



# 2011/12 Office of the Ombudsperson Annual Report

## 18% Increase in Visitors

Each year I say that I will get the Office of the Ombudsperson Annual Report out sooner. Each year I strive to get it written in October or November. Yet each year our office gets inundated with students and the next thing I know it's January and I am once again apologizing for not getting the report out.

None-the-less, I get excited when I see how busy we are. When we ran the numbers for the 2011/12 reporting period, I was ecstatic that our intake of students had grown by 18%. Between August 1, 2011 and July 31, 2012 we saw 496 students about 538 different issues, as opposed to 421 students for the same period the year before.

At an initial read of this, you might say, don't you want that number to go down? If more students come to see you, doesn't it mean that there are more issues on campus? NO! It means that word is getting out about our services and that students, faculty and staff are telling students about our Office. It means that the \$3.00 each student pays toward the Ombuds Office each year is worthwhile, and hopefully it means that students are better prepared when they meet with their Academic Counselor, Associate Dean, Supervisor or Appeal Panel.

### More than meeting with students

Assistant Ombudsperson Anita Pouliot and I don't just spend our days meeting with students. Last year we led sessions and participated in panels at events such as New Faculty Orientation and the Summer Academic Leaders Conference; with staff from the Teaching Support Centre, we presented to Graduate Students on the topic of Conflict Management; we participated in training of the Student Appeals Support Committee; and for the first time in many years we held office hours at an affiliate college. Not many students visited us on our Fridays at King's University College, but this activity was good exposure for the Office.

We also attended the Association of Canadian College and University Ombudspersons (ACCUO) meetings in Quebec City and Edmonton – great opportunities to learn how other post secondary institutions are tackling similar situations to those we face. Assistant Ombudsperson Anita Pouliot continues as Treasurer of ACCUO.

### Recommendation: Academic Integrity Office desperately needed on campus

Although much of our day-to-day work involves advising students on one-off situations, we do get recurring issues that make us ask whether Western should be doing something differently to avoid an issue in the future. One such issue which jumped to the forefront last academic year was academic integrity. Paper writing services are mass emailing Western students with claims of easing stress and "easy As"; students are offering to write other students' on-line quizzes; and the possession of cell phones in exams is an increasing problem.

Western is one of the few universities in Ontario without an Academic Integrity Office. Some offices, like that at the University of Windsor, serve a dual role. They exist to educate their communities about academic integrity, as well as to investigate offenses and help mediate a resolution. Others, like the offices at Brock University and the University of Waterloo, have been put in place to educate students about what constitutes a scholastic offense and to promote ethical activity. The Academic Integrity Office at Ryerson University spearheaded a policy whereby every student writing an exam in one of the large exam halls is given a zip lock bag in which to put their cell phone and other electronic communication equipment. The bag is then placed under the student's desk and cannot be "unzipped" until the exam is over.

In 2011-12 our office voluntarily took on portions of academic integrity education and met with Western Libraries and the Writing Support Centre to lay the groundwork for further Academic Integrity initiatives. This academic year (2012/13) we have instigated further activities and distributed Academic Integrity materials under the theme – Add Integrity to Your Resume. The School of Graduate and Post Doctoral Studies has boldly instituted an academic integrity module that as of the 2013 Winter term is required of each incoming graduate student. Kim Holland of the Teaching Support Centre has transferred the Undergraduate Academic Integrity module to Sakai and is encouraging instructors to incorporate it in their courses. Also this academic year, Dr Ken Meadows of

Teaching and Learning Services spearheaded the Academic Integrity Survey which will help the University better understand faculty and student perspectives on academic integrity.

However, Western needs a coordinated effort to ensure every student is clear about what constitutes a scholastic offense, and that offenses are caught and students are sanctioned as appropriate and in a timely manner. Additionally, we need to ensure professors know the most effective methods of deterring academic misconduct. With the University's strategic focus on internationalization it is even more critical that we strengthen our academic integrity education and inform students of North American expectations.

### Review and Ask Questions

I encourage you to review this report and ask questions. Anita and I are always open to input and happy to respond to inquiries about the Office. We also have an Advisory Committee to whom you can pass feedback. Our Committee last year was made up of Dr Susanne Kohalmi, Dept of Biology, Senate Representative; Dr Nanda Dimitrov, Associate Director; Teaching Support Centre, President's Designate; Marissa Joffre, VP Campus Issues, University Students' Council President Representative; Barshan Quadry, President, King's University College Students' Council, Affiliate Student Representative; Dr Barbara Decker Pierce, Social Work, King's University College, Affiliate Representative; and Jahidur Rahman, VP External Affairs & Communications, Society of Graduate Students Representative.

Jennifer Meister  
Ombudsperson

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# The Numbers

This section provides a statistical breakdown of the office's caseload. It answers the frequently-asked questions of:

*Who* visits the office?

*Why* do students visit the office?

*What* kind of help can you provide?

*Who* besides students comes to you for help?

*How* can I contact you?

*Who* visits the office?

This is the breakdown of STUDENTS who visit our office. Between August 1, 2011 and July 31, 2012, 496 students visited the Office of the Ombudsperson a total of 538 times. In other words, some students visited our office more than once. This was up from 421 in 2010-11. Please note that just because a student from the Faculty of Social Science visits our office, doesn't necessarily mean the student came to see us about an issue in Social Science. However, these demographics help us target our marketing.

## Undergraduate Students

Faculty	2011/12	2010/11	2009/2010
Social Science	108	73	65
Undergraduate faculty not identified by student	107	113	97
Science	67	37	39
Bachelor of Health Sciences	35	23	Less than 10
King's	23	33	12
Arts and Humanities	21	26	19
FIMS	21	16	Less than 10
Engineering	16	12	12
Education	11	Less than 10	Less than 10
Brescia	10	11	Less than 10

All other Faculties, School and Affiliated University Colleges had fewer than 10 students who used the office during the 2011/12 year.

### Graduate Students

Faculty	2011/12	2010/11	2009/10
PhD Engineering	11	3	8
PhD Arts and Humanities	6	4	5
Master's Science	4	Less than 3	Less than 3
PhD Health Sciences	4	Less than 3	Less than 3
PhD Social Science	4	4	3
Master's Health Sciences	4	4	13
PhD Faculty not identified by student	4	3	4
Master's Engineering	4	6	4
Master's Schulich	3	Less than 3	Less than 3
Master's Law	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. The Office of the Ombudsperson also addresses non-academic concerns such as residence issues and parking violations.

### Top Ten Concerns - Undergraduate

Concern	2011/12	2010/11	2009/10
Grade issues	91	63	52
Required to withdraw	55	43	35
Other Academic	41	31	18
Readmission	39	27	30
Course Management	31	27	15
Scholastic Offense	30	Less than 10	Less than 10
Program Requirements	29	23	13
Appeal Exams	22	21	27
Fees	13	Less than 10	Less than 10
Registration/Add Drop	12	11	10
Appeal Other	11	20	17
Admission	10	Less than 10	Less than 10

### Top Ten Concerns - Graduate

Concern	2011/12	2010/11	2009/10
Supervision	16	9	28
Progression	12	8	7
Other Academic	8	13	12
Funding	5	7	7
Grades	5	7	3

### Top Ten Concerns - General

Concern	2011/12	2010/11	2009/10
Other UWO	37	31	11
Student Code of Conduct	15	Less than 10	Less than 10
Student Associations	11	Less than 10	Less than 10

## What kind of help can you provide?

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. Please note that the rise in the intervention category does not mean that there are an increasing number of

cases that are questionable or need the intervention of our office to be resolved.

We have recently found different types of situations that our office isn't experienced with. For example, we have seen a rise in issues concerning Residence Discipline and Code of Conduct issues, some of which we inquire about so that we can better understand how student discipline is being addressed. We have also seen a significant increase in Parking issues, which we have inquired about to best learn the process of ticketing on campus and appealing those tickets.

Action type	2011/12	2010/11	2009/10
Advice	323	267	249
Information	144	156	99
Intervention	71	47	25

## Who besides students comes to you for help?

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. We are often asked if we take questions from Staff and Faculty, the answer is yes, but more often than not, if the question is not student related we direct the individual to their employee association.

Client Identity	2011/12	2010/11	2009/10
Other	26	12	14
Staff	23	11	9
Family member of student or applicant	19	25	33
Faculty member	6	6	12

## How can students 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 and no one outside the Office of the Ombudsperson can access individual records without that individual's permission.

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	2011/12	2010/11	2009/10
Email	203	194	149
Phone	167	133	131
Drop-In	122	90	78

## About the Office of the Ombudsperson

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:

- a) 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).
- b) 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.
- c) To make recommendations to those in authority with a view to remedying unfairness in the situation of an individual student, as appropriate.
- d) 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.



**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 3135**  
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**Office of the  
Ombudsperson**