



OFFICE OF THE **OMBUDSPERSON**

**2009/10**

**Office of the Ombudsperson  
Annual Report**

## Welcome!

This report reviews the activities of the Office of the Ombudsperson for the 2009/10 year, providing statistics on who visited the office, why they visited us, and how we dealt with their concerns.

The report takes a different approach than in the past. First, although the statistical area of the report ("The Numbers") covers the period from August 1, 2009 to July 31, 2010, the written areas touch on some of the activities that the office has taken on in the subsequent year – August 1, 2010 to July 31, 2011.

Second, this report is more targeted at students than past reports. When introducing the office to students, we often hear "Ombudsperson? What's that? What does an Ombudsperson do?" Although it is important for this document to inform all members of the university community about the activities of the office, this edition of the report also strives to remove for students the mystery surrounding the Office of the Ombudsperson.

So students – undergraduate, graduate, Canadian, International, main campus and affiliate – hopefully by reading what type of issues your peers approach our office with, and how we address those issues, you will learn how we can help you.

**Jennifer Meister**  
*Acting Ombudsperson 2010/11*

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## GETTING YOUR Money's Worth

The Office of the Ombudsperson is jointly funded by the University and the University Students' Council. The Ombudsperson reports to no individual on campus, but to an advisory committee made up of students and staff/faculty. These factors combine to ensure that the Office of the Ombudsperson remains impartial and independent. Another essential feature of the office is confidentiality. We don't divulge names or identifying details without an individual's permission.

The functions of the Office of the Ombudsperson are outlined in the Memorandum of Agreement between the University of Western Ontario and the University Students' Council. They are:

- To carry out impartial investigations of complaints or grievances about any aspect of university life at the request of any student, or upon the Ombudsperson's own motion. Before undertaking an investigation, the Ombudsperson will ensure that other avenues have been exhausted. The office may offer advisory support at any stage, to assist a person to resolve a problem by him or herself, and to avoid more formal procedures (such as appeals to the Senate Review Board Academic).
- To serve as a general information centre for students and other members of the university community about university resources, procedures, policies, practices and rules. The office will advise students of their rights and responsibilities in university situations. The Ombudsperson is expected to search actively for the answers to any pertinent questions.
- To make recommendations to those in authority with a view to remedying unfairness in the situation of an individual student, as appropriate.
- To recommend to those in authority, changes in rules or procedures which would have the effect of making the university, the USC or any other signatory fairer in its operations.

As students, you help fund the Office of the Ombudsperson. Use it. We do not advocate for students, or the university, but rather for fairness. Sometimes just explaining why a professor's decision is fair and according to university policy is all you need to put a situation behind you. However, sometimes the university is being unfair – and we can help you remedy the situation.





# The Numbers

In 2009-10, 366 students visited the Office of the Ombudsperson, with a total of 373 complaints and/or questions. This was down from 438 in 2008-09 and 419 in 2007-08. Two possible reasons for the decline in visits are the construction that was taking place in the

University Community Centre during the year – closing the office to drop-in visitors for a period of time, and the office move in April 2010. Later in this report, you will read about initiatives undertaken by office staff to publicize the office's new location.

Who visits the office?

Why do students visit the office?

What kind of help do students need?

Who else visits the office?

How can you contact us?

## Who visits the office?

As stated above, 366 students visited the Office of the Ombudsperson between August 1, 2009 and July 31, 2010. The breakdown of the faculties those students came from, and a comparison to the previous two years, is below:

### Undergraduate Students

Faculty	2009/10	2008/2009	2007/08
Undergraduate Unknown	97	105	99
Social Science	65	75	77
Science	39	53	49
Arts	19	10	26
Huron College	14	Less than 10	10
Engineering	12	22	21
King's	12	22	12
Nursing	10	19	11

All other Faculties, Schools and Affiliated University Colleges had fewer than 10 students who used the office during the 2009/10 year.

### Graduate Students

Faculty	2009/10	2008/09	2007/08
Master's Health Sciences	13	5	10
PhD Science	8	5	6
PhD Engineering	8	3	3
Master's Science	5	Less than 3	4
Master's FIMS	5	6	Less than 10
PhD Arts	5	Less than 3	3
Master's Arts	4	3	7
PhD Unknown	4	7	Less than 10
Master's Engineering	4	Less than 3	Less than 3
SGPS Unknown	4	14	5
PhD Social Science	3	Less than 3	Less than 3
Master's Social Science	3	Less than 3	Less than 3

All other Graduate programs had fewer than three students who used the office.

## Why do students visit the office?

Students come to the Office of the Ombudsperson with a variety of complaints and inquiries. Perhaps they want to know how to appeal a grade or perhaps they need advice on their application for readmission.

### Top Ten Concerns – Undergraduate

Concern	2009/10	2008/09	2007/08
Grade issues	52	68	67
Required to withdraw	35	47	33
Readmission	30	28	21
Appeal Exams	27	24	32
Other Academic	18	14	Less than 10
Appeal Other	17	24	12
Course Management	15	20	29
Program Requirements	13	Less than 10	17
Other UWO	11	Less than 10	14
Registration/Add Drop	10	20	Less than 10

### Top Concerns – Graduate

Concern	2009/10	2008/09	2007/08
Supervision	28	14	12
Other Academic	12	8	9
Progression	7	14	3
Funding	7	Less than 3	5
Scholastic Offense	5	Less than 3	3
Equity	5	8	3
Grades	3	Less than 3	3

## What kind of help do students need?

The Office of the Ombudsperson categorizes cases by type: Information, Advice, and Intervention.

The Information category normally includes short consultations which involve providing students with information about a university policy or procedure and/or referring them to another campus service or resource.

The Advice category normally includes more lengthy consultations that involve one or more of the following: helping

a student to understand a decision, identifying options for resolution, explaining the steps of the appeal process, providing feedback on letters of appeal, and coaching a student about how to effectively approach a particular situation.

An Intervention from the Office of the Ombudsperson only occurs with a student's permission. Interventions often take the form of information gathering, mediation, facilitating communication between students and departments, shuttle diplomacy and case reviews.

Action type	2009-10	2008-09	2007-08
Advice	249	270	227
Information	99	137	150
Intervention	25	31	42

## Who else visits the office?

As mentioned earlier in this report, the Office of the Ombudsperson isn't just here for students. We also respond to inquiries from faculty, students' family members, and members of the London Community who have questions about a policy or practice at Western. Each year, at least 60% of non-student contacts relate to student issues such as equity issues, grades, and general concerns about Western services.

Client Identity	2009-10	2008-09	2007-08
Family member of student or applicant	33	24	24
Other	14	20	18
Faculty member	12	19	20
Staff	9	13	13

## How Can You Contact Us?

It's easy to contact the Office of the Ombudsperson. You can phone us, e-mail us, or drop by our office in the Western Student Services Building. When you first contact us, we will have you complete an intake sheet. This is strictly for tracking purposes so that we can produce documents like this report and can better understand what issues need our attention. There is no need to disclose your name. Information is not shared with anyone outside the office without your approval.

*Sometimes an issue can be solved over the phone or through email, however we will often set up a meeting with you to discuss an issue.*

Initial Contact	2009-10	2008-09	2007-08
Email	149	163	157
Drop-In	78	144	127
Phone	131	88	121



# 2010-11 Activities

Since September 2010, the Office of the Ombudsperson has been putting increased resources into promotion. The Acting Ombudsperson developed a communications plan focusing primarily on outreach to students, but also to residence staff, academic counsellors and associate deans – university employees who have daily contact with students.

The office maintained four of their on-going promotional activities of providing pens to Graduate students when they pick up their bus passes in January, sponsoring the undergraduate bus pass holders, running ads at Western Film, and running classified ads in The Gazette. In addition, a display ad was run in the final issue of the academic year—April 7, as well as in The Gazette's Off Campus issue, on stands April 8. The office also had an advertorial in the April 8 issue. The office also put ads and articles in the newsletters of all the Affiliated Colleges, Western Connections – the newsletter produced by the Student Success Centre for parents of first year students, and faculty newsletters where applicable.

Throughout the 2010-11 academic year, the Acting Ombudsperson spoke to residence staff at all three affiliated university colleges; main campus residence staff; international and graduate student orientation participants; academic counselors; Office of the Registrar staff; and University Students' Council and Society of Graduate Student councilors. These presentations were useful, providing an opportunity to discuss how we can work together to make a student's experience at Western the best it can be. All groups were also given posters and pamphlets for distribution in their areas.

The office held an open house in the Fall of 2010. This will be an annual event in an effort to enhance the synergy between the Office of the Ombudsperson and other student services on campus, and to raise awareness about the office's services.

Almost weekly, a student comments to Ombuds staff that they wish they had known about the office earlier in their time at Western. Even though the office has

worked tirelessly in the past to educate campus about the office, there is a continuing influx of students and the reality of human beings to not pay attention to something until it is needed. For this reason, the Office of the Ombudsperson has been investing to ensure that the office and its services are front of mind for students when they encounter an issue on campus.

The office is expanding its use of technology, investing in its online strategy and investigating the office's use of social media. Ombuds offices in many sectors have discussed the pros and cons of Facebook, Twitter and other social media. While the "friending" and "following" nature of Facebook and Twitter risk the appearance of bias on the part of the Ombudsperson, the Acting Ombudsperson has investigated ways that these tools can be used to communicate to our audience without risking our impartiality. For the purposes of the Ombudsperson, Facebook may be an ideal place to post the University's most pertinent policies and processes such as appeal processes. Facebook Advertising is also a very economical way to get in front of students. For the cohort arriving in September 2011, the Acting Ombudsperson will have ads on pages frequented by University of Western Ontario students.

Needless to say, it is important that students can find the office! The Assistant Ombudsperson has taken the lead in ensuring signage is noticeable and the office easily found. The web site was updated with a pictorial map to our location, and building signs in Western Student Services have been updated to include the Office of the Ombudsperson. There is also new signage on the doors to the suite and the Ombudsperson offices. It is important for students to have a certain amount of confidentiality when looking for the office. It needs to be easily located.

In addition to activities that market the office and its services, the Assistant Ombudsperson and Acting Ombudsperson have both attended professional development events focusing on the role of the Ombudsperson in post secondary institutions and organizations as a whole.



The Office of the Ombudsperson is located in  
Rooms 3100B and C  
of the Western Student Services Building.

# Thank You!

In the daily work of the Office of the Ombudsperson we contact numerous individuals and offices across campus. Without the cooperation of academic counselors; academic administrators; Secretariat staff; Society of Graduate Students staff and student leaders; and University Student Council leaders, the office would not be able to fulfill its mandate. It is these constituencies that ultimately help us serve you.

The Office of the Ombudsperson is overseen by the Office of the Ombudsperson Advisory Committee. The members of the committee are volunteers who act as sounding boards for programs, review documents and provide input to the office budget. Thank you to this group who is always so supportive of our activities.

Most of all, the Office would not function without the tireless efforts of Anita Pouliot, Assistant Ombudsperson. Anita looks at all sides of an issue and does not stop asking questions until she is satisfied she has a complete view of the situation.



**Open to all students.** Confidential, impartial advice and information about University policies and procedures. This office serves graduate and undergraduate students.

**Western Student Services Building, Room 3100b**  
519-661-3573 • [ombuds@uwo.ca](mailto:ombuds@uwo.ca) • [www.uwo.ca/ombuds](http://www.uwo.ca/ombuds)

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