



OFFICE OF THE OMBUDSPERSON

# Report to the University Community

April 1, 2011 – March 31, 2012

Submitted by:  
Robert Clegg, Ombudsperson



UNIVERSITY OF  
CALGARY



## MESSAGE FROM THE OMBUDSPERSON

I report the activities of the Office of the Ombudsperson to maintain accountability to the various stakeholders and to provide insight into the various student issues being identified and addressed. Each year the office compiles informative data for reporting to the Advisory Committee composed of the University of Calgary's Deputy Provost, the Students' Union Vice-President (Academic) and the Graduate Students' Association Vice-President (Academic) per the Terms of Reference.

This past year there was a large number of students requesting private, confidential consultations and, in many cases, I offered assistance with issues and conflicts they experienced while attending studies at the university.

Undergraduate students reported a large number of grievances regarding what many students perceived as personal attacks, a lack of respect, and, in many situations, a violation of professional standards required of university instructors and staff. Included further in this annual report is a relevant case study detailing these student grievances and how best to address them.

Graduate students continued to utilize the services of the office regarding conflicts between themselves and their respective graduate supervisors. Graduate students reported conflicts ranging from very minor concerns to full blown cases of alleged deceit, charges of ethical lapses, and charges of academic sabotage. In these cases most, if not all, students requested either information on, or assistance with, changing supervisors or programs.

The Ombudsperson is a member in good standing of the Association of Canadian College and University Ombudspersons and fully participates in both its mid-year and annual member's meetings. This year's annual meeting is scheduled in Edmonton on June 6-9.

Overall, I received positive feedback from many students regarding the degree of professionalism displayed and in assisting them in resolution of their matters. I have immensely enjoyed serving as the University of Calgary's Ombudsperson and look forward to another fruitful year in service to its student body.



I wish to extend my appreciation to the University of Calgary, the Students' Union, and the Graduate Students' Association for their continued trust in me and for their ongoing support of the office.

Robert Clegg, Ombudsperson



## THE OFFICE OF THE UNIVERSITY OF CALGARY OMBUDSPERSON

The Office of the University Ombudsperson was established in 2010. At that time the Students' Union, the Graduate Students' Association and the University of Calgary came together and agreed to jointly fund and oversee the operations of the Office. The office was to provide an independent venue where students could come to discuss their issues and problems with the university assured that their conversations would remain confidential.

The Ombudsperson's Office continues to be a place where all students can come to discuss their issues in a personal and confidential manner. The Office provides student visitors with:

- o Information on the various university rules and regulations;
- o How to appeal an academic or non-academic decision;
- o Make an appropriate referral to another person or office on campus; and
- o Help facilitate dialog between disputing parties.

The University of Calgary's Ombudsperson adheres to the following Code of Professional Conduct pursuant to its existing Terms of Reference:

### Confidentiality

The Ombudsperson holds all communications with students in a confidential manner and does not disclose any information to any other person or organization unless expressly authorized to do so. Further, the Ombudsperson does not engage in any behavior that could be an actual or potential conflict of interest.

### Independence

The Ombudsperson is charged with carrying out his duties and responsibilities independent of all students, staff, faculty, administrative bodies, and all decision-making structures of the university.

### Neutrality

The Ombudsperson remains unaligned and impartial in all matters. The Ombudsperson strives to promote the highest degree of procedural fairness in the administration of the University of Calgary's practices and procedures and policies. The Ombudsperson does not engage in any situation that could result in either a real or potential conflict of interest.



## THE YEAR IN REVIEW

This report covers the period beginning April 1, 2011 and ending March 30, 2012. The period covers the second year of the mandate for Robert Clegg, Ombudsperson for the University of Calgary.

During this, the second year of the Office, the goal remained to serve as a confidential, independent, impartial and secure place for students to convey their grievances, issues or disputes within the University. Although the Ombudsperson does not advocate on behalf of students per se, he does advocate for the overall notions of fairness.

### ***I. Communication and Outreach Activities***

The Office continues to enhance overall campus awareness of the services provided to students by maintaining an up-to-date website including the mission statement, faculty specific appeals procedures, and valuable student informational available on-line and in the office.

This year, the Office updated its website by including on-line and PDF versions of its advising intake form, hyperlinks to all faculty academic appeal committee and the university's non-academic misconduct policy, rules and procedures. Additionally, information pertaining to subsequent appeals to the General Faculties Committee and the Board of Governors, and non-academic misconduct cases is also made more accessible for student reference.

In coordination with the Students' Union Vice President (Academic) Ola Mohadjer and the Graduate Students' Association Vice-President (Academic) Dina Said, Bills of Rights were developed for use as a student aid. Each document provides links to the original university policy on point and is intended as a guide for students' rights and responsibilities.

### ***II. Campus Event Participation and Initiatives***

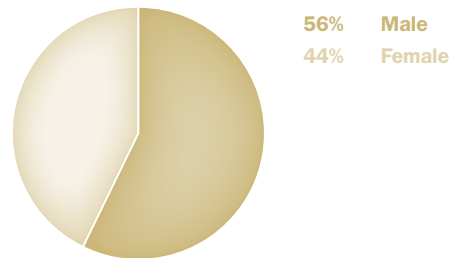
- o Orientation – Graduate Students – Fall 2011
- o Orientation – Undergraduate Students – Fall 2011
- o Orientation – Graduate Students – Fall 2011
- o Orientation – EAP – Fall 2011, Winter 2012
- o Presentation – SU Wellness Center – May 2011
- o UToday interview – Article on the Office – September 2011
- o Develop Undergraduate/Graduate Bill of Rights

### III. Annual Statistics

The following graphics represent the distribution of students requesting service by the Office of the Ombudsperson based on gender, graduate versus undergraduate, international status, type of issue and the faculty in question.

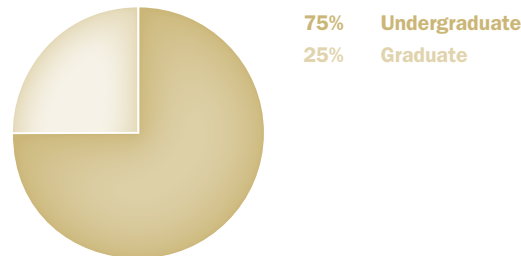
#### Distribution by Gender

Female students represented 191 of the 437 cases at year-end to form 44 per cent of the requests. Male students represented the remaining 240 cases, to form 56 per cent.



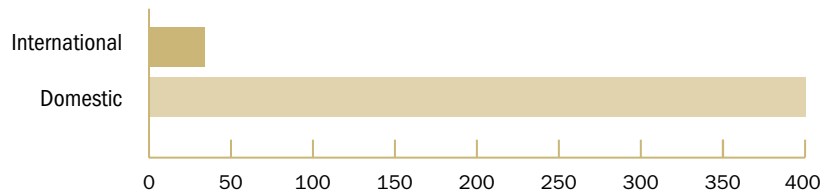
#### Distribution of Undergraduate versus Graduate students

Undergraduate students represented 330 of the 437 cases, to form 76 per cent of the total annual requests for assistance. Graduate students represented 107 cases, or 24 per cent of the total number of annual requests for assistance.



#### Distribution by International Status

Domestic students represented 91.5 per cent of the cases at year end, or 400 of the 437 cases. International students represented the remaining 8.5 per cent, with 37 cases.



## Distribution by Issue Type

Students responded to the increased variety of issue categories available on the student intake form. With 18 distinct categories for issues, 12 per cent of cases are still identified in the eighteenth category, “Other.” Changes made to the variety of categories are expressed in the newest on-line student intake form found on the Office’s website. Consistent in previous years, many students resolve their issues simply by discussing the challenges faced, without identifying a category that defines their issue.

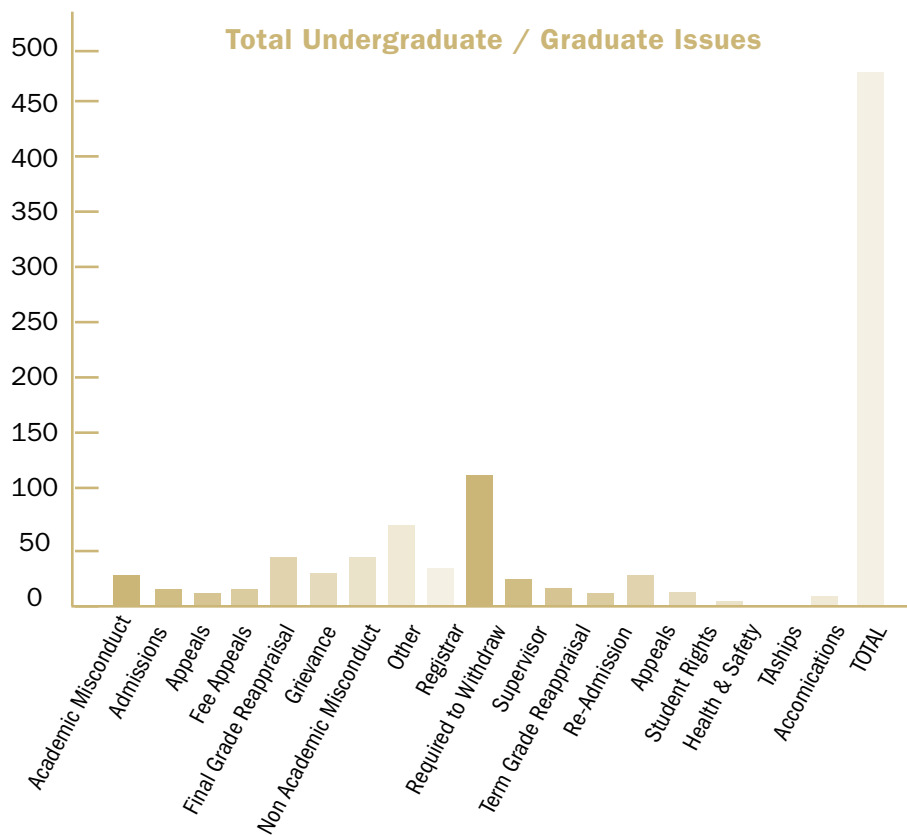
## Other Cases

For the period ending March 30, 2012 “Other” cases totaled 52 cases or approximately 12 per cent of the total annual caseload. Other cases pertain to students with issues involving:

- Disability Accommodation;
- Graduate Student Leave of Absence;
- Credit Transfers;
- Privacy Issues;
- Student Housing – Eviction;
- Student Loans/Hardship;
- Student Delinquent Account Collections;
- Safety Issues;
- Notary Inquiries;
- Code of Conduct Issues.









## Annual Webpage Viewings

An effort was made to track the effectiveness of the Office's website as a platform to further enhance the awareness and for a portal of student information. The website has been a great success and continues to attract users. For the year ending March 31, 2012 a total of 3,179 viewings were made from among the general public. This represents a significant number of viewings from the student and general population at large. The largest number of web page viewings occurred between the first week of August 2011 and the second week of September 2011. The average time spent on the website was approximately 2 minutes.

## Case Study: Grievances

Student grievances represent approximately 7.4 per cent of the total number of cases handled annually, but are certainly emotionally charged. A vast majority of grievances center on the student instructor interactions and the perception, whether real or imagined, of a lack of respect, rudeness or unprofessional behavior on the part of the instructor.

Typically, during an interview with the student, specific questions are asked and answers are provided. Namely, what the nature of the grievance is and whom, if anyone, has the student contacted regarding the issue. Often, students come to the office stressed out and fully prepared to describe, in detail, the facts of their grievance. A majority of grievances involve how students are treated by instructors and always involved a perceived lack of respect and professionalism.

Currently at the University of Calgary there is no formal grievance policy in place. Students with grievances will, often times with my assistance, draft a letter detailing their specific grievance and what, if anything, they want to have happen. Many times students simply want to vent at the office. Other times, students want to complain by filing a formal grievance but are concerned that this may somehow impact their future academics at the university. Yet, others choose to wait to make any moves until after their graduation.

Most grievances are settled at this level, but some require the assistance of the Associate Dean of the respective faculty. Once elevated to the Associate Dean the issue is dealt with and resolved at this level.

## Graduate Student Issues

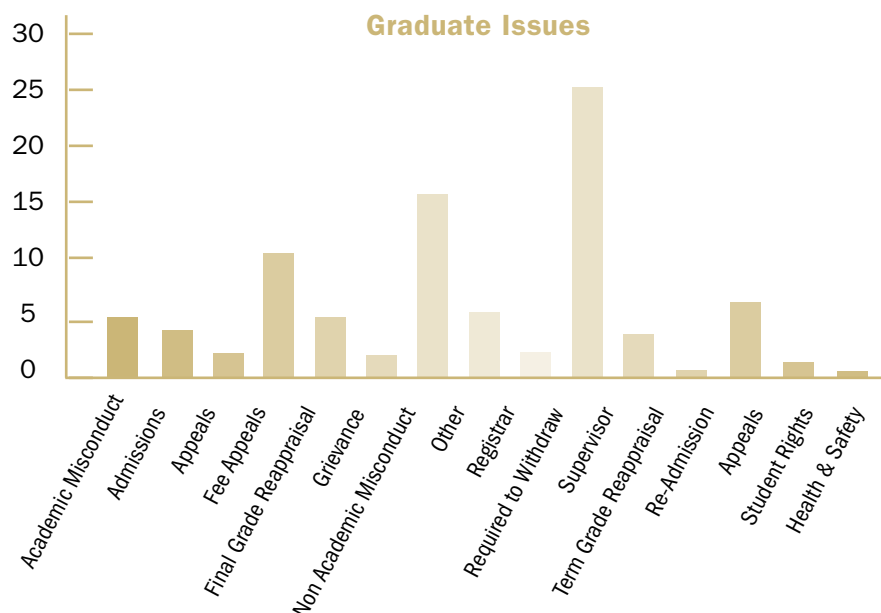
Graduate students' concerns remain predominantly problems between themselves and their respective supervisors. Chief among the complaints is the breakdown of the relationship and how best to mitigate the potential or real impacts of such breakdowns or breakups.

The Office of the Ombudsperson counsels graduate students with respect to best techniques to open channels of communication where channels may not be present. Often times, communication between supervisor and student is non-existent or is sub standard and all that is required to rehabilitate the relationship is simply to open up the lines of communications.

Many cases however, involved relationships that are beyond repair and require a change of supervision. In cases such as these it is recommended that the student either change his/her supervisor, appoint a co-supervisor or make alternative arrangements for the continuation of supervision by the existing supervisor. These cases tend to be emotionally charged and require multiple consultations and in some cases mediation with the Office.

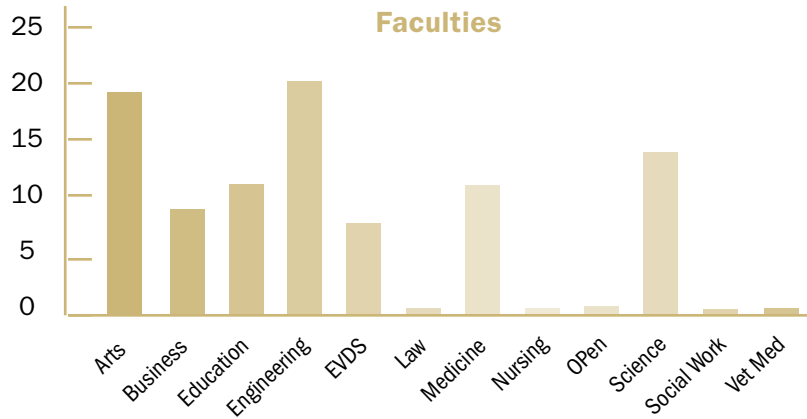
The average time spent on graduate student cases remains greater than the average undergraduate case due mostly to the sensitive and complex nature of issues involved. Moreover, the average graduate student requires on average three consultations during the life of their respective issues with many cases requiring direct intervention.

Not all students require multiple consultations however as a large number of students consult only once. However, students that face either withdrawal or face conflicts with their supervisors require multiple consultations. In an effort better track repeat multiple consultations, beginning 2012-2013 the office will begin tracking the number of times graduate students visit the office, including the cumulative amount of time incurred.



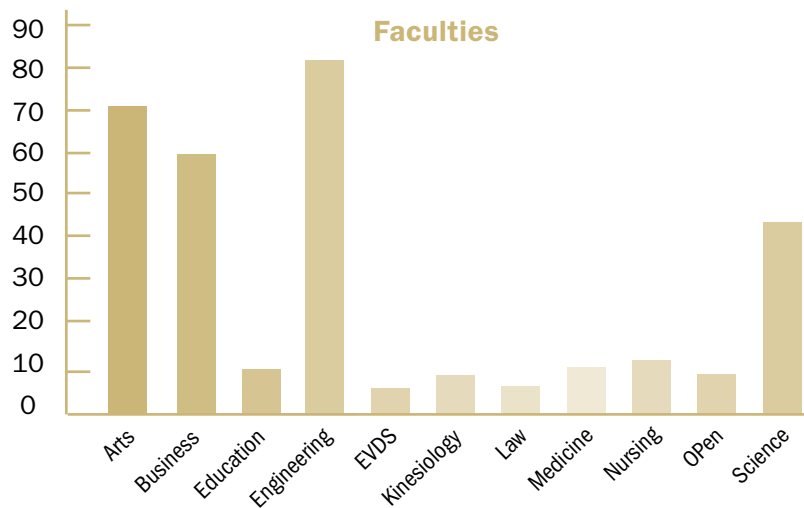
## Graduate Student Cases by Faculty

At year end, student requests have represented every faculty at least once. The faculties of Arts, Engineering Medicine and Science combine to represent nearly 62 per cent of all graduate student requests.



## Undergraduate Student Cases by Faculty

At year end, student requests have represented every faculty at least once. The faculties of Arts, Business, Engineering and Science combine to represent nearly 80 per cent of all undergraduate student requests.



## LOOKING FORWARD TO THE NEXT YEAR

The Office is confident it will continue to maintain and further develop positive relationships with students and faculties by holding to its mandates of confidentiality and impartiality. The Office is encouraged that outreach and event activities are increasing student awareness of the resources available to them through the Ombuds services. The Office anticipates that student requests for the period beginning April 1, 2012 and ending March 30, 2013 will reflect a trend similar to the previous year and result in a year-end total of over 450 student requests.

In addition, the Office is proud to introduce exciting new services by organizing graduate services from the undergraduate services. This will provide students quicker access to the information needed to make well informed decisions. Moreover, the website will include online student feedback forms, informative video links, and additional resources for all students.

## 2012 STUDENT INTERN

A special thanks to Andrew Lunse who served as this year's student intern. Andrew provided much needed assistance with the organization of the Office's statistics, student consultations and with the production of student information brochures and website content. Andrew did a wonderful job and he will be surely missed.



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