



Ombudsperson Annual Report, 2013-14

I assumed the position of University Ombudsperson at the end of October 2013, following two interviews by the search committee. This report covers the period from October 2013 to June 30, 2014, and has three sections: Activities, Case Statistics, and Recommendations

I. Activities

I directed much time to learning about the position within both the Bishop's context by reading internal policy documents and meeting with former Ombudsperson Mr. Keith Baxter and within the wider professional context through personal and online communications with the national and provincial umbrella organizations Association of Canadian College and University Ombudspersons and Association des Ombudsmans des Universités du Québec. I am a voting member in good standing with both groups.

I also devoted much of this year towards raising awareness within the Bishop's University community about the nature and role of the ombuds office. My aim was to affirm and strengthen lines of communications outlined in the university policies and statutes, and to develop respectful working relationships with the administrative structure in order to facilitate the resolution of academic and non-academic disputes. To this end I met with Principal Goldbloom, VP Miles Turnbull, VP Victoria Meikle, Registrar Hans Rouleau, Director of Human Resources Nick Andrews, and Deans Avril Aiken, Michele Murray, and Calin Valsan. I believe these initial meetings helped lay a solid foundation for effective problem solving.

I initiated meetings with all persons and offices that fall within the wide purview of the ombudsperson as outlined in the university calendar. These included Dean of Student Affairs Dr. Jackie Bailey, the SRC Executive, Director of Residence Deborah Langford and the Residence Life Co-ordinators Brenna Haydock and Warren Haydock, Head of Security Carson Brooks, Student Services Psychologist Annick Tremblay, Student Accessibility and Accommodation Services officer Laura Valsan, and Chaplain Heather Thompson.

During the year I participated in a number of events designed to inform the university community about the ombuds office. These included attending winter semester orientation, and making

presentations to the Residence Assistants at their winter orientation, the Understanding Violence Seminars conducted by Counsellor Annick Tremblay, and a chairs and faculty meeting in May at the invitation of Dean Murray. At each event I distributed a pamphlet outlining the services offered by the ombudsperson, with references to the web page, which I also updated with links to main policy documents for students.

I also sat on the Academic Standing and Admissions Policy Committee (ASAP) as a regular non-voting member for all monthly meetings. I was privy to all information regarding cases dealing with academic standing and policy, and actively participated in discussions leading to decisions. I am satisfied that the committee performed its work with fairness and due diligence.

My main occupation was with the day to day business of the office as outlined in the university calendar and policies, a case summary of which follows:

II. Case Statistics

Academic (total 46)

- Dishonesty: 4 Sci, 1 Hum, 1 Ed, 6 Bus
- Grades: 5 Soc Sci, 9 Hum, 2 Sci, 3 Ed, 5 Bus
- Fees/Scholarships: 2 Hum
- Must Withdraw: 2 Bus, 1 Sci
- Medical/Compassion: 3 Hum, 1 Bus, 1 Sci

Professor Student Relations (total 11): 2 Soc Sci, 5 Hum, 1 Sci, 1 Ed, 2 Bus

Sexual Assault (total 2)

Residence Issues (total 3)

Staff Issues (total 2)

Management Issues (total 1)

Other 1

Total: 66 Cases

III. Recommendations

At this point I have only five fairly minor recommendations based on the cases listed above:

- 1) Website. The incomplete and inconsistent updating of committee compositions on the website has been a source of frustration for people seeking information from the various committee representatives, and has led in several instances to delays in conducting ombuds investigations. I recommend that a simple procedure with dedicated personnel be put in place for annual updating of committee memberships. These would involve coordinating information on committee composition by the Secretary of Senate, the Secretary of Faculty Council and the Student Representative Council.
- 2) Policy Infelicities. Confusion concerning jurisdictions between the Student Conduct Committee and Harassment Committee should be rectified as soon as possible. At the moment, it is unclear to which committee students with harassment concerns should appeal. I have been given to understand that the revision of both policies is an important priority in the offices of the Secretary General and Dean of Student Affairs, and it is to be hoped that these policies shall be revised soon.
- 3) Student Confidentiality. On several occasions it has become known to me that professors are sharing information about students charged with or suspected of plagiarism. While sharing information is done in most instances in the spirit of curtailing the problem of academic dishonesty in the university, this information must be considered confidential nonetheless. Discussing suspected cases can be injurious to both the student involved (who may be in the midst of an appeal, for instance) and to the investigation of the case itself. Such conversations should remain between the student, professor, and the administrative personnel and committees tasked with investigation and discipline. This is in the interest, too, of giving first-time offenders a second chance to redeem themselves (as implied in the plagiarism policy) in good faith and free of prejudice. This issue has been dealt with officially at ASAP, but only obliquely in terms of determining who has access to students files for the purposes of academic advising. I have asked the deans to convey this concern to the members of their respective divisions. The general consensus in my discussions with the deans and registrar about this issue is that the Offices of the Deans and Records are best able to track serious and repeated cases.
- 4) Role and Status of Review Committee (School of Education). At the moment the School of Education has a standing committee to which students may appeal in cases related to practicum placements. The committee is comprised of the Dean of Education, a faculty member, the placement officer and a senior Education student. In cases in which students must withdraw from the program as a result of failing the final mandatory practicum, the issue of jurisdictional overlap

with ASAP's function comes inevitably into play. The Dean of Education is aware of this problem and has assured me that she will urge the incoming dean to revise the status and powers of the committee and emend the academic calendar accordingly.

5) Professor Education: I urge all contract and full time faculty to read two important policy documents. The *Responsibilities of Academic Staff to Students* outlines in broad strokes the professional contract between professors and students, and provides detailed information about all manner of academic issues ranging from rules governing justification of grades to permissible scheduling dates for tests and exams. Several cases resulting from policy infractions on the part of professors could easily have been avoided if the parties concerned had been aware of this policy document.

The *Code of Student Rights and Responsibilities* is another important document that outlines the expectations for professional conduct among and between students and professors alike. This document occupies a central place in my communication with the university community and in resolving problems. Should everyone be familiar with and adhere to the articles of this document, many problems could be averted before the need to involve the ombudsperson..

Finally, I cannot at this point comment on previous recommendations, because no Ombuds report has been filed since 2007.

Submitted respectfully to Principal Michael Goldbloom,
15 August 2014

Shawn Malley, Professor
Department of English