



UNIVERSITY
OF ALBERTA



2024 - 25

Office of the Student Ombuds Annual Report

The Ombuds' Way in
Higher Education

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Introduction

The Ombuds' Way in Higher Education

The Office of the Student Ombuds is situated in the Vice-Provost, ACB portfolio. The OSO works independently on student casework to guide with impartiality. The ombuds also offers guidance to faculties and departments on improving policy and delivers presentations on a variety of topics to improve communication and equitable practices on campus. Our professional standards of practice are: Independence, Confidentiality, Impartiality and Accessibility.

The Ombuds' Way in Higher Education: The Ombuds' role is unique, providing a holistic perspective that is distinct from other complaint-handling processes. The office is busy with casework activity to handle and manage complaints within a specified timeline, ensuring consistency in quality and effectiveness. We do not shut the door when a case is closed. We use the knowledge we have gained from each case that we handle through a process of debriefing and reflection with the student and staff.

An important function of the ombuds is to look at ways to improve university policies and procedures, looking for unintended gaps and inequities that further marginalize our most vulnerable students. Our case activity provides us with important personal stories of how the university impacts each of its students. We examine the policies and procedures in place to guide them, and sometimes we find gaps, omissions, ambiguity, etc. Ombuds do not work in isolation despite our independence. We rely on collaboration, looking for expertise and guidance from the entire University community in order to provide robust feedback and recommendations. We work in a more organic than hierarchical manner, reaching out to connect with the growing branches, while examining the hidden, systemic roots. We are always learning as we gain knowledge from the intricate parts of a large organization with a diverse, ever-changing community.

In our work across departments, faculties, and student organizations, we provide a consultative role on various university committees that develop academic and disciplinary policies and procedures. Our perspective is revealed through a fairness lens to ensure that relationships within the university are not just sustained, but thrive in a healthy way. The ombuds' way is adhering to due process, relational and equitable fairness in all decision-making processes.



Natalie Sharpe, Director, OSO

GALD Presentation on Campus, 2024

Notes of Appreciation

"I wanted to tell you that my appeal was approved! All the help I received from you made a big difference in how I presented my appeal. Thank you so much for all your help through this process, I couldn't have done it without you."

"I just want to say thank you for helping and supporting me today and yesterday. I appreciate it very much and am very grateful for your feedback."

"I really appreciate your help, I wanted to let you know I submitted the appeal and it was just approved today. You have really supported me during this time. I can't thank you enough."

"I am writing to you to inform you that my appeal was successful and to thank you for your help. Thank you for being patient and understanding despite the short notice."

"I just wanted to sincerely thank you for your help and support during this stressful period in my program. I truly appreciate everything you've done—it has meant a great deal to me."

"I just wanted to sincerely thank you for your help and support during this stressful period in my program. I truly appreciate everything you've done—it has meant a great deal to me."

Office of the Student Ombuds (OSO) Staff 2024 - 2025

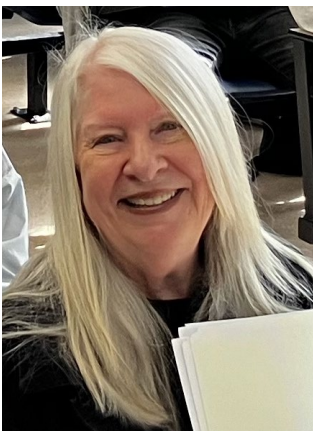
Natalie Sharpe, Director of the OSO

**We connect
with our Canadian
and international
colleagues
to examine
current higher
education challenges.**

Natalie Sharpe

"I am proud of our ombuds team as we work closely to ensure that we respond in a timely way to students, and adhere to the professional standards of the Association of Canadian College and University Ombudspersons. We are committed to applying a fairness lens in our work with students and staff, advocating for fair processes and equity. We make recommendations on ways to improve these processes in our annual report. Ombuds are not lawyers or student advocates; we help students navigate their way through the complexities of policies and processes at the University. Our way is collaboration and the power of moral suasion."

Natalie is committed to the profession of higher education ombuds. "Ombuds do not do good work in isolation and can easily lose trust and respect when 'tilting at windmills'." She encourages staff to engage in professional development activities throughout the year to connect with ombuds at other colleges and universities. "Our ombuds engage in professional development through their work with our various ACCUO/AOUCC committees, and our ties with international higher education ombuds organizations. This is because students in higher education throughout the world face similar challenges. We connect with our Canadian and international colleagues to examine current higher education challenges. We engage in collegial debate at our webinars and conferences on how higher education ombuds can contribute more to their institutions, to advance higher education learning, as well as preserve the ombuds' function in Higher Education."



Natalie Sharpe, BA (Hons), MA, (she/her) is an undergraduate and graduate alumna (Department of Anthropology) of the University of Alberta, and has worked for decades in student services as an ombuds. She has also taught in the social sciences, served on union committees and trial panels, conducted indigenous land claims research, and worked as a Canadian encyclopedia researcher/editor. In recognition of her contributions to Higher Education ombuds work, Natalie has been honoured with two prestigious awards: the Pete Small Award (U.S./ California Caucus of College and University Ombudspersons) and the ACCUO/AOUCC Distinguished Service Award (Canada).

Remonia Stoddart-Morrison, Graduate Ombudsperson

"In my role as the Graduate Ombudsperson, early intervention and resolution, that is, proactive strategies, are key in assisting students to address concerns. Proactive steps also ensure that the university, faculties, units and individuals are held to appropriate standards of fairness, as it relates to each student's concerns, taking into consideration their extenuating circumstances and their social location. Over the years, I have found that helping students gain an early understanding of their rights and responsibilities, as well as an understanding of the support and resources available to them, is one of the most beneficial early intervention/proactive strategies.

"Over the years, I have found that helping students gain an early understanding of their rights and responsibilities, as well as an understanding of the support and resources available to them, is one of the most beneficial early intervention/proactive strategies."

For the year, we had new departments and groups requesting and receiving training sessions on the role of the OSO, building and maintaining strong supervisory relationships, understanding rights and responsibilities, discussing and setting expectations, attending to unconscious bias, having difficult conversations, practicing equity among others. Additionally, geopolitical crises and situations that are directly or indirectly tied to these can bring on added stress to students, thus impacting their ability to perform. As an ombudsperson, it is essential to work with other portfolios and units within the university to ensure that these impacts are identified and strategies put in place so that affected students are not disadvantaged academically. To ensure that those affected were fairly treated, it is important to understand that while each student may have been facing the same crisis, how it was affecting them individually would be different. Thus the resolution could not be a 'one-size-fits-all'. Working to identify various options that could assist students is a crucial part of making certain there are fair outcomes."

Remonia
Stoddart-Morrison



Remonia Stoddart-Morrison is a senior OSO staff member, completing her doctorate in the Faculty of Education; she supports the Director in a consulting role on various University committees. Remonia works collaboratively with GPS and the GSA to ensure policies and processes are in place to make graduate students and postdoctoral fellows academically and professionally successful. As a professional ombuds, Remonia delivers papers at national and international ombuds HE conferences. She also serves on the Association of Canadian College and University Ombudspersons (ACCUO/AOUCC) Executive as a Co-Treasurer, edits the ACCUO/AOUCC bulletin, as Co-Chair ACCUO Communications, and as an ACCUO EDI committee member.

Laurel Wilkie, Undergraduate Ombudsperson

"This past year has been filled with a lot of work supporting students as they navigate both academic and non-academic processes. With the Student Academic Integrity Policy (SAIP) being implemented in September 2024, we worked closely with students to ensure they understood their options within the policy. I appreciate the conversations I have had with students around SAIP, accountability, and learning as the students were empowered to make informed decisions on the processes best suited to their needs."

Laurel delivers on-campus orientation presentations and special sessions for faculties such as KSR. She also co-presented in two professional sessions of the Forum of Canadian Ombudsman and Association of Canadian College and University Ombudsperson's Conference in Victoria, October 2024.

"I appreciate the conversations I have had with students around SAIP, accountability, and learning as the students were empowered to make informed decisions on the processes best suited to their needs."

"I value my role in providing an ombuds lens of fairness to students. We infuse every conversation, meeting, workshop, and ongoing work with this lens to ensure relational and equitable fairness are taken into consideration. I also use the fairness lens to discuss policies with the Program Support Team or Programs Committee, or when faculties or departments approach the OSO team for direct feedback. As the university community faces ongoing challenges, the OSO's advocacy for equitable and fair treatment is vital to a campus where students can thrive."

Laurel Wilkie



Laurel Wilkie, BA, MEd (she/her), became the Undergraduate Ombudsperson in January of 2023 and has completed an OSO internship as the Graduate Ombuds Intern. She has been serving on the Association of Canadian College and University Ombudspersons Executive Committee as a Member-at-Large as well as Secretary of the Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion Committee. In fall of 2025, Laurel will be completing the Forum of Canadian Ombudsman and Osgoode Professional School's "Essentials for Ombuds" certificate, an intense 5-day course, as an important step in her professional development.

Laurel Wilkie, Undergraduate Ombudsperson, presenting at Forum of Canadian/ Association of Canadian College and University Ombuds (AOUCC) in Victoria, B.C.

The OSO Internship Program and Ombuds Interns 2024 - 2025

The ombuds internship program has reached a decade and provided thirty graduate and undergraduate students with an opportunity to learn and practice ombuds work as paid paraprofessionals.

They are educated on the role of the higher education ombudsperson. Interns gain valuable skills and tools to help them examine university policies and processes through a fairness lens. They work with students in a confidential setting to explore their goals and options for academic success. The Graduate Ombuds Intern works two days per week primarily with graduate students, but also assists undergraduate students with academic standing appeals. The Undergraduate Ombuds interns work full-time, ideally through an internship program offered through faculties such as the Art Works Experience, to gain a full experience of a professional internship at the University of Alberta. They are guided by the Director of the OSO and an intern coordinator to develop goals for skill development and apply these to their work as ombuds. They receive mid-term and final evaluations on the development of these skills and are enriched through a training and mentoring program offered by senior ombuds staff. This ongoing training and mentoring helps them develop the skills they need to engage in professional practices, including reflective activities, and adhering to the professional standards of practice of the Association of Canadian College and University Ombudspersons.

**Promoting EDI in the Ombuds World through Internship Programs:
A Case Study of Diversity in the University of Alberta's Student Ombuds Internships**

Presenters: Natalie Sharpe, Remonia Stoddard-Morrison, Laurel Wilkie, Rebecca Avila Garcia & Bryan Campbell, Office of the Student Ombuds, University of Alberta

HISTORY

- 1967: Alberta Provincial Ombudsman created
- 1971: First UKA Ombuds created for staff and students following classroom letter
- 1975: First Ombuds model for staff development
- 1976: Ombuds created for students (Ombuds created for staff and students)
- 1983: Students' Union (SU) creates a separate Student OmbudsService (SOS) with part-time student ombuds
- 1990s: Graduate Students' Association (GSA) appoints a part-time ombuds
- 1997: Rick, Su, and GSA create hybrid SOS, with full-time ombuds and mentoring for ombuds and full-time OSO Ombudsman Ombuds
- 2015: Hybrid ombuds work and become the full-time Office of the Student Ombuds (OSO) with Ombuds Director (OD) leading and managing new ombuds program
- 2016: Two full-time Undergraduate Ombuds Interns created
- 2019: One part-time Undergraduate Ombuds Intern created
- 2023: OSO Strategic Plan: Proposed Mission, Mandate, Terms of Reference, Reporting Relationship
- 2024: OSO starts reporting to Vice President, Equity, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI)
- Decade of ombuds program (2015-2025)

COMMITMENT TO EQUITY, DIVERSITY & INCLUSION

In addition to its value to students, the office, and the University, the internship program exemplifies our office's commitment to equity, diversity, and inclusion. This includes: diverse identities and representation among our interns; creating space for all marginalized voices to be included and being; recognizing and understanding that equity, while important, does not address the individual factors that impact individuals; and engaging in equitable practices to level the playing field. This program allows us to consciously reflect while creating opportunities for capacity building and staff retention in our office and the ombuds profession. Finally, some ombuds find their calling at an earlier stage in their career pathways.

- Diversity**
 - Accounting for intersectional bias
 - Challenging reflexes on personal biases & privileges
- Inclusion**
 - Actively seeking diverse voices
 - Ensuring equitable presence
 - Valuing diverse perspectives & experiences
- Capacity Building**
 - Training
 - Skills development
 - Communication
 - Conflict resolution
 - Decision making
 - Practicing self-care
- Equity**
 - Recognizing systemic barriers
 - Ensuring equitable access
 - Challenging inequities
- Staff Retention**
 - Providing support
 - Building relationships
 - Ensuring continuity of practice and the profession
- Diversity**
 - Diverse identities and representation
 - Recognizing and valuing diverse backgrounds and lived experiences
 - Organizing training & mentoring

VOICE OF INTERNS

Interns' voices are heard through various channels, including social media, newsletters, and direct communication with staff. The diagram shows a central 'VOICE OF INTERNS' box surrounded by various communication methods and outcomes.

LOOKING FORWARD

The ombuds internship program contributes to advancing and promoting EDI in ombuds practice at the University as well as in the ombuds profession.



Meshia Brown, Graduate Ombuds Intern

Meshia Brown, Graduate Ombuds Intern, is an international student completing her Master's thesis in Education Policy (Med) in Educational Policy, Social Justice and International Studies. She also holds a Bachelor's degree in Sociology, an MSc in Instructional Technology, and Diplomas of Education from the USA and Jamaica. Meshia was the Diversity, Inclusion and Service Learning – Resident Assistant at the University of Alberta. Meshia has also worked in Japan, demonstrating her cross-cultural experience. Meshia handles both graduate and undergraduate casework and assists Remonia with many of the Graduate Department and Faculty orientations. Meshia also worked with the ACCUO Communications committee, where she helped to assign articles for the ACCUO/AOUCC Bulletin, and assisted the editors with the organization of its newsletter.

Meshia was the Diversity, Inclusion and Service Learning – Resident Assistant at the University of Alberta. Meshia has also worked in Japan, demonstrating her cross-cultural experience.



Niamh Dower, Undergraduate Ombuds Intern

Niamh Dower is enrolled in an Arts Anthropology/Sociology degree. Niamh served as a member of the ACCUO EDI committee. Niamh reflects on her experience: “This year has been an incredibly transformative experience for me. Initially, I was unsure of what working in this role would mean for me, or even what it would entail — I had never heard of what an ombuds even was before applying. Through my work experience, I have developed a bevy of incredibly useful personal and professional skills, and come to a significantly deeper understanding of both what the position means and its value to institutions. With the constant support of the incredible team here, as well as my fellow interns, I have grown not only as a student and an ombuds but also as a person. I was able to improve my ability to empathize with others and become a better listener, to understand people more intuitively, and to express myself confidently in professional and social settings. I found a great degree of satisfaction and reward in providing students the comfort they needed in difficult circumstances by guiding them through complicated situations and processes. The practices of relational and equitable fairness are important to me, and I have continually seen the benefits of bringing that care for fairness even beyond my work.

Through this internship, I participated in meetings and webinars with University of Alberta staff and with members of the Association of Canadian College and University Ombudspersons. I have been able to listen to and learn from a network of incredible professionals, deepening my understanding of and gaining respect for this work and the work of all staff in higher education. I had the opportunity to interview Tanny Marks, Arbiter of Student Issues at Vancouver Community College, about the experiences of being an ombuds and living with disability in that work and beyond. Highlighting the need for equity, diversity, and inclusion in this work has been a particular point of interest for me in my internship. I strived to do this work while holding to a high standard of equity. I believe that the need for equity continues to grow in the work of higher education. In the ombuds profession, there is a unique opportunity for advocacy through the lens of fairness. The lessons I learned in ombuds work will stay with me throughout my career in both the academic and professional world. I sincerely hope that my internship brought new perspectives to the office that will leave their mark for the future.”

“The practices of relational and equitable fairness are important to me, and I have continually seen the benefits of bringing that care for fairness even beyond my work.”

Niamh Dower



Muna Nwanisobi, Undergraduate Ombuds Intern

Muna Nwanisobi is an undergraduate psychology major. Muna served as the OSO consulting member of the University sub-committee, Coalition for Action on High-Risk Drinking. She was a member of the ACCUO International Relations Committee, where she helped to recruit HE ombuds from many countries for interviews on their role and practices as ombuds. Muna reflects on her work this year.

"I have always been passionate about equity, accessibility and fairness, and this internship has given me the opportunity to do it from an impartial, independent and confidential perspective. This perspective uses policies and human rights to guide our principles while also pointing towards the ability of policies to make changes in a community. I was also privileged to meet people internationally and domestically whose commitment continues to push me towards making an impact on society. Prior to this experience, I pursued a degree in psychology to work in the counselling field, and while that has not changed, I find myself entertaining careers in policy and conflict resolution within the scope of mental health. This career change is also supported by a psychology degree and my shared belief that one's identity is made up by his, her, or their story.

"I have always been passionate about equity, accessibility and fairness, and this internship has given me the opportunity to do it from an impartial, independent and confidential perspective."

It has challenged my approach to communication and enriched me with skills in active listening, interactions and critical thinking to engage in conflict resolution. These are skills I aim to use in whatever position I find myself because it has become an integral part of my being. It calls to my ability to now put on different hats when interacting with people. It also adds to my passion of advocacy for systemic equity and equality that challenges the societal difficulties that people that look like me or belong in vulnerable communities go through."

Muna Nwanisobi

OSO Statistics

April 1, 2024 - June 30, 2025

CASELOAD ACTIVITY FOR OFFICE	APRIL 2024 - MARCH 2025	APRIL - JUNE 2025	TOTAL
Total Clients	1324	546	1870
Undergraduate Students	1145	512	1657
Graduate Students (including Medical Residents & Post Docs)	167	28	195
Unknown (Former Students, Applicants etc.)	12	6	18
Domestic Students (includes PR)	847	374	1221
International Students	472	165	637
Unknown	5	7	12
IN-OFFICE VISITS, MEETINGS & CONTACTS	APRIL 2024 - MARCH 2025	APRIL - JUNE 2025	TOTAL
Total Visits, Meetings & Contacts	16634	4692	21326
Total in-office visits (including Telephone, Email Meeting, Letter Editing, Google Meet, Zoom & Skype)	2233	896	3129
Students' meetings with prof, chair, faculty, AD, DO, UAPS, OSDHR, FGSR AD, etc.	239	49	288
Other Contacts (Email Scheduling, Email Response etc.)			
Casework Contacts	9645	3490	13135
Non-Casework Contacts	4269	212	4481
Appreciative Inquiries	1	2	3
Faculty/Instructor/Staff Inquiries	247	43	290

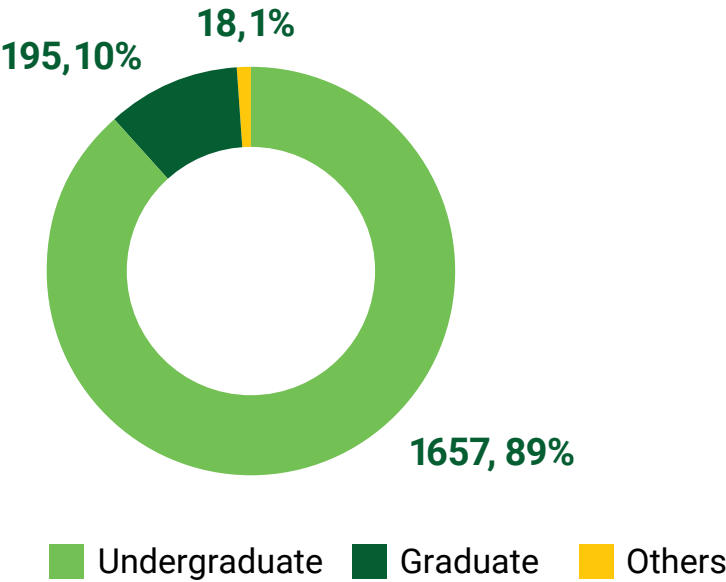
CASEWORK TYPES	APRIL 2024 - MARCH 2025	APRIL - JUNE 2025	TOTAL
Total number of issues	1481	588	2069
Academic (Grade Appeals, Academic Standing, RTW, Tuition etc.)	880	442	1322
Conflicts (Peer, Supervisory, Committee, Authorship etc.)	108	18	126
Academic offences (SAIP Cheating, Plagiarism etc.)	312	87	399
Non-academic offences (SCP, SGBV)	33	6	39
Discrimination and Harassment allegations	42	7	49
Miscellaneous (Work, Collective Agreement, Residence Issues, Admissions etc.)	106	28	134
OSO OFFICE ACTIVITIES	APRIL 2024 - MARCH 2025	APRIL - JUNE 2025	TOTAL
Total meetings outside of the office	624	87	711
Total committee meetings	506	70	576
Total workshops facilitated (includes orientations)	91	13	104
Formal Appeal hearings	26	2	28
Alternative Dispute resolutions	1	2	3
Consultation with Faculties/Staff/Units	96	14	110

HIAR REFERRALS	APRIL 2024 - MARCH 2025	APRIL - JUNE 2025	TOTAL
HIAR Referrals	10	2	12
	APRIL 2024 - MARCH 2025	APRIL - JUNE 2025	TOTAL
Staff Meetings	796	212	1008
Presentation Planning/Office Document Review etc.	177	53	230
Intern Training/Mentoring	203	60	263
Case Consults	167	37	204
Professional Development / Staff Training	246	118	364
Number of Hours Spent in PD	330.5	156.5	487

OSO Client Demographics 2024 - 2025

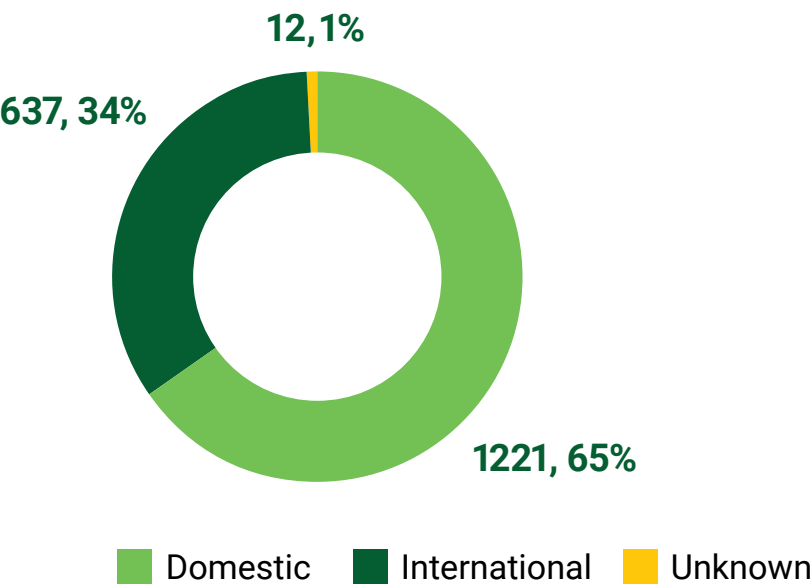
OSO Client Population

April 2024 - June 2025



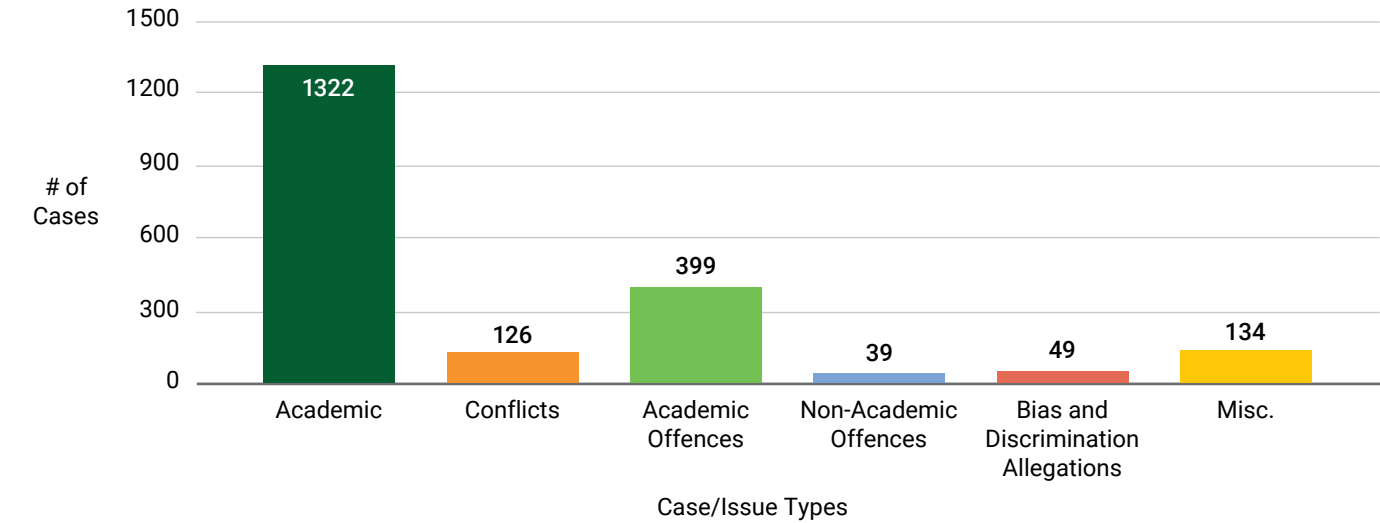
Residence Status of Clients

April 2024 - June 2025



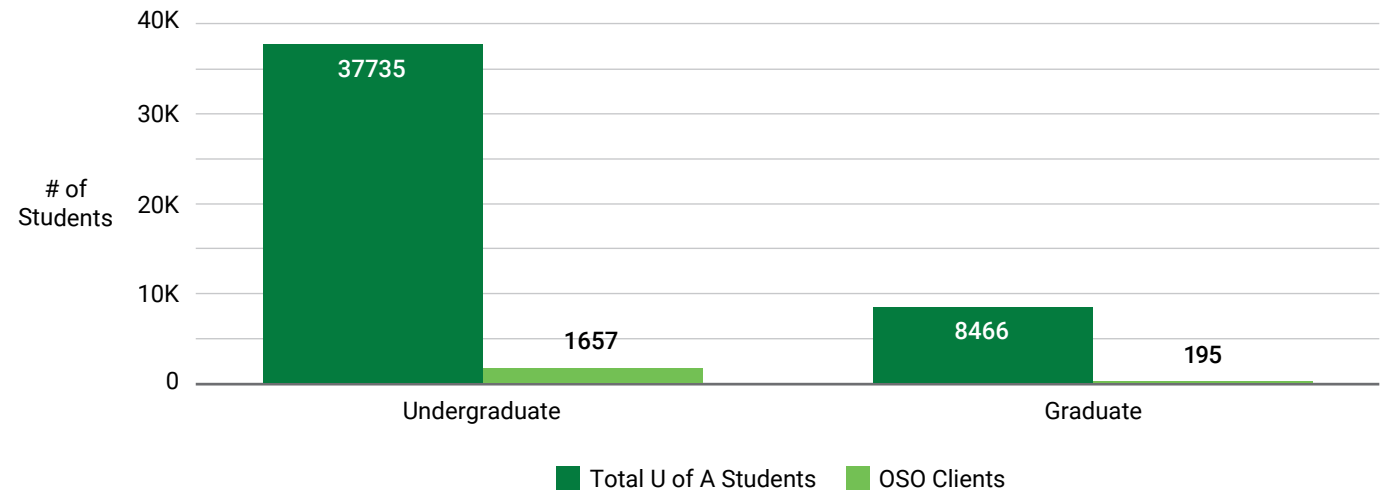
OSO Cases/Issues

April 2024 - June 2025



OSO Clients

April 2024 - June 2025



OSO Recommendations 2024 - 2025

RECOMMENDATION ONE:

Continue updating and implementing the OSO Strategic Plan — As the OSO lacks a clear mandate (which the majority of HE ombuds offices have), we continue to work on the OSO Strategic Plan to provide more independence within our office structure. In our new reporting relationship with the Vice-Provost of EDI, we are hopeful that many of the goals of the plan will be implemented, such as the ability to investigate, and adding a faculty and administrative staff ombuds role to assist the entire university. This would reinstate the original plan of the University Ombudsman serving the entire University (as from 1971-75).

RESPONSE:

We are still adapting to our new working relationship with the Vice-Provost, EDI, now Vice-Provost, Access, Community and Belonging (renamed 2025). As we work closely with our Association of Canadian College and University Ombudspersons (ACCUO/AOUCC), and our staff are serving in various capacities on the executive, we decided to move forward by combining these two recommendations. Our rationale is that formulating a strategic plan is tied to implementing a best/wiser practices in higher education ombuds document. The mandate and strategic plan of our office will be based on the best/wiser practices in higher education document to meet our needs and update/revise accordingly.

RECOMMENDATION TWO:

Working on a Declaration of Best Practices in Higher Education Ombudsing Document — An Ombuds has been present on the University of Alberta campus since 1971. This happened after the creation of the Alberta Ombudsman (1967), yet there is no clear documentation of how the ombuds' role protects best practices in higher education and adheres to high professional standards such as the ACCUO/AOUCC Standards of Practice. The OSO is in the planning stages of writing a declaration of Best Practices document to highlight the value that an ombuds brings to its University community. Similar documents exist in the state of California and other American universities, and are focused on state and national ombuds standards and practices tied to improving higher education processes. Such declarations are also common in European HE ombuds offices where HE is centralized and HE ombuds are mandated by the State.

RESPONSE:

As noted above, a declaration of best/wiser practices in higher education document can serve HE ombuds practitioners at their local institutions and guide all HE institutions on the value of work of HE ombuds in their community. It will reflect how HE ombuds offices are positioned to work collaboratively as a Community of Practice to make systemic improvements to HE processes at the local, regional and national level. Strategic plans and mandates within the institution would be tied to this best/wiser practices document.

RECOMMENDATION THREE:

Ongoing Collaboration with Service Units Focused on EDI practices — With major restructuring in the University as well as the addition of new portfolios such as EDI, the OSO itself is concerned about the creation of new silos. It is critical that in its new reporting relationship with EDI, the OSO ensures that its services and collaborative work with other service units is strengthened, not eroded.

RESPONSE:

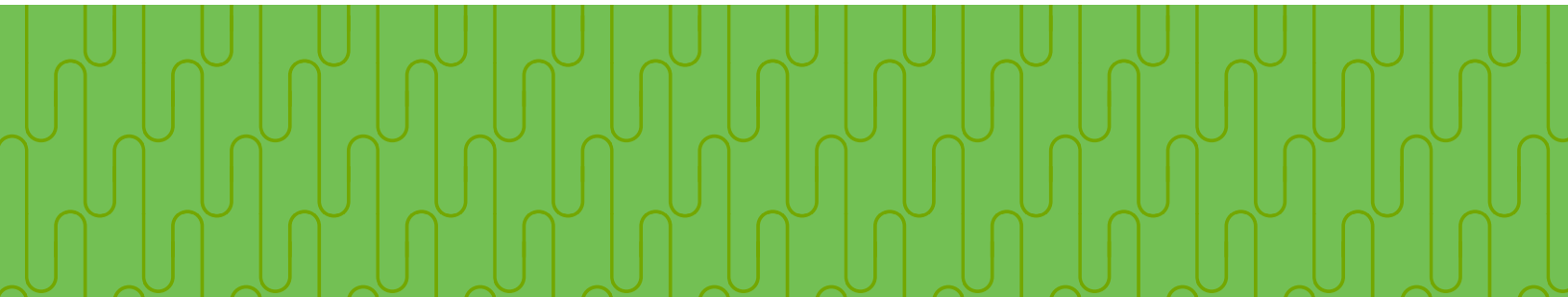
Since moving into the VP EDI, now Vice-Provost, Access, Community, and Belonging, we have continued our ties and collaborations with the Dean of Students, now Student Success and Experience. We have strengthened our relationships through focused meetings with sister ACB units such as OSDHR, HIAR, the SGBV coordinator, and the Academic Lead for Disability Cultures and Access. We continue to do workshops and panels as Services Providers - ACB with OSDHR and the ONN. The new all-staff meetings provide opportunities of training and conversations for the OSO team with their ACB colleagues. We have also moved to a statistical reporting time period in synch with OSDHR and HIAR, and will be moving to a new database within the next year.

RECOMMENDATION FOUR:

Continuing the Promotion of Restorative Practice Sessions on Equity-Minded Practices — Over the past few years, we have built a series of reflective education sessions on equitable practices around EDI issues. Our repertoire of sessions has been built through collaborative work with two faculties, Nursing and KSR. The sessions are focused on EDI issues such as unconscious biases. At the request of the faculties, these are presented two times per year, with separate sessions for students and faculty. When similar issues around EDI practices arise in other faculties, we remind them that we are available to provide tailor-made sessions for them, drawing on case situations that would be common in their profession.

RESPONSE:

In addition to our expanded work with Nursing and KSR, we were approached by the Faculty of Business and the Faculty of Pharmacy for presentations on equitable practices and communication skills/managing conflict resolution. We continue to reach out to faculties that have practicum/experiential learning programs.



OSO Recommendations 2025 - 2026

RECOMMENDATION ONE:

Building a Best/Wiser Practices in Higher Education Ombudsing Document — This document will highlight the value that an ombuds brings to its higher education community in promoting fairness, transparency and accountability. It will provide clear information on ombuds standards and practices that are focused on improving higher education processes. This will inform how the OSO can provide exceptional service standards to meet the needs of the University community, and the resources needed to accomplish this task through a recognized and accepted strategic mandate.

RATIONALE:

A Declaration of Best/Wiser Practices emphasizes the importance of the HE ombuds but also the standards to be expected from this Community of Practice within the institution. It also helps to move from an ad hoc institutional approach to using an ombuds or a complaint management system to a clear body of practice of higher education ombudsman regionally and nationally. It also ensures that HE ombuds build strong communities of practice to develop professionally and adhere to common professional standards of practice that will enhance their institutions. Within the University of Alberta a strategic mandate will help ensure these principles are implemented.

RECOMMENDATION TWO:

Increasing Visibility of the Ombuds Role on Campus — As the work of the ombuds is often “under the radar” to protect confidential information, the value of the ombuds is not always clearly understood. Ombuds attend various orientations and tabling sessions to explain their role, but we need to ensure referrals to the ombuds are made earlier. We encourage those faculties and departments that engage in work with the ombuds to spread this message that we are a resource at the beginning, not a last resort. We also propose to enhance our visibility by presenting more Ombuds presentations as well as two Fairness Days, in the Fall and Winter terms.

RATIONALE:

The ombuds needs to be seen as an early referral resource, not a source of last resort. The ombuds can work collaboratively with faculties and departments by presenting something similar to Ombuds 101 sessions/modules on: “Student Rights and Responsibilities”; “Equity in language”; “Equity in Decision-making”. The Fairness Day in October provides an opportunity for the University community to engage in fairness activities with the Office of the Student Ombuds and to meet the Alberta Ombudsman on the main floor of SUB. By providing an additional Fairness Day in the winter term in SUB or another high-traffic University location, we can promote earlier intervention to resolve conflicts and problems informally. This has to be an ongoing and intentional effort.

RECOMMENDATION THREE:

Promoting and Expanding EDI and Restorative Practice Sessions — As the University has embraced a culture of care, a commitment to access, community and belonging, it is important that the OSO expand the sessions it has been providing over the years, primarily on recognizing biases and conflict coaching, conflict management/resolution. We are committed to working collaboratively with ACB and SSE units to streamline and offer high-quality sessions.

RATIONALE:

As ACB builds its library of current education sessions under its umbrella, the OSO can help to identify gaps and/or omissions where further education is needed, and will work collaboratively with its sister units to plan and deliver these sessions. We will continue to offer tailor-made sessions upon request.

RECOMMENDATION FOUR:

Connecting with Faculties and Departments to encourage the review and update of policies and procedures — With the disbandment or vacuum of various policy review committees at the faculty and GFC levels (often due to staff reductions), the OSO continues to fill this void by encouraging faculties and departments to make scheduled reviews of their policies and procedures every three to five years, and to invite the OSO for comments and recommendations.

RATIONALE:

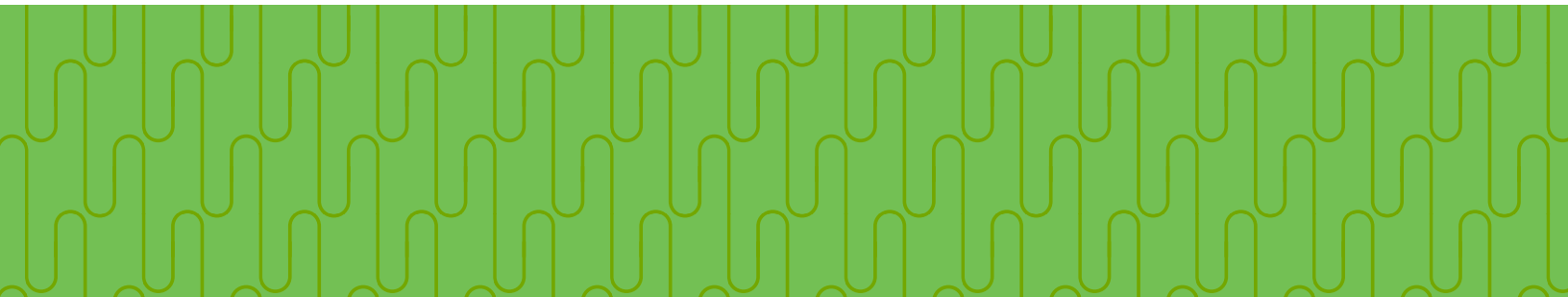
The OSO is contacted by various departments to review policy revisions on such things as academic appeal procedures or other faculty documents. The OSO has also noted that many faculties do not have scheduled reviews of these policies. When the OSO works with students, we see policies that have not been revised for over a decade, and we recognize the barriers these cause for students. Furthermore, as many of these policies do not reflect the importance of ensuring robust policies to remove barriers for all marginalized students, we will continue to promote this work in allyship with advocates such as Disability Cultures and Access.

RECOMMENDATION FIVE:

Encouraging all student services and faculties to reflect on the ways that they are honouring the Calls to Action in the TRC — This can be done in numerous ways to ensure policies are actively addressed to remove barriers faced by First Nations, Métis, and Inuit students; that we have pro-active statements of allyship, engage in staff-reflective practices and further education, etc.

RATIONALE:

The OSO, as a University service, will be reflective on its allyship in supporting the Calls to Action in the TRC. In line with our Standards of Practice ombuds are impartial advisors and our role is to hold the university accountable to its values. The OSO will provide recommendations as to how university community partners engage with the TRC Calls to Action.



OSO Professional Activities and Professional Networks

Higher Education Ombuds Networks

Association of Canadian College and University Ombudspersons (ACCUO/AOUCC):

Natalie Sharpe and staff (Institutional members) ACCUO Executive: Remonia Stoddart-Morrison, Co-Treasurer; Laurel Wilkie, Co-Secretary

ACCUO Sub-committees:

Communications - Remonia Stoddart-Morrison (co-chair), Meshia Brown - produced 3 issues of the ACCUO/AOUCC bulletin; International Relations: Natalie Sharpe, Muna Nwanisobi; Equity, Diversity and Inclusion: Remonia Stoddart-Morrison, Laurel Wilkie, Niamh Dower; Professional Development Committee: Natalie Sharpe (co-chair) - facilitate monthly webinars to members on HE ombuds issues; ACCUO/AOUCC EDI Review Committee: Remonia Stoddart-Morrison, Laurel Wilkie, Natalie Sharpe (presentation)

Alberta Network of Ombuds in Higher Education (ANOHE)

Regional meeting hosted by Jacky Rivas, Ombuds, Norquest College

European Network of Ombuds in Higher Education (ANOHE)

Natalie Sharpe and staff (Institutional members); Intervisioning Practices (4 sessions) - Intervisioning involves case reflections meetings with international higher education ombuds members 2024-2025; Professional Development Webinars on HE ombuds issues

Australasian University Complaints and Ombuds Network (AUCON)

Natalie Sharpe (member) - virtual meetings and professional development webinars

International Ombuds Association - Natalie Sharpe (consultation)

American Bar Association (Ombuds Division) - Natalie Sharpe (contributor/participant)

Association of African Ombudsman and Research Centre (AORC) - International Webinars open to HE ombuds

OSO Staff Conference Presentations

Natalie Sharpe, ACCUO representative with ENOHE, REDDU leaders etc. **The Ombuds Profession and its Grand Design: Voices from our Partners** (roundtable) ENOHE Covilha Portugal 2024

Natalie Sharpe with Dr. Josef Leidenfrost, Past President of ENOHE and Austrian Student Ombudsman, **The Ombuds' Delicate Use of Soft Power/Moral Suasion: Transformation over Co-option** ENOHE Covilha Portugal 2024

Natalie Sharpe with Rob Thompson, Camosun College; Annette O'Hara, Canada West University; Angus Shaw, University of Victoria **Structural Strengths and Challenges for Higher Education Ombuds in Small and Medium-Size Higher Education Ombuds Institutions: Three Ombuds' Perspectives** ACCUO/FCO Victoria 2024

Natalie Sharpe, **Ombuds in HE across Canada** (M3, L4 Video Montage), University of Colorado for Coursera on University Ombudsman 2024

Natalie Sharpe with Dr. Markus Seethaler, Student Ombudsman, Austria, **Shaming and/or Blaming: How far to go (if) with public transparency**, ENOHE Amsterdam 2025

Natalie Sharpe, **Fear and Controversy over EDI: Bridge or Barrier**, ENOHE Amsterdam 2025

Remonia Stoddart-Morrison and Laurel Wilkie, **The Proactive Ombuds: Tensions, Challenges and Opportunities in Policy Review**, FCO/ACCUO Victoria 2024

Remonia Stoddart-Morrison, **The Long Way Round: Hope in Ombuds Practice**, ENOHE Amsterdam 2025

Laurel Wilkie, with Kemi Oke, York University; Julie Boncompain, Polytechnique Montréal; Shirley Nakata, University of British Columbia. **Addressing and Practicing Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI) Values in the Ombuds Role**, FCO/ACCUO Victoria 2024

Bryan Campbell, **The Role and Benefits of the Ombuds Intern**, Centre for Informal Dispute Resolution Symposium, St. Paul's University, Ottawa 2024

Rebeca Avila (Garcia), **Cross-Cultural Communication in Ombuds Practice**, Centre for Informal Dispute Resolution Symposium, St. Paul's University, Ottawa 2024

OSO Campus and Conferences Visuals

**Fairness
Day 2024**



**Left:
GALD
International
Advisors 2024**



**Right:
OSO
Team-building
Potluck 2025**



FCO/ACCUO

(AOUCC Conference
Victoria 2024)

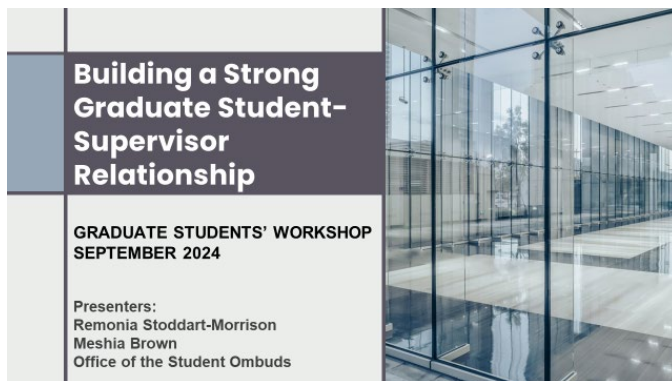
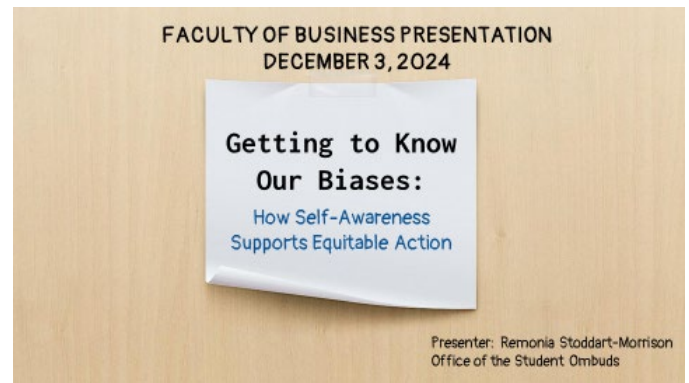
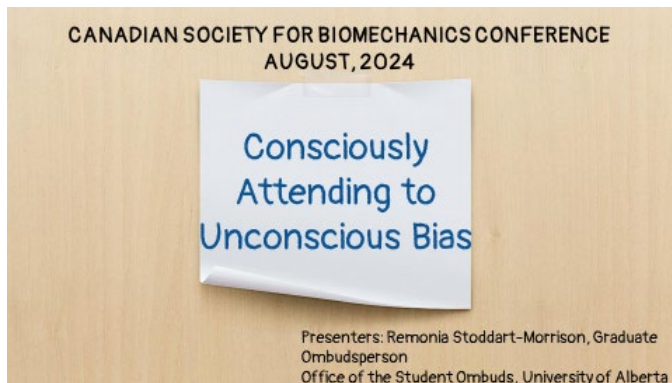


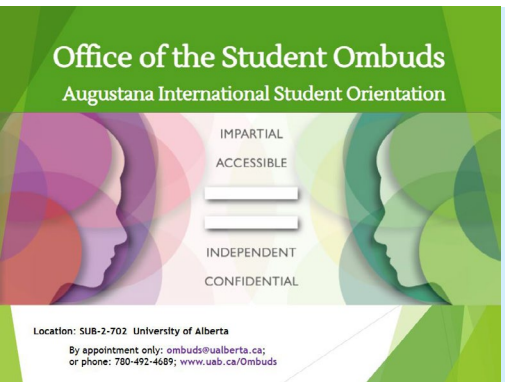
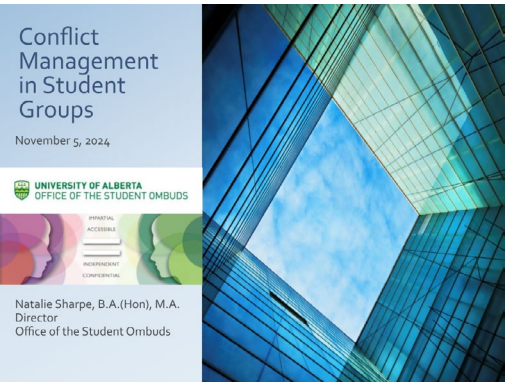
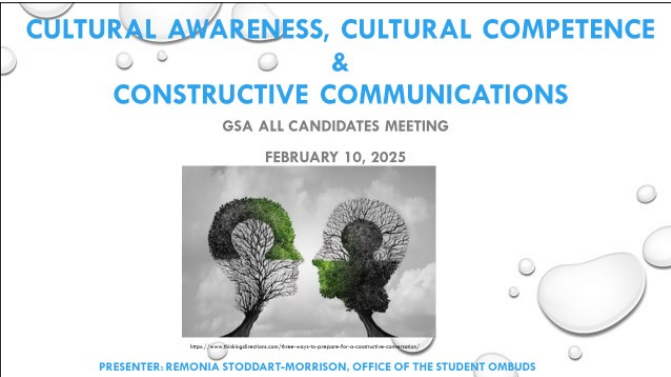
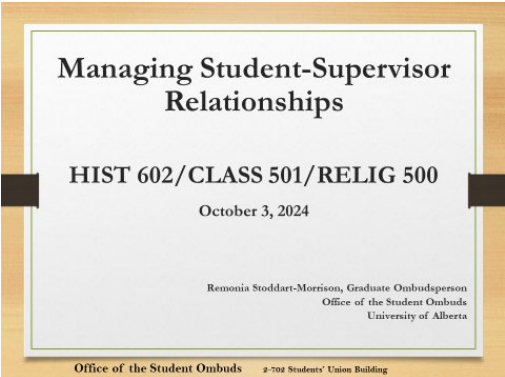
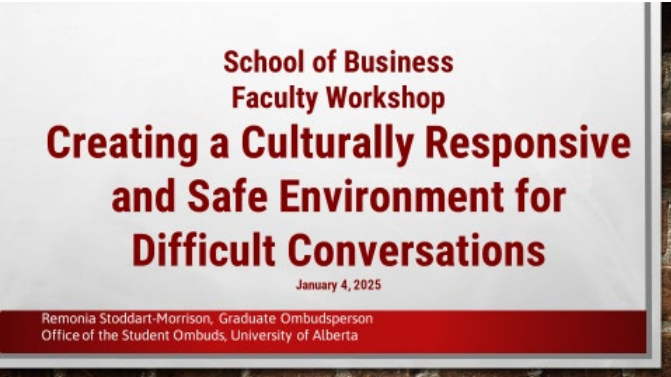
**ENOHE
Conference
Amsterdam**

2025



OSO Presentation (Sample) Visuals





The Role of the Higher Education Ombuds: A Fairness Lens



Class: Business Law 432
Natalie Sharpe, Director,
Office of the Student Ombuds
University of Alberta
Edmonton, Alberta, Canada
March 2025

PROTECTING STUDENT RIGHTS: The Role of the Higher Education Ombuds and the Fairness Lens



GALD Program, UAI
Natalie Sharpe, Director,
Office of the Student Ombuds
University of Alberta
Edmonton, Alberta, Canada
October 2024

ENOHE 2024 Covilha, Portugal

The Ombud’s Delicate Use of Soft Power/Moral Suasion: Transformation over Co-option

Josef Leidenfrost
National Ombudsman for Students
Austria (former)

Natalie Sharpe
University of Alberta, Canada

CROSS – CULTURAL COMMUNICATION IN OMBUDS PRACTICE

Rebeca Avila
Undergraduate Ombuds Intern, University of
Alberta

The role of Ombuds in Higher
Education to foster cross-cultural
and inter-cultural communication
practices that promote inclusion
and understandings, particularly
in benefit of international student
clients

The Role and Benefits of the Ombuds Intern



Bryan Campbell
Office of the Student Ombuds, University of Alberta

Annual Symposium of the Centre for Informal
Dispute Resolution, May 2024

STRUCTURAL STRENGTHS & CHALLENGES FOR OMBUDS IN SMALL & MEDIUM-SIZE HE INSTITUTIONS:

THREE OMBUDS’ PERSPECTIVES

FCO/ACCUE Conference
Victoria B.C. October 2024

Annette O’Hara, Canada West University
Angus Shaw, University of Victoria
Rob Thompson, Camosun College

Facilitator Natalie Sharpe, University of Alberta



FCO/ACCUE Conference

THE PROACTIVE OMBUDS: Tensions, Challenges & Opportunities in Policy Review

Remonia Stoddart-Morrison & Laurel Wilkie
Office of the Student Ombuds, University of Alberta

Addressing and Practising Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI) Values in the Ombuds Role

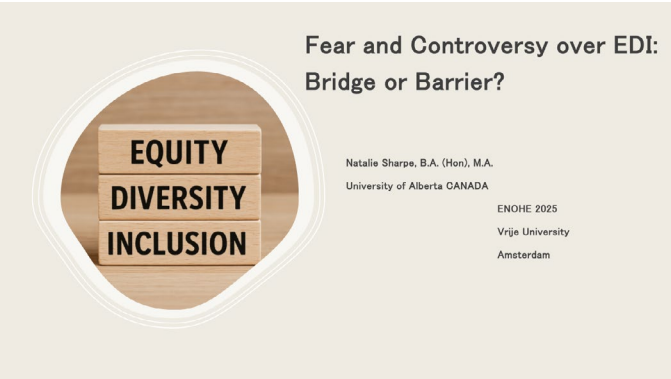
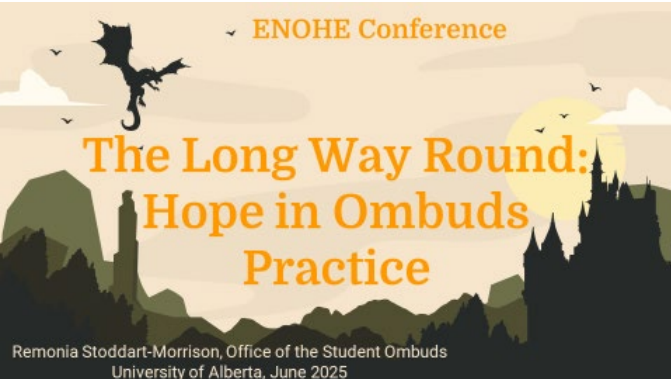
Presenters on behalf of the ACCUE EDI Committee

Kemi Oke, Office of the Ombudsperson at York /University

Julie Boncompain, Protectrice des droits de droits (Ombudsman), Bureau de la protection des droits at Polytechnique Montréal

Shirley Nakata, Ombudsperson for Students, Office of the Ombudsperson for Students at the University of British Columbia

Laurel Wilkie, Undergraduate Ombudsperson at the University of Alberta



Leading with Purpose.



**UNIVERSITY
OF ALBERTA**

Office of the Student Ombuds

2-702 Students' Union Building
Edmonton, AB
Canada T6G 2S4

uab.ca/ombuds