



**York University – Office of the Ombudsperson and Centre for Human Rights
Annual Report 2007/2008**

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 2007-2008 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. It is a free information and dispute resource for all, supported by staff members that are objective and trained in case management, dispute resolution and mediation.

A total of 185 files were opened between September 2007 and August 2008, of which 97 (52.4%) were human rights related complaints, 83 (44.9%) were Ombuds cases and an additional 5 files were enquiries that did not result in formal complaints. As of August 31, 2008, 25 complaint files remain open/active, while the remaining 160 were addressed and closed.

Throughout the 2007-2008 academic year, the Office continued to develop its capabilities and skills to improve service delivery to clients. Informal feedback mechanisms were introduced in an effort to increase accountability to those accessing the services and information provided by the Office. By better understanding the needs of individuals who file a complaint or enquiry, the Office of the Ombudsperson and Centre for Human Rights were able to address each case more effectively.

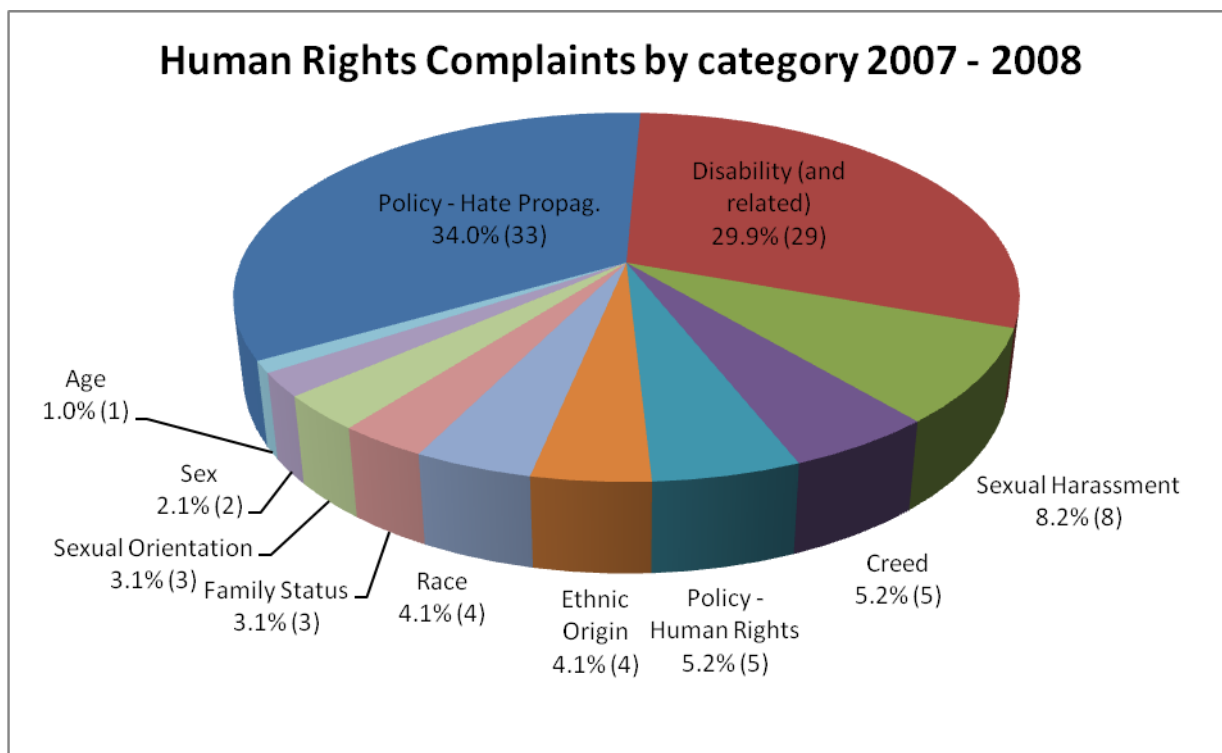
Strengthening relationships and cooperative efforts with other university groups was another important initiative for this year. The Office collaborated closely with the York University disability related offices to develop creative solutions to ongoing issues surrounding accessibility for students with disabilities. In August 2008, the Office also initiated its liaison/advisory role with the York Federation of Students and the Senate Sub-Committee on Equity, therein enhancing the social justice and human rights perspective of both.

Effective July 2008, the Office of the Ombudsperson and Centre for Human Rights were separated and re-launched independently. This move serves to increase each entity's credibility and ability to act independently, while bringing the human rights functions and focus to the forefront of the Centre for Human Rights' mandate. To this effect, the new Centre for Human Rights will place special emphasis on expanding its education and outreach mandate for the 2008-2009 academic year, through added skills workshops and events aimed at engaging all members of the York University community.

II. CASE FILE DATA

Human Rights Complaints

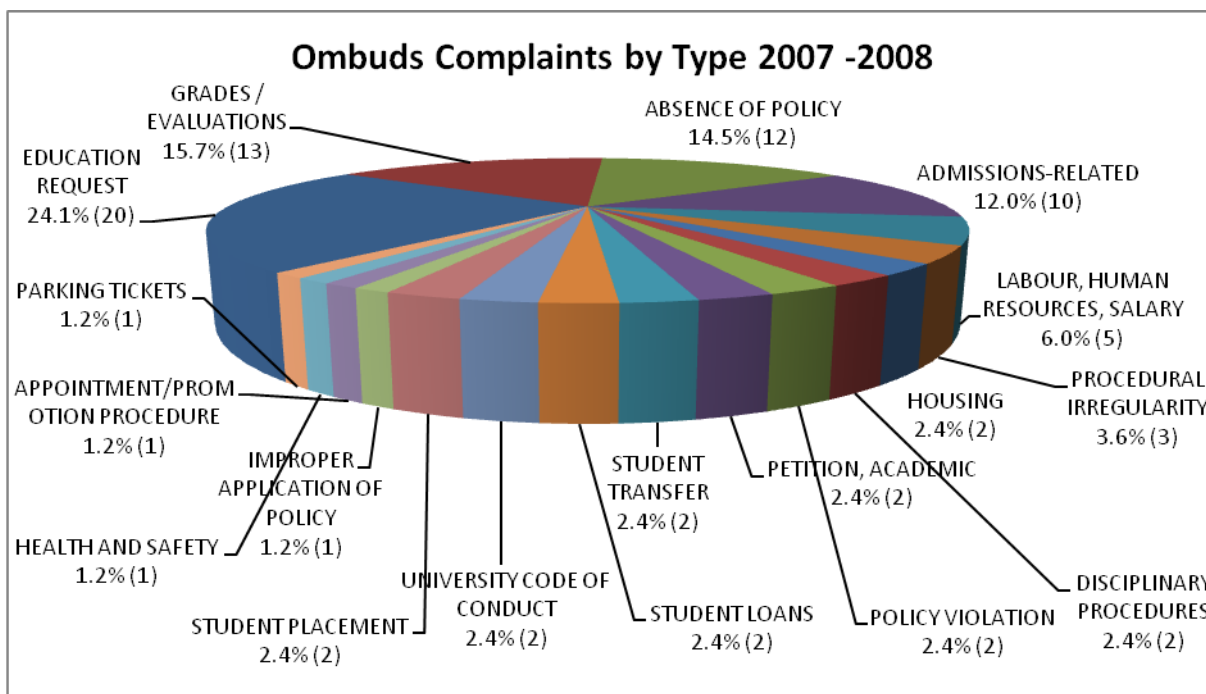
The top three areas of complaints were: disability (29.9%), race/ethnicity/creed with a combined total of over 13.4%, equal to the percentage of cases related to Sex and Sexual Harassment.



The 2007-2008 academic year saw a sharp increase in complaints relating to the University Policy Guide Concerning Hate Propaganda, with 33 files opened versus five complaints filed last year. Most of these complaints related to a newspaper publication in the summer of 2008 which challenged several students' notion of freedom of expression. The majority of these cases were resolved through a series of meetings, by way of shuttle mediation, and resulted in an apology being offered and a greater understanding of freedom of expression and how certain words/phrases/images can cause much distress and hurt feelings when used without consideration of their impact on the community as a whole. The trend of human rights complaints regarding disability issues continued this year, and gave good reason for the Office's ongoing work with Access York and other groups to improve accessibility for students with disabilities.

Ombuds Cases

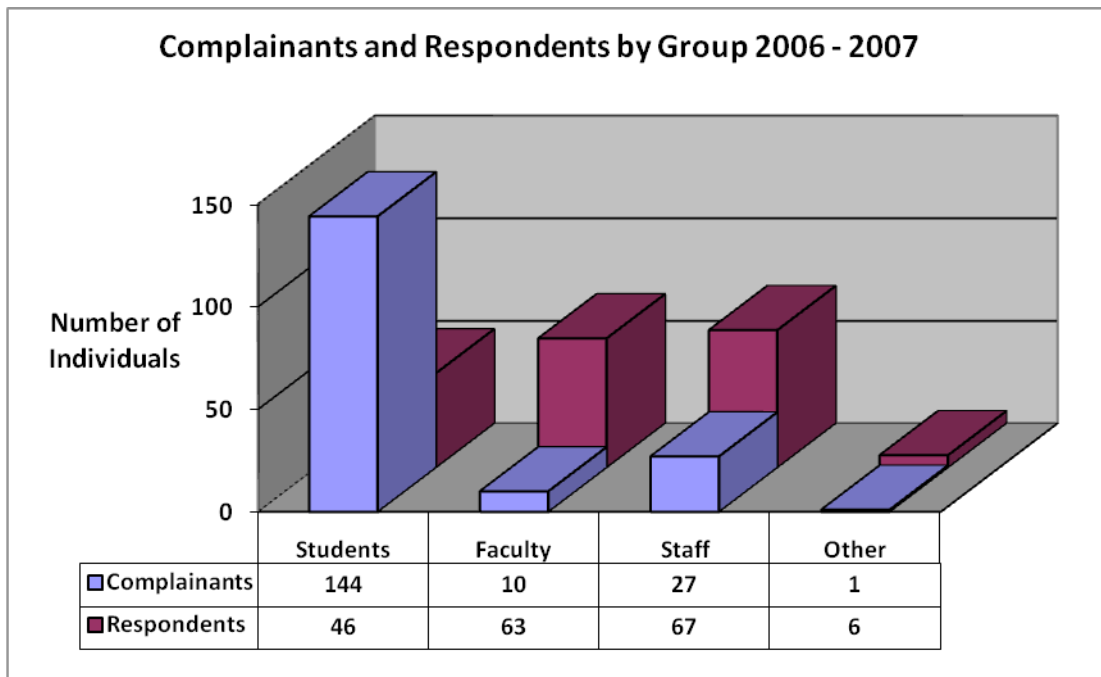
There were 83 files opened through the Office of the Ombudsperson over the past year, of which the majority (20) were requests for education. Other important areas of complaint included grades/evaluations (13 cases) and absence of policy (12 cases).



A continuing trend from last year is the growing proportion of education requests received by the Office as a result of cases filed. There were 20 requests, up from 16 in 2006-2007. This represents an increased demand from the York University community to raise awareness and pre-emptively resolve potential disputes through education and cooperation. The Office responded to requests from faculty, student groups, staff and management, to facilitate various workshops, training sessions and presentations over the course of the year. Another area of demand was in cases regarding grades, evaluations and testing; 13 files were opened across the two related categories. The Office served as a valuable resource to students looking to resolve issues of fairness and equity in their academic evaluations.

Overview of Complainants and Respondents

As in the previous year, the majority of complainants in Ombuds and Human Rights cases were students, representing 79% of the total, or 144 out of 182 cases. There was also an increase in the proportion of staff-driven complaints, which represented almost 15% of cases filed. It is important to recognize that the Office represents not only the interests of the academic groups at York University, but also those of smaller subsets of the greater university community.



III. BEYOND THE OFFICE

Outreach

The Office of the Ombudsperson and Centre for Human Rights received several requests for education over the 2007-2008 academic year, prompting the Office to organize informational and skill-building workshops for various York University community groups. These sessions covered a range of topics relating to anti-oppression, social justice, human rights, administrative fairness, equity and diversity. Educational interventions were tailored to meet participant learning objectives and goals, reinforcing the Office's commitment to providing client-centered programming. For example, workshops for teaching faculty included topics such as inclusive teaching practices, human rights in the classroom, and responding to hate speech, while student organizations learned about leadership and diversity, effective responses to bullying, harassment and discrimination. Below are some examples of this year's educational sessions.

Education Requests:

- **Conflict Resolution:** Instructor health and safety training for Faculty of Arts professors
- **Social Justice** training: skills workshop for SASSL Volunteers
- **Duty to Accommodate:** informational training sessions for Nursing department faculty/staff
- **Harassment Awareness Training in the Workplace:** workshop for CSBO and CUPE 1365 members
- **Diversity** training: awareness and skills-building workshop for various Residence Life Managers, Coordinators and DONs
- **Positive Space Workshops:** advertised through the Training and Development website, these mini-courses were held 3 times over the course of the year. Upon completion, participants received a Positive Space Resource Manual to reinforce lessons learned and to serve as a reference for further exploration of the topic.

Engagement and Awareness-raising:

- **Dec 6:** National Day of Remembrance and Action on Violence Against Women
- **Mar 8:** International Women's Day
- **Mar 21:** International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination
- **Jun 22-28:** Pride Week

Advanced Credit Experience (ACE) program:

Another key engagement initiative from last year saw the Office participating in the ongoing ACE program, which provides Grade 11 students with valuable job and university-level course experience. Through this program, students gained first-hand exposure into the world of human rights by being involved in the discussion of policies and practices relating to exclusion. The Office committed to creating a learning environment that encouraged the next generation of leaders to become aware of their rights and responsibilities and how these can impact others around them. The feedback from the students was very positive, and they expressed their gratitude for the knowledge and skills they had gained during their work experience at the Office.