# ANNUAL REPORT OF THE ONUBLICATION COLLEGE



# 2017-2018



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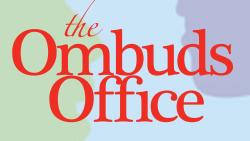
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# In This Report

It is my pleasure to present the Annual Report of the Ombuds Office for 2017 - 2018. The Annual Report includes an overview of the work of the Ombuds Office together with statistical information on the students who used the service, the types of issues they felt were important along with their insights and feedback.

This report discusses the impact of the province-wide academic strike and includes discussions on trends occurring not only within our College but those on a local, national and global level that have impacted what we do and how we do it. We have been sensitized to issues such as those in the #MeToo movement but also from the experience of other post-secondary institutions who have addressed issues regarding freedom of speech during this past year.

The changing conflict environment, a topic that was addressed in last year's report was further elaborated; its nuances explored and those areas which need to be collectively welcomed, embraced, addressed and suffused are discussed.



## Introduction

The 2017 / 2018 academic year was marked by a five-week long academic strike which impacted not only students and their families but funders, faculty and staff. The tenor of the strike was at times confrontational and adversarial. The strike resulted in changes to the academic calendar, increased stress and anxiety, affected students' learning, lives and finances, and led to lowered morale well into second semester.

The strike impacted the nature of the concerns coming forward making them more complex and contentious than ever. The Ombuds Office heard concerns from parents, grandparents and students regarding the strike. During this time, many students felt bereft, losing their motivation to pick up where they left off and uncertain about their decision on whether to continue their academic year. In hindsight, many found it to be an especially difficult year; some students expressed having had regrets about their decision to continue.

# Mandate & Structure

The Office of the Ombudsperson has been in place since 2008 following a task force's recommendation for its establishment. Funding for the parttime Ombudsperson is shared by the College and the Student Union of Confederation College Inc. (SUCCI).

The Ombuds Office is a confidential and safe space where students can give voice to their issues, discuss their problems and explore options for a resolution. Based on the total student population in any given year, 3.7% to 4% of students seek out the service of the Ombuds Office and are provided a direct one-to-one, individualized service. The Ombudsperson helps students resolve concerns of any nature that may impede their academic success. The Office provides a valuable venue to improve communication, transparency and access to information, and encourage fair, consistent practices that are aligned with College values.

Although working within the College, the Ombuds Office is independent

of department or program structures. The Ombudsperson's role and responsibilities are found in the **Terms of Reference for the Ombudsperson**. These provide direction and set limitations for the work of the Ombudsperson e.g. those actions that fall within the Ombuds mandate and those that fall outside.

The work of the Ombudsperson is facilitated and guided by the Ombuds Committee. Under advisement of the College President, a draft Terms of Reference was developed by the Ombuds Committee this year and is pending final approval. All previous **Annual Reports of the Ombudsperson** are available on the Ombuds website.

The Ombuds Office abides by the Standards of Practice of the Association of Canadian College and University Ombudspersons (ACCUO) and the Statement of Ethical Principles of the Forum of Canadian Ombudsman.

# How The Office Works

The purpose of the Ombuds Office is to provide support to students by helping them resolve their problems or concerns informally. Each student is treated as an individual, each issue is treated separately, and each query receives personal consideration. Much of the Ombuds work is conducted behind the scenes; often invisibly by connecting and coordinating all the elements essential to achieving a fair process. This is accomplished through three different and complementary main functions;

#### Ombuds supporting students' own actions:

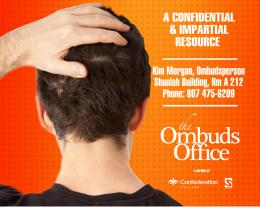
- Promoting the Ombuds service to students through Student News/Updates and college-wide fairs
- Serving as a sounding board in order to air, articulate and identify issues or conflicts that might be resolved informally e.g. administrative challenges or academic concerns
- Assisting the student in reflection and selfdiscovery, attaining clarity on the concern and an understanding of the context and relevance of the concern
- Providing advice and information e.g. policy and practices; brainstorming for potential solutions, evaluating and prioritizing options
- Guiding and coaching students in the use of a direct, respectful approach to engaging in constructive, collaborative conflict resolution
- Following-up with students and offering referrals to other resources

Ombuds interventions to address students' concerns:

- Clarifying a problem informally to protect the identity of the student and facilitate a generic approach to individual problem solving e.g. clarify information with staff from other offices
- Offering shuttle diplomacy e.g. taking discussions in a back-and-forth process to increase understanding of the issue and facilitating restoration of relationships
- Facilitating a meeting with the parties involved to meet face-to-face to discuss the situation and seek a resolution; and offering mediation and with the consent of the parties bringing them together to find a resolution

#### Need Support Problem-Solving? Need Information? Want Advice? Need Options? Seeking Guidance?

# The Ombuds Office is a Safe Space & We Can Help!



2018 Ombuds Student Brochure



# How The Office Works

#### Ombuds efforts to address systemic concerns:

- Providing an early warning of issues that are Basic Conflict Resolution Workshop 'new' or unexpected or which may be potentially destructive in a manner that is cognizant of confidentiality
- Identifying and communicating patterns or trends of issues and meeting with relevant staff to discuss these trends and insights
- Following up on a case with the respective parties
- Working for system-wide change by: making recommendations which impact policies or practices; participating in relevant training for staff about conflict management; serving as a resource person on committees and task forces; networking to contribute best practices in procedural fairness College-wide

### Principles Of The Ombuds Office

- Confidential
- Impartial
- Independent
- Informal

#### All Day Workshops

- Advanced Conflict Resolution Workshop

#### **New Resources**

- Tips for Writing Exams and Avoiding **Allegations of Cheating**
- Three Rules for Considerate Conduct
- Ombuds FAQ's for Faculty and Staff

#### New Presentation

Managing Conflict Mindfully

#### Professional Development

- 2 Day Arbinger Workshop
- An Evening with Dr. Gabor Mate speaking on 'Fostering Resilience in a Stressed Culture'
- All day workshop with Dr. Gabor Mate speaking on 'The Myth of Normal: Depression, Anxiety and Addictions from a New Perspective'
- Psychologically Safe Workplace Conversations Workshop
- Collaborating with colleagues belonging to the Association of Canadian College and University Ombudspersons on common issues via webinars

# Feedback From Students, Employees & Families

#### Students

I felt really comfortable talking to Kim and she was very helpful in trying to resolve my situation. I was very stressed, I was having sleepless nights and I felt like no one was on my side and when I met Kim I felt relieved. Kim is very non-judgmental and she treats situations fairly. I am very happy I met Kim!

You provide a very valuable service to students. Thank you for the great work you do in supporting students and with such care and compassion.

The workshop was informative and interesting! The best part was that the handouts were actually useful and went well with the presentation.

Before seeing you, I felt really by myself. You helped me feel a lot better, more confident in myself.

#### Staff and Faculty

I cannot thank you enough for guiding us during the last few weeks. I really appreciate everything you have done for our group. Thank you very much.

Thank you so much. Apologize for being so intense about it.

You were a great help, and made a big difference.

Just a short note to thank you for the workshop the other evening. I quite enjoyed it and have since tried to be more mindful..... something I am working on.

# Letter to the President of the College from a Parent

I just wanted to take this opportunity to express my sincerest thanks. My son went to speak with Kim to see if there was any way to save his year. Kim provided him with the support he needed in a most caring and understanding way. He was considering dropping out but with the help and support he received from Kim, he not only passed but exceeded his own goals and expectations.

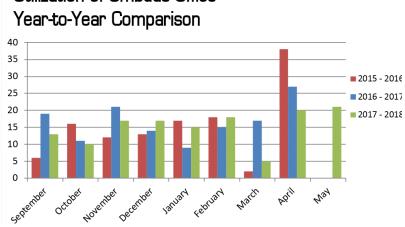
I wanted you to be aware of how helpful and supportive Kim was in saving him in more ways than one! She is a very kind, thoughtful and caring person.

We can never repay her for her help these last few months.

Please pass our heartfelt thanks on to Kim. We will never forget what she did for our son these past few months!

# **Statistics**

Note: The statistics are based on the experience of 136 students who utilized the Ombuds service and represents 4% of the student population. Special thanks to Peter Isosaari for his assistance in the development of these graphs.

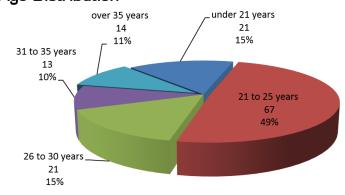


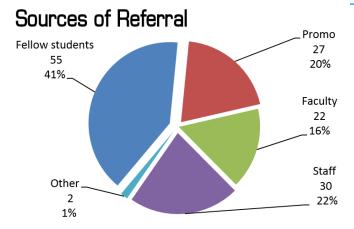
# Utilization of Ombuds Office

Due to the 5 week strike, Confederation College revised the academic year by extending first semester to end on January 23rd, with second semester beginning January 29th and ending on May 11th. The student numbers reflect the revised academic calendar including the addition of the month of May.

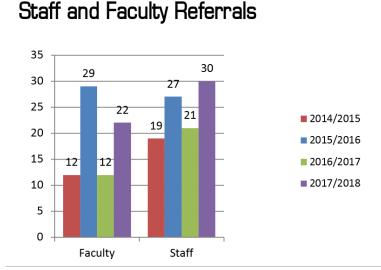
The most notable changes occurred in 2 age categories. Those ages 35 and over decreased by 46% over last year's numbers, while students aged 21 to 25 years increased in numbers by 36%. The remaining categories changed by a few percentage points each.





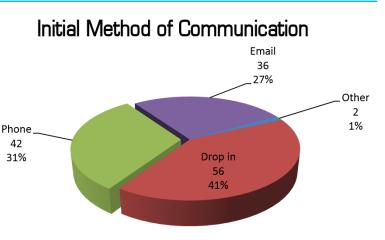


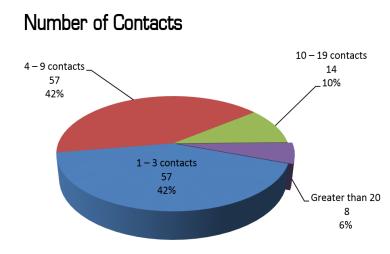
Although the highest number of referrals continues to be from fellow students, this category saw a reduction in numbers alongside an increase in 3 other categories: promotion increased by 52%, faculty by 45% and staff by 30% which is the highest number of referrals from staff over a 10 year period.



Although the number of faculty and staff who referred students to the Ombuds Office increased this year, the actual number of faculty and staff who themselves sought out the assistance of the Ombuds Office decreased by 66% over the previous year - 14 compared to 42.

Although drop-ins by students continues to be the preferred method of choice, telephone calls increased by 36% over last year. In the 'Other' category, 2 students submitted the online contact form on the Ombuds website.





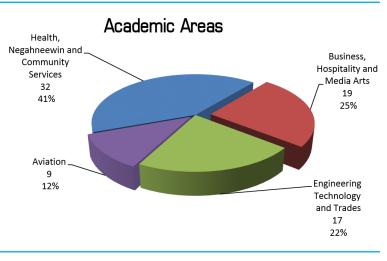
Contacts are those which occur between the Ombudsperson with students, staff and faculty to resolve a concern. The number of contacts in the 'Greater than 20' category increased by 38% this year and 40% in the previous year. This reflects a trend towards the number of increasingly complex cases and the seriousness of the concern brought forward by these students.



## **Statistics**

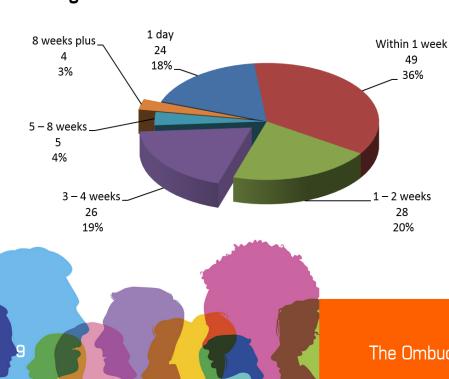
#### **Concern** Involved Full time faculty **External** 10 Part time faculty 6 7% 22 4% 16% Staff 2 Non Specific 2% 96 71% Other students 0 0%

Concerns involving full time faculty decreased by 56% over last year and part time faculty by 12%. Both categories experienced a large increase in the previous year, 65% and 40% respectively. Concerns which involved staff are consistently low. There were no complaints from students about other students.



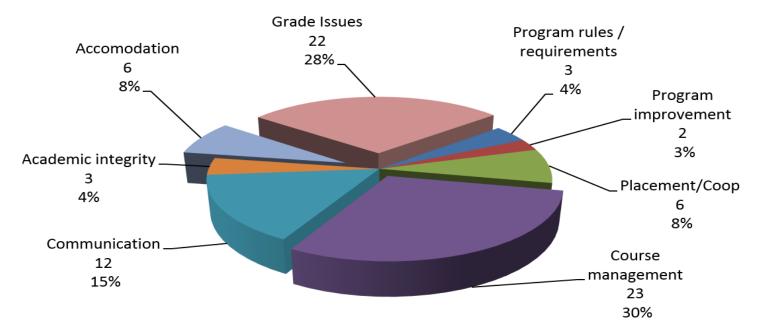
The '3 to 4' week category increased by 54% this year and the 'over 8 weeks' category increased by 50%. An increased frequency of contact and the length of involvement are a result of more complex and multi-dimensional concerns.

The School of Business, Hospitality and Media Arts had 59% fewer concerns as compared to last year and are back in line with previous years. Health, Negahneewin and Community Services experienced a 3% decrease with a 44% decrease in numbers over the last 4 years. The School of Aviation had a 56% increase in concerns, the majority of which were related to the strike. The number for Engineering, Technology & Trades remained consistant with the previous year.



#### Length of Involvement

## Academic Concerns - 77/136



Course Management 23 (30%): Although this category remains in first place from last year's report, it experienced a 53% decrease in the number of issues coming forward e.g. late or non-return of tests / assignments, not following the course outline/ delayed or no course outline or changes made to it during the semester, faculty expertise, inter-agency conflicts e.g. scheduling changes related to the strike and the contingency plans

Grade Issues 22 (28%): Grade issues increased by 36% this year bringing it up from 3rd place into 2nd place this year. Many students had grading concerns that they attributed to the strike e.g. grading attendance, lack of a mid-term evaluation, tests too close together after the strike, incomplete recording of results on lab tests

Communication 12 (15%): This category increased by 25% over last year e.g. respectful communication, breach of confidentiality, delayed responses to emails and phone calls, confidentiality, timeliness of response time in the resolution process

Accommodation 6 (8%): This category dropped from 2nd place to 4th place, a 65% decrease in the number of concerns e.g. accommodations for a missed test, late assignment, rewrites

Placement 6 (8%): Issues in this category are similar to last year's report e.g. flexibility, no placement available, placement interrupted, clinical evaluation issues

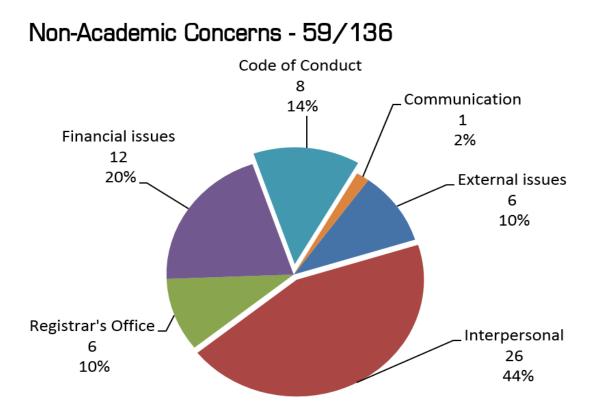
Academic Integrity 3 (4%): Students breaching academic integrity range in numbers from 1 to 4 each year e.g. cheating on a test or exam, sharing assignments, plagiarism

Program Rules/ Requirements 3 (4%): This category continues to experience low numbers e.g. policy/ practice clarification, lab instruction opportunities

Program Improvement 2 (3%): This category is consistent with last year e.g. suggestions from students on ways to improve programming in classrooms, labs and workshops



## **Statistics**



Interpersonal 26 (44%): The number of concerns increased by 42% over last year and related to increased anxiety due to the strike and its consequences. Previous to this, the numbers over the previous 7 years ranged from 9 to 15 e.g. fractured relationships, self-esteem, mental health, time management, queries from faculty into student's personal life

Financial Issues 12 (20%): The percentage is similar to previous years ranging from 20 to 26% with the exception of four years ago which reached a high of 35% e.g. strike relief fund, student health plan, emergency funding, loan repayments, OSAP, residence

Code of Conduct 8 (14%): This category increased 50 percent over last year and includes complaints against

faculty and staff e.g. several forms of discrimination and harassment, unconscious bias, inappropriate behaviors

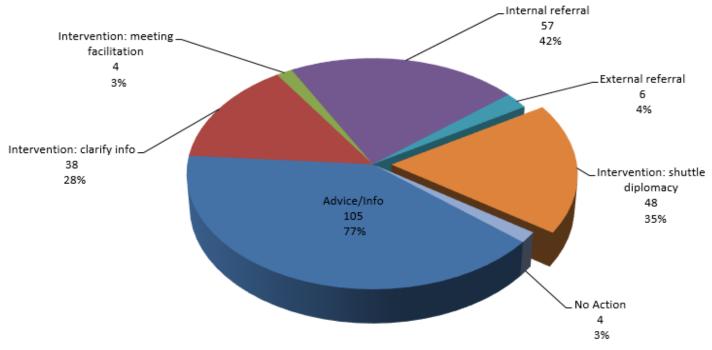
Registrar's Office 6 (10%): The number of concerns remains low for the 4th year in a row. Most concerns centred on withdrawal due to the strike

External Issues 6 (10%): Concerns increased by 66% this year after decreasing by 75% in the previous year e.g. immigration, passports, study permits and landlord issues

Communication 1 (2%): This decreased by 86% in the previous year's report and has remained consistent for a second year in a row e.g. confidentiality, receiving incorrect information, respectful communication.



# Actions Taken



#### Types of assistance provided:

- Providing advice/ information includes discussing policies and procedures, helping a student understand a decision, reframing a situation, identifying options for a resolution, providing guidance for a formal appeal
- An internal referral is made to another service within the College to facilitate a resolution e.g. counselor, academic advisor, financial aid officer, faculty member
- An external referral is made to an agency or service outside of the College community
- No action includes the failure of a student to provide needed information or to show for an appointment
- Intervention is provided with the student's permission to follow-up and assist in some way to resolve the concern.

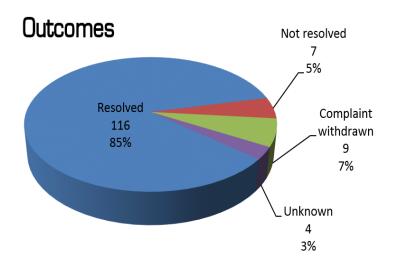
Depending on the particular situation, one or more forms of intervention may be utilized. Intervention methods include:

- 1. Clarifying information informal fact finding/ gathering information
- Shuttle diplomacy discussing the issue with staff or faculty where a student may feel disempowered or where emotions run high
- Meeting facilitation with the consent of all the parties and may include informal mediation

Of the three forms of intervention, shuttle diplomacy constitutes the greatest time commitment by the Ombudsperson and this year shuttle diplomacy increased by 27%.



## **Statistics**

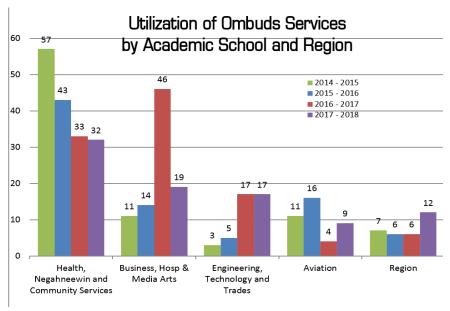


The percentage of cases resolved is consistent with last year's report; whereas the number of complaints withdrawn decreased, the number of concerns not resolved increased. The Office of the Ombudsman of Ontario received complaints from three of our students. Ombuds Ontario advised the College that they were able to assist these students without contacting us or the need for a formal investigation. Issues presented by students were: communication, decision, service quality and the internal complaints process.

This graph depicts the number of students in each academic school that were seen for academic reasons. Although Aviation is currently included in Engineering, Technology and Trades, their data is presented separately here.

Regional numbers had been consistent over the last 4 years until this year where there was a 50% increase. Concerns from the region were all academic in nature and are included in the academic school numbers.

The overall percentage of students who utilized the Ombuds service in each of the last 4 years ranges between 3.7% and 4.0%.



The year-to-year percentages are:		
4.0% in 2017 - 2018	4.0% in 2016 – 2017	
3.7% in 2015 – 2016	3.7% in 2014 – 2015	

# Working With Students - Highlights

#### Profile of Students Using The Service

- 136 as compared to 133 in the previous year (the next highest number was 135 in the 2013 2014 academic year)
- 93% were full time
- 40% identified as male and 60% as female
- 8 students disclosed having a mental health diagnosis as compared to 3 to 5 from previous years
- 4 students identified as Indigenous which is comparable to previous years
- 27 students identified as International as compared to 7 in the previous year This represents 20% of all the students who contacted the Ombuds Office and is a 74% increase over last year's numbers.
- 73% of students contacted one or more staff or faculty to resolve their concern prior to contacting the Ombuds Office compared to 70% in the previous year

#### Cases Received by The Ombuds Office:

- 136 students, 8 parents and 14 faculty and staff
- 57% of student issues were academic. This is a decrease of 33% over last year's high at 75% (note the lowest percentage was 50% in 2013/2014; the average over the last 5 years is 62%)
- Non-academic issues comprised 43% of cases compared to 25% last year
- The majority of these consistently are in the 'interpersonal' category 5 issues of discrimination / harassment were brought forward by students
- 25% of all issues whether academic or non-academic in nature, were in some way influenced by the strike





# Confederation College Reponds to the Ombuds Report Recommendations 2016 -17

Prepared by Patti Pella, Vice President Academic

#### Recommendation #1

The College reviews the current informal academic dispute resolution process (Refer to Academic Dispute Resolution Policy, Number 5-1-02) with the purpose to investigate and create a new facilitated model / format or approach that is interactive, balanced, interest-based (versus issue-based), and collaborative in consultation with relevant staff e.g. Registrar and Ombudsperson.

#### Status:

The recommendation has been accepted. A committee has been formed to investigate and create a new facilitated model.

#### Recommendation #2

The College reviews its Student Accommodation Practice Number 5-4-04 to ensure the inclusion and descriptions of accommodations for a temporary mental health disruption.

#### Status:

The recommendation has been accepted. The college will revise the policy to ensure the inclusion and descriptions of accommodations for a temporary mental health disruption.

#### Recommendation #3

To improve awareness and communication of available resources, the College informs all students about the provision of accommodations and mental health services using many different formats e.g. in brochures, web pages, acceptance packages and the Student Handbook with a link to the Student Accommodation Practice No. 5-4-04.

#### Status:

The recommendation has been accepted. The College has provided a link from the Student Handbook to the Student Accommodation Practice No. 5-4-04. The college will inform all students about the provision of accommodations and mental health services through many different formats.





# Trends and Recommendations 2017 - 2018

#### What is a Trend?

A primary function of the College Ombudsperson is to identify and report trends in student issues and make recommendations for responsibly addressing them. The data collected throughout the academic year provides information along with the compelling anecdotal accounts from students. However trends can be challenging to report at times due to the small size of our College and the need to protect student identities. Generally a systemic response is warranted when a trend is identified.

#### Trends Supporting Recommendations:

The Annual Report of the Ombudsperson is one activity that the Ombuds performs that benefits the entire College community. Recommendations contained in this report are general in nature and call for either policy changes or changes in administrative practice that benefit students and employees whether or not they have accessed the Ombuds Office to discuss a concern or complaint.



#### 1.CURRENT TREND: VIOLATIONS OF ACADEMIC INTEGRITY

Although the Ombuds saw only 3 students for breaches of academic integrity, a much higher number of faculty members addressed this issue with the Ombudsperson. They were seeking advice, guidance and best practice tips on how to prevent cheating on tests and examinations, address plagiarism and suspected cheating, and ways to help students adapt to a new learning and teaching environment, which for some students includes a new culture.

#### Recommendation 1.i:

It is recommended that a package of educational aides in a variety of formats be made accessible to students to help them understand the principles of academic integrity.

#### Recommendation 1.ii:

It is recommended that resources be developed for faculty on how to handle a suspected academic violation; and how best to deal with student reports of academic dishonesty by a classmate.



#### 2. CURRENT TREND: A CHANGING CONFLICT ENVIRONMENT

There is a paradigm shift occurring within our College related to conflict and conflict resolution. This trend is supported in several ways:

- New forms of issues are arising. For instance in the previous year's Ombuds Annual Report, students began to speak up in earnest for their academic rights, while this year students have come forward with human rights issues.
- Issues and disputes are becoming more complex, ambiguous and the context more challenging, turbulent and far-reaching with deeper roots e.g. a caustic or poisoned environment, intersectionality where one or more grounds of discrimination are experienced etc.
- The previous year's trend where students' felt a sense of futility throughout the conflict resolution process and dissatisfied with the process and the manner in which they were addressed remained an issue.

Our College was impacted by events occurring on a nation-wide scale such as the #MeToo movement which

began in November 2017. The surrounding landscape was increasingly fragmented and polarized with a new sectarianism in play, where greater intolerance was more evident and where free-speech had become an issue. We've also witnessed increasing divisiveness and heightened levels of rhetoric and vitriol. For these reasons, it is more important than ever that we be attuned to any loss of desire to speak with one another, learn how to disagree and find a way to acknowledge our humanity.

Keeping our values in the forefront and focusing on improving our moment-to-moment interaction with one another supports and enables a co-creative, positive interaction. Each of us carries a duty of care to communicate in a civil and respectful manner and apply our values towards fair practices and decisions that can withstand both internal and external scrutiny.

We have an opportunity to incorporate humanistic principles in policy and practice. By taking a close look at how we engage with one another and our students and seeking alternatives in practices and pathways, we are committing to a values—based paradigm shift that will inevitably lead to advancing our College culture.

#### Recommendation 2.i

It is recommended that the College facilitate conversations about the values that drive our work, connect values to priorities and decisions made on a daily basis and support and encourage employees to be resourceful and make decisions that are based on our values.

#### Recommendation 2.ii

It is recommended that wherever there is doubt or ambiguity regarding any provision in a policy or procedure, the interpretation appearing most equitable or most consistent with the values of the College shall be applied. (This duty of care principle to act in the best interest of the student can be imbedded in all College policies.)

#### Recommendation 2.iii

It is recommended in situations where a concern remains unresolved at the completion of the Informal Process that the student be referred to the Ombuds Office for assistance.

#### Recommendation 2.iv

It is recommended that the Charter of Student Rights and Responsibilities include the imperative that: students have a right to take action to solve academic issues which they may encounter in their course work by communicating with their faculty or seeking help through College services such as Academic Advising, Counseling or the Ombuds Office.





# Conclusion

The Ombuds Annual Report provides an opportunity for significant change and growth to occur. It informs the College community and our leadership about student issues and trends that impact individual and organizational effectiveness. It is hoped this Ombuds Annual Report will provide meaningful and insightful feedback for developing creative solutions and addressing these through a values-laden lens.

Our culture as a College is being built and is changing over time. It is a long process in our evolution. However it is our values, the words we speak, how we speak them and our behaviours that reinforce and shape our culture. As an educational service, it falls upon all of us to be responsive to the needs and demands of the users - our students, with a pledge to do better. These changes can only be achieved from the inside, out.

# Appreciation

I wish to send a special note of gratitude to Jim Madder, Past-President of the College for his steadfast support of the Ombuds Office. I want to thank the members of the Ombuds Advisory Committee made up of Lynne Savela, Executive Director of SUCCI; Don Duclos, Registrar; Leslie MacGregor, Associate Dean Student Services; and the Presidents of two student associations - Jodi Afonso, Past-President of SUCCI and Ron Kelly, President of Oshki Anishinawbeg Student Association (OASA) for championing the merits of fair decisions.

I would also like to recognize those College employees who approached the Ombuds Office for assistance, were willing to engage in best practice conversations and applied their best efforts towards fair and reasonable outcomes for all concerned. Lastly, I wish to acknowledge those students who shared their stories and brought their concerns forward as they are the ones who lead the change.

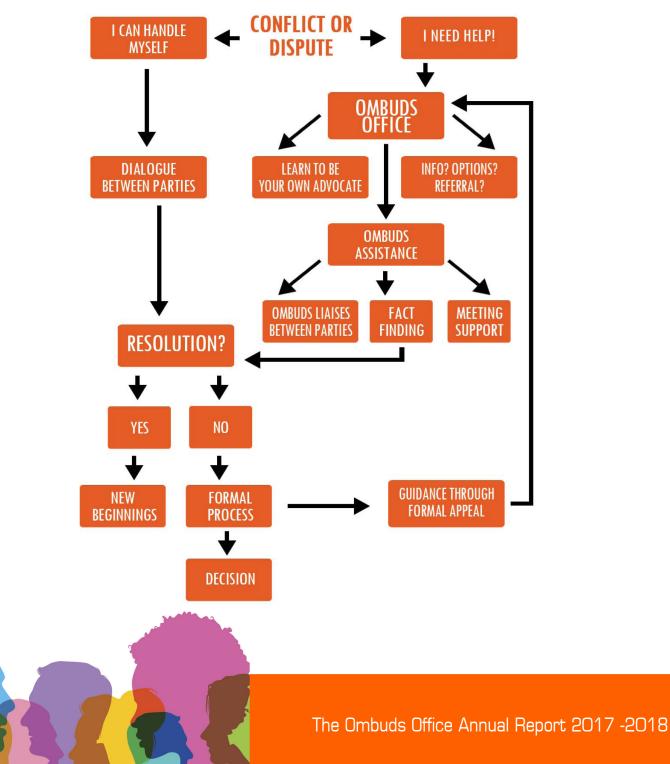
Respectfully submitted, Kim Morgan, BScN, MEd, Ombudsperson



# Appendix - Ombuds Brochure Excerpt

# **CONFLICT RESOLUTION PATHWAYS**

The Ombuds Office offers a confidential, independent, informal and impartial place to discuss your concerns and get the help you need to solve your problem.



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## Appendix - Ombuds Brochure Excerpt

# **HELPING YOU TO HELP YOURSELF!**

The Ombuds Office is a safe place to consider your options and make an informed choice on what steps you can take. The Ombuds can help you build skills to deal directly and effectively with your concerns.

In most situations, working alongside college staff creates a positive, personal approach to problem solving, making it both desirable and possible. Most often, problems can be resolved on your own.

# TOP TIPS FOR HOW YOU CAN SOLVE A PROBLEM

- Act early to clear up any misunderstandings and raise your concern directly with the staff member responsible. Ask for an appointment and meet in person.
- Be prepared. Write down your questions. Have all the information and documentation that you may need for your discussion.
- Share supporting information that will help the staff person understand any exception and/or extenuating circumstances that you've experienced.
- Know the relevant policy, your rights and responsibilities.
- Ask the staff person to help you understand the reasons behind the decision and listen carefully.
- Plan what you want to say: describe the situation; how it is impacting you; why it is important to you; and what you're needing / requesting.
- Take responsibility for any mistakes, misunderstandings or oversights on your part.
- Stay forward thinking, positive and go prepared with solutions.
- Be pleasant and respectful watch your tone of voice and body language.
- Self-reflect and recognize your accountability.
- Keep good records and take notes including the name of the person you spoke with. Save all emails. Ask for copies.
- Prior to the meeting, you may request to have a friend or family member present for support.

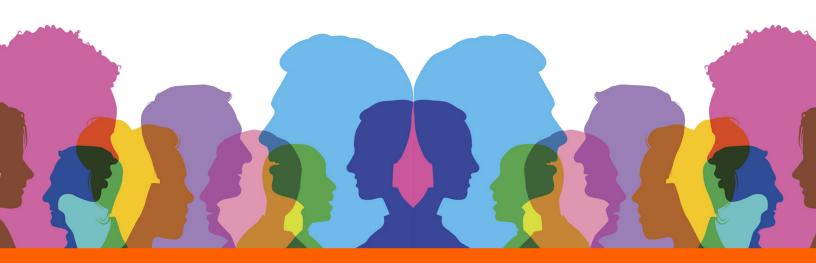


# Share Your Feedback

We invite you to take a short survey on the 2017 / 2018 Annual Report. It should only take 3 minutes to complete. Your feedback will help in planning future reports and make next year's report more informative and accessible. Thank you very much for your time and support!

Share your feedback by visiting www.confederationcollege.ca/ombuds-report

Kim Morgan, Ombudsperson Shuniah Room A212 | (807) 475-6209 www.confederationcollege.ca/ombuds-office ombuds@confederationc.on.ca





a partnership of

