

Ombudsperson for Students

McGILL UNIVERSITY



The Nineteenth Annual Report (June 1st, 2005 – May 31st, 2006)

Dr. Norman M. Miller
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Submitted to the McGill University Senate¹

Presented May 9th, 2007

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.

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I. Introduction

This report covers activities from June 1, 2005 to May 31, 2006, undertaken in the third year of the five-year mandate of Dr. Norman M. Miller, who has been appointed as Ombudsperson for Students from September 1, 2003 to August 31, 2008 at McGill University.

1.1 Mandate

The mandates of University Ombudspersons vary from institution to institution in Canada, the rest of North America and abroad.

The role of the McGill Ombudsperson for Students is specified in the mandate in the Handbook on Student Rights and Responsibilities, 2006, Chapter 5, pages 43-44, which can be consulted online at: <http://www.mcgill.ca/files/secretariat/StudentHandbook2006English.pdf>.

Significantly, the McGill Ombudsperson is a Faculty member and is asked to be of assistance when a problem first arises in order to not invoke the more formal processes of the University.

Other institutions may regard the Ombuds Office as the final step in a long process and/or be an office of notice. Many institutions do not require the Ombudsperson to be a member of Faculty. These types of significant differences make each institution's situation unique and thus make it nearly impossible to create external benchmarks.

The Office of the Ombudsperson for Students is grateful for the work of the Principal's Task Force on Student Life and Learning, particularly for its appointment of a Deputy Provost of Student Life and Learning, as this will facilitate communication among and integration of services for students.

1.2 The Process

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

Visitors approaching the Office are advised immediately that all conversations held with the Office are kept in strict confidence. This tenet of Ombuds services is essential in allowing the Ombudsperson to be effective, as it allows the visitors to feel comfortable in expressing their views.

Visitors are also advised that all services are informal and that the Office is not one of notice. Students fill out Intake Forms (see Appendix A), which are available at our Office or from our website. They are advised that signing the authorization section is only required if the Office is asked to intervene.

The student is interviewed.

Once details of the situation have been offered by the student, and the Ombudsperson has communicated with University officials, the students is advised by the Ombudsperson as to the validity of the complaint. If the validity of the complaint is confirmed then at this time or at a later date advice will be given with regards to the informal resolution of the issue.

If additional intervention by the Ombudsperson is necessary, the student is asked for specific authority to do so.

Many attempts at resolution require multiple visits to, and calls from, the Ombudsperson. These typically require contact with various Associate Deans of Student Affairs, Chairs, Professors, Graduate Program Directors, Supervisors and other academic and non-academic officials of the University.

The Ombudsperson may often act as a neutral mediator. In some cases this requires one or more mediation sessions.

It is important to note that frequently students resolve their situations on their own 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 problem.

Resolutions of issues are frequent. In some cases these may take the form of changes in faculty or departmental rules, and changes in behavior of units or individuals. The Office often provides much needed feedback to many units who may not have another route for this information.

The Office has received many testimonials from students and staff expressing their gratitude and has been told it has a good reputation in the University.

1.3 Visibility

Many students on campus are not aware of the existence of the Office despite the efforts that have been made in disseminating information about it. These efforts include posters (see Appendix B), radio interviews on CKUT, articles written for The McGill Tribune as well as advertisements placed in this paper. Our website is updated, and the Office has held information sessions with many groups on campus, including student and academic units.

Table 1 shows the breakdown of how students who requested our assistance heard about our Office.

Table 1: Breakdown of Student Visitor Sources *

Referred By	2004 – 2005	2005 – 2006
Student/Friend	20.9%	13.6%
Student Handbook/Calendar	6.1%	3.8%
Website	15.5%	20.1%
Staff (academic/non-academic)	11.9%	14.0%
Student Services	5.8%	7.5%
Other	9.8%	7.9%
Student-run Org.	1.1%	2.8%
Poster	2.2%	1.9%
Unknown	26.7%	28.5%
Total	100%	100%
Total Number of Students	277	214

* 2003-04: data not available

The above table shows that word of mouth is slowly being replaced by website contact and referrals from staff and organizations around campus. Therefore, efforts will be made to improve our website.

II. Ombuds Service Statistics

2.1 Individuals and Groups Served

The following table shows the distribution of types of individuals who requested the services of the Office.

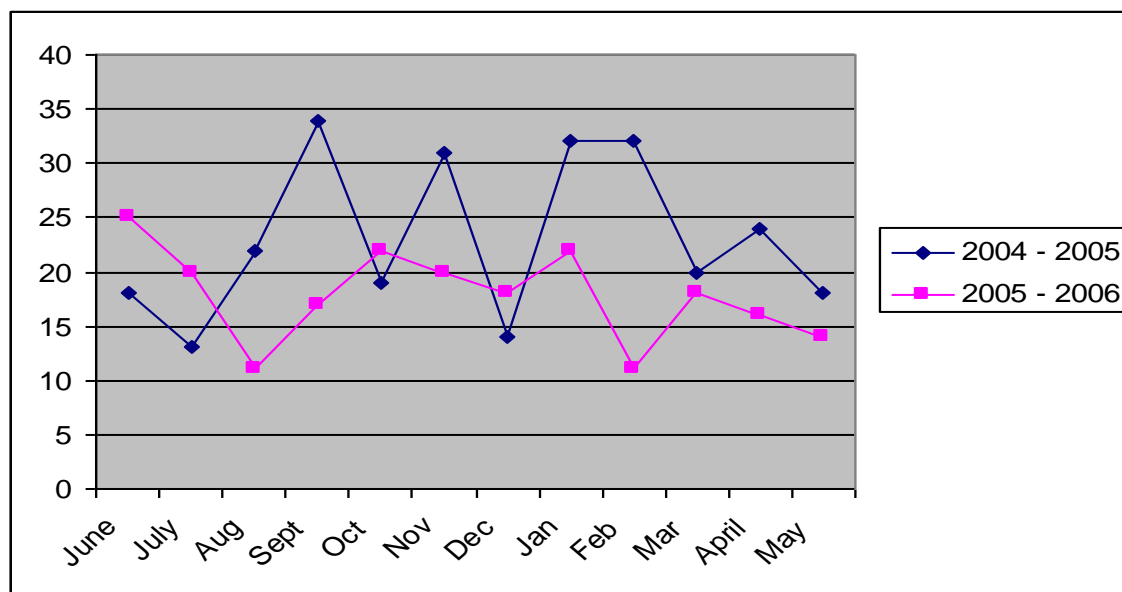
Table 2: Total Number of Requests for Assistance

Type	2003 – 2004	2004 – 2005	2005 – 2006
Students (Applying, Current/ Returning, Former student)	276	277	214
Groups	0	4	1
Faculty & Staff	4	3	8
Community Requests	4	2	9
Total	284	286	232

The distribution shows a preponderance of students visiting our Office given the mandate of the Office. It is interesting to note the increase in requests by staff related to issues involving students. Resolutions to problems sometimes are expedited when a member of staff approaches the Office.

2.1.1 Patterns of Use of the Office

Of the 232 requests for assistance in 2005-06, 214 were initiated by students. Figure 1 shows a month-by-month distribution of when these requests were received.

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

There are peak periods where an increased number of students visit the Office which reflect issues with respect to examination periods, admission periods, etc.

2.1.2 Student Requests Summary

The Office is responsible for requests for assistance by all students in the University. The following table provides important information with the regards to the distribution of these requests, excluding requests by non-students.

Table 3: Student requests for assistance by educational level

Education Level	2003-04		2004-05		2005-06	
Undergraduate	188	68.12%	180	64.98%	119	55.6%
Graduate	82	29.71%	88	31.77%	90	42.05%
Fellow / Resident	2	0.72%	2	0.72%	3	1.4%
Postdoc	2	0.72%	3	1.08%	2	0.95%
UNKNOWN	2	0.72%	4	1.44%	0	0
Total	276	100.00%	277	100.00%	214	100.00%

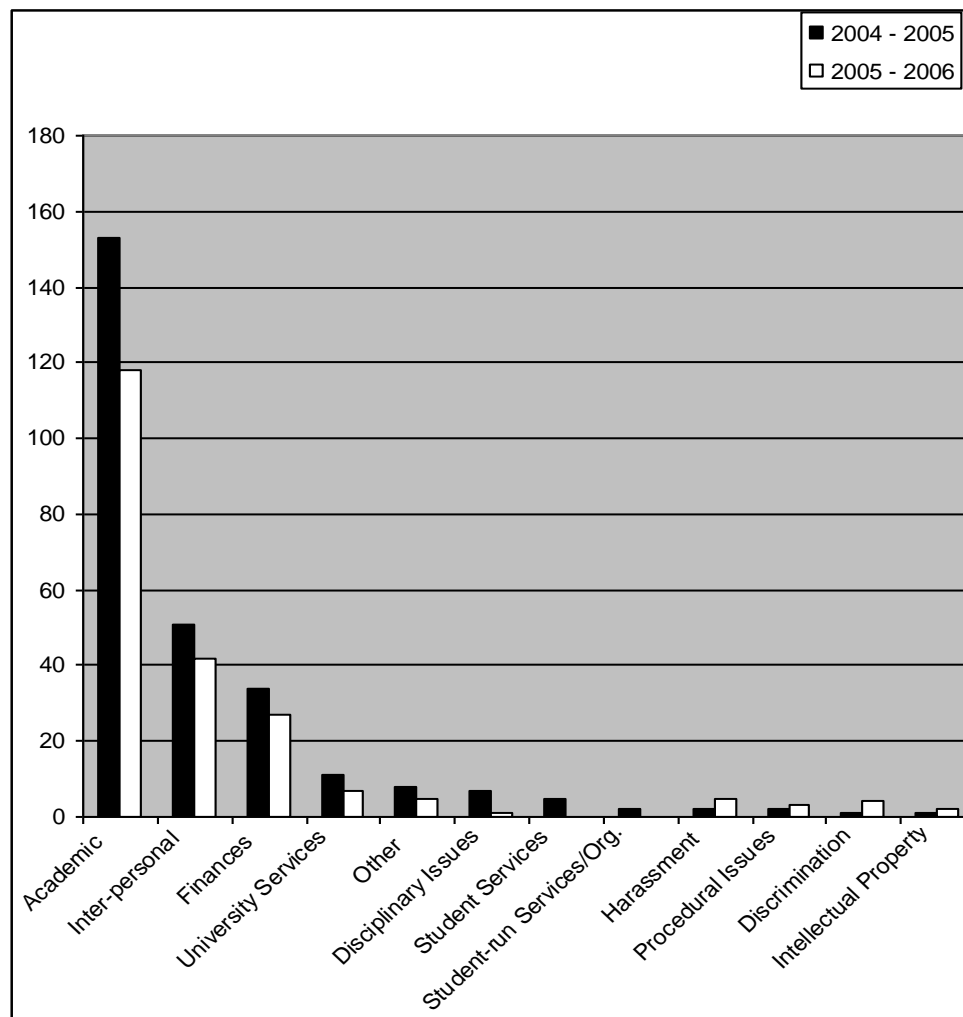
There has been a significant use of the Office by graduate students. The issues of graduate students are complicated and require increased amount of time and attention to resolve. Much of the Office's resources are used in this regard. We are working closely with the Associate Dean of the Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies Office concerning these issues, which stem mainly from the varied nature of graduate student/supervisor relationships.

III. The Nature of Student Visitors Concerns

3.1 The Type of Issue

The following table shows the distribution of issues by type and is further broken down in Table 5 in Appendix C.

Figure 2: Cases by Issue-Type



As expected, most of our students present with academic issues. The Office works with the various academic departments to try to informally resolve these issues. Interpersonal issues include the unique relationship of graduate student/supervisor relationships as mentioned above. The other issues vary greatly. It is important to note that even though the other numbers are comparatively small, many of these issues required our unique approach, and in some cases have inspired systemic changes.

3.2 Referrals by the Ombudsperson

The following table shows the distribution of referrals by organization type.

Table 4: Referrals by Organization-Type

Entity	2003-04		2004-05		2005-06	
Academic Units	136	49.3%	113	40.8%	97	45.3%
Admissions, Recruitment and Registrar's Office	12	4.3%	11	4.0%	8	3.7%
Student Services	34	12.3%	12	4.3%	8	3.7%
Student-Run Organizations	24	8.7%	29	10.5%	20	9.3%
University Wide Services	5	1.8%	2	0.7%	2	0.9%
Other	7	2.5%	8	2.9%	5	2.3%
No referral required	58	21.0%	102	36.8%	74	34.6%
Total	276	100.0%	277	100.0%	214	100.0%

The Office of the Ombudsperson for Students must refer many of the students to other University units for a formal final resolution. As the Office is well networked with these, it can often expedite the issue by contacting these units directly.

IV. Ombuds Professional Activities

This Office continues to work with other ombuds offices from other universities in order to share knowledge. This Office is a member of the following associations: Association des Ombudsmans des Universités du Québec (AOUQ); Association of Canadian College and University Ombudspersons (ACCUO); Forum of Canadian Ombudsman (FCO); International Ombudsman Association (IOA); and has participated at the following meetings/conferences/workshops during the reporting period:

AOUQ: June 9th, 2005; December 1st, 2005;

ACCUO: January 26-27th, 2006; May 17-20th, 2006;

IOA: April 2-5th, 2006;

REFERENCES:

Handbook on Student Rights and Responsibilities, McGill University, 2006.

Website: <http://www.mcgill.ca/files/secretariat/StudentHandbook2006English.pdf>

APPENDIX A

A brief description of your request for assistance (continue on back if necessary):

Referred by:

<input type="checkbox"/> Website	<input type="checkbox"/> Poster	<input type="checkbox"/> Student Services	<input type="checkbox"/> Staff (academic/non-academic)
<input type="checkbox"/> Radio	<input type="checkbox"/> Newspaper	<input type="checkbox"/> Student-run Org	<input type="checkbox"/> Other: _____
<input type="checkbox"/> Student Handbook/Calendar	<input type="checkbox"/> Student/Friend		

Others Consulted:

Name / Title / Office	Code*

* Office Use Only

Authorization:

I understand that the Ombudsperson will treat my complaint in a confidential manner as appropriate, with the utmost care and respect for me and those individuals concerned.

I authorize the Ombudsperson, or his/her associate, to communicate with persons involved with my complaint and to access all official files and information on me held by the University and third parties as the Ombudsperson deems necessary to fulfil his/her function.

Signature:

Date:

APPENDIX B

NEED HELP?

The Ombudsperson for Students Can Help

Ombudsperson for Students
William & Mary Brown
Student Services Building
3600 McTavish Street
Suite 5202, West Wing
Tel. (514) 398 7059

www.mcgill.ca/ombudsperson McGill

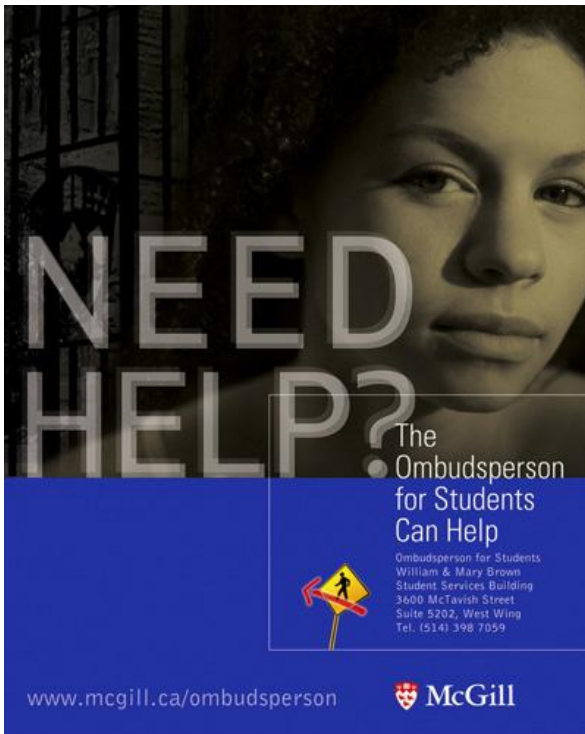
BESOIN D'AIDE?

Le Protecteur des étudiants peut aider

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Pavillon des services aux étudiants
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3600 rue McTavish
Bureau 5202, section ouest
tél. (514) 398 7059

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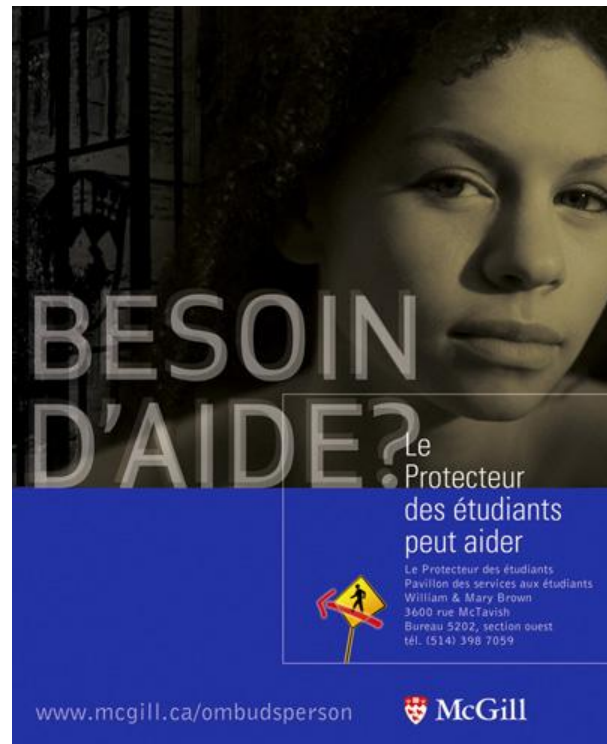
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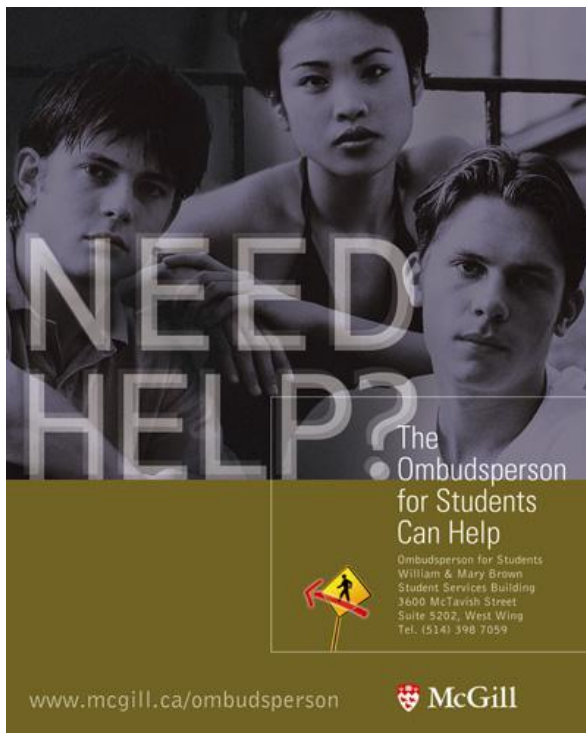
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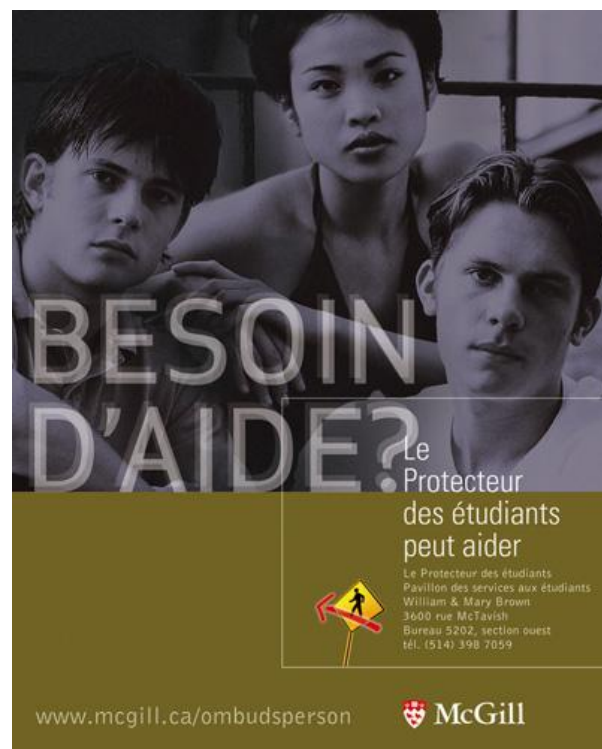
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APPENDIX C

TABLE 5: Breakdown of Issues

Issue Type	Issue	2003 - 2004	2004 - 2005	2005 - 2006
Academic	Admission	19	19	15
	Courses/Program	25	33	26
	Examinations	21	9	15
	Marks/Grades	65	69	43
	Practicum/Field Work/Stage	5	10	5
	Probation/Exclusion	10	5	6
	Advising	0	1	0
	Other	5	7	8
	Subtotal	150	153	118
Discrimination		1	1	4
Finances	Loan / Bursary	7	0	5
	Quebec Residency fee status	13	13	10
	Scholarship	4	2	1
	Student Fees	20	11	9
	Other	3	8	2
	Subtotal	47	34	27
Harassment		1	2	5
Intellectual Property		1	1	2
Inter-personal	Research / Thesis Supervisor	20	13	15
	Administrator/academic	2	2	1
	Administrator /non-academic	3	3	0
	Course Instructor / TA's	11	27	24
	Other Student (s)	2	5	1
	Other	2	1	1
	Subtotal	40	51	42
Procedural Issues		1	2	3
Disciplinary Issues	Academic offense	8	7	1
Student Services	Athletics	1	1	
	Student Aid	2	0	
	Student Health	1	1	
	Students with Disabilities (OSD)	1	3	
	Subtotal	5	5	0
	Student-run Services/Org.		4	2
University Services	Admissions, Registrar	3	2	2
	Library	3	1	0
	Residences	2	4	1
	Student Accounts	0	1	1
	Other	1	3	3
	Subtotal	9	11	7
Other		9	8	5
TOTAL		276	277	214