

The background image is an aerial photograph of a university campus. It features a large, multi-story stone building with a prominent clock tower and arched windows. To the right, there's a modern parking garage. The campus is surrounded by green trees and other buildings in the distance. A Canadian flag flies from a pole on the building.

2024 - 2025

OFFICE OF THE OMBUDSPERSON

PREPARING STUDENTS TO PREVENT,
MANAGE AND RESOLVE DIFFICULT
SITUATIONS.

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Land Acknowledgement

We acknowledge that Western University is located on the traditional lands of the Anishinaabek (Ah-nish-in-a-bek), Haudenosaunee (Ho-den-no-show-nee), Lūnaapéewak (Len-ahpay- wuk) and Chonnonton (Chunongk-ton) Nations, on lands connected with the London Township and Sombra Treaties of 1796 and the Dish with One Spoon Covenant Wampum.

With this, we respect the longstanding relationships that Indigenous Nations have to this land, as they are the original caretakers. We acknowledge historical and ongoing injustices that Indigenous Peoples (First Nations, Métis and Inuit) endure in Canada, and we accept responsibility as a public institution to contribute toward revealing and correcting miseducation as well as renewing respectful relationships with Indigenous communities through our teaching, research and community service.

A MESSAGE FROM THE OMBUDSPERSON

I am honored to introduce myself as the University Ombudsperson and to express my enthusiasm for assuming this important role. Since beginning my tenure on June 16, 2025, I have had the privilege of engaging with many members of the Western community and observing firsthand both the impact and the continued importance of the services offered by the Ombudsperson's Office.

It is with great pride that I present the 2024–2025 Annual Report of the Ombudsperson's Office, covering the period from August 1, 2024, through July 31, 2025. This report includes statistical summaries, student testimonials, and case studies that provide greater context and depth to the data presented.

I extend my sincere gratitude to Stephanie Bolingbroke for her dedicated service as Acting Associate Ombudsperson during the 2024–2025 reporting year. This year represented a significant period of transition for the office, with Whitney Barrett concluding her term as Acting Ombudsperson in December 2024, followed by Joan Finegan's service as Acting Ombudsperson from January through June 2025. In June, both Stephanie and I were pleased to assume our permanent roles, marking the beginning of a new chapter for the office.

Finally, I wish to thank you, the reader, for your interest in the work of the Ombudsperson's Office.

Respectfully submitted,
Melanie Molnar

| Who We Are



Melanie Molnar, Ed.D.
Ombudsperson



Stephanie Bolingbroke
Associate Ombudsperson

Our office operates as an independent, impartial, and confidential resource for students who are uncertain about how to navigate academic or non-academic challenges at Western. We provide a safe and supportive environment where students can seek advice and explore options for resolving their concerns. Students often consult our office regarding interpersonal conflicts, complex decision-making, allegations of scholastic offences or Code of Conduct infractions.

Office of the Ombudsperson Advisory Committee

The Office of the Ombudsperson Advisory Committee serves as a consultative body, providing advice and guidance to the Office on matters including the budget, annual report, and community outreach initiatives. The composition and mandate of the Advisory Committee are outlined in the Memorandum of Agreement.

A special thank you to the 2024/2025 Advisory Committee:

Dr. Bonnie Simpson
Associate Professor,
DAN Management

Dr. Ken Meadows
Educational Developer,
Centre for Teaching and Learning

Claire Hass
King's University College,
Staff/Faculty

Mariana Batista
VP University Affairs, USC

Mohit Gupta
President, MBA Association

Kevin Moore
Peer Advisor, SOGS

Carl Lubano
President, Huron University College
Students' Council



Community Engagement

Over the past year, the Office of the Ombudsperson actively participated in a range of internal outreach events and initiatives, strengthening visibility and connections within the Western community. In addition, the Office maintained membership in both the Association of Canadian College and University Ombudspersons (ACCUO) and the Forum of Canadian Ombudsman (FCO). These memberships provide valuable opportunities for professional development and national engagement, including monthly “water cooler” discussions with colleagues across the country to share insights, best practices, and emerging trends.

Student Testimonial

“

*I would like to
sincerely thank you
once again for all
of your guidance
and support
throughout this
process.*

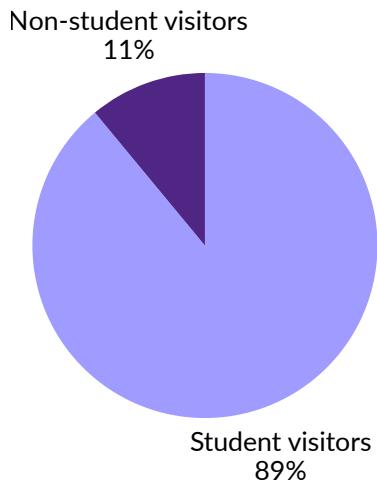
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STATS AT A GLANCE

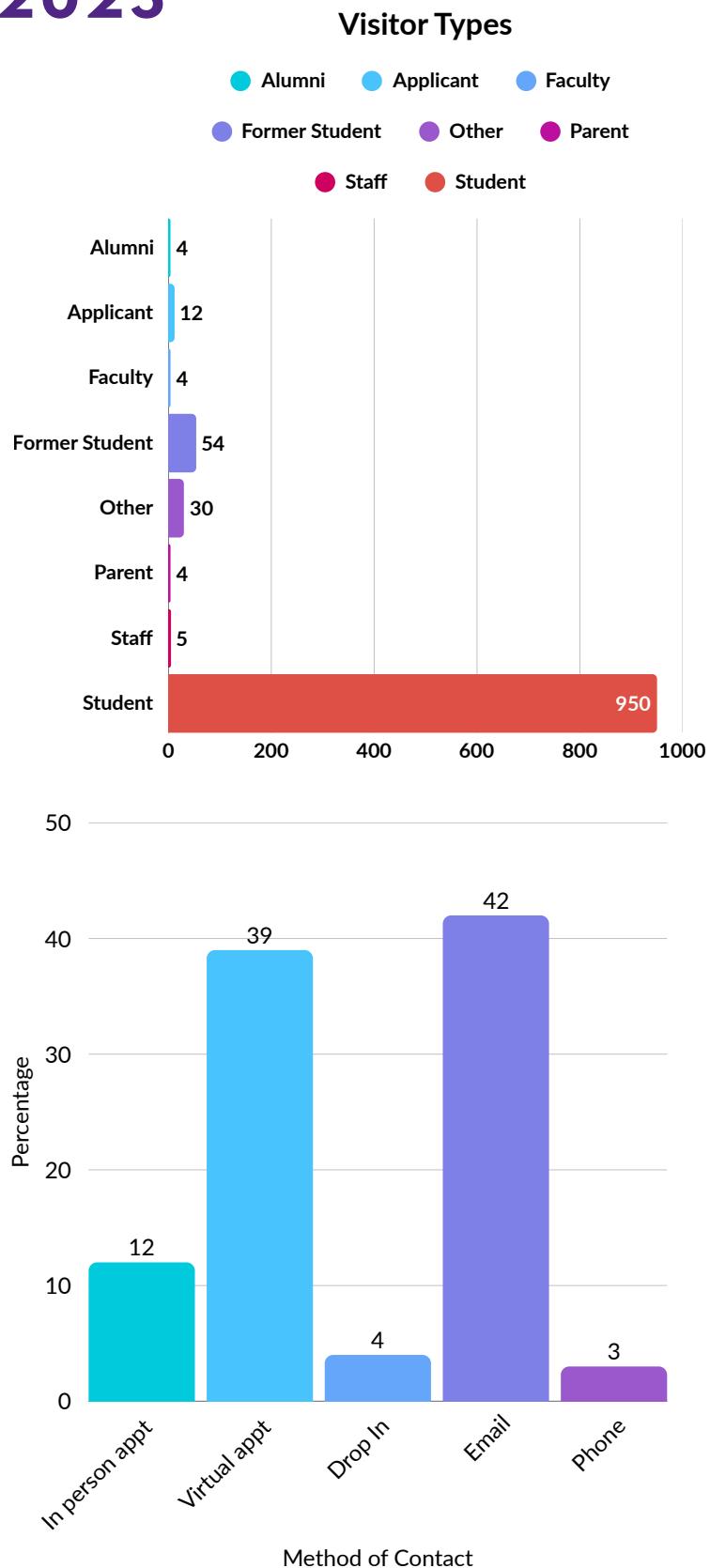
VISITORS FOR 2024-2025

THIS YEAR, THE OFFICE
INTERACTED WITH

1063
VISITORS



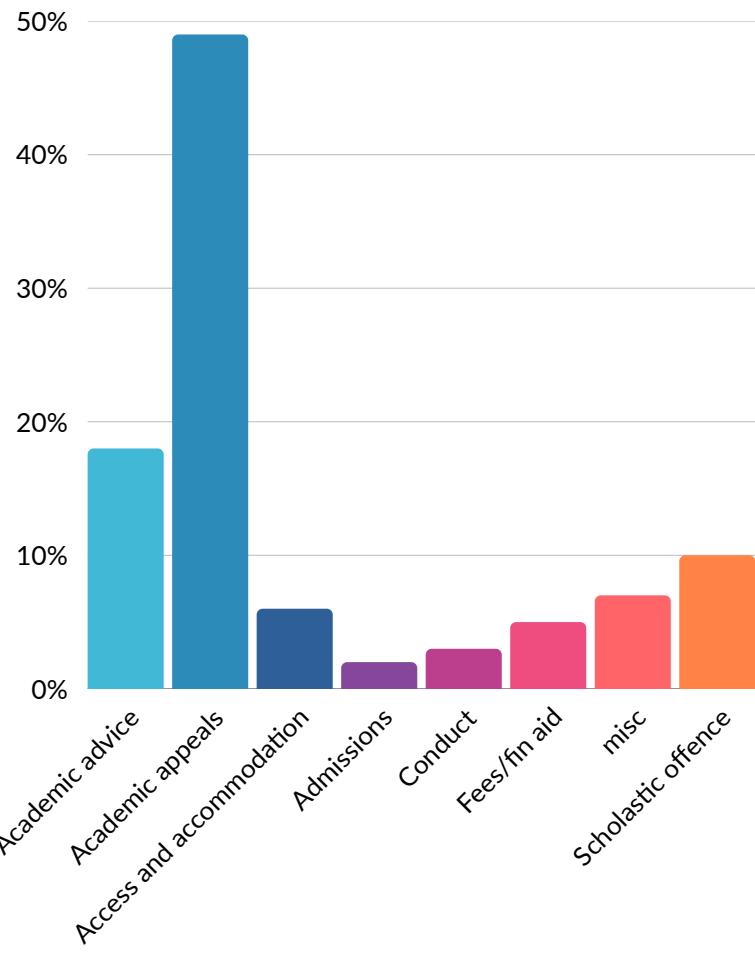
METHOD OF INITIAL CONTACT



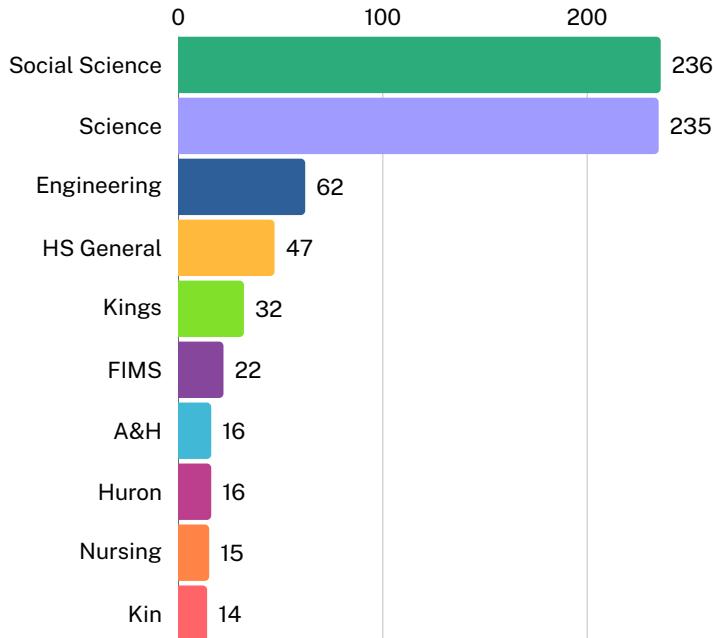
STATS AT A GLANCE

15% of students visiting the Office between August 1, 2024 and July 31, 2025 identified as being an international student.

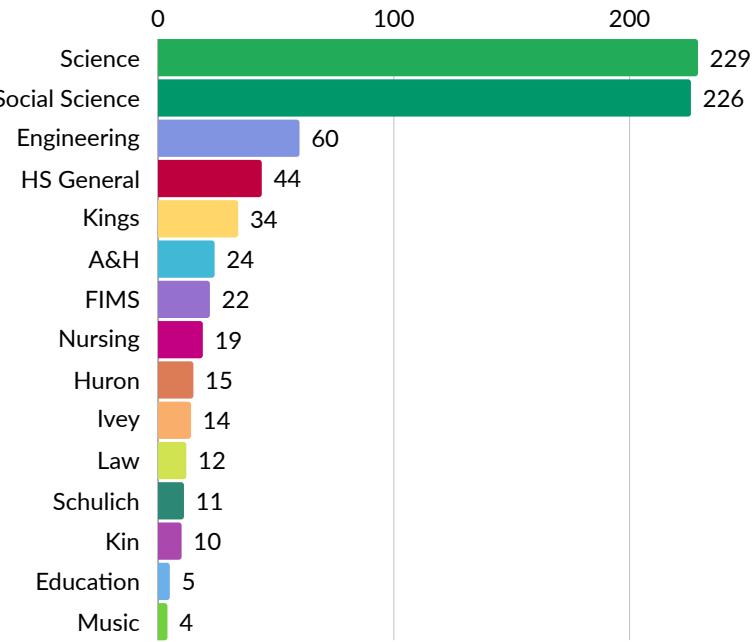
Issues Raised by Students



Undergraduate-Visitors by Home Program



Undergraduate-Issues by Faculty



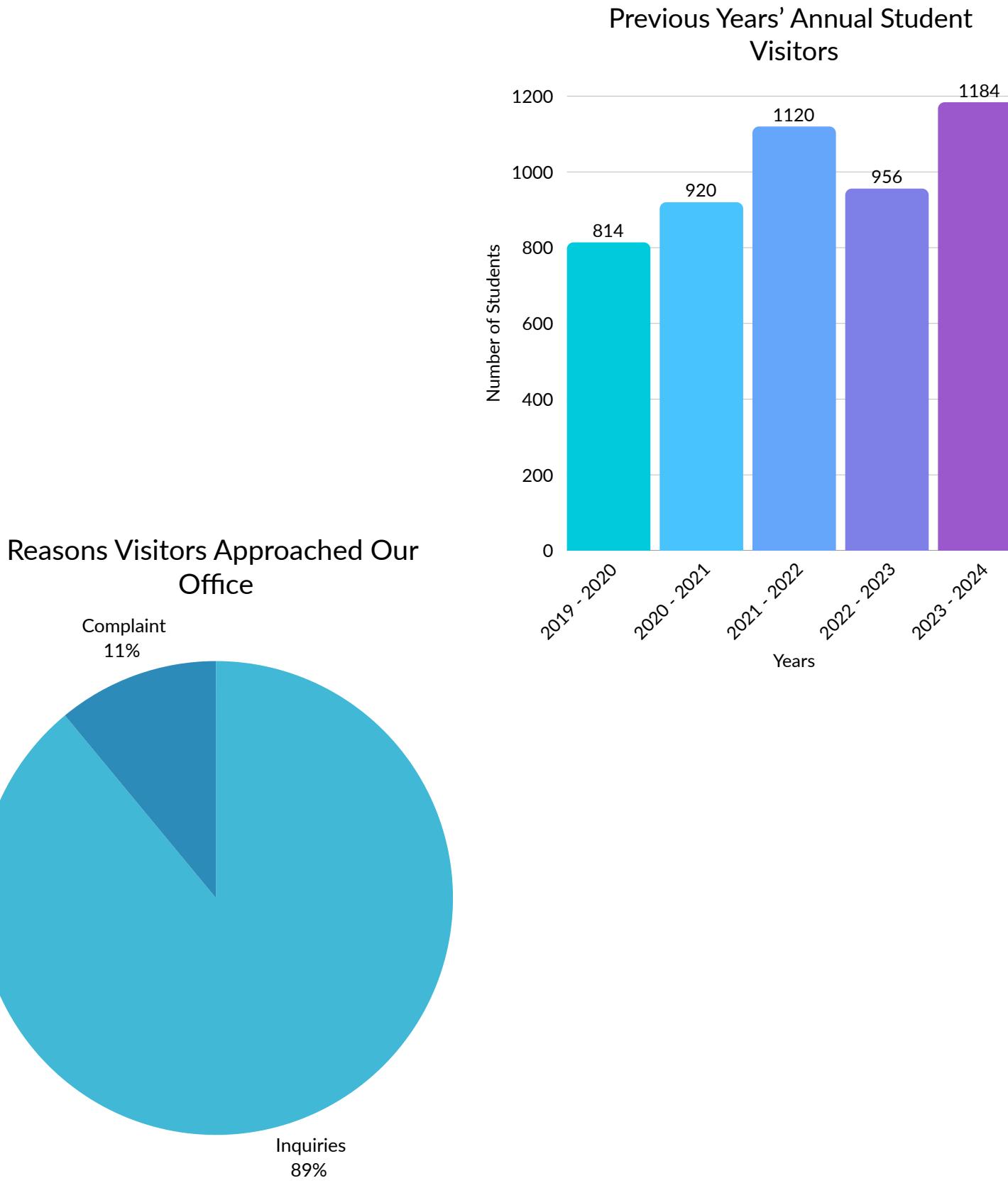
Student Testimonial

“

Thank you so much for your support, I truly can't express how much this means to me. I sincerely wish you the very best. Your support has had a meaningful impact on my wellbeing, and I will not take it for granted.

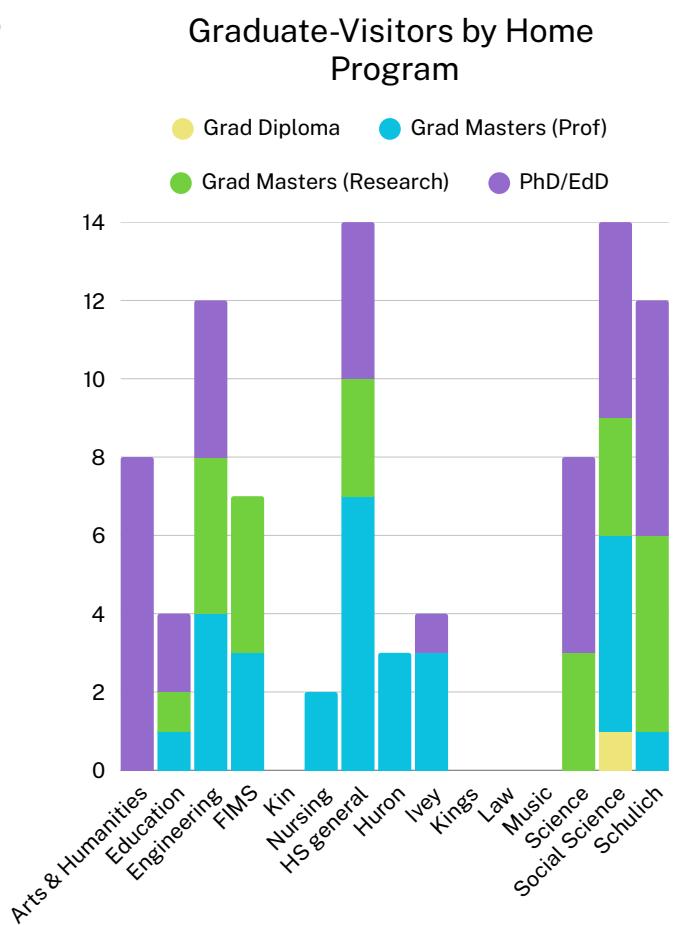
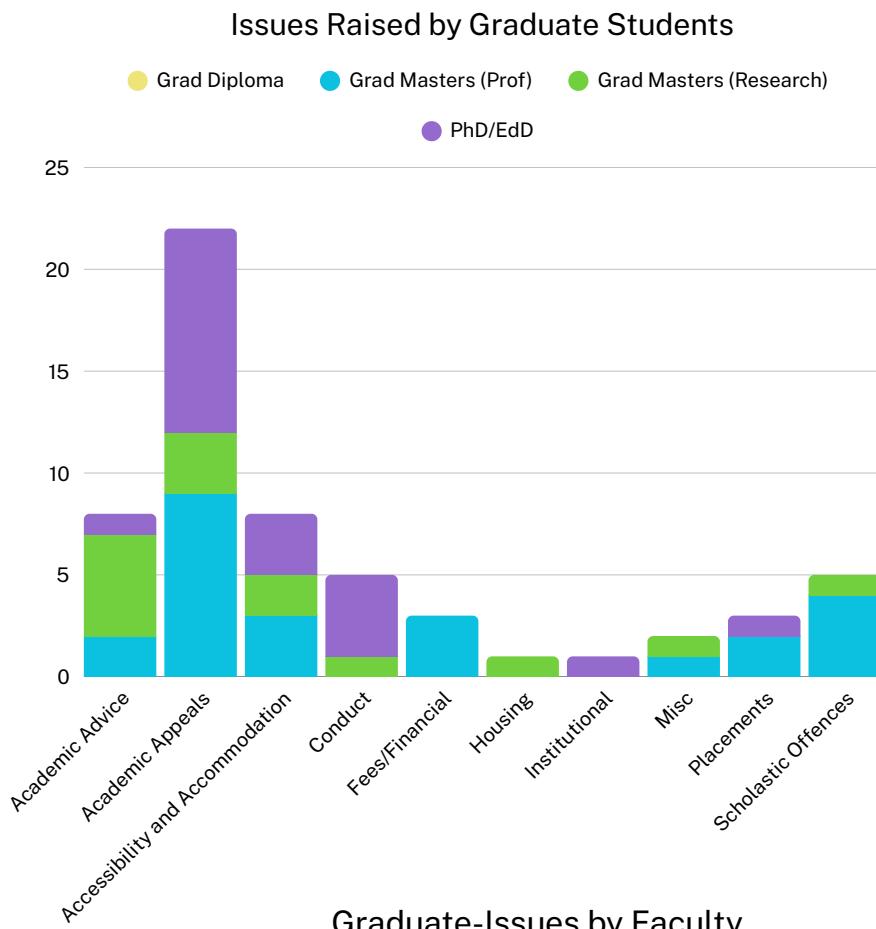
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STATS AT A GLANCE

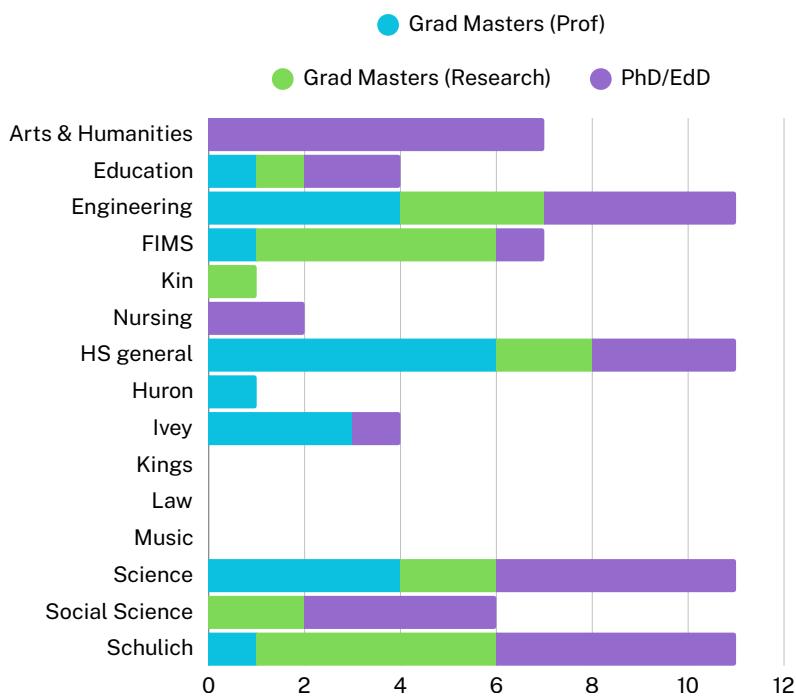


STATS AT A GLANCE

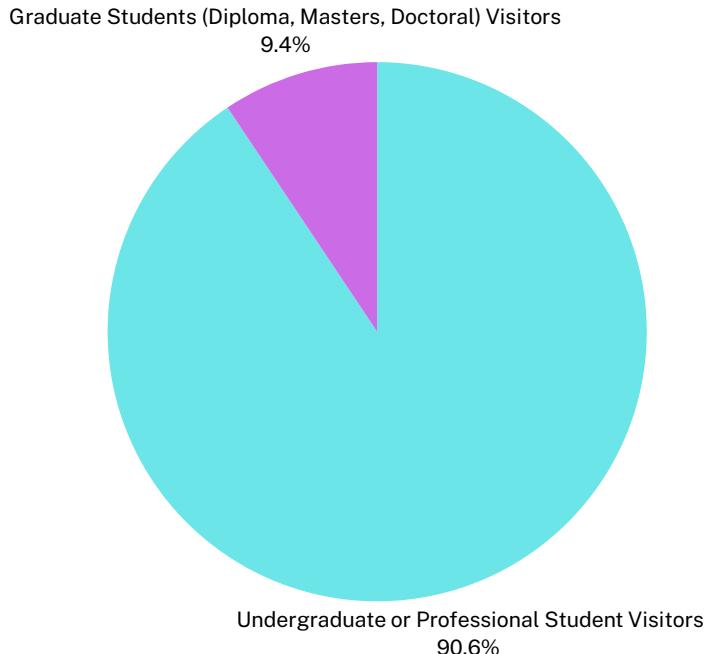
ISSUES RAISED BY STUDENTS



Graduate-Issues by Faculty



Undergraduate vs Graduate Visitors



Student Testimonial

“

*Thanks again for
your guidance, it's
been really
reassuring to have
your support
through this
process.*

”

How We Approach Our Work: Trauma Informed

According to the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health (CAMH):

“Trauma is the lasting emotional response that often results from living through a distressing event. Experiencing a traumatic event can harm a person’s sense of safety, sense of self, and ability to regulate emotions and navigate relationships.”

Trauma may result from a single recent event, a series of incidents, or prolonged exposure to distressing circumstances. It may also stem from historical or intergenerational experiences.

The effects of trauma on an individual’s coping skills can manifest as decreased tolerance for frustration, difficulty adapting to change, and challenges with problem-solving (Warren, R. [2025, September 23]. Trauma-Informed Ombuds Practice).

Within the Ombudsperson’s Office, we have observed an increase in appeal cases in which students are hesitant or unable to fully disclose the details of their situations—information often necessary to appropriately consider the extenuating circumstances affecting them.

To address this, the Office has adopted a universal precaution approach, presuming that any individual seeking our services may have experienced trauma. This approach emphasizes clarity, empathy, and empowerment in all interactions. Specifically, our trauma-informed practice includes:

- Using simple, clear, and strength-based communication.
- Demonstrating empathy and active listening throughout interactions.
- Ensuring transparency in our processes and providing regular updates.
- Seeking consent and maintaining cultural sensitivity at all stages.
- Clearly explaining our role and limitations.
- Removing barriers to access wherever possible.
- Encouraging visitors to bring support persons or Elders, if desired.
- Providing choices and involving visitors in decision-making.
- Maintaining a physically and emotionally safe environment.
- Practicing self-awareness and self-regulation to model emotional intelligence.

By integrating these principles into our daily practice, we aim to foster an environment of trust, respect, and compassion. This trauma-informed approach benefits all members of our community and reinforces the fundamentally humanistic nature of our work (Hodas, G. [2006]. Responding to Childhood Trauma: The Promise and Practice of Trauma-Informed Care).

Student Testimonial

“

Your support during the readmission process was truly invaluable. You went above and beyond with insightful feedback, check-ins and genuine care, which helped me to navigate the process with clarity and confidence. I am sincerely grateful for the support and encouragement you offered throughout my journey back to Western.

”

Scholastic Offences and AI

Following up on a Case Study from the 2022-2023 Annual Report of the Ombudsperson's Office, Artificial Intelligence (AI) continues to be an important area where there seems to be a lack of understanding on what is acceptable for students and in which disciplines. Taken from the AI at Western website, the guidance for students is as follows:

You have an obligation to act with honesty and integrity and abide by the rules of the syllabus for each course. You also have an obligation to yourself to learn more about a technology that may have a significant impact on your life. Check your course outline for a statement on permitted and forbidden uses of AI; it will change by course. Where you are uncertain, ask your instructor for guidance.

During the 2024–2025 reporting year, our office observed several cases involving students from one faculty who sought to fulfill their breadth requirements by enrolling in courses offered by other faculties. In these instances, the guidelines governing the use of AI varied significantly between faculties. These inconsistencies regarding what is deemed permissible have, in some cases, resulted in students being sanctioned for scholastic offences. Although course syllabi outline expectations around AI usage, many students continue to rely heavily on AI tools in their academic work, often without fully understanding the differing standards and restrictions that apply across academic units.

According to a report by the Canadian Alliance for Student Associations “Nearly two-thirds of students (23% consistently and 46% occasionally) misrepresented AI-generated content as their own work. Furthermore, a majority of students (63%) are unaware of institutional guidelines governing GenAI use” (Canadian Alliance of Student Associations. (2025, February 7). Digital transformation: Integrating artificial intelligence in Canadian post-secondary education. https://www.casa-acae.com/ai_casa_publication_2025).

Although the growth of scholastic offence concerns seen by the Ombudsperson's Office has not grown significantly from 2023-2024 where it was 8% to 2024-2025 at 10%, the statistics shared above are concerning.

While several campus initiatives, such as those offered through the PAL Centre (Student Experience) and the School of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies Academic Integrity module, promote the responsible use of AI, the growing accessibility of AI technologies suggests that further education for the student community on the appropriate parameters and limitations of AI use may be beneficial.

Academic Considerations and Fraudulent Notes

Over the past year, the Office has observed an increase in cases involving students being sanctioned for submitting fraudulent medical documentation in support of requests for academic consideration. This upward trend may be attributed to several factors, including but not limited to:

- Increased awareness of the Ombudsperson's Office and its processes among students in such situations;
- A rise in the number of students engaging in this type of misconduct; and/or
- Enhanced verification and auditing practices related to medical documentation.

According to University policy, "Students must request academic consideration as soon as possible and no later than 48 hours after the missed assessment."

Our office has observed several cases where dates had been altered on the Student Medical Certificate (SMC) to fall in line with the requirement of the 48-hour Academic Consideration Policy. Although the SMC's were provided legitimately by a licensed medical provider, because the students had tampered with them by making these alterations, they were now considered to be fraudulent, and the students were facing sanctions because of that action.

As highlighted in the 2024–2025 Report on Academic Considerations presented at Western's October 17, 2025 Senate meeting, 1% of the 9273 academic considerations received for the 2024–2025 academic year were denied due to suspected fraudulent documentation.

The consequences of committing this offence are significant, potentially resulting in severe academic sanctions, including expulsion from the University. In addition, the submission of fraudulent documentation may be a criminal offence, which can have long-term implications for a student's future career, particularly in professions governed by regulatory or licensing bodies.

Observations and Recommendations

The Ombudsperson's Office staff engage in shuttle diplomacy, collaborating with senior administration throughout the year to address and resolve systemic issues as they arise. As a result, formal recommendations are rarely required in the Office of the Ombudsperson's Annual Report.

While this report does not include formal recommendations, it aims to highlight areas of challenge that present opportunities for dialogue, improvement, and positive change, ultimately enhancing the overall student experience across the University.

What's next



The central mandate of the Ombudsperson's Office is to promote and safeguard procedural fairness in university decision-making. This commitment is reflected in the day-to-day support provided to the students who have experienced or perceived unfairness.

Looking ahead, I am eager to advance broader initiatives and systemic priorities identified in last year's annual report. In the coming year, the Ombudsperson's Office will:

- Continue to support the development and revision of university policies to ensure that principles of procedural fairness are embedded throughout.
- Collaborate with Ombuds offices across Canada and internationally to remain aligned with best practices in the field.
- Engage in ongoing professional development and training opportunities.
- Expand outreach initiatives throughout the academic year to meet students where they are and foster greater awareness of the Office's role and services.



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