

OFFICE OF THE STUDENT OMBUDS

IMPARTIAL ACCESSIBLE
INDEPENDENT CONFIDENTIAL

Annual Report 2018 – 2019

(April 1, 2018 – March 31, 2019)

“It’s all about Fairness”

CONTENT

• Who we are and What we do	2
• Students’ Experiences with an Ombuds	3
• “It’s All About Fairness” Bookmark	4
• University Ombuds Staff	5
• Ombuds Interns 2018 – 2019	7
• OSO Activity Summary 2018 – 2019	10
• Demographics of OSO Casework 2016 - 2019	12
• OSO Client Populations	13
• OSO Casework Areas	14
• Review of Recommendations for 2017 – 2018	15
• Recommendations for 2018 – 2019	17
• Appendix: i) OSO Presentation Titles	19
• li) OSO Conference Presentations and Publications	20

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*We promote fairness at the University of Alberta through respectful dialogue,
and by ensuring best practices are followed.*

Who we are and what we do

An ombudsperson is an advocate for systemic fairness. The Office of the Student Ombuds (OSO) advises the University community – students, administrators, faculty, and broader community (parents, friends, concerned citizens) with regard to university policies and procedures, ways to promote healthy conflict resolution, and proper and timely referrals to other student services. The OSO also provides confidential assistance to students through one-on-one meetings. Ombuds use a lens of fairness to examine all issues and concerns that are brought to them:

1. **Procedural Fairness** – access to prompt and unbiased assessment, due process, and the opportunity to respond;
 2. **Substantive Fairness** – ensuring that regulations are applied consistently and that decisions provide the appropriate level of explanation, especially at high-level formal hearings;
 3. **Relational Fairness** – ensuring that all parties are treated with dignity and respect--this means that regardless of mode of communication, language, tone, and gesture should not demean a person;
 4. **Equitable Fairness** – striving to ensure that decision-making processes are inclusive, and cognizant of intersectional concerns that marginalize individuals, and may exclude them.
- Although many of the formal proceedings on campus such as investigations and hearings focus more on procedural and substantive (administrative) fairness, the University community should be held to a high standard for relational and equitable fairness to promote a discrimination and harassment-free campus. Ombuds provide a moral compass to watch for gaps, omissions, and lapses in treating members of the university community fairly. The ombuds office, along with many other strategic offices such as the Dean of Students (DOS) and Office of Safe Disclosure and Human Rights (OSDHR), provides a confidential space for marginalized voices to be heard. It is an important resource for faculty and administrative staff, who may need guidance on best practices to manage delicate and sensitive discussions with students.



ACCUO

ASSOCIATION OF CANADIAN
COLLEGE AND UNIVERSITY
OMBUDSPERSONS

The OSO operates under the ACCUO Standards of Practice: **independence, confidentiality, impartiality, and accessibility**. These standards of practice guide our operations to ensure the integrity of the office. In helping students navigate the policies and procedures of the University, having and maintaining these guiding principles provides students with a feeling of trust in our office and the work we do, which in turn leads to trust in university processes.

What was Your Experience at the OSO?

“During the process of my appeal I visited a lot of student services but the Office of the Student Ombuds was my favourite. I was introduced to the Office of the Student Ombuds by a friend, who informed me that they might assist me in finding a solution to my circumstance. I was in a hopeless situation prior to my visit. In my first appointment, I was informed about the confidential nature and independence of the office which gave me confidence to fully express myself. I fully trusted Remonia to offer me the best option. Every appointment was an improvement to the situation, which helped me stay encouraged. Remonia stayed connected and encouraged me until my appeal was upheld. As a student, I learned from my experience that to overcome fear you must fully express yourself and know you can trust someone, which brings a sense of hope.”

“In every conflict, information is power. My supervisor relied on the fact that I was an international student, alone in a new country. Backed by the department chair, certain information was hidden or misrepresented to intimidate me into conforming with unfair requests. At that time, the Office of the Student Ombuds was the only safe place I could go to raise my concerns. The information I was sharing was confidential; more importantly I had an impartial dispute resolution expert guiding me to most needed resources, like certain health services, Student Accessibility Services, etc., as well as arming me with the proper knowledge about my rights and responsibilities, escalating my concerns to the right people, documenting, and coaching me when needed. Even though I didn't get a fairy tale happy ending, I am extremely grateful to the Office of the Student Ombuds for finding me a safe shore to land on. I graduated from the U of A and I am still in Edmonton.”

“As an international PhD student going through a difficult situation, I found the Office of the Student Ombuds to be a valuable and important service. Being able to go somewhere within the university to talk to someone who understood the workings and policies of the university was invaluable. The fact that the service was confidential and not connected directly to any one department put me at greater ease in sharing my concerns and asking my questions. I truly appreciated having such a service situated within the university while having a degree of autonomy that facilitates open communication and aids us in addressing challenging issues.”

“When I started having issues with my supervisor, I reached out to trusted faculty who either were too scared to even listen or dismissed it as “all in my head”. Somehow the conversations that I thought were told in confidence always ended up getting to other people. Before I walked into the ombudsman office I didn't know I could keep my conversations private by simply asking for them to be so. I didn't know how to frame my rights in a way that resonates with my faculty. I also had no idea how to reach out for help or who to trust. I look back at the day I wanted to quit mid PhD and the ombudsman convinced me to give it a second thought while I gazed on the withdrawal paperwork for days. Now that I'm contributing in a meaningful way to better the life of thousands of Canadians every day, I know it's largely thanks to good people (such as Brent) in the ombuds office. I am in their debt - they literally saved me in the darkest time of my life.”



OFFICE OF THE STUDENT OMBUDS



PROCEDURAL FAIRNESS

Accessing prompt and unbiased assessment and having the opportunity to respond

SUBSTANTIVE FAIRNESS

Applying regulations consistently with comprehensive explanation of decisions

RELATIONAL FAIRNESS

Treating all individuals respectfully

EQUITABLE FAIRNESS

Striving for inclusive decision processes

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 UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA
OFFICE OF THE STUDENT OMBUDS



The OSO “It’s All about Fairness” Bookmark

This bookmark was created by the OSO team in collaboration with the Dean of Students Communications/Design Group and is handed out at all orientation and workshop presentations, as well as our Fairness Day event in October on the main floor of SUB.

The intent was to have a useful item that keeps students informed of the ombuds lens of fairness in all academic and personal issues related to university procedures and interactions with faculty, administrators, and students. It allows an opportunity to ask about the different aspects of fairness and to explore these in the context of issues and/or conflicts they experience.

Here are some examples that clients encounter:

- 1) Procedural Fairness – *“My prof told me not to appeal my final grade as it would be denied.”* Students have the right to question a decision and respond to that decision; they also have a right to a timely decision.
- 2) Substantive Fairness – *“When I received the decision, it was just one sentence saying that my appeal was denied.”* Decision letters must be comprehensive and outline reasons; greater details are expected at the highest level of appeals and/or when sanctions are more severe.
- 3) Relational Fairness – *“When I received the response, ‘you are just a poor student,’ I felt very bad.”* Respectful response and treatment to inquiries is expected; an open and courteous dialogue with the client encourages them to speak with confidence.
- 4) Equitable fairness – *“I was told that I could not use my background status as an excuse to get an extension.”* There must be consideration of humanitarian and extenuating circumstances in a decision to ensure the person’s location and status are acknowledged and understood.

IT’S ALL ABOUT FAIRNESS

IMPARTIAL
ACCESSIBLE

INDEPENDENT
CONFIDENTIAL

Ombudsperson:

(om.buhdz.pur.suhn) noun

An advocate for systemic fairness

The Office of the Student Ombuds advises on university processes and procedures, conflict resolution, and provides referrals to other student services.

University Ombuds Staff 2018 - 2019



Natalie Sharpe, Director of the OSO, has built a strong, collaborative ombuds team as the internship completes its fourth year of operation. The professional staff train the interns with incremental learning modules that are reviewed and updated annually. This year, the Dean of Students offered new workshops for interns in the student services. The OSO invited the Alberta Ombudsman to collaborate on Fairness Day at the University campus. The Alberta Network of Ombuds in Higher Education, whose members comprise ombuds from U of Alberta, U of Calgary, MacEwan U, Athabasca U, NAIT and the Alberta Ombudsman, meet twice a year to discuss issues in Alberta higher education and to provide collegial support. As President of the Association of Canadian College and University Ombudspersons, Natalie works with higher educational ombuds across Canada to develop strategies on improving post-secondary institutions' knowledge and awareness of the role and value of the ombudsperson in making their institutions accountable to society. ACCUO members connect regularly through a list:serve to discuss best practices in Canadian higher education and conduct ombuds training webinars. Natalie has established international alliances with the California Caucus of College and University Ombudspersons, European Network of Ombudsman in Higher Education, and Australian Grievance and Complaint Network. She presents papers internationally to tackle current global issues and challenges in higher education and to share recommendations on individual and systemic fairness. These important alliances promote the establishment of ombuds in HE institutions throughout the world.

Dr. Brent Epperson, Graduate Ombudsperson, joined the Office of the Student Ombuds at the University of Alberta in 2014. The Graduate Ombudsperson position demands communication, conflict resolution, and mediation skills, as well as effective collaboration with the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research, the Graduate Students' Association, the Students' Union, and other key stakeholders. Brent notes: *"In addition to graduate students, I advise undergraduate students, post-doctoral fellows, and medical residents. My work as an ombudsperson has been an extension of scholarship—a way to mentor students, ensure fair policymaking, and promote institutional integrity. Through casework, committee service, and my advisory role to senior university policymakers, I play an active role in policy feedback and evaluation. Most recently, in 2018 – 2019, I led strategic planning efforts for the Office of the Student Ombuds in close collaboration with my colleagues, completing the terms of reference, office mandate, mission, vision, and value statements. My casework for 2018 - 2019 revealed community concerns with regard to services and supports for post-doctoral fellows and visiting researchers. My recommendations to the Director reflect these observations."*



Remonia Stoddart-Morrison, Undergraduate Ombudsperson, is an international PhD student in Education. This is her third year with the OSO, after an ombuds internship and graduate ombuds role. Remonia brings exceptional skills to our team with a strong administrative/managerial background as a former high school principal, as an information and computer specialist with a degree in information technology. She has exceptional speaking and research skills that have allowed the OSO to expand our education workshops and presentations. In her work with undergraduate students she helps to ensure that students have a better understanding of the policies and procedures of the University and are empowered to have their voice heard in decision-making processes. She is sensitive to the needs and concerns of students who identify as marginalized. She worked closely with Dr. Brent Epperson on Restorative Practices Initiatives for Graduate Students and Post-doctoral fellows. She has presented at conferences with the OSO Director on the importance of understanding intersectionality and privilege as a University services professional and as an ombuds working with a growing and diverse student population, including international students and students with families.



Kara Blizzard, Augustana Campus Ombudsperson, is also the Public Services Librarian on Augustana (Camrose) campus. Kara provides on-site assistance to students who have academic concerns related to their academic standing as well as academic integrity allegation or non-academic complaints against their conduct. She provides very clear guidelines to them to ensure due process and support throughout investigation processes. In situations where students may have to meet with administrators on campus, Kara provides the assistance to transition to the main campus ombuds office. The Augustana ombuds ensures that students are well aware of this service on their campus.

Ombuds Interns



Taylor Thomas, Undergraduate Ombuds Intern, in her fourth year Faculty of Arts, was thorough in her casework and critical in her analysis of cases, ensuring her clients were treated fairly in university processes. She helped to organize our Fairness Day with the Alberta Ombudsman in October 2018 and contributed to our Alberta Network of Ombuds in Higher Education meetings. She took leadership in workshops, and presented a poster on Indigenous cultural awareness and indigenizing the ombuds practice. Taylor also assisted in background research on sexual violence and intersectionality for OSO presentations. Recognizing the stress of the ombuds world, Taylor found ways to promote mental health and wellness to her ombuds team. Taylor also served as a member of the Communications Committee for the Association of Canadian College and University Ombudspersons.

An Ombuds Response to Indigenizing Institutions

Taylor Thomas, Undergraduate Ombuds Intern OSO

Indigenization in Higher Education

With increasing indigenous participation in post-secondary institutions, shifting institutional priorities towards a more inclusive and culturally cognizant strategic policies, there has been an increasing need for student advisors to be aware of their role within these wider systems of service, policy, and culture. Recognizing privilege and power dynamics is critical in this work for advisors.

This can be facilitated through:

Indigenization:

“the meaningful inclusion of Indigenous knowledge(s), in the every day fabric of the institution from policies to practices across all levels (Pidgeon, 79).”

Decolonization:

“the process of deconstructing colonial ideologies of the superiority and privilege of Western thought and approaches (Cull et al., 6).”

Fig 1.1. Institutional interconnections to Indigenization. Cull et al. 2018

Ombuds Standards of Practice

The Office of the Student Ombuds at the University of Alberta adheres to the Association of Canadian College and University Ombudspersons (ACCUO) standards of practice and is committed to advocating for fairness. The importance of equity and respect for cultural context are critical to this practice (Sharpe, 5).

Fig 1.2. Adopted from Ombuds Saskatchewan and University of Victoria Ombuds Office

Canadian Context

Through a news media scan of 5 major higher education sources within the Canadian context, I was able to see how the narrative of reconciliation and indigenization has been framed over the past 19 years in Canada. This is in part a result of the grassroots movements such as IdleNoMore, who's calls for change note the need to resist violence against indigenous women and girls in addition to building towards coexistence. The institutional responses have also been shaped by the Government of Canada's Truth and Reconciliation Commissions calls to action.

Fig 1.3. Adapted from Cull et al. 2018, 37-43.

University of Alberta

Student Population
4.00% (2017/2018, University of Alberta)

96.00 %

■ Total: 38,445

4.0% Of UofA students self identified as aboriginal in 2017/2018. Importantly, services such as the First Peoples House have been the primary indigenous service provider on campus. The UofA's most recent strategic plan "For The Public Good" "(2016,10) notes the university's,

"commitment to respectful relations with First Nations, Metis, and Inuit Peoples."

Pulling Together: A Guide for Front-Line Staff, Student Services, and Advisors

While higher education institutions require advocates for the success of indigenization and decolonization, the ombuds has the unique opportunity to take the knowledge and perspectives raised through advocacy and utilize this to form what has been termed a multi-partial perspective. In doing so, the ability for ombuds advisors to ensure fairness for our clients is enhanced.

Ombuds as Agents of Change for:

- Policy
- Institutional Culture Shifts
- Staff Practices

Opportunities for an Indigenized Practice

Recommendations: The possibility for indigenous justice paradigms as guiding theoretical frameworks for Ombuds is one of many ways to move forward. A concerted effort to engage the ombuds office in conversation with Indigenous advocacy offices will be necessary to ensure fairness on campus.

Possibilities: At a staff practice level engaging in self-reflection in order to ensure behaviors reflect respectful relationships and encourage learning between colleagues is one way in which we can work towards what Adam Gaudry & Danielle Lorenz call reconciliation indigenization(2018, 221). The collaborative Restorative Practices Initiative is one example of such a way forward.

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Alexandria Hammond, Undergraduate Ombuds Intern, fourth year Faculty of Arts *"I believe I developed a lot of professional confidence in this role, especially dealing with "difficult" students. I learned more effective strategies to manage casework effectively. Learning about the principles of fairness has been impactful on how I think about institutions and systemic issues."* Alex enjoyed research on issues around sexual violence policy issues, cultural nuances in ombuds work. *"Participating in the OSO Internship program has given me the opportunity to gain practical experience and exposure to a range of different career paths. Throughout my internship, mentors helped me to develop a more holistic understanding of fairness and provided me with the skills needed to promote the rights and interests of all parties. The University environment is complex, and access to peer-support that is both confidential and impartial is a necessary resource to ensure students can participate in the campus community to the fullest extent."*

Cultural Consensus in Higher Education

Shared Beliefs, Values, and Assumptions
 Culture can be defined as shared values, assumptions, beliefs, or ideologies that provide meaning to the institution and its work (Ehlers and Schneckenberg, 2010, pp.2).
 Culture is a process of sense-making. Social Anthropologist Joanne Martin (2002) notes that culture is typically characterized by the adoption of a "collective-wide consensus."
 Student Advisors are engaged in a type of socialization, helping students to detect for themselves what beliefs and cultural traits are shared and valued by the institution in order to promote their success (Tierney and Lanford, 2018).

Image retrieved from <https://www.barnettinstitute.com/blog/education/>

Schien's Notion of Culture

- 1) Culture is a pattern of basic assumptions
- 2) Invented, discovered or developed by a given group
- 3) As it learns to cope with its problems of external adaptation and internal integration
- 4) That has been worked well enough to be considered valid and therefore
- 5) Is to be taught to new members of the group as the
- 6) Correct way to perceive, think and feel in relation to those problems

The Levels of Culture

Social psychologist Edgar Schien (1984) provided a framework to analyze institutional culture so that it can be used by Student Advisors to avoid over-simplifying culture. This is integral to moving beyond an intuitive understanding of institutional culture, as biases and assumptions Student Advisors hold influences what you see, say, and believe in your advising practice.

What we see: What student advisors notice on a daily basis about the university (e.g., dress code, organizational charts, logos, office space, email etiquette)
What they say: What student advisors are told in the reason for why the university is the way it (e.g., institutional philosophy)
What we believe: What student advisors unconsciously believe, take for granted, ideas about the purpose of the university

Adapted image from <https://www.generationchange.net/2017/01/08/culture-as-a-core-business-strategy-an-emergent-approach-to-a-future-culture/>

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Creating Conflict

Conflicts in higher education institutions can arise from "instances in which an actor or group of actors ... transgress the boundaries of institutional culture." (Tierney and Lanford, 2018) Individuals or groups of individuals may critique or reject shared values of a particular culture, challenging the institutional roles and purpose.

If student advisors are closed to the possibility of having more than one cultural interpretation, or prescribe a single set of shared values, and demand cultural conformity, conflict can be exacerbated.

Image retrieved from <https://www.duke.edu/~christie/management-course/low-ohes-eds-solutions-for-independent-pharmacy-managers/>

More than What is Shared? Alternative Perspectives of Institutional Culture

MOVING BEYOND CULTURE AS CONSENSUS
 A consensus on what constitutes meaning within the institution is not always necessary to culture...

Integration Theory	Differentiation Theory	Fragmentation Theory
Cultural interpretations are clear, and there is a consistent consensus among members (Martin, 2002). Culture is not ambiguous. It is common to the higher education context.	Interpretations of culture vary by member groups, each having developed their own consensus. The varying interpretations clash against each other sometimes, creating moments of ambiguity (Martin, 2002).	Culture is ambiguity, as cultural interpretations are neither inconsistent or consistent but rather issue-specific (Martin, 2002).

The above theoretical perspectives highlight three different aspects of institutional culture:

- 1) whether or not a range cultural interpretations exist,
- 2) whether or not consensus is shared and,
- 3) if ambiguity is acknowledged as part of the sense-making processes within the institution.

Approaching Cultural Ambiguity in Your Advising Practice

Advising students beyond shared values requires working along the dimensions of interpretations, consensus, and ambiguity to understanding how students perceive the institutional culture as either helping or hindering their ability to succeed.

Ambiguity in the advising context is the quality of being *open to more than one interpretation* of institutional culture. The institution, the supposed origin of cultural meaning, can be removed as the main focus of the sense-making process.

Image retrieved from <https://medium.com/@healthsystem/faculty-assessment-monitors-for-ambiguous-ambiguity-and-clarity-833162c1c2c2>

"[Ambiguity] when acknowledged [is] often described (or perceived) as not being part of 'the culture' (Martin, 2002).

Student advisors can be *multipartial*, rather than *impartial* to a single notion of shared cultural values. **Multipartiality** is "the ability to analyze a conflict from multiple viewpoints" (Wilgus & Homes, 2009). Rather than forcing a single interpretation of culture, student advisors can seek to promote equally a multiplicity of identities and experiences within the institution. If ambiguity is embraced, a *multipartial* perspective will allow student advisors bring attention to experiences of those students who may not culturally conform, and allowing those experiences that do not culturally conform and often go unheard or pushed aside by the dominate culture values, to become part of the institutions culture.

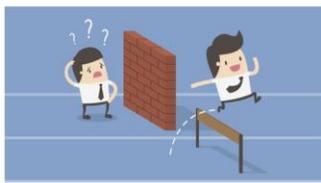


Ryan Moukhaiber, Graduate Ombuds Intern, Master's Program, Neuropsychology. Ryan Moukhaiber's greatest talents as an intern were captured in a note from a student client: *"I was impressed with Ryan's detail, thoroughness, availability and support. Ryan became a valuable source of information and clarification to the many complex procedures I had to face and understand. Ryan was especially skilled at seeking out all the information and procedures related to my case, he even introduced me to the importance of following certain structures and highlighted points that I was not aware of. It's clear that Ryan has a passion to help others and a great eye to detail."* Ryan received a Graduate Student Teaching Award this year.

UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA Addressing cultural norms within the lens of academic integrity
 Ryan Moukhaiber, Graduate Ombuds Intern
 Office of the Student Ombuds, University of Alberta

Background

The cultural and institutional norms that a person learns during their youth affect their ability to navigate and succeed in graduate studies. For example, when entering their programs, graduate students are briefed on various academic offences and expectations. However, within this population of students, some may misinterpret and not fully comprehend these expectations. This misinterpretation may become exacerbated for international students who are still getting accustomed to a non-familiar institution, and who struggle with understanding the localized nuances involved with being a graduate student. Subsequently, these students may exercise the same and localized behaviors associated with their home institution, which may be deemed inappropriate at their new university. As advisors, how are we better able to prepare these students to ensure they understand the academic context in order to succeed their graduate programs?



Academic Integrity

According to the University of Alberta, academic integrity simply means not engaging in inappropriate academic behavior such as plagiarizing and cheating, while promoting the highest level of honesty in one's work.

In recent years, academic integrity has gained national attention and more efforts have been made to mitigate academic offenses (Eaton, 2018)



A literature review conducted by Bista (2011) examined differing institutional, cultural and behavioral norms of international students. It was found that there are six main variables that influence likelihood of academic offenses, mainly plagiarism, in international undergraduate and graduate students (Bista, 2011):

1. Previous Learning Style and Culture
2. Lack of Familiarity with the Culture of Academics
3. Access to Educational Resources
4. Student-Teacher Relationship
5. Psychological Pressure and Adjustment Issues
6. Communication Difficulties

The path forward

- As advisors we need to gain an understanding of how the student learned to research and write papers at their past institution. This way we are able to provide them guidance on how their current institution's practices differ.
- We may also ask these student about their understanding of intellectual property and then provide examples to show what needs to be cited, and why.
- Provide the appropriate University resources to learn and practice these, using a current paper they are working on. When necessary, refer the student to the Writing Resource experts in the Academic Success Centre.
- Introduce the student to all the graduate workshops hosted by the Academic Success Centre and within their own departments, so that they may learn effective time management skills for their research projects.
- Encourage the student to review exceptional papers that have been published in the academic journals of their discipline, either by their peers or faculty to become familiar with best practices in research and writing in their discipline.
- Instead of stating "this is the law here", we should adopt a solution-focused approach, going back to the student's home institution to find out what they understood as acceptable there, and then move forward with resources to help them do better here.
- Let the student know that it may take some practice to learn these skills, and to turn to experts for help in improving them. The experts here may give them important tips to ensure they keep on track and succeed in their programs.
- Ultimately, we as advisors have to ensure we make appropriate referrals for these students.



Office of the Student Ombuds Clientele via Residence Status

The figure below illustrates the percentage of domestic and international students our office serves (2017 – 2018 reporting year). Compared with domestic students, international students are more than twice as likely to utilize our services.



Office of the Student Ombuds Clientele via Program Enrollment

The figure below illustrates the percentage of undergraduate and graduate students our office serves (2017 – 2018 reporting year).



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OSO Activity Summary: 2018 - 2019

- ✓ Fairness Day on Campus with the Alberta Ombudsman Fall 2018 (See pictures)
- ✓ OSO conducted 31 Education and Orientation workshops on campus
- ✓ Attended 342 client-associated meetings outside of the office, including meetings with professors, Associate Deans, Student Conduct and Accountability, Human Rights, Legal Counsel, and UAPS
- ✓ Attended 153 committee meetings on campus, including Dean of Students Leadership Council, Academic Standards Committee, Student Conduct and Accountability Committee, Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research Council, Graduate Students Association, the Postdoctoral Fellows Association etc.
- ✓ Attended 30 formal appeal hearings
- ✓ Engaged in 6 Alternative Dispute Resolution processes (mediations, restorative conferences, etc.)
- ✓ Meetings with Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research on Restorative Practices Initiative
- ✓ OSO presented professional papers in Canada, USA, Austria, and Scotland
- ✓ OSO Director as President of ACCUO has worked to strengthen communication networks among higher education ombuds in Canada, with Executive Bulletin bimonthly
- ✓ Alberta Network of Ombuds in Higher Education met twice to discuss common issues
- ✓ Ombuds attended ACCUO regional meeting at UBC Kelowna, focusing on practicum challenges
- ✓ Workshop for Bridges Orientation for First Peoples' House
- ✓ Workshop for Transition Year Program, First Peoples' House
- ✓ Orientation for University of Alberta International on the services of OSO
- ✓ Academic Integrity Workshop for Law faculty International Graduate students
- ✓ Presentation at Marketing 312 Community Service Learning
- ✓ Panel Presentation for Employers on Faculty of Science Internship Program
- ✓ 2 Workshops on Healthy Graduate Student-Supervisor Relationships
- ✓ 3 Presentations on Mitigating Conflict in Graduate Student Supervisor Relationships
- ✓ Workshop on Supervisory Relationships with Neuroscience graduates
- ✓ Workshop on Conflict Resolution for Modern Languages and Cultural Studies graduates
- ✓ Workshop on Conflict Resolution for Laboratory Medicine and Pathology graduates
- ✓ Workshop on Conflict Resolution for History Graduates
- ✓ 2 Transitions Orientations to international students on OSO services
- ✓ 2 Graduate Students' Association orientations on Graduate Ombudsman role/OSO services
- ✓ 2 Workshops for Faculty of Rehabilitation Medicine on Conflict Resolution
- ✓ 2 Workshops for Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research on Conflict Resolution
- ✓ Role of Graduate Ombudsperson on Faculty of Medicine Ethics and Scientific Integrity Day
- ✓ Orientation to Postdoctoral Fellows Board on Graduate Ombuds role/OSO services
- ✓ FGSR – GFAC Presentation on the Role of the OSO and Services to Graduate Students
- ✓ Mentor-Up FGSR Panel Discussion

- ✓ Conflict Resolution for MBA program
- ✓ Conflict Resolution for GSA All-Candidates Meeting
- ✓ Marketplace OSO Information Booth for Graduate Students in School of Public Health
- ✓ Mitigating Conflict presentation at Campus St Jean
- ✓ Staff Professional Development Training in QPR Suicide Prevention; Peacemaking Circle; Equity, Diversity, Inclusivity; Supporting Survivors of Sexual Assault, Unitea host to promote student well-being



OSO Ombuds Interns on Fairness Day

What is Fairness Day on Campus? The OSO and the Alberta Ombudsman collaborate to explain the different roles of the provincial ombudsman and the higher education ombuds and their range of services. The OSO handles all internal complaints within the University system, and the Alberta Ombudsman deals with issues outside OSO jurisdiction that may impact a student's academic and personal quality of life - on any government-related area such as provincial student funding, government disability funding, etc. The ombuds also help to explain the various kinds of fairness through an ombuds lens, offering hands-on learning activities such as the fairness wheel and a series of academic-related questions around procedural, administrative, relational and equitable fairness. You can even ask them about a career choice on "a day in the life of an ombuds."



Bianca Gheorghe and Lisa Rimstad, Alberta Ombudsman



Remonia, Undergrad Ombuds

Demographics of OSO Casework 2016 – 2019

Reporting Years Comparison (Apr 1 – Mar 31)	2016 - 2017	2017 – 2018	2018 - 2019
Clients	1149	1108	1192
Undergraduate	882	858	904
Graduate (includes Med Residents and Postdoctoral fellows)	248	239	281
Others (parents, admin, outside inquiry)	19	11	7
International*	429	584	552
Domestic	686	512	616
Residence Status Unknown	34	2	23
Contacts and Visits	2508	2770	2169**
Average Number of Visits per Client	2.5		1.8
Issues***	1418	1261	1516
Academic	689	610	659
Conflict	158	184	240
Academic Offence	432	346	474
Non-Academic Offence	51	24	34
Discrimination/Harassment Allegations	59	31	32
Miscellaneous	138	68	77
Activities			
Investigative Meetings	597	361	342
Committee Meetings	218	243	153
Formal Hearings	26	23	30
Informal Resolution/Appreciative Inquiries	21	25	6

* International students are a smaller portion of the total student population, yet are 2 times more likely to visit the OSO student than a domestic student (domestic includes permanent resident).

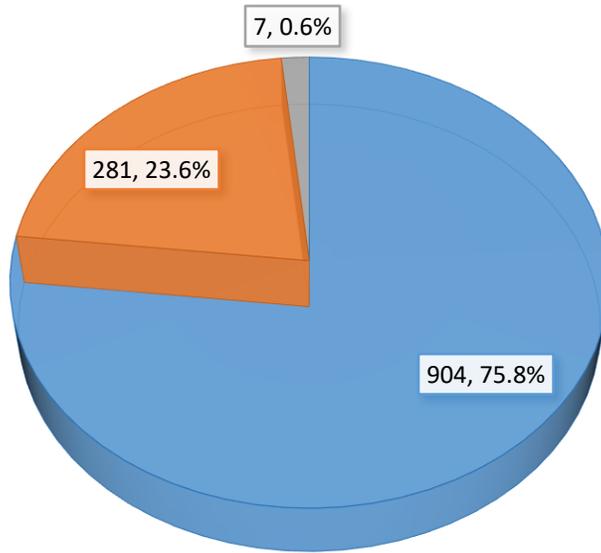
**Our contact numbers do not reflect the amount of time per meeting, which can vary from ½ hour to 2 hours. So a lower number of contacts does not necessarily amount to substantially lower total hours of contact.

***Clients may present with more than one issue.

(**Glossary:** Academic includes required to withdraw (academic standing), grade appeals, exam deferrals and re-examinations. Conflict may involve interpersonal, supervisory, student-professor conflicts. Academic Offence includes plagiarism, cheating, misrepresentation of facts. Non-Academic Offences include disruption, vandalism, and inappropriate behaviour. Discrimination/Harassment allegations related to sex, gender, racial, disability, family status discrimination, duty-to-accommodate violations. Miscellaneous includes fines, housing on campus issues, etc.) Investigative Meetings are tied to instructor, chair, Associate Dean, Discipline Officer, Protective services meetings related to an allegation; Formal Hearings are Formal University Administrative Tribunal Hearings (i.e., the various university appeal boards); Informal Resolutions include (but are not limited to) Coaching, Shuttle Diplomacy, Facilitative Mediation, and Appreciative Inquiries (i.e., for an ombud’s written opinion on a decision when requested).

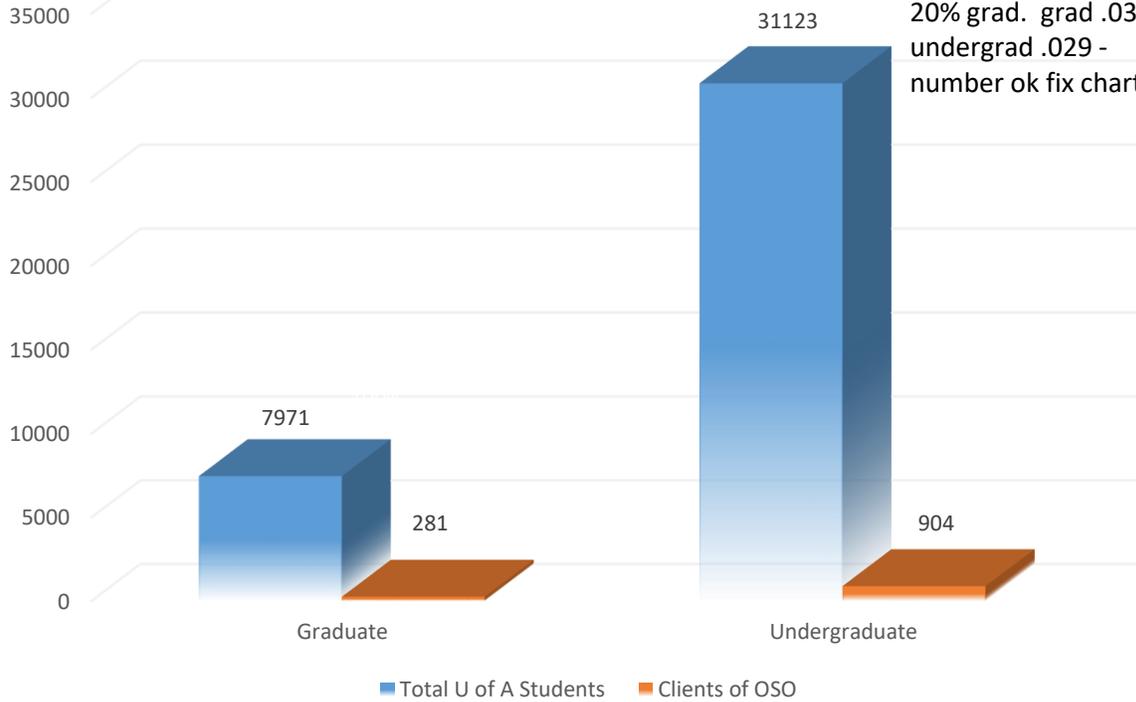
OSO Client Population 2018 - 2019

■ Undergraduate
 ■ Graduate (inc PDF, Med. Res.)
 ■ Other

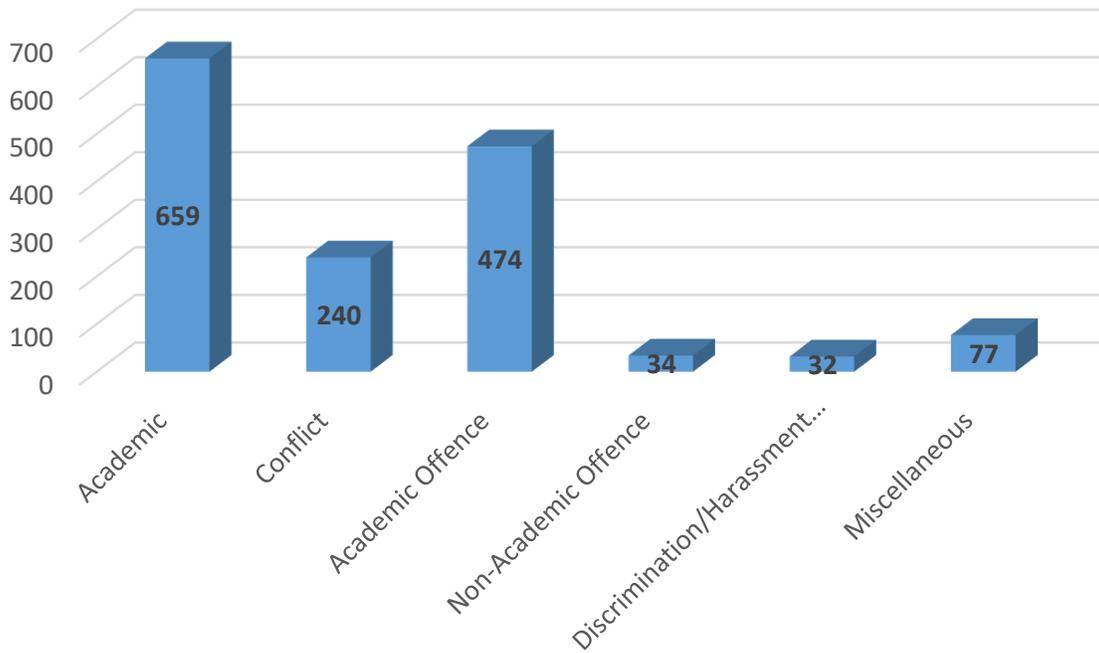


OSO Clients 2018 - 2019

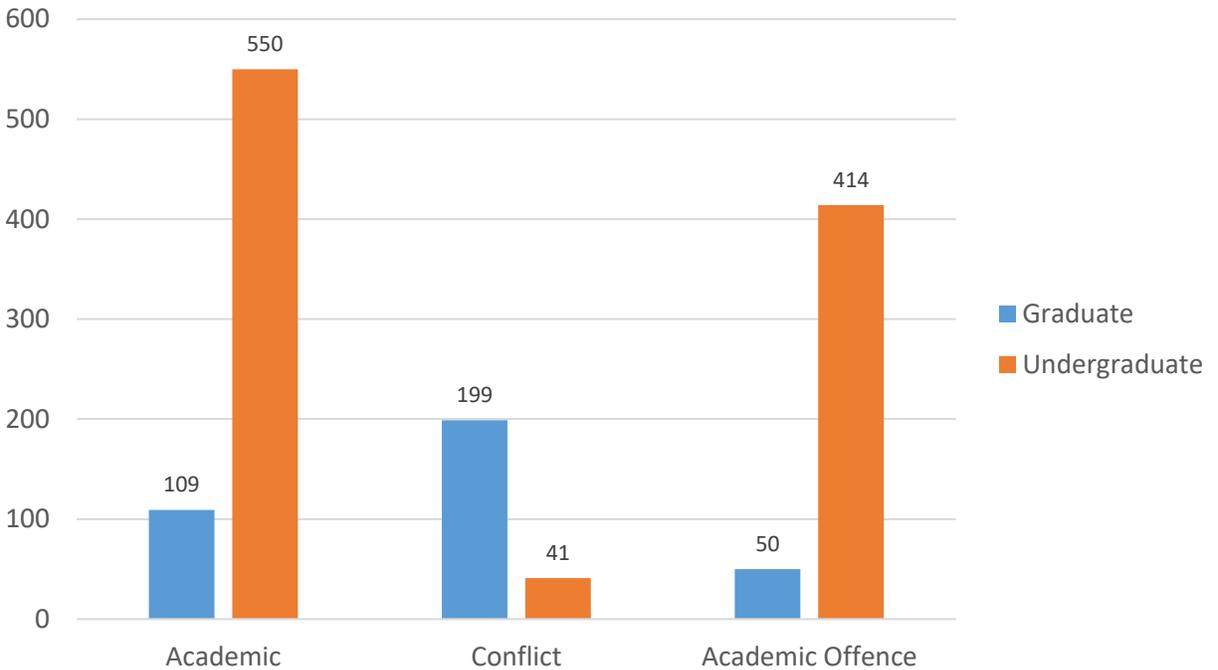
Total: 40061 from 156 countries 80% under; 20% grad. grad .035; undergrad .029 - number ok fix chart



OSO Casework Areas 2018 - 2019



Most Common Cases/Issues 2018 - 2019



Review of Recommendations: 2017 – 2018

RECOMMENDATION ONE - The OSO will undergo strategic planning, including a stakeholder analysis, a new Terms of Reference, Mandate, Mission, and Values Statements, to ensure that its practices are consistent with the Professional Standards of Practice of the Association of Canadian College and University Ombudspersons (ACCUO). This also calls for a review of the OSO current reporting relationship.

Response: The OSO completed a year-long strategic planning process, developing a Mandate, Mission, Vision and Values Statement, and Terms of Reference, and is in the final stage of completing recommended changes to the reporting structure. We have reviewed the current structure with its new internship program to ensure it is capable of adhering to the Professional Standards of Practice of ACCUO. This review of the current reporting relationship compared to other higher education ombuds institutions will help to ensure the service meets professional standards nationally and internationally.

RECOMMENDATION TWO - The OSO will develop a Comprehensive Ombuds Annual Report with a focus on promoting best practices at the Institution, including recommendations and accountability status. This report will also reflect on practices at HE institutions in Canada and elsewhere that may offer or inspire positive changes.

Response: The OSO report this year incorporates the important voice of the student to capture the role that we play in assisting those who marginalized and vulnerable in the University. OSO continues to identify areas where we can engage in proactive collaborative efforts and education sessions as demonstrated in the expansion of talks. We will continue to identify best practices in higher education across Canada through our conversation with ombuds in higher education colleagues, and present a summary of these in the next annual report.

RECOMMENDATION THREE – The OSO supports the exploration of the use of alternative and informal resolution processes through the Restorative Practices Initiative (RPI) work that has been completed to date, with the goal of moving towards a Restorative Campus.

Response: These efforts were, in part, later incorporated into the Restorative Initiatives for Sexual Violence (RISV) Working Group, which has representation from the OSO and Faculty of Graduate Research Council (FGSR). The OSO will continue to support and consult on the efforts of the recommendations from the RISV Working Group. The OSO has also continued efforts on restorative initiatives specific to the graduate student and postdoctoral communities in order to reduce supervisory conflicts. The Graduate Ombudsperson will work collaboratively with FGSR, Graduate Students' Association (GSA), and the Postdoctoral Fellows' Association (PDFA) on restorative practice initiatives specific to those communities. These efforts focus on building an early intervention program as originally envisaged. RPI has proven successful in resolving laboratory group conflicts and social media conflicts, thus there may be potential for broader application in research contexts.

RECOMMENDATION FOUR – The OSO supports all initiatives on campus to build improved communication and supports for international students, in collaboration with the University of Alberta International (UAI) and other support services. Currently the OSO works closely with University of Alberta International (UAI) staff.

Response: The OSO has continued to work collaboratively with the International Student Engagement Programs (ISEP) Coordinator of the International Centre and Office of Safe Disclosure and Human Rights (OSDHR) on common projects to help international students in relation to interpersonal conflicts and academic issues, including academic integrity awareness. A close working relationship has been established with ISEP to ensure international students are given appropriate information and support on academic concerns. Our Graduate Ombuds Intern presented at the Student Advisors' Conference in March 2019, outlining strategies for early intervention with international students who are charged with plagiarism. His work acknowledged the important role of Effective Writing Resources in the Academic Success Centre who reflect on the cultural practices of the students' former institutions when teaching university writing practices.

RECOMMENDATION FIVE – The OSO supports the on-site support of ombuds services offered in the French language at Campus St Jean (CSJ) to ensure access to this important confidential service on all University of Alberta campuses. Currently, we offer services on request, but it would be preferable to have a visible and consistent ombuds face at CSJ, as well as ombuds information in the French language.

Response: Campus Saint-Jean has a unique culture, and the presence of a part-time ombuds on-site linked to the OSO may help to ensure that students on these two campuses are treated equitably in the provision of ombuds services to students. The OSO will continue to work with CSJ and Dean of Student (DOS) initiatives to see if it may be helpful to have a more permanent ombuds presence on CSJ, and will endeavor to ensure services to CSJ students are consistently provided by an ombuds who is fluent in French.

OSO Recommendations for 2018 - 2019

RECOMMENDATION ONE: The OSO completes and submits its strategic analysis, and proposed changes to the DOS/University, explaining how its new mandate, mission, vision and values, Terms of Reference, and recommended reporting relationship reflect the current structure with internship program and meet the professional standards of higher education ombuds offices nationally and internationally. **Rationale:** This will ensure that the ombuds office is better positioned to fulfill its obligations to the university community with the highest level of integrity; it will also add protections to the ombuds office to carry out its important function in promoting individual and systemic fairness and acting as an agent of positive social change.

RECOMMENDATION TWO: The OSO focuses on sharing regional, national, and global perspectives on institutional Best Practices, as it has a unique lens and opportunity through its network of ombuds in higher education to address current universal issues and challenges within higher education. **Rationale:** By sharing institutional best practices, we can focus on these common issues, and promote solutions to improve effective, fair, and timely institutional responses.

RECOMMENDATION THREE: The OSO will continue to work with university partners on Restorative Practices Initiatives. The OSO conducted an information session to GFAC and FGSR Council this year to promote restorative practices in the graduate student community. The OSO supports initiatives that have been completed to date, with the goal of moving towards a restorative campus. OSO efforts in this matter were, in part, incorporated into the Restorative Initiatives for Sexual Violence (RISV) Working Group, which had representation from the OSO and FGSR. The OSO will further continue to support and consult on the efforts of the recommendations from the RISV Working Group. The OSO has also continued efforts on restorative initiatives specific to the graduate student and postdoctoral communities in order to reduce supervisory conflicts. **Rationale:** Restorative practices promote timely resolution, address power imbalances, and promote healthy well-being for the campus community.

RECOMMENDATION FOUR – The OSO recommends reviewing the role of the Augustana ombuds as inspiration to establish an on-site ombuds at Campus St Jean (CSJ) to provide services in French. The OSO will continue to work with Campus St Jean (CSJ) and Dean of Students (DOS) initiatives to study the potential and feasibility of this position. In the interim, we will continue to provide bilingual services for CSJ students from the main campus. **Rationale:** Ombuds services must be accessible to our student populations and campuses, and recognize our diversity as a bilingual university.

RECOMMENDATION FIVE - The OSO recommends that additional support services be made available to postdoctoral fellows (PDFs) as there is an ongoing perception of inadequate support since the recent status changes provincially. The OSO will continue to collaborate with the Post-Doctoral Fellows Association (PDFA) and HR representatives who serve the postdoctoral community to ensure equitable treatment in the area of supervisory/work conflict. **Rationale:** There are perceived gaps with respect to support services in areas such as workplace conflict, mental health, and inadequate staff and faculty knowledge on appropriate

referrals for post-doctoral fellows. As the number of PDFs increases, including many international visitors, it will be necessary to find ways to increase support services to ensure fair and equitable treatment of this important and diverse group.

RECOMMENDATION SIX – The OSO recommends that professional faculties consider requesting a series of workshops through the ombuds and other Dean of Students (DOS) services to address areas such as communication, conflict resolution, effective complaints, maintaining professional relationships, and professional use of social media. The OSO will continue to work closely with faculties that request these important sessions throughout the year, but it would be useful to offer these proactively rather than reactively after incidents.

Rationale: OSO casework has shown that students may need to gain practical skills through workshops and role plays about their communication styles, teamwork interactions, and the importance of confidentiality in professional settings.

Appendix: i) OSO Presentation Titles (Contact ombuds@ualberta.ca for a copy)

Office of the Student Ombuds:
Presentation to Business Law Students,
March 28th, 2019

NATALIE SHARPE, DIRECTOR
OFFICE OF THE STUDENT OMBUDS
UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA
MARCH 2019

(ORIGINAL PRESENTATION OF DR. BRENT EPPERSON 2018; REVISED DATA AND INFORMATION)

IMPARTIAL
ACCESSIBLE
INDEPENDENT
CONFIDENTIAL

Mitigating Conflict and Understanding
Perspectives in Dispute Resolution
Modern Languages and Cultural Studies (MLCS)
September (2019)

Dr. Brent Epperson, Graduate Ombudsman
Bhuva Narayanan, Graduate Ombuds Intern
Office of the Student Ombuds
University of Alberta

UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA Office of the Student Ombuds 2-702 Students' Union Building

"Intersectionality, The Power Flower,
and Intentional Fairness"

—
From Theory to Ombuds Practice

CAL CAUCUS (CCCUO) ASILOMAR, NOV 2018
PRESENTERS: KEVIN WIENS, UNIVERSITY OF CALGARY
LAURA REID, SIMON FRASER UNIVERSITY
CONTENT: NATALIE SHARPE, UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA

AOUCC ASSOCIATION DES OMBUDSMANS
DES UNIVERSITÉS ET
COLLÈGES DU CANADA

ACCUO ASSOCIATION OF CANADIAN
COLLEGE AND UNIVERSITY
OMBUDSPERSONS

A Review of the Higher Education (HE) Ombudsman in Canada:
Why the Ombudsman is Essential in Every HE Community

Natalie Sharpe, Edmonton, Alberta, Canada
President, Association of Canadian College and
University Ombudspersons (ACCUO/AOUC)C
Vienna, Austria June 1, 2018

EXPLOITED BY A GLOBAL NEOLIBERAL HE MARKET?
CASE STUDIES EXPOSE THE PRECARIY OF
INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS' LIVES

ENOHE – ACCUO JOINT CONFERENCE, EDINBURGH JUNE 2018

PRESENTERS: NATALIE SHARPE AND MARC JOHNSON,
UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA, CANADA

Making Higher Education Institutions Accountable
Through Anti-Sexual Violence Policies
A Canadian Perspective

Sexualität(en) und Geschlechtsidentität(en) im österreichischen
Hochschulraum: Zwischen Alltag Und Tabu, June 4, 2018, Vienna, Austria
Speaker: Natalie Sharpe, University of Alberta, Edmonton, Canada

"Intersectionality and Intentional Fairness"

REMONIA STODDART-MORRISON & NATALIE SHARPE,
OFFICE OF THE STUDENT OMBUDS, UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA

STUDENT ADVISORS' CONFERENCE, MARCH 2019

The Role of the Canadian HE Ombuds in the
Wake of a Societal Call-to-Action against
Campus Sexual Violence

ENOHE – ACCUO Edinburg 2018

Natalie Sharpe, University of Alberta, Edmonton, Canada
Carolyn Brendon, McMaster University, Hamilton, Canada

ii) Conference Presentations and Publications

Boncompain, Julie and Brent Epperson. "Addressing Harassment in the Promotion of Equity and Fairness – A Perspective from Canadian University Ombuds." In *El Acoso Escolar: Una Visión Comparada*. Edited by Alfredo Sánchez-Castañeda. Defensoría de los Derechos Univeritarios de la UNAM. México: Presa de la Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México. December 2018.

Sharpe, Natalie "The Fairness Lens: A University Ombudsperson's Perspective on Building a Kinder Online Culture on Campus", Chapter 11 in *Cyberbullying at University in International Contexts*, ed. Wanda Cassidy, Margaret Jackson and Chantal Faucher (Simon Fraser University), Routledge and Kegan Paul 2019

Sharpe, Natalie European Network of Ombudsman in Higher Education Presentation and Recording, University of Austria, Vienna, Austria. May 2018

Sharpe, Natalie "A Canadian Ombud's Perspective on Making Post-Secondary Institutions Accountable through Stand-Alone Sexual Violence Policies". Guest Speaker to Sexualität(en) und Geschlechtsidentität(en) im österreichischen Hochschulraum: Zwischen Alltag und Tabu The University of Music and Performing Arts. Vienna, Austria June 2018

Sharpe, Natalie and Marc Johnson. "Exploited by a Global Neoliberal Education Market? Case Studies on Systemic Inequities for International Students". European Network of Ombudsman in Higher Education and Association of Canadian College and University Ombudspersons joint conference. University of Edinburgh. Edinburgh, Scotland. June 2018

Sharpe, Natalie and Carolyn Brendon. "The University Ombuds in the Wake of a Societal Call-to-Action Against Campus Sexual Violence: A Perspective from Two Canadian Provinces", European Network of Ombudsman in Higher Education and Association of Canadian College and University Ombudspersons joint conference. University of Edinburgh. Edinburgh, Scotland. June 2018

Sharpe, Natalie, Laura Reid and Kevin Wiens "Intersectionality, the Power Flower, and Intentional Fairness – From Theory to Ombuds Practice". California Caucus of College and University Ombuds Conference, Pacific Grove, U.S. November 2018

Sharpe, Natalie and Remonia Stoddart-Morrison. "Intersectionality and Intentional Fairness" Student Advisors' Conference, University of Alberta, Edmonton. March 2019

Professional Ombuds Associations

Association of Canadian College and University Ombudspersons (accuo.ca)

European Network of Ombuds in Higher Education (enohe.net)

California Caucus of College and University Ombuds (calcaucus.com)