



Office of the Ombudsperson

Building a culture of fairness

TENTH ANNUAL REPORT

JUNE 1, 2019 TO MAY 31, 2020

Independent • Confidential • Impartial

TO THE UNIVERSITY COMMUNITY

The year 2019-2020 has given us many challenges. Since March, we have all been experiencing a pandemic that has changed the way we organize most of our activities, whether personal, professional or academic. This has added to the challenges facing the University and our society to improve mental health and well-being and to combat racism. This is a difficult time, but it has also shown us the dynamism and resilience of students, faculty and staff who make a daily commitment through their work, active participation and presence.

2020 is a special year for our office as September 1 marked the 10th anniversary of the Office of the Ombudsperson at the University of Ottawa. It was created under the leadership of Lucie Allaire who completed her contract in 2018. The team has since been composed of Martine Conway, Ombudsperson, and Evelyne Poisson, Assistant Ombudsperson. The Office is mandated to receive requests for assistance from all members of the University community. Our role is to listen and provide services -- ranging from confidential advice to independent and impartial interventions -- to help resolve problems or complaints.

Over the past decade, the University has seen enrolment increase from approximately 39,500 in 2010 to just over 43,000 in 2019. The recommendations of the Office of the Ombudsperson have been reflected in many changes made since 2010. Those recommendations covered topics that included improving processes for accessibility and accommodation, communicating the right to appeal effectively, improving processes for complaints of discrimination, and procedural fairness in processes that could lead to sanctions.

This report includes updates on the recommendations made in the previous report. It also includes quantitative and qualitative data on our services, examples of cases processed, a summary of themes observed during the year, and new recommendations.



A fair environment is one that facilitates inclusion and well-being. It is built with the participation of all members of the University community. I would like to thank the students, staff, faculty and administrators who shared their experience with us or who worked with us to find solutions.

MARTINE CONWAY

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I. HIGHLIGHTS OF 2019-2020

1. Our services by the numbers

This report presents statistics for the period from June 1, 2019 to May 31, 2020, during which we processed service requests from 654 individuals (**see Table 1**), including 389 students (267 undergraduates, 83 graduates and 39 unspecified) and 24 employees. The total number of requests is similar to last year, but we saw a decrease in requests from applicants for admission and an increase in requests from students (54 more).

The “Other” category (56 individuals in 2019-2020) includes members of the University community other than students or employees (such as researchers or residents), as well as parents, job applicants and members of the public.

Since 2018-2019, we have identified applicants for admission (prospective students) separately from the “Other” category in this table. The majority of those who contact us (185 in 2019-2020) are foreign applicants whom we refer to the appropriate services: admissions services at the undergraduate level, services related to financial matters or scholarships, or faculties if it is about an admission to a graduate program. A smaller proportion of requests relate to complaints (15%) that, depending on the case, are routed to an appeal process or are reviewed to clarify the information or resolve the problem. (See for example *Admission* on page 11.)

1. Service Requests by Type of Person

Year	Students	Personnel	Admission Applicants	Other	Total
2019-2020	389	24	185	56	654
2018-2019	335	36	241	38	650
2017-2018	318	20	-	237	575
2016-2017	402	26	-	249	677
2015-2016	316	28	-	196	540
2014-2015	309	37	-	103	449
2013-2014	337	30	-	46	413
2012-2013	340	33	-	32	405
2011-2012	295	48	-	32	375
2010-2011	152	22	-	0	174



Table 2 presents the issues raised by those who consult us. In the second half of March, early in the pandemic, we saw an initial slowdown in consultations, which picked back up in late March with the transfer of exams and courses online.

During this time, we received questions about grading systems, exam monitoring, online course adaptation, and academic fraud. Other issues related to mental health and to the transition to a remote campus.

2. Issues by Type of Person

Type of Problem	Student	Personnel	Other*	Total
Academic	172	0	2	174
Admission & Registration	34	0	183	217
Student Association	10	0	17	27
Relational Conflict	5	1	0	6
Human Rights	33	5	4	42
Academic Support	7	0	0	7
Finance	46	0	7	53
Harassment	4	1	0	5
Workplace	1	16	0	17
Residence	12	0	1	13
Security	5	0	0	5
Supervisor/Student	14	0	0	14
Student Conduct	4	0	1	5
Professor Conduct	23	1	8	32
Other	73	4	14	91
Total	443	28	237	708

A person can have more than one issue.

*Includes admission applicants.



Table 3 details the academic issues raised by students. (Note that graduate student supervisory issues are reported in Table 2.) Compared to last year, we received slightly more requests related to evaluation and academic fraud, in part associated with the transition to online courses. There was only a slight

increase in the “Concession requests” category (requests for extensions, deferred examinations or course withdrawals) despite the pandemic situation. This is likely due to the extraordinary changes made in April by faculties to increase flexibility and facilitate course completion.

3. Students – Academic Issues

	Academic Fraud	Evaluation	Withdrawal from program	Concession Requests	Experiential Learning	Other	Total
Undergraduate	18	55	5	17	7	30	132
Graduate	0	9	6	0	0	14	29
Unregistered/ Former/Special	1	3	5	5	0	17	31
Unknown	1	0	0	0	0	3	4
Total	20	67	16	22	7	63	196

A person can receive more than one service.

Table 4 identifies the categories of human rights complaints. If the person has not exhausted all recourses, we refer them to the Human Rights Office for any issues of discrimination or harassment. As was the case last year, we dealt in particular with

accommodation issues (disabilities), such as identifying resources, explaining processes, and resolving communication or substantive issues. This year, we also received a n increase in questions related to racial discrimination. (See pages 14-15.)

4. Human Rights Issues (total: 42)

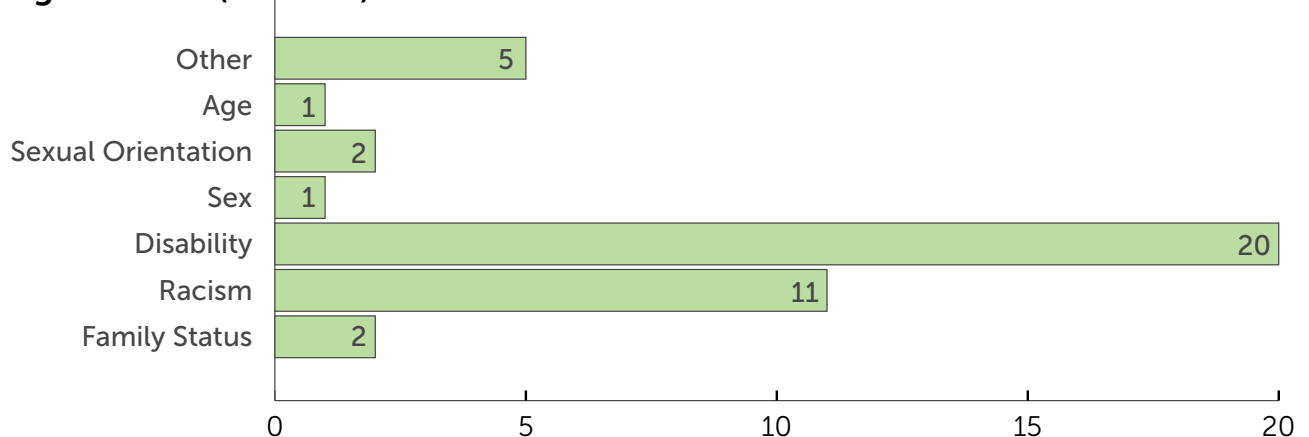


Table 5 summarizes the services we offered to those who approached us. Depending on the nature of the request, the remedies available, the steps already taken by the person and their needs, we generally offer services that can be viewed as falling into three categories: referral, advice and intervention. If the individual has exhausted the recourses available at the University, we can also conduct a final review.

Information and referral: If the person has not yet used the available recourses, we will inform them of the relevant regulations and the processes to be followed. If necessary, we explain the criteria that apply and the options that they may consider. We also refer them to support services.

Advice and coaching: If the person needs help to take action on their own, we offer confidential advice and an independent perspective. We can help the individual better understand the steps to take, identify the issues or compare possible options. We can also help them develop effective communication tools. This may involve coaching or follow-up discussions depending on the issue the person is dealing with.

Various interventions: If the person requires more direct assistance to facilitate the use of processes or to resolve the situation, we require their written consent to contact the corresponding administrative or academic units. Depending on the case, we usually use informal techniques to clarify the information the person needs or to help resolve a problem.

5. Services Offered by Type of Person

Service	Students				Personnel	Other**	Total
	Under-graduate	Master	PhD	Other Students*			
Information and Referral	180	24	16	33	9	235	497
Advice or Coaching	52	17	16	2	9	1	97
Interventions	32	6	6	3	7	5	59
Final Review	3	1	3	0	0	0	7
Total	267	48	41	38	25	241	660

A person can receive more than one service.

*Unregistered/Former/Special/Unknown

** Includes admission applicants



Table 6 presents the results of our interventions. These can occur at various stages of a process and for various reasons. It should also be noted that the solution sought by the individual is not necessarily the one required. As a result, situations “partly” resolved may reflect several scenarios: clarification of the criteria or steps to be followed, clarification of the

reasons for a decision, resolution of a part of the situation, or a solution different from the one initially sought. Situations where the outcome is unknown are those where the individual did not continue to communicate with our office following our initial response and subsequent follow-up.

6. Outcomes of Interventions (total: 59)

Fully resolved	17
Partly resolved	35
Unknown outcome	5
Not resolved	2

Table 7 shows the results of final reviews (seven cases). One of the two situations giving rise to recommendations is described in Section II (see *Program Withdrawal*, page 10); a more systemic recommendation on this matter is also made in Section III.3, p. 16. The other situation that gave rise to a recommendation was appealed to the Senate Appeals Committee (SAC). But it was found to be outside SAC’s mandate, which caused a delay. The recommendation was therefore to strengthen, where

possible, earlier identification of matters outside SAC’s mandate.

A complaint related to a fee refund request had reached the final appeal stage but raised issues related to human rights and accommodations. It was therefore redirected to the Human Rights Office. See also Section III.1 on pages 12-13 for more information. The remaining complaints lacked sufficient grounds to take action.

7. Outcomes of Final Reviews (total: 7)

Recommendations made	2
Redirected complaint	1
No grounds	4

Individual situations can also lead to improvements at a more systemic level. This year, for example, an intervention regarding a request for an official receipt for a professional development course resulted in the creation of a new system for obtaining these receipts. A follow-up on an individual admission question resulted in the clarification of a program’s admission

requirements on the website to specify the basis on which a file is assessed when the applicant has previously studied at different types of institutions. We also collected questions raised by students about exam proctoring software and asked the University to include them in the information it was preparing on that topic.

2. Other activities

The Office of the Ombudsperson participates in promotion and orientation activities such as 101 Week. In 2019-2020, we also updated the Office's logo and key messages to explain our role to students. We presented three workshops for graduate students and two workshops for faculty administrators. The themes were conflict resolution and the tools available to deal with difficult behaviours.

We participated in professional activities. In October 2019, the ombudsperson was part of a panel on conflict resolution in university communities at the annual symposium organized by the Conflict Research Centre at Saint Paul University. In January 2020, we hosted the regional meeting of the Association of Canadian College and University Ombudspersons.

We also undertook training related to our functions. In the fall of 2019, the assistant ombudsperson completed the Mental Health First Aid training offered by the University. In January, she also took two training courses offered by the Workplace Institute on interviewing and fact-finding techniques. In March 2020, the ombudsman attended the Telfer School of Management Forum, Breaking Burnout: Improving Employee Mental Health and Well-Being.

The Advisory Committee of the Ombudsperson met three times in 2019-2020. The committee, composed of undergraduate and graduate students, professors and employees of the University, recommends the budget of the Office of the Ombudsperson and ensures the independence and confidential nature of the ombudsperson's function. In 2019-2020, the ombudsperson and the committee also updated Policy 117 on the ombudsperson, which was passed in the spring by the Senate and the Board of Governors.



Evelyn Poisson (Assistant Ombudsperson), Martine Conway (Ombudsperson)



II. EXAMPLES OF CASES

PROGRAM WITHDRAWAL

Final review (with recommendations)

A doctoral student contacted us after unsuccessfully appealing her withdrawal from her program to the Senate Appeals Committee. During the final review of the case, we noted that there were questions related to accommodations for mental health issues that the student had communicated to her thesis supervisor. We therefore asked the faculty to provide us with a record of the interactions between the student, the thesis supervisor and faculty administration, as well as progress reports and requests for program extensions.

Based on this information, we recommended the student's readmission to the faculty (after checking the progress of the thesis and confirming that the student's health enabled her to resume her studies). The faculty accepted the recommendation and has since re-admitted the student. We also recommended that the faculty improve the procedure before a withdrawal decision, and we made some more systemic recommendations (see pages 16 and 20 of this report).

CONCESSION REQUEST FOR A COURSE

Final review (no grounds)

A student complained about the grade received in one of his courses. He appealed to his department and to the Senate Appeals Committee. He then asked for a final review by the ombudsperson. The student was requesting a deferred assignment date in this course. We reviewed the appeal file and the exchanges that had preceded and followed the issuance of the grade.

We found no grounds to intervene. We explained to the student the criteria to be documented when a request for late submission of assignments is made and the process and timelines to follow. The details of the case confirmed that the student's situation did not meet these criteria.

SINGLE ROOM REQUEST (DISABILITY)

Intervention: Facilitated communication

A student's parent called our office about an unsuccessful application to change residence rooms. We explained to the parent that we needed to hear from the student and we obtained the student's consent. We then contacted the Housing Service.

Based on what the parent and student had explained to us, we clarified to Housing that this was not a request due to a roommate dispute (as the initial request seemed to indicate) but rather a request for accommodation because of a disability. We then explained to the student where to send the documentation to support his request and move the matter forward. Based on the documentation, the student then received the offer of a single room.

"I want to thank you for your assistance in my case. Your support has been essential to maintaining mental balance."



ADMISSION

Intervention: Problem-solving

A candidate for admission contacted us after submitting two unsuccessful applications. The grade average required for admission to a program may vary according to a number of criteria, such as the number of applications received, the quality of applications, etc. On his first application, the student had an average of 80.5% for a program where 82% was required for admission. On his second application, the student had an average of 82%, but was again refused admission because the required average had increased to 84%.

The ombudsperson spoke with the student to understand the context of his applications for admission. The student had strong recent grades in a college program related to the university program. However, his average also included courses from a weak first year (courses unrelated to subsequent studies) during which he had had personal difficulties. The ombudsperson contacted Admissions to discuss the situation. Admissions suggested asking the faculty to reassess the application based on the additional information. The student was admitted to the program of his choice.

"Thank you so much for your thoughtful response. I found all of your suggestions to be exceptionally helpful and I incorporated all of them today."

WORKPLACE

Advice and coaching

A non-unionized employee came to see us for a confidential consultation about difficulties in his workplace. He described communication problems with his supervisor and changes to work descriptions. He wanted to understand his rights as an employee and know the services or people he could go to for assistance.

During the conversation and a follow-up discussion, the ombudsperson also helped him to better identify the issues he was facing so that he could then discuss them constructively with his supervisor, the director of his department or the relevant support services.

SUPERVISORY RELATIONSHIP

Advice and coaching

An international student was worried about having to leave her program after a difficult year. The student had encountered health problems that she had not documented with the University. During the same period, she failed the first attempt at her comprehensive examination. At a meeting with her supervisor, he told her that he was thinking of recommending a withdrawal from the program or a transfer to a master's program.

The ombudsperson discussed with the student how to document the health problems she had experienced so that this could be taken into account. She also helped the student assess the advantages and disadvantages of the various options proposed by the supervisor. Finally, she helped the student develop tools to proactively communicate with her supervisor about her work. The student was not withdrawn from the program. She has since confirmed that her research work is progressing in accordance with the schedule established with her supervisor.



III. ISSUES OBSERVED IN 2019-2020

1. Concession requests (illness or other exceptional personal circumstances)

In 2019-2020, the ombudsperson met with the Council on Undergraduate Studies (CUS) four times. Discussions focused on regulations and processes related to requests for deferred examinations, medical certificates, the self-declaration form (illness or exceptional personal circumstances), illness during an examination, absence from an examination, and late submission of assignments.

At the same time, the ombudsperson met with the student accounts manager to discuss the process for requesting a refund or cancellation of fees when a student withdraws from one or more courses after the deadline due to health or exceptional personal circumstances. This process was under review.

The ombudsperson also consulted with the Human Rights Office on these issues. In particular, the ombudsperson is seeking to bring forward issues or suggestions to clarify the communication of rules and processes to students, and the appropriate handling of concession requests. In her interventions, the ombudsperson stressed the importance of considering processes through a human rights and accommodations lens.

Among the students who consulted us, those who experienced difficulties with these processes were generally experiencing problems related to their mental health or as a result of a head injury. In these situations, it could be difficult for them to anticipate how the situation might affect their performance or for how long.

Information about the options and processes to follow when a student encounters a medical issue or exceptional personal circumstances is located in several regulations or on several pages of the website. It is understandable but makes navigation more complicated.

For example:

Section 4 of Regulation I.9 explains the criteria and process to follow if a student experiences a “significant deterioration in health while the examination is in progress”. Section 5 provides criteria to justify an absence from an examination or a late submission of assignments. Processes for submitting a request for a deferral or a request to withdraw from a course may vary by faculty. The process to request a fee refund is outlined on the Financial Resources Appeals Committee webpage.

This dispersion of information can lead students to make certain decisions without knowing the consequences. It is possible, for example, to request to withdraw from a course after the deadline due to health or exceptional personal circumstances. However, a student who begins experiencing symptoms in October may initially choose to remain enrolled without knowing that a withdrawal later in the term will likely not be accompanied by a reduction in fees. The length of enrolment is generally taken into account by the University, including in medical and exceptional personal circumstances.



IMPROVED PROCESSES

Following discussions with the ombudsperson, Student Accounts consulted with the Human Rights Office (HRO) on these issues and undertook the following steps: refinement of the criteria that could lead to fee reductions depending on the circumstances; annual training session by the HRO for members of the committee responsible for decisions on fee reduction requests; and improvement of the information on the webpage about the process for making these requests. (This work is ongoing.)

In addition, in response to a recommendation by the ombudsperson to improve communication about course withdrawal deadlines and the financial and academic impacts, the Office of the Registrar facilitated the addition of links, on the “student” and “professor” Brightspace modules, to the webpage containing information on important dates.

RECOMMENDATION

I recommend developing and posting in the “Academic Regulations Explained” section of the website a document such as a roadmap or frequently asked questions that would bring together and summarize information on the options (and their implications), processes to follow and resources available when a student experiences a medical issue or exceptional personal circumstances.

The intent would be to present the information in an abbreviated, student-centred manner while including links to existing regulations or information pages: requests for deferred examinations or the late submission of assignments, requests for withdrawals after deadlines, requests concerning fees, support services, etc. Once the document is posted on the website, it could be shared directly with students and a link added in Brightspace.



2. Human rights: related regulations and procedures

In the previous report, the ombudsperson recommended clearer communication of processes, rights of parties, and support services for complaints related to sexual violence. The ombudsperson also stressed the importance of establishing a “case manager” function that provides more specific assistance to a student facing a particularly difficult situation requiring coordination of several administrative and/or academic aspects.

In 2019-2020, the University established an interim “case manager” function while continuing to consider how best to structure it. The Human Rights Office had already initiated a review of Policy 67a (Prevention of Harassment and Discrimination) and Policy 67b (Prevention of Sexual Violence) and related procedures. The ombudsperson therefore proposed to offer comments during the consultation phase.

This year, we received a number of comments in response to the two incidents on campus (June and September 2019) in which two black students were asked to provide identification. Both incidents were subject to external investigations under the University’s Policy 67a. The investigation into the first incident led to two public reports (Phase I, November 2019 and Phase II, January 2020), available on the University’s website, that include recommendations to update regulations and procedures and to improve training for Protection Services staff.

The feedback received by the Office of the Ombudsperson in relation to these two incidents included questions aimed at improving prevention of incidents. The themes were similar to the issues addressed in the Phase II public report, such as updating and clarifying regulations and procedures on certain aspects of the work of protection officers but also of security guards, and developing effective training and communication tools.

Other issues related to the need to better understand complaint processes. For example: confidentiality parameters (including the right to expression); the process for examining systemic elements related to a complaint; the process for identifying witnesses or surveillance camera recordings; and clarity of communication regarding the rights and responsibilities of parties in a complaint process.



UNIVERSITY'S UPDATE (SUMMER 2020):

In an update posted on June 10, 2020, the president stated that the University has "introduced new directives to clarify when and how requests for identification may be made by Protection Services officers on campus (Policy 33)...[and] implemented mandatory training for Protection Services officers focused on unconscious bias and equity, diversity and inclusion." The president's statement also includes a summary of more systemic measures to combat racism on campus.

Furthermore, "[t]he Human Rights Office is still in the process of reviewing Policy 67a and Policy 67b and related methods and procedures. This process is taking longer than anticipated due to available resources and, more recently, the pandemic. Revisions have been proposed to the Office of the Secretary-General for Policy 67a and Policy 67b along with a preliminary review of Procedures 36. However, it has been impossible to start consultations to date. We hope to further advance these exercises by this fall."

RECOMMENDATION AND NEXT STEPS

The situations we have seen this year lead us to reiterate the importance of communicating certain information clearly and systematically, in particular:

- the rights and responsibilities of parties in Policy 67a, Policy 67b and in related processes and procedures
- the expectations and parameters regarding confidentiality and the right to expression in these regulations and procedures.

As the feedback we received indicates, the processes for policies 67a and 67b are linked to many other processes governing interactions between members of the University community. Since the University is already in the process of reviewing policies 67a and 67b and related procedures, as well as implementing the recommendations arising from the Phase II public report, the Office of the Ombudsperson is seeking an update from the relevant administrative units on the progress of this work so that additional comments can be made, if necessary.



3. Graduate studies: Regulation II.3.2 on enrolment and leave

In the previous report, the ombudsperson recommended “reviewing Regulation II.3 – Graduate enrolment and its application. In particular (...) applying a human rights and accommodation lens in reviewing questions about registration (including leaves of absence, tuitions fees, etc.) to ensure that current practices do not present a discriminatory barrier for students with certain disabilities.”

Regulation II.3.2 includes the following: “Students who are granted medical or compassionate leave will be granted a corresponding **extension, not exceeding one year**, within which to complete their program.” (emphasis added)

Following the final review on which the ombudsperson made recommendations in November 2019 (see *Program Withdrawal*, Section II, page 10), we identified aspects of Regulation II.3.2 that could lead students to misunderstand it and not seek a concession to which they might be entitled.

RECOMMENDATION

We have therefore clarified the recommendation to include the following:

In Regulation II.3.2:

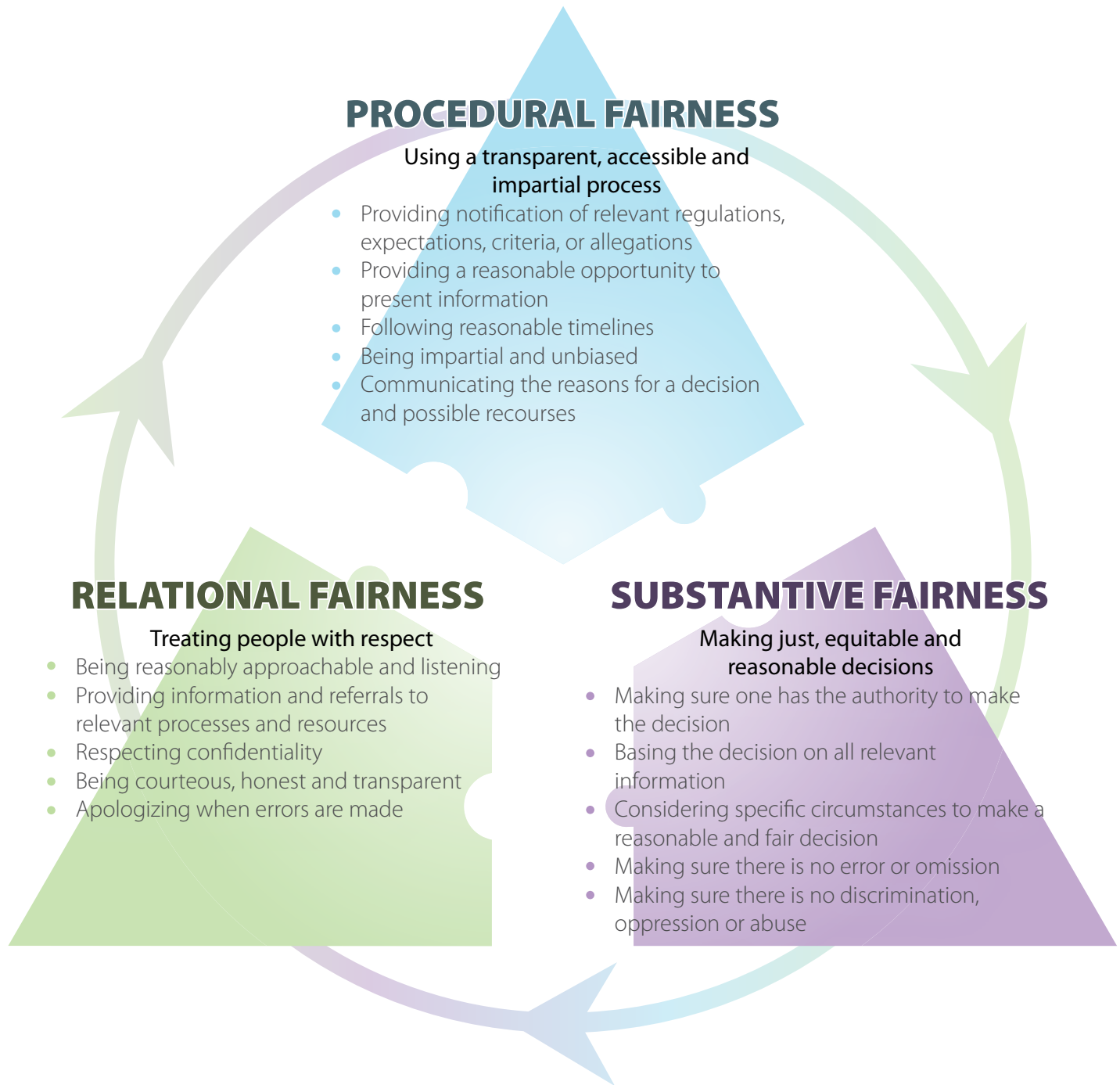
- Use an expression such as “corresponding deferral” to complete the program requirements (to distinguish this situation from an “extension,” which suggests a situation where the student is allowed to enrol in one or more additional sessions after they have reached the total number of sessions normally allowed to complete the program requirements).
- Since the regulation limits the deferral to one year, but accommodation requests related to a disability must be considered on a case-by-case basis, clearly communicate the possibility of making additional concession requests that would be considered on a case-by-case basis.

UNIVERSITY’S UPDATE (SUMMER 2020):

“A discussion with the ombudsperson was held to better understand the concerns raised. The Office of the Provost, Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies will work with the Human Rights Office to review Regulation II.3. This change will be included in the review of academic regulations applicable to graduate studies in 2021.”



THE FAIRNESS TRIANGLE



IV. FOLLOW-UP ON ISSUES RAISED IN PREVIOUS REPORTS

1. Student roadmap

In 2018-2019, we noted instances where students (particularly international students) were not familiar with the resources and processes open to them for more proactive problem or conflict resolution. In fall 2019, the ombudsperson recommended "the creation of a generic and succinct roadmap for all students on the theme of "I have a problem, whom do I contact?", which would identify the main offices for administrative and academic matters affecting all students, as well as academic support services, and the offices to contact within and outside their faculty to resolve conflicts and address complaints."

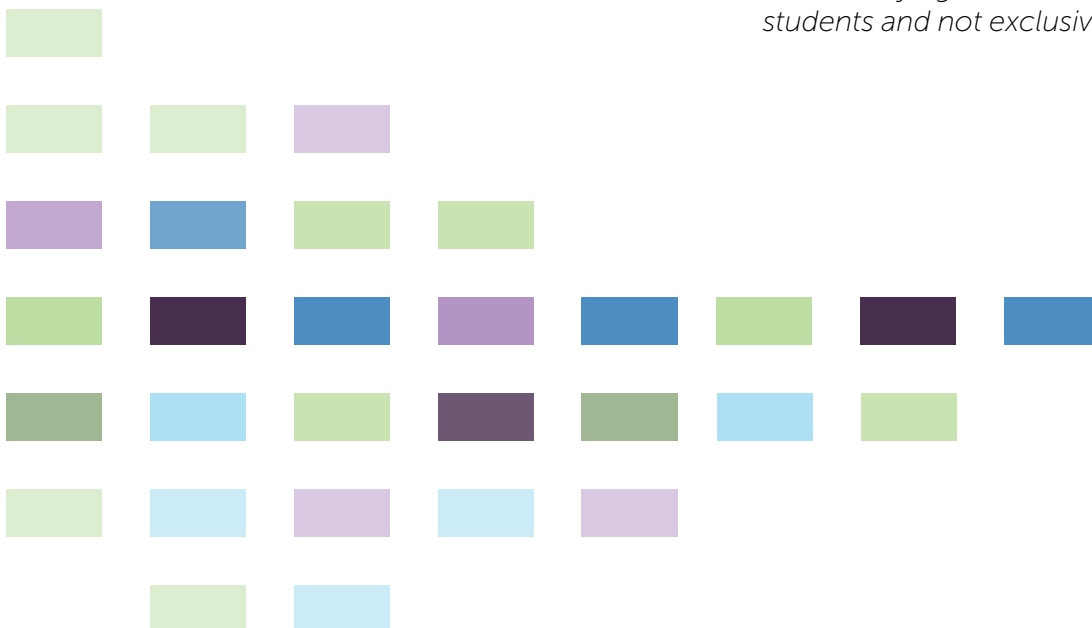
UNIVERSITY'S UPDATE (SUMMER 2020):

"In response to this recommendation, the Vice-Provost of Academic Affairs formed a working group, which she chairs (....)

Using institutional data and their statistical analysis, the group is working to better understand the situation of international students, their challenges and their needs. The group is also evaluating existing services and resources for international students to identify gaps, improvements and the development of new resources or strategies. New avenues and educational resources will also be explored to improve the learning experience for international students as a whole.

Research is also underway to learn more about online academic and wellness support services at Canadian and American universities. Preliminary results show that these services are available to all registered students (...)

This research and analysis will help develop a roadmap to assist students with the resolution of issues. It goes without saying that the roadmap will be available to all students and not exclusively to international students."



2. Graduate studies: supervisory relationship

In fall 2019, the ombudsperson recommended that a regulation or guideline be developed to clarify the responsibilities of the parties in a supervisory relationship. In particular, it is important to clarify the minimum expectations for the role of thesis supervisor regarding the frequency of interactions and feedback; the resources available to students and thesis supervisors when problems arise between them; the role of other parties, such as other committee members and program directors, in resolving problems; and the responsibilities when either party requests that a relationship cease.

UNIVERSITY'S UPDATE (SUMMER 2020):

"The Office of the Vice-Provost, Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies recognizes the importance of this file as a priority. Research to identify best practices at other universities is underway and a first draft of a supervisory guide is planned for the fall. The faculties will then be consulted before this guide is approved by the Council on Graduate Studies in the 2020-2021 academic year."

3. Graduate studies: master's major research paper

There are some differences between the major research paper and thesis processes. In response to issues raised by the ombudsperson in a previous report, the University had clarified that "requests for deferred grades as part of the submission of the master research paper are subject to Academic Regulation II-5: Examinations and grading for graduate studies, 5.3: Deferred evaluation." At the same time, the University established a working group to more fully review issues related to the guidance around major research papers in all faculties.

UNIVERSITY'S UPDATE (SUMMER 2020):

"The working group reviewed all practices on campus and proposed a draft regulation. The Office of the Vice-Provost, Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies will work closely with the Office of the Provost and Vice-President, Academic Affairs over the summer to advance this file and review the draft. It can then be presented to the Council on Graduate Studies and approved in fall 2020. The goal is to have a regulation in effect for May 2021."



4. Graduate studies: academic accommodations

In relation to the research or thesis writing phase of master's and doctoral programs, the ombudsperson noted that students with disabilities, particularly chronic mental or physical health issues, are more likely to encounter barriers. In addition, the academic unit or supervisor may be in the best position to notice a significant change in student behaviour or to identify performance difficulties.

The ombudsperson stressed "the importance of developing constructive and proactive intervention tools to enable academic units to better identify situations in which a student with a disability is experiencing difficulties affecting their academic success. In particular, it involves recognizing situations where the University has a "duty to inquire" and to direct students to appropriate options and resources, thus ensuring the fair treatment of accommodation needs."

UNIVERSITY'S UPDATE (SUMMER 2020):

"The Office of the Vice-Provost, Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies has had many discussions with a number of stakeholders on this topic. This revealed that [unlike the process for lectures], accommodations established by Academic Accommodations for students enrolled in research activities (...) are not communicated to academic units (...) Academic Accommodations is working on identifying a way to ensure this information is communicated to the persons concerned.

Academic Accommodations also confirmed that its staff inform students of their responsibility to discuss accommodations with their professor or thesis supervisor.

In addition, essential requirements for the master's major research paper, the comprehensive exam and the doctoral thesis were developed to better inform stakeholders of the expectations required for successful completion of these activities. They will assist the Academic Accommodations team in developing accommodation needs for these students."



5. Protocol for responding to situations of at-risk behaviour

The University is developing a protocol to respond to situations where a student's behaviour poses a danger to the student or others. The ombudsperson had the opportunity to make the following comments on the draft document in January 2019:

- Ensure clear separation between these guidelines that deal with a non-disciplinary process and any regulations to take disciplinary action
- Ensure that, at each step in the progression of a situation, the support options, accommodation options and the option of a voluntary leave of absence (e.g. temporary absence or withdrawal from classes) are discussed with the student
- Establish appeal and review processes for decisions involving the imposition of a leave of absence or involuntary withdrawal
- Identify a unit responsible for maintaining statistics on these interventions and reporting them to the Senate.

In November 2019, we met with the case manager assigned to further this work. We discussed with him the situations he was encountering among students and the comments we had made on the draft document.

UNIVERSITY'S UPDATE (SUMMER 2020):

"A manager was hired this fall [2019] and had the opportunity to work on many at-risk student files before joining another sector at the University. A new case manager started in April.

Guidelines are still in the development phase. Several consultation steps have been completed to date. The vice-deans will be consulted over the summer and final revisions will follow. Guidelines are expected to be released in the fall of 2020."

6. Normalization of grades: clarification of "definitions of student performance"

In 2019, the ombudsperson recommended posting on the University's website the "definitions of student performance" mentioned in Regulation I-9.1 on the normalization of grades. This recommendation was not accepted as the University indicated that the definitions corresponding to the alphanumeric symbols in the official grading system are set at the course and program level, rather than the institutional level.

THE UNIVERSITY ADDED:

"Professors are strongly encouraged to clearly define in their course outlines the assessment criteria and expectations for achieving specific alphanumeric levels."



APPENDIX A: OTHER STATISTICS ON OUR SERVICES

8. Official Language Used

Official Language Used	French	English
All persons who consulted us	26 %	74 %
Students who consulted us	27 %	73 %
Students enrolled at the University (Fall 2019)*	29.2 %	70.8 %

* <http://www.uottawa.ca/institutional-research-planning/resources/facts-figures/quick-facts>

9. Students – Faculty Distribution

Faculty	Students who consulted us	Students registered at the University (Fall 2019)*
Arts	10.9 %	11.5 %
Law	4.7 %	4.3 %
Telfer School of Management	3.9 %	10.9 %
Education	4.8 %	5.6 %
Engineering	9.8 %	14.3 %
Medicine	2.2 %	5.5 %
Not applicable	--	0.5 %
Interfaculty programs	--	0.4 %
Sciences	5.9 %	12.6 %
Health Sciences	8.3 %	10.7 %
Social Sciences	22.8 %	23.7 %
Unknown	26.7 %	--

* <http://www.uottawa.ca/institutional-research-planning/resources/facts-figures/quick-facts>

10. Students – Level of Study

Level of Study	Students who consulted us	Students registered at the University (Fall 2019)*
Undergraduate	68.6 %	72.5 %
Master	11.8 %	20.2 %
PhD	9.5 %	7.4 %
Unknown or other	10.1 %	--

* <http://www.uottawa.ca/institutional-research-planning/resources/facts-figures/quick-facts>



11. Students – Categories

	Full Time	Part Time	Unregistered	Former	Special	Unknown	Total
Total of students	295	5	21	26	6	36	389

12. Feedback on Our Services

	Yes	No
Was it easy to find the Office of the Ombudsperson?	33	7
Did you receive a quick reply to your email, telephone message or letter?	40	2
Was the role of the Office of the Ombudsperson explained to you clearly?	33	8
If you asked that your name not be released, was your concern handled in a confidential manner by the Ombudsperson office?	35	0
Did the Ombudsperson demonstrate impartiality (objectivity) in reviewing your concerns?	38	0
Did the Ombudsperson handle your concern fairly?	38	0
Were you treated with respect?	41	0
Would you contact the Office of the Ombudsperson again?	36	1

13. Feedback on Our Services (continued)

Why did you contact the Office of the Ombudsperson?	
To acquire information	21
To get advice	24
To facilitate communication with others	9
To determine if I had been treated fairly	17
To discuss options or alternatives so that I could handle the problem myself	15
For the Ombudsperson to intervene and to assist with the resolution of the problem	17





Office of the
Ombudsperson
Building a Culture of Fairness

