

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Camosun College is committed to the just and fair treatment of students. To this end, since 1992 the College and the Camosun College Student Society have together supported the operation of the Office of the Ombudsperson. The role of the Ombudsperson is to deal with inquiries, concerns, complaints, and grievances on any College matter affecting students. The Ombudsperson serves as an independent, impartial and confidential third party in support of fairness and natural justice to provide all possible assistance to students so that they may advocate effectively on their own behalf.

COVID-19 was a present and dominant factor throughout this entire reporting period. During these twelve months from 1 September – 31 August 2021, the Office was involved in 188 new cases and consultations, in addition to three ongoing cases from the previous academic year, for a total of 191 active visitor cases & consultations. Through 561+ substantial contact meetings, the Ombudsperson met with 174 student visitors who raised questions and concerns about virtually every College-related school and service: academic marks and decisions, finances and tuition, course management, records, interpersonal conflicts, personal issues, placements and clinicals, and accommodations. This is roughly 1% of the total registered college student population of 16,000 (*Institutional Accountability Plan and Report 2020/21*).

Students accounted for the vast majority of the 188 visitors: 174 students (92%); with faculty, parents, community members, and own motion concerns making up the other 14 cases (8%). Issues were raised more often by women (62%) than men (32%); other/unknown (6%). Considering the student visitors, at least 19% were international students, the remainder domestic. While 90% were current students, 3% were applying, 4% had graduated, and 3% had dropped. Regarding the overall subject of concerns, 75% were academic-related; 20% were non-academic, and 5% were both. Although questions and concerns were heard about almost every sector of the College, the schools of Arts & Science and Health & Human Services were the two most frequently discussed, with 31% and 26% of visitors respectively. It is important to note that visitors use the Office services for a variety of reasons, including questions, requests, seeking clarity, concerns, and complaints, and many issues are resolved promptly.

To meet, the Office uses whatever mode visitors prefer: MS Teams video (41% of initial meetings), email (30%), phone (27%), and Zoom video (2%). Because COVID-19 restrictions began in mid-March 2020, in-person meetings were not possible during this reporting period.

The outcome categories of consultations and cases include: resolved (55% or 105 cases); no

reason that the Office collects aggregate data on cases and consultations – to become aware of trends, such as an increasing number of complaints or conflicts in a certain area, to be able to offer support for conflict prevention and de-escalation.

The Ombudsperson acts in accordance with the principles of natural justice and fairness, within the existing policies of Camosun College, and in compliance with the Standards of Practice of the Association of Canadian College and College Ombudspersons (ACCUO). Within a Canadian post-secondary context, ACCUO Standards of Practice state that an ombudsperson:

- fosters respectful, fair and equitable policies, practices and treatment of individuals
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Visitor Case Data

THE YEAR IN NUMBERS

Visitor Case & Consultations

Visitor cases & consultations 2020-21	188
	➤ average ~15 new/month
Cases ongoing from 2019-20	3
Total active visitor cases & consultations 2020-21	191
Total student visitors	174
Faculty, staff and community visitors	14
% of student visitors accessing the Office	~1%

Meetings

Number of meetings	561+
average # meetings / visitor	2.9
maximum # meetings / visitor	17
	➤ 34 visitors had 5+ meetings
	➤ 4 visitors had 10+ meetings

Length of Case / [= 191]

average # days / visitor	8.8
maximum # days / visitor	98
	➤ 33 cases were open for 2 weeks+
	➤ 17 cases were open for 1 month+

Recommendations

Recommendations made	7
	➤ 2 based on visitor complaint inquiries
	➤ 5 based on own motion inquiries

Additional Information

Faculty/staff consult on student or policy	20
Student didn't pursue initial inquiry or complaint	6
Presentations & other meetings	50+
⇒ includes academic program introductions, networking, training, workshops, student orientation fairs, etc.	

Webpage

Main Ombudsperson webpage unique pageviews	2093
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Office of the Ombudsman

During 2020-2021, the Office welcomed a wide range of visitors and their concerns. Some were short consultations for information, guidance and referrals, while others involved numerous and lengthy meetings, further research, external clarification, meeting facilitation and observation, and shuttle diplomacy. Normally, the Ombudsperson could arrange meetings promptly and

Fig. 1C Gender

Concerns were raised more often by women (62%) than men (32%); other/unknown 6% (Fig. 2).

Fig. 2 Gender

Regarding the subject of visitors' concerns, 75% were academic-related, 20% were non-academic, and 5% were both (Fig. 3). Data for more detailed categories of academic and non-academic concerns is found below in Fig. 7 and Fig. 8.

Fig. 3 C

Of the student visitors, 81% were domestic students while 19% were international students (Fig. 4). This figure is slightly more than the general ratio of domestic to international students at the College [2,000 of the College's total student population of 16,000 are international, or 12.5%, *Institutional Accountability Plan and Report 2020/21*].

CASE STUDIES

Many international students request assistance navigating challenging circumstances. They are of course well supported by Camosun International as well. For example, one student asked for support in navigating a request to register late for a course. The Associate Dean reviewed it and granted the exception. Several others were stressed about getting transcripts, as they were

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Most student visitors were current students (90%), while others were graduated (4%), dropped (3%), or applying / accepted (3%) (Fig. 5).

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To meet with visitors, the Ombudsperson uses whatever mode is most suitable for visitors: Microsoft Teams video (41%), email (30%), and phone (27%) being most common (Fig. 6). Sadly, not one meeting in this period was in person due to COVID-19 restrictions.

Fig. 6 M de fl a Mee g

The broad range of academic concerns raised by visitors is presented here, and often visitors raised more than one concern. 'Course/program management and improvement' (67 visitors) was the concern most often raised, followed by 'grades' (46 visitors), 'academic misconduct' (14 visitors), and 'accommodations' (10 visitors). (Fig. 7)

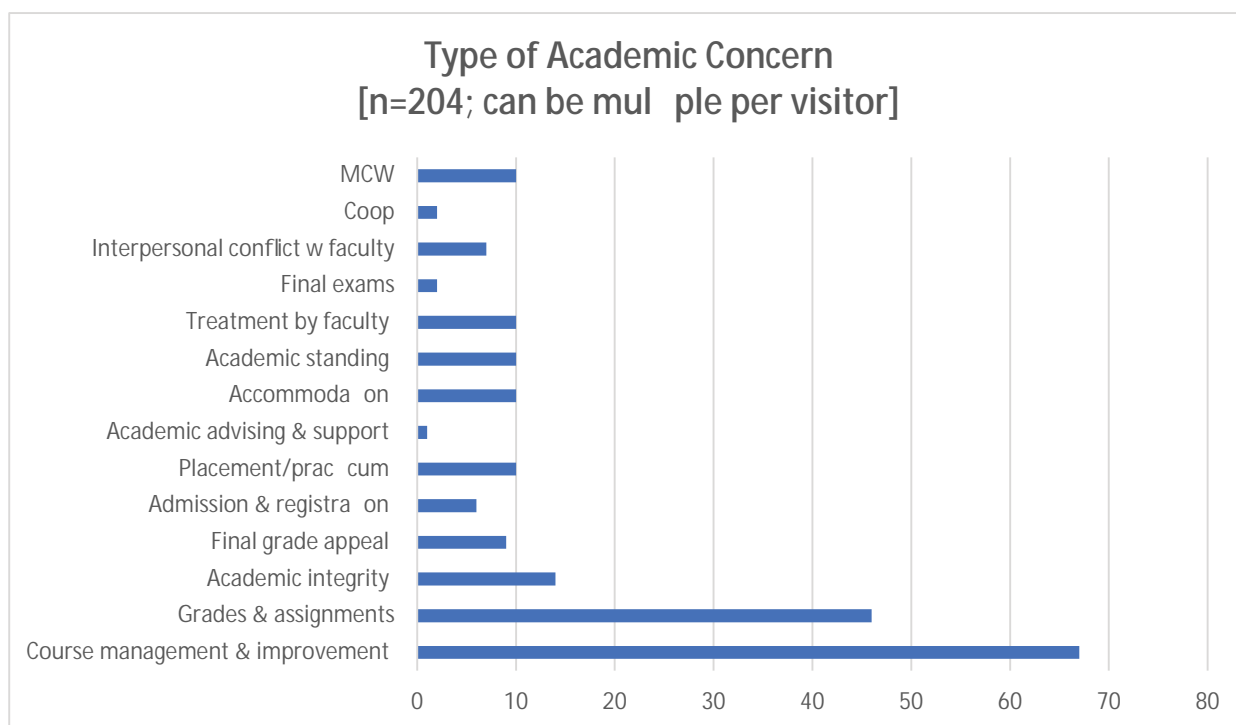
CASE STUDY

Several concerns in the 'course/program management and improvement' category are worth highlighting. Not surprisingly, the significant increase in concerns in this category was very likely exacerbated by COVID-19 and the rapid move to online learning for the majority of courses. With great time and effort, most instructors skillfully transitioned their courses to distance learning so that students could successfully meet their program requirements. Very few complaints were received about these transitioned courses, and from what the Ombudsperson heard from students, students were very understanding and forgiving when instructors had clearly made a sincere effort, as in the vast majority of courses. Rather, complaints regarding course management surrounded courses which were not properly transitioned and were "taught by email," where a handful of instructors

CASE STUDY

One theme that was raised with the Office this year was complaints regarding timely responses for academic processes such as academic appeal decisions. The Ombudsperson observed and was positively impressed that chairs and deans almost always promptly made time to meet students and then provided responses within process timelines (and often early – for example, within the required five business days for an appeal decision). This is unfortunately not the case at all post-secondary institutions; timeliness for decisions can be a significant issue at some institutions which can lead to additional stress and discord. Camosun deans seem very aware of the importance of timely decisions at their level, as students' own planning may hinge on an appeal decision. The chairs and deans are setting an excellent example by following these college timelines. Bravo and thank you!

Fig. 7 Type of Academic Concern

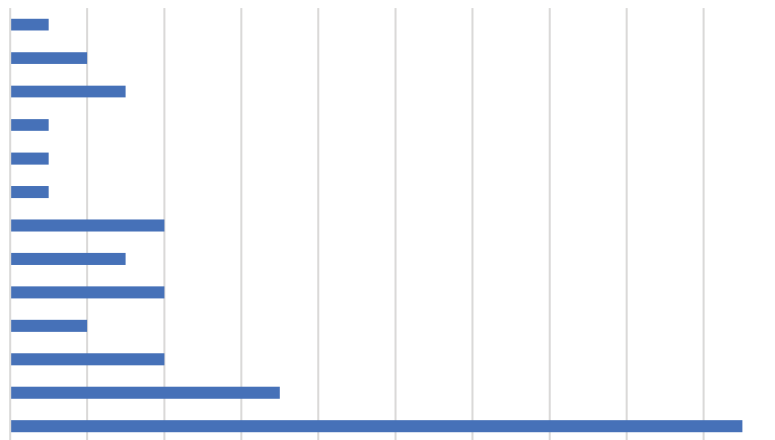


There were also a wide range of non-academic concerns raised by visitors. Again, some visitors communicated multiple concerns. The main concerns raised include 'finances and tuition' (19 visitors), College administration / Registrar's Office (7 visitors), 'College management & improvement' (4 visitors), and CCSS (4 visitors) (Fig. 8).

CASE STUDY

It might surprise some to know that very few complaints were received about COVID-specific policies and guidelines, and in fact only four. Rather than arguing against Provincial Health Office mask or physical distancing guidelines, these four students were mainly requesting that the College do even more for health and safety. In one case, a student was concerned for the health and safety of the residents living in her practicum placement facility.

Fig. 8 The number of COVID-related cases



While concerns were heard regarding many sectors of the College, the schools of Arts and Science (31%) and Health and Human Services (26%) were the two most frequently discussed (Fig. 9). Again, it worth highlighting that not all visitors are raising complaints or problems, and not all visitors create a 'case.' Not infrequently, a question or misconception can be clarified with a brief consultation or two.

Fig. 9 S.

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The categories of 'action taken' are numerous and often a case or consultation involves multiple Ombudsperson actions. Normally a case or consultation includes 'listening, offering information and guidance, and exploring options' (184 times). Additional actions may include 'clarifying – info gathering and fact-finding' (60 times), 'check in, follow up and support' (32 times), and internal referral (24 times), among others. When referring visitors to other internal staff and services, I referred numerous students to faculty members [chairs, advisors and deans] and services including Centre for Accessible Learning, the Counselling Centre, Office of Student Support, Admissions and Registration, Eye? Sq̓'lewen, Academic Advising, and the International Office. A complete list of 'action taken' data is presented below (Fig. 10).

Fig. 10 A. Table of Action Taken Categories

OFFICE ACTIVITIES

Office, Educational and Networking

This year, the Ombudsperson got to know many more staff and faculty, and had regular meetings (virtually) with deans, chairs, VPs, managers, directors, and coordinators on both campuses. In addition, to better explain and increase awareness of the Office's services, the Ombudsperson had promotional materials created through Graphic Services and improved the Office webpages. Including academic program introductions, networking, training, workshops, student orientation fairs, the Ombudsperson conducted 50+ outreach and networking meetings. The reception at Camosun has invariably been very welcoming, open and collaborative in support of fairness. Please contact the Office to arrange an Ombudsperson introduction, presentation or discussion in your department or office.

Office of the Ombudsperson

- Bi-weekly meetings with the Office advisors, who are the VP Student Experience and CCSS Executive Director
- Presenting at Welcome Week and student academic program orientations
- Meeting regularly with faculty & staff to share current concerns and gather feedback
- Providing recommendations and other feedback on draft and current policies, procedures, plans, and college materials, including:
 - Evaluation of Student Learning
 - Indigenization Plan
 - EDI process
 - Academic Misconduct
 - Grade Review
 - Student Athlete Handbook
 - Camosun website
- Organizing the physical office spaces with college staff re: painting, furniture, equipment, etc.
- Participating in Association of Canadian College and College Ombudspersons (ACCUO)

STUDENT FEEDBACK