DALHOUSIE UNIVERSITY



OFFICE OF THE OMBUDSPERSON

2025 - 2026

ANNUAL REPORT

Commitment to Equity, Diversity, Inclusion, and Accessibility

The Ombudsperson Office is committed to equity, diversity, inclusion, and accessibility. These pillars speak to the cornerstone of Dalhousie University's expressed intention to create a safe community and a campus climate that promotes and challenges equity, diversity, inclusion, and accessibility on its campuses.

Acknowledgement and exploration of our privileges and biases positions us to actively seek to ensure that students feel safe, supported, recognized for who they are, and appreciated for their diversity.

Dalhousie University operates in the unceded and unsurrendered territories of the Mi'kmaw, Wolastoqey, and Peskotomuhkati Peoples. These sovereign nations hold inherent rights as the original peoples of these lands, and we each carry collective obligations under the Peace and Friendship Treaties. Section 35 of the Constitution Act, 1982 recognizes and affirms Aboriginal and Treaty rights in Canada.

We recognize that African Nova Scotians are a distinct people whose histories, legacies and contributions have enriched that part of Mi'kma'ki known as Nova Scotia for over 400 years.

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FROM THE OMBUDSPERSON

I am pleased to present Dalhousie University's 2025 - 2026 Ombudsperson Annual Report. As I reflect on my second year in the role, I am grateful for the trust students continue to place in the Ombudsperson Office. It is a privilege to support students as they navigate difficult situations, seek clarity, and explore fair and respectful ways to address university-related concerns.

Over the past year, I have continued to hear about the many challenges that can accompany university life. While each student's circumstances are unique, common themes emerge that highlight opportunities to strengthen institutional processes, communication, and student supports. Listening carefully to students' experiences remains one of the most valuable aspects of the Ombudsperson role; these conversations allow the Office to support individual students while also contributing to broader institutional learning and improvement.

This year has reinforced the importance of providing a confidential, impartial, and informal space where students can ask questions, voice concerns, and consider possible paths forward. Students often seek more than answers; they are looking for understanding, perspective, and confidence in navigating complex university processes. It is a responsibility I do not take lightly.

I am also grateful for the opportunity to engage in meaningful dialogue with faculty, staff, and university leaders to resolve student concerns and identify opportunities for systemic improvement. While the Ombudsperson does not advocate for students or the University, the Office remains steadfast in advocating for fairness, procedural integrity, respectful treatment, and transparent decision-making.

As Dalhousie continues to evolve, I remain committed to supporting students and fostering a culture in which fairness, respect, and accountability guide decision-making and interactions across the institution. I look forward to continuing this work in the year ahead and contributing to a university where every student feels heard, respected, and treated with dignity.

Jessica Chubb

JESSICA CHUBB
OMBUDSPERSON

ABOUT THE OFFICE



The Ombudsperson Office recognizes that power and privilege within the university community can shape how individuals interact and experience institutional processes. Committed to fairness and equity, the Ombudsperson works to educate, collaborate, and address systemic inequalities.

Operating independently and impartially, the Ombudsperson does not advocate for any party in a dispute. Instead, the office offers confidential support to help students navigate concerns related to university policies, procedures, and interpersonal conflicts. Grounded in fairness, equity, and accountability, the office provides a safe, respectful space where students are empowered to voice concerns, understand their options, and resolve issues constructively.

When students encounter services that feel disrespectful, inaccessible, or unresponsive, they may seek accountability and meaningful resolution. By supporting mechanisms like the Ombudsperson Office, institutions such as Dalhousie affirm their commitment to feedback, accountability, and a respectful campus culture.

What Does the Ombudsperson Do?

- **Provide general information and appropriate referrals**
- **Clarify university policies and procedures**
- **Support students in exploring and strategizing resolution options**
- **Empower students to address concerns directly and effectively**
- **Facilitate discussions and seek clarification where needed**
- **Offer objective insight and practical advice**
- **Listen with impartiality and respect**

The Ombudsperson Office upholds the standards of the Association of Canadian College and University Ombudspersons (ACCUO), including:

- **Independence**
- **Impartiality**
- **Confidentiality**
- **Accessibility**

2025 - 2026 STATISTICAL DATA

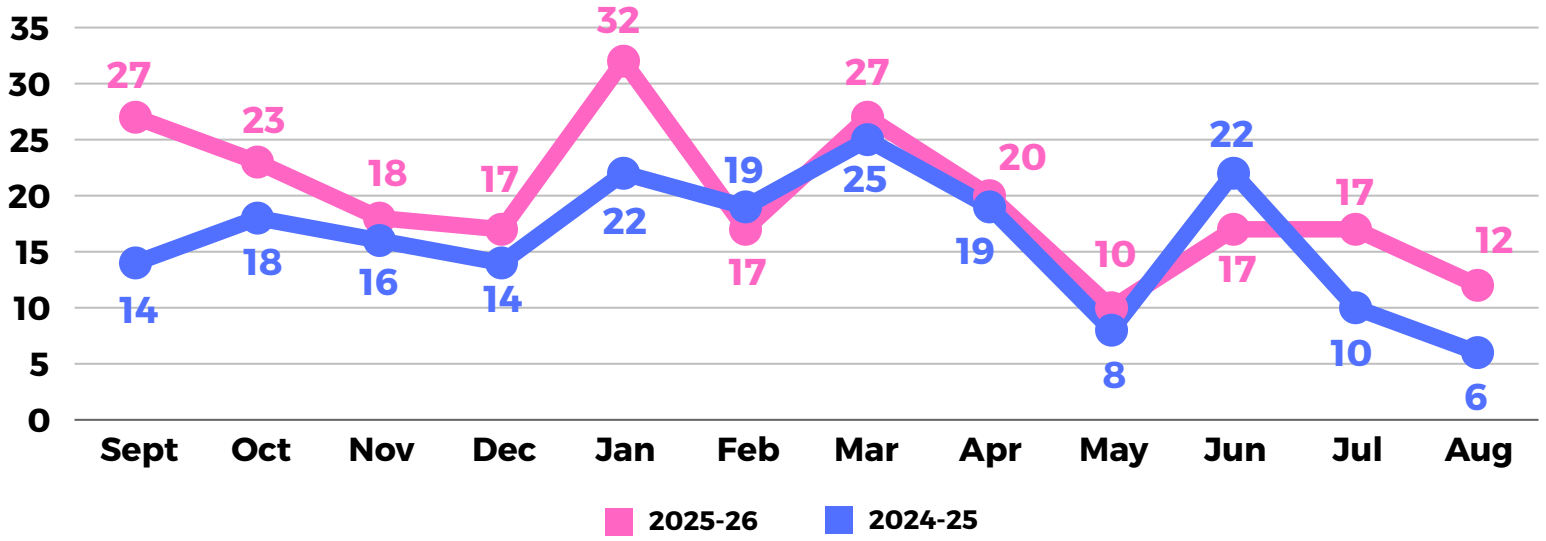
The following numbers and statistics outline the experience at the Ombudsperson Office in the 2025 - 2026 academic year.

Numbers and statistics are representative of September 1st, 2025 to August 31st, 2026.

VISITOR NUMBERS BY SEMESTER

Fall 2025	Winter 2026	Summer 2026	TOTAL 2025 - 2026
85	+ 96	+ 56	= 237

VISITOR NUMBERS BY MONTH



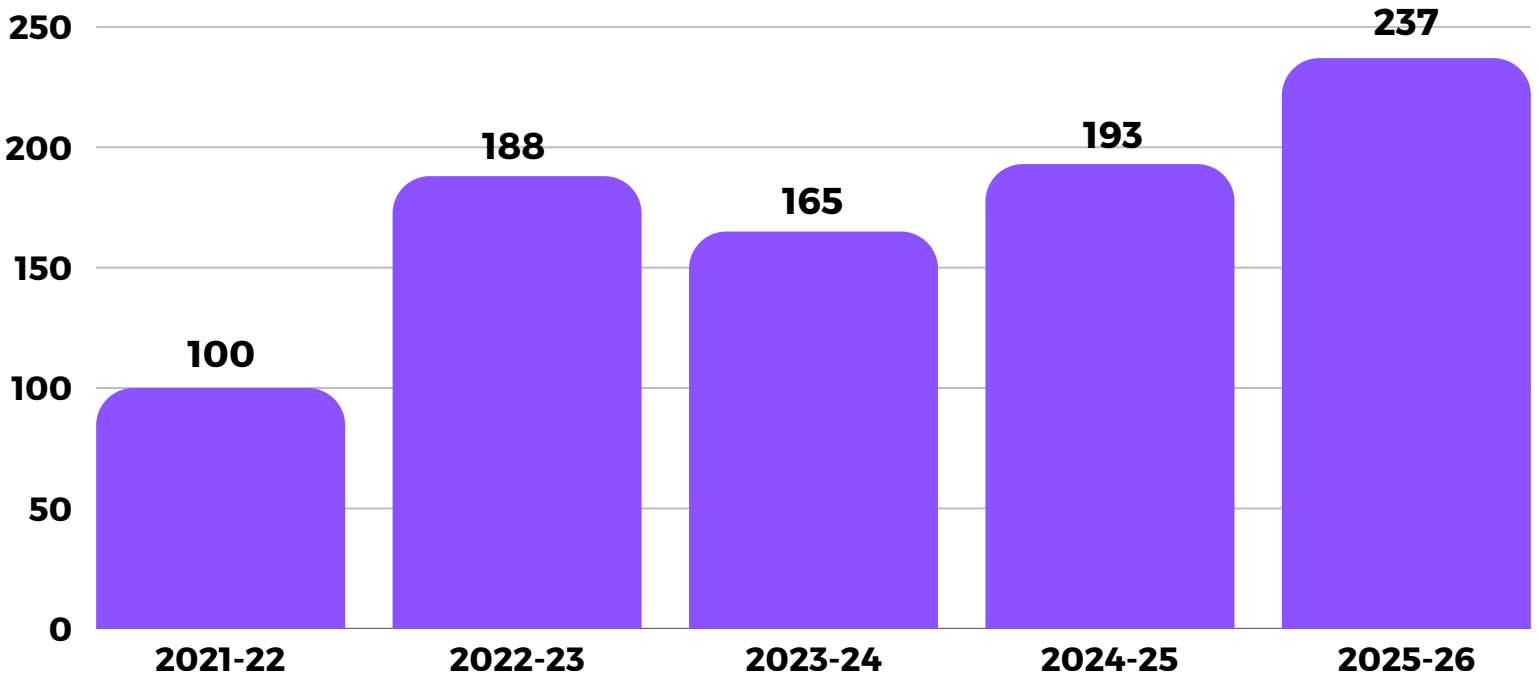
Overall, the data show increased engagement compared with the previous year. The increase was evident across much of the academic year rather than being concentrated in a single month. While the timing of the busiest months varied between the two years, January and March were among the more active periods across the two years.

September accounted for 11.4% of visits in 2025–2026, compared with 7.3% in 2024–2025. January accounted for 13.5% and 11.4%, respectively, while March accounted for 11.4% and 13.0%, respectively. At the same time, both years showed a similar seasonal pattern, with lower appointment activity toward the end of spring and throughout the summer.

2025 - 2026 STATISTICAL DATA



VISITOR NUMBERS BY YEAR



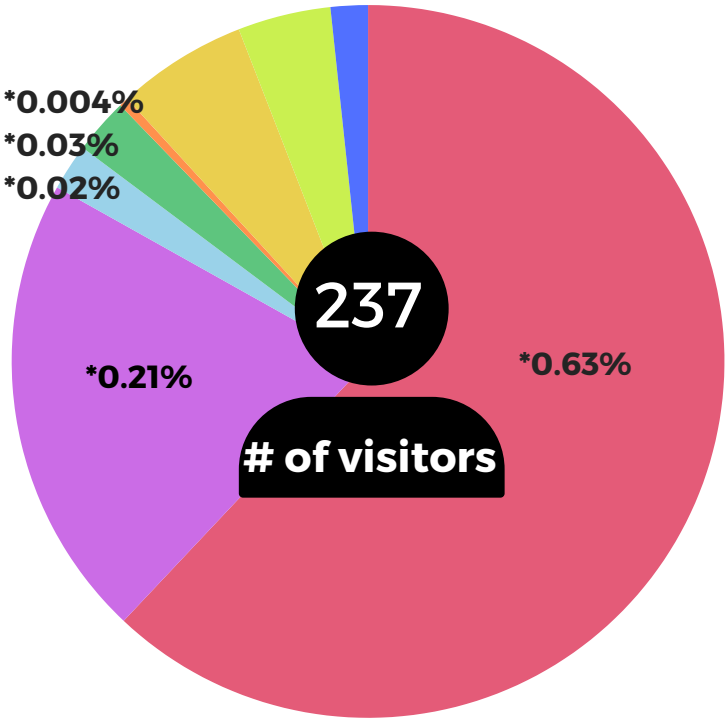
Appointments to the Ombudsperson Office increased by 22.8%, from 193 in 2024–2025 to 237 in 2025–2026. This continues an overall trend of increased engagement with the Office over the past five years.

The only decline in visitor numbers during this period occurred in 2023–2024, when services were temporarily suspended toward the end of the year during the Office's transition.

2025 - 2026 STATISTICAL DATA



WHO VISITED THE OMBUDSPERSON OFFICE



*Proportion of visitors in relation to 2025 - 2026 enrolment numbers for students in undergraduate, graduate, MEDI, LAW, and DENT programs.

- 62% Undergraduate
- 21.1% Graduate
- 2.1% LAW
- 2.5% MEDI
- 0.4% DENT
- 5.9% Parents & Supporters
- 4.2% Alumni
- 1.7% Incoming

Enrolment Numbers

62% of visitors were undergraduate students, accounting for 0.63% of enrolled students.

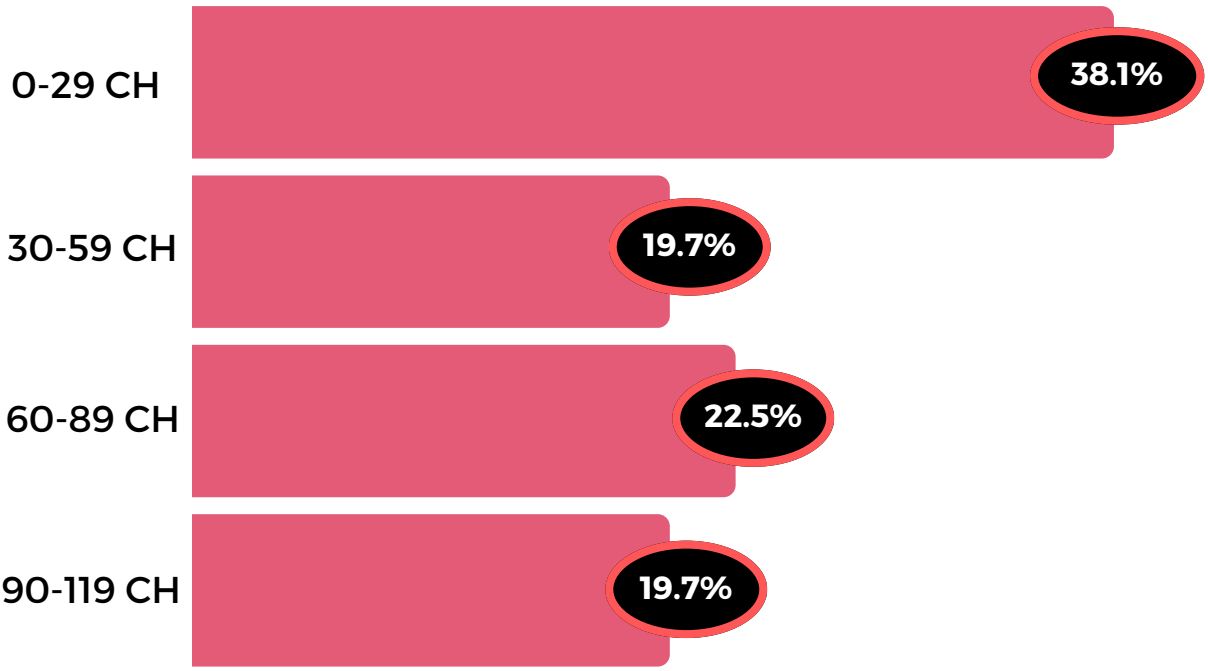
21.1% of visitors were graduate students, representing 0.21% of enrolled students.

2.5% of visitors were MEDI students, representing 0.03% of enrolled students.

2.1% of visitors were LAW students, accounting for 0.02% of enrolled students.

0.4% of visitors were DENT students, accounting for 0.004% of enrolled students.

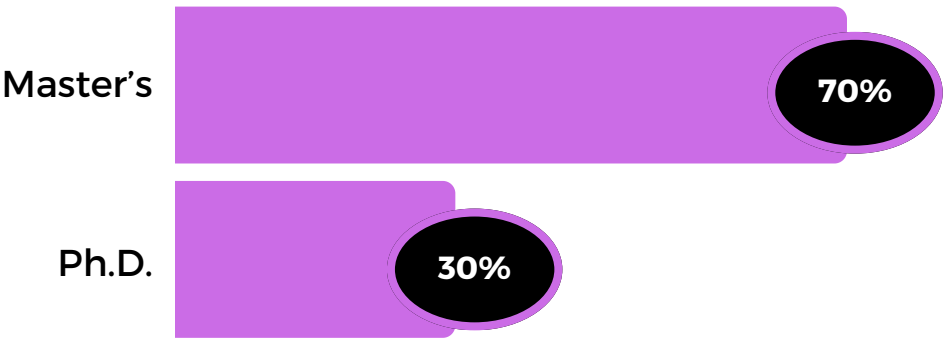
UNDERGRADUATE STUDENTS



The largest proportion of undergraduate student visitors who connected with the Ombudsperson Office (38.1%) were students in the 0-29 credit hour level of study.

In contrast, in 2024-2025, students in the 30-59 credit hour level of study were the largest proportion of undergraduate student visitors at 29.3%.

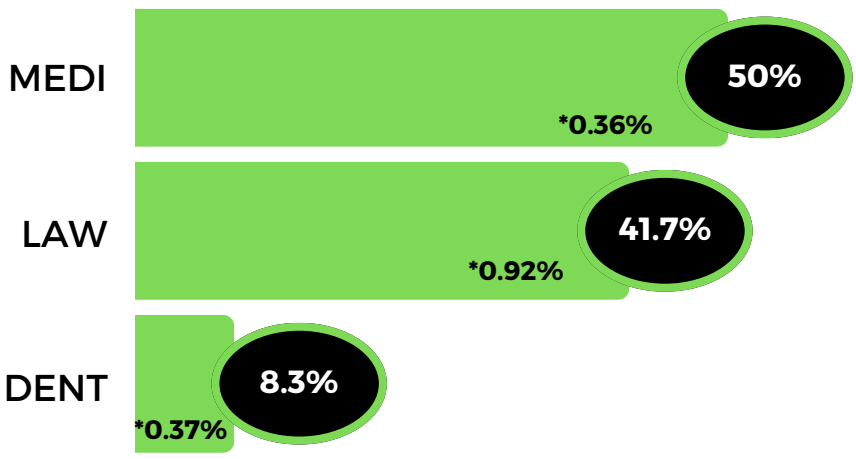
GRADUATE STUDENTS



Students completing their Master's degree accounted for 70% of all graduate student visitors who connected with the Ombudsperson Office.

Master's students in course-based study represented 58% of all graduate students, while those in research represented 12% of all graduate students.

MEDI, LAW & DENT STUDENTS

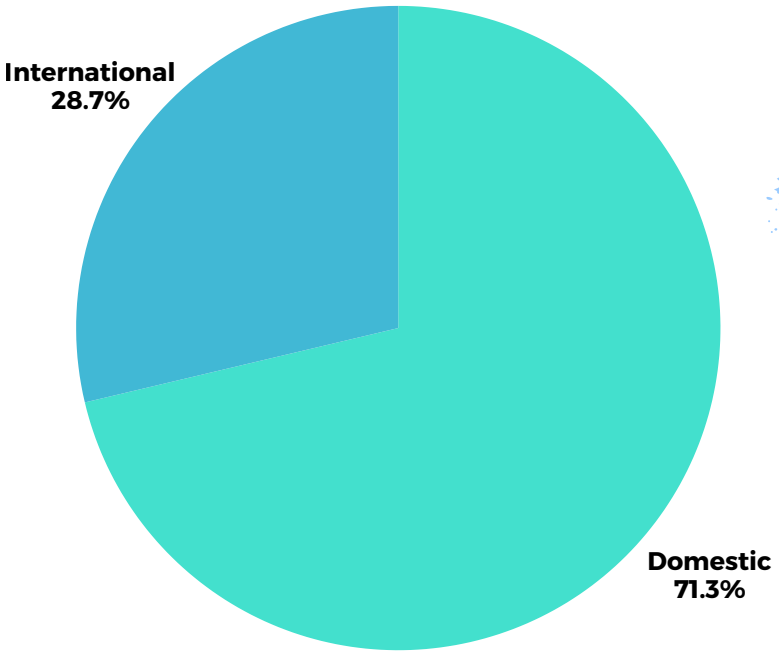


*Proportion of visitors in relation to 2025 - 2026 enrolment numbers for students in MEDI, LAW, & DENT programs.

Students enrolled in the Faculty of Medicine (in either the UGME or PGME programs) accounted for the largest group of student visitors from DENT, LAW, & MEDI to connect with the Ombudsperson Office.

Unlike in the 2024-2025 academic year, where there were no DENT student visitors, this year, students in the Faculty of Dentistry accounted for 8.3% of student visitors in that category.

STUDENT STATUS

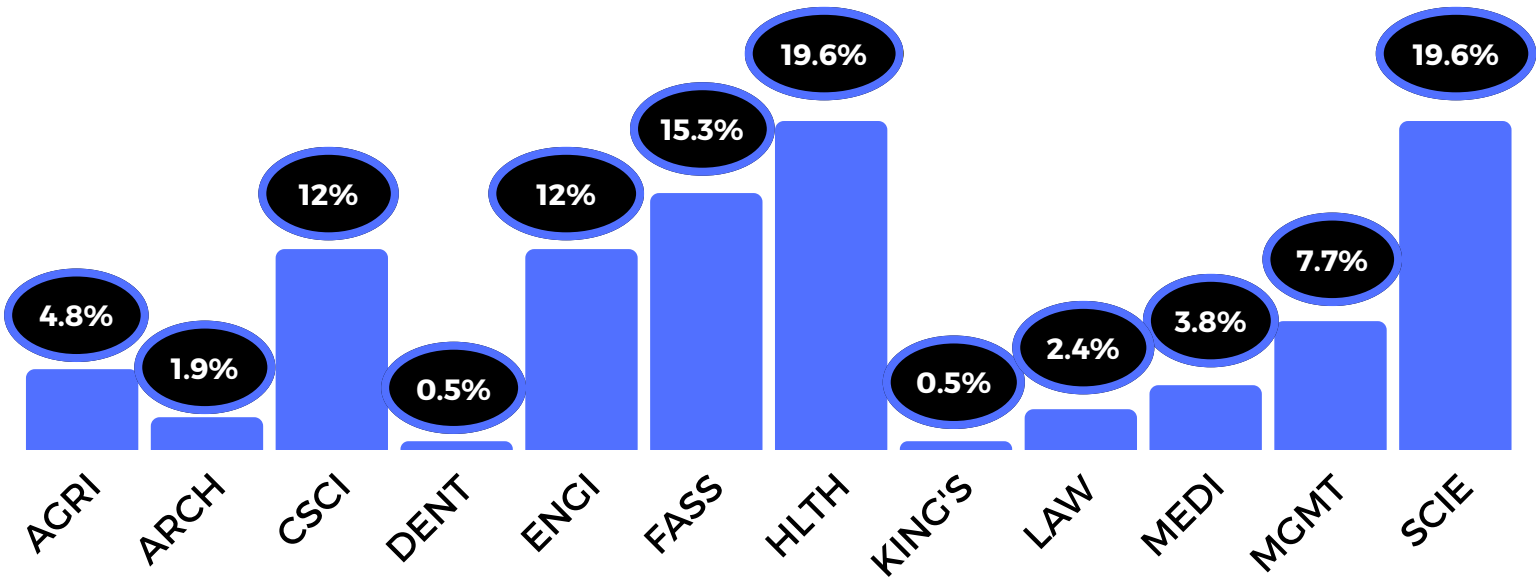


Of the 209 student visitors, 60 were international students, accounting for 28.7% of all student visitors to the Ombudsperson Office. This represents a 42.9% increase in international student visitors this year.

Based on enrolment:
The proportion of international student visitors represented 1.8% of international students and 0.3% of the entire student population.

Domestic student visitors accounted for 0.7% of overall domestic students and 0.6% of the entire student population.

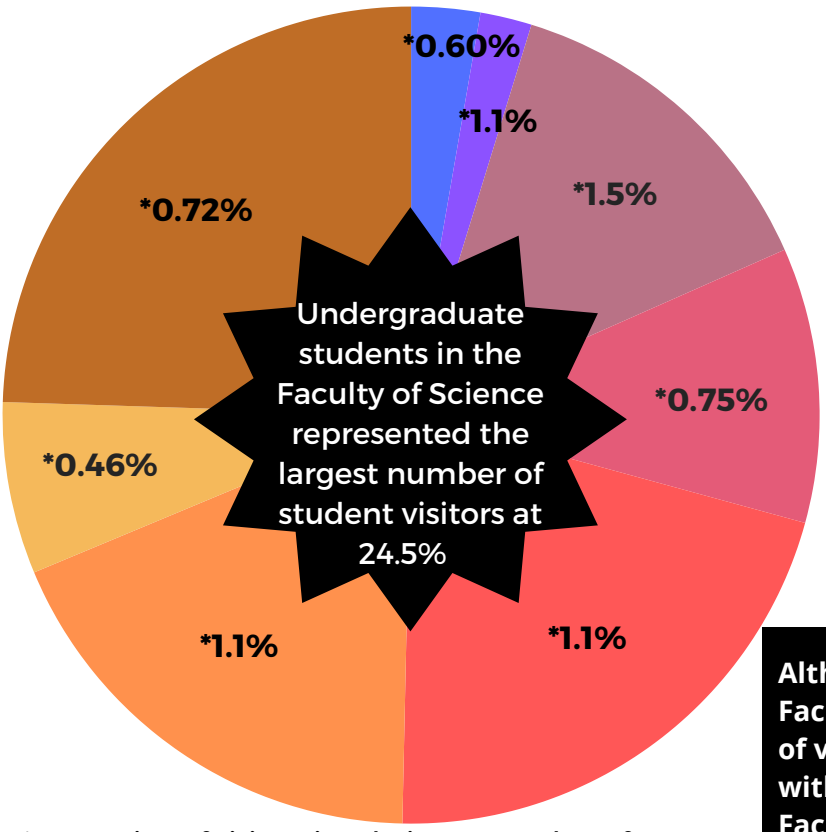
STUDENT VISITOR BREAKDOWN BY FACULTY



Overall, students from the Faculty of Science and the Faculty of Health represented the two largest faculty groups connecting with the Ombudsperson Office, each accounting for nearly 20% of all student visitors.

Similarly, the Faculty of Science represented the largest proportion of student visitors in 2024–25, followed by the Faculty of Health.

UNDERGRADUATE STUDENTS BY FACULTY



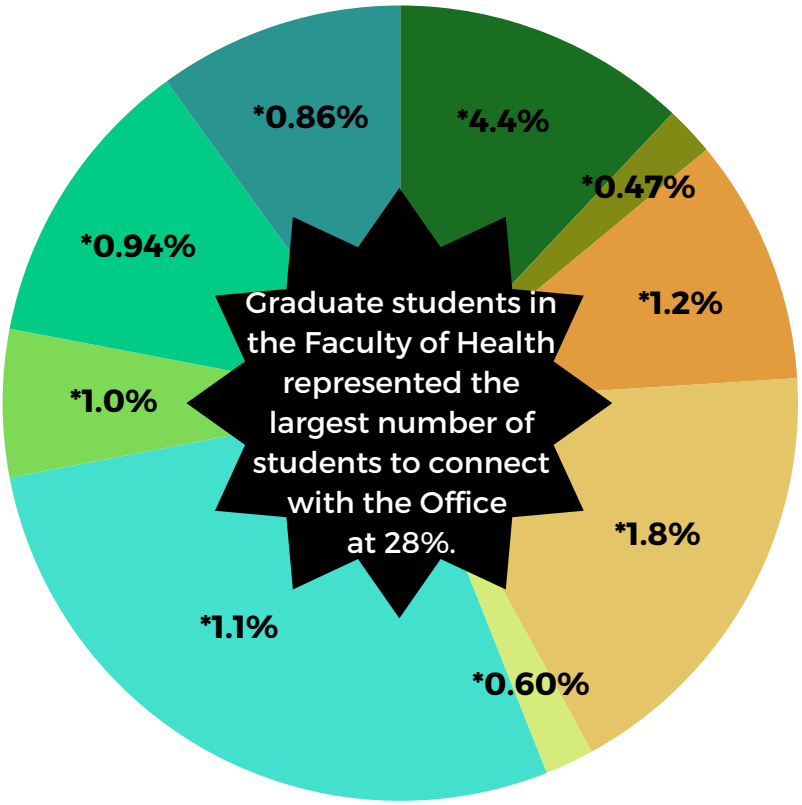
- 2.7% Agriculture
- 21.1% Arts & Social Sciences
- 2% Architecture
- 18.4% Health
- 13.6% Computer Science
- 6.8% Management
- 10.9% Engineering
- 24.5% Science

*Proportion of visitors in relation to number of undergraduate students enrolled in each faculty.

Enrolment Numbers

Although undergraduate students in the Faculty of Science were the largest number of visitors to the office, based on student enrolment within each faculty, undergraduate students in the Faculty of Computer Science represented the largest proportion of undergraduate student visitors at 1.5%.

GRADUATE STUDENTS BY FACULTY



- 6% Medicine
- 12% Agriculture
- 12% Management
- 2% Architecture & Planning
- 10% Science
- 10% Computer Science
- 18% Engineering
- 2% Arts & Social Science
- 28% Health

*Proportion of visitors in relation to number of graduate students enrolled in each faculty.

Enrolment Numbers

Based on student enrolment data, graduate students studying in the Faculty of Agriculture represented the largest proportion of graduate student visitors at 4.4%.

Over the past four years, undergraduate students from the Faculties of Science, FASS, and Health have consistently represented some of the largest groups of students accessing the Ombudsperson Office. This trend continued during the 2025-2026 academic year.

Among graduate students, the Faculties most highly represented over the past four years have been Health, Management, and Science. In 2025-2026, students from the Faculty of Health once again accounted for the largest number of graduate student visitors. The Faculty of Engineering, however, ranked second, while Management and Agriculture tied for third.

The nature of student inquiries, discussed in greater detail below, has also remained relatively consistent from year to year. As expected, academic concerns continued to represent the largest proportion of inquiries to the Office, followed by non-academic and interpersonal concerns.

NATURE OF INQUIRY

Throughout the reporting period, the Ombudsperson Office categorized visitor concerns and complaints according to the nature of the inquiry. This classification enabled a high-level overview of the types of issues brought forward and helped identify trends across key areas. Concerns were organized into the following primary categories: Academic, Accommodations/Equity, Admissions, Finances, Interpersonal, and Non-Academic.

In cases where academic concerns also involved interpersonal dynamics, further sub-categorization was used to capture the specific context and nature of the issue. This approach was similarly applied to non-academic concerns. The additional level of detail supports a more nuanced understanding of complex concerns and helps inform targeted recommendations and appropriate interventions.

CONCERN/COMPLAINT CLASSIFICATION



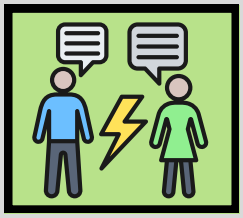
ACADEMIC

43.3%



NON-ACADEMIC

22.2%



INTERPERSONAL

13.4%



FINANCES

10.2%



ACCOMMODATIONS AND EQUITY

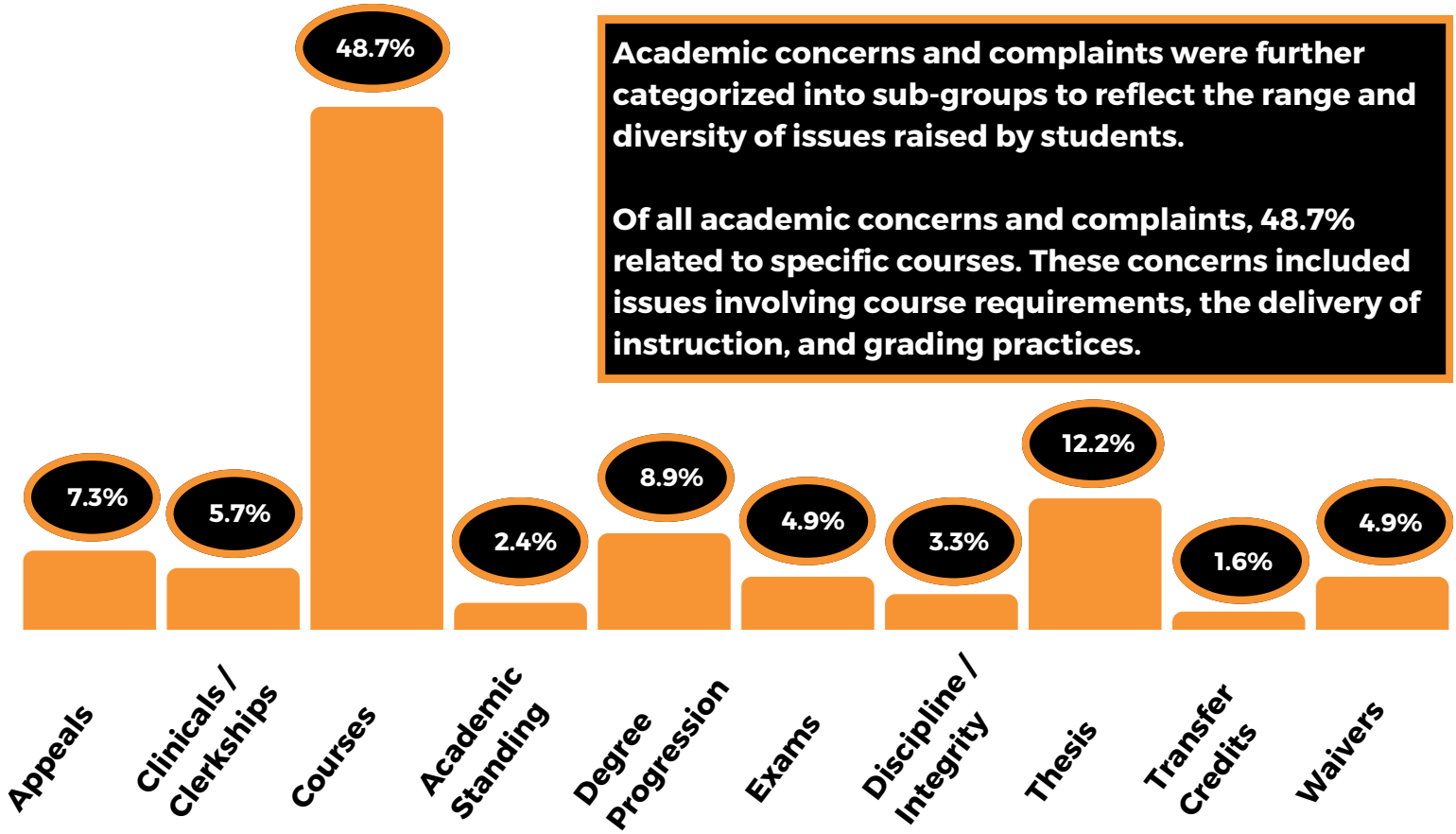
8.5%



ADMISSIONS

2.5%

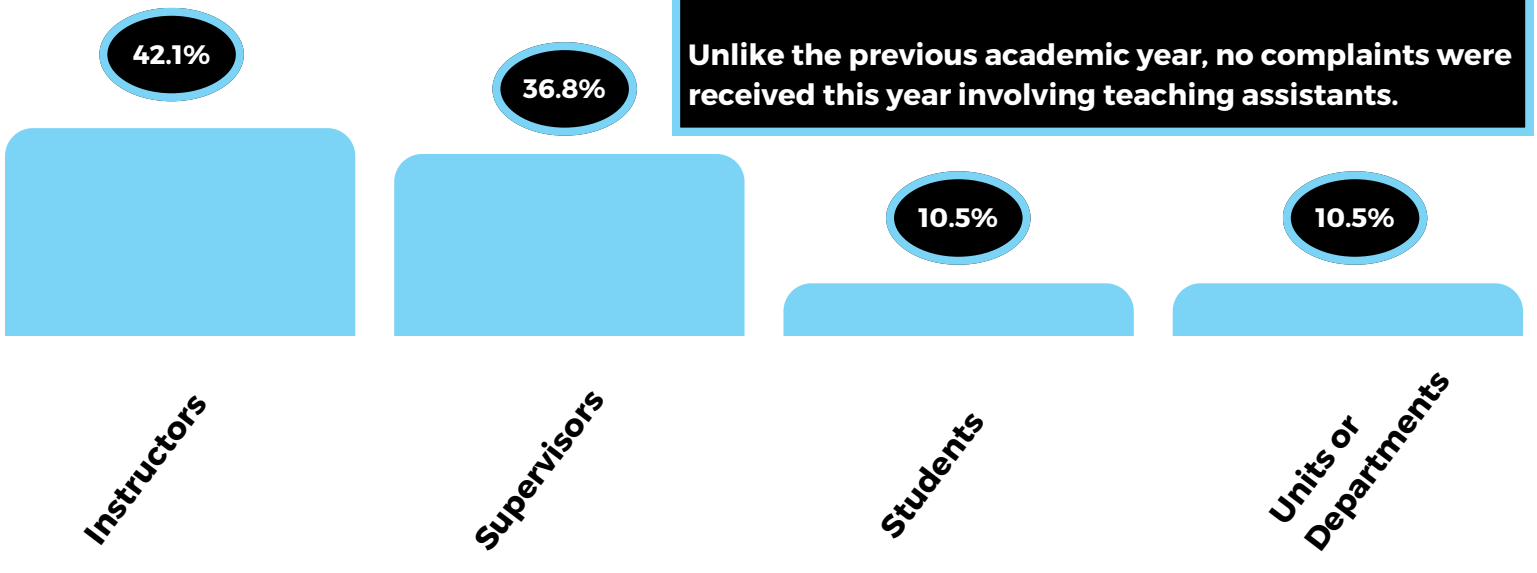
ACADEMIC CONCERNS/COMPLAINTS



Academic concerns and complaints were further categorized into sub-groups to reflect the range and diversity of issues raised by students.

Of all academic concerns and complaints, 48.7% related to specific courses. These concerns included issues involving course requirements, the delivery of instruction, and grading practices.

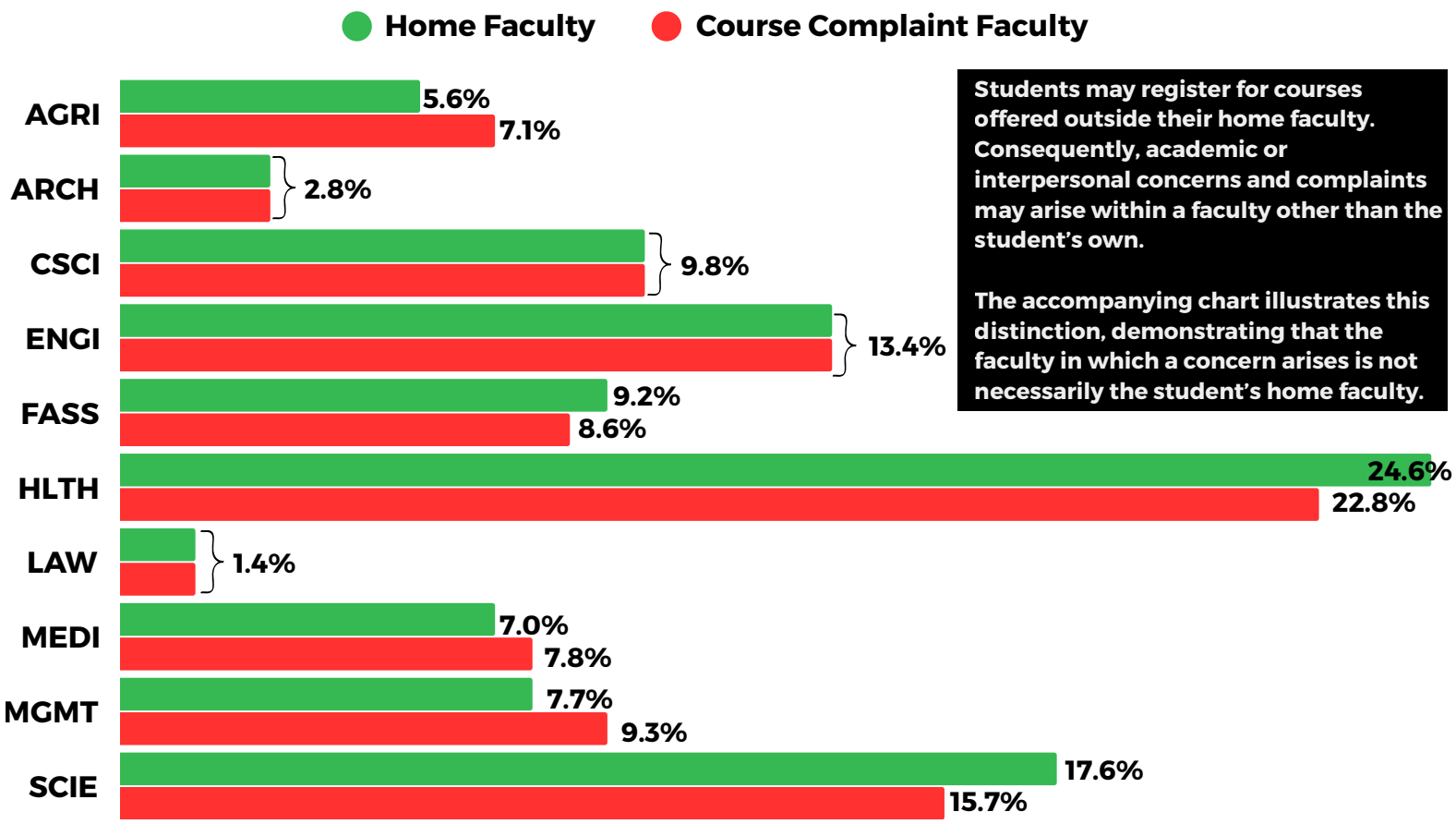
INTERPERSONAL CONCERNS/COMPLAINTS



Among interpersonal concerns and complaints, 42.1% involved interactions with an instructor, including communication challenges and concerns regarding inconsistent or unfair treatment. Supervisor-related concerns accounted for the second-largest category, representing 36.8% of interpersonal concerns and complaints.

Unlike the previous academic year, no complaints were received this year involving teaching assistants.

ACADEMIC AND INTERPERSONAL CONCERNS/COMPLAINTS: COMPARISON OF HOME FACULTY vs COMPLAINT FACULTY



Students may register for courses offered outside their home faculty. Consequently, academic or interpersonal concerns and complaints may arise within a faculty other than the student's own.

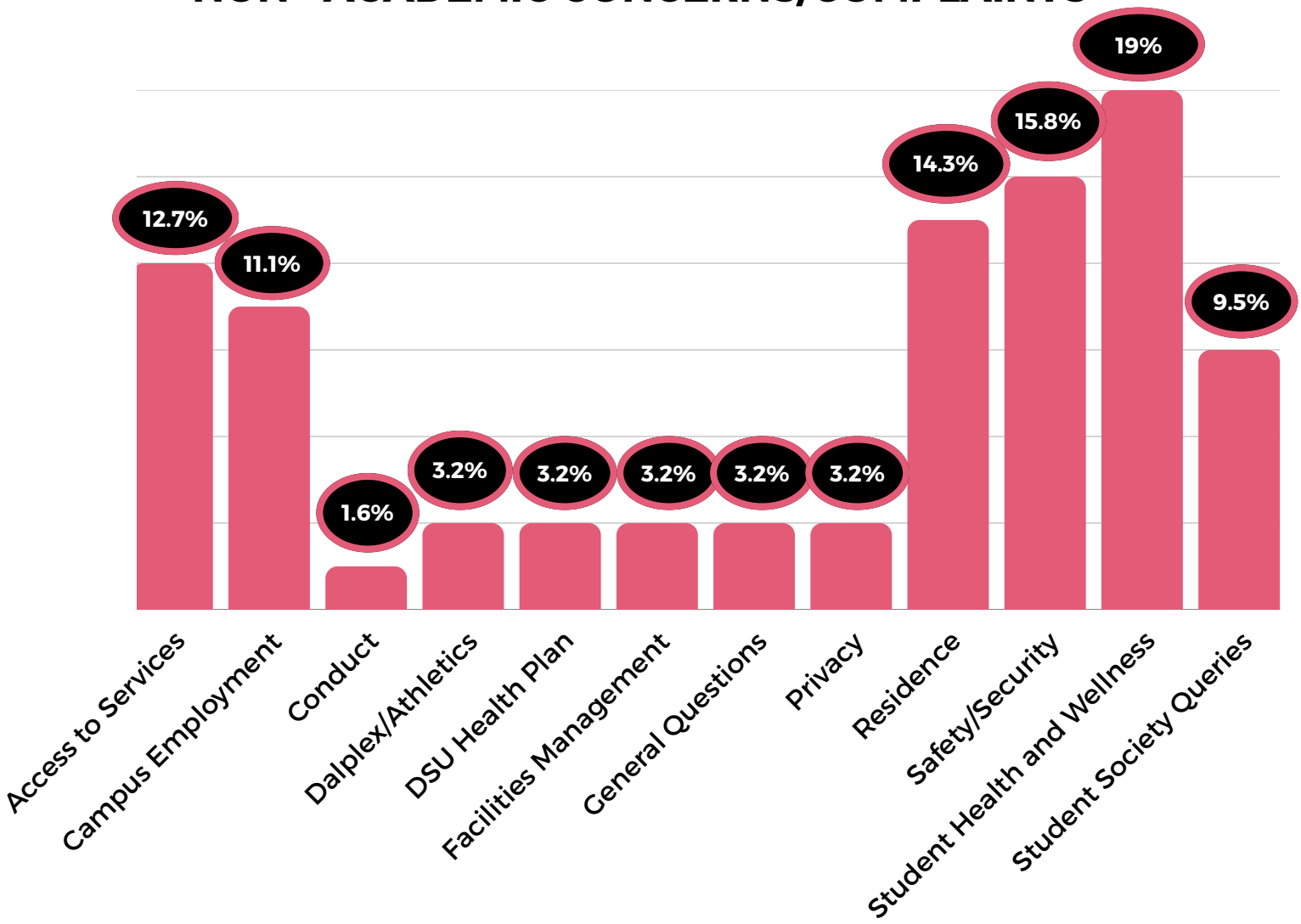
The accompanying chart illustrates this distinction, demonstrating that the faculty in which a concern arises is not necessarily the student's home faculty.

A comparison of students' home faculties with the faculties in which academic and interpersonal concerns or complaints arose indicates a high degree of alignment. Overall, concerns generally arose within students' own faculties, with relatively modest cross-faculty variation.

The highest representation was among students from the Faculties of Health and Science, which also accounted for the highest proportions of concerns arising within their respective faculties. The strongest alignment was observed in Architecture and Planning, Computer Science, Engineering, and Law, where the proportion of students bringing concerns forward closely matched the proportion of concerns associated with those faculties.

Some variation was evident in Agriculture, Medicine, and Management, where the proportion of concerns arising within the faculty was slightly higher than the proportion of students from those faculties bringing concerns forward. Conversely, Arts and Social Sciences, Health, and Science had slightly higher representation among students bringing concerns forward than among concerns associated with those faculties. For Health and Science, this pattern was also observed in the previous academic year.

NON - ACADEMIC CONCERNS/COMPLAINTS



The distribution of non-academic concerns and complaints demonstrates that a small number of areas accounted for the majority of matters brought to the Ombudsperson Office. Student Health and Wellness represented the largest category, at approximately 19%, followed by Safety/Security (16%), Residence (14%), Access to Services (13%), and Campus Employment (11%). Together, these five categories accounted for approximately 73% of all non-academic concerns and complaints.

The concentration of concerns in these areas highlights several key aspects of students' experiences beyond the classroom, particularly health and well-being, safety, housing, access to institutional services, and employment.

The remaining concerns were spread across a range of areas, including Student Society Queries, DSU Health Plan, Dalplex/Athletics, Privacy, Facilities Management, General Questions, and Conduct. Although these matters were less frequently brought to the Office, their diversity underscores the broad range of institutional processes and student experiences that may give rise to non-academic concerns.

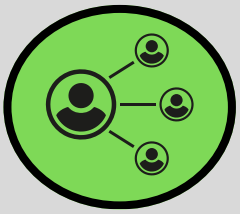
There was also notable consistency with the previous academic year. In 2024–2025, Student Health and Wellness, Safety/Security, and Residence were the three most frequently reported non-academic concerns, while Campus Employment was also among the top five. The recurrence of these areas among the most frequently reported concerns suggests that they remain ongoing areas of importance in students' experiences and may warrant continued attention.

SUPPORT PROVIDED

The support provided by the Ombudsperson Office varied, depending on the nature of the concern/complaint, its complexity, and on visitor needs/wants. All appointments were grounded in active listening by the Ombudsperson and delivered in a safe, respectful, and supportive environment for all visitors.

In the 2025-26 academic year, the most common type of appointment involved providing visitors with advice, information, and referral, accounting for 44.3% of all appointments. This represented an 11% increase from the previous academic year. Appointments involving intervention also increased, rising by 19.9%. This increase may reflect a greater need for more involved support in addressing the concerns brought forward by students.

Advice and information only, and coaching, were the least frequently provided forms of support, each accounting for 6.8% of appointments. Both categories decreased from the previous academic year, with advice and information only showing a notable 24.8% decline.



Advice, Information & Referral
44.3%



Advice & Information
6.8%



Intervention
42.2%



Coaching
6.8%

APPOINTMENT TYPE

During the 2025-2026 academic year, visitors accessed the Ombudsperson Office through a range of appointment and communication formats. The format used was based on each visitor's preference, as well as the method's suitability for facilitating effective discussion and problem-solving.

As in the previous academic year, in-person appointments were the most widely used, accounting for 33.3% of appointments this year, up from 32.1% last year. This was followed by appointments via email, which accounted for 30.4%, up from 27.9% last year.



33.3%
appointments in-person



30.4%
appointments by email

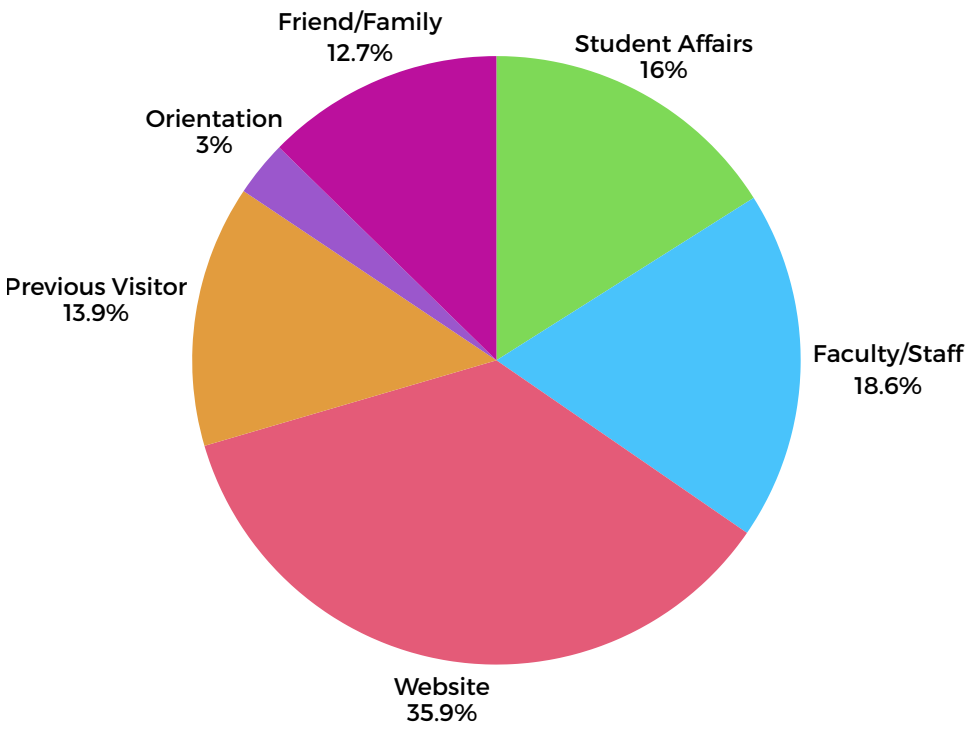


19.5%
appointments on Teams



16.8%
appointments by phone

KNOWLEDGE OF THE OFFICE

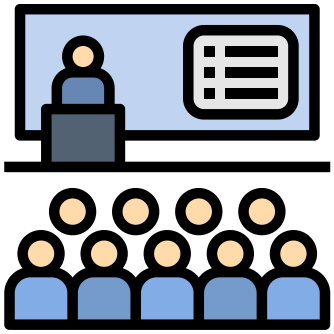


Understanding how visitors learn about the Ombudsperson Office provides valuable insight into the reach of our services and helps inform outreach and communication efforts.

In the 2025–26 academic year, the university website was the most common source of awareness of the Ombudsperson Office, accounting for 35.9% of visitors.

This was consistent with the previous academic year, when the university website accounted for 33.2% of visitors who reported how they became aware of the Office.

WORKSHOPS AND PRESENTATIONS DELIVERED



Workshops and presentations play a vital role in raising student awareness of the Ombudsperson Office. These outreach efforts provide students with valuable knowledge and practical tools to better understand and navigate issues that may arise during their university experience, while increasing awareness of their rights, responsibilites, and available support services.

- Managing Disruptive Behaviour in the Classroom (workshop delivered as part of TA Days)
- Fairness, Bias, and Microaggressions (workshop delivered for staff training at the Murray Engineering Student Centre)
- Lightning Talk Presentation: The Role of the Ombudsperson and HRES (for BIPOC Graduate Student Mentoring Academy) – conducted with Amina Abawajy (Education Advisor, Human Rights and Equity Services)
- Meet the Ombudsperson, HRES, Sexualized Violence Advisor, and Student Support Case Manager (for Faculty of Graduate Studies' Together@Dal Grad Mentors) – conducted with Lyndsay Anderson (Sexualized Violence Advisor, Human Rights & Equity Services) and Jessica Belliveau (Student Support Case Manager)
- Summary of Annual Report presentation to:
  - Deans' Council and Residence Life Management Team
- Professional Career Panel (Career Week, International Centre)
- Ombuds Office Information Session (International Centre)

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Professional development remains a key priority, enabling the Ombudsperson to stay informed of current practices and emerging issues. Ongoing learning supports professional growth and strengthens the Office's ability to effectively serve students. This year, professional development included participation in the following sessions and learning opportunities:

- Privacy and Access to Information (Right to Know Week – Privacy Office)
- Library Services Workshop (DPMG)
- Challenges to the Rule of Law and the Future of Liberal Democracy (Stanfield Conversation)
- Supporting Diverse Post-Secondary Students in Canada: Culturally-Aligned Care and the Role of Online Therapy (Canadian Association of College and University Student Services)
- Mental Health 101 - Recognizing and Responding to Students in Distress (Student Health and Wellness)
- How long do I keep this stuff? DalCLASS can help with that! (Records Management Office)
- Moving Forward, Never Backwards: ACCUO Conference (Association of Canadian College and University Ombudspersons)
- Microsoft 365 Copilot Workshop (DPMG)
- Introducing the Intruder Paradox: It's not the Imposter Syndrome, it's you Don't Want Me in the Field (Karen Mann Lecture)
- Illuminating Hope in Higher Education (Academica Group)
- Capacity Building Session (IDEIA Collective)
- PowerHour 1: Stress, Mental Health, & Resilience (AIR – Accelerate. Inspire. Resilience)
- Project Management Essentials (DPMG)
- Prioritizing Privacy by Design – Celebrate Data Privacy Week (Privacy Office)
- PowerHour 2: Regulation: Strategies to Reduce Anxiety (AIR – Accelerate. Inspire. Resilience)
- PowerHour 3: Regaining a Sense of Control in Stressful Times (AIR – Accelerate. Inspire. Resilience)
- Menopause at Work: Our Campus Community Conference
- The State of the World: Human Rights and Equity Conference
- PowerHour 4: Emotional Literacy: Reading and Understanding Emotions (AIR – Accelerate. Inspire. Resilience)
- Naming Conventions - Things to Think About (Records Management Office)
- MS Teams & Administrative Records Guidelines (Records Management Office)
- Gender-Based and Sexualized Violence Community Risk Assessment Tool Training
- ACCUO Connect (Canadian Ombuds best practices)

BUILDING CAMPUS CONNECTIONS

Consultations are a vital aspect of the Ombudsperson Office's work, supporting informed and effective service. The Office values the collaboration and expertise of campus partners, as well as their willingness to engage in discussions and share knowledge that helps clarify and resolve student concerns. During the 2025–2026 year, the Ombudsperson Office consulted with a range of university departments and student organizations, including:

- Admissions
- Ancillary Services
- Athletics
- Bissett Student Success Centre
- Black Student Advising Centre
- Centre for Learning and Teaching
- Dalhousie Student Advocacy Service
- Dalhousie Student Union
- DalSAFE
- Facilities Management
- Faculty of Graduate Studies
- Health and Dental Plan Office
- Human Rights and Equity Services
- International Centre
- Libraries
- Murray Engineering Student Centre
- Office of Advancement
- People and Culture
- Privacy Office
- Records Management Office
- Registrar's Office
- Residence Life
- Student Accessibility Centre
- Student Accounts
- Student Health and Wellness
- Student Support Team
- Multiple faculties and their Deans, Associate Deans, and Assistant Deans
- Numerous other departments and offices

- Welcome Fair (Halifax campuses)
- Campus Community Expo (Truro campus)
- University of King's College Services and Societies Fair
- TA Days (Lunch Info Session for graduate students)
- Promoting Community Connections (Sexton Campus Fall and Winter orientations)
- Mental Health Forum (monthly)
- IDEIA Education Collective
- Students at the Centre: Student Success Summit
- IDEIA Educational Offerings Working Group
- IDEIA Inclusive Language Guide Working Group

Participation in campus events, committees, and initiatives is an important part of the Ombudsperson Office's outreach, helping to increase visibility and build connections with students and campus partners. These opportunities strengthen collaboration, support engagement with new initiatives and ongoing developments, and help the Office remain responsive to emerging student needs.

VISITOR TESTIMONIALS

Thank you so much for your prompt response and willingness to support me immediately. I was genuinely feeling overwhelmed and stressed, and your quick reply offering help and arranging a meeting on such short notice provided tremendous relief.

I'm happy you're in your role. It makes me feel so much better speaking with you. Thank you so much for your support and help.

Thank you very much for your kindness and advice. I left your office a lot less stressed than when I came in. I feel a weight has been lifted.

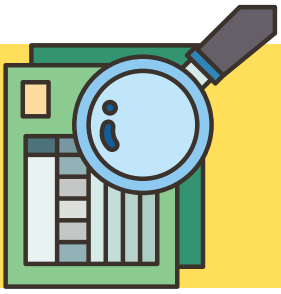
Thank you, thank you, thank you for your support!

Thank you so much! For your support and help. Many blessings!

I'm extremely grateful for all of the assistance and support I've been shown. So, I wanted to extend a massive thanks for your work on this.

I just wanted to thank you for your support and guidance regarding the process. Your advice has been extremely helpful, and I really appreciate the time and effort you've taken to clarify the steps I should follow. Thank you again for your assistance - it means a lot.

TRENDS



Identifying trends across the university helps the Ombudsperson Office recognize areas that may require further attention and informs recommendations aimed at strengthening the student experience. The concerns and themes that emerge through ongoing engagement with students and campus partners provide important insight into how university policies, processes, and services are experienced in practice.

This year, several areas emerged as particularly important to the work of the Office. These included the implementation of accommodations, the use of student feedback, supports available to graduate students, the exercise of discretion in decision-making, and the importance of culturally responsive approaches. While these concerns arise in different contexts, they share a common theme: the importance of clear, accessible, responsive, and equitable institutional practices.

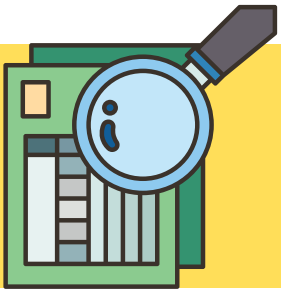
Trend #1: Accommodation Implementation and Accessibility Barriers

Students registered with the Student Accessibility Centre frequently reported that, although accommodations are formally available, accessing and implementing them consistently remains challenging. In addition to having long wait times to meet with an advisor, students described accommodation systems as difficult to navigate, requiring repeated renewals, and continual self-advocacy within the classroom setting throughout the academic year, despite having approved accommodation plans. Delays in processing accommodations, technical issues, limited flexibility for changing health needs, and inconsistent communication between accessibility services, faculty, and students contributed to uncertainty about accommodation processes.

Students also identified inconsistent implementation of accommodations as a persistent concern. Students raised concerns about instructors questioning, overlooking, or inconsistently applying approved accommodations across courses, while delays in arranging exam supports and failure to adhere to deadlines created additional barriers. Students also raised concerns about accommodated testing. This included errors by proctors, inconsistent exam administration, operational issues such as misplaced examination materials, and testing environments that did not adequately account for individual needs. All this increased stress and undermined the effective delivery of approved accommodations.

A thorough and objective review of these student-reported concerns, including all relevant information obtained, found that the concerns were supported by the available evidence.

TRENDS



When accommodations are delayed, inconsistently implemented, poorly communicated, or not honoured, the result can be unequal access to learning, assessment, and academic success. Failures in the system that require students to repeatedly advocate for approved accommodations with multiple instructors can create additional burdens that are not experienced by students who do not require accommodations. Similarly, administrative errors, inadequate support structures, inaccessible processes, and failures in accommodated testing environments can undermine the effectiveness of accommodations and create discriminatory barriers, even when those outcomes are unintended.

The issues raised reveal that barriers are not limited to individual incidents but may reflect broader systemic challenges involving institutional processes, communication practices, accountability mechanisms, staff training, and resource allocation. From a human rights perspective, institutions have a responsibility not only to respond to individual accommodation requests, but also to identify and address systemic barriers that prevent equitable participation.

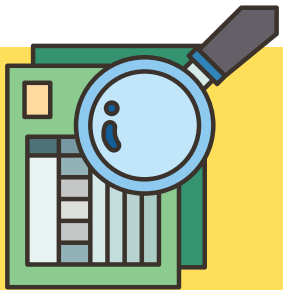
Trend #2: Need for Timely Student Feedback Mechanisms

A recurring trend this past academic year highlights students' hesitancy to raise academic or interpersonal concerns directly with instructors, despite being encouraged to do so. This reluctance often stems from concerns about potential academic repercussions, power dynamics, uncertainty about available complaint mechanisms, or previous unsuccessful attempts to resolve issues. As a result, some students seek alternative, more neutral avenues to have their concerns heard.

Current feedback mechanisms, such as end-of-term Student Learning Experience Questionnaires (SLEQs), provide valuable insights but are limited in their ability to address concerns in real time. By the time feedback is collected, opportunities for timely resolution within the course have often passed. This creates a gap between the student experience and institutional responsiveness, particularly for issues that could be addressed during the semester.

This trend suggests a need for more accessible, timely, and low-risk channels through which students can provide feedback, particularly in ways that preserve anonymity (if needed) while still enabling meaningful and responsive action.

TRENDS



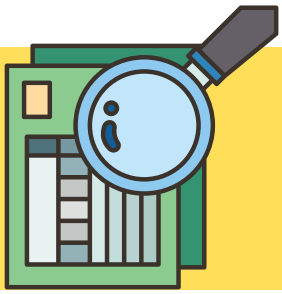
Trend #3: Graduate Student Supervision and Thesis Progress

Graduate students continued to raise concerns related to supervisory relationships and thesis progression. While many supervisory partnerships function efficiently, the Ombudsperson Office observed recurring cases involving infrequent meetings, inadequate guidance, inconsistent feedback, unclear and changing expectations, communication breakdowns, interpersonal conflict, and disputes related to funding and unpaid work. Students also reported barriers to switching supervisors despite documented concerns, leaving them feeling unable to address ongoing supervisory difficulties. Consistent with the Ombuds Office's practice, these matters were examined further by considering the concerns brought forward by students alongside the information gathered through the review process. This review found that the available information provided a basis for the concerns raised.

Several cases involved prolonged delays in thesis approvals or defense scheduling, with students indicating that they had not been provided with clear explanations or timelines, while in other instances, students reported thesis defenses being blocked without clear academic rationales. Students also described inconsistent progress expectations, where work that had previously been approved was later rejected or revised without adequate explanation. These situations can significantly affect academic progress, funding, career opportunities, and student well-being.

Students often reported feeling isolated when difficulties arose and expressed uncertainty about the supports available to them. Even when students believed that changing supervisors was necessary, many felt trapped because supervisors hold significant influence over funding, committee composition, and degree progression. Additional concerns arose when supervisors became unavailable due to foreseen circumstances, with students reporting lengthy delays in being assigned new supervisors and, in some cases, receiving little or no advance notice about the anticipated circumstances. These delays further disrupted students' research, thesis, defense progress, and graduation, and increased uncertainty about completing their degrees.

TRENDS



Trend #4: Equity in Response to Student Mental Health Crises and Other Extenuating Circumstances

A development this year highlights challenges in how institutional processes respond to students experiencing acute mental health crises and other extenuating circumstances. In several cases, students were unable to meet academic requirements or proactively engage with faculty due to the severity of their conditions, resulting in missed deadlines, including those for formal appeals and waivers. As a result, some students received failing grades across multiple courses despite subsequently providing robust medical or other relevant documentation confirming that their crisis directly impaired their ability to function and communicate.

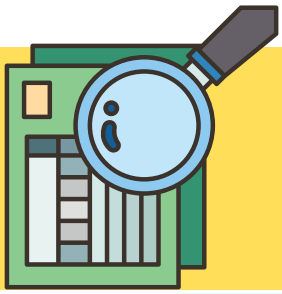
While existing policies emphasize deadlines and procedural consistency, these cases raise important questions about the extent to which equity considerations are applied when students are temporarily incapacitated. The rigid application of timelines, without flexibility for exceptional circumstances, may disproportionately disadvantage students facing serious health issues or other significant personal crises. This is particularly concerning where there is clear evidence that the students' academic decline is directly attributable to factors beyond their control, and where the students had demonstrated strong academic performance prior to the incidents.

This trend suggests a possible gap between procedural fairness and substantive fairness, where adherence to process may limit the institution's ability to respond compassionately and equitably to extraordinary situations.

Trend #5: Cultural Responsiveness and Student Experiences

A theme that emerged this academic year (which was apparent in previous years as well) involves students reporting a lack of cultural sensitivity in their interactions with faculty and staff, particularly in student-facing services. In the cases where these concerns were raised, the Ombuds Office conducted an objective review of the information provided, seeking to understand the circumstances through available documentation, relevant policies and practices, and discussions with appropriate parties, where applicable. While individual experiences varied, the reviews consistently identified recurring themes in the concerns raised that warranted institutional attention.

TRENDS



Students described feeling unheard, judged, or misunderstood, with some indicating that their perspectives or approaches were not fully recognized within the context of differing cultural backgrounds. These concerns highlight the importance of understanding how student expectations, communication styles, and interpretations of processes may vary across cultural contexts, and how this can shape perceptions of fairness. Care that does not account for cultural identity, lived experience, or the systemic barriers that shape how individuals seek and access support can be harmful and may contribute to inequitable outcomes.[1]

These issues were especially evident in healthcare and counselling settings, where students reported challenges accessing culturally responsive support. Concerns included a lack of culturally sensitive counselling and other medical care, perceptions that some providers did not fully understand the needs of international or culturally diverse students, and difficulties receiving guidance that felt relevant or effective. Students also expressed the need for greater flexibility in changing doctors or counsellors when the fit was not appropriate, with clear, transparent guidance on how to proceed with such a process. While these concerns were raised most often by international and culturally diverse students, domestic students also reported similar experiences, suggesting that the need for responsive, inclusive, student-centred care extends across the broader student population.

While these concerns were raised in formal cases, additional students shared similar experiences informally, suggesting that the issue may be more widespread than reflected in reported data. Given that many international and culturally diverse students rely heavily on campus services as primary support systems, these experiences can create barriers to accessing care, reduce trust in institutional processes and university services, and contribute to disengagement or isolation, ultimately affecting students' wellbeing and academic success.

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[1] Suzanne Westover, "From Silence to Systems Change: How Lived Experience Is Redefining Quality Mental Health Care," The Catalyst, Mental Health Commission of Canada, 2026, Mental Health Commission of Canada Website.

RECOMMENDATIONS



The concerns raised by students highlight ongoing challenges with accessibility, communication, institutional responsiveness, academic decision-making, and student supports. The Ombudsperson Office engaged with relevant departments and campus units to gather information, clarify issues, and better understand the broader context of these concerns. These discussions demonstrated a willingness among faculty and staff to engage in constructive dialogue and consider opportunities for positive change.

The following recommendations focus on strengthening accessibility services, expanding formative feedback, enhancing supports for graduate students, applying an equity lens to academic decisions during mental health crises and other exceptional circumstances, and strengthening culturally responsive student-facing services. These recommendations are intended to encourage continued dialogue and reflection and will evolve as new conversations take place, additional perspectives are received, and emerging trends and concerns are further analyzed.

Recommendation #1: Strengthen Quality, Consistency, and Accountability in the Approach to Accommodations

It is recommended that accommodation processes be modernized to reduce unnecessary renewals and technical barriers by implementing accommodation plans that remain active until changes are required. Advisor availability and clear service standards should also be strengthened. Having more advisors on staff, reflective of advisor-to-student industry standards, along with hiring more exam coordinators would positively impact response times and appointment availability, proactive outreach, continuity of advisor relationships, and clearer channels for students to resolve accommodation concerns before they affect academic performance.

Another recommendation is to strengthen accountability for the implementation of accommodations by requiring instructors to acknowledge accommodation notifications. Monitoring compliance would help identify recurring barriers across departments and inform opportunities for improvement. Clearer communication regarding escalation procedures is also needed when accommodations are not implemented appropriately. Beyond email, more effective university-wide communication mechanisms are needed to ensure that information about policy changes, deadlines, and procedures is communicated consistently and coordinated among accessibility services, faculty, staff, and students.

RECOMMENDATIONS



Faculty education on inclusion, accommodation responsibilities, and effective implementation practices, supported by accessible reference materials, would promote greater consistency in students' experiences. Student Affairs has taken the lead in developing and updating several resources to help faculty understand accessibility requirements and meet students' accommodation needs. This work has often been undertaken in collaboration with other units, including the Centre for Learning and Teaching (CLT) and Human Rights and Equity Services (HRES). The development of the Accommodation Guide, along with resources focused on making course content more accessible, represents meaningful progress in strengthening accessibility practices. The expertise demonstrated by the CLT in accessibility and accommodation initiatives is also a positive contribution to this work.

It is also recommended that the university strengthen the quality, consistency, and operational reliability of accommodated testing by implementing standardized exam procedures, comprehensive training and ongoing professional development for proctors/invigilators, quality assurance processes, and formal incident reporting when accommodation failures occur. The university should increase the availability of dedicated accommodated testing spaces, including distraction-reduced environments, across all campuses. Examination handling, storage, and tracking procedures should be reviewed and strengthened through documented chain-of-custody practices and regular audits to reduce administrative errors and the risk of misplaced materials. Greater collaboration with faculty is also recommended to identify opportunities to improve access to accommodated testing. This could include reviewing course and assessment practices to promote more inclusive classrooms and learning environments, which may reduce barriers for students and, in some cases, reduce the need for individual accommodations. This approach could also help alleviate operational pressures on the Student Accessibility Centre while ensuring that students' accommodation needs continue to be effectively met.

The University has continued its practice of regularly evaluating accessibility services and has recently introduced more comprehensive measures, including consulting students about their experiences and the impact of service changes and exam booking procedures. This practice should continue, as student feedback can help identify emerging barriers and inform ongoing service improvements. Instructor feedback is also an important component of evaluating the effectiveness of accessibility services and identifying ways accommodations can be more effectively integrated into course design and delivery.

RECOMMENDATIONS



When concerns arise, the University has an appeals process in place, and further efforts should be made to increase student awareness of this pathway. At the same time, the University should continue to develop and refine proactive strategies, as envisioned through the Student Accommodation Policy review. Building on the progress already made, the University should maintain a systemic approach to strengthening institution-wide processes that make accessibility more efficient, consistent, and equitable, while reinforcing accessibility as a shared institutional responsibility.

Recommendation #2: Expand Formative Feedback Opportunities

It is recommended that the University introduce additional institution-wide, structured opportunities for in-course formative student feedback. These could include brief, anonymous surveys focused on specific aspects of the learning experience, such as course delivery, clarity of expectations, classroom environment, and concerns regarding instructor conduct.

The Centre for Learning and Teaching (CLT) currently provides formative in-course feedback options and can support their implementation by units or instructors who choose to use them. The CLT is available and prepared to work with instructors to help facilitate the process. However, discussions with the CLT indicate that these options have seen limited uptake. Accordingly, greater awareness should be raised among units and instructors regarding the availability and potential benefits of formative in-course feedback. Promoting the availability of a standardized, convenient feedback template, which the CLT has already developed, may further encourage adoption.

In the longer term, an institution-wide approach is recommended. To support consistent implementation, consideration should be given to adapting existing software, such as Explorance Blue, for use as an in-course feedback instrument. A significant proportion of students have indicated that, while they are aware of the summative SLEQs, they are often reluctant to complete them because they do not believe their feedback will be taken into consideration. Making formative feedback opportunities available and accessible should therefore be accompanied by more consistent use of SLEQ data by unit heads, to inform improvements to course delivery, content, and the overall student experience.

RECOMMENDATIONS



At the faculty level, department Heads, Directors, and Chairs should establish other mechanisms for gathering student feedback, including through avenues such as town hall meetings. While software-based tools can provide valuable data, consistent use of other engagement methods can offer important qualitative insight into students' experiences. Students should also be clearly informed of the avenues available to them for raising and resolving concerns within their departments and faculties, including escalation pathways where appropriate. Providing this information on departmental and faculty websites, including through clear and accessible flow charts, could help students understand their options and take appropriate action.

Providing students with opportunities to share feedback during a course, rather than solely at its conclusion, would enable instructors to identify and address concerns in a timely manner and improve the learning experience. Expanding access to confidential, anonymous, and formative feedback mechanisms can help reduce barriers associated with power dynamics, encourage more open communication between students and instructors, and foster a more responsive and student-centred academic environment. This approach may also enable academic leaders to identify recurring patterns in student concerns and take timely action where systemic issues emerge.

Recommendation #3: Enhance Institutional Supports for Graduate Students

The university should ensure that processes for escalating concerns, seeking departmental intervention, and changing supervisors are transparent, accessible, and consistently communicated. Clear information should be provided regarding procedural steps, timelines, funding implications, and the support services available to students throughout these processes. It is recommended that this information be included in the Graduate Handbook for each program.

Graduate students should have clear and accessible information about the full range of resolution pathways available to them. Because supervisory concerns can be complex and may require referral across multiple levels of the institution, clearly defined roles, responsibilities, and escalation processes are essential to ensuring timely access to appropriate support.

RECOMMENDATIONS



The Faculty of Graduate Studies (FGS) currently provides helpful resources through its SharePoint site on student-supervisor relationships, appeal pathways, and other relevant topics, and also offers sessions throughout the year on available supports and navigating conflicts. Despite these efforts, the information may not be reaching all students effectively. Individual programs are well positioned to provide this information directly to their graduate students, and it is recommended that they take a more active role in communicating students' rights, responsibilities, and available resolution pathways. Regular information sessions at the program level throughout the academic year would provide an effective and accessible means of ensuring that graduate students are aware of available supports and understand how to access them when navigating concerns, including supervisory issues.

Beyond ensuring that students understand available processes and resources, the university should also provide accessible and independent sources of support. The university should implement regular, confidential check-ins between graduate coordinators and graduate students that occur independently of the primary supervisor. In addition, each faculty should consider designating a dedicated graduate support contact, separate from both the supervisor and graduate coordinator, who can serve as a confidential resource, provide guidance on available options, and facilitate referrals where appropriate. At the university level, the Associate Dean of Students and PostDocs serves as an existing resource for graduate student support. Some faculties also have Assistant Deans with specific responsibilities for graduate students. However, this support is not consistently available across all faculties. It is therefore recommended that each faculty designate a dedicated position with specific responsibility for supporting graduate students and providing an independent point of contact. These measures would support earlier identification of concerns and enable timely intervention before issues become significant barriers to academic progress.

In addition to strengthening supports available to students, attention should also be given to faculty-level structures and supervisory practices. Improving the graduate student experience requires continued attention to how faculties support graduate students and how faculty members can be better equipped to fulfill their supervisory responsibilities through appropriate guidance, training, and institutional support. FGS has taken steps to strengthen faculty-level support and supervisory practices, and these measures provide a strong foundation for continued development in this area.

RECOMMENDATIONS



A proposal from the Dean of FGS is currently under consideration to restructure FGS as a College of Graduate Studies and Postdoctoral Research, with the aim of decentralizing the administration of graduate programs to individual faculties. Under the proposed model, each faculty would designate an individual, nominated by the Dean, to provide leadership and oversight for graduate programs within the faculty

Another initiative underway is the development of a supervisory certificate by FGS, in collaboration with the Centre for Learning and Teaching (CLT). The certificate is intended to equip faculty members with the knowledge and skills needed to support effective graduate student supervision.

These initiatives, along with the work underway through the Dalhousie Student Union, provide opportunities to further strengthen the network of support available to graduate students. The DSU's recent actions of reopening the Graduate Student Office and establishing a Graduate Student Manager position represent important steps toward expanding accessible support for graduate students. Similarly, strengthened communication and collaboration between FGS and the DSU could improve coordination and students' awareness of and access to available resources. Continued collaboration among these units should be encouraged as part of a broader, coordinated approach to supporting graduate students.

Recommendation #4: Apply an Equity Lens to Academic Decision-Making in Cases of Mental Health Crises and other Extenuating Circumstances

It is recommended that the University strengthen its approach to academic decision-making by incorporating a more explicit equity lens in cases involving significant mental health challenges and other extenuating circumstances. While maintaining the integrity of academic policies, mechanisms should be available to allow for flexibility where students can demonstrate that a documented crisis directly affected their ability to meet academic obligations or adhere to established timelines.

Where a student's mental health condition or other exceptional circumstances have impaired both their ability to meet course requirements and to comply with established timelines, these factors should be meaningfully considered when assessing eligibility. Denying a request solely because it was submitted after the deadline, without considering the reasons for the delay, raises equity concerns.

RECOMMENDATIONS



The University currently has the ability to consider retroactive relief, such as late withdrawals, grade changes, or accommodations, where appropriate documentation is provided. Establishing clear guidelines for evaluating such cases would support consistency while allowing decision-makers to respond proportionately and compassionately.

Section D5 of the revised Student Accommodation Policy addresses some of this need by establishing criteria, aligned with human rights legislation, for retroactive accommodations in cases involving the initial onset of mental health challenges or episodic mental health conditions. Students experiencing these circumstances who may be eligible should be referred to the Student Accessibility Centre.

In other cases, however, students may face significant challenges that fall outside the scope of the Accommodation Policy. In such instances, additional considerations may be warranted and decision-makers may need to exercise discretion. While some do so compassionately, others apply procedural requirements rigidly, potentially resulting in inconsistent and inequitable outcomes.

It is therefore recommended that Faculties and the units responsible for the Student Accommodation Policy engage in discussions to clarify the interpretation of retroactive accommodations under the Policy, and how these provisions might inform guidelines for cases falling outside its scope. This would promote greater clarity and consistency for all involved. Increased awareness and training for faculty and academic decision-makers on trauma-informed and equity-based approaches may also help ensure that responses to student crises are fair and sensitive to individual circumstances. Strengthening these practices would better align institutional processes with principles of equity, reduce unintended harm, and support student recovery and long-term academic success.

Recommendation #5: Advance Culturally Responsive Student-Facing Services

Cultural sensitivity in post-secondary education is essential to fostering an inclusive, equitable, and effective learning environment. It supports student belonging and encourages the inclusion of diverse perspectives. By promoting empathy and reducing bias, culturally responsive practices contribute to safe, respectful, and collaborative academic spaces and are associated with improved student retention and academic success.

RECOMMENDATIONS



As a multicultural institution, Dalhousie University must ensure that its approaches to advising and student support reflect and respond to diverse perspectives and experiences. Embedding cultural sensitivity into everyday practices is critical to reducing feelings of marginalization and fostering environments in which students feel safe, respected, and valued. When students feel understood and supported, they are more likely to engage meaningfully in their academic communities, contributing to stronger morale, improved outcomes, and higher retention rates.

Research supports the importance of culturally responsive approaches in higher education. As noted by Dugbartey (2025), "by promoting cultural sensitivity…institutions can improve student retention, academic success, and overall satisfaction," and embedding such practices into advising "transforms the educational experience of international students [and] strengthens advisor-student relationships."[1] Similarly, Goforth et al. (2023) emphasize that "it is important to adapt practices as needed given the complexity and individuality of culturally and linguistically diverse students."[2]

In light of these findings and observed campus trends, it is recommended that the University continue to strengthen and embed culturally responsive practices across all student-facing services, particularly in healthcare and counselling settings. Within Student Health and Wellness, several initiatives are already underway that provide a strong foundation for this work. These include a learning opportunity on trauma-informed care being developed in collaboration with the Faculty of Health, as well as the ongoing work of the EDIA Committee, which provides an important mechanism for incorporating equity, diversity, inclusion, and accessibility into professional development and student-facing practices. Continued professional development is recommended in these areas, alongside training in cultural humility, active listening, and adaptable, student-centred approaches to support staff in responding appropriately to diverse student experiences, communication styles, and expectations.

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[1] Francis Dugbartey, "The Role of Cultural Sensitivity in Advising International Students in College," Department of Educational Psychology, Foundations and Educational Leadership, University of Northern Iowa, 2025, ResearchGate.

[2] Anisa N. Goforth et al., "The 4Rs of Culturally Responsive Practice," in Culturally Responsive School-Based Practices: Supporting Mental Health and Learning of Diverse Students (Oxford Academic, 2023), https://doi.org/10.1093/med-psych/9780197516928.003.0002.

RECOMMENDATIONS



Equity and inclusion are also being considered as part of the University's plan to develop a shared-care model within the Student Health and Wellness clinic. As this work progresses, attention to accessibility, equity, inclusion, and the diverse needs of students will help ensure that changes to healthcare delivery support equitable access and positive student experiences.

The University is also exploring innovative approaches to supporting student mental health, including the planned implementation of Greenspace Mental Health. Subject to implementation, this Measurement-Based Care tool is intended to be piloted over a two-year period and may provide clinicians with an additional means of assessing student well-being over time, monitoring progress, and identifying areas where further support may be needed. This approach has the potential to complement existing clinical practices and provide deeper insight into individual student needs.

In addition to these ongoing and planned initiatives, it is recommended that the University clearly communicate processes for students who wish to change counsellors or other healthcare providers, including making this information readily accessible on University websites. Clear guidance, based on established professional standards, can help students feel more informed and empowered when seeking care, while supporting continuity of care and respecting individual circumstances.

Taken together, these initiatives demonstrate meaningful progress toward more culturally responsive and equitable student services. To build on this work, the University should continue to coordinate and evaluate these efforts, ensure that information about services and processes is clear and accessible, and embed cultural humility, trauma-informed care, and EDIA into ongoing professional development. Ongoing efforts to strengthen anti-oppressive practices across the institution would support the realization of Dalhousie’s stated commitments. Prioritizing responsiveness to diverse student needs will strengthen student trust and engagement with campus services while supporting more equitable and effective interactions.

STRATEGIC & OPERATIONAL PLANNING 2026-2027



1. **Annual Report Engagement and Dialogue**

One
Share the Ombudsperson Office Annual Report and engage senior leadership, faculties and support services in dialogue around its findings and recommendations, to increase awareness of the Office's work, identify opportunities for collaboration, and strengthen connections across the university community.

2. **Expand the Toolkit**

Two
Continue to develop and expand the online Toolkit to enhance students' understanding of their rights and responsibilities. Engage relevant administrative units and faculties in the development, promotion, and dissemination of these resources to increase awareness across the university community.

3. **Prepare for Emerging University Issues**

Three
Monitor emerging issues affecting the university community such as GenAI and student mental health pressures. Identify how new policies, procedures, or technologies may create navigation or fairness concerns.

4. **Increase Awareness and Accessibility**

Four
Continue to ensure that students understand the Ombudsperson's role and can easily access services. Increase awareness of the Ombudsperson's services through targeted outreach. Expand outreach to historically underserved or less-engaged campus populations.

A Note of Thanks

As I reflect on the past year, I want to take a moment to recognize and thank the many people who have contributed to the work of the Ombudsperson Office.

I am deeply grateful to the members of the Ombudsperson Advisory Committee for the time, thoughtfulness, and expertise they have shared throughout the year: **Patricia Laws, Isabelle French, Lisa Delong, Bob Mann, Rick Ezekiel, Maren Mealey, and Ethan Leckie,** as well as our new DSU representatives, **Anjali Seshadri and Orpy Dey**. I value the perspectives each of you brings to the Committee, and I am grateful for the thoughtful conversations, questions, and guidance that continue to inform my work.

To all **Dalhousie students and visitors** who reached out to the Office this year, thank you. I know that coming forward with a concern is not always easy. I appreciate the trust you placed in me and the Office, and I am grateful for your openness and willingness to share your experiences. Every conversation is an opportunity for me to listen, learn, understand different perspectives, and help explore a way forward. Your willingness to engage contributes to the continued growth of our institution.

I am also very thankful for the many colleagues and campus partners I had the opportunity to work with throughout the year, including colleagues in **Student Affairs, Human Rights and Equity Services, Legal Counsel, People and Culture, the Centre for Learning and Teaching, departments and faculties across the university, university administrators, the Dalhousie Student Union, and the Dalhousie Student Advocacy Service.** I greatly value your willingness to make time for conversations, share your knowledge, consider different perspectives, and work collaboratively to better understand and address student experiences and concerns. Whether through a brief conversation or a more in-depth meeting, these connections are invaluable to the work of the Office, and I appreciate every opportunity to connect and collaborate.

I also want to offer my heartfelt thanks to **Jennifer Murray and Jacqui Langille.** Your continued support, encouragement, and kindness have meant a great deal to me throughout the year. I am genuinely grateful for your steady presence and for all the ways you have supported me and the work of the Office.

Finally, I want to thank everyone who has contributed to the work of the Office this year, whether through a formal consultation, a working group, a conversation, a referral, or simply by taking the time to connect. I am grateful for the trust, collaboration, and collegiality that make this work possible.

Thank you.



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