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Queen's UNIVERSITY



Annual Report 2020-21

OFFICE of the UNIVERSITY

Ombudsperson

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Introduction



I am pleased to present the 2020-21 Annual Report for the Office of the University Ombudsperson ("Office"), which covers the period from August 1, 2020 through July 31, 2021.

The 2020-21 Annual Report provides a summary of the work of the Office during this timeframe. The Report contains statistics about users of the Office and matters that we responded to, and a review of some of the important work that we did in the past year, including the training we provided, our relationship building initiatives with stakeholders across campus, and our continued commitment to equity, diversity, inclusion and indigeneity.

The 2020-21 year picked up right where the last one ended – with everyone still grappling with the ongoing global pandemic. This was a challenging year in which students, faculty and staff were forced to learn and work remotely for the entire academic year. Although in-person contact was completely replaced by virtual meetings online, the Office of the University Ombudsperson adapted our services and continued to be a valuable resource for community members. This included creating asynchronous training modules and providing more dedicated support for BIPOC members of the Queen's community.

As the Ombudsperson, I am proud of what we accomplished during our second year of operation. I am also honoured to have been a support and voice for BIPOC Queen's students, faculty and staff who may have felt like they were alone or did not belong. I remain grateful and committed to serve all members of the Queen's community as we all adjust to a "new normal."

Respectfully submitted,

Lavonne Hood
University Ombudsperson

Who We Are

In 2019, following an external review and revised Terms of Reference, the Office of the University Ombudsperson was re-launched as an important resource to the Queen's community in helping students, staff, faculty, parents, and alumni understand policies and procedures within the university and identifying opportunities for improvement.

The staff in the Ombuds Office:

- help ensure procedural fairness in decision-making
- provide general advice to Queen's community members about their rights and responsibilities
- provide guidance on procedures to follow
- refer enquirers to relevant university offices or publications
- recommend changes to university policies and procedures
- provide training and educational tools
- identify systemic issues

Lavonne Hood, *University Ombudsperson*
Kathryn Morrissey, *Intake Coordinator*
Aimee Burtch, *Communications & Outreach Manager*

For more information, go to
www.queensu.ca/ombuds

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Ombudsperson

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What We Do

Your Impartial Resource Promoting Fairness at Queen's

The key principles guiding the role of the Office of the Ombudsperson are independence, confidentiality, and impartiality.

The central role of our office is to help ensure procedural fairness in university decision making.

The Ombudsperson and all staff working within the office are precluded from acting as advocates as we have no case management role. Rather, we facilitate fair processes within the university. The Office provides general advice to community members about their rights and responsibilities and provides guidance on the procedures to follow. We also proactively review policies, procedures and decision-making frameworks of the university and identify opportunities for systemic improvement.



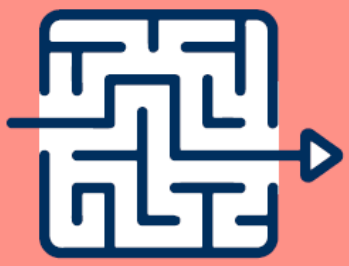
LISTEN

with **confidentiality**, and **impartiality** to concerns about **fair processes** at the university



GUIDE

with advice and **resources** to help understand **policies** and **procedures**



EMPOWER

students, staff, and faculty to **navigate** through university decision-making

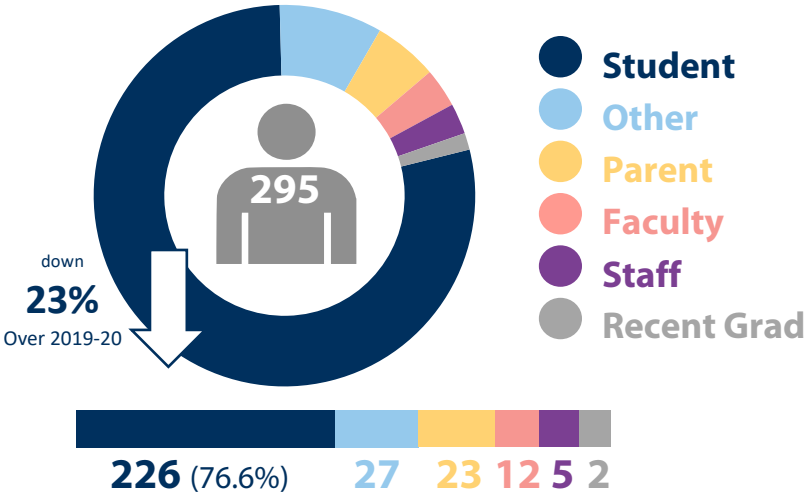
STATISTICS

AUGUST 1, 2020 THROUGH JULY 31, 2021

Over the course of the year, we had 295 individuals connect with the Office for direct advice and support. While this is a 23% decrease over last year, it was not unexpected due to not only the virtual/zoom fatigue people felt from the COVID-19 pandemic but also through the development of self-serve resources found on the website. The website data shows substantial increases in all metrics suggesting stakeholders directly accessed the website for information, as opposed to contacting us directly. The Office uses this data to inform our immediate priorities in terms of creating additional content or resources for our website, and to work with stakeholders to ensure that policies and procedures are clear for students.

The following charts show the breakdown of our Office users, the nature of their inquiries, and the support provided to them:

Type of User



Students, and more specifically undergraduates, continue to be the primary users of the Office. It is worth noting that the 'Other' user is external to the Queen's community, ie. lawyers inquiring on behalf of students, prospective students who are seeking admissions information or individuals who are looking to raise concerns about something Queen's related.

Most Queen's users were working and studying remotely so it's not surprising that our primary method of contact was all via e-mail.

Though the Office did see users who connected with us previously, we continued to see a high number of first-time users.

84% of students were undergraduate students

100% used e-mail as primary contact method

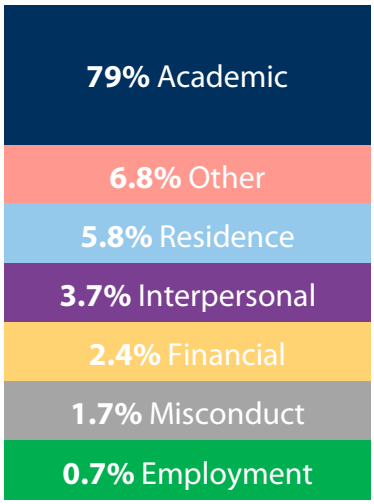
89% of users were new to the office

Users are classified depending on the nature of the inquiry for which they contacted the Office and were each assigned a broad category to give a more general overview of the nature of the concern. In some categories, a more specific nature of concern was assigned by using sub-categories.

Academic inquiries continued to be the most frequent topic. Within the academic inquiries received, questions around academic integrity were the primary topic; these included questions around what to do upon receiving a Notice of Investigation and associated next steps such as meeting with the instructor or appealing the finding and/or sanction given.

The second most common academic topic was appeals, which included any non-academic integrity appeal inquiry. These inquiries included seeking guidance on the appropriate appeal process or the appeal letter itself, or seeking clarification on a particular policy that applied to the situation.

Nature of Inquiry

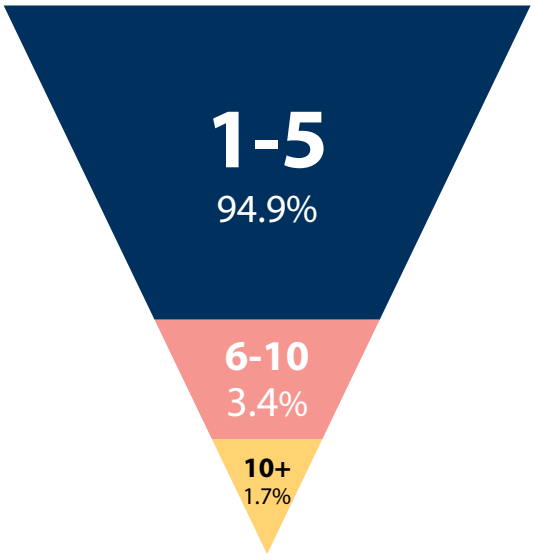


Academic: Specific Nature of Concern

51.5%	Academic Integrity
19.7%	Appeals
15%	Course or Program
9%	Admissions
3.9%	Accommodations
0.4%	Academic Standing
0.4%	Other Academic Concerns

While it is sometimes difficult to quantify the points of contact for each user, users were categorized by considering the number of e-mails exchanged as well as the amount of time spent exploring the matter further. This may include virtual meetings with the user, connecting with external stakeholders or researching the applicable policy or procedure.

Average Points of Contact per User

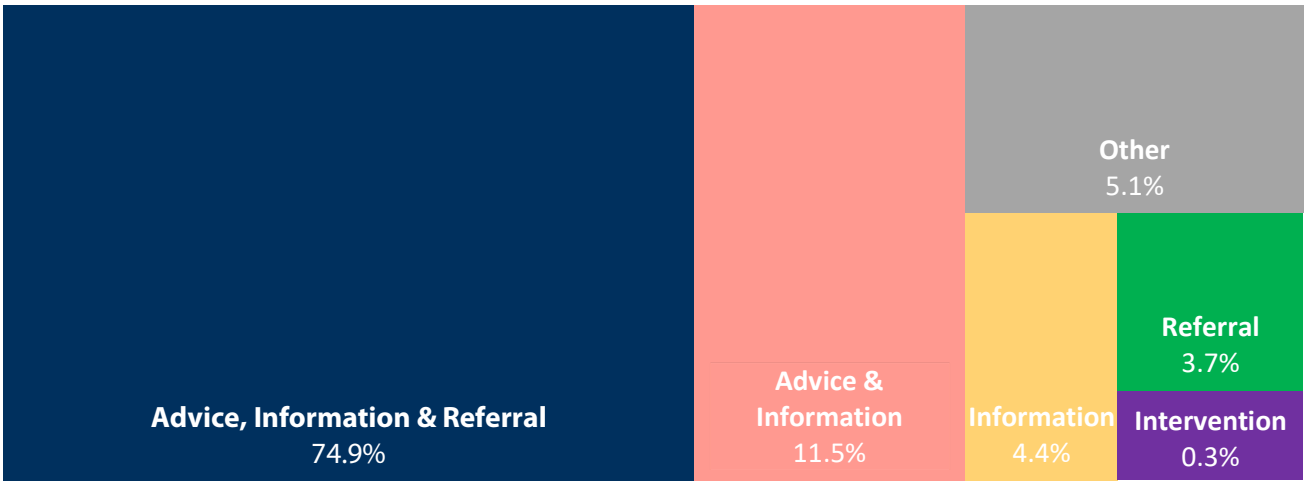


Student Users by Faculty

Faculty	Office User %	Enrolment %
Arts & Science	39.8%	49.98%
Smith School of Business	17.7%	7.67%
Health Sciences	17.3%	1.92%
Unknown	10.6%	N/A
Graduate Studies	7.5%	12.89%
Engineering & Applied Science	4%	12.62%
Law	1.8%	2.33%
Education	1.3%	1.46%

When breaking usage down by Faculty and comparing these percentages with the Fall 2020 enrolment numbers at the University, a few Faculties and Schools were over-represented in terms of those who connected with the Office. Work is on-going to ensure policies and procedures are clear to students. Accurate language helps to ensure that students are receiving appropriate information about the Office and being directed to specific pages on the website.

Actions Taken by Office



Website Quick Facts

9,704
Unique Pageviews
9.1%
Over 2019-20

3,540
New Website Users
28.1%
Over 2019-20

527
Resources Downloaded
60.3%
Over 2019-20

Year In Review

This was the second full year of operation for the Office of the University Ombudsperson following the external review in 2019. The Ombuds staff worked remotely for the entirety of the year due to the COVID-19 pandemic which presented its own unique challenges and opportunities.

From transitioning training materials to be delivered online to countless virtual meetings with stakeholders across campus, the 2020-21 academic year was like no other. The Office participated in a major policy review, contributed material for an undergraduate foundational course, developed and launched the new Advisor program, engaged in a range of EDII opportunities, and developed and built relationships with a variety of on-campus stakeholders and the broader Queen's community.

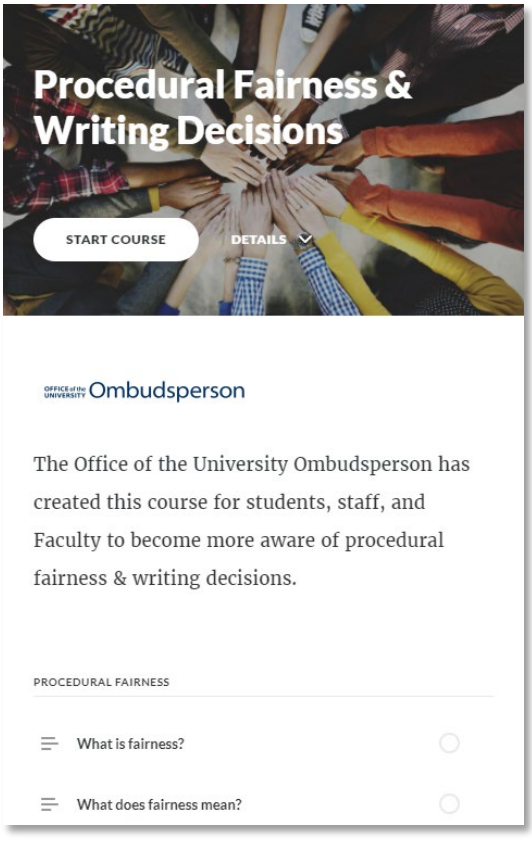
The following describes some of the above in more detail:

Training

Providing training opportunities to promote fairness across campus continues to be an annual priority. The goal of this training is to support consistency in decision-making in all Faculties and Schools, and to encourage fairness throughout each stage in the decision-making process.

The COVID-19 pandemic disrupted the traditional in-person format, which resulted in shifting the training for our stakeholders to an asynchronous delivery format using Rise360. Three modules were developed, including an introduction to the Office, procedural fairness, and writing good decisions, which upon completion, were typically followed by a virtual meeting with the Office.

This asynchronous format and virtual meeting style allowed the Office to discuss Faculty or School specific questions and deliver separate modules, as required by stakeholders, thus offering a more tailored experience.



Asynchronous Rise360 Training

Ombuds Academic Appeals Advisors

To further align the Advisor role to the updated Terms of Reference for the Office along with consultation from the Ombudsperson Advisory Committee, the name and description of the former 'Dispute Resolution Advisor' role has been finalized. The Faculty Advisors are now referred to as 'Ombuds Academic Appeals Advisors'.

The role of Ombuds Academic Appeals Advisors reflects that of the Office of the Ombudsperson - to assist students with understanding policies and procedures of the university. They are not advocates but rather, advisors who help students navigate academic systems. As faculty members, they play an important supportive role to students as they offer unique expertise and insight into academic structures that students may not possess.

The Office will make every effort to have Faculty representation from a variety of Faculties and Schools and strive to ensure that an Advisor will never work with a student from their home Faculty or School. Appointments to the role of Advisor are two-year renewable terms.

In appropriate circumstances and subject to availability, the Office will use their discretion to assign an Ombuds Academic Appeals Advisor to assist a student who is facing serious adverse academic consequences. The assignment of an Ombuds Academic Appeals Advisor is generally reserved for situations such as those in which a student:

- could be required to withdraw for academic reasons
- has received a decision requiring them to withdraw for academic reasons
- is facing an allegation(s) about a departure from academic integrity
- is seeking to appeal a decision that the student engaged in a departure from academic integrity.

Ombuds Academic Appeal Advisors will not be assigned to cases of grade appeals, unless the grade will result in the application of an academic regulation requiring the student to withdraw for academic reasons.

Training for Ombuds Academic Appeals Advisors

Support structures and training materials were developed and implemented to on-board new Advisors. The training included four separate components combining both asynchronous training modules through Rise360, as well as live virtual sessions, coupled with tip sheets and a comprehensive guide. The main training module took Advisors through the role in more detail including: the Advisor responsibilities, the process for assigning Advisors, as well as working through some of the key University policies they are most likely to use. The Office will continue to look for ways to provide continuous education and increased knowledge of the role and responsibilities for Advisors.

Building Relationships

The building of strong relationships and ensuring open communication with members of the Queen's community is key in allowing the Office to be able to function efficiently and is even more important while we continue to navigate working remotely. We'd like to thank the Faculties and all our campus partners for their ongoing dialogue and support, with special mention to the partners listed below.

Partners that directly support the mandate of the Office:

- Lon Knox, University Secretary and Corporate Counsel
- Audit & Risk Committee of the Board of Trustees
- Ombuds Academic Appeal Advisors
    - Alan Abelson
    - Michael Blennerhassett
    - Kate Rowbotham
    - Donald Sackey

In 2020-21, new and continuing initiatives and committee work included:

- Advisory Committee on Academic Accommodations
- Academic Integrity Regulations, Roundtable and Sub-Group
- Bias Hate Ad Hoc Response Group
- Commission on Black Medical Students
- Discrimination and Harassment Policy Working Group
- Commission on Black Medical Students
- Human Rights Legislative Group
- Non-Academic Misconduct Roundtable
- Non-Academic Misconduct Subcommittee
- Ombudsperson Advisory Committee
- Policy Advisory Subcommittee
- SARD Working Group and Sub-Group
- Sexual Violence Prevention and Response Task Force
- Student Services and Operations Sub-Group
- Truth and Reconciliation Roundtable
- University Council on Anti-Racism and Equity (UCARE)
- Inclusive Community - UCARE Sub-Council

Our student partnerships across campus included:

- Alma Mater Society (AMS)
- Society of Graduate & Professional Students (SGPS)
- Arts & Science Undergraduate Society (ASUS)

Our campus partnerships across campus included:

- Human Rights & Equity Office
- Four Directions Indigenous Student Centre
- Office of Indigenous Initiatives
- University Relations
- University Counsel
- University Rector
- Student Affairs & Student Conduct Office

Professional associations:

- Association of Canadian College & University Ombudspersons (ACCUO)
- ACCUO Equity, Diversity & Inclusion Committee

Our gratitude to the 2020--21 Ombuds Advisory Committee:

- Lon Knox (Chair)
- Jeremy Ambraska
- Michael Blennerhassett
- Lucas Borchenko
- Alexandra da Silva
- Janice Hill
- Lisa Newton
- Melissa Seal
- Stephanie Simpson
- Trina Zeimbekis

During the 2020-21 academic year, we worked with campus partners on a variety of presentations, training sessions, and events. The following highlights a few select projects.

The 17 Rooms Event

This event at Queen's was a fast-paced, brainstorming approach to generating awareness of and action on the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The exercise brought together people interested in making a difference into 17 small groups, each tasked with generating ideas and knowledge to make progress towards a particular SDG. The Ombudsperson participated in the SDG Room 16: Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions, which was meant to "promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels." Participation in this activity allowed the Ombudsperson to meet a new and diverse group of university members, and speak a bit about what the Office does.

Arts & Science Undergraduate Society (ASUS) Appeal Volunteers

The Office provided guidance to the Arts & Science Undergraduate Society (ASUS) on how they may fill an identified gap in resources that students find when completing low-level appeals within the Faculty of Arts and Science. ASUS is launching their volunteer-based peer program that will assist students with writing appeal letters for first and second level appeals within the Faculty. The Office will be providing our Procedural Fairness and Writing Good Decisions asynchronous training modules to those that are hired in Fall 2021, along with having a virtual Q&A session following module completion.

ASCX 101 Course – Learning & Working in a Digital World

The Office collaborated on the development of an academic integrity module within a new Fall 2020 Faculty of Arts and Science online course. The Office provided input on a variety of components within the module by providing resources and examples, and an introduction to the Office was also included within the course. One of the priorities for the course was to showcase voices from around Queen's. A video of the Ombudsperson - which addressed academic integrity and introduced the Office - was created and included within the module. This course is an effective way for the Office to indirectly reach members of the first-year class in the Faculty of Arts and Science and to build awareness of the Office and its role as an important resource. In the Fall 2020 term, approximately 100 students enrolled in the course.

Equity, Diversity, Inclusion, and Indigeneity (EDII)

Queen's University has a stated commitment to equity, diversity, inclusion, and indigeneity (EDII). In line with this goal, and in support of the Office's own dedication to promoting EDII, the Office has been very involved in EDII initiatives throughout 2020-21.

Racism that BIPOC students, faculty and staff face daily at Queen's continued to be an ongoing concern. The Ombudsperson met with individuals to listen to their stories about the pain and isolation of racism, and to provide support and advice to these individuals. In some instances, the Ombudsperson connected with an Advisor from the Human Rights and Equity Office to hold joint meetings with individuals. The confidential nature of both offices and the expertise that each provides were of great comfort to these community members during difficult times.

The Ombudsperson also engaged in activities to advance EDII objectives across campus, including:

- *Lived Experiences of Black Faculty, Staff and Students at Queen's:* At the first Board meeting in September, the Ombudsperson organized and moderated a panel discussion about the experiences of Black faculty, staff and students, and the changes that they would like to see from the Board and senior leadership at Queen's.

- *Anti-Black Racism Training:* The Ombudsperson met with Black faculty and staff from the Human Rights and Equity Office, the Faculty of Education and Smith School to collaborate on the development of anti-Black racism training.

- *Together We Are Blog:* The Human Rights and Equity Office (HREO) invited the Ombudsperson to be a contributor to their Together We Are blog, which provides a safe space for conversations about equity, diversity, and inclusion at Queen's. The piece, entitled "Hope for the New Year", was posted online in January 2020.

- *Employment Equity Forum: Redefining Leadership Through the Power of Inclusion:* The Ombudsperson attended this forum hosted by the Human Rights and Equity Office. The goal of the day was to help shape the strategic direction in each of those areas when looking at employment equity along with providing feedback on the draft plan to further define employment equity priorities in the coming year.

- *ACCUO Ad Hoc EDI Committee:* The Ombudsperson is the Co-Chair of the Association of Canadian University and College Ombuds' (ACCUO) Ad Hoc EDI Committee, which has a purpose of working to develop ways for college and university ombudspersons to collectively take action to address racism and anti-Black racism. The Ombudsperson made a statement at the Annual General Meeting on behalf of the EDI Committee paying respects to the Indigenous children who had recently been discovered in unmarked mass graves at former residential schools.

Looking Ahead

As the COVID-19 pandemic continues to evolve to a potential endemic state, the Office continues to work remotely moving into the 2021-22 academic year. The Ombuds Office will look to transition to a hybrid delivery model as the academic year progresses, similar to other units across campus, although many students have already returned to in-person activities. Members of the Queen's community will continue to face unique challenges that come along with navigating the dynamics of learning and working through hybrid models.



Promotional Postcard

Continuing to foster relations with all stakeholders will be on-going. Other goals that align with the work that we are doing are:

- growing the revised Ombuds Academic Appeals Advisor Program
- developing an e-mail campaign showing the benefits of the asynchronous modules in Procedural Fairness and Writing Good Decisions to Faculties and Schools and promoting the training to those who have not yet completed them
- collaborating with stakeholders across campus to ensure key policy updates (Student Academic Appeals Policy) are in alignment with respective policies & procedures within the Faculties and Schools
- cultivating relationships with student groups to better understand gaps or perceived gaps of support from the Office

We will also continue to provide support to BIPOC members of the Queen's community and work on promoting anti-racism training and initiatives at Queen's.

The beginning of the pandemic taught us that we can be flexible and adjust to any challenges that may come our way, and this is still true as we continue to navigate this new normal. It's clear that the Office of the University Ombudsperson continues to be an important resource for the Queen's community and as we look ahead to 2021-22, we will continue to build on our first two years to provide invaluable support and resources to our students, staff and faculty.

OFFICE of the UNIVERSITY

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