

## Measuring the Ombuds Impact — an ACCUO Report

Submitted to the Executive of ACCUO, the Association of Canadian College and  
University Ombudspersons, by:

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### Preamble

The idea of being the social conscience of a college or university is central to the task of the academic ombudsperson. While other members of the campus environment, to varying degrees, have fairness as part of their overall purview, only the ombudsperson is charged with looking out for fairness tout court, in all aspects of institutional policy and practice.

Some of this fairness work is done through casework, while another portion is achieved through formal recommendations and committee work. Still more is done through the informal business of relationship building and interacting with the campus community.

Importantly, the ombuds' position as an impartial, one-step-removed member of the post-secondary community provides him or her with a unique vantage point on campus from which to spot upcoming trends and potential problem areas that may not be as easily or as quickly identified by other community members.

And while the ombuds' efforts can contribute to the overall success of a college or university, at the same time, the impact of the ombudsperson can be notoriously difficult to measure or even to outline with any degree of completeness.

Casework has its records, of course, and recommendations are written down, sometimes garnering formal responses from administration. But casework's piecemeal nature makes its overall institutional effect tough to qualify, while the translation of official recommendations into university-wide procedure and practice is itself difficult to track.

How, then, do we best gauge the impact of the academic ombudsperson?

In the autumn of 2016, in accordance with with Association of Canadian College and University Ombudspersons' (ACCUO's) goals of fostering an understanding of ombuds work and promoting the concept of the ombudsperson at Canadian post-secondaries, the ACCUO Executive approved a project to explore and portray in its various guises the work carried out by ombuds offices, with the aim of achieving some clarity on its impact on Canadian colleges and universities.

The project included a survey of the ACCUO membership as well as a summary and analysis of information collected from annual reports, terms of reference and various documents released by member offices. The following is a report on its findings.

## Part One — ACCUO Membership Survey

### Objective

The aim of the survey was to investigate how ombudspersons themselves view their impact at Canadian post-secondary institutions and to gather information on some of their chief accomplishments and activities.

### Method

Survey notices and questionnaires were emailed directly to ACCUO member offices on December 7, 2016, with a brief description of the questionnaire's purpose. Submissions were collected up until January 30, 2017. The email to the membership and English and French versions of the questionnaire are appended to this report as Appendix #1.

### Results

In total, 12 submissions were received, ten of which were from member universities and two from member colleges. A summary of the responses is appended to this report as Appendix #2.

The four questions eliciting the most substantive responses were questions 1, 2, 3 and 4, while the remaining questions 5 through 8 dealt more with employment and terms of reference for member offices. Below is some detail on questions 1 through 4.

(1) What are the top five success stories from your office over the past five years?

As would be expected, responses to this question varied considerably. Broadly, they fell into five different categories, listed below in a rough order of popularity:

1. Policy-related impacts — this was by far the largest category of impacts, with responses pointing to ombuds' efforts to usher in new policies or to change existing ones on a range of topics, from academic and discipline regulations to discrimination and human rights policy
2. Casework — a number of offices saw their daily work helping to resolve student concerns as their major contribution
3. Communication-related impacts — such as the development of conflict resolution programs and nurturing relationships on campus
4. Mental health and student services impacts — such as helping to develop a mental health awareness campaign or improving the student experience (for student groups, graduate students or international students, for example)
5. Education-related impacts — through workshops on fairness, equity and diversity, for example, or orientation sessions on the work carried out by the ombudsperson

Some example responses:

- “We initiated a discussion about the university withdrawal under extenuating circumstances policy and how it handles students with mental health concerns. The university is open to changing the processes and will be forming a committee to redevelop.”
- “We recommended that a central sign language interpretation service be put in place to ensure proper communication between university officials and students who have hearing handicap. The University agreed and the central service is now available.”

(2) What are the top five official recommendations from your office over the past five years?

Responses fell into three main categories, below in a rough ordering of popularity:

1. Policy, Academic: featured most heavily, with an emphasis on regulatory changes that were initiated by ombuds offices and aimed at achieving procedural fairness, through focusing on regulatory clarity, expediency, consistency and transparency
2. Policy, Institutional: next highest in representation, with emphasis on instituting new policies and strategies surrounding topics such as accommodation (disability, religious and minority accommodation), mental health, students in distress, equity and diversity
3. Institutional practices: recommendations to develop new working groups, tasks forces and strategies on a variety of topics (students in distress, mental health, academic integrity, restorative justice, sexual violence, gender accommodation, conflict management)

Some example responses:

- “Shorter response times to appeals – Most associate deans are responding much faster than they did five years ago”
- “Adoption of a faculty policy on adaptive measures for persons with disabilities”
- “Recommendation to Dean of Students and Students’ Union to initiate a Restorative Practices Initiative to resolve student group conflicts”

(3) What are two or three committees upon which your office has had the greatest impact?

The sheer range of committees and working groups with which ombuds offices are involved was the take-away from this question. Here are some of the main categories of responses, again, in rough order of popularity.

- Academic or Code of Conduct Committees: e.g., the ombuds highlighted procedural fairness and diversity or added a voice on restorative justice to these committees
- Accommodation Committees: e.g., on religious accommodation, on mental health, Indigenous issues or Safe Campus

- Sexual Violence Committees: e.g., the ombuds added concerns for the rights of the accused
- Mental Health Committees: e.g., the ombuds added fairness to the creation of a framework on mental health
- Miscellaneous Committees: e.g., on academic advising, on new departmental chairs

(4) How has your office contributed to the advancement of human rights, equality and diversity at your institution over the past five years?

Responses focused on reviews and reports conducted and written by ombuds. Below are some of the highlights:

- co-authored an equity and diversity inclusion report and sat on the Provost's Advisory Committee on Equity and Diversity
- conducted a diversity review of the School of Nursing
- conducted a review of the institution's accommodation policy
- worked in concert with the institution's Diversity and Equity office
- coordinated a campus mental health conference
- delivered recommendations on breastfeeding policy

The rest of the survey, questions 5 through 9, asked respondents to provide further information on the structure of members offices (employment numbers and details from their terms of reference, e.g.), with question 9 left open for written comments, of which four of 12 respondents provided comments (see the Appendix #2 for these written comments).

## Discussion of the Survey Results

Although there are a variety of ways to interpret the results, one useful approach starts with the observation that ombuds see their impact to be occurring on two main levels: the institutional and the personal/individual.

Concerning the institutional level, overwhelmingly, respondents reported that their main impact on campus has been within the domain of policy development. Through committee work, official recommendations and in reviews and reports, implementing fairness-based changes to academic and institutional policy was the most-often reported achievement and, generally, was seen to be the central product of ombuds' efforts.

As an example, six out of ten responses to question 1 on the topic of their office's greatest successes referred to academic policy changes, while four out of ten responses to the same question referred to institutional policy changes on issues such as accommodation and mental health.

Yet, respondents also emphasized the importance of their work on the individual level, as well, represented by case work and day-to-day interactions with community members. This work can also reverberate through to the broader institution level, of course, but its direct impact on students and community members (by way of helping them resolve concerns, for example) is clearly viewed by ombuds as extremely important.

One ombuds wrote, for example, “Students come to my office after they’ve exhausted other options. The reality is that I spend a lot of my time advising students on how to proceed.”

Another stated, “It is a relatively large university and I have found that many students feel lost and confused and appreciate that there is a space they can sit, explain their situation and have a confidential conversation.”

Doing their work at different levels typically has ombuds focusing on different aspects of the idea of fairness itself. In describing their work advocating for fairness at an institutional level, for example, ombuds often spoke of how they helped to inject more clarity, consistency and transparency into institutional policies and practices.

On the individual level, ombuds often described their work in terms of helping to empower students to make informed decisions, another aspect of the concept of fairness.

Ombuds also see their human rights work to be central to their task, and when asked about their office’s successes, referred often to their accomplishments on that front. This speaks to yet another element to the concept of fairness, viz., work advancing institutional values such as equality and diversity. To this facet, one ombuds wrote, “Our office sees fairness as a multi-dimensional construct that is inextricably linked to culture, equity and inclusion.”

Finally, on the issue of capacities and resources available to member offices, it should be noted that the survey results depicted a wide range of configurations. Almost half (five of twelve) of offices were found to consist of just one ombudsperson working either full-time or part-time. And while the size of ombuds office generally reflected the size of the institution (for example, smaller institutions were more likely to have just one part-time or full-time ombudsperson), this was not always the case. Some offices serving larger institutions, it seems, are having to cope with fewer resources to get the job done. This apparent lack of time and resources was commented upon by two of twelve respondents as limiting the scope of their work.

## Part Two — Annual Reports from Member Offices

In order to get a further sense of the impact of ombuds offices, we reviewed respective offices’ annual reports, going back five years from the present, to gather information on office recommendations and institutional responses to those recommendations.

## (1) Some statistics on ombuds annual reports

- Number of member offices with available annual reports: 24/33
- Number of offices that have filed reports every year for the past five years (or since the establishment of the office if less than five years ago): 16/33
- Number of offices that make formal recommendations in their annual reports: 18/33
- Number of offices that provide information in their annual reports on institutional follow-up to previous recommendations: 12/33

## (2) Topics covered in formal recommendations

As one would expect, the range of issues and topics addressed through formal recommendations is vast, essentially covering the whole of academic and campus activity from admissions policies to disciplinary regulations, from gender equality to bullying in the classroom and mental health on campus. Below is a look at four common themes along with a case example for each, describing how the issue was addressed by the ombuds recommendation and how the institution responded to the recommendation.

### 1. Academic integrity and plagiarism

Typical formulations:

- pointing out academic discipline procedures that are either unfair or unclear
- urging academic institutions to develop more robust strategies for addressing the problem of academic integrity offences

Sample case: Fanshawe College

The ombudsperson observed that in the interest of fairness, all members of the university community need to be well-informed about organizational values and institutional policies on academic integrity. The ombudsperson recommendation was:

- “To create an Academic Integrity educational course and an evaluation method to be electronically accessible to all college community members that outlines to the learner what is the college’s definition of academic integrity, how students may adhere to academic integrity principles, what the college considers academic violation, and the consequences of each offence.”

In response, the college created an Academic Integrity educational module available online for use by college community members. The institution’s academic integrity policy was revised to include a provision whereby completion of the module may form part of a penalty for committing an academic offence.

### 2. Work placement programs, internships and study abroad programs:

Typical formulations:

- calling for more clarity, transparency and fairness in the policies and practices surrounding practicums, work placements and study programs at other institutions

Sample case: École Polytechnique

In its 2014/15 report, the ombudsperson noted that discrepancies between evaluation requirements and standards at other institutions versus those at École Polytechnique were affecting the fair assessment of engineering students' work programs. The ombudsperson recommended:

- “Nous recommandons que les instances concernées de Polytechnique Montréal définissent des outils et des pratiques visant à s’assurer que, dans leur encadrement d’étudiants réalisant un projet intégrateur à l’étranger, les professeurs soient en mesure de prévenir et de gérer les écarts sur le plan de l’évaluation, compte tenu qu’il est de leur responsabilité d’évaluer les projets en fonction des normes édictées par le BCAPG (Bureau canadien d’agrément des programmes de génie).”
- (English): “We recommend that the relevant bodies of Polytechnique Montréal define tools and practices to ensure that teachers, in their supervision of students carrying out an integrating project abroad, are able to prevent and manage discrepancies in evaluation plans, given that it is their responsibility to evaluate projects against the standards set by the Canadian Engineering Accreditation Board.”

In response, the administration modified the Integrative Project form completed by students prior to departure to the host institution and encouraged active discussion between students and their co-director on project expectations and evaluation prior to departure.

### 3. Provision of student services

Typical formulations:

- pointing to a need for greater fairness, civility and care in dealing with student concerns
- calling for workshops and staff training in developing skills in communication skills and conflict resolution

Sample case: Concordia University

In its 2012/2013 annual report, the ombudsperson observed of a “common thread” throughout the year’s casework, which pertained to a difficulty on the part of university community members in delivering difficult or unfavourable news to students but also to supervisors, contract employees or even alumni. In response, the ombudsperson recommended:

- “The academic sector and the human resource sector assess the circumstances in which their members could be better equipped to give difficult news in the context of their work responsibilities.”
- “Based on these more specific assessments by sector, internal or external resources be identified to assist university members in becoming more proficient and comfortable in giving difficult news.”

In response, Human Resources at the university instituted new tools and workshops as part of its staff Learning and Development Calendar, including workshops for academic managers on handling difficult situations with employees and online resources on personal psychology.

#### 4. Graduate student supervision

Typical formulations:

- pointing out that the problem of grad student/supervisor conflict is substantial and should be addressed (through orientation sessions for graduate students and/or workshops and training for grad supervisors and department heads)

Sample case: Ryerson University

In its 2011/2012 annual report, the ombudsperson recognized an increase over the previous year in the number of graduate students raising concerns, most often in relation to student/supervisor relations, and that this uptick was markedly greater than the increase in graduate student enrolment. Stating a need for greater recognition of the problem and, particularly, a need for more and better conflict resolution training and skills development within that milieu, the ombudsman made the following recommendations:

- That Graduate Program Directors receive “specialized training and support on how to address and when appropriate, manage destructive conflict between graduate students and their academic supervisors.”
- That mandatory grad project/grad supervision orientation sessions be provided to graduate students
- So as to avoid lengthy disputes, that the university establish a practice whereby student and supervisor can negotiate a “no fault divorce,” allowing all parties to go forward without recrimination or retribution.

In response, the Dean of Graduate Studies praised the recommendations and the university instituted a half-day workshop on “Conflict Resolution Styles and Effective Conflict Resolution” offered to Grad Program Directors as well as workshops on how to be an effective supervisor and other professional development and enrichment activities.

#### (3) Some further statistics

Below are some further statistics related to the ombudsperson's institutional impact, with the data coming from both annual reports and terms of reference from ACCUO member offices. All information was retrieved online over the course of the month of March, 2017.

(a) Cases per year (based on data from 22 of 33 member offices over the past five years):

- Average caseload: 406 cases per year
- 9 offices (41%) dealt with less than 350 cases per year
- 8 offices (36%) dealt with between 350 and 450 cases per year
- 5 offices (23%) dealt with over 450 cases per year

(b) Personnel (based on information from the terms of reference from 21 of 33 member offices):

- 8 of 21 offices (57%) are composed of one full-time ombudsperson
- 4 of 21 offices (20%) are composed of one part-time ombudsperson
- 9 of 21 offices (42%) are composed of multiple people carrying out ombuds duties

(c) Establishment date (based on records from 30 of 33 ACCUO member offices):

pre-1970: 1 (3%)  
1970 - 1980: 9 (30%)  
1980 - 1990: 6 (20%)  
1990 - 2000: 8 (27%)  
2000 - 2010: 2 (7%)  
later than 2010: 3 (10%)

## Comments on Annual Reports

The annual reports from the various ombuds offices say much about the passion and commitment that academic ombudspersons bring to their work, exemplified by an often dogged determination to change the institution for the better despite apparent obstacles and difficulties.

The work is multi-levelled and requires a delicate yet firm hand, as evidenced by the tone and delivery of many of the recommendations, which in being critical of certain practices and policies (singling out on occasion particular faculties or services within the institution, for example) are often found to express empathy and be constructive and supportive, at the same time.

Yet although these traits are plain to see within the annual reports, what's often not so plain is how well-received the ombuds' recommendations were and whether or not the substance of particular recommendations found its way into institutional policy and practice. As mentioned, only 12 of 33 member offices (36 per cent) include in their annual reports a follow-up describing institutional responses to past recommendations.

There is likely some justification for a lack of emphasis on institutional follow up. As an impartial observer to the institution, the ombudsperson may see his or her job as having more to do with the crafting of recommendations and little to do with the follow-through, as that, some would say, is more under the administration's purview.

Yet at the same time, in order to clearly demonstrate the role and impact of an ombudsperson, it's obvious that an account of recommendations made is not enough: some indication of how well-received and implemented those recommendations were is also essential.

Thus, as one suggestion from this report itself, it can be said that although clearly a time consuming, multi-year process, keeping good track of institutional responses should be, it seems, considered vital to depicting with any degree of fullness the impact ombuds offices have on their academic institutions.

### Part Three - Final comments and suggestions for future research

The ombuds impact is both great and small. The small victories come from activities such as student coaching, relationship building and helping to solve the day-to-day problems that crop up on campus, while the larger ones come in the form of changes to policy and gradual shifts in practices and mindsets within the academic institution.

In highlighting some aspects of ombuds work, hopefully this report also points to some of the challenges faced by the ombudsperson. How to elicit administrative responses to ombuds recommendations? What sorts of capacities and powers of influence does an ombudsperson need at his or her command in order to effect change at an institutional level? How can the ombuds, as institutional bellwether, gain the ear of administration and build persuasive power, thus lending more traction to their recommendations?

None of these questions have easy answers, of course. In one sense, this report suggests that the issue of how impactful an ombuds office is depends in part on how well its activities and successes are documented, for an office that clearly articulates the ways it affects institutional functioning — by speaking the various levels of its impact, for instance, or the different guises of fairness that it pursues or the types of recommendations it makes and how well they are received — is one that is more likely to gain administrative support.

But further, it's clear that ACCUO, as an association of ombuds, has a wealth of experience to draw upon to help fill in some of the details on the challenges of the office. Thus, on the topic of continuing research into the role and impact of the academic ombuds, it can be suggested that future work draw further upon the membership (perhaps through another survey and/or a focus group) to investigate effective strategies and helpful practices for developing an impactful (or more impactful) ombuds office.

## Acknowledgements

This report was written by Jayson MacLean and Lucie Allaire with special thanks to ACCUO members for their participation and to the ACCUO Executive for their support.

Appendix #1 - Email to ACCUO membership and Questionnaire (English and French versions)

**Contribution of Ombudspersons on Campus\_ questionnaire -contribution des ombudsmans-**

**Lucie Allaire** <Lucie.Allaire@uottawa.ca> Wed, Dec 7, 2016 at 3:36 PM To: University and College Ombudspersons in Canada/Ombudsmans universitaires et coll?giaux du Canada <ACCUO@listes.ulaval.ca>  
Cc: Jayson MacLean <jaysonmaclean@gmail.com>

Dear colleague, Chers collègues,

Further to my previous email announcing our project to document the contribution of Ombudspersons on campuses across the country, you will find enclosed the questionnaire that we would ask you to complete and return to Jayson Maclean by January 10. It is very important that we obtain the contribution of everyone so that we can produce a comprehensive report. We have proposed to present the result of our research at the FCO-ACCUO conference next May and also plan to use the information we will have gathered to promote the value of our offices in higher education in Canada. To our knowledge this has not been done, at least in the last while.

We will be accessing information directly from your website, but in addition we do need your input by way of this questionnaire. It should take you no more than one hour maximum to do so.

Thank you very much for your help. Should you have any questions, please don't hesitate to contact me directly.

*Comme suite à mon courriel précédent, vous trouverez ci-joint un questionnaire que nous vous demandons de bien vouloir remplir et retourner à Jayson Maclean avant le 10 janvier 2017. Il est très important pour nous d'obtenir la contribution de tous nos bureaux membres afin que nous puissions présenter un rapport complet. Nous envisageons présenter les résultats de notre recherche à la conférence FCO-ACCUO en mai prochain et aussi de nous servir de l'information pour promouvoir le rôle des ombudsmans dans les institutions d'enseignement supérieur au Canada. Nous croyons que c'est la première fois qu'une telle recherche est effectuée, du moins dans les dernières années. Nous obtiendrons directement de l'information de vos sites internet, mais en plus, les renseignements que vous nous fournirez grâce à ce questionnaire nous seront très précieux. Tout au plus, vous prendrez un maximum d'une heure pour le compléter.*

*Nous vous remercions très sincèrement de votre précieuse contribution. Si vous avez des questions, n'hésitez surtout pas à communiquer directement avec moi.*

*Lucie*

Lucie Allaire

Ombudsman

UCU307

613-562-5800 poste 6599 [www.uottawa.ca/ombudsman](http://www.uottawa.ca/ombudsman)

### ACCUO Questionnaire - English Version

The ACCUO Executive is working on a report which will detail the ways in which ACCUO member offices are contributing to the success of colleges and universities across the country.

Your responses to the following questions will help us in conducting our review and preparing our report.

1. Looking back over the past five years, what would you judge to be your office's top five success stories? These could include:
  - recommendations made
  - changes to institutional policy that your office helped bring forth
  - changes to institutional culture that your office helped bring forth
  - any other work by your office that has produced positive, tangible results
2. Again, looking back on the past five years, please list five official recommendations made by your office that you feel have been the most important. Up to this point, what have been the practical consequences of each at your institution? (Responses to this question may overlap with those from the previous one.)
3. Please list two or three committees and/or working groups upon which your office has had the biggest recent impact and please take a couple of sentences to describe that impact.
4. Please describe how over the past five years your office has contributed to the advancement of human rights, equality and diversity at your institution. (Again, you may refer to recommendations, policy changes, and so on that formed parts of your responses to previous questions.)

5. Please provide directions and/or links to where we might find publicized information (e.g., annual reports) on your office's activities over the past five years.
6. How many people does your office employ and in what capacity?
7. Please describe your office's reporting structure and funding structure (or provide a link to your office's terms of reference)
8. Is there an organizational body at your institution that provides regular appraisals of your office? If so, please provide a link to any publicly available reports by that body.
9. Any other comments:

Please submit your responses by January 10, 2017 to Jayson MacLean at [jaysonmaclean@gmail.com](mailto:jaysonmaclean@gmail.com) with "Questionnaire Responses" in the subject heading.

If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact Lucie Allaire at [lucie.allaire@uottawa.ca](mailto:lucie.allaire@uottawa.ca).

#### Questionnaire de l'AOUCC – Version Française

L'exécutif de l'ACCUCO prépare un rapport sur les façons dont les bureaux membres de l'ACCUCO contribuent au succès des collèges et des universités à travers le pays.

Vos réponses aux questions suivantes nous aideront à mener à bien notre recherche et à rédiger notre rapport.

1. En posant votre regard sur les derniers cinq ans, quelles seraient pour vous les cinq meilleures réussites de votre bureau? Celles-ci pourraient inclure soit des recommandations que vous avez faites,  
ou des changements apportés aux politiques de votre institution,  
ou des changements apportés à la culture institutionnelle,  
ou encore tout autre travail qui a donné des résultats positifs et tangibles.
2. Au cours des cinq dernières années, veuillez énumérer les cinq plus importantes recommandations officielles que vous avez faites et indiquer l'impact qu'elles ont eu à ce jour. (La réponse à cette question peut chevaucher la précédente)
3. Veuillez nous indiquer, le cas échéant, deux ou trois comités et / ou groupes de travail sur lesquels vous avez travaillé et décrire en quelques lignes, l'impact de votre participation.

4. Veuillez décrire comment, au cours des cinq dernières années, votre bureau a contribué à l'avancement des droits de la personne, de l'égalité et de la diversité dans votre institution. (Encore une fois, vous pouvez vous référer à des recommandations, des changements de politiques, et ainsi de suite qui ont fait partie de vos réponses aux questions précédentes).
5. Veuillez nous donner les liens aux pages où nous pourrions trouver des rapports publiés par votre bureau au cours des cinq dernières années (par exemple, rapports annuels ou rapports spéciaux).
6. Combien de personnes travaillent dans votre bureau ? à quel titre ?
7. Pourriez-vous décrire votre lien hiérarchique, et les méthodes de financement de votre bureau (ou fournir le lien au document décrivant votre mandat)
8. Y a-t-il eu une évaluation formelle de votre bureau par un service de votre institution ou autre qui a publié un rapport ? si oui, précisez le lien où nous pourrions le trouver.
9. Autres commentaires

Veuillez nous envoyer vos réponses avant le 10 janvier 2017 à Jayson MacLean à [jaysonmaclean@gmail.com](mailto:jaysonmaclean@gmail.com) avec «Réponses aux questionnaires» dans la rubrique du sujet.

Si vous avez des questions n'hésitez pas à communiquer avec Lucie Allaire à [lucie.allaire@uottawa.ca](mailto:lucie.allaire@uottawa.ca) ou au 613-562-5800 poste 6599.

## Appendix #2 — Summary of ACCUO Questionnaire responses

NB: Responses to Q1 - Q3 are grouped according to theme, with similar responses from respondents indicated as multiples (“x2,” e.g.)

Q1. “Looking back over the past five years, what would you judge to be your office’s top five success stories?”

Response rate: 10 of 12 respondents answered this question

Communication: education: conflict resolution pgm x2

Comm: relationship development x5

Comm: annual advising conference x2

Comm: expanding the reach of omb office

Education: students self-empowerment/advocacy x3

Ed: fairness x3

Ed: Ombuds office and role and value x2

Ed: equity, diversity

Policy: academic regs, RTW

Policy: conflict resolution

Policy: discipline

Policy: appeals x4

Policy: discrimination and HR

Policy: equity and procedural fairness

Policy: accommodation

Mental Health: awareness campaign

MH: regulations

Case work: x5

Research: bullying

Accommodation: expansion of services

Misc.: Improving grad student supervision practices

Misc.: Improving handling of international students

Misc.: Interventions

Breakdown of Q1 Responses:

6 of 10 respondents: Policy, Academic (e.g., playing a role in achieving fairness-based changes to academic policy on topics such as require to withdraw, academic fraud and academic appeals)

4 of 10 respondents: Policy, Institutional (e.g., playing a role in achieving fairness-based changes to institutional regulations concerning topics such as accommodation for mental and physical disabilities, international students, students in distress)

4 of 10 respondents: Case work (e.g., day-to-day informal resolution of individual student issues)

4 of 10 respondents: Relationship building (e.g., between ombuds office and various institutional offices and services)

3 of 10 respondents: Education (e.g., setting up workshops, conferences, coaching sessions on topics like conflict resolution and student advising)

3 of 10 respondents: Promoting fairness (e.g., informal and generalized action in pursuit of fairness with respect to institution's structure and strategic goals)

2 of 10 respondents: Ombuds office development (e.g., outreach, improvement of service delivery)

Q2. "Again, looking back on the past five years, please list five official recommendations made by your office that you feel have been the most important. Up to this point, what have been the practical consequences of each at your institution?"

Response rate: 9 of 12 respondents answered this question

Program Development: developed a Guide for students in distress

Pgm Dvlpmt: developed a Guide for academic integrity

Pgm Dvlpmt: created a new working group on conflict management

Pgm Dvlpmt: created a new program for conflict resolution for grad students and for student groups (restorative justice-based)

Code of Conduct: emphasized educational component to sanctioning

Code of Conduct: emphasized restorative element in sanctioning

Code of Conduct: created a scholastic offences office (not taken up)

Academic Regulations: clarity and transparency in decision-making

Academic Regulations: clarity on syllabi, re: student resources

Academic Regulations: procedural fairness

Academic Regulations: faster response time to appeals

Academic Regulations: consistency across faculties, re. academic appeals (good description of practical consequences)

Academic Regulations: procedural fairness in appeals

Discrimination and Harassment Policy: various recommendations

Discrimination and Harassment Policy: religious accommodations

Discrimination and Harassment Policy: breastfeeding policy

Sexual Violence Policy: various recommendations

Equity and Diversity Policy: various recommendations

General Recommendations: recognition of diversity in policy-making (re: international students)

General Recommendations: getting rid of compulsory attendance/grades including attendance component

Student Services: international student mentoring and safe campus (recomm accepted)

Q3. "Please list two or three committees and/or working groups upon which your office has had the biggest recent impact and please take a couple of sentences to describe that impact."

Response rate: 10 of 12 respondents answered this question

Academic or Code of Conduct: highlighted procedural fairness and diversity x4

Academic or Code of Conduct: added voice on restorative and educational sanctioning

Academic or Code of Conduct: academic policy and programs

Academic or Code of Conduct: restorative justice

Academic or Code of Conduct: Accessibility x2

Academic or Code of Conduct: Faculty of Science academic policy

Academic or Code of Conduct: added right to confidentiality and decision-making  
Accommodation: religious x2  
Accommodation: mental health  
Accommodation: trauma recognition  
Accommodation: Safe Campus  
Accommodation: Indigenous  
Accommodation: learning  
Accommodation: strategic initiatives  
Accommodation: Equity and Diversity  
Accommodation: added fairness perspective  
Accommodation: issues related to mental health  
Accommodation: breastfeeding policy  
Sexual Violence: updated and expanded policy  
Sexual Violence: added concerns for rights of the accused  
Mental Health: added fairness to creation of Framework  
Mental Health: Faculty training program  
Misc: academic advising, calling for greater collaboration between units, fairness  
Misc: new chairs  
Misc: on-line education

Q4. "Please describe how over the past five years your office has contributed to the advancement of human rights, equality and diversity at your institution."

Response rate: 11 of 12 respondents answered this question

1. none (too early in the ombudsperson's tenure)
2. general greater awareness of discrimination, bias and inequality
3. none (too early)
4. sits on Provost's Advisory Ctte on Equity and Diversity, co-authored equity and diversity inclusion report, co-chair Japanese Tributes Ctte, member of Race & Leadership Working Group, built strong relationship with First Nations in support of Aboriginal Strategy
5. conducted diversity review of School of Nursing, produced Issue Paper on handling complaints (HR, most likely), accommodation recommendations on physical handicaps
6. work with Equity and HR office, review of accommodation policy
7. referring students to Diversity and Equity office
8. mental health accommodations
9. hosted Student Advisor's conference on mental health, Restorative Practices Initiative, cyberbullying work with Office of Safe Disclosure, helped develop guide for students on HR and Duty to Accommodate policy
10. none specifically
11. breastfeeding policy, religious accommodation, accommodation for physical handicaps, accommodations for pregnant students

Q5. "Please provide directions and/or links to where we might find publicized information (e.g., annual reports) on your office's activities over the past five years."

(Directions provided by all respondents.)

Q6. "How many people does your office employ and in what capacity?"

1. one full, no staff
2. one part-time
3. one full, shared support staff
4. two full
5. two full
6. two full
7. one full
8. one full, one part-time, one part-time support staff
9. five full time, one part-time
10. part-time (12 hrs)
11. one part time ombuds, one full-time assistant and one part-time support staff
12. one full, one part-time, one full support staff

Breakdown:

one part time: 2

one part time plus assistant: 1

one full time: 3

one full and one part-time: 2

two full: 3

five full and one part-time: 1

Q7. "Please describe your office's reporting structure and funding structure (or provide a link to your office's terms of reference)."

1. R: VP Finance and Admin, FS: Uni, Grad student Society, Undergrad Society, yes ToR link
2. R: President of the college and Pres of SU, no link
3. R: Board of Directors, no link
4. R: President of Uni, FS: Uni and SU, yes ToR
5. R: advisory ctte, FS: half Uni, half SU, yes ToR
6. R: advisory ctte, FS: half Uni, half SU, yes ToR
7. R: Vice Provost Student Exp, FS: Uni, no link
8. link
9. R: Assoc Dean of Students, FS: Uni, no link
10. R: President of college, yes ToR
11. link
12. R: Board of Directors, no link

Q8. "Is there an organizational body at your institution that provides regular appraisals of your office? If so, please provide a link to any publicly available reports by that body."

1. none
2. by President's office, no public reports
3. none
4. Advisory Ctte have the power (but aren't doing them)
5. Advisory Ctte (but aren't doing them)

6. no
7. no
8. yes, link provided for reports
9. not the office as a whole (but PrepD's for indiv employees)
10. no
11. no
12. no

Q9. "Any other comments:"

1. Much of the work of the Ombuds Office involves assisting students one-on-one with issues such as program complaints, graduate/supervisor conflict, and appeals (grades, withdrawals under extenuating circumstances, academic dishonesty, etc.). I guide students through the process of understanding and evaluating their options, help them understand applicable policies, make referrals, and provide feedback on appeal documents. It is a relatively large university and I have found that many students feel lost and confused and appreciate that there is a space they can sit, explain their situation, and have a confidential conversation.
2. none
3. none
4. none
5. I think that the content of the annual reports, particularly the fifth once that recap the prior year's reports, is the best source of information on impact and area of interventions. The aspect of our work that would not be covered in the recommendations sections, is the work we do with individual persons who come to us for assistance, information; we very often educate, coach, inform and refer to the appropriate sources. And we intervene before all processes are completed in situations where there is a sense of urgency: as an example: I intervened to assist 3 International masters students in an academic fraud process that was fraught with serious deficiencies resulting in significant fairness issues; it was very important to handle this exceptionally in consideration of the impact on the students with renewal of visas, time and money to complete their program, etc....
6. none
7. none
8. none
9. Should note the Adoption of our Standards of Practice at the ACCUO Annual Conference at the University of Alberta – 2012 – "a "milestone" for the organization and Canadian post-secondary ombudspersons" (quote of then President Kristen Robillard, ACCUO). Also note the "Fairness is Everyone's Concern: A Sampling of Practices and Resources on Cultivating Fairness From Your Ombuds Community", May 2015 for the FCO/ACCUO Annual Conference in Vancouver, BC Celebrating the 50th Anniversary of Ombuds in Canada
10. I would like to note that I have been contacted in past years by individuals at three other Ontario Colleges seeking information on how the Ombuds Office works at my institution. I did recommend they go to the ACCUO Website to review the excellent information on this topic. I also suggested that they needed the senior administration at their institution to be supportive to the relevance of having an Ombuds Office at their institution. Hopefully your completed report will provide supported information that may help future implementation of Ombuds Office services at more post-secondary institutions.
11. none
12. none

