

FAIRNESS MATTERS



*Camosun College*

**OFFICE of the OMBUDSPERSON**  
**ANNUAL REPORT**

**SEPTEMBER 1, 2023 – AUGUST 31, 2024**

ROB THOMPSON, OMBUDSPERSON, VICTORIA, BC



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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Camosun College is committed to the fair and just treatment of students. To this end, since 1992 the College and the Camosun College Student Society have together supported the operation of the Office of the Ombudsperson.

The Ombudsperson—or Solutions Office—works for fairness at the college. The role of the Ombudsperson is to deal with inquiries, concerns, complaints, and grievances on any college matter affecting students. The Ombudsperson serves as an independent, impartial and confidential third party in support of fairness and natural justice to provide guidance to students so that they may advocate effectively on their own behalf. The Ombudsperson is a conflict resolution resource which collaborates with all parts of the college.

From September 1, 2023 – August 31, 2024, the Office was involved in 183 new cases and consultations (165 in 2022-23), referred to as ‘visitors’, and five ongoing cases from the previous academic year. Through 522+ substantial contact meetings (494+ 2022-23), the Office met with 178 student visitors who raised questions and concerns about virtually every college-related school and service including academic marks and decisions, finances and tuition, course management, records, interpersonal conflicts, personal issues, placements and clinicals, and accommodations. This is roughly 1% of the total registered college student headcount of 15,163.

Students accounted for 178 of the 183 new visitors. Issues were raised more often by women (56%) than men (39%); non-binary (2%) and unknown (3%). Considering the student visitors, at least 34% were international students (24% in 2022-23). While 87% were current students, 2% had graduated, 4% were applying/accepted, 3% had dropped, 2% were on academic removal, and 2% had other student statuses.

Regarding the overall subject of concerns, 73% were academic-related; 18% were non-academic, and 9% were both. While questions and concerns were heard about almost every sector of the College, those relating to the School of Arts & Science, the School of Business, the School of Health & Human Services, and the Registrar’s Office were the most frequently discussed. It is important to note that visitors use the Office services for a variety of reasons, including questions, brainstorming and as a sounding board, requests, seeking clarity, gathering information, concerns, and complaints. Many issues are resolved promptly once the student has the pertinent information.

Visitors choose how they want to connect with the Ombudsperson. For initial meetings, 30% of visitors prefer email, 28% telephone, and 25% MS Teams video. It is worth noting that the visitor preference for in-person meetings remained low (14%).



The outcomes of consultations and cases include resolved (77% or 144 cases), no contact after 1 month / outcome unknown (20% or 38 cases), partially resolved (3% or 5 cases), and pending / in process (0% or 1 case). The categories of the Office's actions taken to resolve the concern are numerous and often a single case or consultation involves multiple actions including:

- listening/providing info and advice/exploring options (183 cases and consultations),
- clarifying – info gathering and fact-finding (54),
- internal referral (31),
- shuttle diplomacy (13),
- meeting facilitation or observation (18).

A complete list of actions taken and other reporting categories is presented in the Aggregate Visitor Data section.

The Office of the Ombudsperson conducted reviews of systemic college practices and policies after concerns had been raised by students, staff, and faculty. The Office made three area- or program-level recommendations.



#### STUDENT FEEDBACK TO THE OFFICE

*... thank you for checking in with me. Yes, an online section was added for the course I needed to take and I also received an email from the college letting me know that on the day that it was added. Thank you so much for looking into this for me. I appreciate it.*



# Greetings to the Camosun Community!



I am pleased to present this annual report covering my third full academic year at Camosun College, covering the period September 1, 2023 – August 31, 2024. An important responsibility of a post-secondary ombudsperson, underlining transparency, is to report back to the community regarding the Office's activities during the previous year.

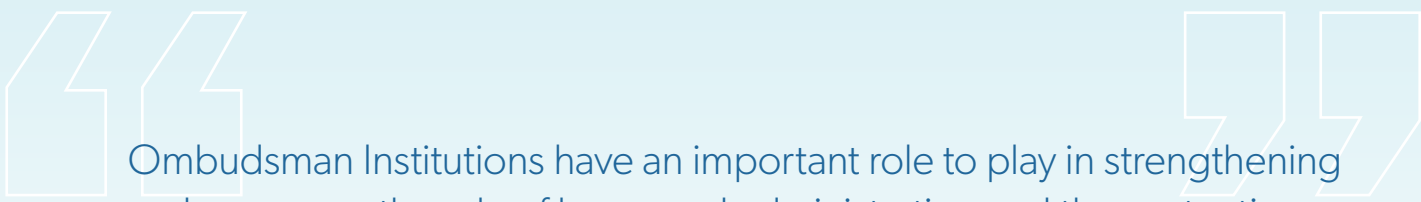
I am thankful to be able to support fairness at Camosun College. As a visitor, originally from southern Ontario, I respectfully acknowledge that our campuses are situated on the territories of the Lək̓ʷəŋən (Songhees and Kosapsun) and WSÁNEĆ peoples. I honour their knowledge and welcome to all students who seek education here. I am committed to reconciliation.

The Office of the Ombudsperson was established at Camosun in 1992 and has been supporting fairness at the college for over 30 years. While most Canadian universities have Ombuds offices, many colleges do not, and I am truly heartened by Camosun's strong and ongoing commitment to fairness, equity, Indigenization, and reconciliation.

Every large institution has a certain number of challenges and conflict, just part of the normal human condition and a changing world. Many social justice leaders have highlighted the potential for growth and opportunity in our everyday conflicts. For example, Kenneth Cloke emphasized, "Every conflict we face in life is rich with positive and negative potential. It can be a source of inspiration, enlightenment, learning, transformation, and growth-or rage, fear, shame, entrapment, and resistance. The choice is not up to our opponents, but to us, and our willingness to face and work through them." Themes involving conflict raised in this report can be considered in this context.

I appreciate the support and openness of the Camosun community and enthusiastically look forward to continued collaboration with you to maintain fairness and equity on campus.

Respectfully submitted,  
Rob Thompson, Ombudsperson  
December 2024



Ombudsman Institutions have an important role to play in strengthening democracy, the rule of law, good administration and the protection and promotion of human rights and fundamental freedoms.

*European Commission for Democracy Through Law (Venice Commission)  
adopted Principles on the Protection and Promotion of the Ombudsman Institution  
("the Venice Principles"), 15 – 16 March 2019*

## ABOUT THE OFFICE OF THE OMBUDSPERSON: MISSION, STRUCTURE AND MANDATE

*Ombudsman*, a word of Swedish origin meaning 'citizen's representative,' is an official appointed to investigate complaints against a company or organization, especially a public authority. Synonyms include: representative, defender, preserver, minder, guardian, watchdog. The first post-secondary ombuds in North America was established in 1965 at Simon Fraser University. There are currently over 40 post-secondary institutions in Canada which maintain ombuds offices. On Vancouver Island, only Camosun College and the University of Victoria have post-secondary ombudsperson offices.

### MISSION

The mission of the Office of the Ombudsperson is to ensure that students are treated fairly at the college. The Office provides a safe place to voice and clarify concerns and complaints. By advocating for procedural fairness and natural justice, the Ombudsperson helps to achieve equitable resolutions and reduce conflict.

### STRUCTURE AND MANDATE

As Camosun College and the Camosun College Student Society (CCSS) are committed to the just and fair treatment of every member of the college community, they collaborate in supporting the operation of the Office of the Ombudsperson.

This service is independent, confidential, impartial, informal, free of cost, and highly accessible. It serves all Camosun students and campuses. To support its independence, the Student Society and the college fund the Office equally. The Ombudsperson is advised by the Human Resources Executive Director and CCSS Executive Director. While it is understood that college students (members of CCSS) comprise the vast majority of visitors, the Ombudsperson regularly consults confidentially with college staff and faculty, and CCSS employees.

The mandate of the Office is twofold in nature. Firstly, the Office provides an independent, impartial and confidential process through which students may find assistance and advice toward a fair and equitable resolution of any college-related concern. The Ombudsperson acts as a support and resource, often serving as a conflict coach, sounding board, or thought partner, providing assistance to visitors so that they are empowered to develop strategies and advocate effectively for themselves.

As Sarah Klaper, president of the International Ombuds Association explains, “Ombuds help visitors navigate the complexities of university life, academics, work, relationships, power structures, etc.,” The Ombudsperson supports students in developing strategies and options to resolve college concerns and provides them with guidance on college policies and procedures, as well as available services. The office is not authorized to receive formal complaints on behalf of the college; rather, if a visitor needs the college to know something and to take action, the office explains the process and gets them to the right place for that to happen. The Ombudsperson is a conflict resolution resource which collaborates with all parts of the college.

Secondly, when trends, patterns, policies, procedures, or practices of the college generate systemic concerns or conflicts, the Office can initiate reviews or investigations and make corresponding recommendations when appropriate. Some recommendations may be initiated to promote discussion or draw attention to institution-wide concerns. In this way, the Ombudsperson also serves as an early-warning system for college leadership by reporting trends and concerns to decision-makers. The office cannot make binding decisions for the college on any case. Monitoring for potential systemic concerns is the vital reason that the Office collects aggregate data on cases and consultations – to become aware of trends, such as an increasing number of complaints or conflicts in a certain area, to be able to offer support for conflict prevention and de-escalation.

## **ASSOCIATION OF CANADIAN COLLEGE AND COLLEGE OMBUDSPERSONS (ACCUO)**

The Ombudsperson acts in accordance with the principles of natural justice and fairness within the existing policies of Camosun College and in compliance with the Standards of Practice of the Association of Canadian College and College Ombudspersons (ACCUO). The ACCUO Standards of Practice state that an ombudsperson:

- fosters respectful, fair and equitable policies, practices and treatment of individuals
- functions independently of the administrative structures of the institution and of the staff, faculty and student associations
- operates in an impartial and objective manner
- respects confidentiality
- provides information, advice and intervention
- investigates and/or informally resolves complaints through access to persons, records, files and information
- recommends on individual and systemic issues without decision-making authority to implement the recommendation
- reports publicly and/or issues an annual report to the authority designated in the terms of reference of the office.

This is a partial list of the ACCUO Standards of Practice; for the complete list, please consult <https://accuo.ca/>.

## OMBUDS OFFICES THROUGHOUT CANADIAN SOCIETY AND INTERNATIONALLY

Independent and impartial ombuds offices are maintained by many government bodies and private institutions throughout Canada to protect procedural fairness. Are you aware of these ombuds offices?

- Every province and territory now has a provincial/territorial office which can review the work of its ministries, Crown corporations, hospitals & health authorities, public schools, colleges and universities, local governments & regional districts and more
- Canada Post
- CBC
- Canada Revenue Agency
- National Defence and Canadian Armed Forces
- Banks and credit unions
- Insurance companies

More broadly, ombuds can provide oversight and investigate allegations of corruption and human rights. For example, the [BC Ombudsperson](#) now also investigates allegations of wrongdoing and reprisal – or whistleblowing – from current and former employees of the provincial government. [The United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights](#), Volker Türk, highlighted the role of ombuds in May 2024 at the 13th World Conference of the International Ombudsman Institute:

- Ombudspersons and national human rights institutions help to protect our universal human rights and fundamental freedoms.
- They carry out the often arduous – but crucial – tasks of addressing imbalances of power, and helping to correct injustices caused by maladministration.
- Ombuds work is essential to improving public services by identifying systemic failings, and by ensuring that governance becomes more transparent and more accountable.
- Ombudspersons are an important link between the institutions of the State and the population, thus for a renewed, refreshed social contract.



### STUDENT FEEDBACK TO THE OFFICE

*Thank you for checking in on us. Yes we both got enrolled in the course with Dean's permission just a few days back. Thank you for your help. You helped us a lot. We really appreciate it.*





# WHAT IS ADMINISTRATIVE FAIRNESS?

Administrative fairness, also known as procedural fairness, is a concept that most people generally understand and feel strongly about – it's the expectation that the public should be treated well by public service staff. In Canada, the concept of administrative fairness is well developed. For example, we can expect in Canadian public service delivery that staff follow rules and guidelines, treat the public with respect, and consider clients' needs. We expect that decisions not be biased and that clear, transparent reasons for decisions be provided by those with authority. Administrative fairness reinforces public trust in institutions and ultimately reduces conflict and correspondingly saves resources.



THE FAIRNESS TRIANGLE

## A FAIR PROCESS REQUIRES:

- An impartial decision maker
- Information about any available review or appeal processes
- Reasonable notice that a decision is going to be made
- Clear information about the decision-making criteria
- Clear and meaningful reasons for decisions
- An opportunity for the person affected to be heard and have their views considered
- A timely decision

## FAIR OUTCOMES (DECISIONS) ARE:

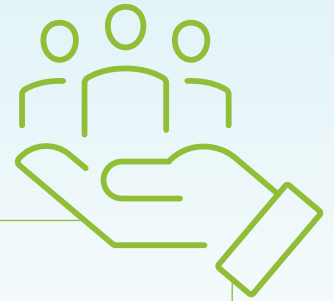
- Made in accordance with applicable rules, laws and policies
- Considerate of the individual needs and circumstances of the person affected
- Made with appropriate legal authority
- Based on relevant information
- Based on rules that are fair (not unjust, improperly discriminatory or unreasonably burdensome)

## FAIR TREATMENT (SERVICE) INCLUDES:

- Respecting confidentiality
- Being honest and forthright
- Being trauma-informed
- Being transparent about what you can and cannot do
- Offering respectful and courteous treatment
- Demonstrating cultural humility
- Making information clear and easily accessible
- Being accountable and apologizing if you or your organization makes a mistake
- Active listening

Source: BC Ombudsperson, [\*Fairness in Practice Guide: A Guide to Administrative Fairness in the Public Sector\*](#)

# VISITOR NUMBERS AT A GLANCE



## VISITOR CASES & CONSULTATIONS

Visitor cases & consultations 2023-24 **183**  
(165 in 2022-23, 179 in 2021-22)

Cases ongoing from 2022-23 **5**

Total active visitor cases & consultations 2023-24 **188**

Total student visitors **178**

Parent, faculty, staff, and community visitors **5**

% of student visitors accessing the Office **~1%**

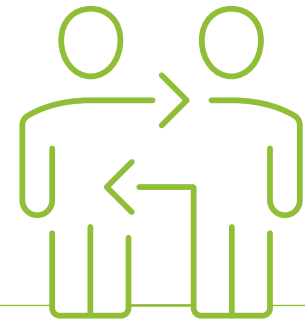
(178 student visitors represent roughly 1% of the total college population of 15,163 students (source: Institutional Research and Planning))

## MEETINGS

Number of substantial meetings **522+**  
(494 in 2022-23, 503 in 2021-22)

Average # meetings/visitor **2.8**

Maximum # meetings/visitor **22**  
6 visitors had 10+ meetings each  
(18 in 2022-23, 24 in 2021-22)



## LENGTH OF INVOLVEMENT/VISITOR [N = 165]

Average # days/visitor **11** Maximum # days/visitor **124**  
21 visitors' cases open 30 days+



## ADDITIONAL OFFICE ACTIVITY AND ACTIONS [N = 97+]

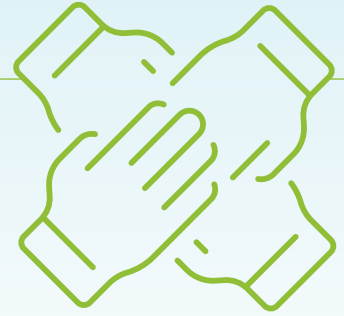
Including:

Faculty/staff/college leadership consultations on policy or process

**52**

Referring student directly to student services

**10**



Attending workshops & trainings as well as office promotional events including presentations, student orientation fairs, academic program introductions, networking, etc.

**22**

## WEBPAGES

Ombudsperson four webpages total

**2059**

users

**3855**

total views



Student Complaints Process webpage users  
(952 in 2022-23, 701 in 2021-22)

**962**



### STUDENT FEEDBACK TO THE OFFICE

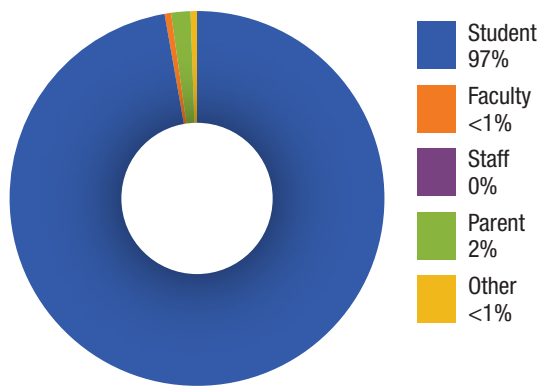
*So nice to hear from you ... All is good !!!! We are all having a great time ... in class [now]. Thanks again for the professional check in, really appreciate it.*



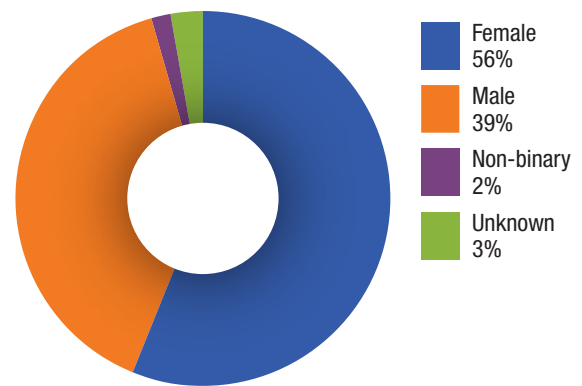
# OVERVIEW OF AGGREGATE VISITOR DATA

During 2023–2024, the Office welcomed a wide range of visitors who raised concerns about virtually every college-related faculty and service. Some were short consultations for information, guidance and referrals, while others involved numerous and lengthy meetings, further research, clarification, meeting facilitation and observation, shuttle diplomacy, and occasionally recommendations. Normally, the Ombudsperson can arrange meetings promptly and meet with visitors in person, virtually, or by phone within a day or two.

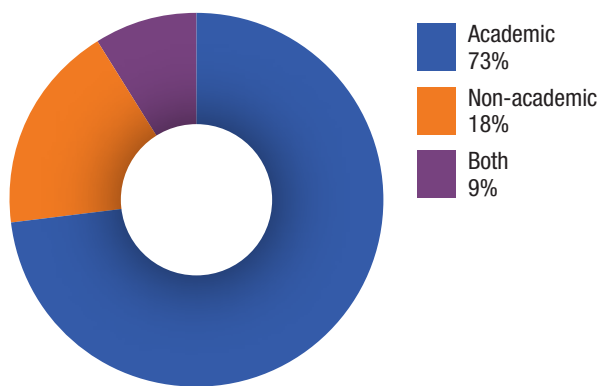
**FIG. 1: CONSTITUENCY [N = 183]**



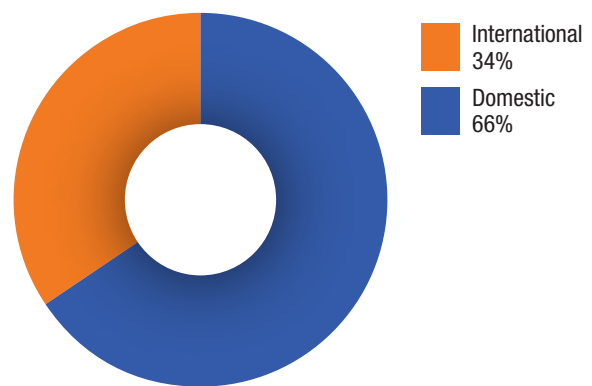
**FIG. 2: GENDER [N = 183]**



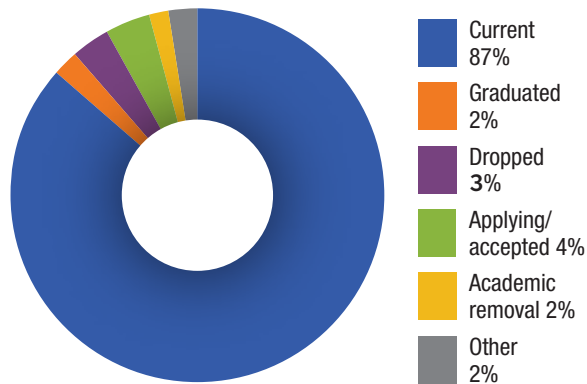
**FIG. 3: CONCERN [N = 183]**



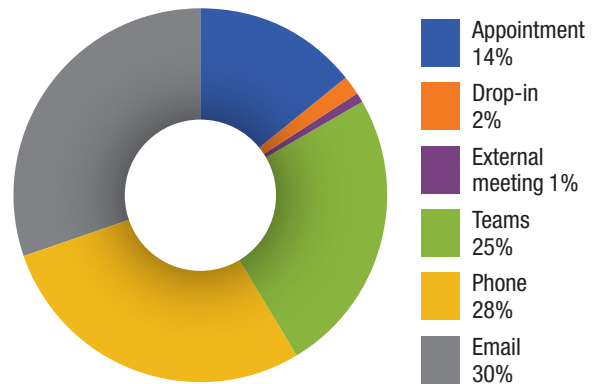
**FIG. 4: STUDENTS [N = 178]**



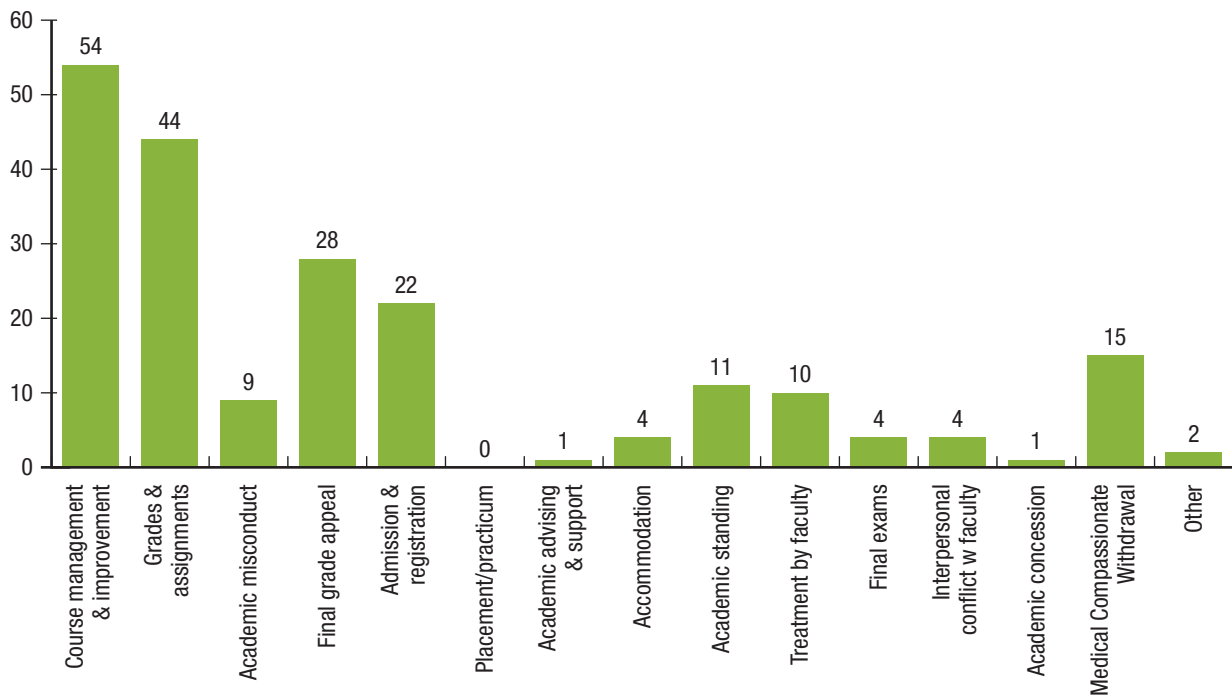
**FIG. 5: STUDENT STATUS [N = 178]**



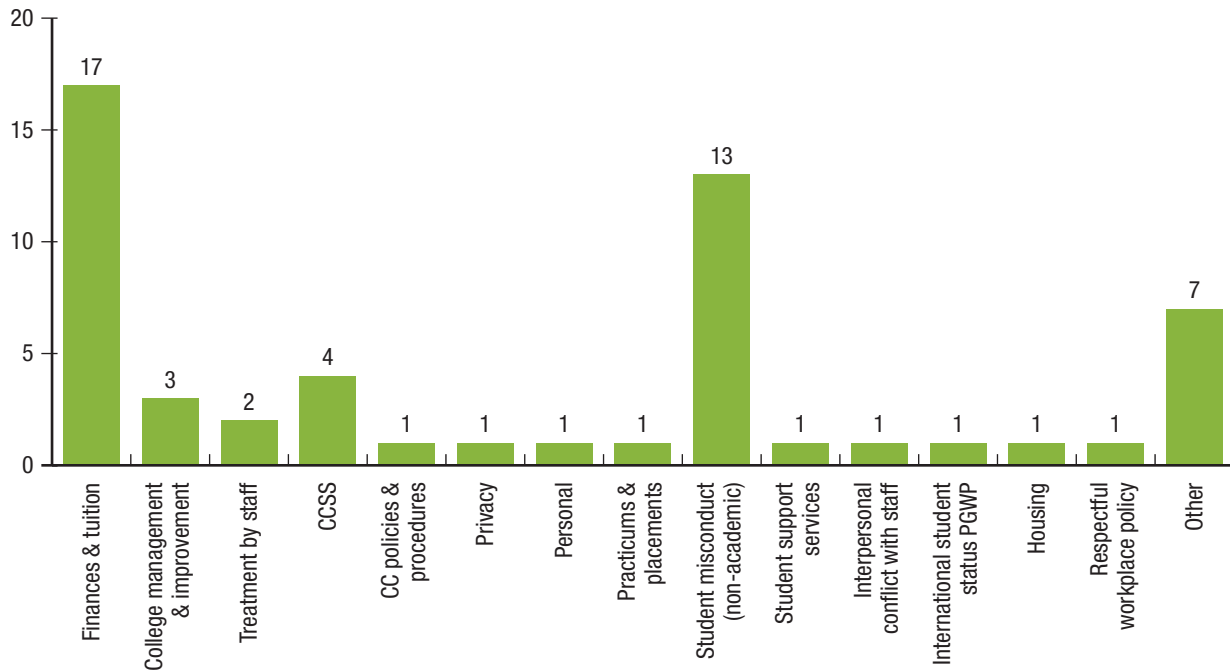
**FIG. 6: MODE OF INTIAL MEETING [N = 183]**



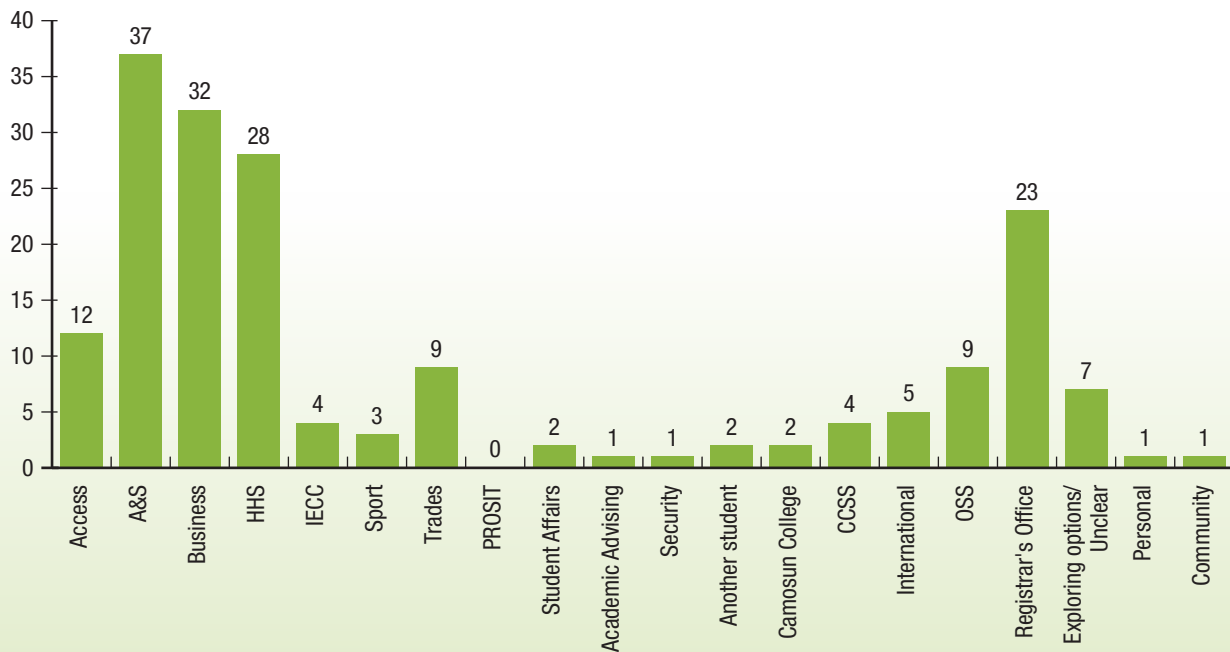
**FIG. 7: TYPE OF ACADEMIC CONCERN [N = 209; can be multiple/visitor]**



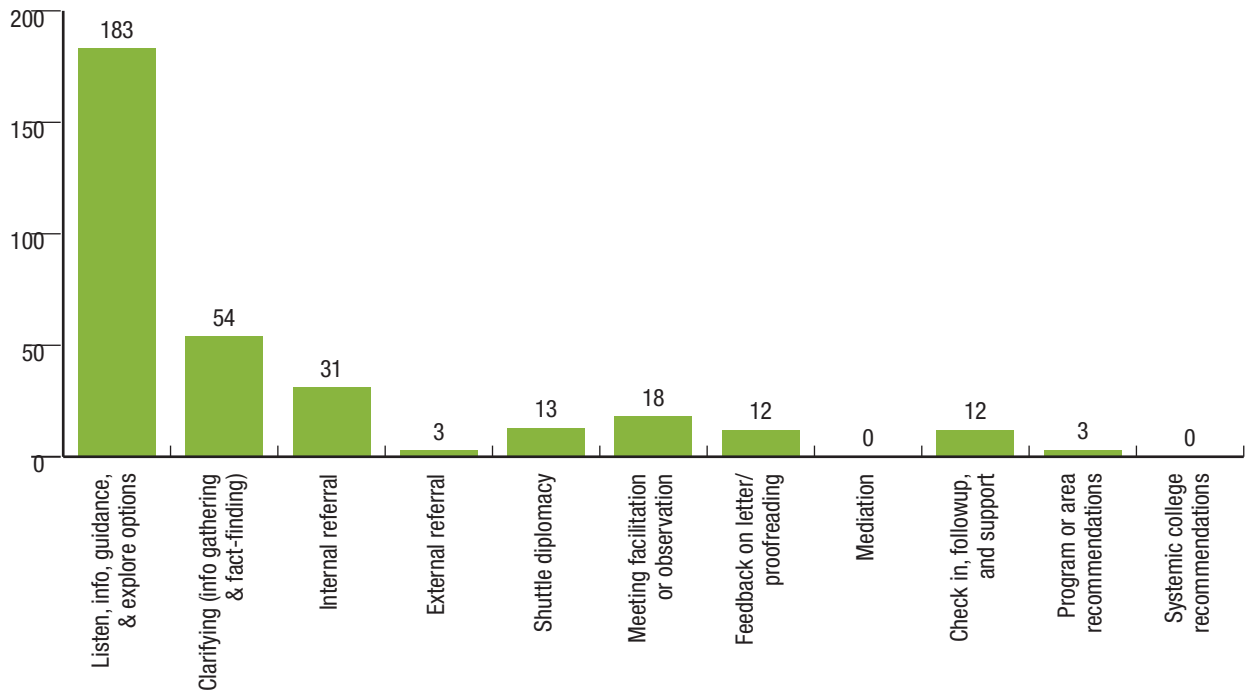
**FIG. 8: TYPE OF NON-ACADEMIC CONCERN [N = 55; can be multiple/visitor]**



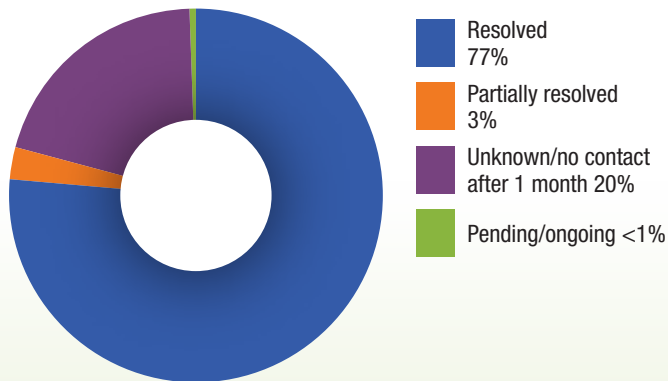
**FIG. 9: RELEVANT SCHOOL/AREA OF COLLEGE [N = 183]**



**FIG. 10: ACTION TAKEN TO RESOLVE CASE [N = 327; can be multiple/visitor]**



**FIG. 11: OUTCOME [N = 188]**



# CASE STORIES & HIGHLIGHTS

To put a human face on the aggregate data, the Office will share a number of case stories and highlight visitors' themes from the reporting period.

## INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS

It's worth highlighting that of the student visitors to the Office, 66% were domestic students while 34% were international students. This figure is significantly more than the general ratio of domestic to international students at the college (approximately 2771 or 18% of the college's total student population of 15,163 were international in 2023-24; source: Institutional Research and Planning).

International students in Canada face numerous challenges, including language, culture, visas and paperwork, finances, housing, and employment. Many international student access college supports and assistance to navigate their new Canadian circumstances and they are well supported by Camosun International. Student services refer many international students to the Office as they seek guidance on navigating college processes such as final grade reviews, academic misconduct, academic progress, the student complaint process, and medical compassionate withdrawals. With cultural and language differences, it is no surprise that international students require more support and make up a significant proportion of visitors to the Office.

## CHANGING FEDERAL GOVERNMENT POLICIES

Several international students contacted the Office, concerned about the impact on them of the new federal government regulations requiring international students to complete a minimum of 50% of their courses in person. They are worried that Camosun may not provide enough in person courses. The Ombudsperson referred them to Academic Advising and then raised the concern with the Dean of Business, who was highly aware of the requirement and confident that the School is maintaining enough in person offerings.

Another common concern raised by international students is waitlists, as they are anxious in their final semesters to register for required courses and then graduate. We discuss registration dates, tuition fee deadlines (when some students drop courses and waitlists are updated), and refer them to Camosun International for further support. While normal waitlists are generally not fairness issues, the Ombudsperson will take the time to meet with any student to discuss their concern. The Office is not considered by the college and the student society to be an 'office of last resort,' as in the case of the provincial Ombudsperson or a banking ombudsperson. Often a confidential conversation can allay students' concerns and deescalate conflicts.



## GRADE OPTIONS

Students are occasionally close to completing the learning requirements by a course's end except for one assignment or several small tasks. A student might ask the Office about options, and if appropriate, the Ombudsperson coaches students to discuss the possibility of an I grade with their instructor/chair. In appropriate circumstances when a student has completed most course learning outcomes, instructors can provide an I grade and allow a student up to six weeks to complete the few requirements remaining.

## COURSE MANAGEMENT AND THE STUDENT COMPLAINT PROCESS

The most-heard academic concern this year was course management, as was the case last year. When a student raises a complaint with the Office, the Ombudsperson arranges a meeting to hear the student's concerns and then explore options, using the [Student Complaint Process](#) as a guide. Students are encouraged to discuss their concerns first with the instructor or staff, and if the concern was not resolved, to raise it with the chair or supervisor. Complaints which are still unresolved, or formal complaints, can be raised with the Dean or Director. The Office is available to provide feedback on students' discussion points or emails, as well as to offer perspective on the concern. It is worth noting that, commonly, students who raise a concern with the Office do not pursue the complaint further; very few complaints raised with the Ombudsperson reach the Deans' level.

In the course management category, students raised the following academic complaints with the Office this academic year:

- their course is unfocussed, lacking direction, or disorganized
- they believe they are not learning due to teaching style, content, communication, mode, lack of rubric
- they feel singled out and treated unfairly or more strictly than other students
- instructors have cancelled numerous classes and not made them up later
- lack of feedback; marks not provided in a timely way [see below]
- group assignment challenges
- interpersonal conflicts.

## COACHING FOR PROCESS SUCCESS

Several other instances are noteworthy of students following the [Student Complaint Process](#) when positive change occurred. In one situation, an instructor allegedly made inappropriate comments to a trans student. The student consulted the Ombudsperson and then initiated the complaint process, which involved the instructor, the chair, and the Office of Student Support. The instructor was very open to feedback and the instructor and student resolved the concern in a positive way. In another course, several students complained that the instructor's expectations were much higher and stricter than the course's learning outcomes as outlined in the syllabus. Again, after coaching by the Office, the students had a productive conversation with the dean, who was able to resolve the concerns.

## FINANCES AND TUITION

Common requests in the ‘finances and tuition’ concern category included special consideration for tuition refunds/credit for dropped courses, perceived incorrect academic advice on courses or programs, or serious concerns with the quality or management of a course. Some students also requested to be allowed a payment plan for past unpaid tuition accounts; they were concerned either about the ability to register for upcoming courses or to avoid the collections agency and associated credit rating problems, and often both.

## CAMOSUN COLLEGE STUDENT SOCIETY U-PASS

Generally, at least once per semester, a student contacts the Office complaining about the mandatory Camosun College Student Society (CCSS) U-Pass student fee, which provides all students with Victoria Transit bus passes for the fall and winter semesters at a very reduced rate. The U-Pass policy is clearly outlined on the CCSS website. Numerous other post-secondary student unions in BC fund a U-Pass. Nevertheless, the disgruntled student feels that because they do not take the bus, they should be exempt from paying the fee. When approached on the theme, the Ombudsperson explains that the fee is mandatory except under strict exceptions and engages in a ‘greater good’ conversation, if the student is willing. For example, we might deliberate on other CCSS services, for instance that not all students use the Fitness Centre, the CCSS Foodbank, or clubs, which are also funded by student fees. Sometimes there is a change of heart following these discussions, sometimes not. Ultimately, if the student wants to continue pursuing their claim, the Ombudsperson refers them to the CCSS Executive Director.

This type of conversation is similar to many others where a student does not like the existence of something at the college, i.e. a tuition fee deadline, or does not like an outcome, i.e. a grade or academic misconduct decision, though the facts have been presented transparently and processes have been followed properly and meet procedural fairness standards. The Ombudsperson offers to engage, discuss the different sides of the matter, and brainstorm realistic options. Often a better understanding is reached. Finally, as with the CCSS example, if the student wants to continue pursuing the matter, the Ombudsperson refers them to the responsible workplace leader.

## STUDENT MISCONDUCT

Students frequently seek guidance on the non-academic misconduct process they are involved in, led by the Office of Student Support. One such instance involved three students who posted transphobic and threatening comments about a transgender student in their class. Several other students had ‘no contact’ agreements with other students which they did not comply with, while another student was involved an allegation of a class outburst.

## OTHER NON-ACADEMIC THEMES RAISED BY STUDENTS

- The college closures for winter weather
- Conflict with landlord
- Questions and misconceptions about tuition fees
- Concerns about interactions with staff and faculty
- Complaint about the Fitness Centre summer hours

## THIRD-PARTY ONLINE COURSE RESOURCES

A noteworthy situation involving both academic and non-academic themes was privacy and financial concerns related to third-party online course resources, where as part of course fees, students pay for the use of a lab software. The Ombudsperson raised the student's concern with the chair and then dean. The student was provided an alternative lab. Once the student's concern was resolved, the Ombudsperson raised the theme of third-party online resources with Education Council, as the college currently has no policy or guidelines to provide direction, and will continue to work with the college, including the Dr. Lloyd Morin Centre for Excellence in Teaching and Learning (CETL), to advance this theme.

## NOT ALWAYS A PROBLEM

Again, it worth highlighting that not all visitors raise complaints or problems. Not infrequently, a question or concern can be clarified during one or two brief consultations. Frequently, a referral will help resolve the question. Common referrals include faculty, deans, and student services (Centre for Accessible Learning, the Counselling Centre, Office of Student Support, Admissions and Registration, Eye? Sqa'lewen, Academic Advising, and Camosun International).

## OUTCOMES: RESOLVED AND SATISFIED?

It is important to clarify the outcome categories and in particular highlight that 'resolved' indicates that the concern was reviewed and completed – often following a college process – in a way that met administrative fairness and natural justice standards. For instance, a student requests a final grade review/appeal and over the course of several weeks followed the college process by meeting with the instructor, then chair, then dean if necessary, to argue that their final grade should be higher. The student's appeal is ultimately not successful and the original grade is upheld at each level. The role of the Ombudsperson is not to advocate for a particular outcome (such as a particular grade for a student) or to determine if a decision was in one group's perceived favour or another. Rather, the Office observes that the concern or appeal is handled fairly through the appropriate college process, the process is publicly available, there is no bias in the decision, and a timely decision is provided and communicated with sufficient rationale and detail.

Similarly, the Ombudsperson does not attempt to indicate in this report an individual's level of satisfaction with a particular outcome. For example, a student submits a Medical Compassionate Withdrawal request and the Registrar's Office correctly follows policy by providing a timely decision with clear reasons, but ultimately does not approve the request. From the standpoint of administrative fairness and natural justice, this case is considered 'resolved' by the Office, regardless of whether the parties agree or whether the request is approved or not, as a fair process is followed. The Ombudsperson certainly understands that a student in this case might feel disappointed and quite possibly frustrated. Therefore, the 'resolved' or 'not resolved' outcome is not synonymous with 'request granted/not granted' or 'satisfied/dissatisfied student.' That said, the Ombudsperson will intervene in circumstances where a college policy or process is not followed or a policy is witnessed to be unfair or unjust. In the latter case, the Office may conduct a systemic review of a college policy and can make recommendations if it is found to be inconsistent with procedural fairness and natural justice.

Outcomes tracked as 'unknown' are fewer this year, due to more follow up and check ins, but still more common than desired. The reason: visitors sometimes do not update the Office, even after individual follow-up check ins. Many visitors respond with an update and often an additional question, making the check ins highly worthwhile. Unfortunately, however, many visitors do not respond and the outcome remains unknown. Although these cases are listed as 'unknown,' the Office suspects that most of them have been resolved in one way or another.



### STUDENT FEEDBACK TO THE OFFICE

*We had communicated last February about my academic record and you had mentioned that I could apply for a compassionate withdrawal. I just wanted to let you know that after almost a year my withdrawal was approved a few weeks ago. They were able to remove five courses with the support of my family doctor. I just want to thank you again for being so kind and supportive during that time. This has been the best thing that has happened to me in a very long time and I'm feeling so much more hopeful about my future. If I do make it into grad school it will be largely because of your support and this decision to remove those courses and I will never forget that. All the people I communicated with at Camosun were so supportive and kind.*



# CONSULTATIONS WITH THE COLLEGE ON FAIRNESS CONCERNS

In 2023-24, the Ombudsperson proactively consulted with college leadership and divisions on a range of topics to improve its policies, programs, and services. Here is a sample of how the Office helped.

## TIMELY AND MEANINGFUL FEEDBACK ON COURSE ASSIGNMENTS

Generally, each semester several students complain that they did not receive any feedback, timely feedback, or meaningful feedback on their course assignments. This was again the case this year. Though involving a small number of courses, the Ombudsperson has become aware that timely feedback is a persistent concern. However, after analyzing visitor tracking data, it does not seem to be connected to any particular department, program, or school. This year, for example, in several courses grades were not provided for several months for completed tests and assignments. Sometimes the instructor responded promptly to the students' requests for grades. Other times, only the chair or dean's involvement resolved the issue and the grades were eventually provided.

The Ombudsperson discussed this theme with the Provost and Vice President Education and Innovation and then requested feedback on this theme from college leadership at Provost Council on March 20, 2024, noting that the college's [Evaluation of Student Learning policy E-1.16](#) states:

All course evaluation results and/or feedback should be communicated to students in a timely manner, after each completed and assessed evaluation, to support iterative learning and to inform students how they are performing in the course.

The Office's concern with timely feedback relates to procedural fairness, equity, consistency, and a healthy learning environment. For context, below are four categories of complaints on timely feedback that the Ombudsperson has heard from visitors:

1. Students want to learn and improve, but are unsure how without adequate feedback ["I accept the marks, but I don't know what I did wrong."]
2. Students have not received enough feedback [or in some cases any] before the last day of classes to make an educated decision whether to remain in or drop the course
3. Students concerned about achieving high marks become frustrated that the lack of timely feedback on previous assignments has impacted their grades on subsequent assignments because they were not advised how to improve.
4. Students receive basic feedback indicating they are doing well and are then later surprised to understand that they were not meeting the learning outcomes. Student will sometimes appeal their final grade based on this latter category, as was the case last year.

On timely feedback, the Office notes:

- Camosun has a 2022 policy which does not specify a % or deadline for feedback.
- Students are extremely reluctant to complain for a variety of reasons; very few will file a complaint with the dean.
- Some Canadian post-secondaries' policies require that feedback be provided for a minimum percentage of the course evaluations within a certain timeframe. For example, George Brown College's Assessment of Student Learning policy requires that 30% of a course's grades be provided by the withdrawal deadline and 50% prior to the final assessment. Conestoga College's policy states that "Evaluation components must be spaced at timely intervals with at least 40% of evaluations delivered by the midpoint of the course. Prompt and constructive feedback about student progress and opportunities for additional learning must be provided prior to a subsequent evaluation."

The Office will continue to monitor this theme and work with the college to increase fairness in its policies.

## APPRECIATION

The Ombudsperson would like to express appreciation and highlight the generous change which the Registrar's Office made to the course withdrawal timeline, allowing students to withdraw from courses on myCamosun up to the last day of classes without academic penalty. This was a significant step for fairness, empowering students with more academic decision-making control and at the same time reducing a significant administration burden on the college. The college is a leader in Canada on this policy.

The Office acknowledges the openness of college leadership to consult on systemic college themes affecting students and to offer helpful feedback to the Office. The Ombudsperson has also been welcomed to join numerous college committees as a regular guest, which allows the Office to stay connected and informed, and to offer feedback or ask questions when appropriate.



### STUDENT FEEDBACK TO THE OFFICE

*I wanted to express my gratitude for facilitating this process for me. Your prompt responses and valuable advice are greatly appreciated. You've truly alleviated a lot of stress for me. Thank you so much!*



# RECOMMENDATIONS

A key role of the Camosun Ombudsperson is to track, review, and investigate potential systemic issues at the college – potential gaps or recurring problems – and if appropriate, make recommendations. Throughout the last academic year, a number of systemic complaints and concerns were raised through the Office. After conducting reviews, and then having informal, confidential consultations with the area involved, the Ombudsperson made three area or program-level recommendations. Two of these recommendations are summarized here and updates on 2022-23 and 2021-22 recommendations are also reported in this section.

## RECOMMENDATIONS: SAMPLE THEMES

At the area or program level:

- Following a misunderstanding with a student, the Ombudsperson requested that Camosun International update its international student tuition fees webpage for clarity. The changes were made and the matter was resolved promptly and efficiently.
- A student completed a Camosun Health and Human Services program and then a year later enrolled in another HHS program. Following questions and concerns about resubmitting student records such as transcripts, the Ombudsperson collaborated with the Registrar’s Office, asking staff to consider and adapt accordingly its student records policy for students enrolling in another program who have already fulfilled student records requirements. Since then, the Registrar’s Office reports that it has started planning the creation of new web information for applicants related to transcripts, which will include information about how long transcripts will be kept on file and in what limited cases transcripts may need to be re-submitted.

## RECOMMENDATIONS: FOLLOW UP

Action has been taken on both of the following Ombudsperson’s recommendations from the past two years, although the second recommendation is recent and will take more time for the college to resolve.

### **1) Student retention and academic early alert system – from the 2022-23 annual report**

In March 2024, the Ombudsperson formally recommended that in 2024 the college initiate a student retention and early academic alert task force to:

- a. Implement a proactive student retention and academic intervention system, which will mandate an intervention for all students at the academic probation stage to meet with an academic retention advisor to create a personalized academic plan.
- b. Develop a specialized, purpose-trained retention advisor role or “Student Success Navigator,” serving students in all schools to ensure that those at academic risk receive dedicated support.

- c. Consider developing a cost-effective “Camosun Student Success” remedial course as part of the college’s support system for students on academic probation. With careful design and/or a modular structure, aspects of such a course might also serve to set new students up for success.
- d. Consider how an academic intervention system could complement existing services, and create opportunities for increased collaboration.
- e. Collect and analyze student retention numbers to support development and success of this system.

The college has not yet implemented these recommendations. The Office recognizes the current financial challenges. The Ombudsperson will continue to monitor the delivery of these recommendations and in next year’s annual report will provide another update. The Office conveys appreciation for consideration and openness to these recommendation themes.

**Status: ongoing**

## **2) Casper test recommendation – from the 2021-22 annual report**

The School of Health and Human Services has now recommended updates to the academic calendar and website that the Casper test be transparently listed as an admission requirement of the SONO and MRAD programs. In October 2024, the Integrated College Curriculum Committee accepted the suggested changes and recommended them to Education Council, which provided final approval on November 20, 2024. By early January 2025, as this report goes to print, the Office observes that the [SONO and MRAD webpages](#) now mention the Casper test in the admissions sections, though the academic calendar has not yet been updated.

The Ombudsperson will continue to monitor the delivery of this recommendation, and in next year’s annual report will provide another update. The office conveys appreciation for those involved in moving forward these changes, including the Associate Dean of HHS.

### **Casper test – background**

The Allied Health and Technologies (AHT) department uses the results of the Casper test as an admission requirement for both the Sonography (SONO) and Radiography (MRAD) programs. As the programs’ info session slides state, “50% of each students’ rank comes from their nonacademic assessment (CASPer Test).” The Ombudsperson recommended in 2022 that the programs update all public-facing SONO and MRAD program communications to provide clear, thorough, and transparent information on the Casper admission requirement, in line with procedural fairness standards and other Canadian PSIs. Admission requirements for all college programs must be clearly and transparently communicated in college communications.

[Acuity Insights](#), the company which owns and administers Casper, describes Casper as “an online, open-response situational judgment test (SJT). It asks what you would do in a tough situation, and more importantly, why. This helps determine behavioral tendencies of applicants pursuing people-centered professions.”

**Status: ongoing**



## STUDENT FEEDBACK TO THE OFFICE

*I am truly grateful to you again for helping me patiently through this entire process of guiding me and counselling me with regards to my concerns.*

## OFFICE ACTIVITY

### OUTREACH, EDUCATION AND NETWORKING

The Ombudsperson has regular consultations with college leadership, staff and faculty on both campuses. This year, the Ombudsperson conducted about 100 non-visitor meetings, including class presentations, staff/faculty consultations, outreach and education, academic program introductions, trainings and workshops, and student orientation fairs such as Camfest. The reception at Camosun has invariably been very welcoming, open, and collaborative in support of fairness. Please contact the Office to arrange an Ombudsperson introduction, presentation, or discussion in your class, department or office. Participatory class workshops, for instance, can explore themes with your students such as effective feedback and self-advocacy i.e. how to make an effective complaint.

### > NETWORKING, OUTREACH & CONSULTATIONS

- Regular oversight meetings with the Office advisors, including the VP Student Experience, Human Resources Executive Director, the interim Associate VP Education, and the CCSS Executive Director
- Consulting regularly with faculty & staff to share current concerns and gather feedback on ombudsperson reviews, including at college leadership bodies including Education Council and Provost Council
- Recommendations or feedback on draft and current college policies, webpages, procedures, and plans
- Social media in conjunction with college Communications office
- Participating in the Association of Canadian College and College Ombudspersons (ACCUO) events and activities, such as the regional conference in Calgary (in person), regular online 'water cooler' theme discussions, serving as co-Treasurer, and remaining an active member of the ACCUO Communications Committee, which produces the association bulletin

## > PRESENTATIONS

- Student academic program orientations such as the Dental programs
- Personalized presentations in individual classes, including EDCP, ELD, Criminal Justice, CMLA, and Sonography
- CCSS board & staff
- HHS student reps
- Program leads & chairs re: college policies
- Faculty meetings
- Camfest

## > COLLEGE COMMITTEES (SERVING AS NON-VOTING MEMBER OR GUEST)

- Education Council
- Equity, Diversity and Inclusion
- Assessment for Learning Committee
- Open Textbook/Zero Textbook Cost (ZTC)
- WUSC Student Refugee Committee

## > WORKSHOPS AND TRAININGS

- HM|HC webinar: Addressing Mental Health and Connection Needs of International Students
- Justice Institute 2-day online course: Motivational Interviewing
- Justice Institute 3-day in-person course: Conflict Coaching
- HM|HC webinar: Building Healthy Trades at North Island College – Learning through Collaboration
- CCDI webinar: Neurodivergent Inclusion: Understanding Neurodivergence in the Workplace

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*Camosun College*

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**OFFICE** *of the* **OMBUDSPERSON**

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*The Ombudsperson welcomes your feedback and questions.*

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