

# Office of the Student Ombuds

## Annual Report

April 1<sup>st</sup>, 2015 –

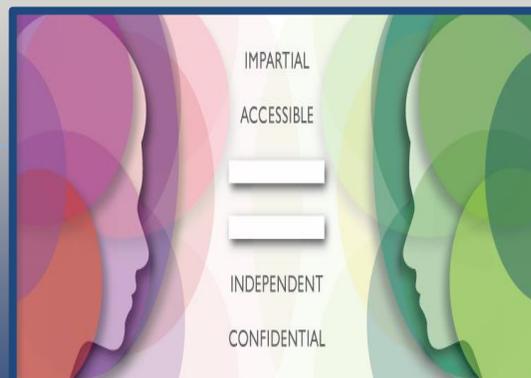
March 31<sup>st</sup>, 2016

[www.ombudservice.ualberta.ca](http://www.ombudservice.ualberta.ca)



**UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA**

OFFICE OF THE STUDENT OMBUDS



## What is the Role of the Office of the Student Ombuds?

The Office of the Student Ombuds (OSO) provides advice and assistance on academic and non-academic conflicts, mediation services, and formal appeal assistance to all students (applicant, undergraduate and graduate), post-doctoral fellows, medical residents, and student groups. Well-informed on University policy and procedures, the OSO provides guidance to the University community, to ensure fairness in procedure and use of appropriate modes of resolution. The OSO advocates natural justice, and works pro-actively to ensure that students are treated fairly and equitably in all university-related processes. The issues brought to the OSO reflect the social and academic activities of students' lives, including: academic standing and grade concerns; academic and non-academic offence allegations; discrimination and harassment complaints; conflicts with supervisors, professors, and other students, etc. The OSO collects statistical information to check for systemic gaps and miscommunications that may unintentionally lead to perceived injustices and systemic discrimination; this follows with recommendations for positive systemic change.

- ✓ **1229 Clients or 3.24% of the University Population**
- ✓ **3083 Visits or 2.5 visits/student contact**
- ✓ **36.5% of visits were from international students**





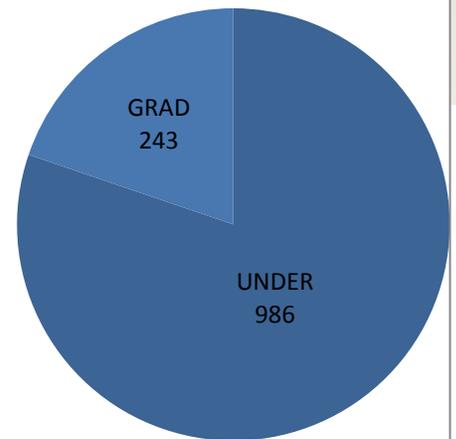
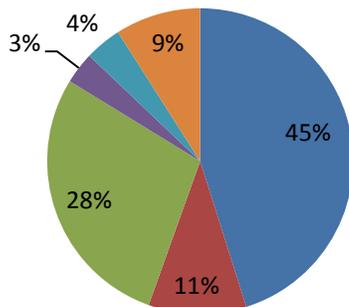
Natalie Sharpe,  
Director, B.A.  
(Hon), M.A.

Building a Team of Ombuds Professionals:  
“Be fair and reasonable in your expectations, and you will always have a healthy working relationship.”

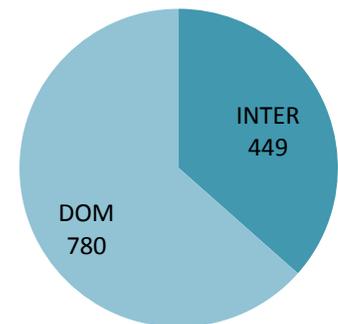
In May 2015, the office was restructured as a stand-alone office reporting to the University. We prepared for a transition of student positions to student ombuds internships and developed a modular approach to teaching ombuds skills to senior undergraduate students who were successful applicants for internship programs. The office was renamed The Office of the Student Ombuds.

### Total Issues: 1418

- Academic
- Conflict
- Academic Offence
- Non-Academic Offence
- Discrim/Harassment
- Miscellaneous



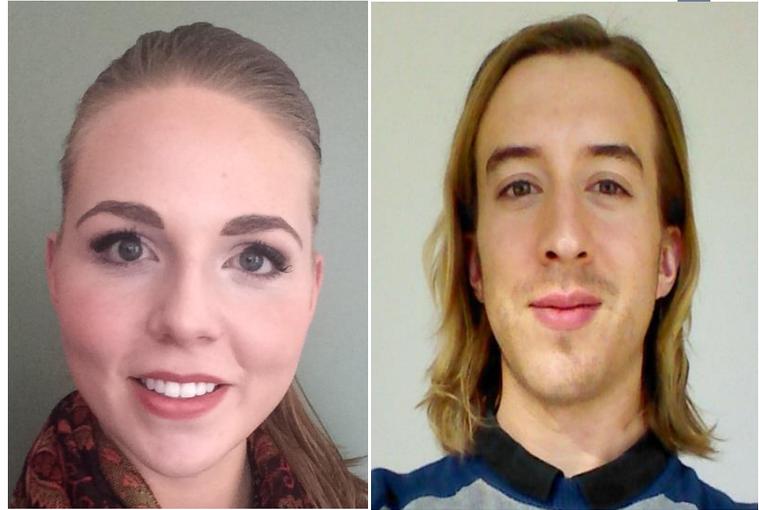
The majority of conflicts are academic: marginal or unsatisfactory academic standing appeals; grade appeals; deferred exam requests; graduation status appeals, etc. These are more common for undergraduates, and second for graduate students. Academic offences include cheating and plagiarism, the second most common complaint for undergraduates, and third most common for graduates. Conflicts are most common for graduate students, and third most common for undergraduates.



# New Ombuds Internships Promote Student Leadership

Interns: Veronica Kube  
and Josh Hillaby

In May, 2015, the Office of the Student Ombuds was restructured with two full-time Undergraduate Ombuds Interns. This allowed for ongoing mentoring and direct supervision of the interns, which was not possible in the previous model. The OSO developed a rigorous training program and collaborated with the expertise of ongoing university services (such as the Career Centre and faculties) that have established internship programs. The OSO is a leader in North American ombuds offices in this new ombuds program, and is helping to promote early entry into careers such as ombuds and mediation services for young professionals. The internship program has been viewed by peer ombuds associations such as The European Network of Ombudsman in Higher Education, the NorthWest Ombuds Group, and the California Caucus of College and University Ombudspersons, as an important initiative in ombuds training. The first interns, Josh Hillaby and Veronica Kube, both presented and wrote on their experiences and learnings. Josh wrote a case study for an American ombuds journal and Veronica wrote a Relational Fairness Guide available online. Both interns presented at the 32<sup>nd</sup> Student Advisors' Conference on the University of Alberta campus. After a successful year, the OSO will continue the undergraduate internships. We are expanding the program to include a graduate ombuds internship. The OSO has mentored student ombudspersons for over 20 years.



- \* **Mentorship** Mentorship begins with many one-on-one meetings to ensure that university policy and procedure is understood. This helps the interns make informed referrals to other university services.
- \* **Shadowing** As each case and client is unique, it is important that the interns spend time shadowing cases. Student interns begin by observing an experienced Ombudsperson, then lead client meetings with an ombuds mentor, eventually managing cases on their own.
- \* **Debriefing** This is an important and ongoing process; it enhances learning and consistency in our advice. This is especially important in the beginning when the learning curve is steep.



## Dealing with Difficult People and Skill Building in Alternate Dispute Resolution

Marc Johnson, Undergraduate Ombudsperson, offers seminars.

Marc Johnson on the role of interns: “Student staff enhance our ability to connect and relate to current students. They revitalize our practice and offer a refreshing perspective.”

Communication and conflict resolution skills are essential in ombuds practice. Ombuds teach and mentor effective communication skills to interns and introduce them to ADR processes (such as Restorative Justice and Mediation); they can apply this knowledge in their casework. In addition, Marc Johnson takes a lead in conducting conflict resolution sessions and workshops to many student leadership units across campus.

The office may also offers mediation assistance upon request.

Marc Johnson (BComm) has been the Undergraduate Ombudsperson at the University for five years. Marc is a Chartered Mediator and is pursuing a Master’s of Education in Educational Administration and Leadership at the University. Marc helps students with academic and non-academic appeals. He also supports students in situations where they feel they have been treated unfairly.

Marc plays a big role in helping with the mentorship of the ombuds interns.

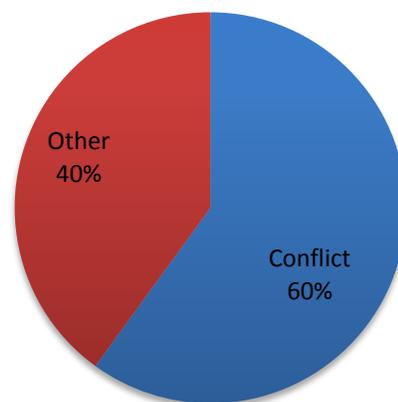
# Enhancing Services to Graduate Students: Challenges and Initiatives



Brent Epperson, our Graduate Ombudsperson, is completing his doctorate in Political Science.

Graduate student visits increased to 243 students this year; over 60 % of their complaints are related to protracted conflict with supervisors. These conflicts ultimately impact their academic performance. When informal attempts from graduate chairs, deans and ombudspersons fail, the only recourse is to move to formal channels, student withdrawals and program changes. This is a significant waste of university resources and student lives. Ongoing dialogue between OSO, Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research (FGSR), the Office of Student Conduct and Accountability (SCA), and the graduate student and post-doctoral fellow association, helped us to identify a gap in resolution services. A Restorative Practices Initiative (RPI) has been identified as a potential intermediate step, using the principles of restorative justice to mediate conflicts in graduate studies. The RPI may help to intervene and reconcile discord in foundational relationships such as student and supervisor. RPI programs exist at other universities and have also been successful in resolving interpersonal disputes in our University residence system. The positive rewards of RPI are: increasing participant satisfaction; maintaining the parties' dignity; preserving valuable resource; and learning healthy communication skills. The OSO, with FGSR and SCA, will hold the first of ongoing workshops later this year, to explore the potential for implementing alternative dispute resolution practices such as RPI as an important informal step toward handling conflicts.

Graduate students visits are two times more frequent than undergraduates. Unlike dropping a course, it is much more difficult for them to change supervisors or find alternate academic paths. The most common issue they bring forward is supervisory conflicts as noted below. A larger proportion of graduate students than undergraduate students are international students; they face more personal stressors (financial, cultural, etc.)



# Professional Network, Conferences and Publications

**FAIRNESS IS EVERYONE'S CONCERN:** A Sampling of Practices and Resources on Cultivating Fairness from your Ombuds Community, Compiling editor Natalie Sharpe, University of Alberta 2015 V. 2  
[http://www.uwo.ca/ombuds/accuo\\_aoucc/english/FairnessGuide2015.pdf](http://www.uwo.ca/ombuds/accuo_aoucc/english/FairnessGuide2015.pdf)

A Restorative Justice Approach to Rebuild Civility and Respect on Campus, Tom Sebok and Natalie Sharpe, The Journal of the California Caucus College and University Ombuds 2015 <http://journal.calcaucus.com/table-contents-2015.html>

Case Study, Josh Hillaby, The Journal of the California Caucus College and University Ombuds 2015  
<http://journal.calcaucus.com/table-contents-2015.html>

Respectful; Workplaces, Respectful Classrooms, Natalie Sharpe and Carter MacDonald, FCO ACCUO Conference, Vancouver, BC 2015

Why an Ombudsperson Is Essential on Every Campus, Lucie Allaire and Natalie Sharpe, FCO ACCUO Conference, Vancouver, BC 2015

Emerging Campus Initiatives to Address Cyberbullying, Wanda Cassidy, Margaret Jackson, Chantal Faucher, Natalie Sharpe, and Lida Blizzard, CACUSS, Vancouver, BC 2015

The Ombuds Lens of Fairness, Natalie Sharpe and Carter MacDonald, CACUSS, Vancouver, BC 2015

Transition to Student Internships, Natalie Sharpe, ENOHE, Innsbruck, Austria 2015

University Ombudspersons as Fairness Policy Entrepreneurs or Ombudsing as Counter-hegemonic Practice? Brent Epperson, CCCUO Annual Conference Asilomar, California. 2015

Claiming our Power: Emboldening Ourselves and Others through Metaphor and Language, Katherine Greenwood, Andrew Larratt-Smith and Natalie Sharpe, CCCUO Annual Conference Asilomar, California 2015

Lorem Ipsum Dolor

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[City], [State] [Zip Code]  
Office of the Student Ombuds Internships: A New and Inspiring Program, Natalie Sharpe, CCCUO Annual Conference Asilomar, California 2016

Mediation in Student Advising, Marc Johnson and Brent Epperson, Student Advisors' Conference, University of Alberta, Edmonton 2016

Am I Being Fair? Veronica Kube, Student Advisors' Conference, University of Alberta, Edmonton 2016

From Student to Student: the Value of the Student-Staff Perspective in Advising and Services (Poster) Josh Hillaby, Student Advisors' Conference, University of Alberta, Edmonton 2016

Office of the Student Ombuds Internships: A New and Inspiring Program (Poster) Natalie Sharpe, Student Advisors' Conference, University of Alberta, Edmonton 2016

Fairness in Communication A Relational Fairness Guide Veronica Kube, Ombuds Intern, Office of the Student Ombuds 2015 [http://www.uwo.ca/ombuds/accuo\\_aoucc/english/FairnessInCommunication.pdf](http://www.uwo.ca/ombuds/accuo_aoucc/english/FairnessInCommunication.pdf)