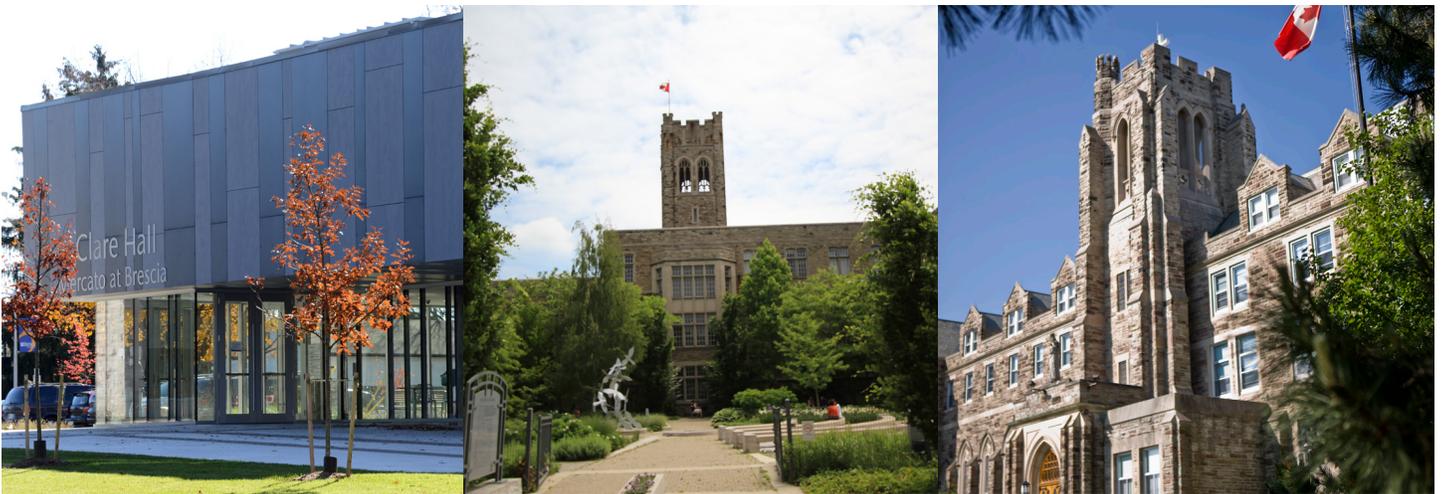


# Office of the Ombudsperson

Annual Review  
2015/16



**Preparing students to  
prevent,  
manage, and resolve  
difficult  
situations.**

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# A Snapshot of the 2015/16 year

**From August 1, 2015 to July 31, 2016, 540 students and 70 non-students visited the Office of the Ombudsperson with 640 issues (575 student, 70 non-student). Although the absolute number of visitors is down slightly from previous years, the percentage of the student population visiting the Office has remained around the same at 1.6%. This is in keeping with the percentage of students visiting Ombuds offices at other institutions across Canada.**

Most cited amongst undergraduate students were general academic concerns (38% or 190 occurrences). This does not include academic appeals, which accounted for sixty or 12% of visits by undergraduate students. Within the graduate student community, academic concerns such as progression and supervision were the primary concern raised at 82% (64 of 78 cases).

## A year of changing provincial regulation ...

In January 2016 Ombudsman Ontario expanded its mandate to include universities. Associate Ombudsperson Anita Pouliot and I were among representatives from Western who attended a session in Toronto where provincial ombuds staff outlined how they would work with universities. Following that meeting, Western's Secretariat developed a process for addressing inquiries from Ombuds Ontario, and I participated in a presentation at the Summer Academic Leaders Conference outlining that process. Between January 1 and November 1, 2016, the Ontario Ombudsman has been contacted about 218 issues involving universities (Ombudsman Ontario, 2016). Only four of those are concerns raised by Western students, and in all but one case the students were referred to the Western process to resolve the situation. In one case Ombuds Ontario contacted our office regarding the situation. Anita and I continue to reach out to ensure students know there is an impartial place on campus to have their concerns heard without escalating their concern to the provincial ombudsman.

## ... and some Western policy changes too

Western's administration continues to review and update policies. The Office of the Ombudsperson welcomes opportunities to comment on new or updated regulations. During the 2015/16 year, I made submissions to the Indigenous Strategic initiatives and Code of Conduct Review Committees. Full text of these submissions can be seen on the Ombuds web site at <http://uwo.ca/ombuds/reports/index.html> I was also involved in a retreat on the state of the Academic Accommodation policy and practices at Western.

At its April 2016 meeting, Western's Senate passed an amendment to the Policy on Evaluation of Academic Performance. Instructors are now required to

“provide an assessment of work accounting for at least 15% of the final grade at least one week prior to the deadline for withdrawal from a course without academic penalty, For 3000- or 4000-level courses in which such a graded assessment is impracticable, the instructor(s) must obtain an exemption from this policy from the Dean and this exemption must be noted on the corresponding course syllabus” (Western, p. 115).

This is a valuable addition to Western policy. It assists students, especially undergrads, in gauging their progress in a course and understanding of the material. To assist graduate students who sometimes go months without receiving feedback on proposal and dissertation drafts, the School of Graduate and Post Doctoral Studies (SGPS) is developing guidelines for graduate supervisors. This is a positive step forward. A colleague pointed out to me that Western highlights outstanding researchers and teachers, but not supervisors. Outstanding supervision needs to be awarded and regulations need to be put in place so that weak and hurtful supervisors are provided with the tools to improve.

## The year ahead

Only nine percent of visits to the Ombuds Office in 2015/16 involved conflict so significant that intervention was required. In all other cases, it was sufficient to communicate policy information or have a brief discussion regarding ways of addressing the situation – perhaps encouraging students to put themselves in the other person's shoes or to help them make a list of discussion points to address with the other individual(s). In the coming year I will be working with other offices on campus to create ways of addressing lower level conflict. This may involve peer-to-peer conflict advising and conflict management workshops.

*Jennifer Meister*  
Ombudsperson, Western University

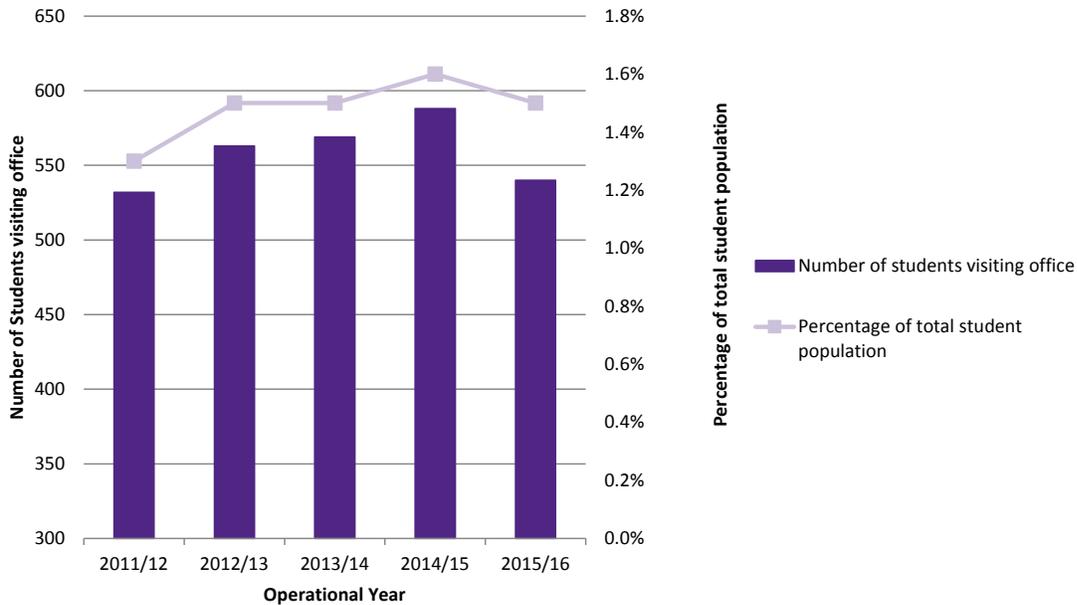
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Western (April 8, 2016) *Senate Agenda* Retrieved from [http://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/senate/minutes/2016/a16apr8sen\\_all.pdf](http://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/senate/minutes/2016/a16apr8sen_all.pdf)

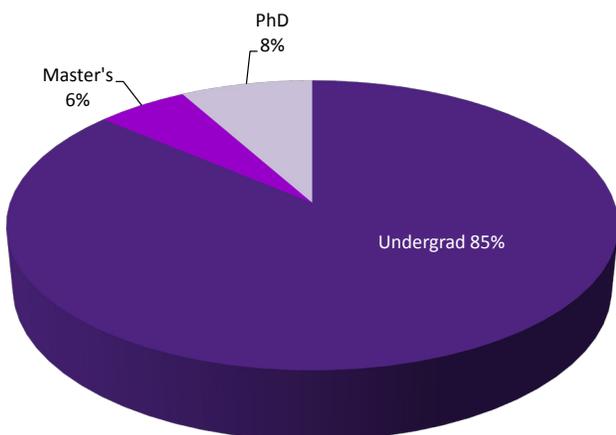
# Visitor Overview

## Visitors over time



As stated on the previous page, the Office of the Ombudsperson addressed 575 issues between August 1, 2015 to July 31, 2016. We saw 540 students or 1.6% of the total student base (graduate, undergraduate, main campus, Brescia, Huron, and King’s University Colleges). (Please note that the scale showing number of students visiting office starts at 300.)

## Degree level of student visitors



Of the 540 students visiting the Office in 2015-16, 489 (85%) were undergraduate, 32 (6%) were Master’s and 46 (8%) were PhD. Students from professional programs such as Medicine and Law are included in the undergraduate calculation.

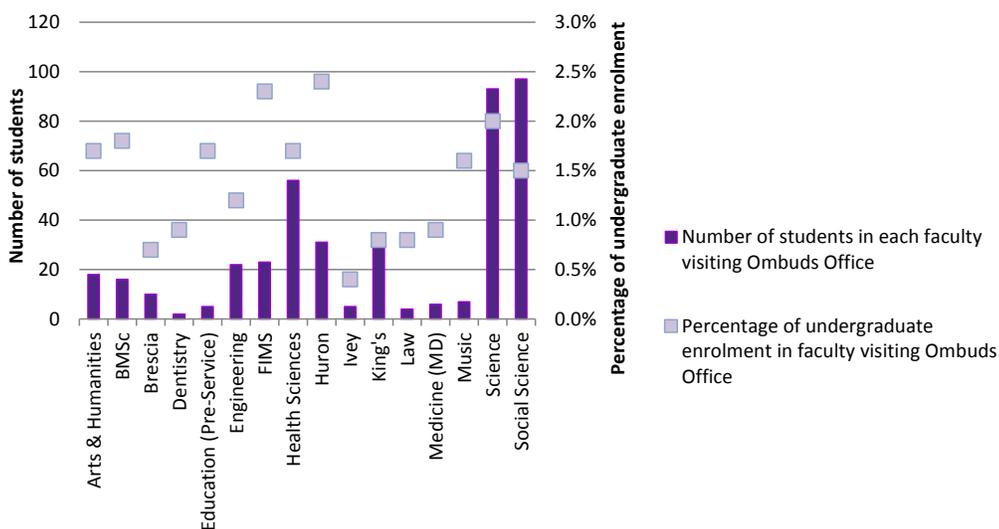
# Academic Data

## Undergraduate Students

The number of undergraduate students visiting the Office of the Ombudsperson is illustrated below in two ways. The first is the number of students from each faculty that we provided service to in the 2015/16 year. For example, a student in Social Science may visit us about a concern in Residence. The second is the number of students who raised concerns about a specific faculty. For example, a Science student may raise a concern about a course they are taking in Arts and Humanities.

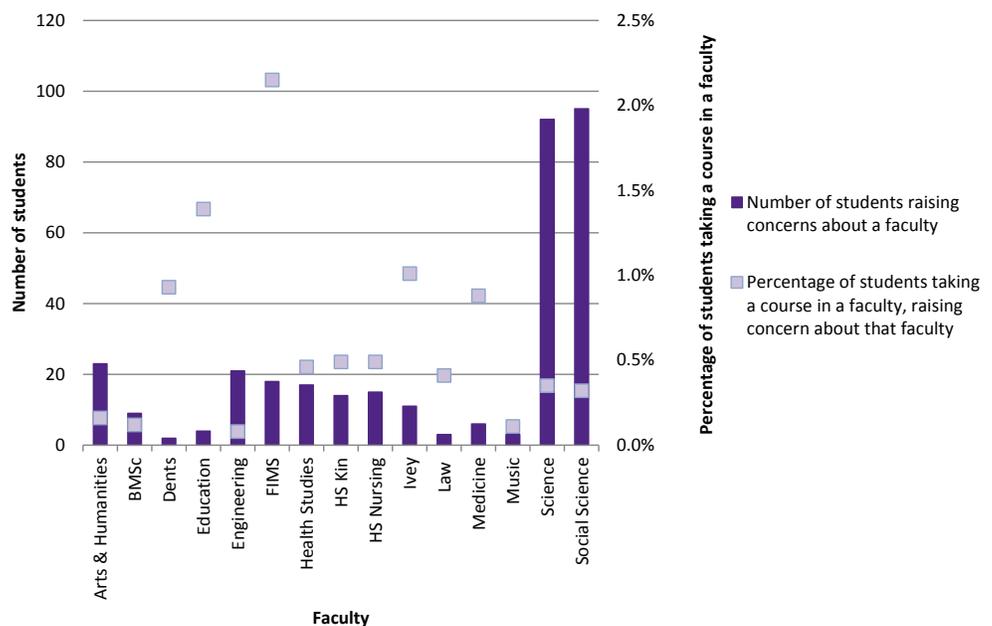
Note that Brescia (8), Huron (25) and King's (20) are not included in the latter graph because the number of students taking their courses is not commonly available. Also, there were two concerns raised regarding Continuing Studies courses.

### Undergraduate student visits per faculty of enrollment



**Faculty Note:** Health Sciences includes Nursing, Kinesiology and Health Studies.

### Undergraduate concerns per course faculty



## Undergraduate concerns - academic and financial

The following chart illustrates the academic concerns that were raised by undergraduate students who visited the Office of the Ombudsperson.

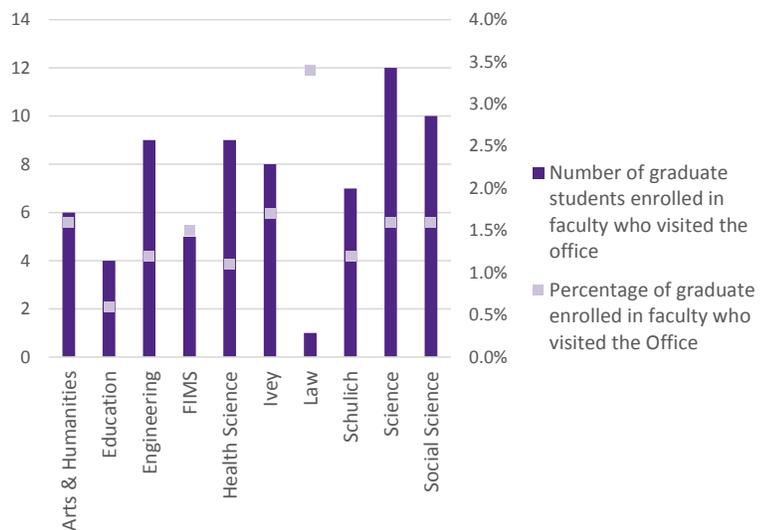
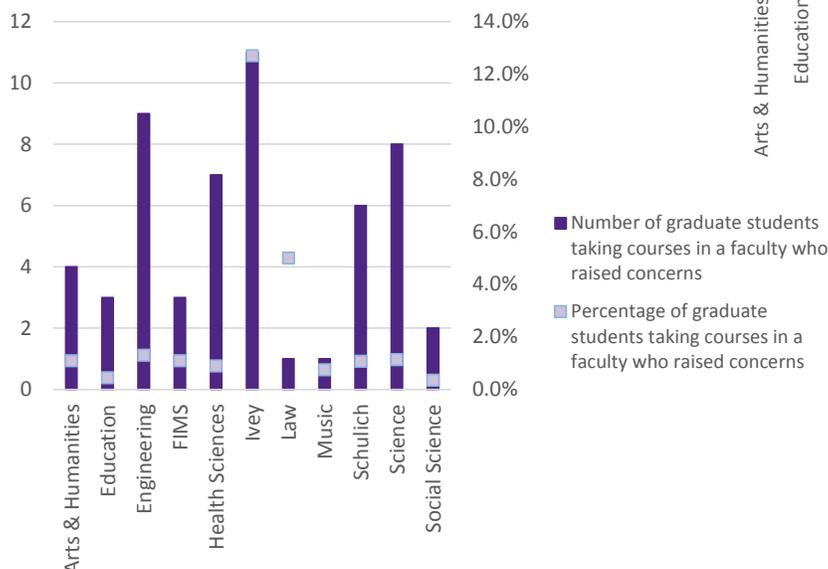
Category of Concern	Occurrences	As a % of total undergraduate occurrences (489)
General academic related (other than appeals)	190	38%
Administrative procedures (other than ac appeals)	134	27%
Academic appeals	60	12%
Financial	16	3%

## Academic Data Graduate Students

A total of 78 graduate students (Master's and PhD) visited the Office of the Ombudsperson in 2015/16 regarding 92 concerns. As in past years, supervision and progress (often related to supervision) were the most cited concerns. A team from the School of Graduate and Post Doctoral Studies (SGPS) is working on supervision guidelines which will hopefully clarify expectations and reduce some of the conflicts that occur.

### Graduate student visits per faculty of enrollment and per course faculty

Although graduate students are all enrolled in the School of Graduate and Post Doctoral Studies, we record their disciplinary faculty when they visit the Office of the Ombudsperson. The graph at the right shows the number and percentage of PhD and Master's students visiting the Office from various disciplinary faculties.



The graph to the left represents the number and percentage of Master's and PhD students taking courses in a faculty, raising concerns about that faculty.

Notes: i) Only faculties where students raised concerns are listed. ii) Health Sciences refers to all Health Science graduate programs. iii) Three King's students raised concerns and four students did not disclose the program they were discussing.

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## Graduate concerns - academic and financial

The following chart illustrates the academic and financial concerns that were raised by graduate students who visited the Office of the Ombudsperson.

Category of Concern	Occurrences	As a % of total graduate student occurrences (78)
Academic	64	82.0%
Admissions	4	5.1%
Financial	8	10.2%

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## Undergraduate and Graduate Non-Academic Concerns

The Office of the Ombudsperson also guides students through non-academic concerns, including Code of Conduct violations, residence and residence conduct issues, and library and parking experiences.

Concern	Occurrences	As a % of total occurrences (575)
Conduct	7	1.2%
Interpersonal concerns (including referrals to Equity and Human Rights Services)	14	2.4%
Housing (including on and off campus)	26	4.5%
Non-University related concerns (including OSAP)	3	0.5%
Student Associations	8	1.4%
All other (includes concerns with libraries and parking for example)	7	1.2%

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## Outreach

**A**nita and I enjoy getting out of the office and talking about how we can guide students through their troubles at the University. Not only do we continue to have opportunities to meet students, but our opportunities for communicating with staff, faculty and administrators have increased. During the 2015/16 year we participated in the following events:

### Booth participation

New Faculty Orientation  
Residence Staff Orientation  
SGPS Orientation  
Student Success Concrete Beach Orientation Week event  
SOGS Amazing Race event  
Mental Health Awareness day (with Clara Hughes as speaker)

*Outreach continued on next page*

# Non-Student Data

One of the greatest services we provide is consultation with faculty members and university administrators on specific student issues. Often administrators will contact us with regard to requirements to withdraw or granting of Dean's Waivers. In these situations, they have made a decision but want to ensure it's fair to the student. We also hear from parents who have a question about a policy. Of course, we don't speak to parents about a specific situation without their student's permission.

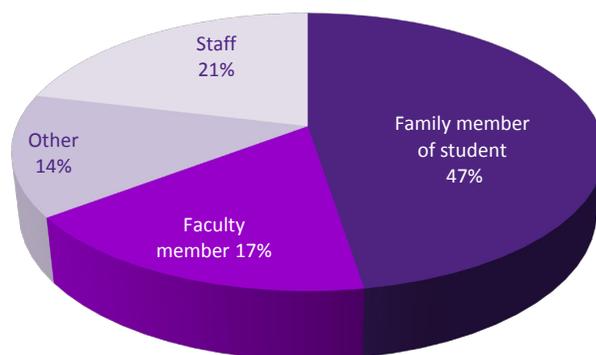
In the 2015/16 year, we heard from 12 faculty members, 15 staff members, and 33 family members. We also heard from ten people who we categorized as "other". These individuals include members of the community concerned with a service on campus and lawyers and other representatives of students.

The following charts break up the categories of individuals who contact us and the concerns they contacted us about.

## Non-student concerns

Concern	Occurrences	As a % of total non-student occurrences (70)
Academic (Graduate and Undergraduate)	23	33%
Conduct (scholastic and non-scholastic)	8	11%
Equity (Including concerns referred to Equity and Human Rights Services)	7	10%
Registration (inc. admission, readmission, requirement to withdraw, add/drop dates, etc)	5	7%
Financial	3	4%
Housing (on- and off-campus)	3	4%
Other UWO	21	30%

## Category of individual



*Outreach continued*

### Presentations

Guest speaker, Brescia Conflict Management class  
 Summer Academic Leaders Conference presentation on Ombudsman Ontario jurisdiction

### Other activities

Regular meetings with SGPS  
 Accommodation retreat  
 Appeals info and recommendations for Western 1010  
 Input to BASICS planning for new chairs

### Courses/conferences

Association of Canadian Colleges and University Ombudspople (ACCUO) mid-year meeting, Toronto, ON  
 Various webinars on issues of interest to the Ombuds community, including sexual violence legislation, accommodation, Ombuds Ontario jurisdiction,

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