

OFFICE of the UNIVERSITY

Ombudsperson

Annual Report 2019-20

http://queensu.ca/ombuds

Queen's UNIVERSITY

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Introduction

I am pleased to present the 2019-20 Annual Report for the Office of the University Ombudsperson ("Office"), which covers the period from August 1, 2019 through July 31, 2020.

The 2019-20 Annual Report provides a summary of, and highlights from the work of the Office during this timeframe, including assessing who the users of the Office are, identifying noteworthy trends that we saw over the past year, and describing some of the initiatives that we undertook.

This was the first full year of operation of the Office following an external review in the fall of 2018. Beginning in my role as University Ombudsperson on August 1, 2019 with new Terms of Reference, the year started off as expected, as we worked towards accomplishing many of the objectives that we had set out for the Office, including launching a revamped website, development of online resources and training modules, and relationship building initiatives with stakeholders across campus. But as 2020 began, it brought a year that no one could have anticipated. COVID-19 caused us to begin working remotely in mid-March, and then racial tensions in North America and on campus resulted in an increase in engagements with BIPOC members of the Queen's community, and in various faculties and schools who were all seeking out the services of the Office during a very difficult time. I met with many of these individuals to provide support by listening to their stories of pain, and by connecting them to the appropriate resources on campus.



As the Ombudsperson, it has been my immense honour and privilege to serve members of the Queen's community during the past year, and I will continue to be of service as we move forward to bring about positive change at Queen's.

Respectfully submitted,

Lavonne Hood
University Ombudsperson

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**. We are 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 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**.



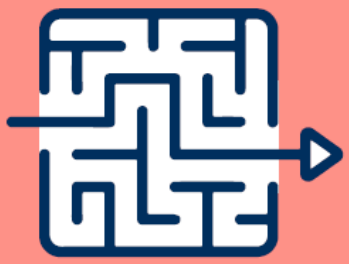
LISTEN

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

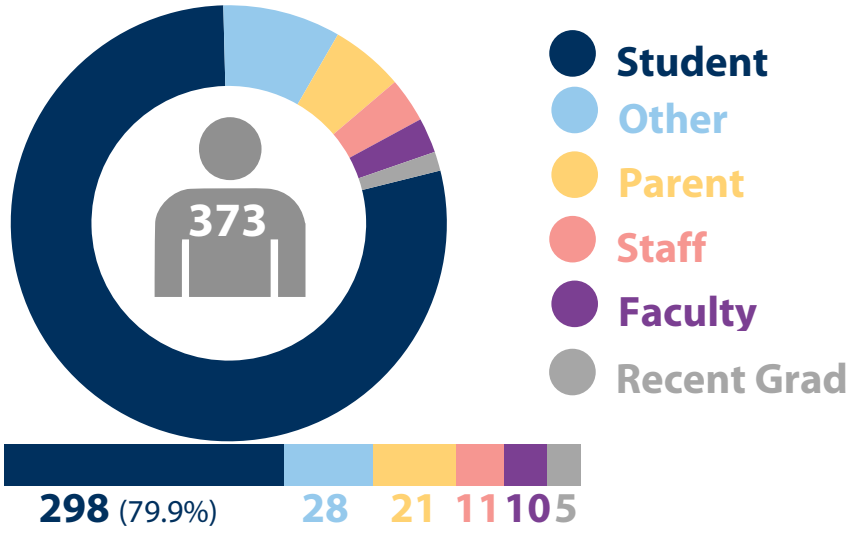
Statistics

August 1, 2019 through July 31, 2020

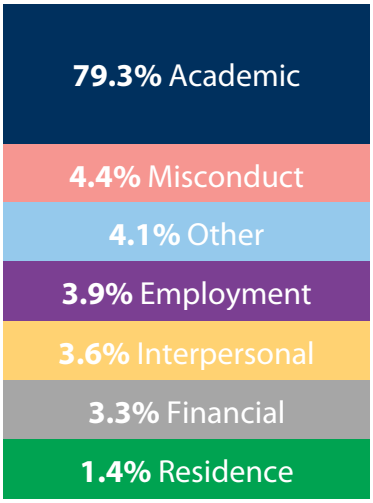
Over the course of the year we had 373 individuals connect with the Office for direct advice and support. Students continue to be the primary users of the Office, and academic integrity and appeal inquiries are the most frequent topics. The Office uses this data to inform our immediate priorities in 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.

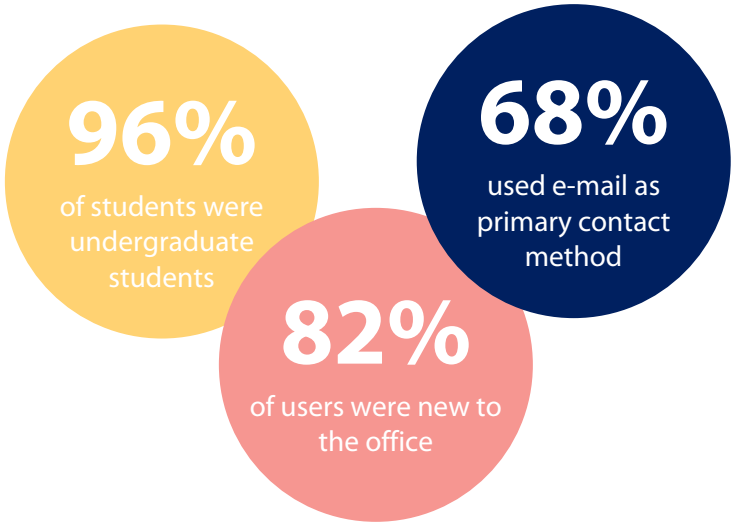
The following charts show the breakdown of our Office users, the nature of their inquiries, and the support provided to them:

Type of User[1]



Nature of Inquiry





Academic: Specific Nature of Concern

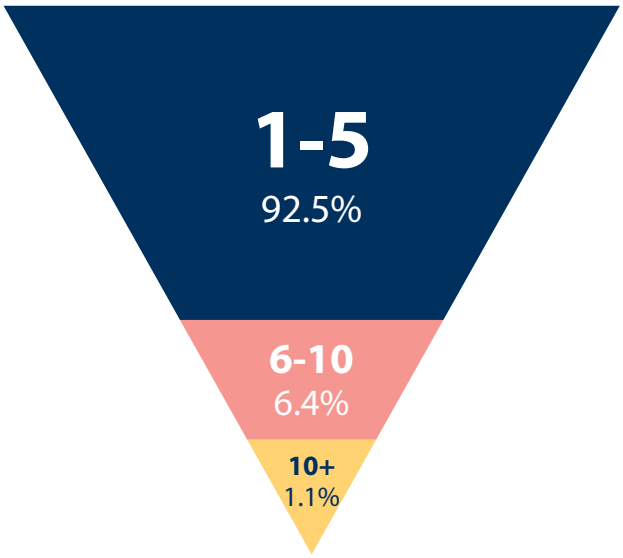
55.6%	Academic Integrity
19.4%	Appeals
7.3%	Course or Program
6.9%	Other Academic Concerns
3.8%	Admissions
3.8%	Accommodations
3.2%	Academic Standing

[1] Other Type of User: This user is external to the Queen's community such as 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.

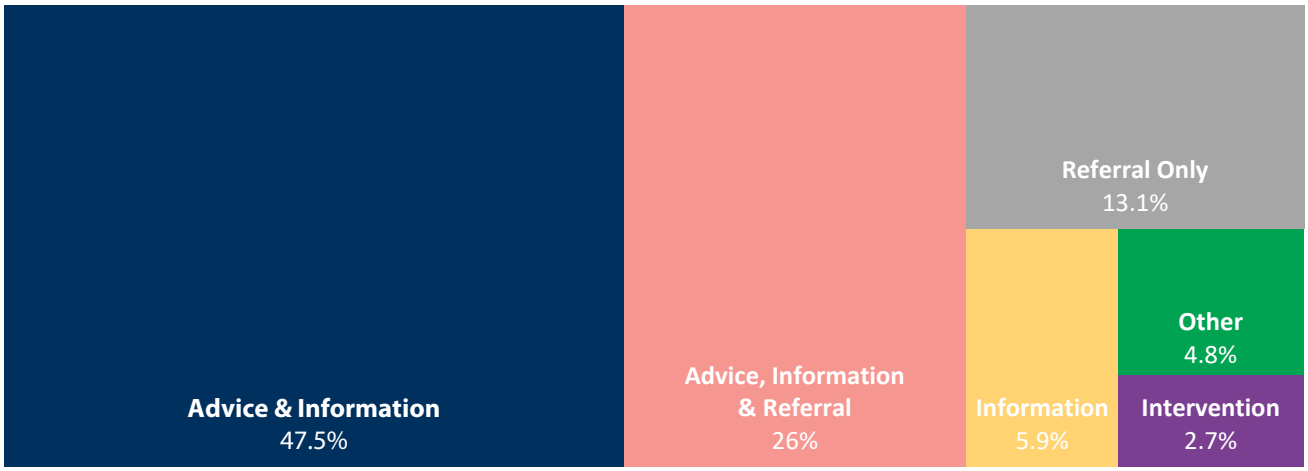
Student Visitors by Faculty

Arts & Science	47%
Engineering & Applied Science	22.5%
Unknown	10.1%
Smith School of Business	8.1%
Health Science	6.4%
Graduate Studies	4%
Education	1.7%
Other	.2%

Average Points of Contact per User



Actions Taken by Office*



*For the 2020-21 academic year we will be utilizing a survey to gauge efficacy.

Website Quick Facts

8,912 Unique Pageviews

3,540 New Website Users

527 Resources Downloaded

Year In Review

As mentioned earlier, this was the first full year of operation the Office of the University Ombudsperson following an external review. This presented unique challenges and opportunities resulting from the reorientation of the Office and the recruitment and onboarding of new staff. Communications and outreach were key to increasing awareness of our Office and developing an understanding of its new mandate.

Relationship building was a priority in order to build strong relationships with stakeholders across the university. From embarking on a Dean's Tour to connect with each of the deans to drive awareness of the Office and how it could assist the faculties and schools, to developing training on procedural fairness for decision-makers within those academic units, the Ombudsperson met with many stakeholders to establish partnerships in support of collaborative and efficient problem solving

The last two quarters of 2019-20 brought about many unforeseeable circumstances, from the pandemic to the increase in awareness about the systemic racism that Black and Indigenous people face in Canada.

The following describes some of the above in more detail:

Communications & Outreach

Since the re-launch of our Office in the Fall of 2019, we have been continuing the work to increase the awareness of the services and resources we provide to all stakeholders. As we were in a situation where the Ombuds Office had existed before, and many had views about the Office and what it does, a significant part of our messaging was explaining how the Office had changed in focus and resource allocation, consistent with revised Terms of Reference.



Ombudsperson Sign Outside Office

We worked with an updated brand developed with University Relations to erect new signage for greater visibility and develop user friendly digital resources. The brand and identity shift, as well as the new orientation for the Office, fostered outreach to schools and faculties to drive awareness of the changes and brought about updates to external resources that reference our Office and its role.

Training

Providing training opportunities to promote fairness across campus was one of the Office objectives for 2019-20. We developed two presentations, procedural fairness and writing good decisions, which are being offered upon request to stakeholders across campus. 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.

COVID-19 Impacts

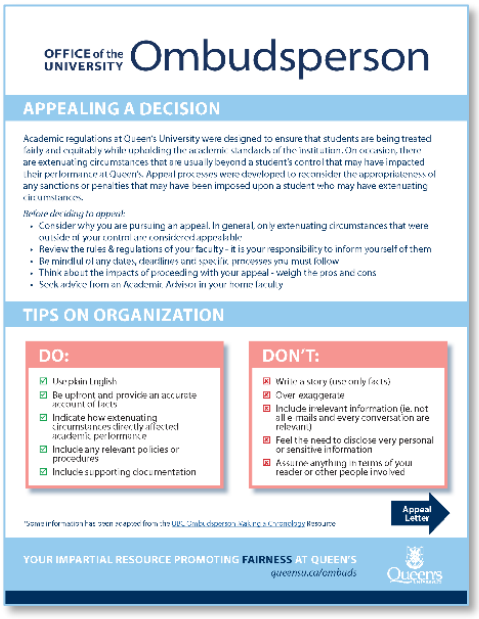
The COVID-19 pandemic brought about changes that no one could have anticipated. In March 2020, we began working remotely, forcing us to make changes to how the Office functioned. Since we were no longer able to provide in-person services, this eliminated drop-ins, which were an important point of first contact for many users. There was also a substantial decrease in phone calls as users were aware that we were not physically on campus. While there was an initial adjustment, we were able to effectively transition to relying almost exclusively on email correspondence and virtual meetings.

While we began working remotely, students also went from on-campus instruction to online instruction due to the COVID-19 pandemic. One trend that emerged was an increase in academic integrity matters. We saw our lowest number of users, 50, in the third quarter in contrast to our highest number of users, 127, in the fourth. Of the academic matters in that last quarter, 73.8% of inquiries were academic integrity related. One outcome from this increase was that we noticed that the academic integrity letters contained inaccurate information about the role of the Office. The Ombudsperson reached out to the appropriate faculty regarding these errors, and appropriate changes were made.

Online Resources

Developing self-help resources to empower stakeholders when navigating university processes is an ongoing objective in the Office. Information gathered from user interactions early in the academic year allowed us to develop our first set of resources which were added to the website.

- About the Ombudsperson Office
- Tips for Writing an Appeal Letter
- Meeting with your Instructor
- Academic Integrity: Responding to a Notice of Investigation
- What is Fairness
- Writing Effective Decisions


OFFICE of the UNIVERSITY Ombudsperson

APPEALING A DECISION

Academic regulations at Queen's University were designed to ensure that students are being treated fairly and equitably while upholding the academic standards of the institution. On occasion, there are extenuating circumstances that are usually beyond a student's control that may have impacted their performance at Queen's. Appeal processes were developed to reconsider the appropriateness of any sanctions or penalties that may have been imposed upon a student who may have extenuating circumstances.

Before deciding to appeal:

- Consider why you are pursuing an appeal. In general, only extenuating circumstances that were outside of your control are considered appealable
- Review the rules & regulations of your faculty - it is your responsibility to inform yourself of them
- Be mindful of any dates, deadlines and specific processes you must follow
- Think about the impacts of proceeding with your appeal - weigh the pros and cons
- Seek advice from an Academic Advisor in your home faculty

TIPS ON ORGANIZATION

DO:

- Use plain English
- Be upfront and provide an accurate account of facts
- Indicate how extenuating circumstances directly affected academic performance
- Include any relevant policies or procedures
- Include supporting documentation

DON'T:

- Write a story (use only facts)
- Over exaggerate
- Include irrelevant information (ie. not all e-mails and every conversation are relevant)
- Feel the need to disclose very personal or sensitive information
- Assume anything in terms of your reader or other people involved

Appeal Letter

*Some information has been adapted from the UBC Okanagan Student Advising Resource

YOUR IMPARTIAL RESOURCE PROMOTING FAIRNESS AT QUEEN'S
queensu.ca/ombuds

Queen's University

TIPS FOR WRITING AN APPEAL LETTER

Relationship Building

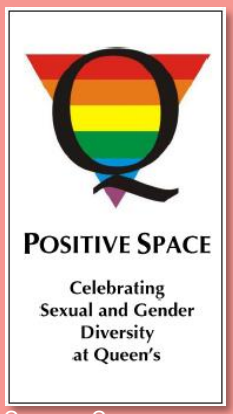
The building of strong relationships and ensuring open communication with members of the Queen's community is key in allowing the Office to be able to function efficiently. This became even more important as we transitioned to working remotely. To build and maintain these relationships, ongoing meetings continue with a variety of staff, student, and faculty stakeholders across the University.

As mentioned above, 2019-20 also included a Dean's Tour, which allowed the Ombudsperson to meet informally with each of the deans across the University to provide an introduction to the Office, discuss the procedural fairness training sessions, and potential opportunities to partner with faculties to make improvements on pressing issues such as accommodations and academic integrity. This led to an increase in contact from some deans and faculties in seeking out the guidance of the Office on various matters at the faculty level.

The Ombudsperson is also a member of several working groups and committees at Queen's, and this involvement has allowed for a better understanding of matters arising across the University. It has also helped to strengthen relationships with stakeholders.

Equity, Diversity, Inclusion, and Indigenization (EDII)

Queen's University has a stated commitment to equity, diversity, inclusion, and indigenization (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 2019-20.



Ombuds Office Completed Training in 2019

At the beginning of the year, all team members received Positive Space[2] training and stickers for our offices. The Office also worked to develop partnerships with colleagues in the Human Rights and Equity Office, the Office of Indigenous Initiatives and Four Directions Indigenous Student Centre.

Then, in the summer, events in Canada and in the US drew the world's attention to the systemic racism that Black and Indigenous people face in both countries. Here at Queen's, the racism that BIPOC students face daily was highlighted on some social media platforms. This social climate led more racialized students, staff and faculty from across the campus to reach out to the Office to seek support for their individual situations. The Ombudsperson met with these individuals to listen to their stories about the pain and isolation of racism, and to provide support. 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.

[2] Positive Space stickers in work, living, or study areas signal that all are welcome. To be welcoming includes not making assumptions about anyone's gender or sexual orientation, being aware of intersectionalities with other forms of oppression, and working to overcome both overt and subtle forms of discrimination and harassment.

Looking Ahead

As we continue to work remotely moving into the 2020-21 academic year, members of the Queen's community will face unique challenges that come along with this virtual setting. Therefore, fostering relationships with these partners will be ongoing. This will include staff training sessions, student group consultations, and ongoing meetings with current campus partners.



Promotional Postcard

Other goals that align with the work that we are doing with these partners are: launching our new Ombuds Academic Appeals Advisor Program, transitioning in-person procedural fairness and decision making training materials to a virtual, asynchronous format for ease of access, continuing to develop self-help resources to empower stakeholders to navigate university processes, and completing a review on two university policies that directly impact the work we do. 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.

2019-20 taught us that we can be flexible and adjust to any challenges that may come our way, and that the Office of the University Ombudsperson is indeed an important resource for the Queen's community. As we look ahead to 2020-21, we will build on all that we created in our first year and continue to provide invaluable support and resources to our students, staff and faculty.

Thank You

The Office of the Ombudsperson at Queen's University has a variety of partners that assist in supporting the mandate of our Office:

- Lon Knox, University Secretary and Corporate Counsel
- Audit & Risk Committee of the Board of Trustees
- Ombudsperson Advisory Committee
- Ombuds Academic Appeal Advisors (formerly Dispute Resolution Advisors)
- Dr. Heather Cole, Senior Advisor and Executive Director (Principal's Office)
- Kathleen Julien-Michels, Coordinator, Finance and Administration (Office of the University Secretariat and Legal Counsel)

We'd also like to thank the faculties and all our campus partners for their ongoing dialogue and support, in particular:

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

We would finally like to thank our colleagues in the Association of Canadian College and University Ombudspersons (ACCUO).

OFFICE of the UNIVERSITY

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