



OMBUDS **REPORT** 2022-2023



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.



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.

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

My sincere appreciation to Meg Easveld, in the FSU Publications & Communications Department for her contributions to the design of this report.

Respectfully,
Rose Padacz, Ombuds

**THE OFFICE
OF THE OMBUDS**

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



This has been an exceptional year at Fanshawe College. As the College community returned to the campus and awaited with anticipation for the opening of Innovation Village, it also marked the 30th Anniversary of the Ombuds Office. Fanshawe was innovative and a pioneer establishing the first College Ombuds Office in Canada in 1993.

Since inception, the Office has operated in the interest of fairness for all by facilitating dispute resolution within the College, negating the need for students, alumni and community members to require external resources ie, legal counsel, the MPP's office, OHRC or the Provincial Ombuds office. The Ombuds Office has played an integral role supporting Fanshawe's mission, vision and values to focus on students, unlock potential, use resources wisely and provide pathways to success.

As the 5th College Ombuds, it has been a privilege to provide guidance to our students, to collaborate with others across all academic schools, student services and to partner with our dynamic Fanshawe Student Union to support students' success by reducing the impact of issues they may encounter during their academic journey to achieve a fair outcome.

During 2022–23 over 400 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. Other concerns related to fees, OSAP, academic accommodations and issues relating to Academic Integrity. Others requested guidance on College policies and procedures and the appeals process.



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Inquiries and referrals were also received from Alumni, family members, the Provincial Ombudsman and the community. Fanshawe's Ombuds Office provided confidential, impartial support, guidance on College policies 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.

Together with our students, Academic Schools, Student Services, the FSU team and College community, we faced many challenges during 2022–23 as we determined new ways to interact as we returned to the campus. We embraced opportunities for change from lessons learned during the pandemic to provide hybrid service delivery models that are student centric and EDI focused to reduce barriers and cultural misunderstandings.

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 ingenuity, a little compassion and collaboration, the College was able to resolve challenging situations and find alternative, fair solutions, to support 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, 2022 to August 31, 2023.

A YEAR AT A GLANCE...

The Office of the Ombuds provides confidential, impartial support, guidance, and consultation for students and all members of the College community who interact with students. Aligned with the College Vision, Mission and Values, the Ombuds operates to promote student potential by collaborating with academic areas and student service departments to 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 provides informal and formal recommendations to the College with the goal to achieve fair and equitable practices reflected in our policies and procedures. 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.

During 2022–23, over 400 students contacted the Ombuds Office 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 admission, challenges resulting from the 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.

International students continued to face additional challenges to secure learning visas, concerns relating to academic program progression, paying fees on time for unexpected program extensions (due to change in program format, course offerings or an unsuccessful course) and concerns over part-time status which ultimately may impact their work permit applications post-graduation.

In consultation with colleagues and fellow Ombuds from across Canadian Colleges and Universities, it was noted that many concerns shared within the Ombuds Office are not unique to Fanshawe and often stem from common themes. Many students are still struggling with the impact of the pandemic on interpersonal relationships, health, finances, and other factors such as, limited access to child care, food insecurity, the high cost of housing or housing disputes.



The above factors, compounded with challenges or issues in the classroom, during the completion of group work, or while on placement impacted their overall academic performance and progression in their academic program, resulting in the perception of unfair treatment and required support for resolution.

In many cases, the stakes were high with financial consequences and emotional impact, involving complicating factors. Sometimes the situation had escalated due to breakdown in communication or escalation in behaviours that perpetuated the conflict. Resolution involved consultation with several departments and academic areas to help address their concern or issue while exploring a fair and reasonable remedy.

Other student situations included conflict with classmates, professors or service providers, inappropriate or harassing behaviours 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 or community resources for additional support.

The office also received inquiries from groups of students who contacted the Ombuds 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.

Many resolutions provided students with a fair opportunity to demonstrate their core learning outcomes by providing alternative evaluation opportunities or assignment submissions, access to course materials or recording of lectures. Depending on the circumstances, students were able to defer admission, reduce their course load, apply for a PLAR or complete an alternate placement to 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, providing education relating to College policies and practices while applying a solution-focused EDI lens of inquiry.

By encouraging students to view the “big 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. In some cases, facilitated mediation helped parties involved to share perspectives, address questions, clarify intentions and land on a mutual agreement to move forward.

Again this year, the creativity, compassion and collaborative spirit demonstrated by our President, Executive Leadership Team, members of the Academic Services Leadership Team (ASLT), Student Services Management Team and the FSU, resulted in innovative solutions, alternate pathways to student success, retention and graduation.

APPROACH TO RESOLUTION, STUDENT SCENARIOS AND FAIR OUTCOMES

DO NUT Cheat!

Academic Integrity

FREE DONUTS!

fsu.ca/academic-integrity

INITIATIVES & COLLABORATIVE SOLUTIONS

In 2022–23, 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. As a member of College Council and in consultation with various committees, the Ombuds Office provided input on revisions to College policies, procedures and practices offering feedback from an EDI perspective and Fairness lens, which included, the College Council Terms of Reference, Academic Policies A128 Student Appeals and A136 Academic Integrity.
2. Academic Integrity Initiatives included participation on the Academic Integrity Advisory Committee and DoNut Cheat campaign with the FSU. Please reference fsu.ca/academic-integrity and Academic Integrity website for valuable resources for students, faculty and staff.
3. Other initiatives included participation as a member of the Student Experience Committee to help contribute to the design of a new SEC Framework to offer an exceptional student experience.
4. Outreach activities included presentations and workshops offered to Academic Schools, participation in Orientation, Student Services events and the “Here for You Campaign”.
5. Professional development opportunities included workshops offered by the Ontario College Administrative Staff Association (OCASA) and Colleges and Institutes Canada (CICan), the Canadian Association of College and University Ombuds (ACCUO) and the European Network of Ombuds in Higher Education (ENOHE).

FIVE YEAR SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS (2018–2023)

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 2018–2023, the status of initiatives, and resulting outcomes.

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.

Update:

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 achieving the above service delivery model 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 Test 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.



Update:

The Test Centre conducted a review and implemented new processes to improve the quality of the overall examination environment and experience. Based on 2021–22 updates, the Centre reported only one issue that impacted the student’s performance that was resolved in consultation with the academic area. Other efforts to preserve the integrity of the examination process are on-going across the College.

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).

Update:

Both the College and FSU continue to offer students a hybrid suite of services including in-person or virtual service options based on their particular needs to help promote student engagement and a vibrant student experience.

2022–23 Recommendation:

A college-wide Student Experience Committee (SEC) was formed in December 2020 consisting of membership from ASLT and Student Services Management Teams, faculty, the FSU and Administration from across the College. A series of recommendations to enhance the student experience have been drafted by the SEC with contributions from student/faculty panels and focus groups to be made public to the College community during 2023.

In consultation with the VPSS and other community stakeholders it is recommended that the College together with FSU partners support the SEC to implement an overall framework to foster a vibrant student experience in response to our evolving student demographic. The framework will include considerations for: Equity, Diversity and Inclusion, (the Digital Strategy) Universal Design for Learning, SILEx/Job Skills for the Future, the Mental Health Strategy, Indigenous Action Plan, and our future Innovation Village.

Update:

The final version of the Framework was presented to the SEC committee and will be shared with key stakeholders across the College with the goal of implementation in 2024–25.

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 2022–23, there were over 400 student visitors and (1) was outside of the Ombuds Mandate.

In addition to student visitors, the Office received inquiries from Academic Schools, Academic Services Leadership Team (ASLT), Student Services, community members and Alumni. The Ombuds provided consultation services with the above groups to help resolve concerns, facilitate fair outcomes, promote student potential and retention while upholding the Integrity of the curriculum offered at the College.

	Inside Mandate	Outside Mandate	Total
2018–19	459	1	460
2019–20	435	0	435
2020–21	415	0	415
2021–22	395	0	395
2022–23	399	1	400

APPENDIX 2:

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

Peter Devlin, President Fanshawe College

Date: 04-05-2023

Stephin Sathya

Stephin Sathya, President Fanshawe Student Union

Date: 04-05-2023

APPENDIX 3:

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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OFFICE OF THE OMBUDS

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