



# OMBUDS OFFICE

Promoting fairness at Concordia

ANNUAL REPORT 2013–2014

PREPARED BY:

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Ombuds Office

April 2, 2015

Members of the Board of Governors  
Concordia University  
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Montreal QC  
H3G 1M8

Dear Members,

As per article 29 of the Terms of Reference of the Ombuds Office, I am pleased to submit the **2013-2014 Annual Report of the Ombuds Office: *Promoting Fairness at Concordia***. This report provides a brief history of the Ombuds Office that is now 35 years old, an overview of its Terms of Reference, a summary of the progress made toward the implementation of recommendations made in previous reports, a description of the year's activities including statistics on the concerns/complaints received from the community as well as annual recommendations.

I look forward to making a brief presentation of the report at your April 15<sup>th</sup> 2015 meeting and answering any questions you may have.

Sincerely,



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## HISTORY OF THE OMBUDS OFFICE

A forerunner in the development of the Ombudsman role in higher education in Canada, Concordia University has supported the existence of an independent and confidential Ombuds Office on campus for 35 years [http://www.uwo.ca/ombuds/accuo\\_aoucc/english/ACCUO30En.pdf](http://www.uwo.ca/ombuds/accuo_aoucc/english/ACCUO30En.pdf)

It was created by the merger of the Ombuds Offices of its two founding institutions, Sir George Williams University and Loyola College. The former was created in April 1971 and served all members of the university community. The 1969 Computer Centre Riot was the catalyst for its creation. The latter office was also created in 1971 and served its institution's student body. When both offices merged in 1978, a decision was made to ensure that Concordia University's Ombuds Office was accessible to all its members. To celebrate this important milestone, a celebration of the 35<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of Concordia's Ombuds Office was held on November 20<sup>th</sup> 2014.

## TERMS OF REFERENCE OF THE OMBUDS OFFICE

Based on the Swedish model of the Parliamentary Ombudsman that goes back a little over 200 years <http://www.jo.se/en/About-JO/History/>, the Ombuds Office is established by Terms of Reference. It primarily uses informal resolution methods and has the power to investigate and report which are characteristic features of classical/legislative Ombuds Offices [http://www.ombudsmanforum.ca/en/?page\\_id=172](http://www.ombudsmanforum.ca/en/?page_id=172).

The Terms of Reference of the Ombuds Office define its mandate. These are available on the University Policies website at <http://www.concordia.ca/content/dam/common/docs/policies/official-policies/BD-2.pdf>. They are also found in the Undergraduate Calendar, the Graduate Calendar, on the Ombuds Office webpage at <http://www.concordia.ca/ombuds> and in our office. The current Terms of Reference were adopted by the Board of Governors in June 2010. The scope and functions of the Ombuds Office are described below.

### Scope

As described in previous annual reports, the scope of the Ombuds Office is outlined in articles 1-5 of the Terms of Reference (2010). The five defining parameters are as follows:

- The Office is defined as **independent** of the University's administrative structures;
- Its services focus on **concerns** and **complaints** related to application of policies, rules and procedures as well as to their improvement;
- Services are to be **impartial**, **confidential** and **accessible** to all members of the community;

- The Ombudsperson’s power is to **recommend** rather than to impose means to resolve concerns and complaints and to improve policies, rules and procedures;
- As **informal dispute resolution** is key to the approach of the Ombuds Office, it does not have jurisdiction to inquire into the application or interpretation of a collective or employee agreement nor into the alleged violation of the duty of fair representation against a certified union.

## Functions of the Ombuds Office

Article 6 of the Terms of Reference (2010) highlights the functions of the Ombuds Office:

“Specifically, the Ombudsperson shall:

- Actively promote these Terms of Reference and the services offered;
- Inform Members about existing policies, rules and procedures and advise them as to the appropriate channel of redress for any concern or complaint they may have;
- Assist Members to resolve complaints informally and quickly;
- At his/her discretion, conduct an independent and objective inquiry into complaints when normal channels of recourse have been exhausted;
- At his/her discretion, conduct an independent and objective inquiry into the application of any policy, rule or procedure of the University;
- Explain decisions taken by University authorities when complaints are not substantiated;
- At his/her discretion, recommend solutions to help resolve complaints;
- Bring to the attention of University authorities any policies, rules or procedures which appear unclear or inequitable or which might jeopardize the rights or freedoms of any Member. The Ombudsperson may suggest changes to the existing policies, rules or procedures or offer advice on the development of new policies, rules or procedures.”

In carrying out its functions, the Ombuds Office is entrusted to advocate for fairness and a reasonable outcome. It does not automatically defend the individual seeking assistance nor does it automatically defend the university. Instead, it focuses on describing processes that are available to resolve problems, brainstorms as to available options for resolution, coaches and role plays as to possible approaches to follow, enquires into versions of events, considers all facets of a situation before arriving at a conclusion and consults with pertinent parties when making individual and/or systemic recommendations. In the course of its work, the Ombuds Office staff use tact, diplomacy and sensitivity in their dealings with Members of the community.

## Reporting Structure

As stated in article 29 of the Terms of Reference of the Ombuds Office, the Ombudsperson reports to the Board of Governors that is the senior governing body of the University. This places the Ombuds Office in the best position to ensure its independence which is key to fulfilling its unique role. With regard to administrative issues that need to be addressed, the Secretary-General (SG) serves as the liaison between the Board of Governors and the Ombudsperson. These relationships are schematized in the following adaptation of the Vice-President, Development, External Relations and Secretary General's (VPDERSG) organizational chart <http://www.concordia.ca/content/dam/concordia/offices/vpdersg/docs/concordia-vpdersg-organigram.pdf>

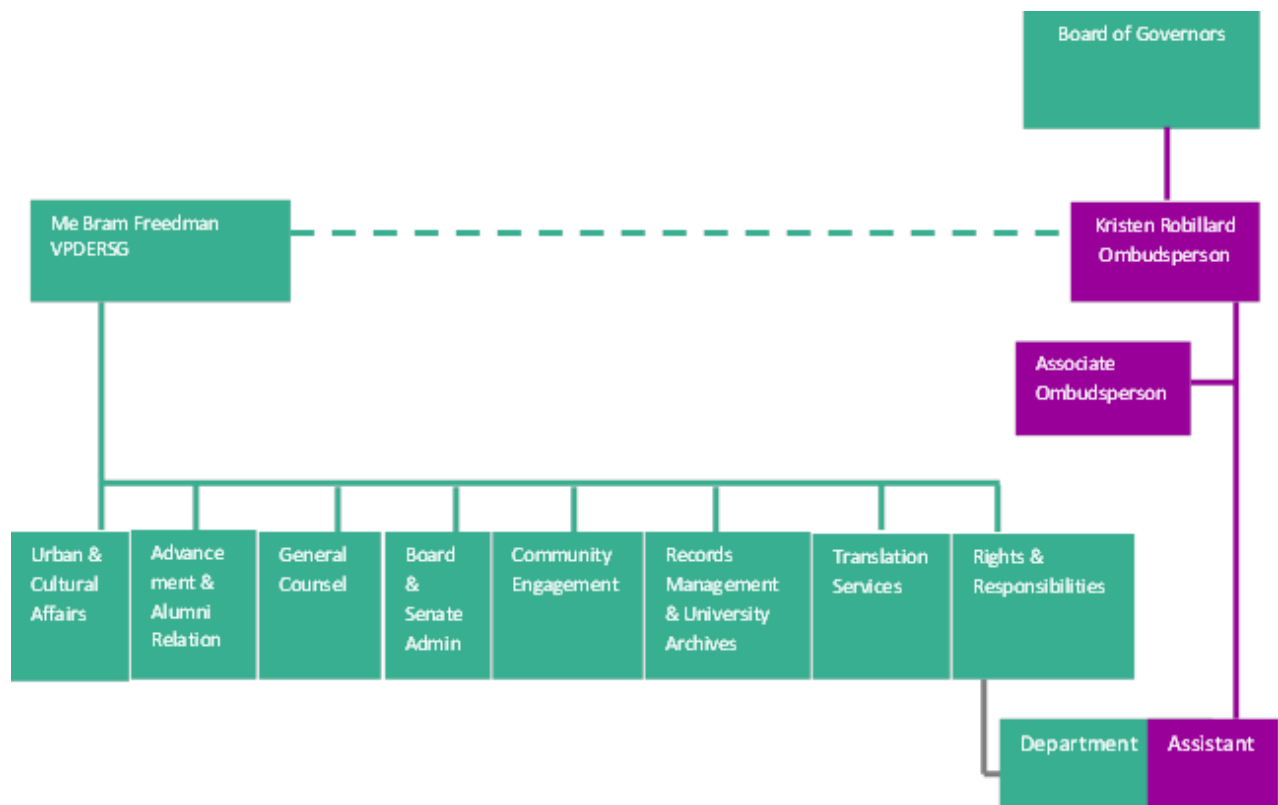


Figure 1 VPDERSG Organisational Chart

## ANNUAL RECOMMENDATIONS

There has been progress on the implementation of some of the Outstanding Ombuds Office Annual Recommendations, some of which are broad in scope. The Ombudsperson therefore thought it fitting to highlight this progress early in the report.

A presentation of the 2013-2014 Annual Recommendations follows (p. 15)

## OUTSTANDING OMBUDS OFFICE ANNUAL RECOMMENDATIONS

### ISSUE: Training for sectors to be more proficient in giving difficult news

- That 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.
- That 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.

### Ombudsperson's Response

In order to implement these recommendations, a decision was made to target different groups that would participate in sessions in a particular sequence. Given their mandates, Associate Deans and GPDs seem an appropriate group with which to begin. Planning as to the content and format of these sessions is

underway with delivery planned in the spring 2015 by an external resource.

### Human Resources' (HR) Response

As work on implementing the recommendation proceeds in the academic sector, HR have provided a description of what training it has provided to staff and managers:

"HR developed and implemented a Learning and Development Centre for employees at Concordia. The Learning and Development calendar is available at <https://cspace.concordia.ca/services/hr/training-development.html>

There are workshops available for staff and a Leadership Portfolio curriculum available for managers. The workshops cover a variety of work related skills development, including the following for employees:

- Service Focus: Ability to understand clients' needs and ensure satisfaction
- Communication Skills: understand and practice effective communications strategies
- Emotional Intelligence: self-awareness, awareness of others, conflict management and management of emotions.
- Leadership Portfolio for managers:
- A number of workshop offerings are available including:
  - Active Supervision
  - Interpersonal skills
  - [..]Emotional Intelligence"<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> HR's response submitted September 29 2014.



## ISSUE: Course Outline

- That the Office of the Provost and VP Academic Affairs (OPVPAA) annually circulate the required, recommended and optional elements for a course outline (Course Outline (May 14, 2009), Office of the Provost) to new faculty as well as to current faculty members.
- That the OPVPAA ensure that the required, recommended and optional elements for a course outline (Course Outline (May 14, 2009), Office of the Provost) be made available on line for faculty and students to access.

### OPVPAA' Response

“As the standardized course outline documents date from 2009, they are presently being reviewed, and will be re-issued as a user-friendly version for faculty. Going forward, this will once again form part of a general semester-timed messaging to faculty members.”<sup>2</sup>

### Ombudsperson's comments:

The course outline is the cornerstone document for the evaluation of student achievement. It sets the parameters for the course with regard to content, means with which performance will be evaluated and schedule. As an agreement, a well-designed course outline clarifies expectations from the beginning of term, avoids misunderstandings and saves time.

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<sup>2</sup>OPVPAA response submitted September 29 2014.

It is sincerely hoped that the review of the 2009 course outline documents will be completed shortly and presented to Senate by the end of the 2014-2015 academic year. Recent discussions with the Vice-Provost, Teaching and Learning indicate that this is indeed the objective.

With regard to the dissemination of the new recommended course outline, making it easily accessible to students should also be a priority. The Student hub seems an appropriate location.

## ISSUE: Academic Regulations

### Recommendation 1

- That the Office of the Registrar review the Academic Definitions and Regulations in the Undergraduate Calendar (Chapter 16) to determine what is essential to convey to the University community;

### OPVPAA' response on behalf of the Office of the Registrar

“The online Calendar is an official University document. It defines academic programs and the regulations that pertain to them. The University Senate reserves the right to modify the academic programs and regulations at its discretion after the posting date of the Calendar.

This Calendar is intended to assist readers to understand the academic and administrative structure and policies and procedures of the University, and to describe the academic programs offered. The material has been submitted by academic units and administrative

departments. Every effort has been made to ensure that all general information and course references are accurate as of the date of posting, but these are subject to possible verification and correction. By the act of registration each student becomes bound by the policies and regulations of Concordia University, including the Faculty in which the student is registered. Students are responsible for familiarizing themselves with the general information, rules and regulations contained in the Calendar, and with the specific information, rules and regulations of the Faculty or Faculties in which they are registered or enrolled or seek registration or enrolment, as well as the specific requirements of each degree or certificate sought.

The official nature of the university calendar requires that it be precise. Nonetheless, section 16 has been reviewed and will be modified for the creation of the 2015-16 Calendar.”<sup>3</sup>

**Ombudsperson’s comments:**

Along with their work on large-scale initiatives in their area, the Registrar and Associate Registrar have completely revised section 16 of the Undergraduate Calendar. Recent communication with the Registrar indicates that work is now underway to prepare those modifications for the consideration/approval of the Academic Programs Committee (APC) and

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<sup>3</sup>Idem, note 2

then Senate in time for inclusion in the 2016-2017 Calendar.

**Recommendation 2**

- That the Office of the Registrar ensure that the chosen text can be understood by the average student;

**OPVPAA’ response on behalf of the Office of the Registrar**

“Both the Registrar and Associate Registrar have worked on the revision, taking into account wording clarifications that have come about in the context of the WCMS project.”<sup>4</sup>

**Ombudsperson’s comments:**

Continuing to make efforts to adopt uniform language is essential across all means used to publish academic regulations. This is the foundation of a solid understanding of any system including the rights/responsibilities of those who use it.

**Recommendation 2**

- That the Office of the Registrar ensures that the chosen information is easily accessible to students, faculty and staff.

**OPVPAA’ response on behalf of the Office of the Registrar**

“The calendar is readily available under the “Quick Links” section of the Concordia University website. The student hub on Concordia’s website

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<sup>4</sup>Idem, note 2

<https://www.concordia.ca/students/undergraduate.html> – allows easy access to key information under the rubric, “Academic Resources.” “Academic Regulations” is one of the selections there, which has easy to understand distillations of calendar material, including exam notations and accommodations (<http://www.concordia.ca/students/exams.html>).”<sup>5</sup>

#### **Ombudsperson’s comments:**

The accessibility of information has indeed improved as reported. Access to the Undergraduate Calendar is easily retrieved via the “Quick Links”, the A-Z index, the Student hub and other means. Searching the online Undergraduate Calendar is now also easier to do. “Distillations of calendar material” are consistent with the original text and easier to find. The Ombuds Office has noted receiving fewer requests for information about deferred exams, etc...

#### **ISSUE: “Emerging” student clientele**

- That the University continue in its efforts to work with other universities, the CREPUQ and the Ministry to ensure the availability of services to respond to the growing needs of this student population;
- That the University consider revising the Policy on Accessibility for Students with Disabilities (VRS-14) issued in April 2003 given the context of growing needs of “emerging” clientele.

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<sup>5</sup>Idem, note 2

#### **OPVPAA’ response on behalf of the Office of the Registrar**

“The Access Centre for Students with Disabilities will review all policies and practices over the next year, given the context of growing needs of our ‘emerging’ student clientele.”<sup>6</sup>

#### **Ombudsperson’s comments:**

According to the Évolution 2009 - 2014 des clientèles «émergentes» et «traditionnelles» report presented in the Statistiques Concernant les Étudiants en Situation de Handicap dans les Universités Québécoises 2013-2014, [http://aqicesh.ca/docs/STATS\\_AQICESH\\_2013-2014.pdf](http://aqicesh.ca/docs/STATS_AQICESH_2013-2014.pdf), the number of “emerging” student clientele continues to increase.

The profile of the 1407 students registered with Concordia’s Access Centre for Students with Disabilities (ACSD) in 2013-2014 shows that its population with more “traditional” disabilities (mobility, vision and hearing) totaled 156 students, an increase of 3 from the previous year (G. Dionne, ACSD Coordinator, personal communication, February 25 2015).

Except for Learning Disabilities (LD), the “emerging” student clientele (Attention Deficit Disorder (ADD)/Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), Mental Health Conditions, Autism Spectrum Disorder) increased both in absolute numbers and percentages since 2012-2013,

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<sup>6</sup>Idem, note 2

particularly for those with ADD/ADHD (17.5%, 29 students) and Mental Health Conditions (15.5%, 29 students). Moreover, students having more than one disability including one that is “emerging” increased in 2013-2014 by more than a quarter (26.8%) or 83 students. (G. Dionne, ACSD Coordinator, personal communication February, 25 2015).

With the Student Services sector including the ACSD now reporting to the Office of the Deputy Provost, planning continues on this restructuring project. The review of the ACSD policies and practices will hopefully be tackled as its proposed alignment with Health Services and Counselling and Development takes shape.

### **ISSUE: Peer Evaluation of Students by Students**

- That the Office of the Provost and the Office of the General Counsel issue notice to the Faculty and student body of the provisions that pertain to student access to peer evaluations.

### **OPVPAA' Response**

"The Vice-Provost, Teaching and Learning will mandate the Center for Teaching and Learning Services (CTLs) to review the best practices in this matter. Legal Counsel (Student & Administrative Affairs) will be consulted regarding how these practices might be implemented in keeping with the

### **Act Respecting Access to Documents held by Public Bodies and the Protection of Personal Information."**<sup>7</sup>

#### **Ombudsperson's Comments:**

The rationale for this recommendation is as follows: "A peer evaluation of students by students is an evaluative method used by some university instructors, particularly in the context of group projects. The weight that peer evaluations are assigned can vary across courses. These evaluations can be formative or summative in nature. As an example of the latter, a professor might ask his students to give their group members a grade for their contribution to their project. These peer evaluations are then factored into the overall final grade for the project that the professor has assigned.

When a student wishes to have access to the assessment of a peer for general information or because he is considering requesting a re-evaluation, professors sometimes respond that for reasons of confidentiality, they are not at liberty to share their peers' comments. Such a conclusion is contrary to the Act Respecting Access to Documents held by Public Bodies and the Protection of Personal Information <http://www.concordia.ca/vpirsg/document/s/policies/VPIRSG-9.pdf> and prevents the student from exercising his right to request a re-evaluation of his work. "(Annual Report 2011-12: Promoting Fairness at Concordia, p. 21).

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<sup>7</sup> OPVPAA response submitted March 11 2015.

As peer evaluation continues to be used by instructors and course outlines sometimes promise students that their comments about their group members will remain confidential, a review of best practices and what the Access legislation permits students to access is a positive step. In addition to providing notice of the review's findings and recommendations to instructors and the student body, it would be helpful to consider including the issue of access to peer evaluation results in the Q & A section of the Guidelines on the application of the Act Respecting Access to Documents held by Public Bodies and the Protection of Personal Information <http://www.concordia.ca/content/dam/commmon/docs/policies/official-policies/New-Access-Guidelines.pdf>

### **ISSUE: Policy on Intellectual Property**

- That the Office of the Vice-President Research and Graduate Studies (OVPRGS) take concrete measures to ensure that the University's revised Policy on Intellectual Property is communicated to both students and the faculty with whom they engage in research activities.

#### **OVPRGS' Response**

"The Vice-President, Research and Graduate Studies (OVPRGS) formed a Working Group to review the existing Policy on Intellectual Property (VPRGS-9) earlier in 2013. The Group's specific mandate was to review 'student IP'. The Group submitted a report summarizing its findings as well as

proposed revisions to the Policy. These documents were first reviewed by the Senate Research Committee (SRC) at its June meeting and were recommended for review by Faculty Councils. Therefore, through the months of September and October, the VP will be visiting the four Faculty Councils as well as the Council of the School of Graduate Studies. A comment period will follow prior to the final proposal being returned to SRC for final review and recommendation to Senate for approval. All of the reviewing bodies have representation from faculty members and students and Senate decisions are transmitted to the University community through the NOW newsletter. One part of this is how complexities of IP issues are communicated; therefore, an education plan is also being developed."<sup>8</sup>

#### **Ombudsperson's comments:**

When the Ombudsperson initially made a recommendation regarding Intellectual Property in her 2011-2012 Annual Report, the following was her rationale for better communication of the University's Policy on Intellectual Property. She wrote: "The experience of the Ombuds Office in recent years has been that ... students are often not aware of the University's Policy on Intellectual Property. And, when they review it, they are not certain how it applies to their discipline, especially if it is other than pure sciences, engineering and

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<sup>8</sup> OVPRGS's response submitted October 3 2014.

computer science. Students involved in independent research at the upper undergraduate level and graduate level need to be aware that their rights and obligations.” Now that the steps highlighted in the OVPRGS’ response at the upper undergraduate level at the steps highlighted in the OVPRGS’ response(above) have been completed and the revised Policy on Intellectual Property was adopted by Senate on January 16, 2015, the timing is ideal for the OVPRGS to begin to implement the recommendation of the Report of the IP Working Group that “education about IP be expanded and improved, to demystify IP and better prepare all members of the Concordia community to understand and manage IP and its related rights, protection and commercialization activities.” (p. 2)

In that vein, the OVPRGS reports that discussions are underway to implement this educational recommendation. In this process, the OPVPAA and other stakeholders will be consulted.

The revision coupled with expanded IP education will serve the university well in fostering the attainment of Objective 1 of Concordia’s Academic Plan 2012-2016 which is to: **Expand our research strength** <http://www.concordia.ca/content/dam/cconcordia/docs/academic-plan.pdf>

### **ISSUE: Supervision of Graduate Students**

### **Recommendation 1**

- That supervisors and students devise both an Academic and Research plan at the start of the student’s studies and fine tune their

### **School of Graduate Studies’ (SGS) response**

“The APR system now allows GPDs to close ‘satisfactory’ APRs when they have read them. There is also an option to forward problematic APRs directly to the attention of SGS. A staff member in SGS assesses the APRs forwarded to us and sends to the Associate Dean, Student Affairs all APRs that require follow up.

A new, university-wide, research student tracking facility will be available to academic departments who provided feedback to the School of Graduate Studies. The “live” system will be operational at the beginning of 2015 for students who began studies in Summer 2014.

Information will be stored, by student, in a central repository and will be accessible via the web. Only authorized people will be able to access the system. Queries can be generated to retrieve the information.

There will be an ability to:

-identify milestones that research students must achieve (FT & PT) e.g. comprehensive exam 18 months following admission for FT students, thesis proposal, progress reports, completion of course work 12 months following admission, student’s research topic, to name a few.

-set the expected completion date of the program

-allow students to see their milestones on a self-service website

-identify the supervisor/co-supervisor assigned to the student including external co-supervisors

-adjust the time-line for students taking leaves or change of status e.g. track consumption

-store the committee setup e.g. examining committee, thesis committee, etc.”<sup>9</sup>

#### **Ombudsperson’s comments:**

In cases when graduate students consult the Ombuds Office regarding concerns about supervision, reasonable workload expectations as well as performance expectations are reviewed. The Ombuds Office often suggests that the student draft an action plan. Coaching about how to discuss the action plan with their supervisor is often provided.

Similar to an action plan, having a research student tracking facility will be a very useful tool for all students and faculty to successfully manage the timely attainment of milestones and timely degree completion. Though SGS reports that the pilot group’s schedule has been delayed because of the SIS implementation, it expects to begin testing the system the

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<sup>9</sup> SGS’ response submitted October 1, 2014.

summer. The time estimated to prepare it for all departments to use is a year.

#### **Recommendation 2**

- That orientation sessions for Graduate Program Directors (GPD) continue to be offered to solidify their important role in program management and development

#### **SGS’ response**

“Two GPD orientations were offered in Fall 2013 and Fall 2014. Also, 2013-14 saw the institution of monthly GPD ‘luncheons’ designed to inform GPDs on specific issues and practices such as admissions, recruitment activities and awards, as well as to provide a forum for discussion on all matters related to graduate studies. The luncheons will continue to be held in 2014-15, Fall topics include the Graduate Student Experience, Mental Health, and Retention Efforts.”<sup>10</sup>

#### **Ombudsperson’s comments:**

Given the SGS’ response, it is clear that it continues in its efforts to offer learning opportunities and support to GPDs. They play a vital role in their department.

#### **Recommendation 3**

- That the Guidelines for Supervisors and Graduate Students (May, 1996) be revised.

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<sup>10</sup> Idem , note 10.

### SGS' response

"The Associate Dean, Student Affairs has produced a draft of revised version of the Guidelines. A review committee will be established in late fall, 2014 or winter, 2015 to vet the draft and help prepare a version for discussion at Faculty Councils and approval at Senate."<sup>11</sup>

### Ombudsperson's comments:

That the Guidelines for Supervisors and Graduate Students are being revised after so many years is good news. And that this is being done alongside improvements to the APR system and the piloting of the research student tracking facility is excellent. In a recent communication with the Associate Dean, Student Affairs, he reports that the review committee comprised of a faculty member from each Faculty and 2 graduate students should have a preliminary Guidelines document ready by the fall term at which time consultation can begin.

### Recommendation 4

- That students continue to have the opportunity to participate in seminars about techniques to successfully complete their requirements.

### SGS' response

"GradProSkills offers full range of seminars focused on supporting the development of

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<sup>11</sup> Idem , note 10.

diverse skills to meet the demands of graduate school including:

Grad School Base Camp – for new graduate students with six workshops that highlight graduate school goal planning and time management, knowing the academic code, research resources, academic conversations, managing graduate level reading and writing requirements, and negotiating diversity in Montreal.

Grad Read/Write/Present series – over 30 workshops with strategies for managing graduate level reading/writing workload, technical writing, avoiding plagiarism, presentation strategies, preparing for academic conferences, etc.

GradProFellows host workshops on supervisor relations, effective literature reviews, research conduct, research project management, creative/innovative thinking, and participate in the research conversation series.

In addition there are workshops to support graduate students in preparing for future careers whether within or beyond the academy including development of tailored application packages, teacher training, and entrepreneurial strategies."<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Idem , note 10



### **Ombudsperson's comments:**

GradProSkills has been successful in providing useful tools to graduate students and the postdoctoral population to meet their academic requirements and to develop professional skills.

In fact a recent case study of the GradProSkills program (Venkatesh et al., 2014.) reports on the results of an evaluation of the perceptions of program graduate students' perceptions were very positive for each of the three categories. For the different items evaluated per category, scores ranged from 4.08 to 4.41 on a five-point Likert scale<sup>13</sup> (p. 46).

With these findings, the Ombudsperson is hopeful that the SGS is successful in finding new funding to pursue its relatively new phase as a permanent program, the steps of which are summarized in the conclusion section of the case study.

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### **ISSUE: Employee Categories**

- That Human Resources consider the creation of an employee categories policy that is devoted to defining each of the six (6) categories highlighted in HR-1, HR-4 and HR-5.

#### **HR's response**

"As noted in previous updates, the current policies will not be amended at this time, but will be reviewed in the context of a general review of all HR policies, a considerable undertaking which is underway. In the meantime, the process for hiring casual employees has been reviewed and is pending implementation."

<sup>14</sup>

### **ISSUE: Time-Sheet employees**

- That Human Resources reinforce to the community that employees paid according to hours submitted on a time-sheet are casual employees;
- That Human Resources inform the community of the rights and responsibilities of these casual employees, particularly with regard to the impact of extending the status over a prolonged period of time.

#### **HR's response**

"As noted in previous updates, the Non-Academic Hiring workshop offered as part of the Learning and Development Calendar of the Learning and Development Calendar is the preferred vehicle to ensure

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<sup>13</sup> Scores ranged from agree (1) to strongly agree (5).

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<sup>14</sup> HR's response submitted September 29 2014

appropriate dissemination of information related to casual employees. <sup>15</sup>

**Ombudsperson's comments:**

As attending the Non-Academic Hiring Workshop is voluntary, those who don't attend can consult the HR webpages and Cspace (employee intranet) where information related to HR practices and policies is available. This coupled with the implementation of the process for hiring casual employees should serve to respond to the recommendations pertaining to employees paid according to hours submitted on a time-sheet.

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<sup>15</sup> Idem, note 8.

## 2013-2014 OMBUDS OFFICE ANNUAL RECOMMENDATIONS

Further to a review of the 2013-2014 caseload presented later in this report (p. 19-33), the Ombuds Office would like to focus its annual recommendations on 1) Academic advising; 2) Course Evaluation as a collective quality assurance mechanism to promote excellence in teaching and student success and 3) Part-time students with a disability - eligibility for internal awards. It is our hope that the University will support our conclusions and recommendations. The Ombudsperson welcomes any questions or requests to discuss these in greater detail.

### ISSUE: Academic Advising

As the Academic Concerns table (Figure 8, p. 26) presents later in the report, the most common concern for undergraduate students is related to Program/Degree requirements. Assessment of the attainment of program requirements for graduation, requesting a transfer of credits after an international exchange and requesting a degree transfer (ex BA to B.Sc.) are some examples of the issues brought to our attention in that rubric.

In working through these cases that are usually brought to the Ombuds Office when students are well into their program, we have observed that they don't appreciate that on an ongoing basis, they are responsible to monitor their progress in

meeting their program/degree requirements.

Moreover and despite the availability of academic advising information on line including guides and videos, an understanding of the role of a departmental academic advisor and that of an academic advisor in a Faculty Office of Student Academic Services is not always well differentiated.

Unfortunately, when the decision-making scope of different levels of academic advising services isn't consistently understood and students don't always self-monitor their progress, completing program requirements can be delayed. This can result in postponed graduation, delays in entry into the workplace and delays in submitting applications for further study. As well, extra time demands are placed on advisors.

While the University has set an objective in its Academic Plan (2012-2016) to **“Develop and implement a plan to improve coherence and quality of advising, in particular for first-year students, in order to help them understand and achieve their educational objectives”**, allowing for the University to **“devise ways to inform students more effectively about expectations, progress and achievement”** (p. 14), there is more work to do before the Advising Plan is implemented. Until that time that is not imminent according to a recent update from the Vice-Provost Teaching and Learning, academic advising

resources need to be maximized and timely graduation fostered. It is therefore recommended that:

#### Faculty Offices of Student Academic Services as well as academic departments

- 1) Prominently emphasize in all academic advising materials that students are responsible for meeting program/degree requirements;
- 2) Review their academic advising materials to ensure that their respective academic advising support roles are clearly defined;
- 3) Define expectations of students when accessing Academic Advising at both the Faculty and department levels with respect to self-monitoring of their progress.

#### ISSUE: Course Evaluation as a collective quality assurance mechanism to promote excellence in teaching and student success

Efforts to make course evaluation more useful to evaluate teaching performance and to improve pedagogy have clearly been ongoing for some time. Important milestones:

- Originally a paper course evaluation questionnaire was administered in class to all students shortly before the end of the term. The instructor was not present for the exercise;
- Except for classes taught by PT Faculty whose collective agreement requires the use of a paper-based questionnaire

<https://cspace.concordia.ca/resources/faculty/teaching/services/course-evaluations/part-time-faculty.html>, online evaluations were adopted in 2007 on a Faculty-by-Faculty basis and subsequently for e-Concordia courses;

- In the spring 2011, an e-mail survey of all current students was commissioned by the Vice-Provost, Teaching and Learning and conducted by the Institutional Planning Office. The purpose was to collect student feedback to better inform decision-making regarding paper vs on-line course evaluations, in-class vs outside of class administration and participation rates;
- In the Academic Plan (2012-2016)'s objective to **Build Support for Student Success**, a commitment is made to **Develop a validated course evaluation questionnaire for use across the university** (action 3.6.6). This will involve "creating a locally developed questionnaire that will likely include a shared set of core questions asked in all courses university-wide, while allowing for differentiation outside this core on the basis of Faculty, discipline and instructor priorities" (p. 15).

In communication with the Vice-Provost Teaching and Learning as to progress on this action, she recently wrote: "This is an ongoing process that was begun by my predecessor but was ultimately unsuccessful. The process continues, but I do not anticipate any resolution quickly."<sup>16</sup>

<sup>16</sup>OPVPAA response submitted March 17<sup>th</sup> 2015.

While the university-wide course evaluation questionnaire is being designed, the course evaluation process continues as is and information is published for different players as if they operated in silos rather than collectively. As well, in cases where students consulted the Ombuds Office about course management and grades/re-evaluation (Figure 8, p. 26), it is often recommended that they make sure to avail themselves of the opportunity to submit a course evaluation to voice their concerns. In response and in keeping with the results highlighted in the Course Evaluation Survey, they often question the anonymity of the answers they submit and are skeptical as to whether their feedback is taken into consideration.

As such and to make the process clear and transparent to the community, it is recommended to the OPVPAA that:

- 1) Course Evaluation as a collective quality assurance mechanism to promote excellence in teaching and student success be written up as a whole including who is involved, how is the data collected, analyzed, disseminated and used as well as the different resources made available by the University (ex. Chairs, CTLS) to assist with the interpretation and application of course evaluation results;
- 2) Course Evaluation written up as a collective quality assurance mechanism be included as an item in the A-Z Index on the Concordia homepage <http://www.concordia.ca/> to highlight the University's commitment to teaching excellence and student success before linking the reader to specifics;
- 3) Course Evaluation written up as a collective quality assurance mechanism be accessible from the Student Hub <http://www.concordia.ca/students.html>
- 4) Course Evaluation written up as a collective quality assurance mechanism be accessible on Cspace

### **ISSUE: Part-time students with a disability eligibility for internal awards**

Students with a major functional disability or a serious episodic disability can apply for loans and bursaries from l'Aide financière aux études as a full-time student even though they might be studying part-time <http://www.mesrs.gouv.qc.ca/en/aide-financiere-aux-etudes/loans-program-for-part-time-studies/exceptional-cases-of-eligibility-under-the-loans-and-bursaries-program/> If successful with their funding request, these students' academic record will nonetheless indicate that they are studying part-time. As full-time status is very often an eligibility requirement, their eligibility for internal awards is sometimes unclear. Consequently, these students don't apply or are not automatically considered when first starting a program. If successful with their funding request, these students' academic record will nonetheless indicate that they are studying part-time. As full-time status is very often an eligibility requirement, their eligibility for internal awards is sometimes unclear. Consequently, these students don't apply or are not automatically considered when first starting a program.

It is therefore recommended that:

- 1) Students who are registered with the ACSD and studying part-time be considered full-time when applying for internal awards;
- 2) The Financial Aid and Awards Office, SGS and ACSD draft a notice inviting ACSD clients who are part-time to apply for internal awards as they may be eligible on that basis to apply for internal awards;
- 3) The notice is published in all materials related to internal awards

## CONCERNS AND COMPLAINTS

### Receiving a concern/complaint

When a request for service is made, the Ombuds Office aims to first respond within 24 hours excluding weekends and holidays. A file is then opened and the following information is collected:

- (a) Status at Concordia University
- (b) Demographic information
- (c) Contact information
- (d) Means used to contact the Ombuds Office
- (e) Identification of parties aware of the concern/complaint
- (f) Description of the concern/complaint and steps taken to address the matter
- (g) How the concern/complaint might be resolved
- (h) Whether permission will be given to the Ombuds Office staff person to discuss the case with other involved parties.

### Addressing a concern/complaint

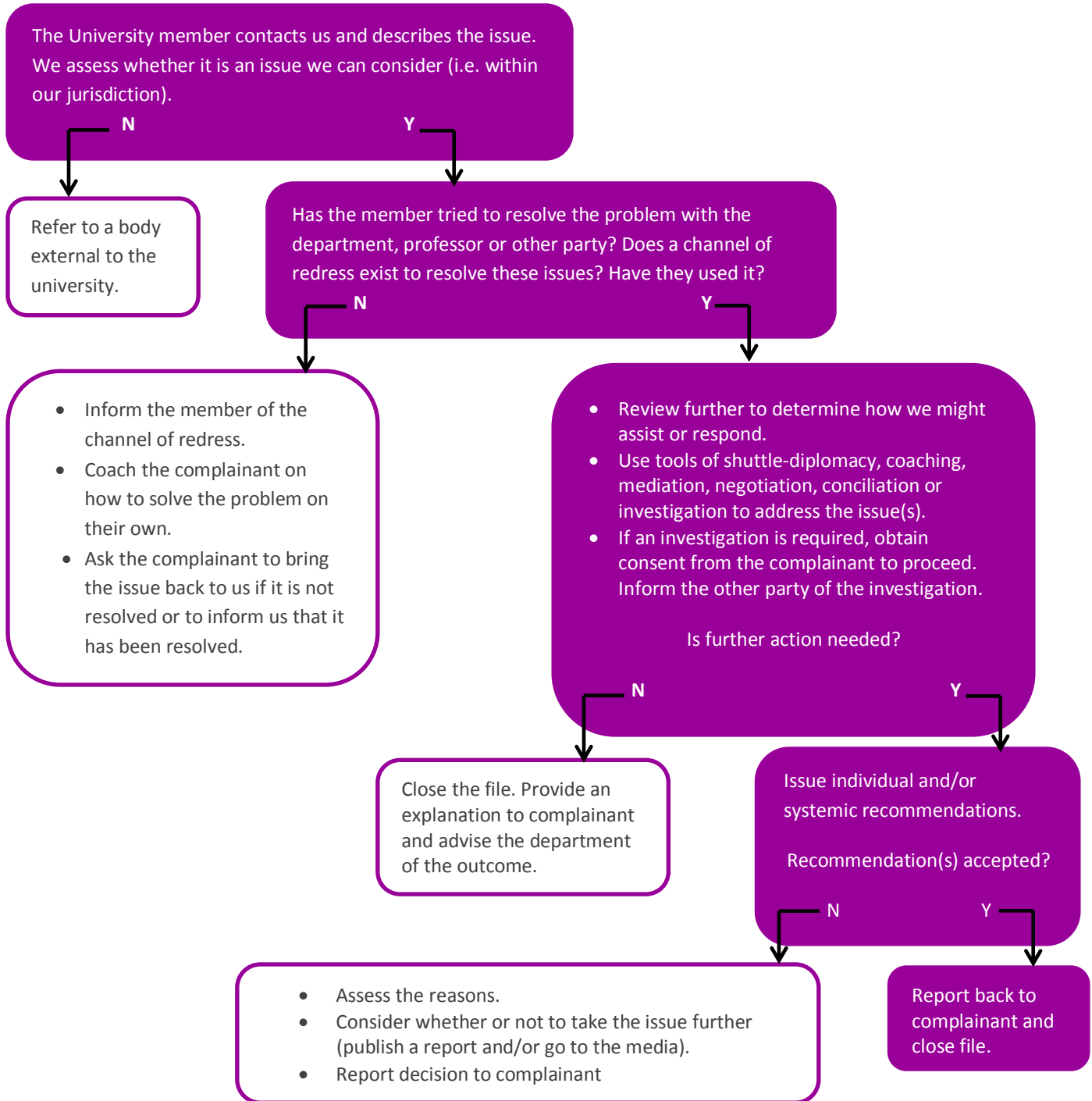
A concern/complaint brought to the attention of the Ombuds Office can relate to more than one issue. Each is addressed but for statistical simplicity, the predominant issue is recorded.

Actions taken in cases and how they relate to the different functions of the Ombuds Office are described later in this report. These are recorded at the conclusion of a case. Finally, any individual and/or systemic recommendation made is noted and implementation is monitored.

The time required takes to address the concern/complaint varies depending on the nature of the situation, the actions discussed with the Ombuds Office, the motivation of the member, the availability of the other parties involved and their responsiveness. Addressing the concern/complaint can range from the same day to a longer period of time. To assess casework efficiency, processing times as well as other factors are monitored.

## The Flow of an Ombuds Office Case

As each Ombuds case is unique, there are different routes that it can follow in order that it is addressed. The following flow chart provides an illustration.



Adapted from "Complaint Flowchart" from Ombudsman Saskatchewan

Fall 2011.

Figure 2: Flow chart of an Ombuds Office Case



## 2013-2014 CASES<sup>17</sup>

### Caseload by status

During the 2013-2014 year, that corresponds to both the University's academic and financial year (May 1<sup>st</sup> to April 30<sup>th</sup>), the volume of the Ombuds Office caseload was 471.

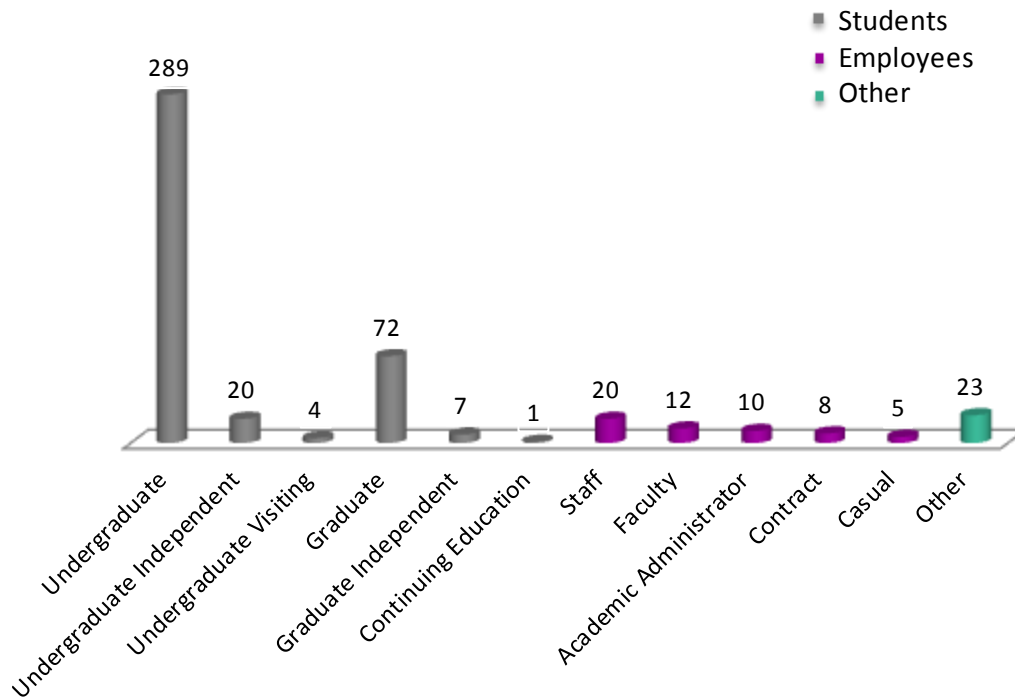


Figure 3: Caseload by Status

This histogram shows that a total 392 cases or 83.2% of the 2013-2014 caseload were students studying for credit. One other case originated from Continuing Education (0.2%). Fifty-five employees representing 11.7% of the overall caseload availed themselves of our services.

Twenty-three cases representing 4.9% in this year's caseload were brought to the attention of the Ombuds Office by individuals that are referred to as our "other" caseload. These are not current members but have a relationship with Concordia (former students, alumni, applicants, parents, etc).

<sup>17</sup> To give the reader a sense of the comments that the Ombuds Office received during the year, a selection is interspersed in this section on 2013-2014 Cases.

## Means of Contact

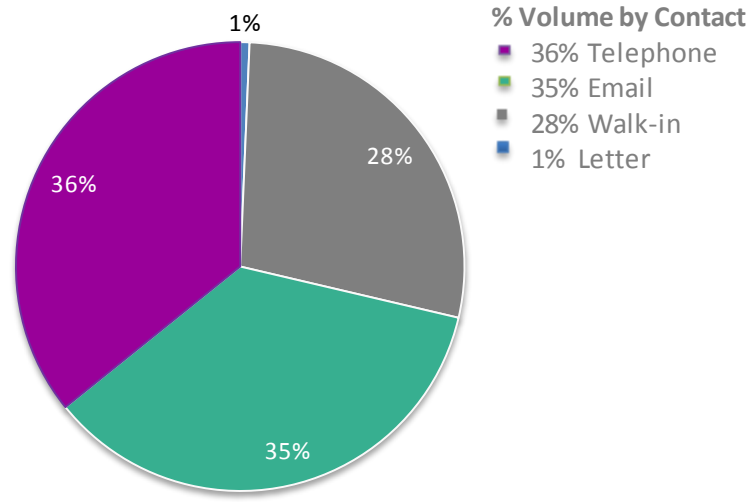


Figure 4: Means of Contact

Compared to years past when phone contact was the preferred means to communicate with the Ombuds Office, e-mail is increasingly moving toward that rank. Increasing as well is the percentage of clients who choose to avail themselves of our services without an appointment (Walk-ins).

## Caseload by Month

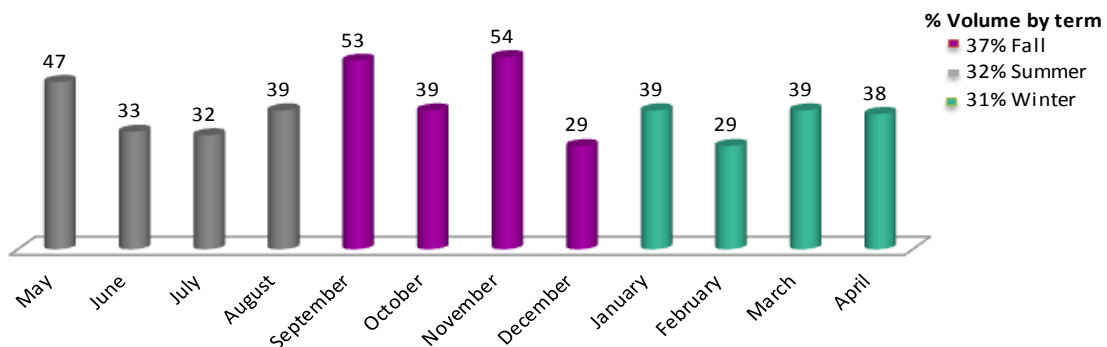


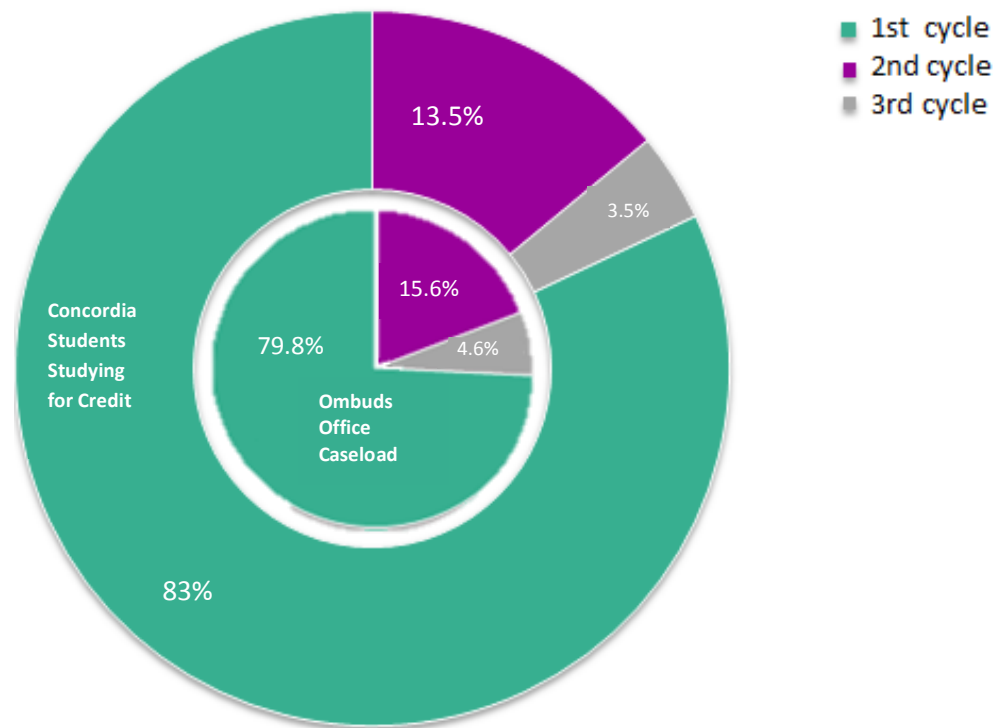
Figure 5: Caseload by Month

The volume of cases opened by term and has been consistent for the last number of years and is in stride with the academic cycle.

## Student Caseload

As highlighted above in the Caseload by Status histogram (p. 20), 392 students studying for credit consulted the Ombuds Office. The total student caseload represents just under 0.9 % of the overall student body of 43 752 that were studying for credit at Concordia in 2013-2014 (Concordia Institutional Planning Office, 2014). The undergraduates who consulted the Ombuds Office represented 0.9% of that segment of the student population. The graduate students (2<sup>nd</sup> cycle) represented 1% of that segment of the student body. The Ombuds Office provided services to 1.2% of the graduate students (3<sup>rd</sup> cycle) studying at Concordia for this reporting year (Concordia Institutional Planning Office, 2014).

The outer section of the pie chart below highlights the Concordia student body studying for credit by cycle (Concordia Institutional Planning Office, 2014). The Ombuds Office caseload by cycle is presented in the center of the pie chart and is relatively representative of the student body with a greater proportion of graduate students having used our services.



*"You, and your office, humanize the experience"*  
- Ph. D student

Figure 6: Caseload by Cycle

Four-fifths of the Ombuds Office student caseload (79.8%) was made up of undergraduate students (1<sup>st</sup> cycle). One in five students who consulted the Ombuds Office was a graduate student. Of those, 84.7% were 2<sup>nd</sup> cycle students (Master's, Diplomas, Certificates, and Preparatory Studies) and 15.3% were Ph.D. (3<sup>rd</sup> cycle).

Compared to 2012-2013, the breakdown of students by cycle in the Ombuds Office caseload showed a lesser proportion of undergraduate students (74%) and a greater proportion of both 2<sup>nd</sup> cycle (19%) and 3<sup>rd</sup> cycle (7%) students. We are monitoring this to determine whether changes in the methods used to orient graduate students in the fall term resulted in fewer of them knowing about our services, whether unionization of TAs and RAs brings fewer students to us initially to discuss their concerns informally or perhaps it is due to SGS' Annual Progress Report system.

### International Students

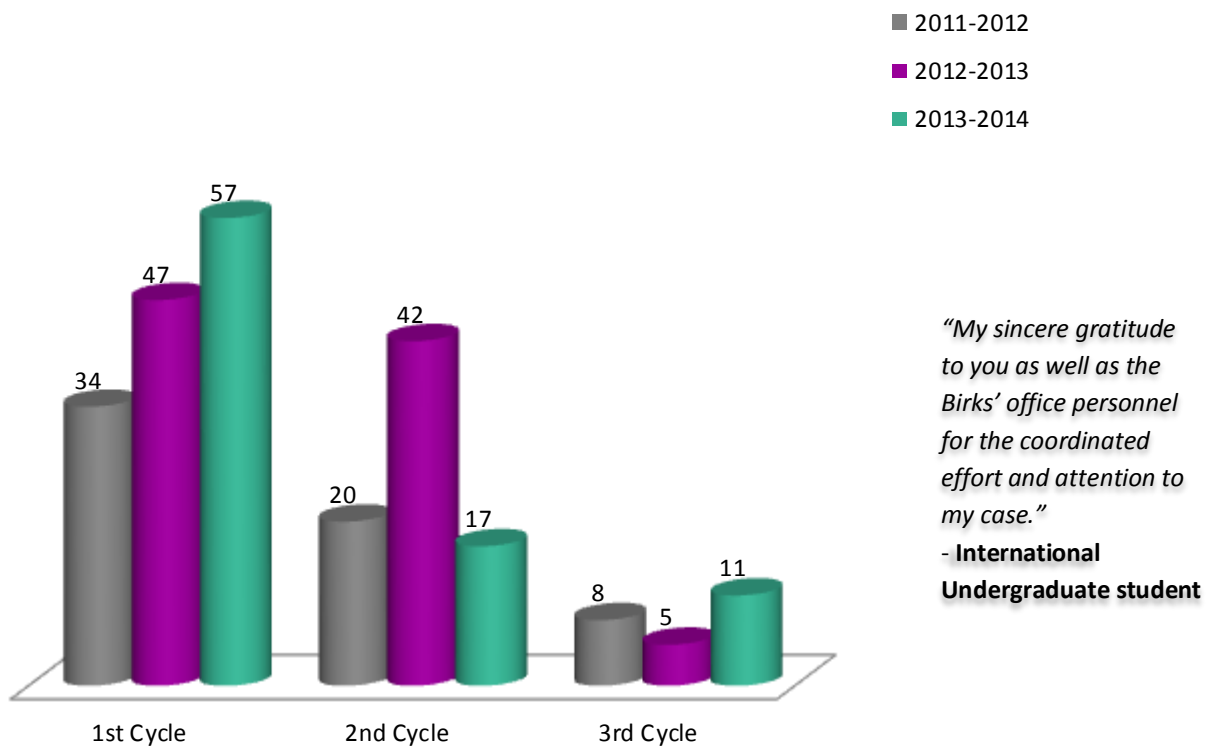


Figure 7: International Students

Similar to last year, 21.7% of the Ombuds Office student caseload was studying at Concordia on an international visa. This compares to 15.5% for the overall international student body studying for credit (Concordia Institutional Planning Office, 2014).

Figure 7 highlights that since 2011-2012, there has been a 2/3 increase in the volume of international undergraduates using our services. In 2013-2014, the increase stemmed from students being deregistered from their courses when their immigration documents were not submitted by the deadline. In working through these cases with the International Students Office (ISO), the Ombuds Office recommended that a process be instituted for international students who wish to appeal de-registration on account of special circumstances. As an initial step, this systemic recommendation was implemented such that a Committee was struck to design the process. It was finalized recently.

With regards to 2<sup>nd</sup> cycle students who used the services of the Ombuds Office in 2013-2014, the important increase in 2012-2013 did not keep pace. With respect to 3<sup>rd</sup> cycle international students, they used our services in greater numbers than in the last two years.

## Students

### Student Concerns

As in previous years, academic concerns were the predominant reason for students to consult the Ombuds Office. In 2013-2014, this was the case for 73.7% of the issues brought to our attention.

	Undergraduate	Undergraduate Independent	Visiting	Graduate	Graduate Independent	total
<b>Academic Concerns</b>						
Program/Degree requirements	44	3		9		56
Course Management	40	3		4	1	48
Grades/Re-evaluation	39	1		6	1	47
Exams	28	3		1		32
Academic Standing	22	2		8		32
Registration/Course Change	22	1		3		26
Admission	13	2		3	3	21
Missing Exams and Papers	10					10
Advising/Supervision				8		8
Academic Misconduct	4	1		2	1	8
Intellectual Property				1		1
<b>Total Academic Concerns</b>	<b>222</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>45</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>289</b>

*“Were it not for all your help and hard work helping me, I most likely would never obtain a degree.”*

**- Undergraduate Student**

*“My internship has been settled. It was a long and stressful battle but it was worth the persistent effort. Thank you for your advice.”*

**- Undergraduate Student**

Figure 8: Academic concerns

Issues related to Program/Degree requirements were the academic concern raised the most often by undergraduate (1<sup>st</sup> cycle) at 19.7%. This was followed by course management (18.1%) and grades/re-evaluation (16.8%). Concerns about exams accounted for 13% of concerns raised and academic standing accounted for 10.1%.

With regards to the academic concerns of graduate students (2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> cycle), issues pertaining to Program/Degree requirements were raised most frequently at 17.6%. Advising/supervision and academic standing were next in occurrence at 15.7%. Grades/re-evaluation accounted for 13.7 % of the concerns raised by graduate students. Admission accounted for 11.8% and course management for 9.8% of the concerns raised.

	Undergraduate	Undergraduate Independent	Visiting	Graduate	Graduate Independent	total
<b>Non-Academic Concerns</b>						
Fees	25	1	4	11		41
Miscellaneous	11					11
Univ. Policy & Procedures	6			4	1	11
Financial Aid	3			7		10
Medical/Compassionate/ Humanitarian Situations	8	2				10
Non-Academic Misconduct	2			2		4
Non Jurisdiction	4					4
Security/Safety	2			1		3
Student Associations	2			1		3
Residences	1					1
Employment	1			1		2
Libraries	1	1				2
Access to Infor/privacy	1					1
<b>Total Non-Academic Concerns</b>	<b>67</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>27</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>103</b>

*"I believe you were very useful in shaking the administration a bit as they did not answer my reimbursement request. For that I am grateful."*  
**- Undergraduate Student**

Figure 9: Non-Academic Concerns

Non-academic concerns highlighted above accounted for a little more than one-quarter of the issues brought to the attention of the Ombuds Office.

For undergraduate students, fees accounted for 40% of non-academic concerns. “Miscellaneous” issues were the next category of concern at 14.7% (ex: graduating student needing official documentation to complete an application for another university; options to pursue for a student whose professor did not follow-up on her request for a letter of recommendation) followed by medical/compassionate/humanitarian situations (13.3%) for which students requested different accommodations. Requests for information/interpretation of university policies and procedures accounted for 8 % and non-jurisdiction for 5.3% of non-academic concerns.

For graduate students, fees were the source of close to two-fifths of their non-academic concerns. In one-quarter of cases, students had concerns about financial aid. Requests for information/interpretation of University policies and procedures accounted for 17.9% of non-academic concerns.

### Action Taken in Student Cases

	Undergraduate	Undergraduate Independent	Visiting	Graduate	Graduate Independent	total
Info/Advice/Referral/Non-Jurisdiction	175	11	3	50	3	242
Informal Conflict Resolution	80	7	1	18	3	109
Withdrawn	13	1		1		15
Investigation With/ Without Recommendation	12			2		14
Expedite	7			1	1	9
Witness	2	1				3
<b>Total</b>	<b>289</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>72</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>392</b>

*“It was really nice to have someone listen to me, as well as offer constructive advice”* Graduate - Graduate Student Diploma Student

Figure 10: Action Taken in Student cases

The table above provides a description of the actions taken in each of this year’s 392 cases of students studying for credit.

**Providing information/advice/referral** was the action taken in 61.7% of student cases. When there are channels of recourse available to address a problem, the objective of this action is to provide students with the tools to engage in the process on their own. When the means available are less clear cut and depending on the student, the staff and student will brainstorm about different options and evaluate them. The student will subsequently decide on a course of action. In so doing, we hope that students will appreciate that problems and conflict will occur, better understand the principles of natural justice and look for constructive ways to address their concerns. Hopefully, these skills and the confidence to use them will serve them well in their studies at Concordia and beyond.

**Informal conflict resolution** was the action used in more than one-quarter (27.8%) of student cases. In these, the Ombudsperson or the Associate Ombudsperson play an active role as an intermediary by adopting a range of Alternate Dispute Resolution (ADR) techniques (informal fact finding, shuttle-diplomacy, facilitation and mediation) to foster a reasonable outcome.

Sometimes student cases are **withdrawn** because a concern is resolved through other means, a student decides to no longer pursue the matter, the student doesn't follow-up as planned or the student doesn't wish to identify him/herself thereby preventing any possible resolution of the concern/complaint. In 2013-2014, 3.8% of student cases were withdrawn.

When a student has followed the usual avenues of recourse to resolve a particular problem and believes that the outcome is unfair, he or she might approach the Ombuds Office for assistance. If the Ombuds Office assesses the preliminary facts and determines that there is some merit to the claim, she will conduct an **investigation** as per The Terms of Reference. Fourteen of these were conducted in 2013-2014.

In another 2.3% of student cases, situations were **expedited** by Ombuds Office staff. This can include cutting through red tape, gathering information needed by a student to resolve a problem or setting up an appointment for a student after providing some background to the person he or she will meet.

Cases are categorized as **witness** when the Ombuds Office is notified of a situation and no action is requested, appropriate or possible. The student is essentially informing his/her addressee that the Ombudsperson is now aware of a situation. As a matter of course, she will then acknowledged receipt of the copy of the correspondence and suggest to the student that he allow the recipient time to respond to the concern. The Ombudsperson will also invite the student to share the outcome. Three cases were categorized as "witness".



## Employees

As highlighted in the Caseload by Status histogram (Figure 3, p. 20), there were 55 employees who availed themselves of services of the Ombuds Office. Of that total, 20 (35.7%) were staff members, 12 (21.4%) were faculty, 10 (17.9%) were academic administrators<sup>18</sup>, 9 (16.1%) were contract employees and 5 (8.9%) were casual employees.

## Employee Concerns

	Staff	Faculty	Academic Administrator	Contract	Casual	Total
<b>Academic Concerns</b>						
Course Management	4	5	1	1		11
Grades/Re-evaluation	2	1	1			4
Academic Misconduct	1		2			3
Program/Degree Requirements	2					2
Academic Standing	1					1
Intellectual Property		1				1
Exams			1			1
<b>Total Academic Concerns</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>23</b>
<b>Non Academic Concerns</b>						
Employment	1	2	1	7	3	14
Univ. Policy & Procedures	4	2	1			7
Access to Infor/Privacy	2				1	3
Medical/Compassionate/Humanitarian Situations	1		1			2
Miscellaneous			2			2
Non Jurisdiction	1	1				2
Non-Academic Misconduct					1	1
Student Associations	1					1
<b>Total Non Academic Concerns</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>32</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>55</b>

*"It is good to know that the university has you and we can come for help and guidance."*  
- Staff

*"Thank you so much agreeing to take a look at the email draft for my three disruptive students in my course. Your help is much appreciated"*  
- Faculty

Figure 11: Employee Concerns

<sup>18</sup> Academic administrators include Deans, Associate Deans, Chairs, GPDs and UPDs.

In 2013-2014, staff was the category of employees that most used the services of the Ombuds Office. Their concerns were equally distributed between academic and non-academic issues whereas in the previous year, the latter concerns were raised in 3 out of 4 cases.

Of the overall concerns of **staff** members, the most common issues (40%) were requests for information/interpretation of University policies and procedures and inquiries about reasonable course management practices (ex. accommodation for religious observances, ethical questions, etc).

The second category of employees that most frequently used services of the Ombuds Office was that of **faculty** members. Academic concerns were more commonly presented (58.3%) by this group than were non-academic concerns. Of the academic concerns, close to three-quarters (71.4%) were issues related to course management, followed by concerns related to grades/re-evaluation and intellectual property. Requests for information/interpretation of University policies and procedures and questions about employment were the most common non-academic concerns raised by faculty.

In terms of frequency, **academic administrators** were the third employee group to avail themselves of services, their numbers were greater than in years past. Similar to staff, their concerns were equally distributed between academic and non-academic issues. Academic concerns related most often (40%) to issues of academic misconduct. With regard to non-academic concerns, the most common were miscellaneous in nature, namely, requests for both advice on the best resource to refer a student living under difficult circumstances and advice regarding the application of an administrative process.

Seven out of eight issues raised by **contractual** employees pertained to employment questions including conditions related to fair hiring, remuneration, renewal and termination practices.

Five **casual** employees used our services in 2013-2014. The majority of their concerns (60%) related to employment issues that included timely remuneration, possible acquired rights when moving from a casual status to a contract position and continuation of a casual assignment.

## Action Taken in Employee Cases

	Staff	Faculty	Academic Administrator	Contract	Casual	Total
Info/Advice/Referral/Non-Jurisdiction	16	12	7	6	3	44
Informal Conflict Resolution	1			3	2	6
Withdrawn	1		2			3
Prevention			1			1
Investigation With/Without Recommendation	1					1
Witness	1					1
<b>Total</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>56</b>

*“Your words of encouragement certainly put my mind at ease when I felt like I had nowhere to turn. Keep up the great work!”*  
**- Faculty**

Figure 12: Action Taken in Employee Cases

In over three-quarters (78.6%) of employee cases, Information/Advice/Referral was provided. Six cases (10.7%) were concluded using informal conflict resolution techniques, one investigation was conducted for a staff member, three were withdrawn and one case was witnessed and resolved by other parties .

One Academic Administrator case was categorized as “prevention”. This categorization is used when a member is designing/reviewing a program, procedure or policy and asks the Ombuds Office for its advice on questions of fairness. In these situations, there is no complaint. The focus is to anticipate and prevent problems. This year, the issue of concern focussed on how to design procedures for a soon to be launched departmental committee on Equity and Diversity that will function within the context of the University’s current policies and procedure.

## “Other” Caseload

This caseload is a grouping of individuals who are not current members of Concordia (students, employees) but have a relationship with the institution. In 2013-2014, there were 23 cases in this category. More than one-third (34.8%) were former students, alumni accounted for 17.4% of this caseload and CSU Advocates represented 13% of this “other” caseload. Two applicants availed themselves of the services of the Ombuds Office. Together, these individuals represented three-quarters of this caseload.

### Concerns of “Other” caseload

Concerns of "Other" Caseload	cases
<b>Former Student</b>	<b>8</b>
Advising /Supervision	2
Grades/Re-Evaluation	1
Fees	3
Miscellaneous	2
<b>alumni</b>	<b>4</b>
Advising /Supervision	1
Program/Degree Requirements	1
Fees	1
Univ. Policy & Procedures	1
<b>CSU Rep</b>	<b>3</b>
Course management	2
Program/Degree Requirements	1
<b>Potential Applicant</b>	<b>2</b>
Admission	2
<b>Citizen</b>	<b>1</b>
Student Association	1
<b>Contract Researcher</b>	<b>1</b>
Intellectual property	1
<b>Estate Manager</b>	<b>1</b>
Miscellaneous	1
<b>Parent</b>	<b>1</b>
Financial Aid	1
<b>Professor HTW</b>	<b>1</b>
Security /Safety	1
<b>Student Association</b>	<b>1</b>
Student Association	1
<b>Total</b>	<b>23</b>

*“This is to update you with my recent follow up on journal papers with Dr. M and to thank you and the Ombudsman office for the assistance so far. It helped me to understand my situation better. I was at one point worried since the papers were past due after graduation. Once again thank you for talking to Dr. M. in an intermediate position.”*  
**- Former Graduate student**

Figure 13: Concerns of “Other” caseload

As shown above, concerns about fees were the most common for former students (37.5%) followed by advising/supervision (25%), another quarter of concerns were miscellaneous in nature (cleanliness of bathrooms in the HB and how to access community services). Grades/re-evaluation was the last concern of former students (12.5%). The concerns of alumni were evenly distributed between academic and non-academic issues. CSU representatives contacted the Ombuds Office for clarification about academic regulations that were of concern to students they were representing. The concerns of the other members of this caseload were varied.

### Action Taken in Cases of “Other” caseload

Action Taken in Cases of “Other” caseload	cases
Former Student	8
Info/Advice/Referral/Non-Jurisdiction	7
Investigation With/Without Recommendation	1
Alumni	4
Info/Advice/Referral/Non-Jurisdiction	2
Expedite	1
Informal Conflict Resolution	1
CSU Advocate	3
Info/Advice/Referral/Non-Jurisdiction	3
Potential Applicant	2
Witness	1
Withdrawn	1
Citizen	1
Info/Advice/Referral/Non-Jurisdiction	1
Contract Researcher	1
Info/Advice/Referral/Non-Jurisdiction	1
Estate Manager	1
Expedite	1
Parent	1
Informal Conflict Resolution	1
Professor HTW	1
Info/Advice/Referral/Non-Jurisdiction	1
Student Association	1
Informal Conflict Resolution	1
Total	23

Figure 14: Action Taken in Cases of “Other” caseload

The actions taken in the “other” caseload are described above. In just under two-thirds of these cases (65.2%), information and advice was provided. The Ombuds Office staff became involved as an intermediary in one alumni case, one case with a parent and one case of a student association. Two cases were expedited, one case was investigated, one was witnessed and one was withdrawn.

## FOSTERING BEST PRACTICES

The Ombudsperson and the Associate Ombudsperson are active in staying abreast of current issues and best practices in the field. This is accomplished by participating in different Ombudsman associations, planning and partaking in networking and training opportunities and following the Association of Canadian College and University Ombudspersons (ACCUO)'s Standards of Practice/Normes d'exercice de la fonction (2012).

Staff members also keep abreast of current issues on campus. Community newspapers, on-line news, minutes of the meetings of the Board of Governors, Senate and Faculty Councils are some examples of publications we regularly consult. Community events and workshops are also attended.

### Ombudsman Associations

The Ombudsperson and the Associate Ombudsperson held memberships in the:

- Association of Canadian College and University Ombudspersons (ACCUO)
- Association des Ombudsman des Universités du Québec (AOUQ)
- European Network of Ombudsmen in Higher Education (ENOHE)
- Forum of Canadian Ombudsman (FCO)

The Ombudsperson has been a member of the ACCUO since 2000 when she began her role at Concordia. She has been an active member of the Executive Committee since 2004 and was the President for two consecutive mandates (2010-2014). She continues to be active on the Executive in the position of Past President.

As for her participation in the AOUQ, the Ombudsperson has been a member of the Executive Committee since 2002.

The Ombudsperson is active in the ENOHE. Despite its name, the organization has a membership that goes beyond Europe with members from Canada, the United States, Mexico and Australia. At the end of the year covered in this report, the Ombudsperson was preparing to attend the 11<sup>th</sup> Annual ENOHE conference in Warsaw where she gave a presentation titled **Ombudsmanship as a tool for empowering Canadian Institutions in Higher Education.**

## Meetings, workshops and conferences

In 2013-2014, staff in the Ombuds Office attended the following:

- **AOUQ Annual General Meeting** (Université Laval, Québec, May 16-17 2013)
- **ACCUO/FCO Biennial Pre-Conference : Systemic Investigations for the Small Office** (Halifax, Nova Scotia, June 9 2013)
- **ACCUO/FCO Biennial Conference: The Ombuds Office in Canada Today: Learning and Working Together** (Halifax, Nova Scotia, June 10-12 2013)
- **AOUQ Midyear Meeting** (Université de Montréal, Montreal, November 29 2013)
- **ACCUO Midyear Meeting** (Concordia University, Montreal, February 6-7 2014)  
Hosted by Concordia's Ombuds Office, this 2 day meeting was attended by 19 ACCUO members from New Brunswick, Ontario and Quebec. During the event, a special presentation was made by the University of Ottawa's Ombudsperson on her **Report on Diversity at the School of Nursing**. And as invited guests, Concordia's Director and Senior Advisor, Rights and Responsibilities and the Legal Counsel for Student and Administrative Affairs presented the **Code of Rights and Responsibilities** and the **Policy on Student Involuntary Leave of Absence**. Both documents are viewed as models that are being adapted in other institutions of higher education in Canada
- **Face to Face: Let's Talk about how front line staff can respond to the needs of students with mental health concerns** (Concordia University, ACSD, February 11 2014)
- **IOA Webinar Series on Conflict Management: Conflict Coaching Models and Process** (March 23th 2014)
- **IOA's 9<sup>th</sup> Annual Pre-Conference: The Fine Art of Fairness: A Model for Decision Makers (FD1)** (Denver, April 6 2014)
- **IOA's 9<sup>th</sup> Annual Conference: "Join the Conversation: Learn, Share, Grow."** (Denver, April 7-9 2014)

## Standards of Practice/Normes d'exercice de la fonction

The Ombuds Office was involved in drafting the ACCUO's Standards of Practice/Normes d'exercice de la fonction <http://www.uwo.ca/ombuds/SoP.pdf>. Since being adopted in June 2012 these have been followed as a complement to the Terms of Reference of the Ombuds Office.

## INFORMING THE COMMUNITY OF TERMS OF REFERENCE AND SERVICES

Promoting the role and services is done on an ongoing basis as well as on a cyclical basis that is in keeping with the rhythm of the academic year.

### On-Going Promotion

- Pamphlet titled Promoting Fairness at Concordia/Pour la Promotion de l'Équité à Concordia
- Link to the Terms of Reference of the Ombuds Office in e-mail staff signatures
- Web page <http://www.concordia.ca/ombuds>
- Presence on all digital screen information loops on both the SGW and Loyola campuses

### Cyclical Promotion

This type of promotion is carried out at the start of both the fall and winter terms. In preparation for the fall term, we send thousands of pamphlets to the New Student Program and the International Students Office to be included in their welcome packages for incoming students. Pamphlets are also sent to academic departments and non-academic offices in the early fall.

We publicized our services in the following publications:

- CSU Handbook
- GSA Handbook
- The Bridge

In 2013-2014, we participated in the following orientation activities for different university audiences:

- Engineering and Computer Science New Faculty Orientation
- Graduate Student Orientation
- International Student Orientation
- MBA New Student Orientation
- Re-Discover Concordia Fair
- New Undergraduate Student Orientation
- Orientation for New Chairs
- Student Transition Centre Orientation



## OMBUDS OFFICE RESOURCES

In 2013-2014, the Ombuds Office's resources included its team, office space and budget:

### Team

- Kristen Robillard, Ombudsperson
- Julie Boncompain, Associate Ombudsperson
- Michael Rassy, Department Assistant (.5) who assumed the same part-time role in the Office of Rights and Responsibilities left in December 2013
- Caseworker (.5) position recommended following the Board of Governors' June 21 2012 approval of the **Report and Recommendations of the Appraisal Committee of the Ombuds Office Concerning the Ombuds Office** on (Recommendation #4) "to better allow for the fulfillment of all of the obligations provided for in the Terms of Reference" has not been hired due to ministerial budget cuts first announced by the former MELS.

### Space

The Ombuds Office has shared space with the Office of Rights and Responsibilities for over 10 years in suite 1120 of the Guy-Metro Building (GM). Though these offices provide distinct services to the community, their proximity is useful for ease of client referral and consultation.

As previous Annual Reports described, the space was seriously deficient with regards to safety, accessibility and confidentiality. Only one door was available to enter and exit the suite of offices. Entering the suite and negotiating the space was a challenge for people with reduced mobility. When there were people in the very small reception area, maintaining confidentiality of case information required the Department Assistant to have to interrupt his work.

In 2013-2014, much planning was done with Facilities Management to our new 10<sup>th</sup> floor home in the GM Building. Occupancy was scheduled for July/August 2014 but was delayed until mid-October 2014. We are pleased with the results as our space is now safe, accessible and maximizes confidentiality.

### Budget

In addition to funds for the usual salary and office expenses, a small amount was available for professional development. Memberships in professional organizations as well as attendance at meetings, workshops and conferences to promote best practices are described previously in this report.

## APPRECIATION

The publishing of a report such as this is an opportunity to formally extend our appreciation to students, academic administrators, faculty, staff and other community members who take the time from their busy schedules to come forward with their concerns and complaints and who work patiently with us to arrive at creative solutions. In Concordia's large and diverse community, misunderstandings occur, mistakes are made, language is not always clear, decisions are not always timely or fully reasoned, feelings sometimes get hurt and feathers get ruffled. We understand that these situations are not always easy to address and thank you for promoting fairness at Concordia and making it a better place to work and study.

Many thanks go to Julie Boncompain (Associate Ombudsperson) who was instrumental in producing this report. Thanks also go to Sraddha Bista (Department Assistant) who joined us in September 2014. She was a great help in preparing this report. Finally, I would like to thank them for their ongoing contribution to the work of the Ombuds Office that has been serving the community for 35 years.

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