



SPECIAL ANNIVERSARY REPORT:

**Building a Culture of Fairness at the
University of Victoria**

Reflections by Previous Ombuds at UVic

“Although policy is written in black and white, there are always informed interpretations to bring to bear. Being a fairness advocate is a big part of who I am. I have developed a lot of patience with brick walls and I am willing to try and remove the bricks bit by bit.”

Patty Beatty-Guenter

“Because you don’t have formal power to change a decision, you learn to be persuasive. Sometimes you have to take risks and take a position on something that is really important in principle. [As a 1984 Supreme Court decision¹] said, the ombudsman can bring a light to shine in areas that might otherwise be dark.” **Rick Cooper**

“You end up in [an ombuds] position because you’ve got a sense of justice and you want to make a difference. So you take that with you when you leave.” **Bruce Kilpatrick**

“Listening to people. That’s a big part of [the ombuds] job, and it is a big part of what I do now. You really have to be able to listen to people, to read between the lines and pick up what else is going on.” **Peter Holmes**

“[I have held] very senior jobs in the public service, and all of them had to do with reconciling very different views, working with people all across government to develop policy that responds to public needs, and using listening skills, reaching out, paying attention to what needed to be changed and taking the steps for change.” **Joy Illington**

“There is usually a story behind what happened, and I think that’s part of the ombudsman role... to try to unearth that story, to find the nuance, and [see if it] has relevance to the problem or not. I have always maintained an interest in the need for complex organizations to have a human face.” **Carol Hubberstey**

“I learned that with people in a position of power, if you present something in a very reasonable, simple and human way, great things can happen. It is about finding a way to get people to listen and to care about the issue.” **Charlene Simon**

“You hone your skills for developing consensual resolution. If you can bring the parties to a consensual agreement on anything, you are way ahead of the game.” **Kathleen Beattie**

1. British Columbia Development Corporation v. Friedmann (Ombudsman), 1984 (S.C.C.)



Introduction: The Ombuds Experiment



The Ombuds History Project at the University of Victoria (UVic) takes us on a 30-year journey, with roots in the creation of the modern parliamentary ombudsman in Sweden in 1809, and in the North American student and civil rights movements of the 1960s. The ombudsman concept was adopted in North America in the 1960s and 70s, at a time when society had experienced civil unrest and was looking for ways in which grievances could be heard and remedied.

Although the first bills for the creation of a national parliamentary ombudsman in North America were introduced in

Canada in 1962, the first North American parliamentary

ombudsman was not established until 1967 in Alberta. The first ombudsman position on a North American campus was a student position at Simon Fraser University, British Columbia in 1965, followed by the creation of the ombudsman office at Michigan State University, United States, in 1967.

In 1969, Stanley Anderson, a political scientist from the University of California, Santa Barbara, compiled his *Ombudsman Papers*¹, a “plea for adopting the ombudsman idea to American [governmental and non-governmental] institutions, a plea based on the conviction that ombudsmen are humanizers” (Anderson, 1969). Anderson recommended further experimentation with the ombudsman concept, and, by the mid-70s, several ombuds offices had been created on Canadian and US campuses².

According to Anderson, the ombudsman—“independent, impartial, knowledgeable, “universally accessible”, and empowered “to recommend and publicize”—was expected to make three contributions in a society with increasingly large bureaucracies: to resolve grievances, to improve administration and to assist in oversight (Anderson, 1969). Using persuasion to effect change, the ombudsman could give “voice to collective conscience” (Anderson, 1969) and act as a “guiding influence” on the institution (Rust in Anderson, 1969).

In 1977, a group of student leaders decided to try an ombudsman experiment at the University of Victoria. The story related in this *Special Anniversary*

Report is a tribute to their vision and to the commitment of the many students, staff, faculty and administrators who have worked with the ombuds office over the last three decades to foster an environment of fairness and equity. Above all, it is a testament to the dedication of the individuals who have served as ombudspersons at UVic.

Martine Conway, September 2008

1. Anderson, Stanley V. (1969) *Ombudsman Papers: American Experience and Proposals*. Institute of Governmental Studies, University of California, Berkeley.

2. In Canada: Simon Fraser, 1965; University of Alberta, 1971, Concordia University (then Sir George), 1971; Carleton, 1971; Dalhousie, 1971; University of Toronto, 1975; University of Western Ontario, late 70s.



THE EARLY YEARS: March 1978 - April 1983

In 1977-78, the Alma Mater Society (AMS) and in particular student leaders Brian Gardiner and Ben Webb put in place the building blocks of what became the ombuds office at UVic. Their vision was for the AMS and UVic to jointly appoint an ombudsman: a fair and impartial conduit for the resolution of student grievances. With the help of then Dean of Law F.M. Fraser, the AMS researched existing campus ombuds offices in Canada and proposed the first terms of reference for an office at UVic.

Patricia Beatty-Guenter, then a sociology graduate student, was hired for a 3-month pilot project in 1978 and became the first ombudsman when the office was created in May 1978 with funding from the AMS. “I could have decided to take a confrontational position as student advocate,” Beatty-Guenter¹ says. Instead, she adopted an independent and impartial approach, on the Swedish ombudsman model, and pursued a longer-term objective of full university recognition.

Rick Cooper, Bruce Kilpatrick and Peter Holmes followed Beatty-Guenter in the role, which, by 1981, had become a part-time student position for a one-year, renewable term. They describe the same challenges and successes in building credibility for a concept that was new and not well understood: without funding or an official mandate from UVic, the office had no statutory power to access information.

Howard Petch, UVic president at the time, held a forum every Friday, the Petch Peeves, where students who had a problem could talk to him. “He said his door was always open [to students] and he didn’t think [UVic] needed an ombudsman,” recalls Cooper. But Petch’s approach also sent a message of cooperation with the office. The faculty of Arts and Science responded to the creation of the office by dismantling its faculty-student liaison committee and appointing two faculty members to the Ombudsman Advisory Committee in 1978.

“Good decisions can stand scrutiny. And if they aren’t good decisions, you can make them better by having someone a little outside the structure who has a sense of process and administrative justice.” Bruce Kilpatrick, UVic Director of Communications and former ombudsman, Dec. 19, 2007 interview

Beatty-Guenter stresses the work of David Clode (then AMS general manager and a member of the Ombudsperson² Advisory Committee until 1989) and the support of Gordon Smiley, UVic Administrative Registrar, in fostering communication networks and establishing the office as a voice for fairness. “Most professors and administrative people gave us lots of time and dealt with us very fairly,” Cooper says. And by 1982, under Kilpatrick’s watch, the office of the ombudsman was listed in the Calendar as a resource under “Avenues of Redress and Appeal” and described as an “independent, impartial investigator” receiving “student complaints about any department or office on campus” and seeking to ensure that “decisions and regulations are fair and equitable.”

Any large bureaucracy encounters difficulties in making the problems and questions of those at the bottom known to those who have the power to resolve such problems.” Patricia Beatty-Guenter, *First Annual Report of the Ombudsman*, AMS, University of Victoria, May 1979

“I am fairly disarming with people and gracious. And yet, I don’t just tell them what they want to hear,” says Holmes. This consistent focus on identifying problem areas while fostering respectful relationships quickly led to results. In 1978, some professors still

“graded on the curve” in violation of Senate policy. “So I took on the curve,” Beatty-Guenter explains, highlighting this as an area of success during her term as ombudsman. Cooper, Kilpatrick and Holmes respectively prompted improvements to UVic’s appeal procedures, to a clause in the financial aid system in BC, and to exam invigilation on campus.

By 1983, a growing number of students had recourse to the ombudsperson, while staff and faculty members increasingly referred students to the office. In concluding his term of office, Holmes noted that “[i]n five years, the office ha[d] grown from an AMS experiment to an essential and invaluable part of the services offered to students at UVic.” He recommended changes to the structure and powers of the office, stressing that:

“The success and respect achieved by the office has been achieved without one of the most important components of ombudsmanship, the unobstructed power to gather information.”

(Peter Holmes, *Annual Report of the Ombudsperson*, May 1, 82-April 30, 83).

1. Unless otherwise indicated, quotes are from interviews conducted in 2007 and 2008.

2. The name changed from ombudsman to ombudsperson in the early 80s.



The Ombudsperson Advisory Committee

The Ombudsperson (Ombudsman) Advisory Committee (OAC) is chaired by the University of Victoria Students' Society's (formerly the Alma Mater Society) Director of Academics. In 1978, the committee included student representatives and two faculty members appointed by the Faculty of Arts and Science. A representative of the Professional Employee Association (PEA) was added in the 80's, and faculty appointments were then made by the Faculty Association.

Reflecting the joint funding arrangement between the UVic Students' Society (UVSS), the Graduate Students' Society (GSS) and the University of Victoria (UVic), today the committee is composed of undergraduate and graduate students (including a student senator), a faculty member selected by the Faculty

Association, a representative of the PEA, and two representatives from the University administration.

The committee's purpose is to ensure the impartial and independent operation of the ombuds office. It acts as hiring and performance review committee, solicits funding and approves budgets, and receives annual and statistical reports from the ombudsperson. The committee does not have access to confidential case files.

Over the years, committee members have included representatives from the UVSS, the GSS, the Office of the Registrar, Campus Security, Housing Food & Conference Services, the office of the Vice-President Academic and the faculties of Education, Human & Social Development, Humanities, and Law.

"The ombudsperson is one person students can approach and be sure of objectivity." Ben Webb, AMS Director of Academics and OAC Chair, quoted in the *Martlet*, April 13, 1978

Courtesy of: UVic Archives



Bruce Kilpatrick in his office, 1980

Ombuds Chronology: Where are they now?

- **Patricia Beatty-Guenter:** March 1978-April 30, 1979. Dr. Beatty-Guenter is manager of Student Research & Reporting for the BC Ministry of Advanced Education and Labour Market Development.
- **Rick Cooper:** May 1, 1979-April 30, 1980. When he left the office, Rick Cooper went to work with the Office of the Ombudsman of British Columbia. Today, he is a management consultant in Victoria.
- **Bruce Kilpatrick:** May 1, 1980-April 30, 1982. Bruce Kilpatrick is director of communications at UVic.
- **Peter Holmes:** May 1, 1982-April 30, 1983. Dr. J. Peter Holmes is minister of the congregation for the Yorkminster Park Baptist church in Toronto.

COMING OF AGE: May 1983 - April 1992

Early annual reports had repeatedly called for formal powers of access to information by the ombudsperson, and for university recognition in the form of joint funding. Office holders continued to work toward that goal, and the 1980s brought increased stability to the position and “de facto recognition” of the office, as David Clode pointed out after the 10th anniversary of the office.

By 1988, the position had developed into a two-year renewable appointment (still funded for 20 hours a week by the Students’ Society). The revised 1988 terms of reference for the office clarified its inde-

pendence from the AMS and from the University. The document included the first wording on access to student files by the ombudsperson, making official what was by then established practice.

With a steadier term of office, ombuds were able to bring more continuity to the advocacy part of the role. In 1983, Joy Illington, a young practicing lawyer, was the first non-student in the position. “It was an exciting time at the university,” she recalls. Illington took advantage of a general interest in fairness questions to make the office and its mandate more widely known on campus, reaching out to administrative and academic units. “Students wanted to participate with faculty and staff on initiatives like a sexual harassment committee, and they turned to the ombudsperson for advice.”

During the 80s, the scope of questions brought to the office also expanded to include concerns about privacy, harassment, services for foreign students, human subject research and employment. “Students come with social needs,” says Carol Hubberstey who succeeded Illington in 1985, and was followed by Lynda Dunham-Wilkie and Charlene Simon. Annual reports from 1983 to 1992 show the ombudspersons opening dialogue on a broad range of issues on campus.

Appointed to the advisory committee on Equal Rights and Opportunities by president Howard Petch in 1984, Illington and then Hubberstey participated in the development of the first sexual harassment policy and the creation of the first sexual harassment officer positions at UVic. Hubberstey facilitated a forum on women’s voices, participated in a report on the status of women students and called attention to the difficulties faced by foreign students.

“... Often times people get involved in disputes they can’t resolve because they can’t step outside their viewpoints, so it helps to have a neutral party there. I think the ombudsperson really does fulfill three different roles: investigator... mediator... and advocate, but rarely all three at once.”

Joy Illington, former Ombudsperson, January 2008 interview.

Picking up on issues raised by Illington and Hubberstey, Dunham-Wilkie advocated for fairness in dealing with students who are absent because of an illness, and for due process in plagiarism cases. She commented on the arbitrariness and inconsistency of certain decisions by citing an incident where a professor had first failed a student for suspected cheating because a paper was “too good”, then changed the grade to an A+ because the student had followed up and claimed innocence.

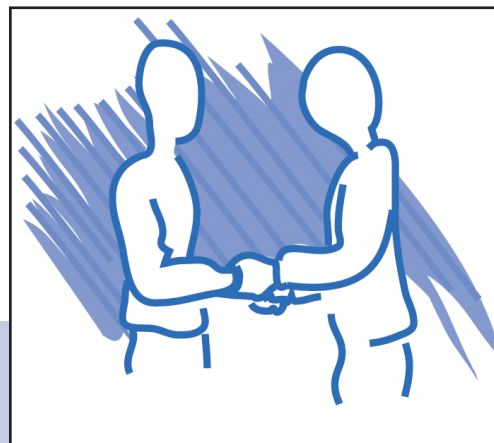
Simon brought the need for conflict of interest guidelines in student-professor relationships to the attention of the Vice President Academic. She raised awareness

and provided guidance on dealing with disruptive behaviour in the classroom. She responded to the December 6, 1989 massacre of 14 female students at l’Ecole Polytechnique in Montreal by addressing the Memorial held at UVic and compiling the report of the Conference on Dealing with Violence and Disruptive Behaviour held at Concordia in June 1990.

Annual reports from 1983 to 1992 also identified ongoing concerns about mental health issues, admission or progression decisions in professional programs, and the need to surface graduate student problems early, while they are amenable to solutions. On leaving office, Simon stressed the dual role of the ombudsperson: to resolve individual cases and to raise awareness about broader or systemic issues. She concluded:

“Given the complexities which face the modern student, the increase in the student population and in programs and degrees offered at UVic, as well as the size of the ombudsperson’s caseload, I believe the entire community would benefit from expanding the existing model.”

(Charlene Simon, *Annual General Report*, April 1992).



Ombuds in Campus Media

Ombuds have publicized the office and discussed topics of interest using a range of campus media. Until the late 80s, the ombudsperson wrote a column in the *Martlet*. There were also occasional articles in *The Ring* or the *Torch*. In 1998, Kathleen Beattie began distributing the annual report as an insert in the *Martlet*. Today, the annual report is announced on the UVic website and available on-line.

In the first few years, ombuds worked as orientation officers in the summer and published *The Ombudsman's Guide to UVic*. The publication continued until the late 80's under different titles.

Ombudspersons have continued to participate in student orientation every year, providing workshops, leaflets and "ombuds tips to avoid pitfalls".

In the 80's, Illington created a CFUV radio show with interviews on topics of interest to the campus. Since then, ombuds have been interviewed on CFUV radio, written columns in the graduate students' magazine *The Unacknowledged Source* and taken ads in student handbooks. Images advertising the office have ranged from serious to more playful.

Ombudsman named for 3 month term



Martlet, February 24, 1978

Be Fair to Yourself - Use the Ombuds Office!

- Unsure about your rights and responsibilities?
- Problem-solving on campus?
- Appealing a grade or a decision?
- Don't know your options?

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ombuddy@uvic.ca

www.uvss.uvic.ca/ombudsperson

Student Union Building B205
Monday to Friday
See Website for drop-in times



INDEPENDENCE - CONFIDENTIALITY - IMPARTIALITY

Ombuds Chronology: Where are they now?

- **Joy Illington:** May 1, 1983-April 30, 1985. Illington went on to work for the Office of the Ombudsman of British Columbia before occupying several senior posts in the BC civil service. Today, Illington is an independent officer of the Legislative Assembly. As Merit Commissioner, she monitors fair and merit-based hiring and promotions in the BC Public Service.

- **Carol Hubberstey:** May 1, 1985-August 31, 1988. Hubberstey has been a consultant, trainer, and researcher since 1995 and is one of three partners in Notabene Consulting Group.

- **Lynda Dunham-Wilkie:** Sept. 1, 1988-August 31, 1989. Current activities unknown.

- **Charlene Simon:** Sept. 1, 1989-1991. Simon is on the board of the VicWest Community Association and acts as liaison to the Victoria Esquimalt Harbour Society and the Gorge Waterway initiative. She is also a volunteer with Restorative Justice Victoria.

BUILDING ON STRONG FOUNDATIONS: 1992 - 2008

With Kathleen Beattie's arrival, the position of ombudsperson became permanent. It continued to be funded by the UVSS for 20 hours a week, a level of service it had reached in its first year when the student population at UVic was around 7,000. By the mid-90s, enrolment had doubled, and the ombuds' caseload had grown accordingly. In her March 1, 1994 semi-annual report, Beattie noted an increase in the seriousness of complaints due to competitive entry requirements, higher fees and stress. More complexity meant more time spent on education, interventions and follow-up. The ombudsperson was also active in student and faculty orientation, served on several university committees, and offered workshops and talks on a variety of topics to students, staff and faculty.

In 1995, the Ombudsperson Advisory Committee (OAC) approached the university with a funding proposal for a full-time ombudsperson, noting that the office provided a service of benefit to all constituents on campus. The university administration declined the request, citing budget cut-backs at a time of financial constraints, while recognizing the value of the work conducted by the ombudsperson, and the reality of a workload "sufficient to keep a full-time ombudsperson occupied".

This led to a series of initiatives, starting with a 1996 assessment of services based on a confidential "client" survey. The results—covering questions about accessibility, sensitivity, confidentiality, effectiveness, impartiality and insights gained from the ombudsperson—showed a high level of satisfaction with the office and confirmed the need to increase staffing levels. In 1999, undergraduate students voted in a referendum to fund the office directly through a fee levy, replacing the funding provided by the UVSS board. They were followed by graduate students in 2002.

During the 2003 Equity and Fairness review at UVic, the OAC submitted a funding proposal that was approved by UVic in 2004. The resulting annual grant from the university increased service to full-time. Terms of reference for the committee were modified to provide for representation from graduate students and from the university administration, and a memorandum of agreement was signed by the UVSS, the GSS and UVic.

This period was also one of growth and change for the university: increased diversity among student, staff and faculty populations brought differing needs. In 1996, Beattie recommended the development and dissemination of a policy addressing the university's responsibilities under human rights legislation, in particular

regarding accommodation for students with disabilities. She also brought attention to different cultural norms in citations of academic work, and to the need for education and guidance about expectations at a North American university like UVic.

Beattie stresses "trouble-shooting" as an essential tool of the office, explaining that a call to someone in authority to say: "This situation is different and needs to be dealt with individually" can be a life altering intervention for a student in a complex system. She credits the California Caucus of College & University Ombuds and their progressive work on questions of race, climate and culture for informing her own contributions on campus. Beattie used anonymous case stories in her widely distributed annual report to educate students, staff and faculty about fair policies and procedures.

The focus on education at the individual and systemic levels continued with Martine Conway. Her first annual reports talked of the need to develop a "conflict resolving culture" on campus and used case stories to provide information for students on raising concerns effectively and constructively. The February 2007 report describes "coaching" as an educative tool used by the ombudsperson to improve

self-advocacy, negotiation and problem-solving skills, thus encouraging appropriate airing and resolution of grievances at the lowest levels of decision-making.

"The ombuds' role isn't one of power but one of influence," says Dr. James Anglin, Associate Vice-president Academic & Student Affairs. "The ombudsperson is there to try and make the process the most effective it can be and to work on prevention so that problems can be avoided. Reports often take a proactive stance about issues that could be systemic and need attention."

Since 2000, areas of focus have included mental health, climate in the classroom, graduate students & the supervisory relationship, and accommodation & academic concessions for students with a disability.

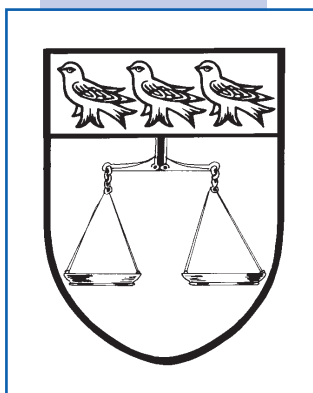


Ombuds Chronology: Where are they now?

- **Kathleen Beattie:** 1992-1999. Today, Kathleen Beattie is a member of the Ontario Bar and a practicing barrister and solicitor in North Bay.

- **Martine Conway:** 1999-present.

OFFICE LOGO



In 1981, Bruce Kilpatrick created the first logo for the office, modifying the UVic shield to combine the charge of three martlets (upper part of the shield) with the scales of justice (replacing UVic's image of the book).

In 2004, the university unified and standardized the use of its symbols and colours, providing Martine Conway with an opportunity to design an office-specific logo:



The **circle** is a symbol of infinite or all possibilities. It represents inclusion, confidentiality and the necessary link between individual situations and the systemic whole.

The **triangle** is a symbol of balance and strength. It signals a commitment to fairness, impartiality and the absence of bias. It also represents the dynamic process of transformation and creation.

The **bird** is a manifestation of spirit, transformation and growth. It represents aspirations and potential. It is also a symbol of freedom and peace, illustrating the independent nature of the ombuds function, and the ombuds role as agent for constructive change.

The bird casts a **shadow**, a representation of the process of integration in terms of personal development. It signals a commitment to reflective practice for the ombudsperson, and offers that same reflective lens to the community served by the office.



Issues and the Ombuds' Impact at a Glance

The ombudsperson makes recommendations on individual and systemic issues. **Grading procedures** were recurring themes in early ombuds annual reports. Out of a total of 106 cases in 1978-79, Beatty-Guenter reported 28 grading-related cases involving 41 students. Concerns included bell curving, non-adherence to the course outline and differing procedures in multi-sections courses. Over the years, several ombudspersons have provided input into the development of **grade review procedures** and **fair grading practices**.

During his tenure, Cooper was instrumental in improving **senate appeal procedures**, in particular the right for students to hear the evidence provided by a department or faculty, a key principle of natural justice. Holmes brought attention to the need for proper **invigilation of exams**, especially the use of I.D. checks and the appropriate storing of exams. Illington commented on a policy paper on plagiarism and called for **due process in plagiarism cases**.

During the 80s and early 90's, the campus saw the development of many important policies and services on campus. In 1983-84, Illington provided input into the **bookstore's** policy on returns and refunds and **student financial aid services'** policy on appeals. She spoke on **sexual assault prevention** in residence and participated in new faculty orientation. Illington and Hubberstey served on the Committee on Equal Rights and Opportunities, helping to create the **first policy on sexual harassment** and the **first sexual harassment officer position** at UVic. In 1990-91, Simon participated in the creation of the **Fee Reduction Appeals** committee.

In 1986, Hubberstey's annual report documented the difficulties faced by **international students** and called for the creation of **services tailored to specific student populations** (e.g. women, First Nations, students with disabilities, international students). In 1990-91, Simon asked for **clarification of teaching assistants' roles**. She raised **privacy and safety** concerns related to the library's practice of giving out names and phone numbers of students to other students. Before Family Housing existed on campus, she brought up the needs of **students with families**. In the mid-90s, Beattie intervened to clarify **working conditions for student employees**, especially minimum hours of work, and she made presentations to chairs and directors on **climate in the classroom**.

The influence of the ombuds office has reached beyond campus. In the early 80s, Kilpatrick recalls guiding an admission appeal all the way to the Lieutenant Governor General of British Columbia. He also made a presentation to what is now the Ministry of Advanced Education on behalf of **single parents** who received the same funding as students without dependants. This led to a change in **BC's student financial aid system**, recognizing the need of single parents. In 1983, Illington was successful in having a Ministry of Human Resources **day-care subsidy** reinstated after it had been abolished. 1988-89, Dunham-Wilkie worked with several former students seeking interest relief from their **student loan debt** and brought unfair regulations to the attention of the Secretary of State for Canada and the opposition critic.

"I think that often times the office of the ombudsperson has helped uncover systemic problems built into our system(...) It has actually been a very powerful tool in affecting change, because it hasn't been a function of people feeling they are compelled to do something against their will. They feel like they are making a change to make the system better." David Clode, Executive Director of Student and Ancillary Services (December 2007 interview)

Ombuds interventions have increased students' chances at retention and completion. Hubberstey liaised with the Registrar's office to ensure that students

required to withdraw from UVic because of low grade point average were sent an accompanying letter from the ombuds office with guidance on writing an appeal, a practice still followed today. Simon successfully recommended a change to Senate, so that students registered in fewer than 4.5 units whose gpa fell below 1 for the first time are placed on **probation** rather than required to withdraw.

Beattie and Conway made recommendations for improved **appeal and decision-making procedures in two professional faculties**, in particular for questions of admission and requirements to withdraw. Increased outreach to **graduate students** led to more students coming to the office at an earlier stage, making the resolution of **progression or supervision problems** more frequent. Conway also recommended the addition of a Calendar entry on **academic concessions** (Calendar 03-04).

In 2000, Conway **provided conflict resolution** training to staff, managers and faculty in a pilot project involving the Equity office, Human Resources and the Learning and Teaching Centre. Today, Human Resources offers a range of workshops for staff professional development. In 2004, Conway drafted a discussion paper for chairs, directors and deans on **academic concessions and accommodation for students with mental health issues**. Since then, ombuds reports and interventions have provided guidance on dealing fairly with sensitive or difficult questions like **interpersonal conflict and a mental health issue**, or **academic accommodation and academic requirements**.



Case Work and Committee Membership at UVic

The ombuds office handles over 400 individual complaints or requests for assistance from students every year, relating to academic decisions, administrative processes and service delivery in all aspects of student life. The response from the ombudsperson may include information & referral, advice & coaching, or intervention. The ombudsperson also receives questions from faculty and staff on student fairness issues. Approximately 75 to 80 % of academic issues are dealt with at the departmental level (instructor or chair), which encourages effective early resolution of grievances.

Over the years, ombudspersons have also served on the Women Studies' Sub-committee on the Status of Women Students, the Learning and Teaching Centre Advisory Committee, the Peer Helpers Advisory Committee, the Campus Security Committee, the Campus Restorative Justice Group, the Human Rights committee, the Advisory Committee on Academic Accommodation and Access for Students with a Disability, and the working group on Mental Health Promotion and Suicide Prevention. They have conducted workshops for students, staff and faculty on fair process, academic integrity, equity & human rights, conflict & communication.



Influence on the Development of the Ombuds Field

From the inception of the office, ombuds at UVic have maintained links with their counterparts on university and college campuses. In 1983, Illington participated in the ombuds conference held at Concordia that saw the founding of the Association of Canadian College and University Ombudspersons (ACCUO).

Since then, ombuds have been active members of ACCUO as well as the California Caucus of College and University Ombudspersons (CCCUCO) and several other organizations. In the 80's, Hubberstey helped define membership criteria for ACCUO. She recommended an approach distinguishing ombuds from non-ombuds, yet respecting the diversity of practice on college and university campuses in Canada. This is still ACCUO's approach today.

Over the years, ombuds have participated in planning regional, national and international ombuds meetings and conferences. They have liaised with the provincial ombudsman and with academic ombudsman offices in BC, and provided support and information to campuses interested in starting or reviewing their ombuds program, for example: Camosun College, Langara College, and more recently Simon Fraser, UBC.

In the 90's Beattie became a member of ACCUO's executive committee and began writing for CCCUCO's Journal. Conway has contributed several articles to CCCUCO's peer-reviewed Journal. She has regularly presented at and participated in planning conferences for several ombuds associations. She is in her second term as president of ACCUO, and in 2006 she received the Pete Small Award from CCCUCO for her contribution to the ombuds field.

THE FUTURE: a Changing Environment

“The office has a lot of credibility and it is very strongly supported, both in principle and now to some degree in funding. I think it is a key part of the due process structure within the university.”

Dr. James P. Anglin, Associate Vice-president Academic and Student Affairs, 2008.

In 1980, Stanley Anderson¹ wrote that “the ombudsman method of persuasion is eminently appropriate” in educational institutions because it fosters “an environment conducive to mutual learning by stimulating effective communication”. If so, it is greatly relevant today, at a time of increased internationalization, changing technology and competition to attract and retain an ever more diverse student, staff and faculty population.

Ombuds offices are now well established in Canadian universities and colleges, usually funded from institutional budgets or through equal contributions from the institution and the students. At UVic, undergraduate and graduate students jointly contribute about seventy-five percent of the funding. Thanks to their commitment to ombuds principles of independence and impartiality, the “ombudsman experiment” started 30 years ago by their peers has stood the test of time.

Since the creation of the office, the ombudsperson has acted both as a bridge between people and systems, and as a catalyst for positive change. Credit is due to the students who bring questions and concerns to the office, helping to identify areas in need of improvement. Much of the success has also been possible because of the willingness of staff, faculty and administrators to resolve issues at the source. In a changing university environment, the ombuds office provides a conduit for individual voices to be heard and for building a consensus on fair and respectful treatment. It is part of the culture of fairness at UVic.

1. Anderson, Stanley V. (1980) Ombudsman Readings: International Ombudsman Institute. See also Introduction and note 1 page 1.



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