Addressing Harassment: A Perspective from Canadian University Ombuds Office (OO)

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A Perspective from Canadian OO

- Presentation of the OO of the University of Alberta (UofA) and Concordia University (CU)
- Profile of the Association of Canadian College and University Ombudspersons (ACCUO) members
- Results of the survey
- OO in Canada: not a linear evolution
- Best practices to address harassment
- Lessons learned
Presentation of the OO of the University of Alberta (UoA) and Concordia University (CU)

UofA
- 38,000 students (1st, 2nd, 3rd Cycle)
- 15,000 employees (4 campuses)
- 21% international students
- English Main language, second French

CU
- 45,000 students (1st, 2nd, 3rd Cycle)
- 6,000 employees (2 campuses)
- 17% International students
- English Main language, second French
Profile of ACCUO Members

- ACCUO has 37 members
- Variance in client base:
  - 66% serve students only
  - 44% serve faculty, staff, and students
- 75% have their own Terms of Reference and produce an annual report
Results of the ACCUO Survey: 62% responses

Who deals directly with harassment complaints?

- 43% said YES
- 57% said NO

How many harassment cases received per year?

- 60% received between 1 to 10 cases
- 40% received 10 cases or more

What type of harassment cases are received?

- 50% of the cases received are related to social media
- 30% psychological harassment
- 20% sexual harassment.
OO in Canada: not a linear evolution

1969

- Computer science riot

1971

- Ombuds Office created at both universities

CU

UofA

- Complaint letter from citizen
1970s to 1980s

**CU**
- CU starts using term harassment:
  - Disruptive behaviour
  - Inappropriate conduct
  - Violence incitement, libel, slander...

**UofA**
- UofA Faculty dispute Ombuds resigned
- **1976** New Ombuds position is created
  - Complaint and concern of students only
1980’s to 1990’s

CU

1981

- CU policy harassment: physical, verbal, psychological

1982-1983

- Ad hoc Intervention team: informal

UofA

- Secretary General: staff, faculty grievances
- President’s Advisory Committee on Sexual Harassment (PASCH)

- Equity Office (EO): promote human rights
- Student Ombuds Service (1st cycle)
- PASCH + EO = Office of Human Rights
1990’s to 2000

CU

1992

- Re-evaluation of internal policies
- Examine larger questions: expel or suspend a disruptor

1995

- Office Rights and Responsibilities: One stop

UofA

1992

- Sexual Assault Centre
- Graduate Student Association created 1st part-time ombuds position
2000 to Today

CU

2008- 2009
- Sexual Assault Centre

UofA

- Student Ombuds Services (1\textsuperscript{st}, 2\textsuperscript{nd}, 3\textsuperscript{rd} cycle)
- Office of Human Rights renamed Office of Safe Disclosure and Human Rights,
- Renamed: Office of the Student Ombuds (OSO)
- Created Sexual Violence Policy

2016
- Sexual Assault Centre

2018
# Best Practices to Address Harassment

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<th>Best Practices</th>
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<td>Refer harassment complaints diligently and confidentially to the appropriate office</td>
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<td>Be empathetic and listen to all clients: let complainant tell their story</td>
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<td>Urge the Complainant to complete a summary document of events and to keep you updated on the progress of events to ensure they understand process and delays</td>
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<td>Offer support throughout the process, refer to relevant policies</td>
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<td>Make sure the student understands the harassment process and harassment complaint process</td>
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<td>Assist the student in the complaint in addressing other administrative issues: academic issues</td>
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<td>Follow-up on the complaint</td>
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Lessons Learned

- Be careful in evaluating information
- Not a court interrogation
- Beware not to use “trigger words” or draw conclusions in an area in which you are not an expert; it is better to refer a person to the right resource or to work in collaboration
- Do not accept unwritten rules or practices to be fair because “that is the way it has always been done.”
- Question and evaluate practices, and see what is being done elsewhere.
- Beware of charming and manipulative harassers