



UNIVERSITY  
OF ALBERTA

2022-2023

# OSO Annual Report

The Office of the Student Ombuds

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The Art of Being Here and  
There helps us to be a Flexible,  
Hybrid Ombuds Delivery

Natalie Sharpe, Director, OSO



OCTOBER 2023

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## Territorial Acknowledgement

The University of Alberta, its buildings, labs, and research stations are primarily located on the traditional territory of Cree, Blackfoot, Métis, Nakota Sioux, Iroquois, Dene, and Ojibway/Saulteaux/Anishinaabe nations; lands that are now known as part of Treaties 6, 7, and 8 and homeland of the Métis. The University of Alberta respects the sovereignty, lands, histories, languages, knowledge systems, and cultures of First Nations, Métis and Inuit nations.



# INTRODUCTION

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Natalie Sharpe, Director

“The Art of Being Here and There helps us to be a Flexible, Hybrid Ombuds Delivery.”

The delivery of Office of the Student Ombuds (OSO) services changed dramatically at the beginning of the pandemic (2020). The return to our onsite activities has been an incremental process of deliberate caution as we transitioned from a remote (“secure”) to hybrid model of service delivery. We learned a great deal about what we lost, but we found that there were some unexpected gains by working remotely with students. For instance, we realized it was unnecessary to attend late night hearings on an empty, dark campus. We found some flexibility in being able to continue many of our appointments, investigations and hearings through virtual meetings. However, OSO staff recognized it was important for us to be able to meet at least twice weekly in our offices, as well as online, to engage in work discussions, staff training/mentoring. In the past, the ombuds spent a lot of time, like students, traversing campus, and rushing from appointment to appointment, sometimes on opposite sides of campus. The pandemic gave us some flexibility in planning our schedules and attending to the needs of students, many continuing studies several time zones away. We adjusted accordingly and found that sometimes it is best for students to be able to meet us at hours after the regular work schedule. One of the most dramatic changes was adapting hearings to a virtual environment. This continued, offering safety and convenience to students, staff, and of course to the ombuds. Throughout this year, 85 to 90% of our appointments, investigations, and hearings were held virtually. Similarly, committee meetings were often virtual, or allowed the option for onsite and virtual. We were mindful of checking in on each other’s wellness when working remotely. We need to focus on each other, perhaps even more so than onsite in the past, for the pandemic has forever shifted our focus on caring for others by attending to self-care first. At least for our staff, in our discussions with faculty, administration and our student clients, we continue to deliver the important message of relationship building in the University community, i.e., relational fairness.

Did our case numbers decrease throughout this period of time? No, they held steady. We also were very productive as a staff, focusing on collaborative work with faculties, departments, etc., to promote relational and equitable fairness in the classroom, in the lab, in clinicals, in practicums, and when deliberating petition and appeal decisions. We used the power of education and moral suasion, the very skills of ombudsing that help individuals to move toward restorative solutions. We recognize that we may be a small office, but we are mindful of keeping a steady focus on the values of the University to resolve conflicts and misunderstandings that may arise because of divergent views. We ask the University to critically examine how its hierarchies divide and disempower the marginalized populations on our campus, setting up barriers (sometimes

unconsciously) and opening doors for only some (based on unconscious biases and privilege). These are realities that need to change, and the ombuds must use their voice to promote collaborative change.

As to who we are, here is a brief description of the Office of the Student Ombuds (also in the DOS MNIF report 2022-2023).

*As advocates for fairness and equity, the Office of the Student Ombuds (OSO) is confidential, impartial, accessible and independent. We offer advice and support on academic policies and procedures, and issues around conflict and discipline. We focus on early intervention and resolution to strengthen collegial relationships within the university, whenever possible without compromising equity principles. We listen to and support the sharing of multiple perspectives to help parties expand their options for mutual, fair and achievable resolution.*

*We offer information and advice to faculty, staff and students as they deal with academic, discipline, interpersonal, and financial issues...(Our ongoing feedback and recommendations to faculties are based on direct reflection of casework, investigations, and formal appeal hearings. Each year we offer (formal) recommendations (in our Annual Report) to (recognize and close) ... systemic gaps and inequities...(thereby making) the university accountable to its members. (In addition to our casework), ... the OSO offers tailor-made skill development sessions and support for faculties/departments/professor/supervisor and peer conflicts as requested throughout the year; the sessions vary from year to year depending on their needs.*

*The OSO has an internationally recognized professional paid internship program which includes training and mentoring of two undergraduate student interns and one graduate student intern each year.*

The Office of the Student Ombuds has ties to regional, national and international communities of practice. It has an Alberta provincial network, a western ACCUO regional network, and is an institutional member of the Association of Canadian College and University Ombudspersons (ACCUO/AOUCC). The OSO adheres to the ACCUO/AOUCC professional Standards of Practice: Confidentiality, Independence, Impartiality and Accessibility. OSO has ties to international higher education ombuds networks and organizations in the United States, Mexico, Europe, Australia, Central and South America, and most recently to Africa.

## NOTES FROM OUR STUDENTS ARE A GIFT!

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Thanks for meeting with me today and helping me understand plagiarism.

I had no idea that the ombuds service was available until I found myself with an academic conflict. Your ongoing support really helped me feel more comfortable and informed about the university process I was facing, which allowed me to better prepare and actually advocate for myself. Thank you so much!

I think I have clarity and peace now, and I am comfortable with the decision. I wanted to let you know that I really appreciate your help and your kindness in guiding me through an unfamiliar process. Thank you very much.

I wanted to start by thanking you for your assistance throughout this process and let you know that my appeal was approved. I am extremely grateful for all of the help you gave me, and the time you dedicated to my appeal.

WE DID IT!!! I can't even start to thank you enough for all the help and support. There were so many times I was ready to give up but you kept giving me options....

I would like to thank you again for your support during the hearing. I received the formal decision of the appeal panel today. I am feeling so relieved after this. You have helped me a lot. It was not possible without your support and guidance.

Thank you so much for all your help! Words cannot express my gratitude! Please continue being so good at what you do.

Thank you so much for helping me to advocate for myself and being beside me to support, guide and help me gain a better understanding of the whole situation....(Just wanted to express my gratitude and once again thank you so much for everything.)

I wanted to thank you again for all your support and feedback throughout this process, it has been extremely helpful!

My appeal was accepted and I am being allowed to continue. Thank you so much for your help and guidance; it was amazing to have your support and guidance....

## OMBUDS STAFF 2022-2023

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The year 2022 will be remembered for major staff renewal. The positions of Undergraduate Ombudsperson and Graduate Ombudsperson had been filled on an interim basis. Remonia Stoddart-Morrison who had served in both roles after completing a year internship with the OSO, was the successful candidate for the Graduate Ombudsperson.

At the beginning of April, Sylvie Vigneux stepped into the role of Undergraduate Ombudsperson. In 2022, Ms. Vigneux resigned from the position. By winter term January 2023, former Graduate Ombuds Intern, Laurel Wilkie, was appointed the Undergraduate Ombudsperson.

This period was marked by intensive training for the successive Undergraduate Ombuds staff members. They were also trained to engage in mentoring the interns. The OSO staff speak about their work in this following section.

## Natalie Sharpe, Director of the OSO



Natalie Sharpe, BA Hon, MA (she, her) is the Director of the Office of the Student Ombuds and Past-President of the Association of Canadian College and University Ombudspersons (ACCUO/AOUCC).

Ms. Sharpe holds professional certificates in negotiation, mediation, arbitration and the Osgoode/Forum of Canadian Ombudsman “Essentials for Ombuds”. Ms. Sharpe has worked for over three decades as ombuds, mediator and educator in the social sciences and alternative dispute resolution. She received the auspicious Pete Small Award (California Caucus of College and University Ombudspersons) in 2019 for her contributions to the field of higher education ombudsing and has presented at higher education ombuds conferences globally.

“As the Director of the OSO, it is important to bring the unique strengths of the ombuds team together to make their vital contribution to this University community. Our ombuds work with a large student population and engage frequently with university staff, bringing a fairness focus on policies and processes affecting student lives. You often see them at orientations, faculty tabling events, the Fairness Day booth on the main floor of SUB in mid-October, and at specific training sessions as requested. They also serve in an advisory capacity on many University committees, and attend as impartial supports for students at private, formal investigations and appeal hearings. The bulk of their work is the tedious, detailed confidential one-on-one meetings with students, to examine their issues from an institutional as well as personal context and to explore ways that students may gain agency to voice their concerns, viable options, and find informed decisions.

Ombuds are curious, creative and caring in their approach to working with students so as to better understand and respect their social location. Ombuds work to ensure that the University is accountable and proactive in building relationships and making



equitable and just decisions. The ombuds' power is to convince, not tell others what to do, but what is fair and the right thing to do. We engage in the art of moral suasion, recognizing the need to focus on rebuilding and repairing relationships. Our work is not easy, but is necessary, as we work for equitable change.

"In addition to overseeing our ombuds' work on campus, I have been active on the national and international scene with ombuds colleagues in higher education. In June, 2022, I presented and co-presented two sessions at the European Network of Ombuds in Higher Education Conference in Athens, Greece. In October and November, 2022, I was a panel member at the joint Forum of Canadian Ombudsman and Association of Canadian College and University Ombudspersons Conference in Ottawa; with the International Ombudsman Association on Ombuds Day, an annual international event, and with faculty ombuds colleagues at the California Caucus of College and University Ombudspersons in Pacific Grove, California.

The professional discussions of higher education ombuds focus on the future challenges we are facing in higher education globally. We have begun a self-reflective ombuds practice known as intervisioning with higher education ombuds nationally and abroad. Ombuds are often referred to as "the canary in their institution's coalmine" but unlike the canary we work to ensure we are not placed in such a fragile or precarious position to be harmed or destroyed in delivering our message."

## Remonia Stoddart-Morrison, Graduate Ombudsperson



Remonia Stoddart-Morrison, BSc, MEd (she, her) is a PhD candidate in Education and has worked at the OSO for many years. Remonia was an international student and our second Graduate Ombuds Intern. Subsequently she moved back and forth in two interim positions, Undergraduate Ombudsperson and Graduate Ombudsperson. Remonia was permanently appointed as the Graduate Ombudsperson in March 2022. With her academic and teaching background, she can relate to students and faculty with a focus on strengthening their relationships.

“As the Graduate Ombudsperson an important element that I believe must always be kept at the forefront as I do this work is that no student, no case, no situation is ever the same. They may be similar but never the same and thus each case needs to be treated as unique. I entered the 2022-2023 reporting year continuing the work of advocating for fairness by helping to provide a fairness lens through which students, faculty members and university administrators can view and consider when they are developing policies and making decisions.

I provide students, especially graduate students, medical residents and postdoctoral fellows, with the information, advice and support that can assist them in empowering themselves to understand their rights and responsibilities, voice their concerns, and exercise agency at the university.

I provide workshops and presentations, with students and faculty in areas related to early resolution and intervention, conflict management and resolution, discrimination and bias and building caring, collegial and collaborative relationships and environments. I consider these workshops and presentation sessions integral in providing information and helping to ensure early resolution of issues; I also encourage individuals to do their part in enriching the shared working space. I invite graduate departments who have yet to hold these sessions, for graduate students and/or faculty members, to reach out to our office for these sessions.

Remonia's work with faculty is highly valued. One Associate Dean writes to Remonia:

"Thank you on behalf of all the faculty members for your...Teaching and Learning presentation on Getting to Know Our Biases: How Your Self-Awareness Supports Your Student's Success & Wellbeing. The session provided an overview of a key area for our faculty instructors and was very thought-provoking...."

As a PhD candidate, Remonia is acutely aware of the need for a strong, collaborative network of services:

"Establishing and maintaining a university environment where graduate students are being set up for success, where they feel they belong and where they are able to interact, collaborate and work without fear, is not the role of just one unit or department on campus. With this knowledge, I collaborate (whilst maintaining independence) with departments, the GSA, FGSR and various student services to ensure that students have access to advice in not only understanding their rights and responsibilities but also understanding the policies and procedures surrounding their case and the options that may be available to them.

Each year, as a part of my role, I train interns to be able to take on cases throughout their time with the office I also assist the Director in the training of our new Undergraduate Ombudsperson (twice this year)"

## Sylvie Vigneux, Undergraduate Ombudsperson (Apr-Nov 2022)



Sylvie Vigneux, BA Hon, MA, JD (she, her) Undergraduate Ombudsperson, joined the OSO in April 2022 after practicing law in the areas of labour, employment, and human rights.

Sylvie operationalized her expertise in principles of administrative law and procedural fairness to support undergraduate students in resolving disputes and navigating university policies related to discipline and academic standing. Sylvie proactively connected with service providers across campus and conducted training and orientation sessions for students, as well as drafting policy reviews, internal OSO protocols, and an office hazard assessment. Sylvie represented the OSO as a non-voting member on several university committees, including the GFC Student Conduct Policy Committee, the Dean of Students' Health, Safety and Environment Committee, Program Support Team, and Programs Committee. She was also an active participant in the Association of Canadian College and University Ombudspersons (ACCUO), attending the biannual FCO/ACCUO conference and serving as the co-chair of ACCUO's Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion ad-hoc committee.

## Laurel Wilkie, Undergraduate Ombudsperson (Jan-Mar 2023)



Laurel Wilkie, BA, MEd (she, her) became the Undergraduate Ombudsperson in January of 2023, and had previously completed an internship with the OSO as the Graduate Ombuds Intern while completing her Master's degree. Laurel serves on the Student Conduct Policy Committee, the Program Support Team and Programs Committees, and the DoS Health, Safety and Environment Committee.

"I primarily work with undergraduate students who are engaging in various academic and non-academic processes on campus. I have also worked very closely with students experiencing different types of conflict and provide conflict coaching to help students navigate their situations. Some of the frequent situations our office helps students navigate are academic standing concerns, allegations under the Code of Student Behaviour, grade appeals, as well as interpersonal/intrapersonal conflicts on campus. As an advocate for fairness, I strive to help students better understand their rights and responsibilities within the various structures at the University of Alberta so that they may best advocate for their unique situation.

A large portion of my work is directly with students but I also get to engage in various orientation sessions, tabling, or other projects in collaboration with other departments or faculties. Empowering students with information on topics such as managing difficult conversations with supervisors or around the unique services that ombuds provides allows us to continue engaging with the university community through a fairness lens. I am very excited to continue engaging in equity and fairness work at the University of Alberta."

## OSO Ombuds Interns 2022-2023

This was the 8<sup>th</sup> internship year of the OSO Ombuds Internship program, a highly successful program that helps develop student leadership and skills for future professional endeavours, including contributing to the broader human community. The internship program consists of several learning modules around ombudsing practice-taught by the Ombuds staff. The interns receive incremental training on being an ombuds by first observing the senior staff with full consent from the student clients, then practice casework under the observation of the senior staff before taking on cases of their own. Their skills are developed through reflective practices with their mentors and at case debriefings of generic issues at the twice weekly OSO staff meetings. The Undergraduate Ombuds Interns may also earn credits for their internship in a faculty internship program after completing additional assignment requirements. The interns and Director meet with the faculty Intern Program Coordinator shortly after the internship begins to monitor their professional and personal development based on their goals and objectives in the internship program (these vary with each intern as they reflect on their professional and personal interests). The OSO Director as their supervisor provides guidance and rates their performance as they gain new skills and hone them throughout the year. The intern may meet with the supervisor to discuss these goals and reflect on their development throughout the year. This culminates in a final assignment and final reflection by the intern and OSO supervisor evaluation on their overall professional and personal development as an individual worker and as a team player. Each year, we ask the mentors to provide their observations on the interns' development and for each intern to reflect on their OSO experience.

As the Director and Supervisor for the program, Natalie Sharpe views this as a unique experience for ombuds staff and students to build the quality of OSO service for their University community. As an ombuds career is often a mid or later life career change, the internship provides students an intensive year of skill-building and experience learning through the lens of an ombuds. This allows those interested in the ombuds profession to start a career much earlier, and/or use these skills in a number of closely-related professions that require conflict management and diplomacy skills.

Remonia Stoddart-Morrison reflects on her roles as a mentor for the interns, and in particular her close work with the Graduate Ombuds Intern.

"Mentoring of interns is an ongoing process throughout the intern's time with the office. There are formal training sessions, discussions/reflections on casework at staff meetings, online chats, telephone calls, etc. OSO interns know they are able to reach out to ask any question; it doesn't matter how small. I find it most rewarding to have informal discussions with the interns to hear about their background, lived experiences and getting to know them. This gives a lot of insight into the best way to support the intern in their work. Given that the students we see in our office are different and their cases vary, the mentoring I provide interns occurs daily, not just during their initial training. Ongoing mentoring helps with focusing and understanding the uniqueness of

each case and provides the support interns need to handle specific difficulties in these cases. Using a hybrid model, we were in the office together for two days of the week. This allowed us the opportunity to interact in person to build the connection and camaraderie in the office. Our social gatherings such as our potluck lunches and evening winter event, bonds us as staff, thereby strengthening the work interns do.”

Sylvie Vigneux as Undergraduate Ombudsperson (2022) worked closely with the 2022-2023 Undergraduate Ombuds interns, Andrew Schultz and Navneet Chand. In particular, she developed and delivered training modules on the topics of Maintaining Professional Boundaries, Empathetic Listening, Working with Students in Crisis, and Equitable Fairness. She also provided one-on-one coaching to the interns and encouraged them to find their individual voice and approach to ombuds work. A highlight of her mentoring role was working collaboratively with Andrew to create a new OSO protocol for records retention and disposal. The internship program represents a core component of the OSO’s operations and Sylvie was honoured to take a role in mentoring and training the student interns.

Laurel Wilkie, Undergraduate Ombudsperson (2023) provides these observations.

“Our internship program is one of the most rewarding experiences as an ombuds as we support the professional growth and development of our interns. Through our close mentorship our interns get to build their capacity to navigate institutional policies, engage their interpersonal skills as they support students, learn about fairness and equity within the institutional structure, as well as connect with both national and international ombuds partners through conferences or committee work. As a previous U of A ombuds intern, the skills gained and honed throughout the internship were invaluable to my professional practice, so I am thrilled to be able to give back to this program.”

## Eric Awuah, Undergraduate Ombuds Intern



Eric Awuah, BFA, MA (he, him, Yaman) Eric earned a bachelor's degree in dance and theater studies and later pursued a master's degree in dance and Heritage Studies in Europe through an Erasmus-Mundus scholarship.

Following the completion of his graduate studies, he served as a lecturer at both the University of Ghana-Legon and the University of Education-Winneba. Presently, Eric is a doctoral candidate in the Anthropology Department at the University of Alberta. As an experienced University instructor, Eric is an asset to the internship program; he provides leadership to his intern peers and has a keen interest in the value the ombuds brings to relational and equitable fairness in the classroom. His expertise in the professional arts, in the field of dance, helps us examine the importance of all modes of communication, verbal and non-verbal. He is a valuable contributor to our staff discussions and a strong supporter of his colleagues.

"I am currently pursuing my Ph.D. in the Anthropology Department, and I am also serving as a Graduate Ombuds Intern. This internship has been incredibly valuable to me, fostering a deeper respect and appreciation for student support and the importance of collaborative problem-solving approaches. The Ombuds office has been exceptionally supportive of intern development, consistently offering assistance and guidance. They regularly check in on interns and provide the necessary support to enhance our ability to serve the University of Alberta students effectively."



## Andrew Schultz, Undergraduate Ombuds Intern



Andrew Schultz (he/him) is an undergraduate at the University of Alberta studying Psychology with a minor in Philosophy and has had previous experience in student governance. Andrew served on the Association of Canadian College and University Ombudspersons Communications Committee and conducted an interview with Dr. Wolf Hertlein from Damstadt University, Germany on the reflective practice with higher education ombuds colleagues known as intervising (European Network of Ombuds in Higher Education).

“My year at the Office of the Student Ombuds was a year of both personal and professional growth. Although initially I was unsure of how the position might relate to my future aspirations in psychology, I quickly saw how much value this position offered me. I gained a much greater understanding and appreciation of how the university operates at large, and further, the role of the Ombudsperson within that ecosystem. Through the thorough training provided by the team, I developed the skills necessary to support students in all situations. I began to look at situations from multiple perspectives and began to see the importance of being as impartial as possible. Additionally, given my status as a student, I was able to bring a unique perspective to the team which would not be available without the internship. Early on in my internship I was presented with the opportunity to attend the ACCUO-FCO conference in Ottawa.

After applying and receiving the Green and Gold Student Leadership and Professional Development grant, I was able to attend the conference and engage in the Ombuds world at a national (and international) scale. I gained further insight on how important the work of Ombuds is, not only in the Higher Education context, but in many others as well. Later in my internship, I was able to share much of what I learned as an Ombudsperson by presenting with my colleagues at the Alberta Student Leadership Summit. This opportunity allowed me to develop my presentation skills, as well as engage with the campus community in a meaningful way, as our presentation focused

on resolving conflict within student groups. All in all, my experience at the Office of the Student Ombuds has proven to be an invaluable one.”

## Navneet Chand, Undergraduate Ombuds Intern



Navneet Chand (he/him) is a senior undergraduate student in Political Science, Women's and Gender Studies, specializing in Indigenous legal politics, labour ethics, and public policy development; he also does student programming development and government policy analysis.

"My internship as an Undergraduate Ombudsperson with the Office of the Student Ombuds has been a masterclass in developing greater emotional intelligence, mediating complex disputes with a restorative mindset, and critically responding to institutional policy structures. Upon entering the role, I could not begin to fathom everything that the multidisciplinary and rewarding field of ombuds work would have in store for me.

My internship has revealed the relevant sector of ombuds work that builds upon my academic and professional interests. Each student I have worked with has entrusted the Office and I with their conviction in our ability to support them in nurturing their skills as a self-advocate. I have learned alongside them with my own circle of support from the rest of the impeccable ombuds team. The Office provided me with the space to effectively comprehend the dynamics of post-secondary policy and how this applies to the myriad of conflicts and decisions students face. A key objective of mine in this role has been to ensure that the Office continues to amplify the relevance of our services to students, particularly international and junior undergraduate students, especially before they find themselves in the throes of difficult academic situations.

As such, I championed our intern group's return involvement in this year's Alberta Student Leadership Summit, discussing a comprehensive and applicable framework of fairness for students. The multitude of networking and collaborative opportunities in the field of ombuds work also provided me with the rare chance to attend the European Network of Ombuds in Higher Education annual conference held in Prague, Czechia this June (2023), where I was invited to present my research on effective practices for building student involvement in higher education governance. This was a definite

highlight of my internship, providing me with the space to make international connections with ombuds practitioners that have graciously extended invitations to me for internships at their respective institutional offices.

I could not have asked for a more comprehensive and dynamic internship experience. I will cherish this role and the learnings I have gleaned from it forward into my professional career, now with the foresight to understand the opportunity the field of ombuds work has for me.”

# OMBUDS ACTIVITY SUMMARY 2022-2023

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- ❑ Orientations on the Role of the OSO for the Transition Year Program, Augustana Indigenous, Graduate Student Association, International Student Services Tabling (Fall/Winter), 10 Graduate Department Presentations, e.g., MLCS, Neuroscience
- ❑ GSA All Candidates Meeting
- ❑ FGSR Council Presentation
- ❑ Arts Leadership Council – Managing Conflict and Responding to Allegations
- ❑ Faculty of Arts Advisors Meeting
- ❑ Workshop with Students Identifying and Addressing Bias and Discriminatory Behaviours for students in Faculty of Nursing
- ❑ Workshop with students on Managing Difficult Conversations in Your Practicum for Faculty of Kinesiology, Sport and Recreation (KSR) (Fall/Winter)
- ❑ Workshop for Faculty of Nursing Faculty members on Creating a Culturally Responsive and Safe Environment for Graduate Students
- ❑ Workshop for Faculty of Rehab Medicine to Faculty members on Getting to Know our Biases: How Self-Awareness Supports Your Students’ Success and Well-being
- ❑ Workshops on Mitigating Conflicts in the Supervisory Relationship for several departments.
- ❑ OSO Fairness Day in SUB – Activities to promote fairness and understanding all forms of fairness in situations of conflict and decision-making processes
- ❑ Faculty of Arts Chairs Retreat on Conflict Management and Resolution
- ❑ Osgoode Professional Development Facilitator on Responding to Sexual Violence course
- ❑ First and Second Congress Ombuds – contributed to setting up the Ombuds function at Congress, Canada’s largest Humanities and Social Science Conference, to ensure fairness at proceedings
- ❑ “Intervisioning” Case Self-Reflective meetings with international higher education ombuds members (European Network and Canadian associations)

## DEMOGRAPHICS OF OSO OVER THE 3-YEAR PERIOD FROM 2020-2023

Reporting Years Comparison (Apr 1-Mar 31)	2020-2021	2021-2022	2022-2023
<b>Clients</b>	1498	1438	1466
Undergraduate	1170	1236	1259
Graduate (includes Med Residents and Postdoctoral Fellows)	296	198	187
Others (parents, admin, outside inquiry)	1	4	20
International*	547	466	520
Domestic	918	938	876
Residence Status Unknown	77	34	79
Contacts and Visits	6996**	14274****	16348
Average Number of Visits per Client	3.5	2.0	2.0
<b>Issues***</b>	1761	1600	1643
Academic	435	820	957
Conflict	177	121	104
Academic Offence	1011	496	440
Non-Academic Offence	13	25	14
Discrimination/Harassment Allegations	35	50	52
Miscellaneous	90	88	76
<b>Activities</b>			
Investigative Meetings	926	421	303
Committee Meetings, Staff Consults, Orientations, Presentations	863	974	836
Formal Hearings	31	32	49
Informal Resolution/Appreciative Inquiries	6	11	10

\* Proportionately, international students visit the ombuds more frequently than domestic students.

\*\* Contact hours are typically scheduled for 1 hour but may vary from ½ hour (RTW) to 2 hours.

\*\*\* Clients often present more than one issue.

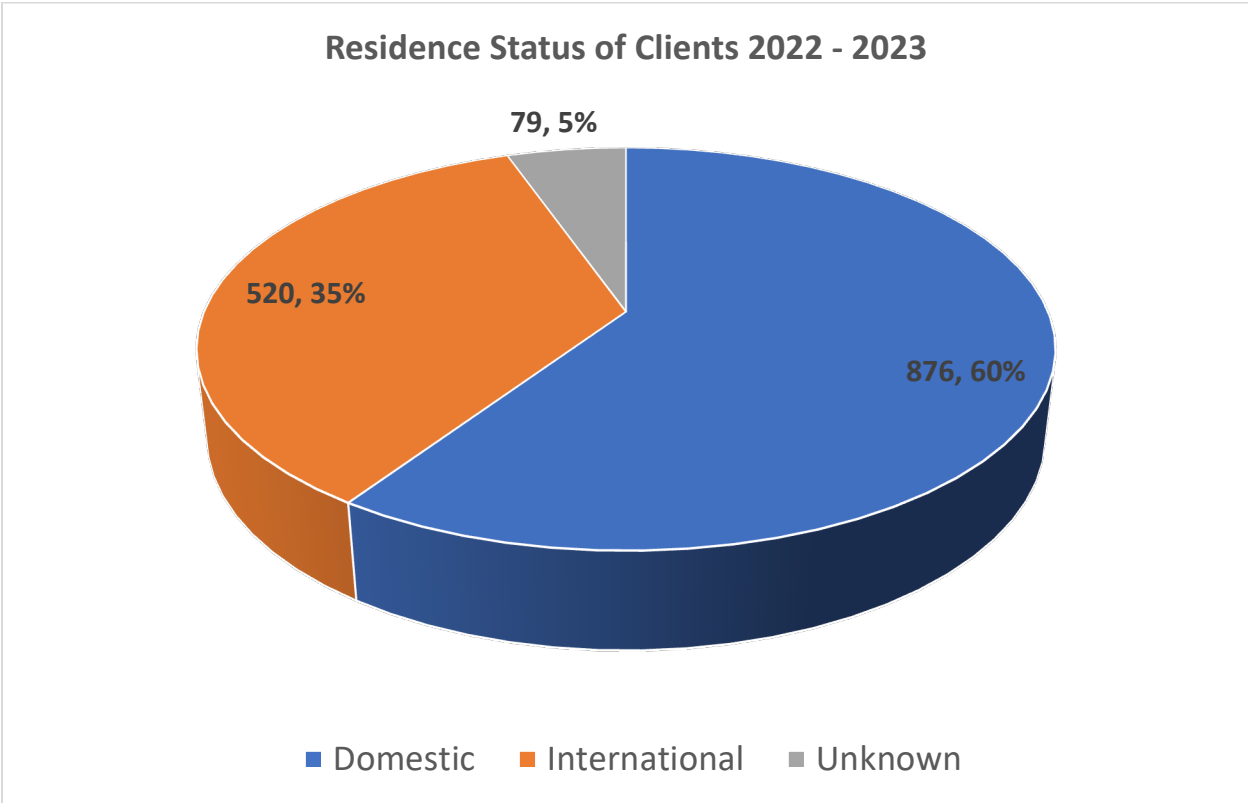
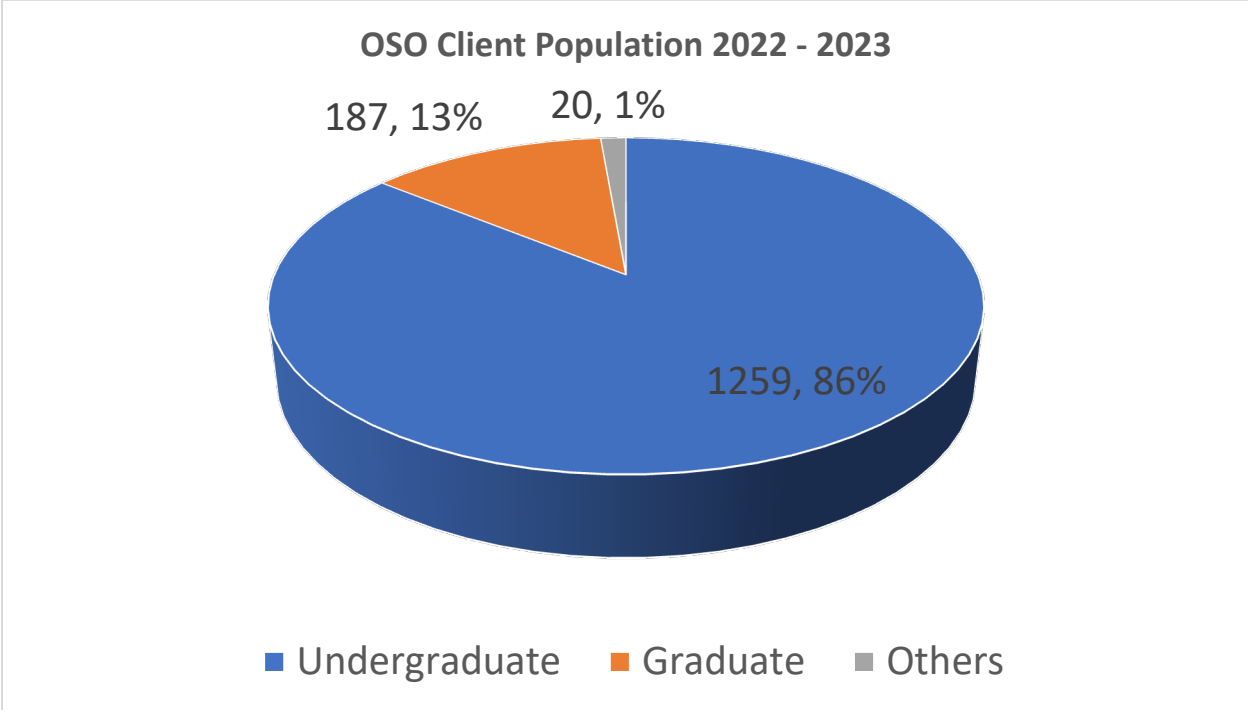
\*\*\*\* While working remotely, we tracked meetings, emails scheduling and responses.

## **Glossary:**

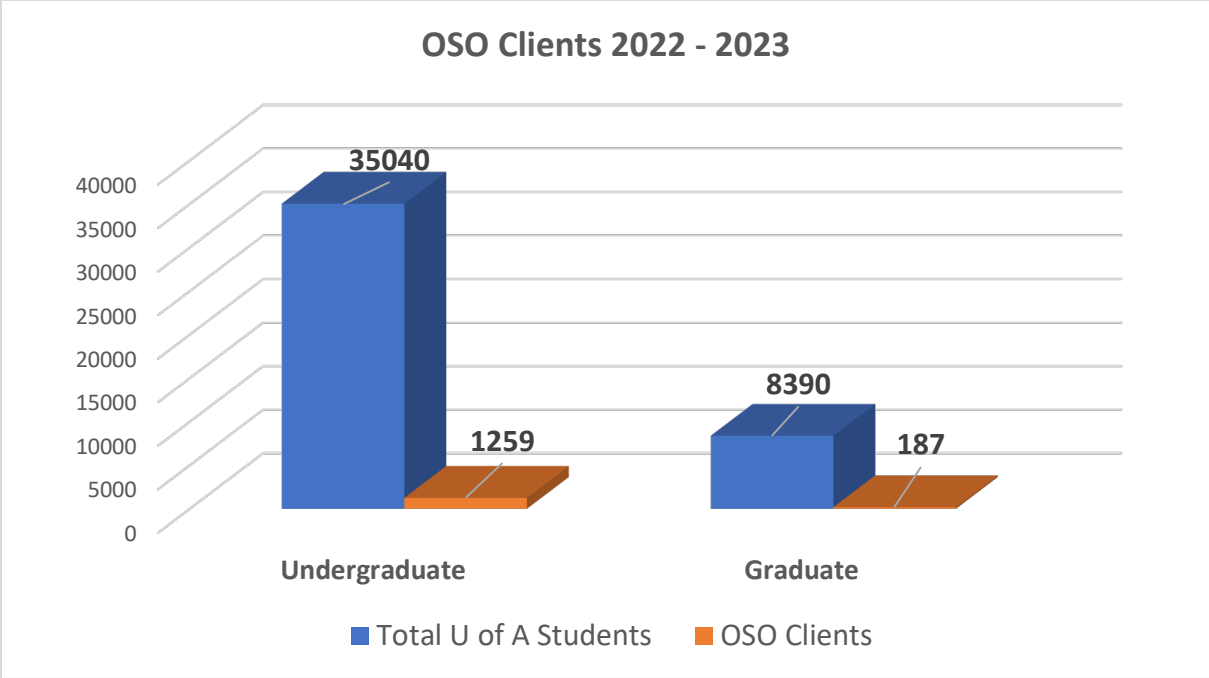
Academic includes required to withdraw (academic standing), grade appeals, exam deferrals and re-examinations. Conflict may involve interpersonal, supervisory, student-professor. conflicts. Academic Offence includes plagiarism, cheating, misrepresentation of facts. Non-Academic Offences include online bullying, discrimination, different forms of harassment and inappropriate behaviours. Discrimination/Harassment allegations related to sex, gender, racial, disability, family status discrimination, duty-to-accommodate violations. Miscellaneous includes residence conflicts, etc., Investigative Meetings include Instructor, Chair, Associate Dean, Discipline Officer, Protective Services; Formal Hearings are Formal University Tribunal hearings; Informal Resolution include Conflict Management Coaching, Mediation, Appreciative Inquiry

# GRAPHS/CHARTS FOR 2022-2023

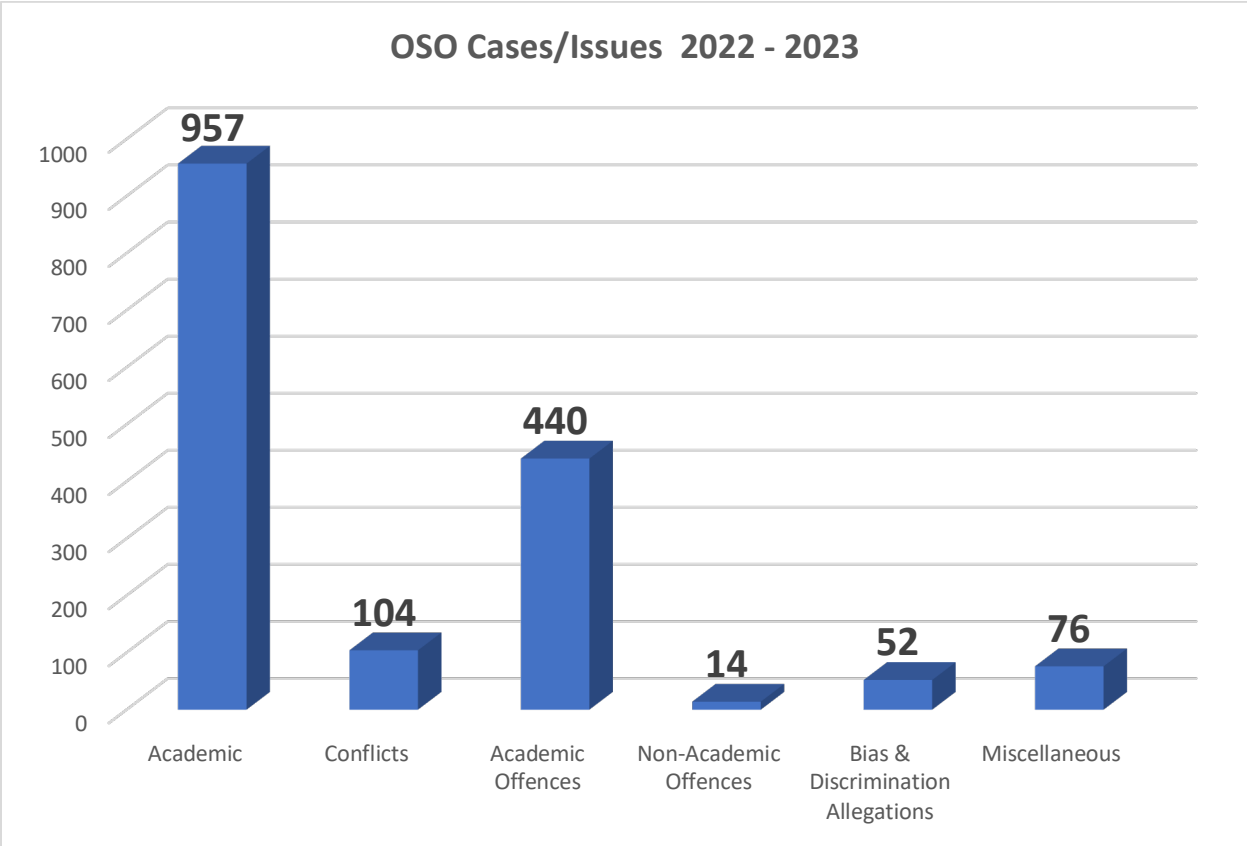
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U of A's population data source:  
<https://www.universitystudy.ca/canadian-universities/university-of-alberta/>



# OSO RECOMMENDATIONS FOR 2022-2023

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## RECOMMENDATION ONE:

The OSO recommends to various stakeholders, including Dean of Students and University Administration, the need to expedite the implementation of the OSO strategic plan. This recommendation has been in our annual report for the past three years.

**Response:** In March 2022, OSO was informed that it would begin a new reporting relationship to the Vice-Provost of Equity, Diversity and Inclusion on April 1st, 2023.

As noted in our 2021-2022 Annual Report, “The view of the OSO is that our work is more aligned with offices such as OSDHR and HIAR. The OSO view the work of an ombuds office as necessary for faculty, staff and students, as it is at many other Canadian post-secondary institutions. We are hopeful that this need would be realized as it was in the original model of the University of Alberta Ombudsman in the early 1970s. The OSO strategic plan will be revised into a document titled Declaration of Best Practices for the University of Alberta Ombuds (Office of the Student Ombuds), to strengthen the OSO capacity to deliver the highest quality of services to the University community, as outlined in last year’s recommendation. The OSO Mandate and Terms of Reference would then be aligned with the national guidelines of the Association of Canadian College and University Ombudsperson’s Standards of Practice: independence, confidentiality, impartiality and accessibility. Working closely with the EDI team and other equity-focused offices at the University, the OSO visibility and practices will be enhanced at the University of Alberta.

## RECOMMENDATION TWO:

The OSO continues to promote the visibility and availability of ombuds services for Augustana and CSJ students. One example of commitment would be to provide OSO information and university appeal and complaints processes in French for CSJ students. The OSO therefore promotes in collaboration with the Dean of Student and the AD of CSJ, the provision of ombuds services, appeal hearings, and appeal information in French.

**Response:** The OSO, among other services focused on equity, supports students from Campus St. Jean. With the move to the VP, EDI we are focused on ensuring that our written materials be available to CSJ students in their spoken and written language (French). This will be an ongoing collaborative initiative with all areas

within EDI serving CSJ. In addition, the OSO works collaboratively with Augustana student service administration and units to ensure effective ombuds' referrals.

### **RECOMMENDATION THREE:**

The OSO promotes a continuing hybrid model of onsite and remote delivery to increase accessibility to its clients as aligned to ACCUO Professional Standards of Practice.

**Response:** The OSO believes that the hybrid model has merits in increasing accessibility for students during and after regular work hour meetings, especially evening appeal hearings (most evening hearings are conducted remotely.) An additional benefit is cutting commuting time to and from campus and across various areas of campus. Comfort and safety (physical and mental, especially during the winter and dark evenings) are important factors for students and staff. This also cuts costs for university services such as protective services surveillance when walking to and from evening campus hearings, and food/beverages for onsite meetings. Students feel more comfortable meeting with their ombuds in a remote breakout room, and procedures for hearings are more carefully monitored by the appeal administrator and chair.

### **RECOMMENDATION FOUR:**

The OSO, in collaboration with professional and graduate faculties, recommends more restorative practice sessions with special focus on equity, diversity and inclusiveness. The OSO in collaboration with other units on campus will promote earlier restorative practice sessions, as requested.

**Response:** Professional faculties are encouraged to schedule these requests with the OSO Director and/or Graduate Ombudsperson as needed. The Graduate Ombudsperson offers these with the assistance of the Undergraduate Ombudsperson and the Graduate Ombuds Intern.

## **RECOMMENDATION FIVE:**

The OSO recommends continued development and facilitation of presentations and workshops addressing EDI issues and the promotion of EDI in all of our presentations and collaborative work with departments and faculties, student associations and as a self-reflective practice in the ombudsing profession.

**Response:** Workshops for Nursing and Kinesiology, Sport and Recreation, expanded this year with more self-reflective practices on EDI, tailored information for instructors, students, practicum professionals, etc. There were ongoing discussions with Rehab Medicine, Faculty of Medicine and Dentistry, Education and Pharmacy for the need to prepare students and staff around EDI issues, for practicum settings.

## **RECOMMENDATION SIX:**

The OSO promotes the initiatives of the new Sexual and Gender-Based Violence (SGBV) Advisory Council and will collaborate in all its initiatives as an advisory member.

**Response:** The OSO is now a team member, working closely with the SGBV Coordinator and will continue to provide critical commentary on the implementation of new policies and practices. As the OSO serves those who have been alleged to be perpetrators of SGBV, it recognizes the support needs for all parties, and will provide ongoing feedback to ensure safety and fairness for all parties.

# OSO RECOMMENDATIONS FOR 2023-2024

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## RECOMMENDATION ONE:

That the OSO Director in consultation with the VP, EDI team develop a Declaration of Best Ombuds Practices Document implementing the OSO strategic plan to meet the ACCUO Standards of Practice of Independence and Impartiality. As of April 1, 2023, OSO's reporting structure has changed to an independent structure – reporting to the Vice Provost, Equity, Diversity and Inclusion. This meets the ACCUO Standards of Practice of Independence and Impartiality. One of the main goals of our strategic plan was to have more independence in our structure and with that the perception of impartiality. We are hoping to work on the other goals outlined in the strategic plan to be implemented, such as working on establishing the ability to investigate as part of our mandate.

**Rationale:** One of the main goals of our strategic plan was to have more independence in our structure and with that the perception of impartiality. We are hoping to work on the other goals that are outlined in the strategic plan to be implemented, for example, establishing the ability to investigate as a part of our mandate.

## RECOMMENDATION TWO:

The OSO recommends that faculties introduce a policy on Undergraduate Leave of Absence similar to that under FGSR for graduate students.

**Rationale:** At least ten major universities in Canada have a clause on Undergraduate Leave of Absence whereas the U of Alberta does not. In our ombuds casework, we have recognized that the lack of such policy ignores structural barriers to students who may need to take leave for health, financial, and other reasons. In our casework we see students may have to apply for readmission, a costly process and an additional barrier. Given that such an Undergraduate Leave of Absence policy exists at other Canadian institutions, it may be a best practice to follow.

### **RECOMMENDATION THREE:**

The OSO recommends that faculties review and revise academic policies older than five years, and encourages faculties to invite feedback from the OSO on these revisions. The OSO acknowledges that some faculties practice regular updates of their academic policies and often request feedback from the OSO for revisions. We consider this a good practice for all appeals such as those related to grades, practicum interventions, as well as the faculty appeal committee and practicum appeal board procedures.

**Rationale:** The OSO believes that policies should reflect the ongoing changes in the faculty for the students it serves. We are hopeful that processes can be streamlined to reduce anxiety and confusion. These include current practices such as 'parallel proceedings' (for grade appeal, letter of concern, request for interim measures, etc.), as well as corrective measures of a formal sanction without a full investigation. Regular scheduled reviews of policies and procedures contribute to a fair process that meets the needs of the current environment. The OSO will provide procedural, substantive, relational and equitable fairness feedback as requested.

### **RECOMMENDATION FOUR:**

The OSO encourages instructors, investigators and decisionmakers to embrace the language of restorative measures and learning opportunities when questioning students at investigations, at appeal board hearings, as well as when framing their decision letters. One method is by refraining from language that labels individuals; this may occur through privilege and unconscious bias (making assumptions or speculating about a person's motivation) rather than focusing on the actual incident, issues and concerns. It is important to understand that negative labels can further stigmatize, marginalize and oppress those who have faced and continue to face additional barriers in life.

**Rationale:** During investigations and decision making, there are occasional references made to the Code of Student Behaviour as a "crime and punishment manual" and the use of outmoded and pejorative guilt and innocence language. It is important for instructors, deans and all decisionmakers to be mindful of the power they wield in their use of language. Corrective measures and sanctions need to focus on learning opportunities, rather than further stigmatizing students with labels. As the University embraces restorative methods of academic accountability, this paradigm will shift the discourse with EDI sensitive, relationship-building/restoring language. Ombuds recognize that emotions are strong for all parties and the stakes are high when there is an accusation of an alleged offence. Hence, there is a need for parties to engage in language that focuses on care and dignity (rather than accusatory language that escalates harm and fear) when working toward a resolution.

## **RECOMMENDATION FIVE:**

For many years the OSO has advocated for a complete review of the Code of Student Behaviour and a development of a new policy regarding academic misconducts that would incorporate a restorative and educative approach instead of a punitive one as is currently in the Code of Student Behaviour. The OSO has a representative on the Academic Integrity Working Group which has been tasked with the development of the new Academic Integrity Policy. Our continued work in this area ensures that the ombuds lens of fairness and equity is put forward so that the developed policy is fair and equitable. The OSO will also provide supports to faculties and all university community members as this policy and procedures are implemented.

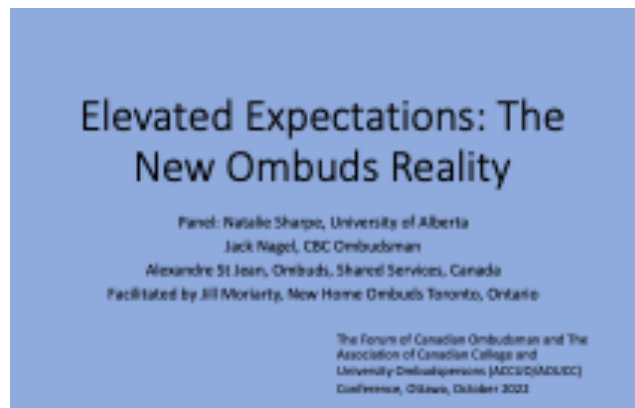
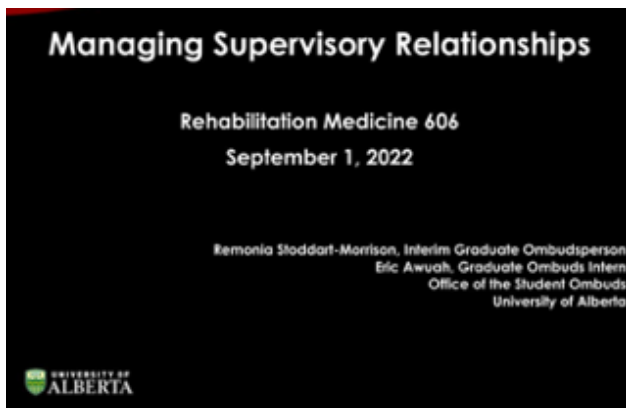
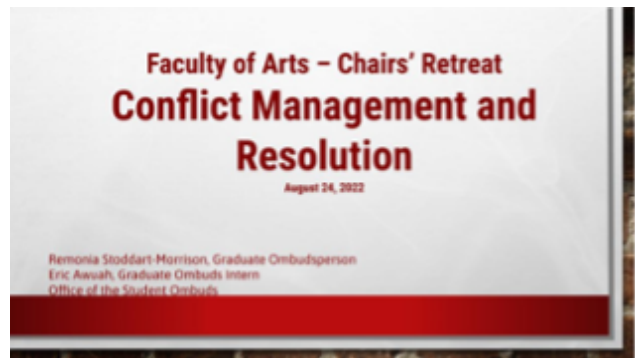
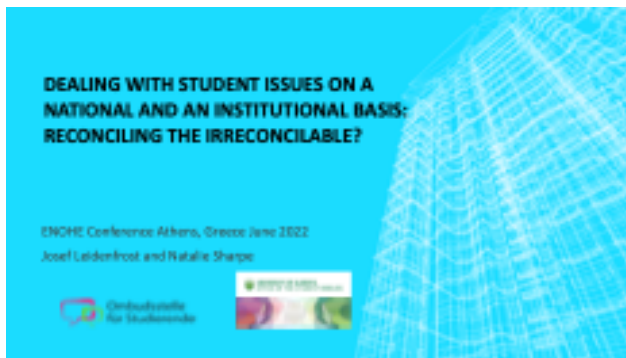
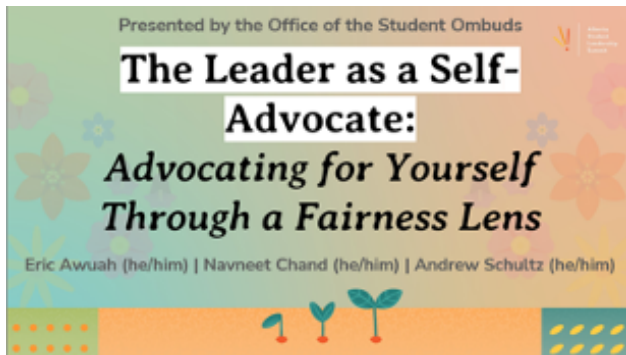
**Rationale:** This restorative approach will influence how decisionmakers make their decisions. The policy will ensure the student's voice is heard and their circumstances are uniquely considered and treated. The input of the OSO in policy development and this committee helps to ensure that the values of fairness are embedded in University policies and procedures. When policies are not fair and equitable, we run the risk of students not trusting and/or being frustrated with the process. This is compounded by the stress of the time it takes away from their academic work. There is also the potential for unfairness in decision making.

## **RECOMMENDATION SIX:**

The OSO recommends that all professional faculties and graduate departments promote restorative practice sessions for students, student groups, faculty and administrators around the principles of EDI. The OSO provides facilitation and tailor-made sessions for parties who make a request.

**Rationale:** Restorative practices are used as both proactive and reactive strategies to help address conflict or harms that have occurred in relationships in an effort, where possible, to restore the relationship so both parties can move forward in a caring, collaborative and collegial manner. This is important for graduate students and students in professional faculties who occupy the space as both colleague and student, where power differentials between students and supervisors exist and where the building of these relationships are crucial to the success of students. These restorative practice sessions can be used as early intervention strategies; to help parties develop a healthy foundation and build collegial relationships, leading to academic success.

# VISUALS OF PRESENTATIONS







## Identifying and Addressing Biased and Discriminatory Behaviours

Presenter:  
Remonia Stoddart-Morrison  
Office of the Student Ombuds

## Creating a Culturally Responsive and Safe Environment for Graduate Students

Presenter: Remonia Stoddart-Morrison  
Office of the Student Ombuds

## Mitigating Conflicts in the Supervisory Relationships

### Modern Languages & Cultural Studies (MLCS)

October 28, 2022

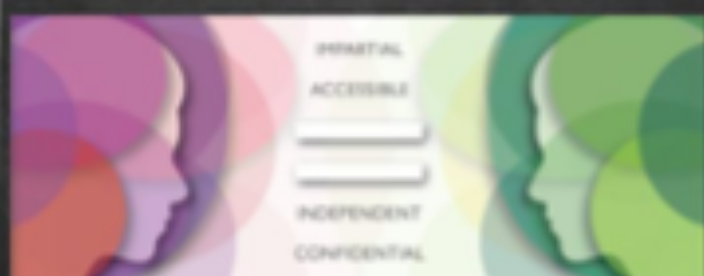
Remonia Stoddart-Morrison, Graduate Ombudsperson  
Eric Awuah, Graduate Ombuds Intern  
Office of the Student Ombuds  
University of Alberta

## Like a Tidal Pool:

### Building a Rich, Diverse & Sustainable Ombuds Office

A Conversation with: Hector Escalante,  
Bruce MacAllister, & Natalie Sharpe  
CCCUO Asilomar 49th Conference  
November 6-9, 2022  
Pacific Grove, California

# OFFICE OF THE STUDENT OMBUDS



Location: 2-702 Student Union Building  
By Appointment Only - [ombuds@ualberta.ca](mailto:ombuds@ualberta.ca)  
Phone: 780-492-4689; [www.uab.ca/Ombuds](http://www.uab.ca/Ombuds)

# Photos of OSO Staff and Activities 2022-2023

## Fairness Day

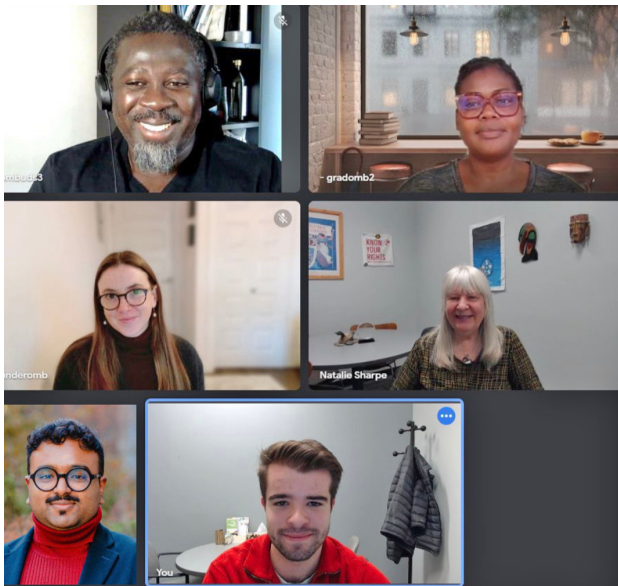


## Orange Shirt Day





OSO Staff in Self-Care and Teambuilding Activities



Staff Potluck 2023

Staff Meeting

