



Memorandum

Office of the Ombudsperson for Students
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TO: Senate
FROM: Professor Dimitrios Berk, Ombudsperson for Students
SUBJECT: Annual Report of the Ombudsperson for Students (2018-2019)
DATE: February 19, 2020
DOCUMENT #: D19-38
ACTION REQUIRED: INFORMATION APPROVAL/DECISION

ISSUE The annual report of the Office of the Ombudsperson for Students is presented for information.

BACKGROUND & RATIONALE Section 10.1 of the Terms of Reference for the Ombudsperson for Students (OFS) states that the OFS shall annually provide to Senate a report, including relevant statistics, concerning such matters as:

- (i) the number of inquiries for information, advice or assistance;*
- (ii) the general subject matter of such inquiries;*
- (iii) the number of complaints;*
- (iv) the nature of the complaints;*
- (v) the source of the complaints;*
- (vi) the resolution or other disposition of the complaints; and*
- (vii) other information deemed appropriate by the OFS.*

Accordingly, the Ombudsperson for Students submits the annual report for 2018-2019.

PRIOR CONSULTATION None.

SUSTAINABILITY CONSIDERATIONS The Office of the Ombudsperson for Students has a sustainable framework in place to fulfill its mandate.

IMPACT OF DECISION AND NEXT STEPS N/A

MOTION OR RESOLUTION FOR APPROVAL This item is presented for information.

APPENDICES Appendix A: Ombudsperson for Students – 32nd Annual Report (2018-2019)
Appendix B: Intake Form

McGILL UNIVERSITY



Thirty-Second Annual Report

(June 1st, 2018 – May 31st, 2019)

Dimitrios Berk, PhD
Ombudsperson for Students

February 2020

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Submitted to the McGill University Senate¹
Presented February 19th, 2020

¹ In accordance with the terms of reference of the Office: Approved by McGill University Senate, April 23, 1986, Minute 84; Approved by the Board of Governors, May 26, 1986, Minute 6085; Amended by Senate, December 9, 1992, Minute 32. Amended by Senate, January 21, 2009, Minute 5; Approved by the Executive Committee, May 19, 2009, Minute 4.2.

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Introduction

This report covers the activities of the Office of the Ombudsperson for Students from June 1st, 2018 to May 31st, 2019, during which Professor Dimitrios Berk undertook his fifth year of a five-year mandate as Ombudsperson for Students that started on September 1st, 2014 and would have ended on August 31st, 2019.

In January 2019, the Provost's office announced that an Advisory Committee for the Selection of an Ombudsperson had been struck and provided a link to the composition of the Committee. In October 2019, the Provost's office, following the recommendation of the Advisory Committee, announced that Prof. Patricia Hewlin would start her mandate as of May 1st, 2020. To facilitate the transition, Prof. Dimitrios Berk's appointment as Ombudsperson for Students was extended until April 30th, 2020.

1.1 Mandate

The mandates of University Ombudspersons vary from institution to institution in Canada and abroad. Each academic institution's approach to the role of the ombudsperson has unique features; however the essence of the mandate is generally universal. A document on the Standards of Practice produced by ACCUO (Association of Canadian College and University Ombudspersons) can be found at: [ACCUO - Standards of Practice](#)

The role, function and scope of activity of the McGill Ombudsperson for Students are specified in the Mandate available on its website: [Mandate](#)

Article 1.1 of the Mandate states the following:

The mandate of the Ombudsperson for Students (OFS) shall be to:

- (i) provide an independent, impartial and confidential process through which a student may seek the just, fair and equitable resolution of any university-related concern where normal non-adversarial administrative channels for addressing such matters are inappropriate in the circumstances or prove ineffective;*
- (ii) where appropriate, review University policies, guidelines and procedures affecting students and make recommendations for change normally to the relevant University administrative officer;*
- (iii) where appropriate, promote discussion of University-wide student related concerns.*

When issues arise, the McGill Ombudsperson is asked to provide assistance to students to avoid recourse to the more formal grievance processes of the University; thus McGill's Office of the Ombudsperson for Students offers informal dispute resolution services, and it is not a University "office of notice" (as per article 5.2 of the Mandate).

1.2 The Process

The process at the McGill University Office of the Ombudsperson for Students is generally as follows:

Students contact the office by phone or email to request an appointment. A meeting is scheduled and some information is requested so that the Ombudsperson has an initial understanding of the issue. If the student prefers to speak to the Ombudsperson without providing any information before the meeting, the student's preference is respected. Students fill out an Intake Form (see Appendix B), which is available at the Office or from the website: [Intake Form](#)

Once details of the situation have been provided by the student, information, advice and/or possible options are discussed, depending on the nature of the concern. Students are always informed that all conversations within the Office are held in strict confidence. If additional intervention by the Ombudsperson is necessary the student is asked for specific permission to do so.

Attempts to arrive at a resolution may require several days and include a dialogue with concerned parties. These typically require contact with various unit Directors or Associate Deans of Student Affairs, Chairs, Professors, Graduate Program Directors, Advisors, Supervisors and other academic and non-academic members of the University.

The Ombudsperson also makes referrals, explains University policies and procedures and serves as a sounding board for students who are uncertain about how to deal with a situation. Frequently students resolve their situations on their own by following advice given by the Office. In some cases simply being given the opportunity to speak openly and confidentially will result in the resolution of the student's concern.

The Ombudsperson may also provide feedback to university members (academic and non-academic) and units regarding issues that have been brought to his attention.

1.3 Visibility

Students learn about our Office in a variety of ways. Table 1 below summarizes the information provided by the 188 students who requested our services in 2018-19.

Table 1: Sources of awareness of services (%)

Referred By	2014-15	2015-16	2016-17	2017-18	2018-19
Website	26	28	28	27	28
eCalendars	1	0	0	1	2
Poster	0	1	0	1	0
Staff (academic /non-academic)	12	15	11	8	12
Student/Friend	12	13	12	12	17
Student-run Org.	1	5	4	5	2
Student Services	11	8	4	9	6
Other	13	10	9	8	11
Unknown	24	20	32	29	22
Total	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%

As a form of outreach, the Office staff is present at student orientation activities where information regarding the Ombuds Office is available. In addition, since the beginning of his mandate, the Ombudsperson for Students meets on a regular basis with key unit directors to promote a better understanding of the function/role of the Ombuds Office.

The Office is also listed as a student resource in various University services/publications, providing contact information/link to the Office website. These include:

- [Student Life and Learning](#)
- [I've Been Accepted](#)
- [First Year Office - Undergrads](#)
- [First Year Office - Grads and Postdocs](#)
- Student Rights and Responsibilities: [Dignity](#); [Resolving Disputes](#); [Research Ethics](#); [Research Supervision](#); [Conflicts of Interest](#); [Freedom from Harassment](#); [Contact Us](#)
- [Academic Advising](#)
- Grads and Postdocs: [Responsibilities](#); [Supervision](#); [Skillsets](#)
- [Post Graduate Society of McGill University \(PGSS\) online Hand Book](#)
- [Undergraduate Medical Education](#)

2. Service Statistics

2.1 Individuals and Groups Served

The following table shows the distribution of individuals and groups who requested the services of the Office:

Table 2: Total number of requests for assistance

Type	2014-15	2015-16	2016-17	2017-18	2018-19
Students (Applying, Current/Returning, Former students)	149	201	160	166	188
Groups	1	1	1	5	0
Faculty & Staff	12	3	2	2	1
Community Requests	8	6	7	7	10
Total	170	211	170	180	199

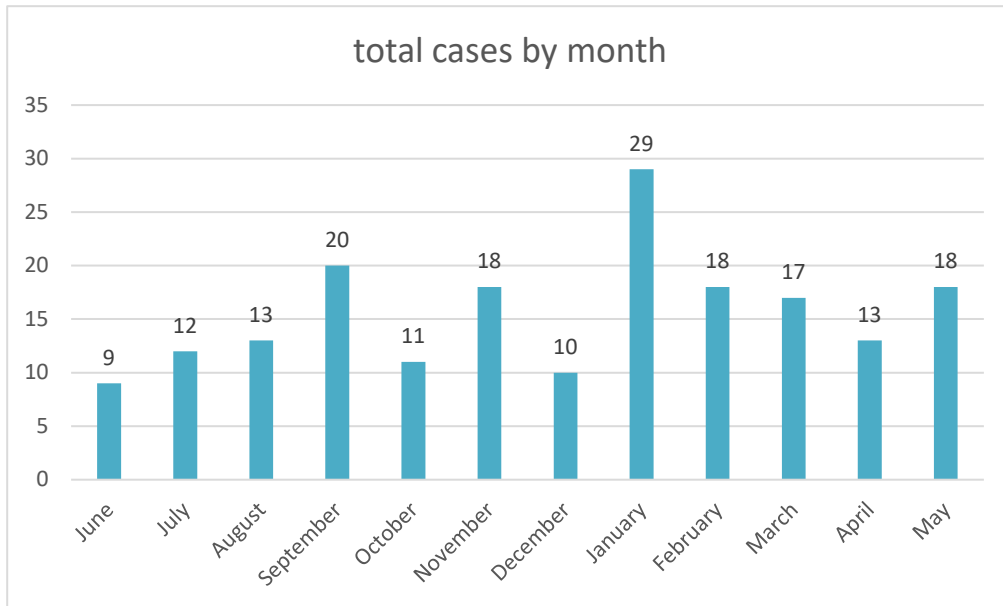
The mandate of the Ombudsperson for Students, in Article 1.2, defines 'student' as follows: *'Student' means a person who is, or within the past twelve months was, registered in the University as a student, whether or not as a candidate for a degree, diploma or certificate.*²

2.1.1 Patterns of Use of the Office

Figure 1 shows a month-by-month pattern of when student requests for assistance were received in 2018-2019.

² [Mandate](#)

Figure 1: Number of student requests on a month-by-month basis in 2018-2019



2.1.2 Summary of Students' Requests

The following table provides information with regard to the distribution of requests by students:

Table 3: Student requests for assistance by educational level in % (number)

Education Level	2016-17	2017-18	2018-19
Undergraduate	57	58	46
Graduate	40	38	49
Resident/ Fellow	1	1	0
Postdoc	2	3	4
Other	0	0	1
Total	100 (160)	100 (166)	100 (188)

3. Nature of Student Concerns and Resolutions

3.1 Categories of Concerns

Table 4: Cases by issue-type

Issue Type	Issue	2014-15	2015-16	2016-17	2017-18	2018-19
Academic	Admission	14	14	12	6	7
	Advising	1	4	0	1	0
	Courses/Program	8	16	18	18	25
	Examinations	6	10	9	7	16
	Inter / intra faculty transfer	2	1	1	4	2
	Marks/Grades	20	36	21	20	22
	Practicum/Field Work/Stage	7	6	9	10	6
	Probation/Exclusion	5	6	1	4	5
	Other	6	12	15	15	16
	Subtotal		69	105	86	85
Inter-personal	Administrator/academic	2	3	4	1	2
	Administrator /non-academic	0	2	0	2	0
	Course Instructor / TA's	11	13	16	6	14
	Invigilators	0	0	0	0	0
	Lab instructor/ demonstrator	1	0	0	0	0
	Other Student (s)	2	2	2	9	7
	Research / Thesis Supervisor	31	31	23	22	24
	Other	2	6	5	2	1
Subtotal		49	57	50	42	48
Finances	Loan / Bursary	1	0	0	3	4
	Quebec Residency fee status	0	1	0	0	0
	Scholarship	2	4	1	2	0
	Stipend	0	1	0	0	4
	Student Fees	10	9	2	8	9
	Other	1	1	4	2	2
Subtotal		14	16	7	15	19
Student Services		3	6	2	2	3
University Units		4	7	6	4	1
Student-run Org.		0	0	0	1	1
Residence Life		1	1	2	4	0
Student Discipline	Academic offense	1	7	0	5	6
	Non-Academic offense	1	0	0	1	1
	Subtotal	2	7	0	6	7
Procedural Issues		1	1	0	1	1
Intellectual Property		4	0	0	0	1
Harassment		1	0	1	2	2
Safety/Security		0	0	0	2	2
Abuse of power		0	0	0	0	0
Discrimination		0	1	3	1	1
Other		1	0	3	1	3
TOTAL		149	201	160	166	188

3.2 (a) Resolution Categories

The total number of student requests for assistance during the current activity year of 188 is broken down into two categories of resolution:

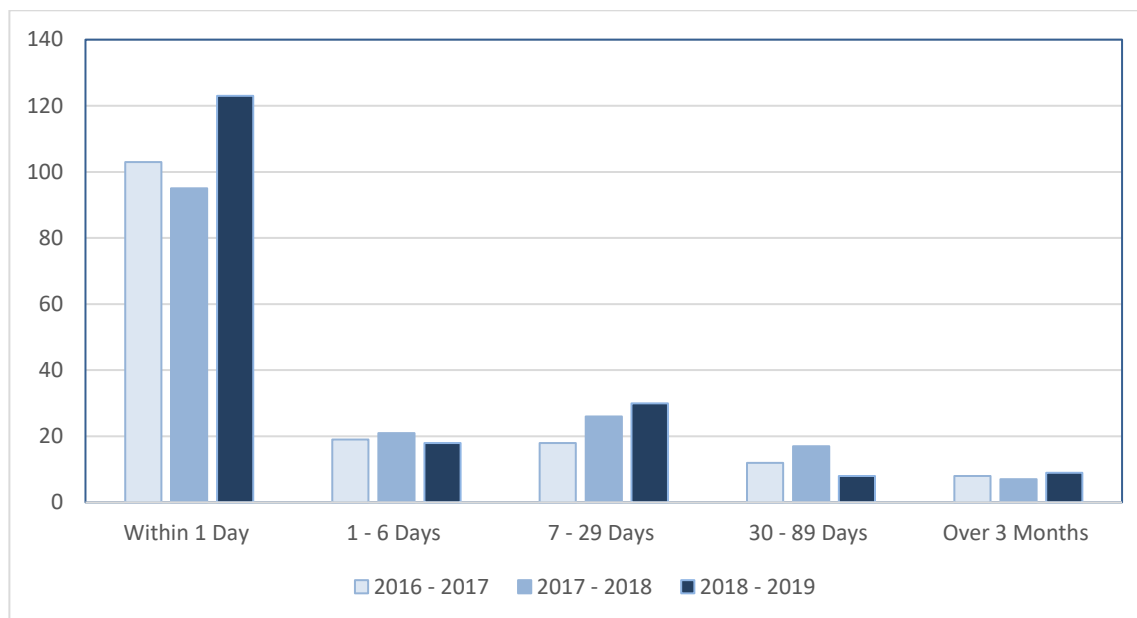
(i) *information/advice*: listening; suggesting an approach/coaching; determining options/referrals; explaining policies: 94%

(ii) *intervention*: individual or multi-party discussions and proposals: 6%

(b) Duration of Assistance

In order to provide an indication of the length of time it takes the Office to deal with issues brought forth, Figure 3 below describes the approximate length of time from the opening to the closing date of a file.

Figure 3: Number of students per duration of assistance



4. Professional Activities

The McGill Ombudsperson for Students is a member of the following associations: *Association des Ombudsmans des Universités du Québec* (AOUQ) and Association of Canadian College and University Ombudspersons (ACCUO). Since 2010, Ms. Carmela Parzanese, Assistant to the Ombudsperson, holds a position on the Executive Committee of ACCUO.

During the reporting period, the Office has participated in meetings and/or conferences organized by various ombuds associations.

Attendance at meetings with ombudspersons from other universities and active participation at these meetings continue to be an important commitment of the Office, resulting in a fruitful sharing of policies and experiences, in addition to providing opportunities for professional development in the field.

5. Acknowledgements

I wish to acknowledge senior administrative officer Carmela Parzanese's invaluable contribution to the Office. Students greatly benefit from her experience, knowledge and pedagogy when communicating with the Office. For their assistance, I also wish to thank both Sara Cornett, who in December 2018 moved on to another position at McGill, and Holly Smith, who replaced Sara and joined our office in February 2019.

Also the numerous expressions of gratitude from students who sought help from the office and the cooperation from McGill administrators, staff and professors in the endeavor to resolve student concerns are gratefully acknowledged.

Respectfully Submitted,

Dimitrios Berk
Ombudsperson for Students

Description of your request for assistance

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Others Consulted (name / title / office)

Authorization

<p>I understand that the Ombudsperson will treat my request in a confidential manner, with the utmost care and respect for me and all individuals concerned.</p> <p>I authorize the Ombudsperson, or his/her associate, to communicate with all persons involved with my request and to access all official files held by the University and third parties as deemed necessary by the Ombudsperson to fulfill his/her function.</p> <p>Signature: _____ Date: _____</p>

Last updated: August 2019