



Annual Report 2008/2009

About the Center for Human Rights

The Centre for Human Rights (the Centre)'s raison d'être is to advocate for the adherence to both the spirit and intent of the provisions of the Code as well as all human rights policies at York University (YU). The mission of the Centre is to assist individuals and groups to address and resolve allegations of discrimination and harassment as defined by the Ontario Human Rights Code (the Code) and University policy. Furthermore, the Centre promotes and encourages respect, equity and inclusion at YU through both broad and targeted educational initiatives. It is a free information and dispute resource for all university community members, supported by staff members that are objective and trained in case management, dispute resolution and mediation. When allegations are raised, an inquiry is conducted at an informal level, seeking resolution early and effectively for the individual(s) involved. Where a complaint cannot be resolved informally by the Centre, the matter is investigated in accordance with established University policies, practices and agreements.

The Centre plays a significant role in human rights education by promoting a culture of equity, inclusion and mutual respect and by mounting educational initiatives. As part of its educational role, the Centre liaises with human rights groups, committees, associations, and organizations both within the University and in the external community as resources permit, in an effort to gain knowledge and information about emerging issues as well as best practices.

In July 2008, the previously combined Office of the Ombudsperson and Centre for Human Rights were severed and re-established independently, in an effort to refine each entity's purpose and role within the university. This important change put into motion a thorough evaluation and redesign of the Centre's purpose, objectives and mandate over the summer and fall of 2008. These assessments and consequent policy adjustments worked to better define the Centre's role in the YU community and increase its potential to *pro-actively* effect positive change, in addition to its mainly reactive case resolution functions. To this effect, a new Outreach Coordinator one year term position was created to make direct connections with student groups, staff and faculty. In addition, a second Advisor, Communications and Education position was created and filled in the summer of 2009. These combined efforts set an enthusiastic and ambitious tone for the 2008/2009 academic year, one in which the Centre greatly expanded its educational and outreach activities.

A total of 210 files were opened between September 2008 and August 2009, of which 131 (62.4%) were Human Rights related complaints, 20 (9.5%) were Ombuds cases and an additional 59 files were enquiries that did not result in formal complaints. As of August 31, 2009, 42 complaint files remained open/active, while the remaining 168 were addressed and closed. The number of files opened increased compared to the previous

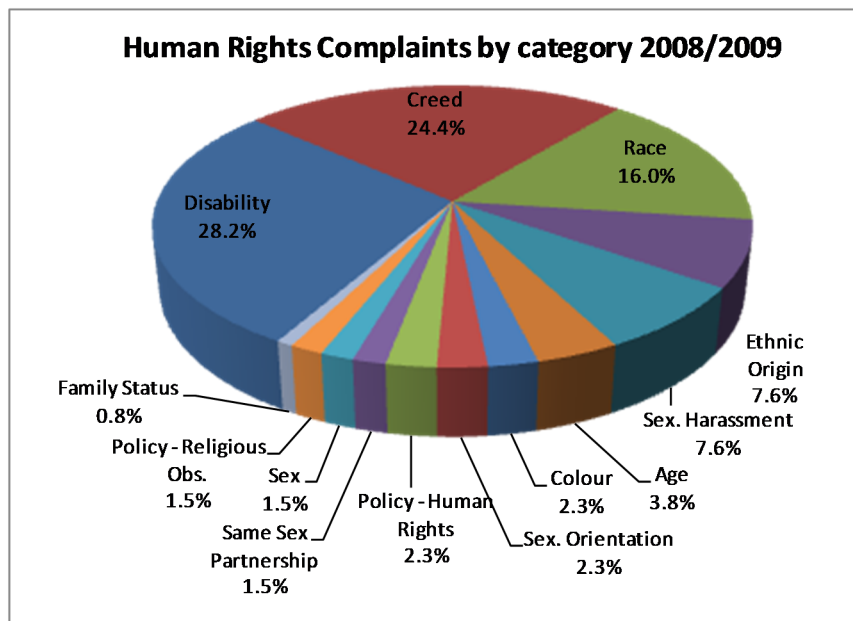
year but it is important to note that a greater proportion of the total was made up of enquiries (59 cases versus 5 in 2007/2008). The Centre sees this as a positive statistic, highlighting the fact that more community members have accessed its resources and benefited from additional learning opportunities available.

Case File Data

Human Rights complaints

The main areas of complaint for the 2008/2009 academic year were related to disability (37 complaints, or roughly 28%), creed (32 complaints, 24%), and race (21 complaints, 16%). Another significant portion of complaints surrounded discrimination associated with sex and sexual orientation. The trend in disability-related complaints is consistent with data from previous years; the Centre has played an important role in investigating and remedying situations and processes that discriminate against disabled community members at YU. Working closely with Counselling and Disability Services (formerly Disability Services), the Centre has been able to affect positive change by requesting accommodations and modifications to eliminate barriers in classrooms, work places, and in residences.

The large proportion of complaints regarding discrimination based on creed relate to three main incidents that occurred between February and March 2009. The incidents brought up issues related to freedom of expression, perceived hate speech and threatening behaviour, and form part of a complex, ongoing challenge surrounding the Israel/Palestine debate. As per its mandate of neutrality, it was not the Centre's position

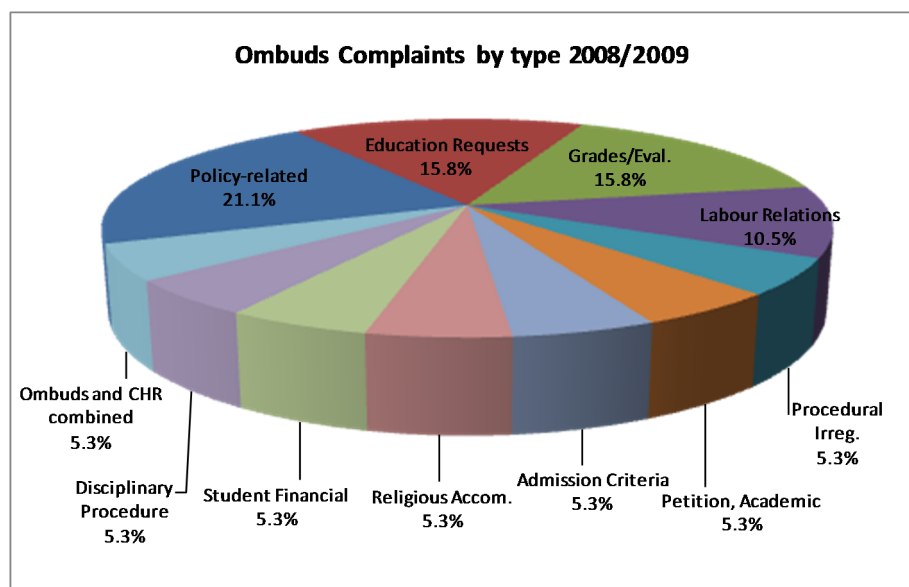


to advocate for one side or another, but rather to determine whether a human rights issue was being raised, and to encourage respect, tolerance and dialogue in resolving conflict. The Centre has since made proactive steps towards engaging community members from all sides of the debate, including meeting with student and other groups who

have a keen interest in this issue. These collaborative efforts are described in further detail in the Education section of this report.

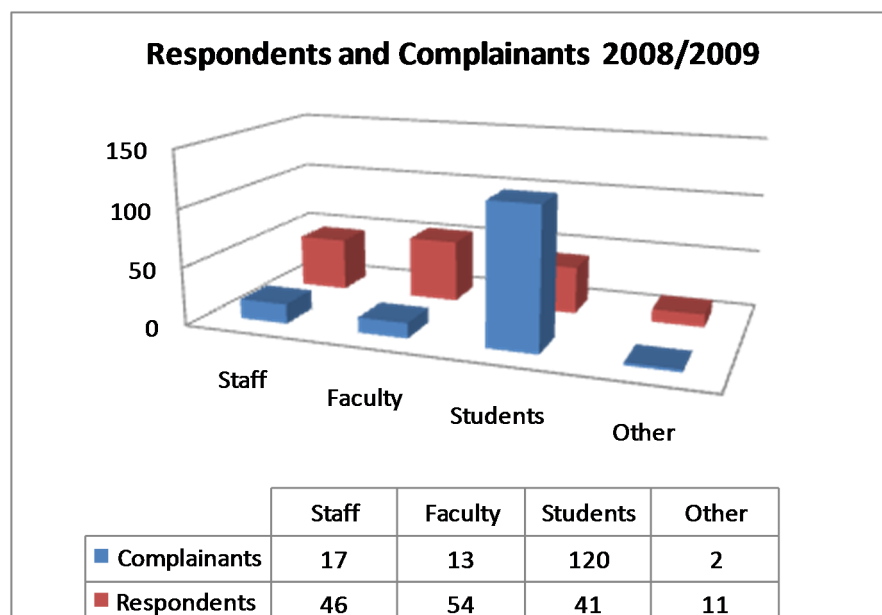
Ombuds complaints

Although the Ombudsperson function was no longer a part of the Centre for Human Rights after July 2008, the Centre continued to work on and close 20 files over the course of the year that had been opened prior to August 2008. The majority related to policy, grades and evaluations, and requests for education. Now, complaints and inquiries that clearly fall under the Office of the Ombudsperson's mandate are referred to that office.



Overview of Complainants and Respondents

As in previous years, the majority of complainants (120 of 152) were students, which is consistent with their proportion in relation to the university population. There was a slight decrease in the number of staff complainants; as this could be an indication that information about the Centre and the services it offers may not be reaching as many community members in the workplace as last year, the Centre will review some of its ongoing priorities in an effort to engage community members who would not normally access the education and mediation resources available. This includes non-faculty union staff, service providers on campus, temporary/contract workers, and others in the surrounding community. Respondents were fairly evenly split between faculty, staff and students, which consistent with last year's figures.



Beyond the Centre

Partnerships and Outreach

In early 2009, a series of Strategic Planning sessions were held to explore the effectiveness and relevance of the Centre's educational programming. Special emphasis was placed on determining how the Centre could improve both its reach and impact in this regard. The result was a renewed commitment to expanding the Centre's role as a learning and training resource, while taking steps to reach out to community members who would not normally access the Centre or its services.

The Centre meets and collaborates with other similar equity-related bodies. These include Access for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (AODA), AccessYork, SexGen, the Aboriginal Council, and the Senate Equity Committee among others. Over the 2008/2009 academic year, the Centre once again worked with AccessYork to raise awareness and advocate on behalf of disabled students to improve access to residence and work placement sites. The Centre also worked with SexGen to improve and deliver Positive Space programming, in addition to collaborating on event planning for annual Pride festivities.

The Centre also attempted to revive the then Security Advisory Council's (SAC) Anti-Discrimination Committee. Together with the Centre, the Committee reviewed its mandate and expanded it to include all human rights related questions and concerns, not just those having a security component. Two open forums were held to engage YU

community members in dialogue regarding human rights issues and to re-introduce the Committee to the university community. While the first two forums were not very well-attended, there were some useful suggestions about possible directions for the Centre that were received and eventually incorporated into the Centre's strategic plan.

Special efforts were made to reach YU's various student groups with information about the Centre, its services and opportunities for partnership. In October 2008, the Centre created a temporary Outreach Coordinator position to kick-start this initiative. Invitations were sent to each of the over 350 registered student clubs on campus, to attend a meeting with the Centre's staff and to visit the office for an Open House; over 65 groups responded and met with the Centre, leading to sponsorship of various student-focused activities that promote a positive awareness about human rights. Based on the success of this initiative, the Centre will continue to seek new and alternative ways of reaching out to students, faculty and staff during 2009/2010.

In an effort to improve the Centre's capacity and effectiveness, several staff members pursued external partnerships and training opportunities. These included working with the YU TD Engagement Centre in the areas of programming and evaluation; participating in the Canadian Association for the Prevention of Discrimination in Higher Education's (CAPDHHE) annual conference and annual general meeting to showcase some of York's initiatives as well as to learn some best practices; attending both the Canadian Centre for Diversity and the City of Toronto's Human Rights Awards; and meeting with the Canadian Race Relations Foundation, among other external organizations. These relationships and interactions in the human rights community



have served to further strengthen the Centre's resource base, while creating opportunities for collaboration on and off campus.

Finally, seeking to increase transparency and accountability, the Centre agreed to organize and coordinate the President's Advisory Committee on Human Rights (PACHR). During the 2008/2009 period, two meetings were held – the first of which revisited the terms and mandate of the committee. At that time it was agreed that the committee should have student representation and in this regard, representatives of the YFS and GSA were added to the committee list. The second meeting saw both written and verbal reports provided by various committee members regarding human rights related activities and initiatives. The Centre submitted the first of its now-regular written reports, which have since evolved to include statistical information as is presented in this annual report, as well as updates about events and outreach.

Featured Partnership: YFS Student Leader Training

These sessions in August 2009 were the first time that human rights related training was given to student leaders. The purpose was to make orientation leaders aware of diversity and how to be more inclusive with new students they show around campus, through lessons in anti-oppression.

It showed YU's commitment to promoting inclusion and non-discrimination – sending a powerful message to incoming students. The trainings were a collaborative effort with YFS, Student Community & Leadership Development (SCLD).

Result? The training went very well and we received feedback about how to make improvements for next year. Future training will continue to improve and be topical to issues student leaders need to be aware of in order to provide an inclusive, safe and welcoming campus environment.

Education and Awareness-Raising

As noted above, a major initiative undertaken by the Centre over the 2008/2009 school year was that of expanding and improving its educational programming. This included broadening existing courses, plus adding several new trainings and classes. At the Centre's strategic planning sessions held in early 2009, it was determined that the educational offerings were very basic; they only provided superficial lessons in awareness

surrounding human rights, discrimination and inclusion. The strategic planning group decided that courses and trainings should be made more complex, interactive and challenging, so as to engage participants in a more meaningful way. This would include proposing real-life scenarios with relevant behaviour and language, exploring topics that touch upon current events, and using an approach that encourages inclusion and respectful dialogue/conversation.

Another important element is the recent addition of a second Senior Advisor in Communications and Education to support the Centre's new direction in programming. Having two staff members dedicated to educational initiatives and liaising with YU community member groups will expand the Centre's presence on campus, while simultaneously raising its profile through positive exposure. Having started in August 2009, the focus is on planning the direction of educational activities for 2009/2010; nevertheless the enhanced team has already made several important relationships with YU community members, at the student, faculty and administration level. Below is a sample of educational programming delivered over the 2008/2009 academic year to various community member groups.

- **Diversity and Assumptions training, Social Justice training** – delivered programming to Residence Life staff over two Don training sessions; provided training for 100 student mentors
- **Orient the Leader** – partnered with YFS to deliver an inclusion training session for student leaders ahead of Orientation Week 2008 for new students
- **In-class presentations** – Centre for Human Rights awareness presentation at Schulich for 20 students; speech at Winter's college orientation, to 1000 students and 700 parents
- **Staff training** – diversity workshop for 20 service providers at Tait-McKenzie; developed 4 sessions with Learning and Development for the Violence Prevention Series, focusing on sustaining a respectful workplace.

Remembrance of the Montreal Massacre and the Day of Remembrance and Action on Violence Against Women



December 6, 2008

**Featured Educational Initiative:
Respect and Inclusivity Awareness Tutorial (RIAT)**

Several campus groups raised concerns about certain instances of discrimination that occurred during the 2007/2008 academic year. The response included a campaign launched by students to establish a HR course to help YU community members better understand their roles and responsibilities under the Ontario Human Rights Code and the University Code of Conduct. In early 2008, students from Prof. Peter Dawson's HR and Sociology class organized a petition calling for the creation of a mandatory human rights course and successfully collected over 9000 signatures. The petition was presented to YU's senior administration in the Spring of 2008.

In June 2008, meetings began with staff members from the Provosts' office, faculty members and staff from the Centre for Human Rights and SCLD, as well as from Student Conduct and Dispute Resolution. The purpose of the meetings was to collectively come up with a means of addressing the student groups' concerns, the student petition, and York administration's conversations. This led to the initiation of a working group in the fall of 2008 where students who were involved in the petition for a mandatory course were invited to participate in the development an online tutorial as part of the university's response to the community's concerns.

Over the course of the 2008/2009 school year, the working group has succeeded in developing a pilot tutorial. The course touches upon basic human rights and responsibilities for YU community members, including important features of the Student Code of Conduct, examples of discrimination and information about accessing the resources available through the Centre. The pilot course will be launched in October 2009 to coincide with the university's first Inclusion Day on October 5. During the initial launch phase, student focus groups will be held to review and inform future development of the tutorial.

The Respect and Inclusivity Awareness Tutorial (RIAT) is the culmination of collaborative efforts to normalize Human Rights awareness and education among all YU community members.

Events

As part of its outreach initiatives, the Centre hosts, sponsors and promotes several events related to human rights and social justice. These presentations and activities have engaged hundreds of YU community members, whether through opportunities for participation and dialogue, or simply by raising awareness. The Centre is committed to continuing to host interesting presentations and speakers, both for important human rights dates and for relevant topics of interest for the community. Below is a listing of key events held over the last year:

OCT 2008	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Open House at the Centre for Human Rights
NOV 2008	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Holocaust and Genocide Awareness Week
DEC 2008	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Remembrance of the Montreal Massacre and National Day of Remembrance and Action on Violence Against Women
FEB 2009	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conference on the Genocide of Tutsi in Rwanda
MAR 2009	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • International Women's Day • International Day for the Elimination of Racism • D.R. Congo Conference
APR 2009	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Holocaust Martyrs and Heroes Remembrance Day • Anti-Discrimination Committee open forum #1
MAY 2009	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Anti-Discrimination Committee open forum #2
JUN 2009	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pride Week on campus • Pride Event at Glendon campus, featuring speeches in both official languages

CONGO CONFERENCE 2009



**Featured Event:
March 21, Dr. Sara Ahmed presentation**

International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination, established in 1966 and observed annually on March 21. On that day, in 1960, police opened fire and killed 69 people at a peaceful demonstration in Sharpeville, South Africa, against the apartheid "pass laws". Proclaiming the Day in 1966, the United Nations General Assembly called on the international community to redouble its efforts to eliminate all forms of racial discrimination.

On March 21, 2009, YU and the Centre hosted an awareness-raising event featuring professor Sara Ahmed, which turned out to be exceptionally well-attended. Dr. Ahmed is a professor of race and cultural studies at Goldsmiths College in London, and she works at the intersection between feminist theory, critical race studies, post-colonial theory and queer studies.

She delivered a presentation titled "Race, Happiness and Empire", which touched upon important issues of how the concept and attainment of "happiness" is formed by Western perspectives and ideals. She applied a unique lens to the popular British film, Bend it Like Beckham. Her engaging speech sparked the interest of attendees by challenging them to consider this uplifting movie in a different light. She noted that despite its pro-multiculturalism premise, the imagery and trajectory of the film tended to project "happy" outcomes as those most closely associated with White or Western ideals. It was an eye-opening presentation that engaged participants in reflecting upon their own views, biases and perspectives.

Over 275 individuals attended, and many provided positive feedback to the Centre afterward. Expanding on these types of student-initiated partnerships and event sponsorships will be a key focus for the Centre for 2009/2010. By hosting human rights and social justice related presentations that are of special interest to community members, the Centre can increase awareness and dialogue around important issues while also lending credibility and relevance to its efforts. Bringing Dr. Ahmed to YU was achieved through the hard work and determination of two students, Vanessa Rosa and Usamah Ansari. The fact that this was a student-driven initiative resulted in a meaningful and relevant event that appealed to many of their peers. Unfortunately, Usamah died in a tragic car accident prior to the event, and so the event was dedicated to his memory.

Looking ahead to new school year

The Centre for Human Rights made several important advances last year in expanding its education mandate, re-establishing itself independently from the Office of the Ombudsperson, and in actively resolving outstanding files and cases that pre-dated the July 2008 re-launch. For 2009/2010, the Centre will focus on making further progress in expanding its educational and outreach initiatives, while also improving its administrative and case resolution procedures to ensure a more timely response overall.

External Relationships

The Centre's new Communications and Education team will be instrumental in continuing progress made in events, training, and partnerships. Building on this year's success, the Advisors will make improvements to the Orient the Leader training sessions, launch and evaluate the Respect and Inclusivity Awareness Tutorial (RIAT) pilot project with student focus groups, and conduct other outreach initiatives to engage YU's student and non-student groups. This includes contacting YU community members who may not otherwise know of or approach the Centre for assistance, such as international students and contract staff, to make them aware of the Centre's role and mandate. There is also an important launch coming up, of YU's first Inclusion Day, which will take place in October 2009.

Finally, the Advisors will develop additional programming to augment the Centre's existing resources; more in-depth, issue-based sessions that will explore participant's own perspectives, experiences and real-life examples. Once again, collaboration with various community groups on this effort will be instrumental in promoting such courses and ensuring wide participation.

Internal Processes

Several administrative improvements are also planned for the upcoming year. Since the Centre's re-launch in July 2008, staff has worked steadily towards resolving all past outstanding cases and in reducing the average processing time for case files opened. The Centre has recently committed to a 6-8 week timeframe for successfully resolving any new cases opened, and has been able to fulfill this target for a vast majority of the complaints received over the past year. The goal for 2009/2010 is to facilitate more early case resolution through mediation and respectful dialogue, so that fewer cases actually reach the investigation or referral stages. Additionally, a new filing system has been developed, and new case files will have a digital component, for easier reference and record-keeping. This information will eventually be used to in a more modern Centre for Human Rights database, which will help provide more accurate information on trends related to cases, including complainant and respondent data, the nature of complaints, and what methods were used in resolution.

2008/2009 was the year the Centre really began to come into its own as a well-recognized institution among YU community members. This was achieved through the active, intentional efforts by the Centre to engage the university community on several levels, whether through awareness-raising events or topic-specific courses. The success of this approach has solidified the Centre's commitment to its new strategic direction moving forward: be more proactive, cultivate partnerships, and address issues that are relevant to the community. The 2009/2010 academic year will provide an opportunity for the Centre to fulfill these goals, and in the process, it is hoped that this will lead to the wider acceptance of Human Rights and social justice principles as mainstream among the YU community.

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If you believe you have experienced discrimination and/or harassment as prohibited by the Ontario Human Rights Code or University Policy, you can engage the Centre for Human Rights for assistance

