



Memorandum

Office of the Ombudsperson for Students
3610 McTavish Street, Suite 14
Tel: 514-398-7059

TO: Senate

FROM: Professor Dimitrios Berk, Ombudsperson for Students

SUBJECT: Annual Report of the Ombudsperson for Students (2013-2014) – 27th Report

DATE: February 18, 2015

DOCUMENT #: D14-41

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), found in the *Handbook on Student Rights and Responsibilities*, states:

10.1 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.*

Pursuant to the terms of reference, the Ombudsperson for Students submits the annual report for the 2013-2014 year.

MOTION OR RESOLUTION FOR APPROVAL: N/A

PRIOR CONSULTATION: N/A

NEXT STEPS: N/A

APPENDICES: Appendix A: Ombudsperson for Students 27th Annual Report (2013-2014)
Appendix B: Intake Form

Ombudsperson for Students

McGILL UNIVERSITY



Twenty-Seventh Annual Report

(June 1st, 2013 – May 31st, 2014)

During the mandate of:

Dr. Spencer Boudreau
Ombudsperson for Students

Submitted by:

Dimitrios Berk, PhD
Ombudsperson for Students

February 2015

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Submitted to the McGill University Senate¹
Presented February 18th, 2015

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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1. Introduction

This report covers activities of the Office of the Ombudsperson for Students from June 1st, 2013 to May 31st, 2014, during which Dr. Spencer Boudreau undertook his final year of a five-year mandate which ended on August 31st, 2014. This was followed by the appointment of Prof. Dimitrios Berk as Ombudsperson for Students who began his five-year mandate as of September 1st, 2014.

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 Colleges and Universities Ombudspersons) can be found at: <http://www.uwo.ca/ombuds/SoP.pdf>.

The role, function and scope of activity of the McGill Ombudsperson for Students are specified in the Handbook on Student Rights and Responsibilities:

<http://www.mcgill.ca/secretariat/files/secretariat/Ombudsperson-Students-English.pdf>

In the Terms of Reference, Article 1.1 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 "an office of notice" (as per article 5.2 of the Terms of Reference).

1.2 The Process

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

Students normally 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, her or his preference is respected. Students fill out an Intake Form (see Appendix B), which is available at the Office or from our website (<http://www.mcgill.ca/ombudsperson>).

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 reassured 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 uncertain about how to deal with a situation.

It is important to note that 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 units regarding issues that have been brought to his attention.

1.3 Visibility

Students learn about the existence of the Office in a variety of ways (Table 1). In addition, Office staff is present at orientation activities where information regarding the Ombuds Office is made available.

Table 1: Sources of awareness of services (%)

Referred By	2009-10	2010-11	2011-12	2012-13	2013-14
Website	14.9	21.5	18.4	19	27.2
Student Handbook/Calendar	4.9	2	2	2.4	2.9
Poster	18.3	0.4	0	0.8	0.5
Staff (academic/non-academic)	3	11	12.8	14.6	11.7
Student/Friend	0.7	11	14.4	10.5	14.1
Student-run Org.	1.5	5.3	1.6	0	1.9
Student Services	12.3	6.5	5.6	4.5	3.4
Other	6	7.7	9.6	8.5	8.3
Unknown	38.4	34.5	35.6	39.7	30.0
Total	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%
Total number of Students	268	246	250	247	206

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	2009-10	2010-11	2011-12	2012-13	2013-14
Students (Applying, Current/Returning, Former students)	268	246	250	247	206
Groups	2	4	1	5	2
Faculty & Staff	14	5	8	12	8
Community Requests	9	6	12	12	5
Total	293	261	271	276	221

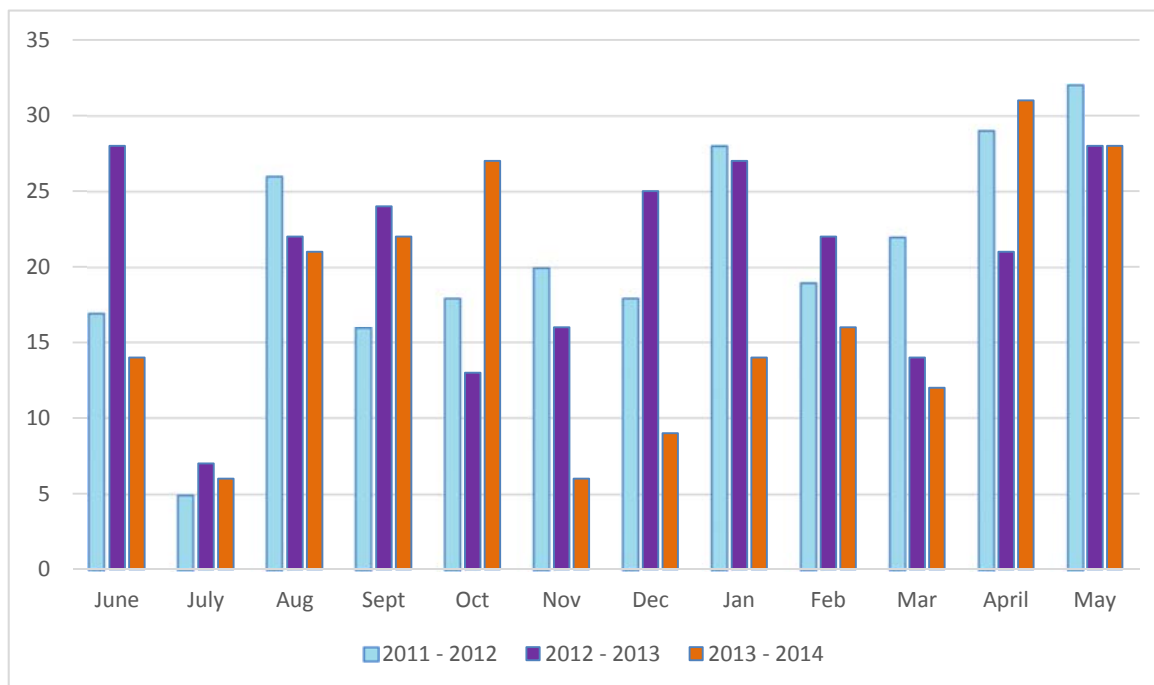
The mandate of the Ombudsperson for Students, in Article 1.2, defines 'student' as follows: *'Student' means a person who is, or within the past twelve months was, registered in the University as a student, whether or not as a candidate for a degree, diploma or certificate.*²

² <http://www.mcgill.ca/secretariat/files/secretariat/Ombudsperson-Students-English.pdf>

2.1.1 Patterns of Use of the Office

Figure 1 shows a month-by-month pattern of when requests for an appointment or assistance were received over the last three activity years.

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



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 (% , number)

Education Level	2009-10	2010-11	2011-12	2012-13	2013-14
Undergraduate	59.3 (159)	47.6 (117)	52.8 (132)	55.5 (137)	51.5 (106)
Graduate	38.8 (104)	48.8 (120)	42.8 (107)	42.9 (106)	44.0 (91)
Resident/ Fellow	1.1 (3)	1.6 (4)	2 (5)	0	1.9 (4)
Postdoc	0.4 (1)	0.4 (1)	1.6 (4)	1.2 (3)	1.4 (3)
Other	0.4 (1)	1.6 (4)	0.8 (2)	0.4 (1)	1.0 (2)
Total	100 (268)	100 (246)	100 (250)	100 (247)	100 (206)

3. Nature of Student Concerns and Resolutions

3.1 Categories of Concerns

Table 4 presents the distribution of categories and issues:

Table 4: Cases by issue-type

Issue Type	Issue	2009-10	2010-11	2011-12	2012-13	2013-14
Abuse of power		0	0	1	0	0
Academic	Admission	15	9	19	15	18
	Advising	1	0	2	2	1
	Courses/Program	39	32	28	30	23
	Examinations	14	16	14	14	9
	Inter / intra faculty transfer	3	2	1	1	0
	Marks/Grades	53	39	52	48	31
	Practicum/Field Work/Stage	9	7	9	9	10
	Probation/Exclusion	7	12	8	11	6
	Other	15	14	19	5	8
	Subtotal	156	131	152	135	106
Inter-personal	Administrator/academic	4	3	3	2	3
	Administrator /non-academic	1	1	3	1	2
	Course Instructor / TA's	10	6	8	18	12
	Invigilators	1	0	0	0	0
	Lab instructor/ demonstrator	0	0	1	0	1
	Other Student (s)	2	1	3	1	1
	Research / Thesis Supervisor	17	34	29	18	30
	Other	11	3	8	11	9
	Subtotal	46	48	55	51	58
Finances	Loan / Bursary	1	4	1	4	2
	Quebec Residency fee status	5	4	0	1	1
	Scholarship	4	1	2	3	8
	Student Fees	18	18	15	11	8
	Other	5	2	4	6	6
	Subtotal	33	29	22	25	25
Student Services		2	5	2	4	1
University Units		1	9	5	1	4
Student-run Org.		2	0	1	2	1
Residence Life		4	2	3	2	2
Student Discipline	Academic offense	10	4	2	8	2
	Non-Academic offense	1	0	1	0	1
	Subtotal	11	4	3	8	3
Procedural Issues		4	1	0	6	1
Intellectual Property		1	3	3	5	1
Harassment		1	3	1	4	2
Safety/Security		2	1	0	1	1
Other		5	10	2	3	1
TOTAL		268	246	250	247	206

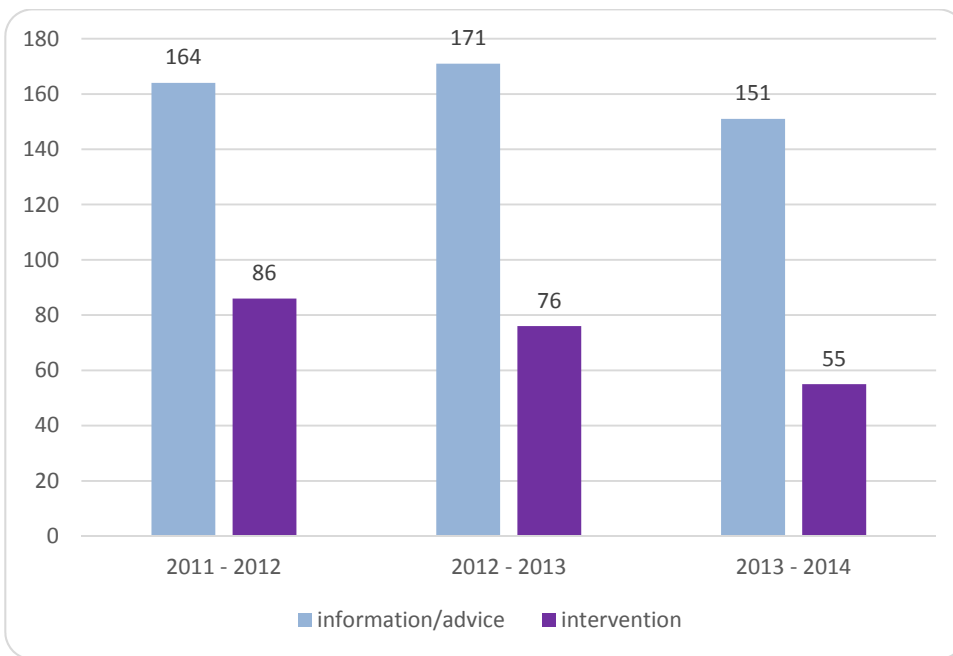
3.2 (a) Resolution Categories

The student requests for assistance are broken down into two categories of resolution:

- (i) information/advice: listening; suggesting an approach; explaining policies;
- (ii) intervention: individual or multi-party discussions and proposals

The figure below shows the distribution of the student requests per these two categories for the past three activity years:

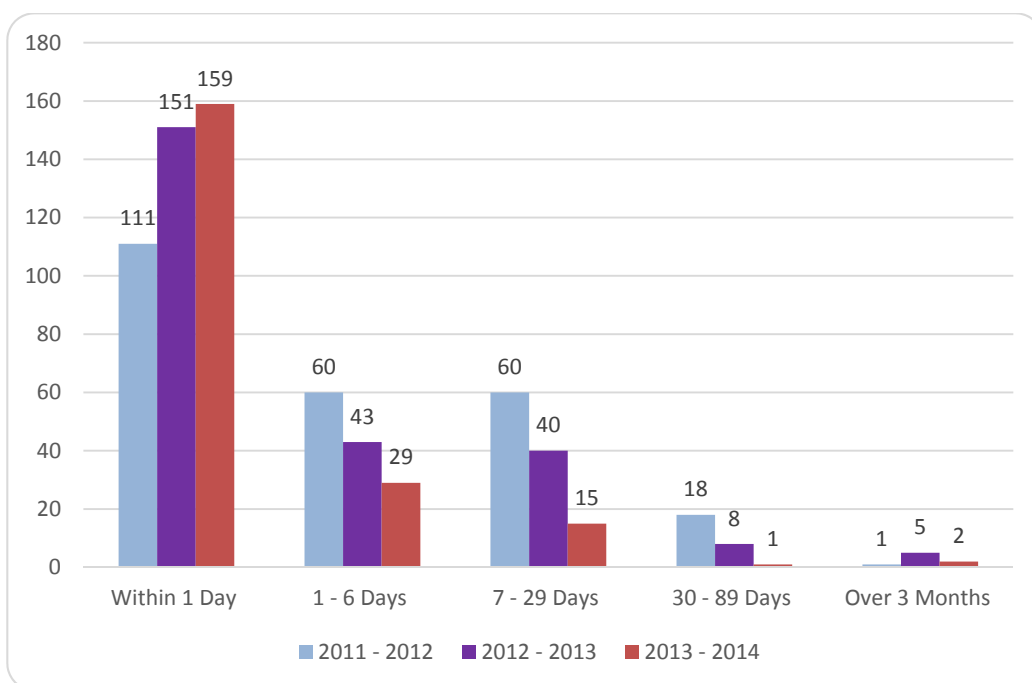
Figure 2: Number of Students per Resolution Category



(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), and since 2010 the 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 the AOUQ, the ACCUO, and ENOHE (European Network of Ombudsmen in Higher Education).

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.

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. I also wish to thank Sara Cornett for her assistance.

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

McGill University

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Website: www.mcgill.ca/ombudsperson**Mandate**

The Ombudsperson investigates, at the request of any member of the student body, any complaint that may arise between that student and the University or anyone in the University exercising authority. The Ombudsperson does not make University policy or replace proper legal channels but brings to the University's attention any apparent inadequacies in existing University procedures which may jeopardize the rights and liberties of any members of the University community. The Ombudsperson acts solely in an advisory and intermediary role and if required by both parties, mediates disputes between parties.

Date: _____

Is this the first time you have contacted the Ombuds Office? Yes No [Month: __, Year: __]**Personal Information:**

Last Name: _____
First Name: _____
Address: _____ Apt. ____ City _____
Province/State/Country: _____ Postal Code: _____
Home Phone: [] _____ Messages: <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
Alternate Phone: [] _____ Messages: <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
Fax: [] _____ Email: _____

McGill Student Status:

_____	<input type="checkbox"/> Applying to McGill
Student No.	<input type="checkbox"/> Current/Returning Student
	<input type="checkbox"/> Former Student - last session attended: _____
	- graduated (degree/year): _____

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		

CONTINUE ON BACK ->

Description of your request for assistance:

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Others Consulted:

Name / Title / Office

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 fulfill his/her function.

Signature:

Date: