



OMBUDS **REPORT**

2020- 2021



FAIR



CONFIDENTIAL



COLLABORATIVE
SOLUTIONS

THE OFFICE **OF THE OMBUDS**
ANNUAL REPORT

OUR VISION
UNLOCKING POTENTIAL

MISSION STATEMENT
Provide pathways to success, an exceptional learning experience and a global outlook to meet student and employer needs.

OUR VALUES
Focus on students, involve our communities, utilize resources wisely, embrace change, engage each other.



FANSHAWE

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OFFICE OF THE OMBUDS MISSION

To Promote a College community environment where all students may address and resolve concerns or issues in a manner that is consistent with the Office of the Ombuds' mandate of impartiality, independence, and confidentiality.

fanshawec.ca/ombuds

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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The Office of the Ombuds would not be possible without the support of Fanshawe College and the Fanshawe Student Union (FSU). I would like to extend my sincere appreciation to both College and FSU Presidents, FSU Management, the Senior Vice President Academic Services, VP Student Services, the Ombuds Advisory Committee and members of College Council for their leadership, support and guidance. Your dedication to ensure continuous quality improvements in the teaching, learning and student life environments is commendable, particularly during the unique challenges of 2020-21.

A special thank you to the students, administrators, academics and staff members who have consulted in the interest of fairness at Fanshawe College.

A sincere appreciation to Darby Deline, Creative Director in the FSU Publications Office for her contributions to the design of this report.

Respectfully,
Rose Padacz, Ombuds

**THE OFFICE
OF THE OMBUDS**



As we complete another academic year, we reflect on the unique challenges and opportunities of 2020-21, (including a quick pivot of academic programming to offer on-line and blended curriculum in response to public health and Ministry guidelines). We reflect on lessons learned during a global pandemic that impacted education systems around the world while we search for a “silver lining”.

At Fanshawe College, we were called to action, to innovate, respond and think collaboratively to support our students and faculty in our teaching, learning and student life environments. Under the direction of our President, Executive Leadership Team and Academic Leadership teams, many initiatives were implemented to support student retention and success. Our Academic Schools swiftly migrated courses from classrooms to on-line or blended learning environments, providing synchronous and asynchronous delivery of curriculum. Virtual simulated labs, placements and innovative Co-operative Education experiences were created together with Industry partners, enabling students to progress, succeed and graduate. Student Services, the Fanshawe Student Union (FSU) and Fanshawe International collaborated with IT Services to offer virtual and in person service options and Student Services Hubs as part of the “Here for You” Campaign.

The majority of our students were able to successfully navigate the new ever-changing environment, after pivoting to virtual or blended education. However, the impact of the pandemic on academic program delivery options, interpersonal relationships, health, finances, ability to travel and other factors such as limited access to computing technology and child care challenges created barriers for some students often impacting their academic performance, resulting in concerns or issues that required resolution.

During 2020-21, over 415 students contacted the Office of the Ombuds to seek resolution for a variety of concerns primarily related to participation or progression in their academic program. Others requested guidance on College policies and procedures and appeals. Inquiries and referrals were also received from Alumni, family members of students, and the community.



The Ombuds Office provided confidential, impartial support, guidance and dispute resolution for students and consultation services for all members of the College community who interact with students. While adhering to the principles of Independence, Impartiality and Confidentiality, the Office operated in the interest of fairness for all.

Aligned with the College Vision and Mission, the Office of the Ombuds operated to promote student success and retention by collaborating with academic units and student service departments to encourage or facilitate informal dispute resolution and student progression while upholding the integrity of the curriculum offered at Fanshawe. As part of the continuous quality improvement process, the Ombuds Office also provided informal and formal recommendations to the College with the goal to achieve fair and equitable practices reflected in our policies and procedures.

Many resolutions provided students with a fair opportunity to demonstrate their knowledge of the core learning outcomes by offering a supplemental exam, assignment or project submission, providing access to course materials or recordings of the lecture. Depending on the circumstances, in some cases, students were able to defer admission, reduce their course load or transfer to another program.

Together with our students, Academic Schools, Student Services, the FSU team and College community, we faced many challenges in 2021. We embraced opportunities and learned that a little kindness, compassion and “outside the box” thinking does go a long way in uncertain times to support our students. From a UDL perspective, we learned there are many “roads to Rome” when determining alternative options that are fair and reasonable and that provide a pathway forward. With a little ingenuity, (the College was able to) (we were able to) resolve many challenging situations (to find alternative, fair solutions) to support our students in their academic journey while upholding the integrity of the credentials offered at Fanshawe.

The following report provides a year at a glance, highlighting a summary of the Office of the Ombuds activities, statistical information, recommendations to the College community and initiatives underway. This report is based on activity from September 1, 2020 - August 31, 2021.

APPROACH TO RESOLUTION, STUDENT SCENARIOS AND FAIR OUTCOMES

Fanshawe College was a pioneer establishing the Office of the Ombuds in 1993. Today, the Office provides confidential, impartial support, guidance, and consultation for students and all members of the College community with the goal of dispute resolution as part of our Quality Assurance Process (CQAAP 2018 Report). The Ombuds Office reports to the College President and is funded by the College and the FSU to ensure impartiality. While adhering to the principles of Independence, Impartiality and Confidentiality, the Office operates in the interest of fairness for all.

The Office seeks to engage students and members of the College community in the resolution of disputes while promoting student success, self-efficacy, complex problem solving skills and resilience. Fundamental to the Ombuds Office is the goal to achieve fair process while seeking to uphold the academic integrity of the curriculum offered at Fanshawe College. During 2020-21, the Office consulted with Academic Schools and Student Service departments to facilitate informal resolutions and alternative remedies, often negating the need for a formal Appeal, reducing the impact on students and College resources that may accompany formal Appeals.

Over 415 students contacted the Ombuds Office in 2020-21 to discuss concerns or issues of fairness, to seek confidential guidance and support with interpretation of College policies, procedures and practices. Students primarily presented issues relating to their academic programs, such as, concerns related to admissions, challenges resulting from the new on-line learning environments, timely access to course materials, fairness in evaluation methodologies or group work, academic accommodations, academic integrity offences and options for appeals.



APPROACH TO RESOLUTION, STUDENT SCENARIOS AND FAIR OUTCOMES

Due to the pandemic, International students faced additional challenges impacting global travel, challenges to secure learning visas, access to on-line learning platforms and course materials, fees and concerns relating to academic program progression, part-time status and academic integrity issues.

In many cases, the stakes were high with financial consequences and emotional impact, involving complicating factors, several departments and academic areas where they attempted to address their concern or issue without resolve. Sometimes the situation had escalated due to breakdown in communication or escalation in behaviors that perpetuated the conflict.

Other student situations included conflict in interpersonal relationships with classmates, professors or service providers, inappropriate or harassing behaviors and interactions with the community at large. In many cases, information and education was shared regarding the “Respectful College” Policy, the College/Student “Statement of Rights & Responsibilities” and the Code of Conduct policy. The collaborative response involved guidance on possible informal resolutions, facilitated mediation, referral to campus services and community resources for additional support.

The Ombuds Office also received referrals from Academic Schools and student services departments, requesting support for students struggling to navigate the College system including challenges posed by the new on-line environment when they were not sure where to turn for resolution of complex concerns or unique situations.

In some cases, groups of students contacted the Office to address their collective concerns. Rather than submit multiple individual appeals, the Ombuds explored possible options, informal remedies and facilitated mediation together with the Associate Dean, Dean, Academic Manager or Professor to help resolve their situation in a fair and reasonable manner, often resulting in alternative evaluation opportunities to demonstrate their core learning outcomes and achieve academic progression.

Each student situation was approached with empathy, integrity, respect and dignity for the individual facing challenges or conflict by helping to deescalate emotions and distill the issues down to salient, solvable pieces, by providing education relating to College policies and practices while applying a solution-focused impartial lens of inquiry.

By encouraging students to view the “bigger picture” and the perspective of their professor, fellow students or the service provider involved in the dispute, we were able to explore possible remedies that would be fair, respectful, and appropriate given the circumstances. The goal, to empower the students to feel equipped with strategies to have a “healthy, respectful conversation” with the decision-maker to achieve a fair outcome or resolution.

Balancing fairness and compassion, efforts were dedicated to provide students and other visitors with feasible options in collaboration with Academic Schools, the Fanshawe Student Union, Student Services, and College departments.

During this uniquely challenging year at Fanshawe, the creativity, compassion and collaborative approach demonstrated by our President, the Senior Academic VP, Senior Administration, members of the Academic Services Leadership Team (ASLT), Student Services and the FSU, resulted in innovative College practices, alternate pathways to student achievement, retention and graduation.



INITIATIVES & COLLABORATIVE PARTNERSHIPS

In 2020-21, the Office of the Ombuds participated on College-wide committees and collaborated with the College Administration, Academic Schools, Students Services Departments and the FSU on several initiatives.

- 1) Academic Integrity Initiatives included participation on the Academic Integrity Advisory Committee. Please reference www.fsu.ca/donutcheat and Academic Integrity website for valuable resources for students, faculty and staff.
- 2) Outreach activities included presentations and workshops offered to Academic Schools, participation in virtual Orientation, Student Services events and the “Here for You Campaign”.
- 3) As a member of College Council, the Ombuds Office provided input on revisions to College policies, procedures and practices, such as, Policy A128, to encourage informal resolution between students and Professors prior to pursuing an Appeal and recommending that Appeals only be filed when reasonable grounds can be supported by documentation.
- 4) Other initiatives included participation in the Student Services Leadership Team (SSLT) and Student Services Management Team (SSMT), the Student Services Structure Review, Administrators COVID meetings and as a member of the new Student Experience Committee.
- 5) Professional development opportunities included attending Senior Leaders Workshops, OCASA seminars and virtual workshops as a member of the Canadian Association of College and University Ombuds (ACCUO) and the European Network of Higher Education Ombuds (ENHOE).

FIVE YEAR SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS (2016-2021)

The College, under the leadership and direction of our College President, FSU President, the Senior VP Academic, VP Student Services and members of ELT is committed to continuous quality improvements and the development of policies and procedures to achieve fair, inclusive and equitable practices for participation in the teaching, learning, employment and student life environments. As a result, the Annual Ombuds Report includes recommendations and a summary of achievements on a five-year cycle. These recommendations are collaboratively developed between the Ombuds Office, College leaders and the FSU. Please find the recommendations below for the period from 2016-2021, the status of initiatives, and resulting outcomes.

2015-16 Recommendation:

That the “Academic Offences” form be reviewed with the goal to improve the content and language to ensure clarity for all parties, and student acknowledgment.

Update:

Under the direction of the Senior VP Academic, this review was undertaken by members of the College Council, Academic Policy Review Committee and the new Academic Integrity Advisory committee. The revised “Academic Offences” form was implemented at the outcome of the 2019 Review of the Academic Integrity Policy with the goal to ensure that the process prescribed on the form parallels the new College Academic Integrity policy.

2015-16 Recommendation:

That students have access to the Notice of Appeal of a Grade/Academic Decision form via electronic format.

Update:

In consultation with the Registrar’s Office the student “Notice of Appeal” form was made public and posted on the Fanshawe website with a featured link to the Appeals Policy (A128) to ensure transparency and accessibility for students studying at all Fanshawe campuses.

2015-16 Recommendation:

That the College establish a working group, consisting of internal stakeholders to determine best practices when identifying and implementing individual accommodation requirements and that the College promote these best practices amongst its academic and service teams by the end of the 2016/17 academic year.

Update:

The College established a working group with internal stakeholder representation to review the process for individual accommodation requests. The group has identified best practices and implemented various learning tools and communication strategies to support faculty and students. The working group will continue to identify and implement additional recommendations as they arise and now hosts “Lunch and Learns” to relay updates and address faculty questions on how to best support students on how to best support students.

2016-17 Recommendation:

The Office of the Ombuds recommended moving the annual report recommendations and presentation from the winter term to the fall semester. This would provide an opportunity to share observations and recommendations to be considered and implemented to effectively impact the subsequent academic year.

Update:

The 2016 Annual Report was presented to College Council in April 2017. The current Ombuds joined the College in the summer semester 2017 and a province wide College strike occurred in October 2017. As a result, it was recommended that the 2016-17 data be presented to Council in the Fall 2018 combined with the activities in 2017-18 collapsed into one report. We resumed reporting on a single academic year in 2019.

2017-18 Recommendation:

That a review of the College Code of Conduct Policy and the Sexual Violence Policy be undertaken to develop and implement a revised process or “Response Model” that takes into account the intended “spirit” of the Sexual Violence Policy balancing “Duty of Care” and compassion with fairness for all parties involved.

Update:

The Review was completed and resulting recommendations implemented within the revised Code of Conduct and Sexual Violence Policies, Procedures and Protocols. Under the direction of the Vice President Student Services, multidisciplinary committees were implemented and meet regularly to achieve consistency in practice and applications of policies ensuring outcomes for students are fair, balancing compassion and justice.

2018-19 Recommendation:

The Office of the Ombuds will provide feedback from Office visitors to help inform the revisions to Policy A128 Student Appeals in preparation for review of the policy and procedures in 2021.

Update:

With the support, and under the direction of the Senior Vice President Academic Services, a collaborative working group was established to draft preliminary revisions to Policy A128 to present to the Academic Policy Review Committee for 2021 policy Review. The revised policy was endorsed by College Council and implemented in September 2021.

The Working group recommended engaging in informal resolutions where possible while highlighting the need to have “reasonable grounds” to proceed with a formal Academic Appeal. The group also made recommendations for revisions to the Academic Integrity policy and procedures with the goal to ensure consistent practice, language and usability for Academic Schools, students and Administrators.

2018-19 Recommendation:

That the Student Services Review and the “Here for You” campaign seek opportunities to enhance partnerships with Academic Schools to collaborate on early intervention, further reducing barriers to navigate the College system, promoting a holistic student- centric approach to student success.

Update:

The Vice President Student Services proposal to establish a collaborative Student Experience Committee was endorsed by the Executive Leadership team. The College wide committee launched in Fall 2020 consisting of stakeholders from Academic Schools, Student Services, the FSU, student ambassadors and other departments to share insight on “Lessons Learned” from the pandemic, relevant research and “Best Practice Models” in Student Development Theory.

The Student Services Review, On-line Learning Survey and Student Services Survey, Indigenous Action Plan, Digital Strategy and student focus groups will provide qualitative and quantitative data to inform and guide this initiative to enhance the Fanshawe student experience.

2019-20 Recommendation:

Given the unprecedented year for the College, we hope to share lessons learned from new ways of operating that will continue to enhance our teaching, learning, working, and student life environments.

2020-21 Recommendation:

Based on feedback from student focus groups and the findings of the Student Experience Committee, we learned that students prefer to have options for course delivery modes. They also benefit from consistent access to course materials via the LMS, including recordings of lectures whenever possible (to help increase knowledge retention and participation) while reducing geographical barriers and challenges posed when trying to balance school, family responsibilities, and employment schedules.

We also learned that students want to engage in meaningful and transformative experiences to achieve their goals and that they prefer to have additional transactions available in a self-serve model. The College dedicated efforts toward this goal and College communications, FAQ’s, College forms, methods of payment, text book purchases etc. have been automated and made accessible via the Fanshawe website.

2020-21 Recommendation:

While we continue to offer on-line curriculum, remote testing and evaluations, it is recommended that a consistent approach be adopted across the College to provide (real-time feedback), communication between students and professors in the event of a technical glitch, emergency or other issue, to permit students to participate in the exam process, while preserving the integrity of the evaluation.

It is also recommended, that a standard exam invigilation report be implemented to (flag/ document) any exam incidents or discrepancies when students are writing in the Testing Centre or in alternate locations at the College and that the report automatically be made accessible to faculty for consideration when marking exams. This change may help to reduce the need for academic appeals.

2020-21 Recommendation:

During the pandemic, we learned that students want to have options for College meetings and service delivery and want to engage in meaningful, supportive interactions to achieve their goals. Based on findings of the Student Experience Committee, feedback from visitors to the Ombuds Office and Student Satisfaction surveys, it is recommended that the College and the FSU continue to offer students options for virtual or in-person service models post pandemic (while adhering to health and safety protocols).



APPENDIX 1 - DATA:

OFFICE OF THE OMBUDS STUDENT VISITORS

Diagram

The diagram below provides the total number of student visitors for each of the past five years and captures data related to whether the student’s fairness issue falls within the Ombuds mandate. In 2020-21, there were 415 student visitors and (0) were outside of the Ombuds Mandate.

In addition to student visitors, the Office received inquiries from Community members, Alumni, Academic Schools, Student Services and Administrators and provided consultation services with the above groups to resolve student concerns, facilitate fair remedies, student success and retention while upholding the Integrity of the curriculum offered at the College.

	Inside Mandate	Outside Mandate	Total
2016/17	319	1	320
2017/18	556	1	557
2018/19	460	0	460
2019/20	435	0	435
2020/21	415	0	415



APPENDIX:

STATEMENT OF RIGHTS AND RESPONSIBILITIES

The College and FSU value the following principles of trust, confidentiality, respect, fairness, equality, dignity, diversity, security and safety in order to offer the highest quality education, learning experience and student life in this academic community. These principles encompass all student activities under the banner of Fanshawe College and/or FSU, on and off College campuses. All participants entering into this moral and social contract will commit to the following principles:

STUDENTS HAVE THE RIGHT TO:

- a safe, secure and accessible College environment, suitable and reasonable for learning, study and wellness
- a positive environment conducive to learning characterized by equality and mutual respect that remains free from personal bias, and unlawful harassment and discrimination
- timely, objective, fair and reasonable academic evaluation methods that are reflective of academic, occupational and industry standards and competencies
- timely notification of all academic and administrative decisions that affect their College community life (in writing and including supporting rationale where required by College policy)
- timely and appropriate services and supports to foster a positive and meaningful educational experience
- seek clarification of, or recourse on, all decisions under College policies that affect them without fear of reprisal
- the protection of privacy and confidentiality of personal information, subject to limits in accordance with the law

STUDENTS HAVE THE RESPONSIBILITIES TO:

- abide by all applicable federal, provincial and municipal law
- treat members of the College community with respect
- follow all reasonable direction provided by the College and/or FSU
- be engaged in the pursuit of learning within an ordered academic environment
- adhere to the Student Code of Conduct and other relevant College/FSU practices, policies and procedures
- be honest and truthful and not make any false, misleading or inflammatory statements or allegations
- report any wrong doing or unlawful activities to the College and/or FSU officials
- ensure all College and/or FSU visitor(s) are informed of the expectations outlined in the Code of Conduct
- adhere to the “fair information principles” and abide by College policies respecting the privacy of others and the confidentiality of personal information

COLLEGE AND FSU HAVE THE RESPONSIBILITIES TO:

- abide by all applicable federal, provincial and municipal law
- act in the best interest of students following the principles of 1) act in good faith, 2) be reasonable, 3) adhere to set standards and 4) place appropriate weight on information gathered against set criteria
- provide an environment conducive to learning that is safe, secure and accessible; suitable and reasonable for learning, study and wellness
- provide students timely and relevant advice and guidance
- publish accessible and relevant information (e.g. program and course content and academic progression criteria)
- ensure no changes to practices, policies or procedures will apply retroactively to the detriment of the student
- adhere to the “fair information principles” and collect, use and disclose personal information in accordance with the law, including the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act and the Personal Health Information Protection Act
- protect the security of students while maintaining the physical facilities to government, educational and appropriate industry standards
- promote dispute resolution through the assistance of the Office of the Ombuds

The College and the FSU will meet annually to review and, if both parties agree, to renew the Statement. In signing this document, the Presidents are committing the College and the FSU to the principles set forth.

Signed and dated by:



Peter Devlin, President Fanshawe College

Date: May 4, 2021



Ricardo Souza, President Fanshawe Student Union

Date: May 3rd, 2021

APPENDIX:

FANSHAWE COLLEGE, OFFICE OF THE OMBUDS, BROCHURE

The Ombuds provides confidential, impartial support with the goal of dispute-resolution for students and all members of the Fanshawe community who interact with students. The Office of the Ombuds reports to the College President and is funded jointly by Fanshawe College and the Fanshawe Student Union.

Fanshawe's Ombuds is available to help facilitate resolutions, provide guidance on College policies and procedures and may collaborate with Academic Schools, Student Services and the FSU to explore alternative options that are fair to all parties involved.

Are you out of options? If you have a difficulty or dispute that you've tried to resolve or you believe you've been treated unfairly, the Ombuds may be able to help. Fanshawe's Ombuds, provides the college community with a safe and comfortable place to discuss concerns. When you don't know who to talk to, where to turn, or what options are available, consider meeting with the Fanshawe College Ombuds.

The Ombuds

- Listens and helps to analyze your concerns respectfully
- Will brainstorm together with you to explore options or alternative solutions to help resolve your concerns informally, often negating the need for a formal Appeal
- May provide referrals to a support person at the FSU who may help students write their appeals and may be available to accompany students during the appeals process

The Ombuds may also...

- Connect with academic units or Student Service departments with your permission
- Make referrals to campus and community resources
- Make informal or formal recommendations for revisions to College practices, policies or procedures as part of continuous quality improvements cycle

*Please Note:

The Ombuds does not act as an advocate or an adjudicator and operates under the Principles of Independence, Impartiality and Confidentiality with the goal to achieve Fairness for all parties involved.

Confidentiality

Protection of your privacy is very important and the Ombuds Office takes its commitment to confidentiality very seriously. Except in cases where there is potential for harm, the Ombuds will never reveal your identity or act on your behalf without your consent.

Contact

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HERE FOR YOU

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