



# OMBUDSPERSON

## 2014 ANNUAL REPORT

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2014 marked the 10-year anniversary of the change in funding structure for the ombuds office, following the 2003 Equity and Fairness review at UVic. Until then, the office had operated on a part-time basis, funded by undergraduate students since 1978, and by graduate students since 2002. The funding is now shared between undergraduate students, graduate students and the university.

The shared funding structure reflects the independent and impartial role of the ombuds office and provides for a full-time ombudsperson at UVic, a resource to students, staff, faculty and administrators on student fairness questions. The office and UVic have also strengthened their lines of communication for feedback on policies and procedures, and input on key initiatives.

UVic has grown and its population and programs have become more diverse over the last decade. With greater diversity comes a wider range of expectations. Some of the casework and trends highlighted in this report illustrate challenges that an administration faces when trying to communicate accurate and consistent information about a complex system while adapting to differing needs. (See for example *Admission* on p. 3 and *Fees and funding* on p. 6.)

The university is now in a phase of self-definition, an institution that sees itself as “large enough to matter and small enough to care<sup>1</sup>”. No institution can be everything to everyone, but a university can build on its strengths, adapt and continue to attract an increasingly diverse student body. One challenge is to do so while also being consistent and transparent about complex academic and administrative regulations that are fundamental and therefore strictly enforced.

As academics and administrators position UVic to be a university of choice for a more diverse student body, two questions must guide their work:

- Where do we need greater flexibility and more academic or administrative options?
- Where do we need greater clarity in communication between units and to students?

1 Jamie Cassels, UVic president and vice-chancellor: Report to the University Community on Campus Conversations, January 2014, p. 4.



## 1965-2015: 50 YEARS OF ACADEMIC OMBUDSING

In 1965, new ideas were brewing in British Columbia. Simon Fraser University (SFU) was opening its doors in a spirit of excitement and innovation, and its Alma Mater was looking “outside the box”. That year, inspired by a concept that was travelling from Scandinavia to North America via New Zealand, SFU students created the first ombudsman for students in a university. In May 2015, ombuds from all sectors of practice will celebrate this landmark at the joint ACCUO-FCO<sup>2</sup> conference in Vancouver.

To describe ombudspersons, I often quote Stanley V. Anderson<sup>3</sup> who called them “humanizers” who help “restore the dignity of the individual” and “give voice to collective conscience”. If you want to know more about the birth and development of academic ombudsing in Canada and elsewhere, see the snapshot created for ACCUO’s 30th anniversary in 2013 at [http://www.uwo.ca/ombuds/accuo\\_aoucc/ACCUO30.pdf](http://www.uwo.ca/ombuds/accuo_aoucc/ACCUO30.pdf).

2 ACCUO: Association of Canadian College and University Ombudspersons; FCO: Forum of Canadian Ombudsmen

3 Anderson, S. V. (1969). Ombudsman Papers: American Experience and Proposals. Institute of Governmental Studies, University of California, Berkeley, pages 3 and 72.



### MARTINE CONWAY

For questions or comments about this report, please contact Martine Conway at [ombuddy@uvic.ca](mailto:ombuddy@uvic.ca) or **250-721-8357**.

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...BECAUSE FAIRNESS MATTERS...

# CASE DISTRIBUTION

## DISTRIBUTION OF CASES BY SUBJECT MATTER

In 2014, the office handled a total of 404 inquiries and complaints, distributed as follows: information/referral (R) 118, advice (A) 230, intervention (I) 56. This was a slight increase from last year, but it is close to the average over the last 10-year period. See case summaries on page 3 and reflections on best practice on pages 4 and 5.

SUBJECT MATTER	R	A	I	2014	2013	2012
Academic concession	12	60	18	90	75	60
Acad. integrity/plagiarism	2	13	2	17	23	12
Acad. writing requirement	0	0	0	0	1	0
Accommodation of disability	1	4	3	8	14	6
Admission	2	3	1	6	13	16
Civility/conduct	0	1	2	3	2	6
Course delivery	1	8	1	10	7	15
Course registration	2	2	1	5	3	4
Employment	9	3	0	12	5	5
Examination	2	4	0	6	11	9
Fees	2	6	3	11	26	16
Financial aid/funding	5	6	0	11	12	9
Grading/evaluation	5	34	4	43	38	40
Housing	1	0	2	3	4	2
Human rights & safety	5	2	0	7	8	7
Interpersonal conflict	2	3	1	6	5	8
Landlord-tenant	4	0	0	4	4	3
Practicum/work placement	3	6	1	10	4	2
Privacy/FOI	2	1	0	3	4	1
Program requirement	2	3	1	6	7	7
Requirement to withdraw	32	42	4	78	65	53
Student societies/groups	2	1	7	10	8	11
Supervisory relationship	2	19	1	22	9	13
Transfer credit	0	0	0	0	2	6
Other academic	15	7	3	25	16	21
Other non-academic	5	2	1	8	18	32
<b>Total</b>	<b>118</b>	<b>230</b>	<b>56</b>	<b>404</b>	<b>384</b>	<b>364</b>

**R:** Information & Referral    **A:** Advice & coaching    **I:** Intervention



## DISTRIBUTION OF ACADEMIC CASES BY LEVEL\*

When dealing with an academic question, students consulted or involved the ombudsperson at the following stages:

<b>Instructor:</b>	<b>28.8 %</b>
<b>Department:</b>	<b>33.3 %</b>
<b>Dean:</b>	<b>36.3 %</b>
<b>Senate Committee on Appeals:</b>	<b>0.0 %</b>

\*These do not include requirements to withdraw from UVic for low gpa, which are handled by Records Services and the Senate Committee on Admission, Re-registration and Transfer.

## TYPE OF ADVICE SOUGHT BY STUDENTS

The advice category includes extended (45 minutes or longer) or repeated consultations at various steps in the student's handling of the situation.

• <b>Generating options / independent perspective</b> ( <i>students may or may not pursue the situation further</i> )	<b>35.1 %</b>
• <b>Guidance on process or procedure</b>	<b>28.6 %</b>
• <b>Feedback or coaching</b> ( <i>feedback on a letter; preparation for a meeting or an appeal</i> )	<b>36.3 %</b>

## OUTCOMES OF INDIVIDUAL INTERVENTIONS

The ombudsperson only intervenes in individual cases with the student's consent. Interventions include facilitating communication between students and units, problem-solving, mediation and case review or investigation.

<b>Recommendation made</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Resolved</b>	<b>18</b>
<b>Partially resolved / satisfied</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Information clarified</b>	<b>26</b>
<b>No ground</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Denied / Not resolved</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>Discontinued by student</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>56</b>

# CASE SUMMARIES



## HIGHLIGHTS

In 2014, there were more requests for mediated or facilitated communication, some between students (e.g. within a student group), and others between a student and an academic or administrative unit.

It is also worth noting that there were only two questions related to confusion about percentage grading. As 2014 was the first year UVic included this information on students' official transcripts, this suggests that the lead-up work undertaken by the office of the Vice-president Academic, the Registrar, individual academic units and instructors has been very successful.

## REQUIREMENTS TO WITHDRAW

Students who are required to withdraw from UVic are automatically referred to the ombuds office. In 2014, 78 students consulted the ombudsperson about an appeal. (Appeals are considered when student submit supporting documentation of extenuating circumstances such as illness, personal or family affliction, accident or injury). In the same period, UVic received 58 appeals: 44 granted, 11 denied, 3 deferred/not required.

## ACADEMIC CONCESSION

Intervention (resolved)

A student became ill at the end of term and was unable to write exams. She filed a request for academic concessions (deferral) for her three courses with final exams. Two were granted, but the third instructor proposed instead a take home exam that would be returned within 3 days of the original exam, in time for grade submissions.

**The student was referred to the ombudsperson. The student wasn't well enough to write exams on campus or at home, but was unsure how to discuss this further with the instructor. The instructor was to be away in January, but she proposed an arrangement so that the student could write a deferred exam in early January, and the academic concession was granted.**

## ADMISSION AND TRANSFER CREDIT

Intervention (clarified)

An international student applied for third year entry into a UVic program. She thought she had course work equivalent to the first two years of the degree, and she indicated clearly when she first approached UVic that she was only interested in third year entry. She was referred to the application process and to admission staff. Admission staff didn't receive the initial communication from the student. The application and transcripts were submitted and processed like all applications, leading to an offer for first year admission and requests for additional information to determine transfer credit.

**The student contacted the ombuds office to help clarify communication. It turned out that this student had no chance of a third-year admission into the desired program. This information would have been clarified much earlier had admission staff had access to the original communication from the student. They agreed to return some documents to the student, and to follow-up with other units to improve internal communication.**

## COURSE DELIVERY

Advice (options/coaching)

An undergraduate student came to discuss concerns about a course, including: ambiguity of questions in the mid-term, inconsistencies in expectations or in feedback, and gaps or delay in covering course material. Students had raised questions in class, but thought that the instructor had not identified workable solutions. Some students were dropping the course while others worried about completing it.

**The ombudsperson encouraged the student to speak with the chair and suggested constructive ways of describing the problems to seek assistance. The student later reported that he had met with the chair, as had other students. The chair had provided a clear rationale where he didn't agree with the students, and had also taken concrete steps to address concerns for the second half of the course.**

## SUPERVISION

Advice (coaching)

A graduate student needed help before a meeting with her supervisor. Concerns included mutual mis-communication, and unresolved commitments to next steps in the supervisory relationship. An unproductive meeting would result in an end to the supervisory relationship and possibly a withdrawal from the program. The student and ombudsperson considered the elements that had led to misunderstandings, and the student identified the ones where she thought she needed to take responsibility.

**While doing so, a clearer picture emerged about assumptions that had led both student and supervisor toward miscommunication, and to the current impasse about the direction of the academic work. The ombudsperson suggested ways of setting the tone and framing the discussion to acknowledge but move through the difficulties and rebuild communication lines. The student hoped to "at least part on good terms". She later reported that the meeting was successful beyond her expectations. Both parties had an open discussion that led to a renewed commitment to work together, with specific next steps.**

*Some details and identifiers have been modified to preserve anonymity*

In October, the ombuds office participated in *Out of the Shadows and into the Sunshine: a Mental Health Information Fair at the University of Victoria*. Visitors commented on their view of fairness:





# THEMES AND BEST PRACTICE

## LOOKING BACK 2004-2014

Over the past decade, the number of inquiries received by the ombuds office from students has averaged 408 annually, with a low of 364 in 2012 and a high of 444 in 2010. The ombuds office provides students with information and referrals, advice, facilitation or mediation as appropriate to assist with the resolution of student inquiries and complaints; the ombudsperson may also investigate impartially and make recommendations on individual or systemic issues (see *Mandate* page 8).

In practice this means that students may consult the ombudsperson at any stage in a problem or dispute. At lower or more informal levels (e.g. instructor or staff, department head), they often seek advice on navigating university procedures, and coaching or facilitation on resolving issues; at more formal or later stages, they often seek guidance on appeals or assistance reviewing the fairness of a decision.

This section of the report highlights themes in three areas, as brought to the ombuds office by students, with a view to highlight some of the best practice approaches used by faculty members and departments to facilitate prevention and early resolution.

## ACADEMIC CONCESSIONS, CHRONIC HEALTH AND INVISIBLE DISABILITIES

Trends in ombuds statistical reports over the last ten years show an increase in inquiries about academic concessions (requests for extensions, deferrals or course withdrawals because of illness, accident, injury, or family or personal affliction), from 53 in 2004 to 90 in 2014.

Details of these inquiries for the last two years show that 37% come from students with chronic physical or mental health issues who need adjustments in their academic workload or deadlines. In recent years, there were also more requests for facilitated communication and problem-solving (ombuds intervention), and longer (more complex) requests for advice on appeals related to academic concessions.

During the same period, the university has seen a significant increase in students registered with the Resource Centre for Students with a Disability (RCSD), in particular students with learning disabilities and, in the last few years, students with mental health disabilities. UVic and many other Canadian universities have adopted a greater focus on diversity and accessibility in their strategic plans.

The increased time spent in the ombuds office on questions of academic concession is a reflection of the increased time spent by students, staff, faculty and administrators on those processes, and it underscores the need to continue to develop improved academic, administrative and communication tools. While this is a challenge, it has also led to many improvements, such as more visible and clear information on websites and many course outlines, and updated policies and procedures for the accommodation of disabilities at the undergraduate and graduate levels.

It has also triggered major initiatives such as the National College Health Assessment survey and the survey on access

and services for students with disabilities undertaken at UVic, in 2013 and 2015 respectively; and UVic's 2014-2017 Student Mental Health Strategy, which in its first year has focused on developing robust awareness and education tools for students, staff and faculty.

Proactive strategies to develop fair and practical solutions at the course or program level include:

- using a Universal Instructional Design lens and identifying “essential requirements” when reviewing courses, programs and related administrative procedures
- integrating problem-solving mechanisms into course outlines, such as reasonable solutions to missed course components
- setting the stage for clear, open and respectful communication at the beginning of each term.

## ACADEMIC INTEGRITY, CHEATING AND PLAGIARISM

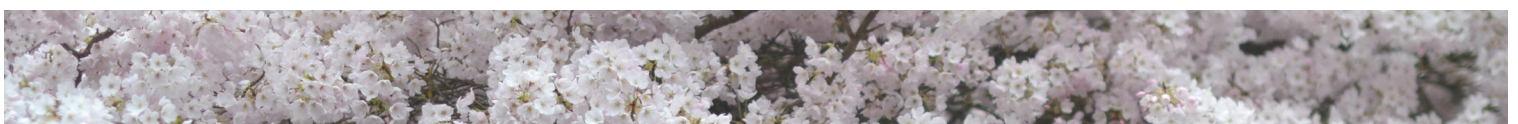
Last year's report described instances of students accused of plagiarism who lacked an understanding of when or how to cite, how to paraphrase, how to track their sources, or how to deal with a significantly different assignment format. These first time or “low level” academic integrity issues usually form the majority of inquiries coming to the ombudsperson, although more serious or repeated instances of plagiarism and cheating also lead to inquiries to the ombuds office about criteria for violations, penalties and appeal processes.

Students more rarely come to the ombudsperson to share concerns about cheating by others, or about uneven or unfair handling of academic integrity issues in their department. When they do, they tend to mention

- lack of clarity about the kinds of collaboration expected in a course or program or in group work (especially where “studying together” is otherwise allowed or encouraged by the department)
- lack of fairness when exam or assignment questions are re-used (unequal access to resources and unfair competition for grades, increased opportunities for cheating)
- lack of clarity about the process (e.g. not knowing what the allegation is prior to meeting with the department head)

Best practice approaches include:

- teaching how to cite, giving students examples of common (plagiarism) mistakes, and referring students to support services (e.g. Centre for Academic Communication)
- being clear about boundaries for group study and group assignments
- designing tests and assignments to prevent opportunities for cheating (e.g. consultation with the Learning and Teaching Centre)
- developing a consistent approach within the academic unit for dealing with allegations, including appropriate notice to students about the nature of the allegation and any evidence, followed by an opportunity to respond before a decision is made.



## CONDUCT, CIVILITY AND RESPECT

UVic introduced a non-academic misconduct policy in 2011, and revised the university calendar in 2012 to include a statement on *Creating a Respectful and Productive Learning Environment*. Inquiries from students to the ombudsperson on allegations of misconduct remain low: 2 to 6 a year, including issues dealt with through Judicial Affairs and situations addressed by academic departments.

Students seek independent information on how the process works and how to prepare for it, including their rights and responsibilities; or they request assistance such as facilitated communication to resolve the issue.

But questions of civility, respect and conduct also come up in the ombuds office in ways that are not directly reflected by the statistical table. For example, they sometimes underlie concerns by students about a supervisor's interactions in an academic or employment-related relationship. They are also at times a factor in students' complaints about course delivery or about evaluation and grading.

Faculty members and department heads also occasionally contact the ombuds office for information about how to deal with disruptive behaviour from a student. For them, the most difficult situations involve the responsibility to attend fairly to a student's reasonable needs or complaints, while at the same time dealing effectively with perceived or real inappropriate behaviour from the student.

Best practice approaches include:

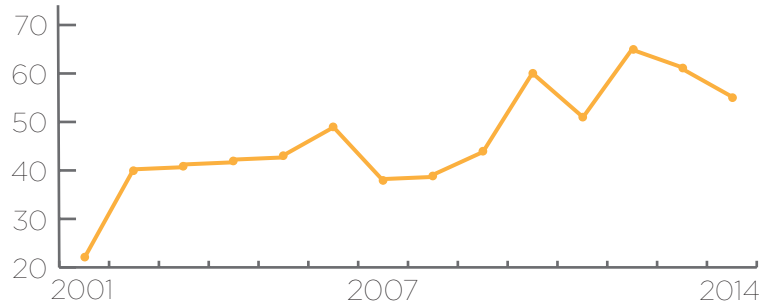
- modelling civility and setting the tone for interactions in a course (in the course outline, in class discussions, when approached by a student about an issue,...)
- establishing clear consultation and referral channels when difficulties occur (including referring a student to relevant resources other than the decision-maker for support and advice)
- paying attention to the three dimensions of fairness (see page 7), and attending appropriately to concerns or complaints raised by a student even while dealing effectively with a student's behaviour.

## GRADUATE STUDENTS

One of the goals in developing a shared funding structure for the ombuds office (see page 1) was to better serve the graduate student population. Prior to that time, ombuds statistical reports indicated that graduate students tended to seek assistance from the office at a late stage in an administrative or academic problem, when there were few options or solutions left.

Over the last 10 years, the number of graduate students consulting the ombuds office has increased from between 20 and 40 per year to between 50 and 65. More importantly, more students come to the office earlier, before their options have narrowed, when they can address a wider range of related problems such as communication in the supervisory relationship, changes in funding, re-registration and leaves, etc.

## NUMBER OF GRADUATE INQUIRIES FROM 2001-2014



The greater visibility of the ombuds office as a problem-solving resource for graduate students is helped by referrals to the ombuds office from various members of the UVic community, including the Graduate Students' Society (GSS) and the Faculty of Graduate Studies (FGS). The ombudsperson has also taken an active role in graduate orientation panels and workshops over the years.

## IMPORTANCE OF PROBLEM-SOLVING INQUIRIES

In working with graduate students, the emphasis is particularly on helping them develop communication and problem-solving skills to navigate their way successfully through challenges or difficulties. The ombuds office also helps students understand how resources like supervisors, committee members, graduate advisors, department heads and associate deans may play a role in resolving an issue.

A majority of graduate students consult the ombuds office confidentially before or while trying to resolve an issue at the level of a faculty member, supervisory committee, graduate advisor, or department; they also seek assistance before an appeal to a department, to the Dean, or to an administrative body.

Graduate students typically ask for

- information and referrals about policies, procedures and relevant resources (including relevant UVic support services and recourses)
- independent advice or coaching (e.g. preparing for a meeting with a decision-maker, organizing relevant points, understanding grounds for appeal, addressing issues constructively,...)

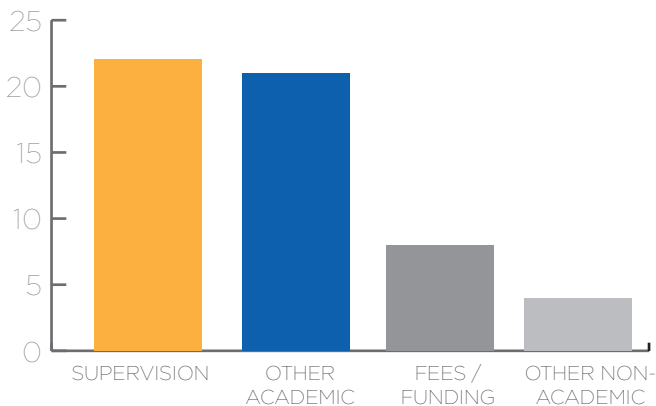
On request from a student, the ombudsperson may also intervene (i.e. contact a UVic office) to

- clarify information
- facilitate communication
- problem-solve
- review or investigate



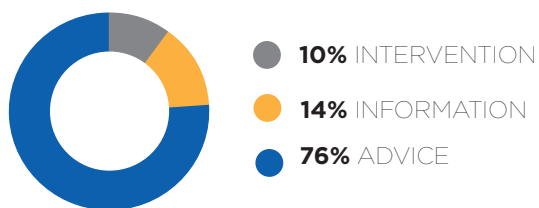
# GRADUATE STUDENTS HIGHLIGHTS FOR 2014

## SUBJECT MATTER OF INQUIRIES (2014)

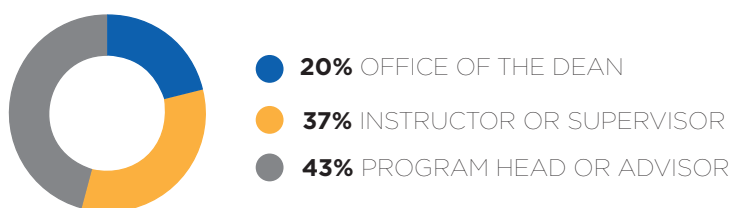


In 2014, there were 55 requests for assistance from graduate students. The category “other academic” included questions about course delivery, failed practicum, grading/evaluation, candidacy, accommodation of a disability, requirement to withdraw, readmission. The “other non-academic” issues included concerns about accommodation (housing), interpersonal dynamics, and employment.

## TYPE OF ASSISTANCE SOUGHT



## ENTITY CONTACTED BY THE STUDENT (ACADEMIC ISSUES)



## SUPERVISION

The great majority of students who came to discuss concerns about the supervisory relationship were looking for confidential advice or coaching to work through problems such as: communication; the need for directions, input or timely feedback from a supervisor; sorting out expectations in the supervisory relationship; or adapting to changing conditions in the project or research. There were also a few questions about a postponed anticipated defence; several questions about developing a long distance relationship with a supervisor or committee; and a couple of students were working through a change of supervisory relationship at the level of their department.

The ombudsperson also refers students to relevant resources within the program or faculty, such as the

graduate advisor, chair or associate dean if they haven't yet contacted those resources. The students who followed up on these referrals generally reported getting assistance to understand options and to work through next steps. This included students who resolved difficulties with their existing supervisor, and students who worked through a transition to a different supervisory structure.

## EVALUATION OF STUDENT WORK

The themes of clear expectations, timely feedback and fair grading underlied several of the questions about course delivery, failed practicum, grading and one situation related to a candidacy exam. In particular, students raised questions about the fairness of grades in situations where the evaluation was not based on written work, especially in several graduate courses evaluated primarily through a combination of oral examinations and class participation. It is important to note that students in this type of course had no effective access to the grade review process otherwise available to UVic students.

**The students who consulted the ombudsperson on these questions all expressed a need for clearer evaluation criteria and more timely feedback (e.g. at the mid-point in a course or practicum). In addition, academic units developing courses with oral final examinations must also make the evaluation criteria for these courses transparent and the grade subject to the appeal process.**

## FEES AND FUNDING INQUIRIES

There were instances of miscommunication about the level of funding available to a student, later clarified or resolved through discussion with the department and/or graduate studies. There were also situations of significant misunderstanding or miscommunication about a program fee structure. In one instance, a student expected to be charged a one-year program fee (in three installments) whereas the program's fee structure is based on a minimum of five fee installments. In another situation, a student expected to be registered part time (and pay a part time program fee) throughout the length of the program, which is not a possibility except in the initial phase (course portion) of the program.

Graduate education is a diverse, competitive and complex environment. Students compete for graduate seats and funding, and universities compete for the best graduate students. Students come with diverse expectations and needs, and differing levels of familiarity with the graduate world. The graduate program fee structure at UVic is simple in principle: students are charged a minimum program fee in part-time or full-time installments, and a re-registration fee afterwards. But it is complex in its detailed application as there are differences between programs and between student paths.

**Graduate Admissions and Records, the Faculty of Graduate Studies and departments regularly engage in clarifying Calendar entries and communication to students during the recruitment phase. Further, the examples discussed here show the need for clearer and more direct communication of the specific program fee structure at the time when a graduate student receives an admission offer from UVic.**



# FAIRNESS IN ACTION

In 2013 and 2014, the ombuds office had the opportunity to conduct five Fairness in Practice sessions with administrative staff. The discussions focused on the three dimensions of the fairness triangle: relational, procedural and substantive. (See the ombuds website for the detailed triangle.)

Fairness tools are also at the core of academic staff's work with students. This is especially important as questions of academic judgment (impacting grades, course delivery, progression, etc.) are primarily made at the levels of instructors and departments or schools.

Students sometimes use poor strategies when raising issues, such as overstating an issue; or labelling an issue without providing evidence; or appealing without supporting documentation related to appeal grounds. In most cases, these students can be guided to a more productive process either by clear communication, or by referral to a relevant resource.

But some students tell me that they are reluctant to raise issues. When this happens, it is a loss for all, as a system that doesn't receive feedback about itself cannot learn or improve. This is due to a number of factors:

- the fear to be seen as a problem-maker
- the fear of repercussions (e.g. grade)
- the perception that nothing can be done or that the academic unit will not care

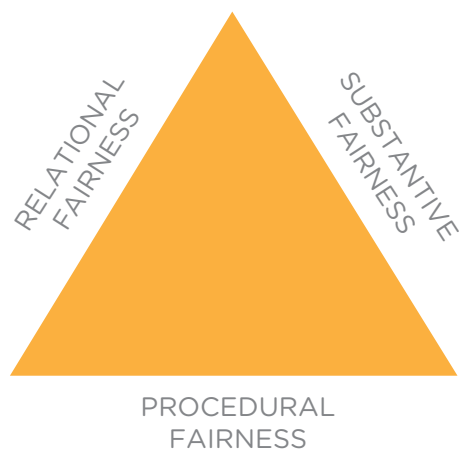
These perceptions can be either dispelled or made worse in initial communications with an instructor or department. Students who perceived a situation as unfair tended to say that:

- the student's issues had been dismissed without being heard or without a reason
- the instructor or unit head had already made a decision before speaking with the student
- the department had not taken steps to correct the situation

On the other hand, many students had productive meetings with instructors, chairs and deans, during which they valued:

- being heard (having an opportunity to explain concerns from their point of view before a decision was made)
- understanding criteria and reasons for decisions
- clarification about any next step or relevant appeal process.

## THE FAIRNESS TRIANGLE



## WHAT STUDENTS SAID ABOUT FAIRNESS

The best case scenario is a full resolution of the issues. But students experienced a situation as fair even when it didn't lead to the solution they had hoped for, as long as relevant relational, procedural and substantive fairness elements were respected.

### After meeting with an instructor (grading)

**“The** instructor didn't agree to change the grade. But we had a good discussion and although I am disappointed in the result I understand the decision. The instructor was very supportive about my work and I learned a lot from this interaction.”

### After meeting with a chair (course delivery)

**“My** meeting with the chair went not too badly. [The chair] agreed with me on some things and did a good job explaining the things s/he didn't agree with. Overall I would consider it a productive meeting, and the ideas s/he presented [i.e. next steps] were satisfactory Thank you for your help and advice.”

### After meeting with an associate dean (funding)

**“Thank** you for your advice and for encouraging me to also talk to the dean's office. I spoke with the associate dean. S/he was sympathetic to my situation and [understood the problem]. I think it was a very good, productive meeting.”

## WHAT STUDENTS VALUED FROM THE OMBUDS

### Being heard

**“Thank** you very much for your help. It felt good to meet with you and I learned a lot about the situation and what happened so you helped me quite a bit. I felt heard and that there was a fair process so I felt validated and empowered. Thank you for that..”

### Understanding process and options

**“I** wish to express my sincere appreciation for your past two emails, which are clear and detailed and have been tremendously helpful in my efforts to apply for an academic concession. I would like to thank you for the kindness and grace you've shown me when I came to see you. Without your help, I would not have recognized the options I had in my situation.”

### Developing communication and dispute resolution skills

**“Speaking** with you really helped me to get a better understanding of some of the misunderstandings that remained. Your recommendations helped me to set the right tone in my approach, and I can now understand how the situation looked from [the instructor's] point. I feel I have also benefited from speaking with you in developing relationships with [other professors].”

# MANDATE / OTHER ACTIVITIES

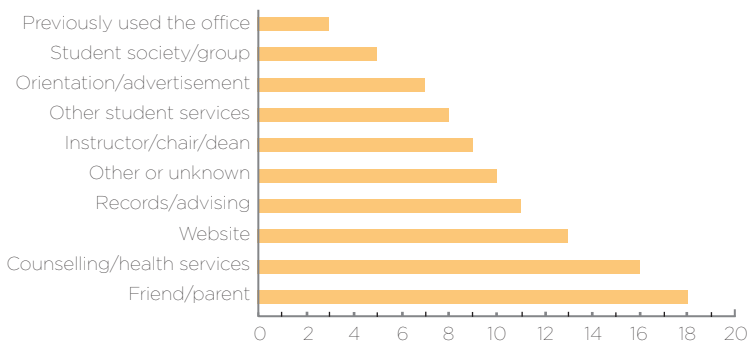
## OFFICE MANDATE AND STRUCTURE

The ombuds office at UVic is an independent, impartial and confidential resource for all members of the university community on student-related fairness questions. In parallel with the educational mission of the university, the ombudsperson provides students with tools to understand policies and procedures, make informed decisions, access available recourses, self-advocate, identify relevant resources, and learn constructive approaches for raising and resolving concerns.

The ombudsperson seeks to ensure that the principles of fairness and natural justice are observed, and to help resolve issues at the lowest appropriate level. Students may access the office at any stage in a problem or dispute. The ombudsperson may also facilitate access to problem-solving or review mechanisms, investigate, recommend, or bring individual or systemic issues to the attention of relevant authorities. The ombuds office acts as a reflective lens to improve procedures and practices.

The office is funded by direct contributions from undergraduate and graduate students, and a grant from the university administration. It is staffed by one full-time ombudsperson. The ombudsperson reports to the Ombudsperson Advisory Committee, with representation from undergraduate and graduate students, the Faculty Association, the Professional Employee Association and UVic senior administration. (Because of confidentiality requirements, committee members do not have access to individual case information.)

## HOW STUDENTS HEARD ABOUT THE OMBUDS OFFICE (%)

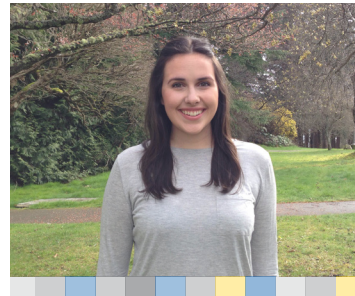


The work of an ombuds office relies in great part on the willingness of the members of the university community to engage, question and resolve. I thank the students who inform the activities of the office by sharing their stories, and the many students, staff, faculty and administrators who work collaboratively with the office to help clarify or resolve issues.

## OUTREACH, COMMUNICATION AND COMMITTEE WORK

The ombudsperson took part in undergraduate and graduate orientation fairs; made short presentations to the UVSS board, GSS representatives, and Clubs and Course Unions councils; and co-presented orientation workshops for graduate students. The ombudsperson also conducted two Fairness workshops for staff and administrators in the fall.

The ombudsperson participated in the Educational Equity Advisory Group (Human Rights Committee), the Advisory Committee on Academic Access and Accommodation for Students with Disabilities, the Student Mental Health Strategy Advisory Committee, and the Healthy Campus Advisory Group. The ombudsperson also meets with the Associate Vice-President Student Affairs on a regular basis, and with support services staff and other senior administrators yearly.



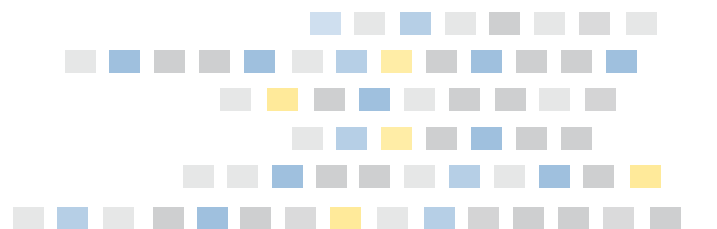
Erin Keely, a third-year student in Sociology and Political Science, provided communication support services to the office from September 2014 to April 2015. Erin represented the office at information fairs; assisted with web searches; developed spreadsheets and organized data for

ombuds statistical reports; and designed the ombuds webpage for the UVic Online Academic Community. I am grateful for Erin's positive approach to new and changing goals, her creativity and attention to detail, and her engaging interpersonal skills.

## PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT AND ACTIVITIES

In March I attended the spring meeting of the NorthWest Ombuds Group (NWOOG), which coincided with the 21st annual Northwest Dispute Resolution conference in Seattle, WA. In June I attended the Association of Canadian College and University Ombudspersons (ACCUO)'s western regional meeting in Victoria, BC. In October I presented a case-study for the annual conference of the Mexican university ombuds network (REDDU).

In 2014, I also helped coordinate the completion of ACCUO's Ombuds Toolkit, with information for institutions and for new ombuds on setting up and operating an ombuds office in a Canadian post-secondary institution.



Design Credit: Katie Hulbert