to receive recommendations on how the information could be presented to make it more easily comprehensible.

*During the past year we have taken a series of steps to enhance the clarity of fees information provided to Ryerson undergraduate students. Information on the Student Fees web site was overhauled ([http://www.ryerson.ca/currentstudents/fees\\_finances](http://www.ryerson.ca/currentstudents/fees_finances)).*

*A second step was the introduction of an account statement in a PDF form in the re-engineered RAMSS Student Centre that allows students to isolate charges and payments to one term at a time, either in detail or summary form ([http://www.ryerson.ca/RAMSSsupport/ugrad\\_grad/student\\_fees](http://www.ryerson.ca/RAMSSsupport/ugrad_grad/student_fees)). Fees information in Ryerson's Student Guide was also revised extensively (<http://www.ryerson.ca/studentguide/MoneyMatters1.html>).*

*A further step was the introduction of a monthly fee reminder email message to students who had an outstanding balance. Finally, an electronic RAMSS demo on how to navigate and use RAMSS information (including fees information) was introduced as part of the RAMSS upgrade in November 2008 ([http://www.ryerson.ca/currentstudents/images/ramss\\_leftsidebar\\_demo.jpg](http://www.ryerson.ca/currentstudents/images/ramss_leftsidebar_demo.jpg)). Feedback from students as these measures were developed and implemented has been extremely positive.*

*We continue to invest significant amounts of time on the part of Student Fees staff to ensure that erroneous charges do not occur. Based on experience in the past year it would appear that these efforts have reduced the incidence of problems.*

### Recommendation 2 (Reducing Unintentional Accumulation of Debt and Affect on Academic Record):

That an investigation be undertaken to determine alternative technological or administrative methods of determining if students who have submitted course intentions or registered for continuing education courses are actually attending classes at the beginning of the semester. In addition, in the interim, I am recommending that additional efforts be made to alert students at the point of registration of the importance of cancelling their registration as soon as possible in order to avoid negative consequences if they subsequently decide not to attend classes.

*During the past year we have continued efforts to ensure that undergraduate students clearly understand the academic and financial obligations they undertake when they either enter Course Intentions or directly enroll in classes for the academic semester/year. For the first time this fall, a feature has been built into the student portal website. Undergraduate students with a Fall 2009 enrolment have been asked to confirm that they are planning to attend classes that they are enrolled in prior to entry to RAMSS. Those who indicate they are not continuing in Fall 2009 studies have been asked to formally withdraw from courses. During the coming year this tool and related procedures and communications will be refined to ensure that all students with an active enrollment have confirmed their enrollment.*

*With respect to registrations for Chang School courses, a review team has been analyzing Chang School registration and fee issues. One of the objectives of the review is to introduce process and procedural changes that will ensure students are fully aware of their academic and financial responsibility for all continuing education course registrations. Review team recommendations are expected later in the fall with implementation beginning in the 2010/2011 academic year.*



**Recommendation 3 (Review of Methodology for Orientation on Student Code of Conduct Policy and Procedures):**

That the current training program for orienting faculty and staff on how to handle suspicions of academic misconduct and conduct hearings be reviewed by a diverse group of Ryerson community members, including educators, student representatives and content experts, so as to build on its strengths and increase university-wide participation.

**Recommendation 4 (Investigation of Alternatives for Adjudicating Appeals of Charges of Academic Misconduct):**

That the university investigate alternatives to the Faculty Appeals Committee approach for adjudicating charges and penalties associated with the Student Code of Academic Conduct so as to reduce the demand currently placed on a small number of faculty members, reduce waiting times and contribute to a higher level of fairness. My understanding is the Academic Integrity Officer has recently amassed a comprehensive inventory of all the academic honesty/integrity policies and procedures from across Canada. This material may yield alternatives that are also viable within the Ryerson community.

*The Student Code of Academic Conduct has been revised such that Faculty Appeals Committees have been replaced with a centralized Academic Integrity Council. As the AIC will be managed by the Academic Integrity Office, it can be ensured that all members are properly trained and that the policies and procedures are more consistently applied.*

**Recommendation 5 (Review of Academic Standing Variations):**

That all academic standing variations be reviewed by the Academic Standards Committee or its delegate, in consultation with the relevant schools and departments, to ensure the variations are consistent with the University's recently adopted Academic Plan (June, 2008) and are presented in such a manner as to be easily understood.

*The standing variations have been reviewed by the Chair of the Academic Standards Committee who is in the process of*

*working with the various departments/schools to clarify language and determine if any changes need to be made. These revised variations will be presented to the Academic Standards Committee for its approval, and then reported to Senate.*



## OFFICE OF THE OMBUDSPERSON 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 650 unique visitors viewed our website each month of this service year. This number represents one hundred (100) more visitors per month than made use of this resource last year. Activity was greatest in the month of May 2009 when 947 individuals visited the site and in January 2009 when 745 individuals viewed the site. We track the pages visited and 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.

## 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)	99.5%
RESPOND WITHIN ONE DAY	.3%
RESPOND WITHIN TWO DAYS	.2%

## CASE CLOSURE TIMES

CASES CLOSED AFTER ONE WEEK	82.3%
CASES CLOSED AFTER TWO WEEKS	5.6%
CASES CLOSED AFTER THREE WEEKS	2.4%
CASES CLOSED AFTER FOUR WEEKS	2.6%
CASES CLOSED AFTER FIVE WEEKS	1.9%
CASES CLOSED AFTER SIX WEEKS	1.2%
CASES CLOSED AFTER MORE THAN SIX WEEKS	4.0%

## IN APPRECIATION

I would like to express my appreciation to everyone who has contacted this Office and all those who have responded to inquiries made by this Office in a manner that contributes to the fair resolution of concerns and complaints in a respectful and civil manner.

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 for her dedication and thoughtfulness, and Stephanie Lever, our Administrative Assistant, for her attention to important details.

Respectfully submitted,

Nora Farrell, Ombudsperson  
Ryerson University

