

Does York University need an Ombudsman? Yes

I was flying across the Atlantic from London to Canada last March when the word: "This is your captain speaking" came over the intercom... "I am very tired" he continued in even more sombre tones... He explained why we were flying eight hours behind schedule. Leaving Toronto the previous night and starting out across the ocean, he had been notified that a passenger had suddenly been taken dangerously ill. There were 400 other passengers to consider, and turning back to the nearest major airport, Montreal, would mean being caught by their curfew which prohibits taking off till dawn. "I had to decide", said the Captain, "whether a human being counted more than time, money and missed appointments. "After all", he added, "it might have been any one of you." That is, really the basis of the Ombudsman's belief. A human being counts more than the system. "After all it might be any one of you." It is a recognition of the importance of each individual.

The purpose or aims of a university have been and continue to be variously stated, but for the purposes of this report, it is enough to say that the University is a community of faculty and

students dedicated to the pursuit of truth, the advancement of knowledge and a place where there is freedom to teach, freedom to engage in research, freedom to associate, freedom to write and to publish.

These freedoms can only be fully realized if the University is secure from external constraint, and if internally an environment is nourished...and which is characterized by a mutual consideration, restraint, and tolerance among all of its members so that the advantages of teaching, research, and study will be available to all to the extent to which they can or choose to benefit from them.

The Presidential Advisory Committee on Sexual Harassment was chaired by Professor Ann B. Shteir, Advisor to the President on the Status of Women 1979-81, and the following list of member was developed in consultation with major constituencies within York University:

The committee noted in the course of its work the lack of centralized disciplinary and grievance procedures for students. We believe this problem should be remedied. We recommend that the President bring this matter to the attention of the recently established Presidential Committee on Student Activity and that he ask that they request suggestions and comments in this area from the student community.

Role and Function

The Ombudsman functions primarily as a mediator between the individual and the governing authority. He is alert for maladministration of the policies and by-laws of that authority, which, when perpetrated, could result in injustice, discomfort, frustration and dissatisfaction to the complainant.

A major role of an Ombudsman is to protect the rights of the individual and to make every effort to ensure that everyone enjoys the right of both social and humane justice. The Ombudsman safeguards against the growing complexity of large organizations and their relationship with the individual. He does not merely act as a buffer between the individual and an authority--but as a promoter of justice.

An Ombudsman should exhibit the qualities of independence, objectivity, competence and fairness. Without these qualities the incumbent will have difficulty carrying out a thorough investigation the Ombudsman may not be in a position to make a responsible recommendation to the appropriate authorities.

There are three major reasons for an individual to visit an Ombudsman. The first is to request general information about an agency or institution to which the individual is somehow related, such as a student making an enquiry about the university's regulations and by-laws. The second reason may be a direct inquiry about the individual's rights and the availability of appeal or grievance procedures. In this situation the individual usually has a specific concern or problem and is seeking information regarding possible remedies. The third use of an Ombudsman's office is related to a complaint an individual has against a decision, action, recommendation or omission. The individual may have exhausted the avenues of appeal at the faculty level.

The CYSF is working towards the creation of an Ombudsman at York. Its creation will be up to the student body. Please submit you questions, and submissions to Mr. Pearlman Vice-President Academic Affairs. CYSF Rm 105 Central Square.

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