

# ***McGILL UNIVERSITY***



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## **Twenty-Ninth Annual Report** (June 1<sup>st</sup>, 2015 – May 31<sup>st</sup>, 2016)

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**Ombudsperson for Students**

**January 2017**

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Submitted to the McGill University Senate<sup>1</sup>  
Presented January 18th, 2017

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<sup>1</sup> In accordance with the terms of reference of the Office: Approved by McGill University Senate, April 23, 1986, Minute 84; Approved by the Board of Governors, May 26, 1986, Minute 6085; Amended by Senate, December 9, 1992, Minute 32. Amended by Senate, January 21, 2009, Minute 5; Approved by the Executive Committee, May 19, 2009, Minute 4.2.

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# 1. Introduction

This report covers the activities of the Office of the Ombudsperson for Students from June 1<sup>st</sup>, 2015 to May 31<sup>st</sup>, 2016, during which Prof. Dimitrios Berk undertook his second year of a five-year mandate as Ombudsperson for Students started on September 1<sup>st</sup>, 2014.

## 1.1 Mandate

The mandates of University Ombudspersons vary from institution to institution in Canada and abroad. Each academic institution's approach to the role of the ombudsperson has unique features; however the essence of the mandate is generally universal. A document on the Standards of Practice produced by ACCUO (Association of Canadian Colleges and Universities Ombudspersons) can be found at: [http://www.uwo.ca/ombuds/accuo\\_aucc/english/SoP.pdf](http://www.uwo.ca/ombuds/accuo_aucc/english/SoP.pdf)

The role, function and scope of activity of the McGill Ombudsperson for Students are specified in the Handbook on Student Rights and Responsibilities:

<http://www.mcgill.ca/secretariat/files/secretariat/Ombudsperson-Students-English.pdf>

In the Terms of Reference, Article 1.1 states the following:

*The mandate of the Ombudsperson for Students (OFS) shall be to:*

- (i) provide an independent, impartial and confidential process through which a student may seek the just, fair and equitable resolution of any university-related concern where normal non-adversarial administrative channels for addressing such matters are inappropriate in the circumstances or prove ineffective;*
- (ii) where appropriate, review University policies, guidelines and procedures affecting students and make recommendations for change normally to the relevant University administrative officer;*
- (iii) where appropriate, promote discussion of University-wide student related concerns.*

When issues arise, the McGill Ombudsperson is asked to provide assistance to students to avoid recourse to the more formal grievance processes of the University; thus McGill's Office of the Ombudsperson for Students offers informal dispute resolution services, and it is not "an office of notice" (as per article 5.2 of the Terms of Reference).

## **1.2 The Process**

The process at the McGill University Office of the Ombudsperson for Students is generally as follows:

Students contact the office by phone or email to request an appointment. A meeting is scheduled and some information is requested so that the Ombudsperson has an initial understanding of the issue. If the student prefers to speak to the Ombudsperson without providing any information before the meeting, her or his preference is respected. Students fill out an Intake Form (see Appendix B), which is available at the Office or from the website (<http://www.mcgill.ca/ombudsperson>).

Once details of the situation have been provided by the student, information, advice and/or possible options are discussed, depending on the nature of the concern. Students are always informed that all conversations within the Office are held in strict confidence. If additional intervention by the Ombudsperson is necessary the student is asked for specific permission to do so.

Attempts to arrive at a resolution may require several days and include a dialogue with concerned parties. These typically require contact with various unit Directors or Associate Deans of Student Affairs, Chairs, Professors, Graduate Program Directors, Advisors, Supervisors and other academic and non-academic members of the University.

The Ombudsperson also makes referrals, explains University policies and procedures and serves as a sounding board for students who are uncertain about how to deal with a situation.

It is important to note that frequently students resolve their situations on their own by following advice given by the Office. In some cases simply being given the opportunity to speak openly and confidentially will result in the resolution of the student's concern.

The Ombudsperson may also provide feedback to university members (academic and non-academic) and units regarding issues that have been brought to his attention.

## **1.3 Visibility**

Students requesting our services learn about the existence of the Office in a variety of ways (see Table 1).

**Table 1: Sources of awareness of services (%)**

Referred By	2011-12	2012-13	2013-14	2014-15	2015-16
Website	18.4	19	27.2	26.2	27.9
Student Handbook/Calendar	2	2.4	2.9	0.7	0.5
Poster	0	0.8	0.5	0	0.5
Staff (academic/non-academic)	12.8	14.6	11.7	11.4	14.9
Student/Friend	14.4	10.5	14.1	12.1	12.9
Student-run Org.	1.6	0	1.9	1.3	5
Student Services	5.6	4.5	3.4	11.4	8.5
Other	9.6	8.5	8.3	12.8	10
Unknown	35.6	39.7	30	24.2	20
<b>Total</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>100%</b>

As a form of outreach, the Office staff is present at student orientation activities where information regarding the Ombuds Office is available. In addition since the beginning of his mandate, the Ombudsperson for Students meets with key unit directors to promote a better understanding of the function/role of the Ombuds Office on a regular basis.

The Office is also listed as a student resource in various University services/publications, providing contact information/link to the Office website. These include:

- eCalendars: [Undergraduate](#) ; [Graduate & Postdoctoral Studies](#); [School of Continuing Studies](#) ; [Health Sciences](#); [Summer Studies](#)
- [Post Graduate Society of McGill University \(PGSS\) online Hand Book](#)
- Student Rights and Responsibilities: [Handbook](#); [Dignity](#); [Resolving Disputes](#); [Research Ethics](#); [Research Supervision](#); [Conflicts of Interest](#); [Freedom from Harassment](#); [Contact Us](#)
- SSMU [Equity](#)
- [Campus Life & Engagement](#) (listed under Student Life)
- [Welcome to McGill's MacDonald Campus](#) (listed under Students Services)
- [Academic Advising](#) (listed under Resources for Students: Who's Who)
- [Undergraduate Medical Education](#)
- [Faculty of Medicine: Office of Admissions](#) (listed under Harassment & Discrimination)
- [Skillsets](#) (listed under Quick Links)
- [I've Been Accepted](#)
- [Welcome to Graduate & Postdoctoral Studies](#) (listed under Resources and Regulations)

## 2. Service Statistics

### 2.1 Individuals and Groups Served

The following table shows the distribution of individuals and groups who requested the services of the Office:

**Table 2: Total number of requests for assistance**

Type	2011-12	2012-13	2013-14	2014-15	2015-16
Students (Applying, Current/Returning, Former students)	250	247	206	149	<b>201</b>
Groups	1	5	2	1	<b>1</b>
Faculty & Staff	8	12	8	12	<b>3</b>
Community Requests	12	12	5	8	<b>6</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>271</b>	<b>276</b>	<b>221</b>	<b>170</b>	<b>211</b>

The mandate of the Ombudsperson for Students, in Article 1.2, defines 'student' as follows: *'Student' means a person who is, or within the past twelve months was, registered in the University as a student, whether or not as a candidate for a degree, diploma or certificate.*<sup>2</sup>

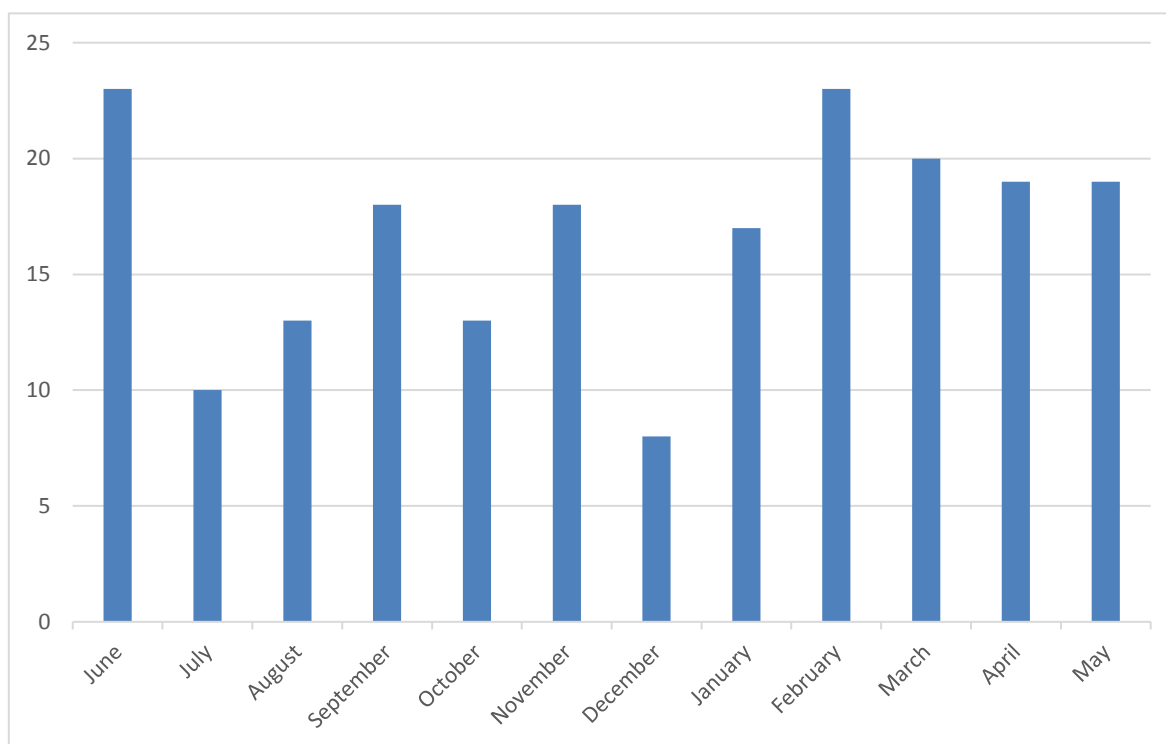
#### 2.1.1 Patterns of Use of the Office

Figure 1 shows a month-by-month pattern of when requests for an appointment or assistance were received in 2015-16.

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<sup>2</sup> <http://www.mcgill.ca/secretariat/files/secretariat/Ombudsperson-Students-English.pdf>

**Figure 1: Number of student requests on a month-by-month basis in 2015-2016**



### 2.1.2 Summary of Students' Requests

The following table provides information with regard to the distribution of requests by students:

**Table 3: Student requests for assistance by educational level in % (number)**

Education Level	2013-14	2014-15	2015-16
Undergraduate	51.5	44.3	<b>49.8</b>
Graduate	44	49	<b>45.8</b>
Resident/ Fellow	1.9	6.7	<b>0.5</b>
Postdoc	1.4	0	<b>2</b>
Other	1	0	<b>2</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>100 (206)</b>	<b>100 (149)</b>	<b>100 (201)</b>



### 3. Nature of Student Concerns and Resolutions

#### 3.1 Categories of Concerns

Table 4: Cases by issue-type

Issue Type	Issue	2011-12	2012-13	2013-14	2014-15	2015-16
<b>Academic</b>	Admission	19	15	18	14	14
	Advising	2	2	1	1	4
	Courses/Program	28	30	23	8	16
	Examinations	14	14	9	6	10
	Inter / intra faculty transfer	1	1	0	2	1
	Marks/Grades	52	48	31	20	36
	Practicum/Field Work/Stage	9	9	10	7	6
	Probation/Exclusion	8	11	6	5	6
	Other	19	5	8	6	12
	<b>Subtotal</b>	<b>152</b>	<b>135</b>	<b>106</b>	<b>69</b>	<b>105</b>
<b>Inter-personal</b>	Administrator/academic	3	2	3	2	3
	Administrator /non-academic	3	1	2	0	2
	Course Instructor / TA's	8	18	12	11	13
	Invigilators	0	0	0	0	0
	Lab instructor/ demonstrator	1	0	1	1	0
	Other Student (s)	3	1	1	2	2
	Research / Thesis Supervisor	29	18	30	31	31
	Other	8	11	9	2	6
	<b>Subtotal</b>	<b>55</b>	<b>51</b>	<b>58</b>	<b>49</b>	<b>57</b>
<b>Finances</b>	Loan / Bursary	1	4	2	1	0
	Quebec Residency fee status	0	1	1	0	1
	Scholarship	2	3	8	2	4
	Stipend	0	0	0	0	1
	Student Fees	15	11	8	10	9
	Other	4	6	6	1	1
	<b>Subtotal</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>25</b>	<b>25</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>16</b>
<b>Student Services</b>		<b>2</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>University Units</b>		<b>5</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>Student-run Org.</b>		<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>
<b>Residence Life</b>		<b>3</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Student Discipline</b>	Academic offense	2	8	2	1	7
	Non-Academic offense	1	0	1	1	0
	<b>Subtotal</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>Procedural Issues</b>		<b>0</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Intellectual Property</b>		<b>3</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>0</b>
<b>Harassment</b>		<b>1</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>0</b>
<b>Safety/Security</b>		<b>0</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>
<b>Abuse of power</b>		<b>1</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>
<b>Discrimination</b>	Sexual orientation	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Other</b>		<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>0</b>
<b>TOTAL</b>		<b>250</b>	<b>247</b>	<b>206</b>	<b>149</b>	<b>201</b>

### 3.2 (a) Resolution Categories

The total number of student requests for assistance during the current activity year of 201 is broken down into two categories of resolution:

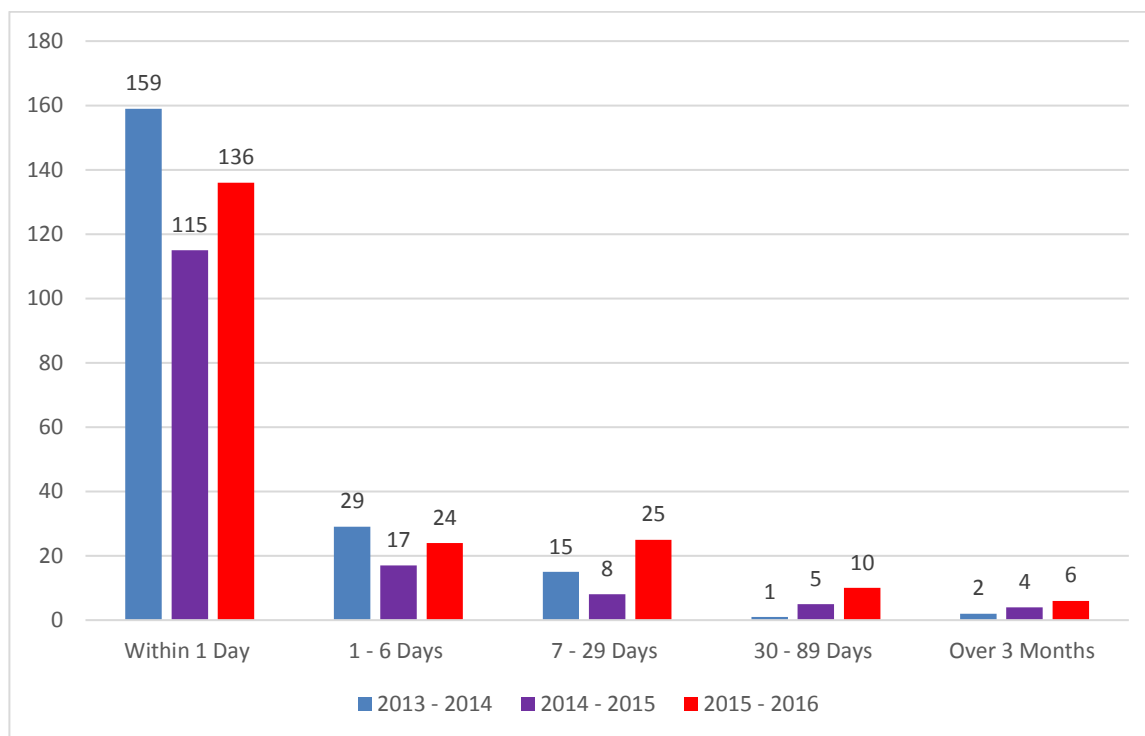
(i) *information/advice*: listening; suggesting an approach/coaching; determining options/referrals; explaining policies: 89.1%

(ii) *intervention*: individual or multi-party discussions and proposals: 10.9%

### (b) Duration of Assistance

In order to provide an indication of the length of time it takes the Office to deal with issues brought forth, Figure 3 below describes the approximate length of time from the opening to the closing date of a file.

**Figure 3: Number of students per duration of assistance**



## 4. Professional Activities

The McGill Ombudsperson for Students is a member of the following associations: *Association des Ombudsmans des Universités du Québec* (AOUQ) and Association of Canadian College and University Ombudspersons (ACCUO). Since 2010, Ms. Carmela Parzanese, Assistant to the Ombudsperson, holds a position on the Executive Committee of ACCUO.

During the reporting period, the Office has participated in meetings and/or conferences organized by AOUQ and ACCUO.

Attendance at meetings with ombudspersons from other universities and active participation at these meetings continue to be an important commitment of the Office, resulting in a fruitful sharing of policies and experiences.

## 5. Acknowledgements

I wish to acknowledge senior administrative officer Carmela Parzanese's invaluable contribution to the Office. Students greatly benefit from her experience, knowledge and pedagogy when communicating with the Office. I also wish to thank Sara Cornett for her assistance.

Also the numerous expressions of gratitude from students who sought help from the office and the cooperation from McGill administrators, staff and professors in the endeavor to resolve student concerns are gratefully acknowledged.

Respectfully Submitted,

**Dimitrios Berk**  
**Ombudsperson for Students**



**Description of your request for assistance:**

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**Others Consulted:**

Name / Title / Office

**Authorization:**

I understand that the Ombudsperson will treat my complaint in a confidential manner as appropriate, with the utmost care and respect for me and those individuals concerned.

I authorize the Ombudsperson, or his/her associate, to communicate with persons involved with my complaint and to access all official files and information on me held by the University and third parties as the Ombudsperson deems necessary to fulfill his/her function.

Signature:

Date: