



**York University – Office of the Ombudsperson and Centre for Human Rights
Annual Report 2006/2007**

December 2010

I. ABOUT THE OFFICE

In July 2008, the Office of the Ombudsperson and the Centre for Human Rights were separated and re-established independently, in an effort to refine each entity's purpose and role within the university. The annual reporting results for 2006-2007 presented here remain linked, since the Office was still operating as one body during that academic year. Data regarding the nature of complaints/enquiries has been divided between the Ombuds and Human Rights cases, and are presented as such. Data profiles of the complainants and respondents, however, remains combined.

The mission of the Office of the Ombudsperson and Centre for Human Rights (the Office) is to encourage policies, practices and systems that are fair, just and equitable. The Office assists individuals and groups to address and resolve allegations of discrimination and harassment as defined by the *Ontario Human Rights Code* and University policy, while simultaneously encouraging tolerance, inclusion, and fairness through educational programming to the university and community.

The Office's first year (2005-2006) focused on addressing enquiries and investigating relevant complaints from students, staff and faculty, striving therein to resolve these in a fair and efficient manner through a client-centred approach. Individuals who contacted the office with an enquiry and/or to file a complaint were engaged in a cooperative process to resolve the issue, whether through referrals, investigation, mediation, or a combination of the three. The value and scope of this on-campus resource was further developed for the 2006-2007 academic year through targeted events, workshops and advisory roles.

A total of 197 relevant files were opened between September 2006 and August 2007, of which 89 (45.2%) were Human Rights-related, 72 (36.5%) were Ombuds-related, and a further 36 (18.3%) were enquiries that did not result in formal complaints. As of August 31, 2007 there were 28 active complaints, with the remaining 169 files addressed and closed.

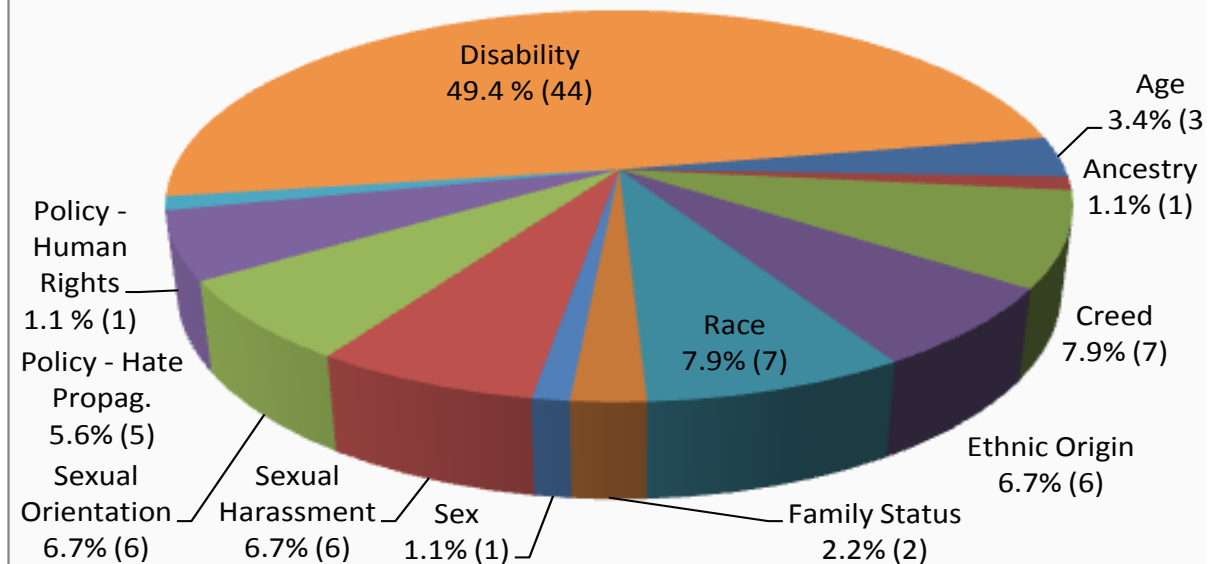
Finally, the Office made efforts to increase its reach and engage various groups at York by promoting human rights awareness events, facilitating educational workshops and hosting presentations. The positive response to these sessions has encouraged the Office to continue and expand its educational programming in coming years.

II. CASE FILE DATA

Human Rights Complaints

The majority of complaints investigated and addressed by the Office were related to disability (49.4%), while issues of race, creed and ethnic origin were also prominent (22.5% combined). From September 2006 to June 2007, the Office received a wide variety of complaints related to all of the prohibited grounds outlined in the *Ontario Human Rights Code*, but many were concerned with accessibility for students with a disability. This particular trend resulted in collaborative efforts to help accommodate disabled students on a work placement site while completing a practicum.

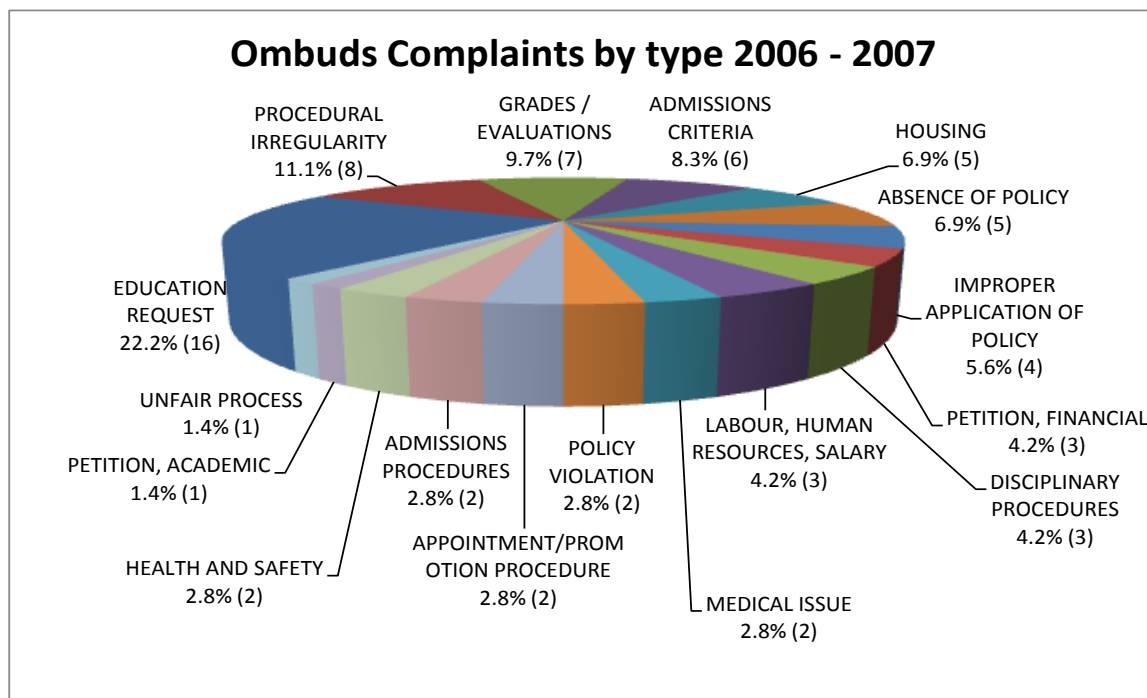
Human Rights Complaints by category 2006 - 2007



Ombuds Cases

The Office received a total of 72 complaints/cases, of which the largest group (16 cases, or 22%) were requests for education. A significant number of files were also opened with regards to procedural irregularity (8), grades and evaluations (7), and admissions criteria (6).

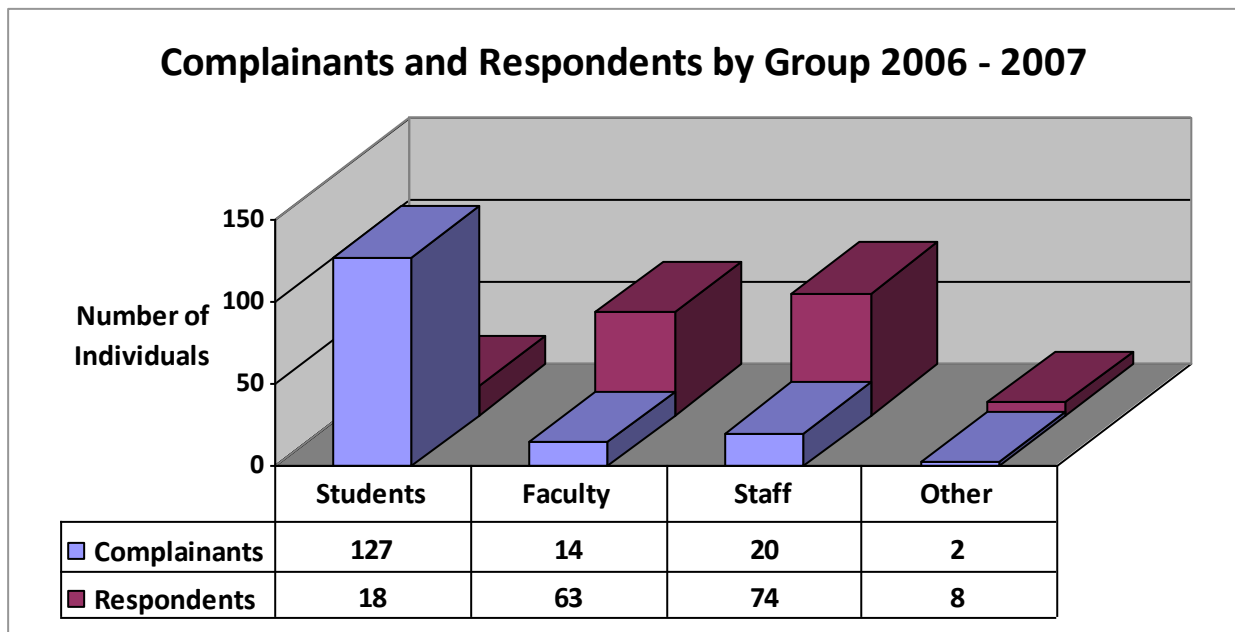
Ombuds Complaints by type 2006 - 2007



A continuing trend in complaints and enquiries fielded with the Office of the Ombudsperson and Centre for Human Rights was from students confused about where they could turn for help regarding academic issues. For many students the Office served as a valuable informational resource, as reflected in the number of educational requests and complaints regarding procedural irregularity, grades and evaluations.

Overview of Complainants and Respondents

In every complaint file, the complainant and respondent are identified by their main role at the university: students, faculty, university staff and others. The past year saw a large majority of student complainants, with the bulk of cases listing either staff or faculty as respondents. This shows that students are the main community members approaching the Office for assistance, which is a positive but predictable result, as students represent the majority of York’s community members. This presents an opportunity to increase efforts to reach smaller groups at the University, and thus promote the services of the Office to a wider audience.



III. BEYOND THE OFFICE

Outreach

As mentioned, one of the main reasons the Office of the Ombudsperson and Centre for Human Rights was contacted in 2006 – 2007 was to provide education. These vital information sessions were provided upon request and often in collaboration with various university groups. The topics covered ranged from explaining the role of the Office at York University, to skills-building workshops and sensitivity training surrounding particular issues. The number of education requests received encouraged the Office to become more involved in this type of programming, by organizing events, coordinating presentations and raising awareness around key dates linked to social justice and human rights issues. Below is a sampling of the initiatives the Office was involved in over the past year:

Education Requests:

- **“My Space is Your Space”** – dialogue-building event with students at Stong College, focusing on ensuring a safe and respectful environment.
- **Diversity and Respect at Pond Road Residence** – training session with residents, following an incident of homophobia.
- **Diversity Customer Service Training at Tait McKenzie** – leadership training with assistant managers, focusing on integrating equity into customer service.
- **Respectful Language Presentation** – Social Science students at Atkinson College participated in case study discussions, and received a package of relevant literature for further exploration of the issues addressed during the presentation.
- **Presentation on Hate Speech** – Mathematics students participated in discussions specifically addressing actions and words that can be defined as hate speech, and how these relate to York University policies
- **Diversity Training at York Youth Connections** – camp staff underwent diversity training related to conflict resolution.
- **Diversity and Respectful Workplace Training** – CSBO Managers and a CUPE representative participated in full-day trainings to develop their capacity to train others in creating a respectful workplace.

Engagement and Awareness-raising

Over the 2006-2007 academic year, the Office proudly organized and supported many presentations, events and conferences to involve the York University community in important social justice and human rights issues. Below is a snapshot of some key public engagement dates the Office participated in:

- Feb 2: YFS Equity Conference
- Mar 8: International Women’s Day
- Mar 21: International Day for the elimination of Racial Discrimination
- Mar 21: Panel Presentation on AIDS, Employment and Human Rights
- Apr 20: Sexuality Studies Research at York Conference
- Jun 18-24: Pride Week