



## ACCUO Bulletin – November 2022



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### President's Message - Carolyn Brendon

I would first like to thank Emma Thacker for her contributions to ACCUO/AUOCC, including as Secretary and President, and wish her all the best as she takes on new challenges. I am honoured and grateful to the members of the Executive for placing their trust in me to shepherd ACCUO/AUOCC during this next phase of our organization's journey. I have been a member of ACCUO/AUOCC since joining the Higher Education Ombuds community in 2001. I have served on the ACCUO/AUOCC Executive in recent years and am currently a member of the Board of Directors for the Forum of Canadian Ombudsman.

My vision as President is to continue the important work the organization has been undertaking including strengthening opportunities for networking and professional development for our members, maintaining and fostering relationships with our national and international sister organizations, and enhancing the stature and understanding of the role of Ombuds in Higher Education.

As you know, ACCUO/AUOCC hosted a joint hybrid conference with FCO in October of this year: "Together Again: Strengthening Ombuds Practice through Connectedness and Inclusion." Jennifer Meister and I served on the conference organizing committee, and Jennifer organized a wonderful and well-attended ACCUO/AUOCC networking dinner on the evening before the conference.

ACCUO/AUOCC members attended and participated in the conference in large numbers. Longtime member, Shirley Nakata, presented the first general session of the conference titled: "Stop Saying We're Neutral" that became the theoretical touchstone for the conference, as it was frequently referred to by other speakers and conference goers; Jennifer Meister delivered a personal and moving land acknowledgement that keynote speaker and Indspire CEO, Mike DeGagne, said was one of the best land acknowledgements he has heard; and Julie Boncompain participated on the engaging and provocative closing panel on the future of Ombudsing.

In addition, Julie Boncompain, Brent Epperson, Maureen Helt, Lavonne Hood, Shirley Nakata, Heather McGhee Peggs and Natalie Sharpe participated in concurrent sessions, as did our international colleagues, Jorge Pereira and Anna-Katharina Rothwangle.

Finally, I would like to thank all the volunteers who devote countless hours and energy to ACCUO/AUOCC, from committee work to translations and everything in between. You are what makes this organization so special!!



## ACCUO - Time to Get Involved! Committee Membership for 2022 – 2023

Much of the work that ACCUO/AOUCC does is implemented by committee members. Please give some thought to a committee you could participate in. Many hands make light work!

### **Professional Development Committee**

ACCUO is excited to announce the creation of a Professional Development Committee which will be focused on ways in which we, as an organization, can facilitate knowledge sharing and professional development amongst our membership. We have a few members from Ontario and Alberta and are looking for additional members from the west and the east, including at least two francophone members.

*Please contact Maureen Helt, Toronto Metropolitan University if interested at [maureen.helt@ryerson.ca](mailto:maureen.helt@ryerson.ca)*

### **Communications Committee**

The Communications Committee promotes ACCUO/AOUCC through social media and the quarterly newsletter. An important initiative undertaken by the Communications Committee last year was a letter writing campaign, encouraging institutions without Ombuds to introduce one.

*More information: Remonia Stoddart-Morrison, University of Alberta, [gradomb2@ualberta.ca](mailto:gradomb2@ualberta.ca)*

### **Equity, Diversity and Inclusion Committee**

This committee works to help members understand EDI and strengthen the EDI focus of our Ombuds practices. The Committee has conducted a survey and is planning professional development events discussing the role of Ombuds in EDI on our campuses.

*More information: Annette O'Hara, University of Victoria, [ombuddy@uvic.ca](mailto:ombuddy@uvic.ca)*

### **International Relations Committee**

ACCUO/AOUCC is part of an international network of Ombuds organizations, working to increase the visibility and importance of the Ombuds function. The International Relations Committee strengthens relationships and plans joint events with organizations such as the European Network of Ombuds in Higher Education (ENOHE); California Caucus of College and University Ombudspersons (CCCUO); Australian University Complaints Community of Practice; University Ombuds Network of Mexican Ombuds (REDDU); the African Ombuds Research Centre (AORC); and the International Ombudsman Association (IOA).

*More information: Julie Boncompain, Polytechnique Montréal, [julie.boncompain@polymtl.ca](mailto:julie.boncompain@polymtl.ca)*



## **Awards Committee**

Each Spring, ACCUO/AOUCC recognizes members for their contributions to the organization. This committee distributes the call for nominations and tabulates results.

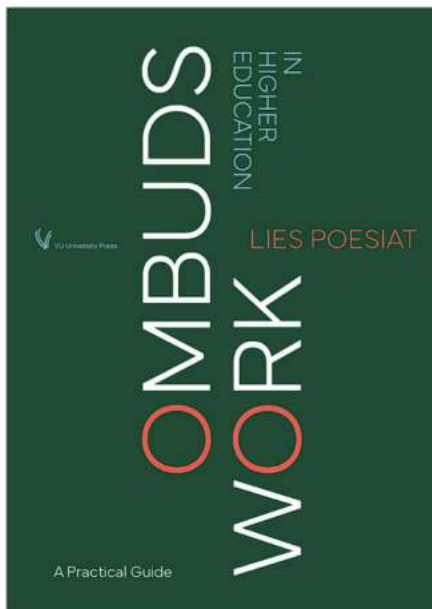
More information: George Cole, Algonquin College, [coleg@algonquincollege.com](mailto:coleg@algonquincollege.com)

## **ACCUO Youtube Channel**

ACCUO's official [Youtube channel](#) has launched! Please send any videos or video ideas towards Rob Thompson ([thompsonr@camosun.ca](mailto:thompsonr@camosun.ca)).

## **Book Review - OMBUDS WORK in Higher Education**

**By Natalie Sharpe, University of Alberta**



OMBUDS WORK in Higher Education: A Practical Guide (2022) – VU University Press, Amsterdam, The Netherlands (144 pages) by Lies Poesiat focuses on the function and practice of the HE ombudsperson. The book can be read chronologically or thematically through the 20 short chapters of interest. The Appendices provide practical guides and examples for Student Ombudsmen and Staff Ombudsmen. The writer notes that the regulatory framework of the ombuds provides clear guidelines on the ombuds' jurisdiction. Many Western European nations fall under national ombuds regulation schemes while others are governed by their local institution. Poesiat notes ombuds' first appearance in HE in the early 1960s in North America during the various rights' movements, and continues to grow with "approximately 945 ombudsmen in 140 countries" today.

Ombuds' backgrounds are varied, and many like Poesiat, come from the university academy. Ombuds are becoming more common in HE because they add value to their institutions, providing important feedback to the institution, and a safe place where people are encouraged and feel supported to file a complaint, without fearing repercussions. Although ombuds can function as watchdogs, they are increasingly becoming the first point of contact where the person can speak confidentially to an ombuds who is trusted because of their independent status and impartiality. The ombuds helps the complaint to be clarified, explains processes without taking sides, and helps find creative options that may allow earlier win-win resolutions for the parties involved. She emphasizes that each case must be treated uniquely and the ombuds uses a toolkit and various creative approaches (such as mediation) and strategies (questioning techniques) to help find resolution. Poesiat states that ombuds "perform their work independently and impartially, and are not subordinate to anyone. With strong interpersonal skills, they use principles of natural justice, and mediation." The ombuds must have organizational sensitivity to understand complex organizations, be a skilled writer and deliver institutional recommendations that are reasonable and doable. To be successful, the ombuds must be supported by the top decision makers and have an accessible, fully resourced service.



In succinct chapters, Poesiat shows the how to of formulating a complaint, drawing up the complaint report, delivering an annual report that illustrates complexity of cases and trends, creating peer support for solitary ombuds offices, and growing a community of practice with Standards of Practice and Codes of Ethics through ombuds associations and international networks. Poesiat speaks to cultural sensitivity and awareness of the institutional barriers faced by vulnerable complainants, the need to understand that persistent or querulous complaints may come from a client's need for social justice as well as mental health. She explains that ombuds need to set professional boundaries, not rescue, but be polite, patient, and understand the duty of care in Higher education to refer the complainant for professional advice or treatment that is beyond the ombuds' scope of practice. Although Poesiat's guide focuses on the terminology and practices among HE ombuds in the Netherlands (especially in the Appendices), she offers clear advice to fellow practitioners on demonstrating the value of their role in Higher Education.

For further information on the book, visit:

<https://vuuniversitypress.com/product/ombuds-work-in-higher-education/?lang=en>

### EDI Spotlight - Autumn Creepy Crawlers

**By Julie Boncompain (Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI) Committee), Polytechnique Montréal**

I had a good time scaring off some cute kids and teenagers too old for Halloween! What does this have to do with equity, diversity, inclusivity and accessibility (EDIA) values? Stay with me. You know how sometimes unexpectedly a spider crawls on your kitchen wall. Well, I have the same unpleasant feeling when I realize one of my files is related to some form of unconscious bias, stereotyping, incivility or prejudice or is dealing with ethics and moral issues. I usually cringe internally as I ask myself: how am I going to deal with this?

I will be honest, my first instinct is to squash the spider. I want to get rid of the file or expedite it as quickly as possible to the human rights office or refer it to someone else. Sometimes I can feel my own bias or judgment creeping up on me as I try not to draw hasty conclusions. When this happens my trick is to breathe in, pause and remind myself that some creepy crawlers have a utility: some eat other crawlers or are good for aerating the soil for plants.

So, I do the same for my file, what is its utility? I ask myself what is this EDIA issue shedding the light on, or my own biases, what is my responsibility as an ombudsperson in my environment. As I start seeking answers slowly, I feel more comfortable in handling the file. I also try to approach the EDIA issue in a constructive way to allow the members of the community involved in the file to explore or consider their options rather than proposing them. Even if I am coming from different intersectionalities, EDIA files are never easy to tackle. There is always room for improvement in my view. Just try not to squash the spider!

**Upcoming Event:** Keep your eyes open for the 2023 EDI ad hoc committee webinar tailored to your needs and interests.



## Conference Reports & Highlights

### ENOHE Conference, June 8-10, 2022, Athens, Greece

By **Dominique Demers, Université du Québec à Montréal**

After a two-year absence of on-site conferences, more than 50 participants from 15 countries on three continents gathered at the National Technical University of Athens, Greece, for the 2022 Annual Conference of the European Network of Ombuds in Higher Education.



Carolyn Brendon, Natalie Sharpe and Dominique Demers (Photo: © Mari Skogheim Møst)

In this period when inclusion is now part of the reality of society and materializes in the higher education environment around the world, the subjects at the conference set the table for enriching presentations and exchanges. The theme "*Student Rights and Ombudsman Values: Ensuring Inclusion in Higher Education*" provided an opportunity for two ACCUO members to share their experiences and perspectives on the issue as speakers: **Natalie Sharpe**, Director, Office of the Student Ombuds at University of Alberta, Edmonton, and **Carolyn Brendon** is the University Ombuds for McMaster University in Hamilton, Ontario.

This was my first participation in an event on the European continent and I was fascinated to see that the issues and challenges faced by higher education ombudsmen are similar wherever we are on the

planet. Topics such as the involvement of the ombudsman in inclusive education, the challenges related to the pandemic or issues related to the principles and values of the ombudsman function to be protected are themes without borders. These events allow us to break out of the isolation in which the ombudsman often finds himself. Sharing informally with peers reinforces our opinions or positions and enriches us with new ideas

The next Annual Conference offered by ENOHE will be held in **Prague, Czech Republic** on 14-16 June 2023!



Participants at the 2022 Conference in Athens (Photo: © Mari Skogheim Møst)

### ACCUCO / FCO Conference, October 18-19, 2022, Ottawa, Canada

**By Caroline Audette, University of Sherbrooke**

What a pleasure to get acquainted during the FCO/ACCUCO conference on October 18-19! With more than 189 participants, including around 53 virtually, it was good to see each other again, to discuss, to hear stimulating conferences and to reflect together on subjects that are close to our hearts. Although I only know a handful of association members, the connection to ACCUCO was very present in my veins and I was more than happy to participate!

If you weren't able to be with us, then you missed conferences aimed at supporting reflection on Aboriginal reconciliation and our role, on developments in administrative law that have an impact on procedural fairness, on the importance of the real accessibility of our services for equity-seeking groups, on the reasons for no longer using the term "neutral" to describe our function, on the inspiring management of the investigation carried out concerning the cuts made by the Laurentian University in its French-language programs, and much more. Of course, I was not able to attend all the sessions! The choices were hard to make!

In addition, some inspiring strategies favoured exchanges with members who we know less. For example, there was an assignment when we arrived at a table, discussion topics during a break with our colleagues sitting with us, there was also, on a voluntary basis, an organization of a morning group walk before the start of the lectures, and so on. All this demonstrated to me the concern of the organizing committee to reinforce inclusion and facilitate sharing between us. Completely in line with and consistent with the theme of the year: "Together Again: Strengthening Ombuds Practice through Connectedness and Inclusion."

I can only imagine the gigantic amount of work that this required for the organizing committee. I would like to raise my hat very high and recognize everyone who contributed directly or indirectly to this event which allowed me to recharge my batteries, to connect with other members, and to leave with a head full of ideas for office. More specifically, I would like to recognize the organizing committee, which was



composed of FCO and ACCUO representatives including Carolyn Brendon, Ombudsperson at McMaster University and Jennifer Meister, Ombudsperson at Western University. Another very special thank you to our members who shared their knowledge, skills and life skills with us during the conference: Shirley Nakata, Julie Boncompain, Natalie Sharp, Heather McGhee Peggs, Maureen Helt, and Lavonne Hood. To all of you dear members involved, a huge thank you!

### Cal Caucus Conference, November 6-9, 2022, Asilomar, USA

Some highlights from the Cal Caucus Conference



Presentation & Participation from ACCUO Members:

- Title: Can we? Should we? How do we? Engaging in EDI work as an academic ombuds  
Presenters: Julie Boncompain, Brent Epperson, Heather McGhee Peggs
- Title: Like a Tidal Pool: Building a Rich, Diverse & Sustainable Ombuds Office  
A Conversation with: Hector Escalante, Bruce MacAllister, & Natalie Sharpe
- Closing Circle: Sharing the experiences and the encounters of learning and unlearning during the four days of interaction.  
Facilitator: Remonia Stoddart-Morrison

### Ombuds Day 2022

**By Caroline Roy, University of Montreal**

On October 13th, the Association des ombudsmans des universités du Québec (AOUQ) organised a virtual lunch conference which took place as part of the Ombuds Day. This conference was held in French.

This year's theme was resilience, respect and resolution. The guests speakers were the following:

- Soucila Badaroudine, ex-ombudsman Université de Sherbrooke.
- Hélène Vallières, vice-protectrice Protecteur du Citoyen.
- Caroline Martin, lawyer Venice Commission
- Jean-Marc Nantais, ombudsman Canada Post



Speakers shared their respective experiences, their knowledge and commitment to advancing the role of the ombudsman. They have helped to promote the role of the ombudsman, to better understand it and to highlight the challenges and our aspirations to improve our practices.

We also wish to recognize the contribution of Me Joëlle Thibault, ombuds at Hydro-Québec and at the École nationale de cirque, and that of Mr. Pierre Champoux, ombudsman CBC (French section) for their exceptional collaboration in the planning and facilitation of the question period. They moderated the meeting intelligently, energetically and showcased our speakers. For your information, you can review the video recording of the event at the following address:

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VX3Wsi\\_a8Z0](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VX3Wsi_a8Z0)

We would like to thank the Association of Canadian College and University Ombudspersons for generously sponsoring the translation of this event.

## ACCUO Membership

### New Members!

#### **Heather Trojek - Queen's University, Associate Ombudsperson**



Heather joined Queen's University as the Associate Ombudsperson in September 2022.

Over her twenty-five-year career, Heather has worked as a mediator, adjudicator, advocate, prosecutor, investigator, trainer, and mentor. She has worked for all three levels of government practicing almost exclusively in administrative law and social justice. In each of her roles, Heather has demonstrated a strong knowledge of and commitment to procedural fairness.

Most recently, Heather was appointed as a Vice Chair at the Ontario Human Rights Tribunal and the Licence Appeal Tribunal of Ontario. During her 7 year appointment, Heather conducted hundreds of mediations, hearings and settlement conferences. Heather graduated from the University of

Western Ontario with an honours degree in Political Science and is a certified Mediator and Adjudicator. Her certification was obtained through Osgoode Professional Development and the Society of Ontario Adjudicators and Regulators. Heather is also roster certified mediator with the Ontario Superior Court of Justice.





### **Meghan Rego - McMaster's University, Assistant Ombuds**



Meghan began her role as Assistant Ombuds at McMaster University in September of this year. She previously worked in the area of family law, so she is no stranger to the world of dispute resolution and working with folks dealing with difficult situations. Meghan's interest in fairness and equity was fortified during her time at York University while obtaining her Bachelor of Arts Degree in criminology and psychology. Meghan obtained a master's degree in political science with a focus on public policy at McMaster University which further strengthened her interest in the Ombuds role and her belief in its importance. She is excited to be a part of the Ombuds community and a new member of ACCUO.

### **Navneet Chand - University of Alberta, Undergraduate Ombuds Intern**



Navneet Chand is the newest member of the University of Alberta's Office of the Student Ombuds, having started in September 2022 in the position of an Undergraduate Ombuds Intern. Academically, Navneet is in his fourth year of a Bachelor of Arts degree in Political Science and Women's and Gender Studies with the co-pursuit of Certificates in Interdisciplinary Leadership, International Learning, Sustainability, and Innovation and Entrepreneurship. Prior to joining the Office of the Student Ombuds, Navneet has worked in various policy research, program development, and consultancy roles with government and local organizations. He is eager to involve himself more deeply into the field of ombuds work and to learn from the inspiring network of ombudspersons he has witnessed so far. In his fabled spare time, Navneet enjoys swimming, enjoying local spots in Edmonton, and sipping masala chai by a frosted window.

Welcome! Congratulations on your roles and we look forward to connecting with you soon!

### **Departures**

### **Sylvie Vigneux - University of Alberta, Undergraduate Ombudsperson**



Sylvie Vigneux, Undergraduate Ombudsperson at the University of Alberta, left her position in November. Sylvie has worked on social justice and equity issues, taught at the Faculty of Law, and delivered resources and workshops on anti-racism in legal practice. At the Office of the Student Ombuds, Sylvie helped with developing modules, training and mentoring the undergraduate ombuds



interns, serving on various University advisory committees, contributing to internal policy documents, and giving orientation presentations. She recently served as Co-Chair of the EDI committee for ACCUO.

#### Next Bulletin – March 30th

Please send items to us! We welcome spotlights on new initiatives, Ombuds community staffing changes (e.g., milestones, arrivals and departures), new resources (e.g., podcasts, tip sheets, publications), and members' reflections and articles. We are planning the next ACCUO Bulletin for March 2023. Please submit any questions to Remonia Stoddart-Morrison ([gradomb2@ualberta.ca](mailto:gradomb2@ualberta.ca)) or items to Rob Thompson ([thompsonr@camosun.ca](mailto:thompsonr@camosun.ca)).