

Office of the Ombudsman

Annual Report, 2020-2021



The Office of the Ombudsman is jointly supported by
Algonquin College and the Algonquin Students' Association



Algonquin College is located on the unceded and unsundered territory of the Algonquin people. Traditionally known as "Anishinaabe", Algonquin people are the original inhabitants of the wide swath of territory along the Ottawa River. In Algonquin culture, it is appropriate for guests to acknowledge the hospitality of their hosts when entering their territory. With this tradition in mind, Algonquin College respectfully thanks the Algonquin people for hosting us on their ancestral lands.

30 November 2021

Ombudsman Review Committee (ORC)
Algonquin College of Applied Arts and Technology
1385 Woodroffe Avenue
Ottawa, ON K2G 1V8

Dear Members of the ORC,

In accordance with section 3, subsection (3.11) of SA02: Ombudsman, Terms of Reference, the Office of the Ombudsman (the "**Office**") presents this annual report of our activities for the period 1 May 2020 through 30 April 2021. The reporting period fell within the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic.

This reporting year has been unlike any other. Similarly, in a departure from previous reports which focused on academic areas and departments, this Report is arranged by the top presenting concerns: **course management, evaluation, progression, interpersonal conflicts, academic appeals, and academic accommodations**. Each of these is immediately followed by an increased number of case summaries, in response to earlier feedback from the ORC, that these provide greater insight into the kind of concerns for which students, employees (full-time and part-time), and other stakeholders sought our assistance. Irrefutably, the COVID-19 pandemic is an underlying factor in almost all the caseload we handled.

In addition, again addressing an earlier request of the Algonquin College Executive Team (ACET) and the ORC's earlier request the Report presents our caseload on international students.

The statistical overview of the activities of the Office reflects the **403 files** opened in the reporting period. Of these, there were **296** student files, **90** non-student files (faculty, staff and the Algonquin Students' Association), and **17** files involving other stakeholders. The **403 total files** reflect a **25%** decrease from the 2019-2020 reporting period. Similarly, the **296 student files** reflect a **35%** decrease in our student files from the 2019-2020 reporting period. In contrast, the **90** non-student files (faculty, staff, and the Algonquin Students' Association) reflect an increase of **12%** over the same period. Also, outreach from 'other stakeholders' – namely: parents, support people, and interested external parties – increased sharply, more than quadruple the previous year's total of **4**. Overall, the files raised **983** topics of concern, of which **756** were academic-related. It appears that the decrease in our caseload may correlate with the decrease in the overall student population in the reporting period. It may also be that, especially for students new to the College, decreased opportunities for interpersonal interaction among the student body, and limited physical visibility, fewer students were aware that this resource was available. At the same time, we are encouraged at what appears to be an increased rate of referral of students by faculty and staff to the Office of the Ombudsman, as well as the ongoing invitations to assist the College in proactive interventions, policy/protocol development, and other such opportunities.

The Report presents a recommendation, along with a status update on recommendations from previous annual reports. There is also a section on an 'emerging issue' that we continue to observe but which is not specifically addressed in the recommendation.

Respectfully,

Office of the Ombudsman at Algonquin College.



Reflection

Algonquin College has been guided by its mission of transforming hopes and dreams into lifelong success, and its vision to be a global leader in personalized, digitally connected, experiential learning. This bold commitment has been challenged and tested at all levels of the College community by the rapidly evolving circumstances arising from the COVID-19 pandemic. Nonetheless, the College stands with great strength, recognizing that even challenges of this magnitude present significant opportunities for growth.

The COVID-19 pandemic has called on our humanity and creativity. It has also challenged our assumptions and confirmed certain realities, including that:

- clear, accurate, and timely communication is essential
- members of the College community are inter-dependent. There is no Algonquin College without students; similarly, student's hopes and dreams for a successful educational experience at Algonquin College cannot materialize without the people (all employees of the College – full-time and part-time, as well as stakeholders within the broader external community) whose collective expertise and support play a critical role in delivering upon the College's promise to students
- our boundaries of possibilities are more expansive than imagined – recognizing that the achievement of dreams must be tempered with reality, such as limited availability of expertise, time and resources
- barriers can be deconstructed, and seemingly impossible situations can be resolved when we work together across the College, and with partners within the broader external community

In this reporting period, in case after case, the resolutions for the concerns that came to our attention were found through the collaboration of all parties, and the willingness to focus on our shared interests. This collaborative attitude, anchored in the College's values - Caring, Learning, Integrity and Respect - is a strength to be cherished and protected.

As with all communities across the globe, there is a moment in history that beckons us to harness our collective strength for the journey to the post-COVID-19 pandemic future. In our local context, it is doing this knowing that:

- i. the College's ability to be adaptable and resilient falls on all of us
- ii. advancing the mission and vision of the College is bigger than any one of us
- iii. we can make much progress when we gather our individual and collective strengths, and focus on our common interests and shared values, while respecting opposing views
- iv. we have a responsibility and an opportunity to not only maintain but build foundations for an even stronger Algonquin College for the current and future generation

We are all encouraged to carry these lessons to the post-pandemic future to ensure an even stronger College. In harnessing our strengths, and carrying these lessons forward, we are equipping ourselves well for the journey ahead.

Appreciation

The Office of the Ombudsman remains inspired by the ingenuity, goodwill, and collaboration of the Algonquin College community at all levels in seeking to contribute and participate in a positive path to finding reasonable resolutions to the college-related students challenges that arise.

The Office of the Ombudsman is grateful for the support of the Ombudsman Review Committee (ORC). The current ORC members (2020-2021) are: Emily Ferguson – President, Algonquin Students' Association [Co-Chair]; Ben Bridgstock – Director, Student Support Services [Co-Chair]; Katrina Medina – Director, Algonquin Students' Association; Jessica Akwaeke – Director, Algonquin Students' Association; Nicholas Lefebvre – Student; Jack Doyle – General Manager, Algonquin Students' Association; Leslie Wyman – Faculty Representative; Katherine Root – Academic Administrative Representative; Leo Comunale – Community Representative; and Erin Langevin – Director of Labour Relations, Human Resources.

We also wish to express our appreciation to the Algonquin College Leadership Team, and the Algonquin Students' Association for understanding the unique role of our Office and for supporting the confidential, impartial, and independent nature of our operations.

Our sincere thanks to those who sought our assistance and trusted us with their concerns. We are grateful for the opportunity to serve you, to learn from you and to use your situation/matter, in whole or in part, as a catalyst to improve the learning and working experience of members of the Algonquin College community.

To all the students, faculty, staff, members of the Algonquin Students' Association and other stakeholders within and outside the College, who patiently and professionally work with us to resolve the matters that come to our attention, thank you.

Respectfully,

George Cole, Ombudsman
Barbara Carswell, Assistant Ombudsman
Carley Davidson, Ombudsman Officer

Office of the Ombudsman
Algonquin College
Ottawa, ON K2G 1V8



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Recommendation

To the Algonquin College Executive Team (ACET), the Office of the Ombudsman recommends that:

“The College increase its efforts in clarifying the meaning and terminology of “flexibility” and “personalized learning” to reconcile the expectations of students with the College’s commitments and capacity to deliver on such commitments.”

In handling our caseload, we regularly observed what appeared to be a misunderstanding of, or elevated expectations associated with programming and service delivery. This common theme reverberates across the stories we heard from our visitors — students, employees (full-time and part-time), and other stakeholders. Considering that the boundaries of *programming* and *service delivery* have evolved during the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, there is an indication that some students’ expectations and/or understanding of **flexibility** and **personalized learning** may have evolved and differ from the College’s commitments. This potential misunderstanding, if not addressed, could jeopardize not only the important relationship between students and faculty in the classroom; and between students and support-staff/administration on service delivery matters; but the College’s reputation related to its promises.

In the reporting period, our Office observed the incredible resilience of students in pursuing their educational goals, while juggling other responsibilities, and adapting to the rapidly evolving circumstances of the COVID-19 pandemic. Similarly, the College (faculty, support-staff, administration, and other stakeholders) has been remarkably resilient and adaptable in ensuring continuity in the learning and working experience of members of the Algonquin College community. The College found innovative solutions, within a very short time frame, to many challenges even while continuing to deliver on its commitment to student success. Faculty had to be creative and develop online materials, while continuing to deliver their course(s); some needed to learn technical skills midstream. AC Online had to suddenly respond to increasing demand to support students in finding different pathways regarding their education. The College quickly transitioned to virtual programming and service delivery; made innovative adjustments to courses, and placement/lab/clinical requirements; invested in physically-separated learning environments, reduced registration fees; developed temporary academic grading options to minimize adverse academic impacts; allowed students who withdrew to return the following semester on a priority basis; arranged for personal protective equipment (PPE) testing and provided PPE to facilitate placements; reduced clinical hour requirements in consultation with accreditation partners; and enhanced Information Technology (IT) support/access, to name a few that had an impact on our caseload. In the same light, the Algonquin Students’ Association made creative arrangements and strategic investments to continue to support student success.

We applaud the resiliency and adaptability of all members of the broader Algonquin College community.



Update on Previous Recommendations

RECOMMENDATIONS

UPDATE ON PREVIOUS RECOMMENDATIONS

1. In our 2018-2019 Annual Report, we recommended that the College - in collaboration with the necessary stakeholders - review the process for determining, implementing and monitoring academic accommodations, including retroactive accommodations.

1. The College stated in its Response to the 2018-2019 Annual Report that:

“We will coordinate and carry out a continuous improvement process review and appropriate counter measures to mitigate barriers to our learners. This will involve using AC Way process improvement model and incorporating initiatives into the Learner-Driven Implementation Plan.”

UPDATE:

At the time of presenting this report, the College had formed a ‘Working Group’ that is reviewing the retroactive accommodation process in order to propose necessary changes, and proceed accordingly, following the designated approval processes within the College.

2. In our 2018-2019 Annual Report, we recommended that the College develop a unified approach in the processes and practices to support students: specifically, clear workflows between the Registrar’s Office, academic areas, and other service areas to effectively manage student-related matters and minimize errors or omissions.

2. The College stated in its Response to the 2018-2019 Annual Report that:

“We will coordinate and carry out a continuous improvement process review and appropriate counter measures to mitigate barriers to our learners. This will involve using AC Way process improvement model and incorporating initiatives as appropriate into the Learner-Driven Implementation Plan. In addition, this recommendation will be considered as part of the transition to needs required in the new Student Information System. As this is a large and complex issue to resolve and as such we anticipate this being a multi-year approach to resolving these items.”

3. In our 2018-2019 Annual Report, we recommended that the College develop a policy that provides guidance to all stakeholders involved in placements (clinical, practicum, and field/other placements).

3. The College stated in its Response to the 2018-2019 Annual Report that:

“We will work with Academic Departments to review and update as appropriate department/program-level policies and procedures guiding placements to ensure clear and fair processes. We will establish mechanisms for the clear communication of these policies to faculty and students.”

Update on Previous Recommendations

RECOMMENDATIONS	UPDATE ON PREVIOUS RECOMMENDATIONS
<p>4. In our 2018-2019 Annual Report, we recommended that the College continues its efforts in line with our first recommendation in the 2017-2018 Annual Report. Specifically, that the College “ensures the consistent application of the Academic Appeal, Review of Final Grade, Academic Dishonesty, and the Plagiarism policies across Algonquin College.”</p>	<p>4 The College stated in its Response to the 2018-2019 Annual Report that:</p> <p>“The Academic Area notes your continuing recommendation to review and adjust department-level practices and operating procedures to ensure consistent application of College policies and procedures. We will renew our efforts to improve the application of these policies.”</p>
<p>5. In our 2019-2020 Annual Report, we recommended a review of the policies on Academic Appeal, Review of Final Grade, Academic Dishonesty, and Plagiarism to ensure their clarity, alignment and consistent application across the College</p>	<p>5. The College stated in its Response to the 2018-2019 Annual Report that:</p> <p>“We acknowledge that this recommendation has carried forward from past reports including the Ombudsman’s Annual Reports of 2017-2018 and 2018-2019. It is with regret that our efforts to date to improve the application of these policies has not yet demonstrated satisfactory outcomes for our learners.</p> <p>We are pleased to advise that in Fall 2020, a working group was struck to review and revise policy AA18 Academic Dishonesty and AA20 Plagiarism with the intent to provide clarity and collapse the two policies into one. The policy is targeted for approval by the Algonquin College Executive Team in June 2021.</p> <p>The working group will then move its focus to the review and revision of policy AA19 Academic Appeal and AA37 Review of Final Grade with the intent to obtain approval from the Algonquin College Executive Team in December 2021.</p> <p>In further building upon these efforts, we will be sure to involve the use of the AC Way process improvement model and the <i>Plan, Do, Study, Adjust</i> methodology.</p> <p>UPDATE:</p> <p>At the time of presenting this report, the College had followed through on its commitment to review and revise policy AA18 Academic Dishonesty and AA20 Plagiarism with the intent to provide clarity and collapse the two policies into one by June 2021. The new policy - AA48 Academic Integrity was approved by the Algonquin College Executive Team in June 2021.</p> <p>Further, a working group is currently reviewing and revising policy AA19 Academic Appeal and AA37 Review of Final Grade. It is expected that a revised policy will soon be presented to the Algonquin College Executive Team for approval.</p>

The Office of the Ombudsman applauds the College for its leadership and ongoing commitment to improve processes and procedures to reflect the voice of students, faculty, staff and other interested stakeholders. We hope that the revised policies will be applied fairly and consistently to further promote a successful learning and working experience of all members of the Algonquin College community and partners in the broader external community.



Highlights

May 2020 – April 2021

Top Presenting Concern Categories

- 27%** Course Management (107)
- 25%** Evaluation (101)
- 23%** Progression (93)
- 20%** Academic Accommodations (80)
- 16%** Interpersonal Conflict (64)
- 14%** Academic Appeals (58)

Client Composition

- 296** Students
- 90** College Personnel (Non-students)
- 17** Other

Table of Contents

- 4 ... Reflection
- 5 ... Appreciation
- 6 ... Recommendation
- 7-8 ... Update on Previous Recommendations
- 11 ... About the Office of the Ombudsman
- 12-32 ... Top Presenting Concerns
- 33-35 ... International Students
- 36-37 ... Emerging Issue
- 38-44 ... Appendices

403 Total Files

- ↓ **25%** in total files from 2019-20
- ↓ **35%** in student caseload 2019-20
- ↑ **11%** in non-student caseload (2019-20)
- ↑ **4x** increase in 'other stakeholders' (2019-20)

Total Caseload Trend

- 2020-2021:** 403 Files
- 2019-2020:** 539 Files
- 2018-2019:** 503 Files
- 2017-2018:** 466 Files
- 2016-2017:** 485 Files

Area(s)/Department(s) Most Frequently Involved

Centre for Accessible Learning	32
School of Business	30
School of Health, Public Safety, and Community Studies	27
AC Online / Centre for Continuing and Online Learning	22
Algonquin Students' Association	15
School of Advanced Technology	15
Registrar's Office - Fees	14
Risk Management (including Security)	13
Registrar's Office - Financial Aid	12
Registrar's Office - Admissions	10
Registrar's Office - Registration	9

Top Academic Programs in Contact

- 22 Computer Engineering Technology – Computing Science
- 14 Practical Nursing
- 14 Bachelor of Commerce e-Supply Chain Management
- 13 Veterinary Technician
- 11 AC Online – Business
- 10 Computer Systems Technician
- 9 Computer Programmer
- 6 AC Online – Community Studies
- 6 Project Management

About the Office of the Ombudsman

Since 1979, the Office of the Ombudsman has played a unique role in the Algonquin College community. The Office is jointly supported by Algonquin College and the Algonquin Students' Association without any compromise of the Ombudsman's autonomy. As identified in the [Ombudsman Policy \(SA02\)](#), updated in March 2021, the Office of the Ombudsman is to provide an independent, impartial and confidential process through which students of the College may pursue the resolution of any College-related concern.

Specifically, the Ombudsman has the mandate:

1. To provide information to students on College policies and procedures, the rights and responsibilities of students in College situations, and provide advice on options for the resolution of College-related concerns, including where and to whom concerns should be appropriately directed.
2. To investigate, at the absolute discretion of the Ombudsman, any student(s) complaint about aspects of student life, including:
 - a) academic matters,
 - b) services provided by the College or the Students' Association,
 - c) the operations of the College or the Students' Association,
 - d) the treatment received from other students, and
 - e) the treatment received from employees.

The Office of the Ombudsman adheres to the standards of practice that guide the work of all Ombudsman/persons across Canada and other parts of the world. These standards of practice include the following (see our [website](#) for more details):

- I. Independence,
- II. Impartiality,
- III. Confidentiality,
- IV. Accessibility, and
- V. Informality.

The principles of natural justice, fairness, and credibility are essential to these standards of practice.

In fulfilling our mandate, the Office uses multiple methods of intervention, including:

- Coaching/Advice,
- Dialogue Facilitation/Mediation,
- Fact Finding/Investigation,
- Problem Resolution,
- Providing information on policies and procedures,
- Referral, and
- Shuttle Diplomacy



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Top Presenting Concerns

Overview

This section of the report presents details on the top-presenting concerns that came to our attention, namely **course management, evaluation, progression, interpersonal conflicts, academic appeals, and academic accommodations**.

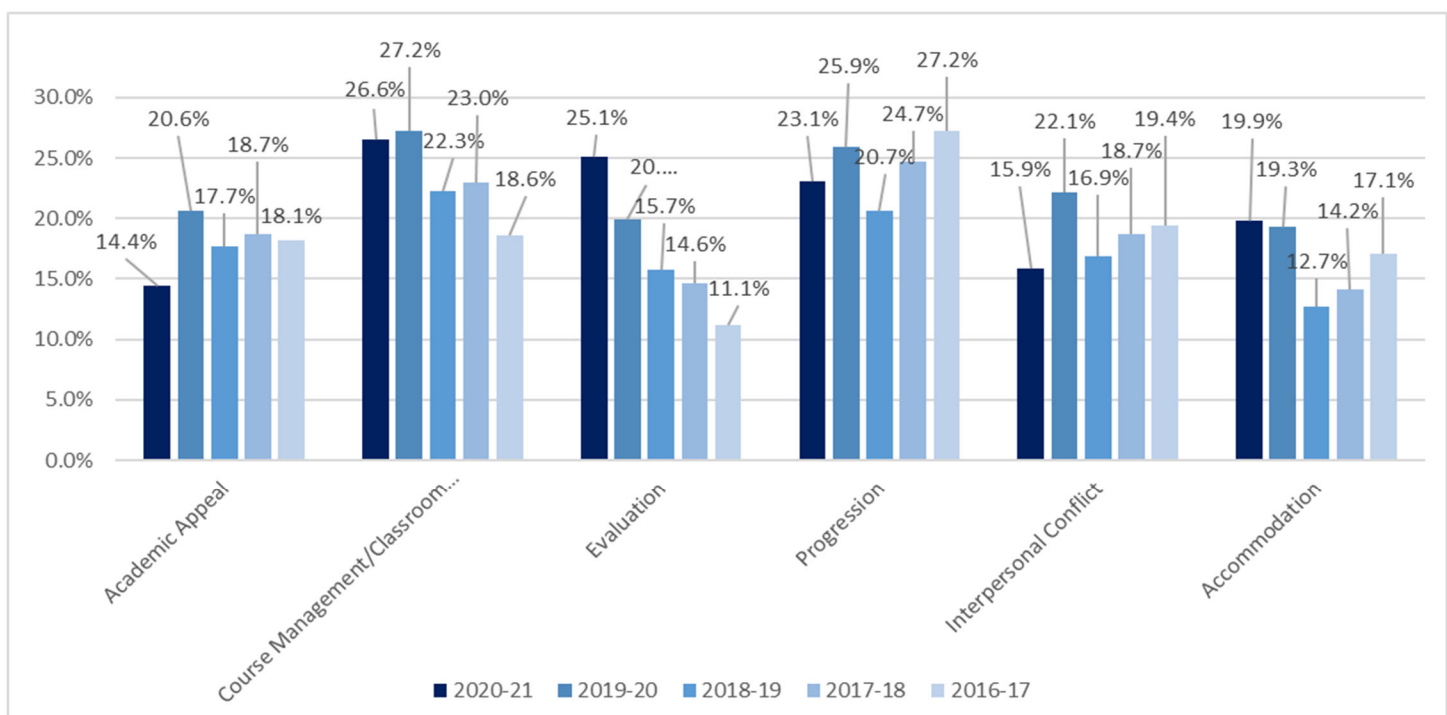
Although they are presented under separate categories, these concerns are not mutually exclusive as some files simultaneously raised several topics of concern. Case summaries are presented at the end of each category to provide insight into the kind of concerns that were raised. While confidentiality prevents us from providing the details of specific cases, we hope these examples are useful for a better understanding of the range of issues we handled.

As with all our reports, we recognize that our observations are only based on our work with students, faculty, support staff, administration (and other interested stakeholders), and does not necessarily reflect the experience of all members of the Algonquin College community. However, we are always mindful of the fact that students (and other interested stakeholders) usually contact us under unique circumstances, including where they perceive unfairness and have not found a satisfactory resolution within the College; where there are no clear processes for addressing their concerns; and when they feel aggrieved and seek to raise concerns that sometimes reflect the sentiments of many other students/people who may not want to come forward for reasons best known to them.

As shown in Fig. 1, the top two categories, not surprisingly, - Course Management and Evaluation – have been steadily growing over the last five reporting periods. The difference though is the underlying factors —primarily, the COVID-19 pandemic — that influenced the issues raised in this reporting period. While the circumstances of the pandemic cannot be compared to the past, it challenged assumptions, tested vulnerabilities, stretched boundaries, shed light on some realities, and presented lessons that are instructive for the future.

Fig. 7 and Fig. 8 in the Appendices (see page 37) presents some graphs showing course management related concerns by academic area, and in comparison to the total registered students at the College in Fall 2020.

Fig.1 Annual Comparison of Top Presenting Concerns by Proportion of Total Caseload



Course Management

This category comprises matters regarding teaching and delivery, course-related learning resources, course outlines, course section information, course policies, and other matters associated with the learning process. Overall, 63% of the concerns in this category were focused on teaching and delivery; followed by 19% on course-related learning resources; and 18% on course outlines and course policies.

In our opinion, many of the concerns in this category were prompted by challenges arising from the COVID-19 pandemic. Faculty had to quickly transition to teaching remotely, some with limited knowledge of a new level of technological teaching tools, and in some cases, it took time to adjust. It appears that some instructional materials could not be easily taught remotely and that caused some frustration. In reality, there are elements of in-person interaction that technology has not yet been able to replicate.

The common theme of issues raised included:

- a) adjustments to the sudden transition from in-person learning to virtual/remote learning platforms. This includes perception of frustrations about the learning curve associated with using virtual teaching tools, or an alleged lack of interest in adapting to virtual teaching methods in some cases; and perceived ineffective use of teaching tools — for instance, projecting a full page of handwritten notes.
- b) different expectations about the adequacy of support for learning success. This includes the perception of limited access to some instructors (for instance — faculty allegedly not fully available during class time, late arrival and/or early departure; expectations of being able to communicate with faculty outside class time).
- c) perceptions of a disconnect between what was written in published course outlines and/or course section information and what was actually taught in the course.
- d) perceptions of a disconnect between what was taught in the course and what was eventually assessed in examinations/assignments/quizzes.
- e) allegations of unexpected changes in assessment schemes, learning objectives, and other expectations announced in the middle of the course or academic term/semester, without adequate student consultation.
- f) misunderstanding and/or miscommunication of expectations of deadlines regarding the submission of assignments, projects and/or examinations, particularly: take-home exams or exams done virtually (or even where deadlines are clear, submission instructions on how to submit and/or in what format); misunderstanding and/or miscommunication on project expectations, rubric outline, and reasons why a student earned a particular grade.
- g) expectations on privacy; specifically, whether to turn on or off cameras on students' personal computers and/or mobile computing devices on remote learning platforms.
- h) both tone and timeliness issues with electronic communication; barriers such as the perception of untimely (based on individual subjective definition of timely) responses to email; and sharing assumptions with a student about their lack of initiative or effort to find needed information from peers or as posted on course pages: and
- i) perception of a lack of ownership of course material being taught — for instance, course materials allegedly written by predecessor or another faculty member.

For the purposes of clarity, students were compassionate about the difficulty some faculty had, and were also clear that the issue(s) raised pertained to difficulty with digital teaching/learning tools or platform and not subject-matter expertise.

Comparably, course management-related matters were among the primary reasons faculty, staff and administration contacted our Office for assistance. The reported concerns included:

- a) perceived unrealistic expectations of the availability of faculty/staff — for instance, expectations of almost immediate response to emails and/or voice messages (including, evenings, weekends or while away from work); and an expectation to tutor or almost re-teach the whole material(s) outside class time.
- b) excessive reliance on faculty: to re-teach course materials outside of class; to provide information readily available from designated sources (such as announcement posts on course pages, referenced articles, and textbooks); and to be provided with the information missed in class regardless of the reason for a student's absence.
- c) where a student allegedly expects a pass or grade adjustment, based on extenuating personal circumstances, while the work done or submitted does not meet the required standard(s) for the grade they want; or an expectation of the availability of "second chance" evaluation when a student is simply disappointed and would like the opportunity to improve the grade, without consideration of the fairness to others, limits on time or resources, course integrity, and other implications.
- d) frustration arising from an allegation that a faculty member's personal dislike, bias or prejudice against a student explained a lower-than-expected grade.
- e) insistence that courses should have consistent layout (for instance – Brightspace features, materials, format of evaluation, class rules such as submission methods and preferred communication methods) in all classes/courses, regardless of the "fit" of a standardized layout to different courses.
- f) managing conflict with students where difficult program changes are misinterpreted as evidence that faculty/staff did not care, did not try, did not appreciate how hard the situation was for students, particularly in the face of exhaustive "behind the scenes" efforts by faculty/staff to accommodate program requirements during the COVID-19 pandemic.
- g) cameras turned off in virtual/remote classes, resulting in difficulties for faculty to engage students and encourage participation, group discussions and mutual learning possible in in-class settings.
- h) where a student requests an adjustment to established course requirements, such as deferred evaluation and/or any other academic accommodation, and provides insufficient information for the faculty or staff to reasonably consider the request before the student escalates the matter through other informal or formal avenues.
- i) alleged unprofessional, inappropriate or misdirected communication from a student, such as sending multiple incomplete emails expecting faculty/staff to track, assemble and quickly action on the message.

Concluding Remarks:

Evidently, the circumstances associated with the COVID-19 pandemic had significant impact on the issues raised under the course management category. The pandemic necessitated many adjustments, and the transition was challenging on many levels. In handling our caseload, we observed that:

- i. it is important to have clear expectations.
- ii. mutual respect is a necessity in any healthy relationship, including the student-faculty relationship.
- iii. students feedback of their experience in the learning process can be constructively used to enhance the overall learning and working experience, especially when the focus is on addressing the underlying factors that influence the issues raised.

In addition, we observed that students get frustrated when they perceive a repetition of the same issues they have raised for address, especially when they assert that their predecessors raised similar issues in the past. The College is encouraged to pay closer attention to students' feedback in course evaluations, not as a mechanism to penalize faculty, but to identify trends and matters that needs to be addressed to make the overall learning and working experience even stronger.

The case summary below provides a glimpse of some of the issues raised in our caseload on course management.

Case Summary: Expectations, Perceptions, and Reality

Near the end of the term/semester, Beatrice approached their academic department to raise concerns about the professionalism of Professor XYZ. Allegedly, Professor XYZ appeared to be smoking during a virtual class; sometimes appeared inebriated; and frequently made comments which made some students uncomfortable. Beatrice was also concerned that the classes were supposed to be three (3) hours long, per their class schedule and under normal on-campus circumstances; however, the virtual classes sometimes lasted only thirty (30) to sixty (60) minutes before the professor ended it. Allegedly, Professor XYZ gave the impression of unfair grading by suggesting what time of the day students should submit their work so his/her mood would influence the grading; replied with unhelpful or discouraging comments when students reached out for help during class or by email; and suggested that s/he was not afraid of students reporting him/her because s/he was planning to leave and felt there was nothing the College could do. According to Beatrice, Professor XYZ appeared to need support with the transition to teaching virtually/remotely and had difficulty using virtual tools in teaching strategies. Students were required to submit their assignments/projects in hard copy for grading, and while teaching, Professor XYZ would write on a piece of paper and hold it up to the camera, which was often very difficult to see (and vice versa, because s/he could not properly see student's work during class.)

Beatrice applied for admission at a university to pursue further studies. While checking her transcript, she noticed that her grade in Professor XYZ's course was lower than she expected. Beatrice speculated that it was reprisal arising from her complaints about the professor. Beatrice contacted the Office of the Ombudsman for advice. Considering Beatrice's speculation that the lower grade was potentially linked to reprisal, we discussed her rights and responsibilities as well as her options for a resolution through several College policies, including AA37: Review of Final Grade, AA19: Academic Appeal, and SA07: Student Complaint Policy. All these policies had an option for an informal resolution, including an outreach directly to the Professor. Beatrice decided to contact the professor directly to inquire about her lower grade.

Professor XYZ informed Beatrice that she had a lower grade because there was some missing material in her final assignment. It turned out that because Professor XYX required a hardcopy submission of the assignment, Beatrice submitted a soft copy to Professor XYZ, and also to someone else on campus who printed it and submitted the hard copy for grading. Inadvertently, part of Beatrice's work went missing in the printing process, so Professor XYZ did not receive the missing material for grading. Meanwhile, Beatrice was unaware that part of her work went missing in the printing process. Beatrice thought it was unfair considering that she had no control over the error. It was during the COVID-19 pandemic; there was limited access to campus; there was a back-log with mailing via postal services; she had submitted a soft copy of the assignment; and still made the best arrangement she could by submitting it to someone on campus to print and submit the hard copy on her behalf. Under the circumstances, Beatrice did not have an opportunity to review the paper submission before grading and could not have known that something was missing. Professor XYZ fairly graded the assignment, based on the paper submission, and was unaware that something got missing during the printing process.

Ultimately the assignment was regraded, including the part that mistakenly went missing, and Beatrice received a final grade that properly reflected her work in the course.

Comment(s)/Feedback: The COVID-19 pandemic, as we observed, affected everyone (including students, faculty, and staff) although everyone was impacted differently. Depending on the unique circumstances of a case, it is usually helpful when students and faculty collaborate to address their differences. Sometimes, certain things get in the way, including - not focusing on shared interest, not collaborating in good faith, lack of mutual respect, imbalance of power and inability to harness the collective strength. The College's mission of transforming hopes and dreams into lifelong success cannot happen without the joint effort of students, faculty, staff, other stakeholders, and partners in the broader external community.

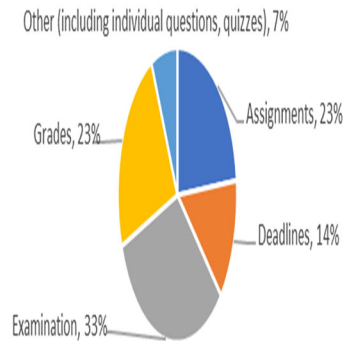


Evaluation

This category pertains to matters that arose from student performance evaluation and assessment, including assignments, quizzes, examinations, final grades, and impact on performance evaluation due to deadlines. In some cases they relate to adjustments made to student performance evaluation and assessment during the COVID-19 pandemic; in other cases, the nature of the concerns was similar to those raised during in-person classes in previous reporting years.

The sub-categories of the types of concerns raised under evaluation is shown in Fig. 2. As you can see, examination related issues were the most frequent.

Fig. 2 Types of Concerns about Evaluation



One common concern which intersects with Accommodation, another top-presenting category, was that students who were used to the quiet facilities of the library, or a proctored exam room may have had poorer performance remotely while trying to find an undistracted working space, on camera, using unfamiliar technology, all while coping with the natural stress of evaluation.

Other concerns raised under this category included:

- the relevance of certain content on a test or quiz (questions on whether it was taught in the course, or whether it should be assessed based on the course learning requirements).
- the accuracy of the student's numerical score based on a rubric where the student interprets the rubric requirements to have been met.
- a perception that the instructions for a given assignment/assessment were unclear and therefore students did not know to include certain criteria or quality that otherwise would have improved their grade.
- expectation that there should be some leniency or understanding of exceptional circumstances that led to a student's late submission of work (which sometimes results in a zero grade, and in some cases became the limiting factor to a student's success in the course).
- some courses and/or programs do not offer Failure with Supplemental Privilege (FSP) opportunities, where a student feels they are close to having passed and would like another opportunity to demonstrate their knowledge.
- where a student has missed an assessment (for various reasons, whether inadvertently or due to personal circumstances) and is seeking an opportunity to demonstrate their knowledge (with compassionate consideration of the circumstance), when at the same time the perspective is that it would be an unfair opportunity (for an extension or to have insight from peers) to allow the student a "second chance."

It is worth noting that Algonquin College implemented several measures that significantly addressed some of the concerns students raised, such as allowing flexible scheduling of exams (late at night when children were in bed), alternate assignments, extended submission deadlines, penalties for late submission rather than refused assignments, extended use of deferred evaluations, special academic grading options to minimize adverse academic impacts, option for honorable withdrawal in-lieu of a failing grade; reduced clinical hour requirements in consultation with accreditation partners, and enhanced IT support/access, to name a few that had a positive impact on our caseload.

Similarly, students demonstrated remarkable resilience in pursuing their studies, adjusting their employment schedules, accepting weekend labs and frequently showing an understanding of the challenges the College was grappling with.

The following case summaries reflect some of the issues that were raised in this category.

Case Summary: Is there Room for Flexibility?

Jo was enrolled in the third-level of a two-year program and hoped to graduate in the next term. The clinical hours in their program had been reduced by half because of the COVID-19 pandemic, but Jo was committed to learning and intended to do everything possible to do well. However, Jo was halfway through the winter term before realizing that online labs could be redone and marked repeatedly within the software program. Essentially, students were not required to submit their first attempt; they retained the discretion to choose when they were satisfied with their learning – at which point a student could press << submit >> and only then would their latest/best grade be recorded by the instructor. From that point forward, Jo redid the labs online as needed before submitting them. As a result, the lab marks improved dramatically. When the Evaluation and Progression Committee sent a warning letter reflecting Jo's earlier premature submissions, Jo asked how to improve, but did not mention the initial misunderstanding of the option to redo labs within the software program.

Jo's end of term grade fell just short of the requirement to write a "Failure with Supplemental Privilege (FSP)". Further, lack of success in this course meant repeating its two co-requisites. Jo was advised by some friends to contact the Office of the Ombudsman regarding options to appeal.

Jo met with our Office, but readily acknowledged that the final grade had been impacted by the misunderstanding of the software program and not redoing the online labs before submission, as other students had done. We suggested reaching out to the academic program and asking if there was room for flexibility in allowing Jo to write an FSP, given that there were already COVID-19 related challenges in the course; that there was clear improvement in lab marks once Jo had realized the option to resubmit; and that Jo would experience a three-semester delay otherwise. To support the success of the student, the academic program allowed the FSP: Jo did very well, moved on to the final level of the Program, and graduated with an impressive GPA.



Case Summary: COVID-19 Related Issues Contributing to Lack of Success in Final Exam

Sasha's own description was that he was "not a strong student, but one who with hard work and the help of professors was managing to get through courses". Sasha was disappointed when he did not pass the final exam of a challenging, third-level course in a computer program.

Sasha has a disability affecting concentration and had a Letter of Accommodation to help him overcome the academic barriers this posed. When the College closed because of the COVID-19 pandemic and classes were being held remotely, he experienced multiple challenges: he no longer had access to the tutor who had provided him with considerable weekly support; he could no longer use the library for quiet study; he was sharing cramped living space with two other people so had no relief from constant distractions, and he could not work at all until his young child was in bed. Emails from Sasha were sent to our Office very late at night or in the early morning hours, attesting to these challenges. Sasha could no longer use the CAL Testing Centre to assist his focus in exams. His professor had done the best to accommodate the situation by rescheduling his exams from morning to evening, by giving him assignments that were not time sensitive, and by offering direct virtual support to help in the absence of the tutor.

Sasha felt that it was unfair he was unable to succeed mostly because of COVID-19 pandemic related factors outside of his control, particularly when the dramatic decline in his academic progress corresponded with the start of remote learning and the inaccessibility of needed accommodations. He had hoped he could be granted extra marks in view of the situation and when that was not possible, wanted to appeal. The Office of the Ombudsman discussed possible options, such as the opportunity to redo the exam in a way that more closely gave him the quiet that he needs, but he insisted he would be just trying again in the same environment. The College had also made available several exceptional options to support students faced with the challenges of COVID-19. Those options included an appeal with the option of asking for an "Honourable Withdrawal" if the appeal was unsuccessful, deferred evaluations, and/or conversion of a low final grade to an Aegrotat (AG) credit. Ultimately, with the support of the Academic Chair and his instructor, Sasha chose deferred evaluation with the option to apply for the AG credit.

Case Summary: The easiest solution isn't always the best solution

Tim contacted his academic department regarding his disagreement with a final grade. He was provided several options, including – a review of final grade, academic appeal, and changing the grade to AG due to exceptional COVID-19 circumstances (an option provided only in that term/semester for students who believed their performance was impacted by the COVID-19 related changes). Tim chose the AG grade in two courses, which happened to be his highest course grades. It appears that Tim did not fully understand the implications of his decision, although the informational websites clearly stated that students should first consider the type of course and potential impacts. Additionally, students had to consent that they are aware this change cannot be reversed. Immediately after the grades were changed, Tim noticed the impact on his GPA and contacted a faculty member about changing it back. The faculty member did not understand because the grade submitted was different than the AG grade; hence, Tim was referred to the Registrar's Office (RO). Tim contacted his client service officer and multiple contacts in the RO over the next three days and was referred to his Program Coordinator. Eventually, the College concluded that there was sufficient notice and in fairness to all other similar requests, Tim's grade would not change. Tim thought it was unfair because he needed stronger grades for an application for further studies at another institution.

Tim contacted the Office of the Ombudsman and upon reviewing the available information, our Office concluded that the College provided sufficient and thorough information for Tim to make an informed decision. Barring any exceptional circumstance that may have impaired his judgment, there was not enough grounds to warrant an exceptional reversal of the AG grade. Tim was offered other supports to improve his likelihood of success in his application for further studies. He was also advised to contact the Ombuds Office at the other institution, should he believe there is unfairness in the admissions process.

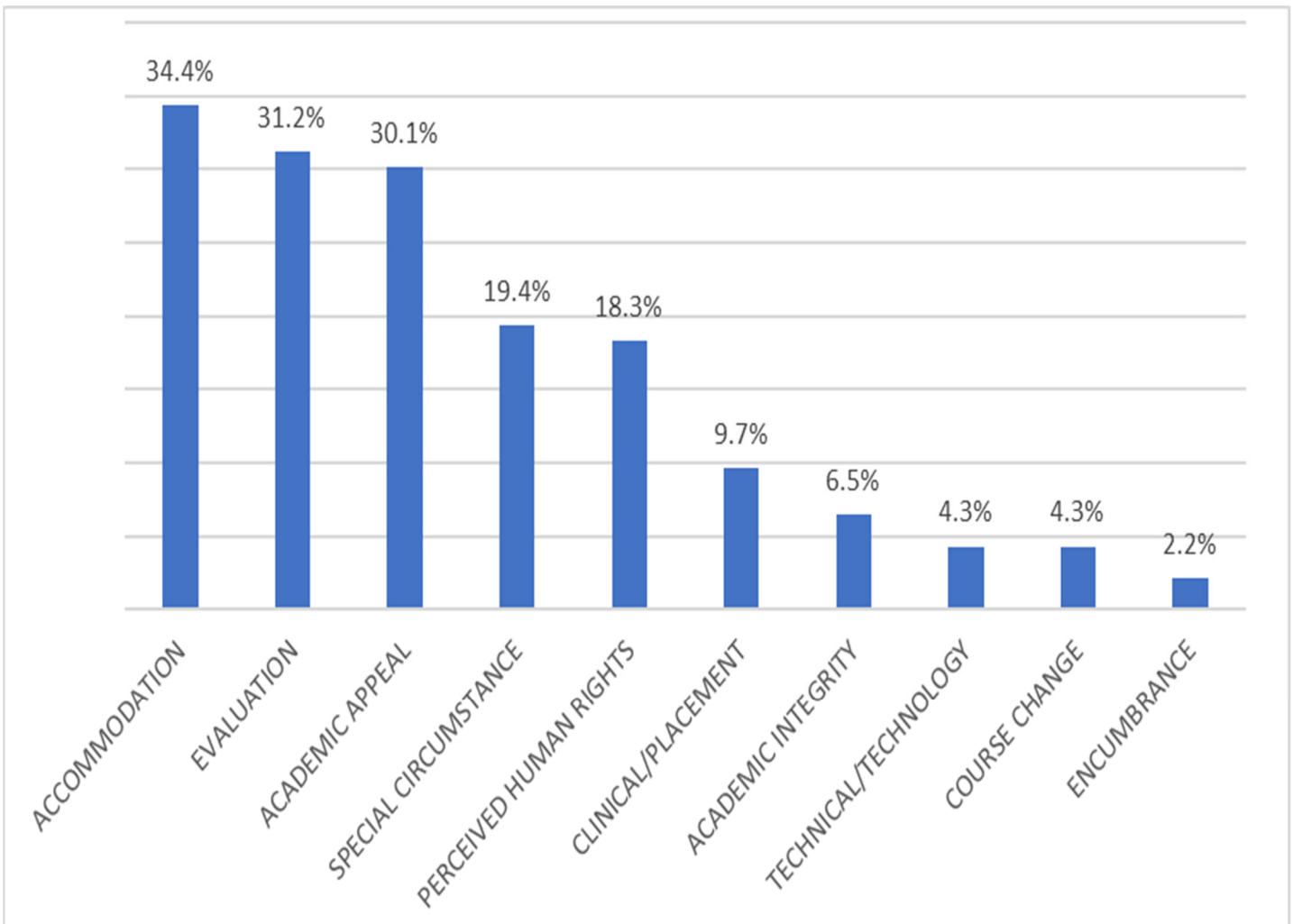
Progression

This category addresses matters regarding students' progression in their studies or graduating from their studies to secure employment opportunities and/or pursue further studies. It also involves non-academic related matters where the potential impact on students was significant; hence, they sought resolutions that offered more flexibility and/or had expectations for personalized service delivery at the College – for instance: addressing matters with the Registrar's Office (including Financial Aid), Student Support Services, Financial Services (specifically, unresolved financial encumbrances), and other service delivery areas/departments.

Other issues under this category arose from the cascading effect of the interruption in the operations of partners in the broader external community whose services are essential for the smooth running of the College – for instance: COVID-19 related backlogs that delayed issuance of international student visas (and study permits), delays in obtaining police background checks required for placements in vulnerable sectors, delays in obtaining driver's license, and delays in obtaining the necessary immunization (or other medical) clearance for placements.

The issues under this category intersected with the other top presenting concerns. As shown in Fig. 3, accommodation-related matters (including retroactive accommodation) had the most intersection with progression.

Fig. 3 Categories most often Intersecting with Progression



In the next few pages, several case summaries reflecting some of the concerns raised are presented to provide more context on our caseload, what we did, and how they collectively informed our recommendation in this report.

Case Summary: Lost in Translation

Pauline returned to school, after a short leave of absence, to complete the remaining credits in her program of studies. She read a notification on Brightspace, directed at the whole cohort, that students were required to submit proof of placement hours completion. It had to be signed off by the appropriate level of management at the placement site, and had to be completed within the last year. Pauline started to worry that her previously completed placement hours would not be accepted. She made several attempts to contact someone at the placement site to verify the completion of her placement hours. Unfortunately, the manager who signed off her placement hours had left the company and the employer had shut down the business due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Pauline was unable to reach any of the previous contacts who were at the required level to sign off the placement hours she completed.

Pauline felt she was in an impossible situation, and it was unfair that the placement hours she successfully completed, before her leave of absence, no longer counted. She now had to redo those placement hours. Pauline contacted the Office of the Ombudsman to explore her options for a resolution. When our Office contacted the academic department to discuss the matter, it turned out that Pauline's academic transcript had not been checked as she contacted the academic program about providing the necessary signed off documents to verify the completion of her placement hours. Hence, the academic department was focused on assisting Pauline to get the placement hours acknowledged. The academic department and Pauline were both unaware that, fortunately, she already had the placement credit earned per the credit transfer when she re-entered the program in advanced standing. The notification on Brightspace did not apply to Pauline, although it was sent to all students in her cohort. Pauline already had the placement credit so the attempts to demonstrate her completion of placement hours was unnecessary. Subsequently, Pauline was able to continue with her studies.

Case Summary: Any Room for Flexibility in Eligibility Deadline?

Ava applied in May and was registering in a one-year diploma program. As her Ontario Secondary School Diploma showed that she had only the "basic" level in Senior English, she was required to take an English Language Skills Assessment test to determine her eligibility for admission. Because of the COVID-19 pandemic, the test was online, but she did not have the required video camera on her computer. She was told to take an English course and wrote to the Upgrading Centre in the College, understanding that bursaries are available for courses taken through the Centre. Because of the COVID-19 pandemic, the Centre was closed and she was advised to go to the English School of Canada. She then verified with the College that out of the multiple offerings at the School, she had indeed selected the correct course to meet the requirements, and subsequently checked that she had the correct textbooks.

In early June, the earliest possible date, Ava began the course and found it was excellent, but quickly discovered that she would not be able to finish the five modules proceeding at the normal rate until October. She checked with the College but initially was told that August 1st was the deadline by which to provide proof of eligibility; without this her seat would be released, although she could be waitlisted. She felt that it was unfair that she had followed the College's advice in a difficult circumstance regarding which language school and course, knowing that she would be required to meet an impossible deadline.

The Office of the Ombudsman worked with the Registrar's Office, who agreed to make an exception in view of the situation and allowed Ava to complete the course (and provide proof of meeting the language requirement) by the end of August.

Case Summary: Student Seeking Exception in Registering for Placement

Bartha perceived that the requirement that a prerequisite course must be completed *before* registering for a placement was merely a technicality; by registering early, she would be able to begin the placement in early spring, almost immediately after the course ended. Her concern was that if she were forced to show successful completion before registering, the delay would jeopardize her chance of placement in schools near her, the school year would be almost over, and she would be forced to travel to access alternate placement sites. Bartha asserted that having to travel to her placement would also detract from the additional time she needed as the result of her disability to keep up with her studies. She sought help from the Office of the Ombudsman in the hope that the prerequisite completion requirement could be set aside.

While gathering information to understand the requirement and explore whether expedited registration was possible, the Office of the Ombudsman learned that Bertha had yet to complete an outstanding second prerequisite from the previous semester. She had expected that that matter would be addressed through a retroactive accommodation, although this decision had been pending for some time. Our Office followed up on that request for accommodation; shortly after, Bertha was advised that retroactive accommodation had been refused. This meant that her hope to be “pre-registered” for a March placement was even more unlikely, as she was missing two pre-requisites.

Bartha decided to appeal the retroactive accommodation decision and asked for help in understanding the process. We explained the appeal process but used that opportunity to encourage her to meet with the academic program and her disability counsellor to better understand program requirements and plan accordingly.

Case Summary: COVID Creating Impossible Domino Situation for Determined Student

Z is a permanent resident who registered in the Winter term/semester for a two-year diploma program. The Ontario Student Assistance Program (OSAP) required that she provides a Social Insurance Number (SIN) number, which because of her status first required that she have a valid work permit. With response time more than tripled because of COVID-19 related delays, her work permit expired before a new one could be issued. Eventually, despite evidence of her best efforts in working to obtain the updated documentation in this environment, her OSAP application expired, and she was left owing tuition for the winter term. In May, she applied for an emergency bursary, but as she was no longer officially a student, she was ineligible. In June, her file was sent to Collections. Further, as her file was encumbered because she had not received OSAP, she was unable to register for Fall Term. It was at this point that Z reached out to the Office of the Ombudsman in the hope of help delaying the Collection process and negotiating a repayment plan which would allow her to register for Fall Term.

The Office of the Ombudsman worked with the Registrar’s Office (RO) to find a way to help Z succeed. The RO intervened with the Ministry to allow the student access to Winter OSAP, as the reasons for the delay in processing the student’s work permit renewal and SIN renewal were outside of Z’s control. The encumbrance was lifted from Z’s file, and she was able to apply for Fall 20XX OSAP funding and register for the Fall term/semester.

Case Summary: Covid and Impact of Splitting Theory and Practical Applications Between Semesters

Shae was excited to enrol in the co-op version of a two-year diploma program. Shae and classmates had only the Fall Term left to graduate. As of the upcoming January, they would then have their diplomas and be eligible for the hiring call-back with one of the largest industry employers in North America. Unfortunately, in July the students were advised that, because of the COVID-19 pandemic, the theory courses would again be delivered remotely in the Fall Term, and the remaining two courses with “practical applications” which were normally scheduled in the Fall Term would now be delivered in January. This created a series of issues for Shae. As an OSAP recipient with a full-time student status; taking the courses part-time would result in becoming a part-time student, and risk incurring an overpayment. Further, Shae would not be able to receive the diploma to be eligible for the hiring call-back, and without this would potentially have a long wait for the next iteration of hiring.

The academic program required what they call “culminating performances” from the students in the final two semesters, to demonstrate their mastery of the skills and abilities required to graduate. Because this required that students be on campus, Shae knew it would be necessary to find and fund temporary accommodation in Ottawa to complete the final two courses if no solution could be found to splitting the fall semester. The Program recognized the challenges that this split semester posed to students but required that the practical work be done in person. Students were understandably concerned and looking for answers, but at this early stage the Program was still considering what options were possible.

The Office of the Ombudsman advised Shae to stay in touch and work with the Program as they looked for workable solutions. In the meantime, our Office met with Financial Aid to describe the situation and to seek advice about the student’s options. Financial Aid was in communication with the Program, and very shortly afterward advised that for purposes of OSAP, students who had applied for full-time funding would not lose that status, even if the semester ultimately remained split between fall and winter.

Case Summary: Timing

Dorothy, a student in the final term/semester of a two-year program, was hoping for a placement in Ottawa. She found out late, after renewing a one-year lease with her landlord, that she would be required to go to Kingston for placement. Apparently, due to the cascading impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, there were limited opportunities for placement sites/hosts so the academic department notified students about their challenges in securing placements and left open the possibility of being posted outside Ottawa. There was no expectation that students would be placed in Ottawa.

Dorothy explained that although she knew her academic department made no promise of a placement in Ottawa, she was compelled to renew the lease because she had no-where else to live, and at the time of signing the lease, the academic department had not provided any information about her placement site. Dorothy further explained that she cannot commute daily to Kingston, and her lease agreement did not permit sub-lease. She was concerned about paying double rent, as she had to move to Kingston, and attributed the conundrum to the academic department’s delayed communication of her placement in Kingston.

Given the circumstances, we explained that although our Office sympathizes with her, we could not attribute the situation to the academic department as they notified students about the challenges in securing placement sites/hosts due to the COVID-19 pandemic, and specifically left open the possibility that students could be placed outside Ottawa. Our Office advised her to contact her landlord to explain her circumstances; referred her to the Ontario Landlord and Tenant Board for support; and also referred her to the Financial Aid Office for a discussion on obtaining some assistance, as needed.

Comments/Feedback: Referencing the third (3rd) recommendation in our 2018-2019 Annual Report, we encourage the College to continue to review and update, as appropriate, department/program-level policies and procedures guiding placements to ensure clear and fair processes.

Case Summary: Losing Seat for Non-Payment of Fees by Deadline

Jose was surprised to learn that, after having been accepted into the co-op version of a two-year program, he lost his seat for failing to pay his fees by the June 15th fees deadline. He explained that the deadline passed while he was waiting for an answer about opting out of a fee from some part of the College (he could not recall to whom he had been speaking) when the deadline passed. Jose acknowledged that he could have sought that answer earlier, and that he had seen and in fact still had a copy of the June 11th fees reminder.

The Office of the Ombudsman did not see an issue of fairness in his loss of the co-op seat given the situation. However, Jose wanted to know if he could register for the non-co-op version of the program which still had open seats, and then switch into the co-op version he wanted. The Office of the Ombudsman advised Jose to reach out to the Registrar's Office to determine where he was on the waiting list for the co-op version of the Program to help him assess whether he would likely be offered a seat again in the coming semester. We also referred Jose to the academic program to find out whether the conversion he hoped might happen would be possible. Jose decided to register for the non-co-op version of the program and proceeded accordingly.



Interpersonal Conflict

This category addresses matters that arose regarding disagreements among students, between students and faculty, and/or between students and staff members. In some cases, the issues were not necessarily academic-related; rather, it pertained to other services students received from the College.

The following case summaries reflect some of our caseload in this category.

Case Summary: Professor Sally Saved the Day!

A few students, in their final term/semester of a tight-knit program, had a misunderstanding on a private social media group chat, and it evolved into a larger conflict among most of the students in the class/cohort. Students took sides and because the conversations were online, it quickly got intense – for instance, people wrote things they wish they had not, intentions were misunderstood, and feelings were deeply hurt. Due to the emergency stay-at-home orders, there were no in-person classes, so all these heated discussions happened online, privately.

It turned out that the next class for the cohort was one of Professor Sally's virtual classes. Incidentally, Professor Sally was also the Program Coordinator. She noticed that the mood in the class had changed, and the usual enthusiasm associated with their lively discussions in previous classes was gone. She did her very best to engage the class and taught what she needed to do in the syllabus for that class. Later, one of the students reached out to inform her about the unfolding heated conversations online, and the concern that it could affect their learning experience. Their program naturally required collaboration among students for group projects and teamwork. Professor Sally took the initiative to reach out to some of the students, including the class representative, to better understand what was happening. She realized that something had to be done to mitigate the situation that was rapidly spiralling out of control.

Professor Sally reached out for assistance to help her students, including contacting our Office to assist in addressing the unfolding conflict among the cohort. Our Office advised Professor Sally, and agreed to assist with mediation, as needed and appropriate. The students agreed they needed someone to assist in facilitating a group discussion, and were more comfortable with Professor Sally whom they had known since they enrolled in the program. Although not expected of Professor Sally, she was willing to initiate a discussion among the group to address their differences and move along to successfully complete their studies. Our Office kept in contact with Professor and advised accordingly. Professor Sally had a joint conversation with the group and it was phenomenal – people expressed regrets for their role in the conflict, there were apologies that was accepted in good faith, and the group agreed to move on and not allow the situation to dim their otherwise positive experience in the program, as it was their last term for graduation.

Comments/Feedback: Over the years, on a regular basis, our Office encounters people who go over and above to make a difference in the learning and working experience of the Algonquin College community. Professor Sally's role in this matter was one of such moments. As with all our case summaries, due to confidentiality, not all the details can be disclosed. Unfortunately, the case summary above does not fully capture the complexity of the issues that was at stake and the significance of Professor Sally's role in bringing peace in a situation that could have had a rather unfortunate ending.

This case summary does not suggest that faculty members should intervene in the private affairs of their students. Under the circumstances, it was Professor Sally's personal choice to intervene, and even then, she reached out for assistance and advise on how to proceed, kept her supervisor(s) informed of what was happening and what she was doing, and effectively used the goodwill she had built over time with the students. Our Office has been involved in other matters where the most appropriate action of the involved parties was to notify the designated officials at the College for the necessary follow up. Every case is different and a successful approach in one may not necessarily work in another.

Case Summary: Safety

Tom, a student in a two-year program, found that wearing his own glasses, plus a face mask, plus the requisite safety glasses in his lab classes was causing his glasses to fog up, and was disruptive. Hence, he would remove the outer glasses, only to be reminded by the lab instructor that the requirement to wear the glasses always applied for safety reasons.

Tom's frustration grew as fog formed on his glasses during labs, especially when he needed to see the board or read and work safely. He felt that although the lab instructor was responsible for the lab, he was being deliberately difficult. At some point, the situation got heated and Tom contacted the Office of the Ombudsman. Our Office met and had separate meetings with Tom and the lab instructor to understand their perspectives and assist in finding a resolution.

In the heat of the moment, Tom had not appreciated that the lab instructor was required to constantly insist on safety measures in the lab. On the other hand, the lab instructor had not realized that Tom had not had the opportunity to try more appropriate masks and was equally concerned about seeing properly in order to work safely. The lab instructor provided different masks, a better fit was found, and the fogging issue was addressed. Tom and the instructor both said they did not want any conflict but was simply trying to do the right thing. They were satisfied with the outcome.

Case Summary: Is it About my Name? Can't change it though.

Shamonda Ki-Al Santos was an Online student in a competitive program. Shamonda asserts that she worked hard on her first assignment in a class; in her opinion, she went above and beyond the requirements of the assignment so was surprised by the 'F' grade on the assignment. She suspected that the "blank" space on the first page, with portions of the assignment description which she included for reference, may have confused the facilitator who ostensibly did not scroll down to see the complete work.

Shamonda contacted the facilitator by email and provided screenshots to show that the work was there, and only had to scroll down the page. However Shamonda was most affected by the facilitator's written feedback that came with the failing grade. Apparently, the feedback suggested that Shamonda did not do the assignment and was expected to write with "proper grammar in future assignments." Shamonda felt this was particularly hurtful since the facilitator seemingly had not yet read any part of her work, so could not have known about her proficiency in grammar. English is Shamonda's first language, as she was born and raised in Canada. She felt the facilitator made an assumption based on her name. The facilitator acknowledged the mistake, but Shamonda felt it was not sincere because there was no accompanying apology and was allegedly treated unkindly during the course. Shamonda felt judged and mistreated and alleged she had had similar experiences with other facilitators. Shamonda asserts that the experience affected her motivation so she changed her program of study.



Academic Appeal

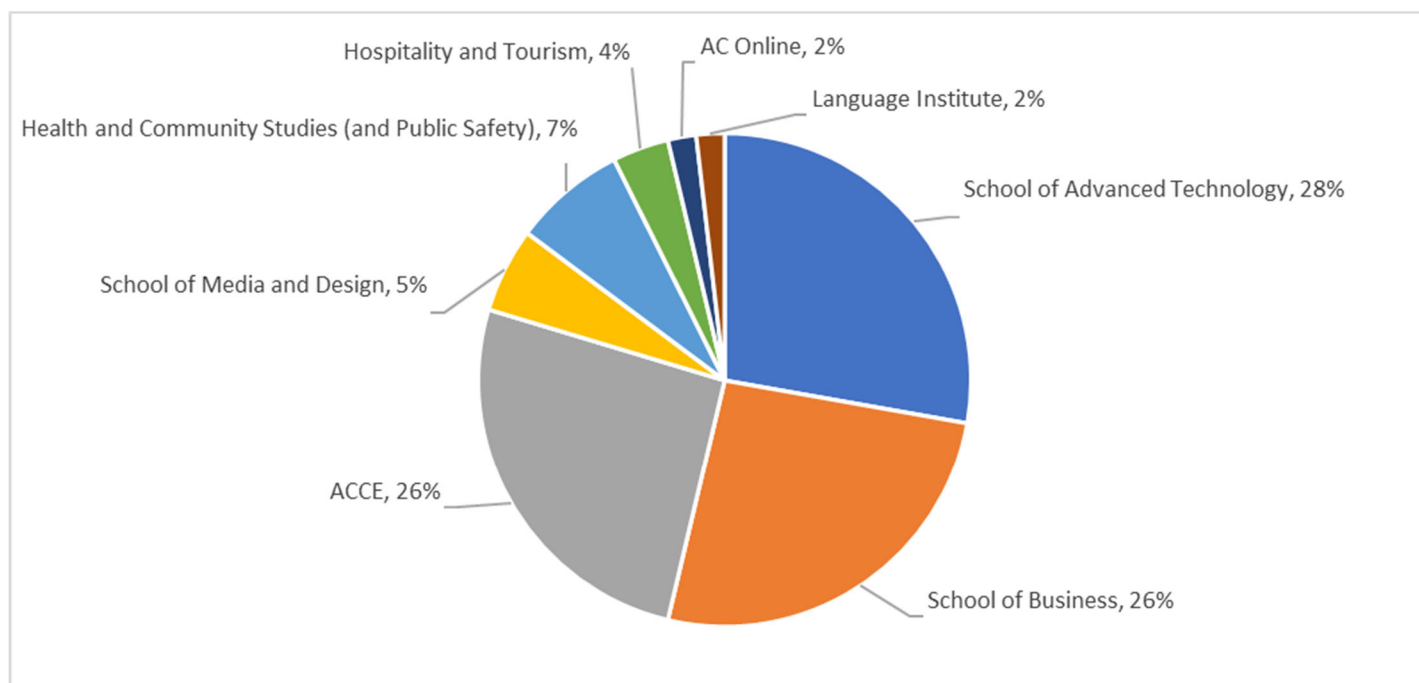
This category addresses matters that arose regarding disagreements with academic decisions falling under the AA19 Academic Appeal Policy, including matters such as non-reviewable grades, academic sanctions including those associated with allegations of academic misconduct/academic integrity.

Historically, academic appeal/review of final grade related concerns are among the most frequently raised concern in our reporting periods. In our immediate past reporting period, it was the second (2nd) most frequent concern raised. In this reporting period, it was the fifth (5th) most frequently raised concern. While we do not fully know why it dropped in ranking, we suspect that the temporary initiatives the College implemented were positive contributing factors—for instance, the temporary academic grading options that minimized adverse academic impacts on students; students who were allowed to withdraw and return the following semester on a priority basis; arrangements for Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) testing and provision of PPE equipment to facilitate placements; and the reduced clinical hour requirements in consultation with accreditation partners, to name a few.

In this reporting period, 63 files fell under this category, amounting to approximately 16% of our caseload. Of this, 81% (i.e. 51 out of 63 files) came from students, and the remainder from College personnel or other stakeholders. Of our student files, 76% (i.e. 39 out of 51 files) came from domestic students, and the remaining 24% (i.e. 12 out of 51 files) were international students. Only 16% (i.e. 8 out of 51 files) of our student visitors proceeded to a formal academic appeal. Essentially, the majority of our caseload under this category were resolved informally or withdrawn. It is somewhat consistent with the scenario in our immediate past reporting period where of the 94% of formal applications submitted to the Registrar's Office and resolved informally, one or more of the parties had consulted with our Office.

Available information shows that 65 formal appeal applications (6 submissions in Spring 2020; 41 in Fall 2020; and 18 in Winter 2021) were submitted to the Registrar's Office in the reporting period. Of this, approximately 43% were international students. This percentage stands out considering that per the Day 10 Registration Total for Fall 2021 (after the withdrawal deadline), international students make up approximately 15% of the overall student population.

Fig. 4 Formal Appeal and Review of Final Grade Applications on S2020-W2021



As shown in Fig. 4, 28% of the formal submissions came from the School of Advanced Technology. While we know the specific programs they came from, we currently do not know the reasons for the increase. We will continue to observe this, and academic appeal related processes across the College, to see if there is a trend that requires attention.

The case summaries below reflect some of the concerns in our caseload in this category.

Case Summary: Who is Responsible?

Tulane and her four other groupmates (Tim, Jo, Xi, and Hamza) – worked on a project that had several questions. Tulane did one of the questions, and the other group mates did the remaining questions. One of the questions the other group members worked on allegedly had some plagiarized material, and the professor gave all group members zero points on the group project. The professor did not notify the academic chair or academic department about the alleged plagiarism or accompanying sanction. The Professor invited all the groupmates to a meeting for further discussion. All but Tim attended the meeting, and upon reviewing the alleged plagiarized material it was directly linked to the question Tim answered. Tulane and her groupmates explained that because Tim was directly responsible for the plagiarized material, it was not fair to be equally penalized by the zero points on the group project. The professor disagreed and maintained that they were jointly responsible for the group project so the penalty would stand. Tulane and Jo sent an email to several people within the College explaining the perceived unfairness, and the implications of the penalty on their ability to pass the course and graduate to pursue further studies at another institution, and accept an employment offer respectively. Someone advised Tulane to take the matter to her Dean, Vice President, President of the College, and contact the Office of the Ombudsman for advice on the applicable College policies to explore her options for a resolution within and outside the College.

Our Office explained the potentially applicable policies – AA19: Academic Appeal, AA20: Plagiarism, AA37: Review of Final Grade, and SA07: Student Complaints – and specifically advised Tulane to begin with the informal process by contacting her Academic Chair.

Case Summary: Confusion about Process and Opportunity to Appeal

After completing the final exam, Wakita was contacted by the professor to indicate that they had reported an alleged academic dishonesty based on seeing extremely similar answers to another student in the course, including the same, not common, mistakes. The email referenced the Algonquin College policy, AA20: Plagiarism (instead of AA19: Academic Dishonesty), and invited Wakita to a meeting regarding the findings. Prior to this meeting, Wakita was unaware of the specific examination questions of concern and had been provided the wrong policy to understand the allegation and proceedings. After the meeting, Wakita was given both the AA18: Academic Dishonesty and AA20: Plagiarism policies and was asked to complete the 'student sections' in the appendices of both policies. Wakita did so and later followed up with the professor for a status update. The professor informed Wakita that the matter had been forwarded to the attention of an academic support person for further review.

After a month without hearing from anyone, Wakita contacted the academic department for any update on the alleged academic violation and was referred to the professor. Wakita contacted the professor and was referred to a Program Support Specialist who in turn advised that the academic department had decided that there was cheating so a zero grade had been awarded as penalty. Wakita was then advised of the right to appeal. Wakita felt that the decision was unfair as there had been no opportunity to be heard before the decision. Having then received a copy of the highlighted areas of concern in the allegation, Wakita asserted there was a credible explanation of how the answers had different styles of writing, despite the alleged similarities.

Concluding Remarks:

In working towards the College's mission, vision, and goals, it is inevitable that differences of opinion will emerge on many issues, including student-related academic decisions. The academic appeal process and associated processes contain the most formal avenues within the College for addressing disagreements in student-related academic decisions; including, matters regarding - course management, evaluation, progression, and academic accommodations. The specific policies for reference are - AA19: Academic Appeal, AA37 Review of Final Grade, and AA48: Academic Integrity (Updated in June 2021 after reviewing, revising and combining former policies AA18: Academic Dishonesty, and AA20: Plagiarism). At the time of presenting this report, the College had formed a Working Group to review and revise the Academic Appeal and Review of Final Grade policies.

As a publicly assisted institution, Algonquin College is expected to promote procedural fairness in the implementation of its policies and processes. This expectation is subsumed in the College policies. For clarity, the role of decision makers (including - Academic Appeal Committee, Academic Appeal Review Committee, Academic Chairs, AOP Chairs, Associate Chairs, Academic Managers, Deans, and other designated College Officials) in these policies requires neutrality in promoting fairness when reviewing the issues at stake. For example, the current policy AA48: Academic Integrity, references certain important principles of the International Center for Academic Integrity (ICAI), including fairness. In explaining the value of fairness, the ICAI noted that: "important components of fairness include predictability, transparency, and clear, reasonable expectations." Further, it is generally accepted that the perception of fairness is as important as fairness itself.

In handling our caseload in this category, we noticed that the College made significant progress in the general handling of academic appeal and associated matters. However, as with any other institution, there is still room for improvement. The College is encouraged to continue to improve on matters regarding:

- a) clarity of the role and responsibilities of decision makers like the AOP Chairs, Academic Chairs, Academic Managers, Associate Chairs, and other designated academic administrators particularly in the informal and formal processes/procedures of the academic appeal policy.
- b) providing students the necessary information on alleged violations before scheduled meetings to enable fair and reasonable time for preparation, as well as the opportunity to respond to alleged violations.
- c) continue to ensure that students' voices are heard particularly during the informal phase of the processes and procedures, and fairly considering the perspectives of all parties when making final decisions.

Without fairness (as well as the perception of fairness), the whole mechanism for resolving academic appeal related matters will unravel. Students may lose trust in the process and may resort to seeking remedies outside the College. These are usually costly, time consuming, stressful and unnecessarily strains relationships that may have been helpful.

Overall, our Office is encouraged by the remarkable strides the College has made and continues to make, as well as the commitment to promote fairness in academic appeal and associated matters. We saw this first hand from the willingness of many stakeholders to collaborate to find solutions and continue to support student success.



Academic Accommodation

The COVID-19 pandemic has significantly affected the health, social and economic wellbeing of people across the globe. It is public knowledge that the pandemic has affected the mental health of many students, and in some instances, exacerbated pre-existing medical conditions necessitating the request for academic accommodations to provide an equal opportunity for success. In the Chief Public Health Officer of Canada's Report on the State of Public Health in Canada 2020, Dr. Theresa Tam stated that although the COVID-19 pandemic affects everyone, the "health impact has been worse for seniors, essential workers, racialized populations, **people living with disabilities**, and women." (*emphasis mine*).

The caseload under this category includes disability (medical) related accommodation issues where previously approved accommodations that were designed for in-person learning required reconsideration to address new barriers associated with the new (virtual/remote) learning environment; experimentation to find the appropriate fit; and difficulty getting access to medical professionals to assist in the accommodation process. There is also the issue of effectively coordinating accommodations for students in blended delivery arrangements (i.e. where the College partners with other institutions for programming delivery). Academic accommodation was the top presenting concern for which faculty/staff contacted our Office for assistance.

Some academic accommodation requests were unrelated to disability (medical) but based on a protected ground in the Ontario Human Rights Code – such as, family status, creed, and sex (including pregnancy and breastfeeding). Overall, the common theme underlying the accommodation related concerns included the following:

- a) the perception that some faculty members were not understanding and/or sensitive enough about the impact of the pandemic on students,
- b) some specific accommodation requests that faculty and/or staff could not support for reasons that included safety, academic integrity, and external accreditation requirements,
- c) instances where an asserted lack of success was not demonstrably linked to academic accommodations,
- d) instances of repeated retroactive accommodation requests (for instance, repeated retroactive requests in two or more semesters/terms; repeated retroactive accommodation requests in a course within a semester/term; retroactive accommodation requests for specific courses but not others within the same semester/term).
- e) parents with child-care arrangements where the dual responsibility to be both a student and parent conflicted when child-care supports were withdrawn,
- f) international students who were at the mercy of their agents; and dependent on their home governments and/or the Canadian federal government's policies to control the spread of the COVID-19 virus, which resulted in prolonged delays in processing visas and associated travel documents.

The following case summaries reflect some of the concerns that were raised.

Case Summary: Death of a Beloved Aunt

On learning of the death of a beloved aunt, Sam asked if he could postpone a test that was scheduled for next day; he was told no. Sam took the test and failed. Subsequently, he wrote a mid-term exam the following week, which fell on the day of his aunt's funeral. Sam failed the course, which was a pre-requisite for all but one of the courses at the next level. He was threatened with removal from his academic program and payment of residence fees to the end of semester.

The Office of the Ombudsman advised Sam about the Deferred Evaluation policy and referred him to the Academic Chair, with an option of Academic Appeal. The Academic Chair met with Sam, reviewed the matter, and arranged for a re-write of the exam.

Comment(s)/Feedback: Each matter on academic accommodation is fact specific and addressed based on the particular circumstances of the situation. It is acknowledged that academic accommodations require, among other things, careful attention to fact, extensive coordination, creativity, sensitivity, and confidentiality. At times, we see that our learners do not know to provide specific information that is crucial to understanding their situation; our challenge in our meetings with students is to respect their privacy, while seeking information that might be important to their success in seeking accommodation.

Case Summary: Accommodating the Accommodation

Due to Public Health guidelines and the Ontario Government's stay-at-home measures to control the spread of the COVID-19 virus, students and professors temporarily did not have access to the Centre for Accessible Learning (CAL) Testing Center for academic accommodations during final examination. To address the accommodation needs of students who required separate rooms – to minimize distractions – during examinations, an innovative remedy was implemented that allowed the students to have an isolated breakout room, during their Zoom-proctored examinations.

Matthew requested a separate room for his final examination over a month in advance, and reminded Professor Sam again two (2) weeks before the scheduled examination. It appears that Professor Sam made inquiries about implementing the necessary accommodations but denied the request only a day before the examination. Matthew was forced to write the examination with the rest of his course mates. He mitigated the situation by controlling the volume on his computer but felt that the denial of his CAL approved academic accommodation impacted his ability to perform better, and the request should not have been denied, especially at the last minute. Professor Sam explained that s/he felt it was impossible to proctor both virtual rooms at once and/or had to have all students in a breakout room for it to work. It was a misunderstanding of the breakout room features on Zoom. Although Matthew did not want to rewrite the examination, due to the personal impact of preparing for another examination, he raised his concerns about the last-minute denial so it does not happen again considering that he would take another course with Professor Sam.



Caseload on International Students

In response to a request from the ACET and the ORC, this is the second year we have tracked and separated information regarding International students* in our Annual Report. The number of international students who approached our Office this reporting period (40) was slightly more than half that of the previous year (76). Being cognizant of this limited sample size, it is too early to see trends or draw any conclusions about challenges or different concerns that may face this particular group of students. This year, international students represented 13.5% of the students who consulted our Office.

Certainly we continue to hear anecdotally general themes related to international students:

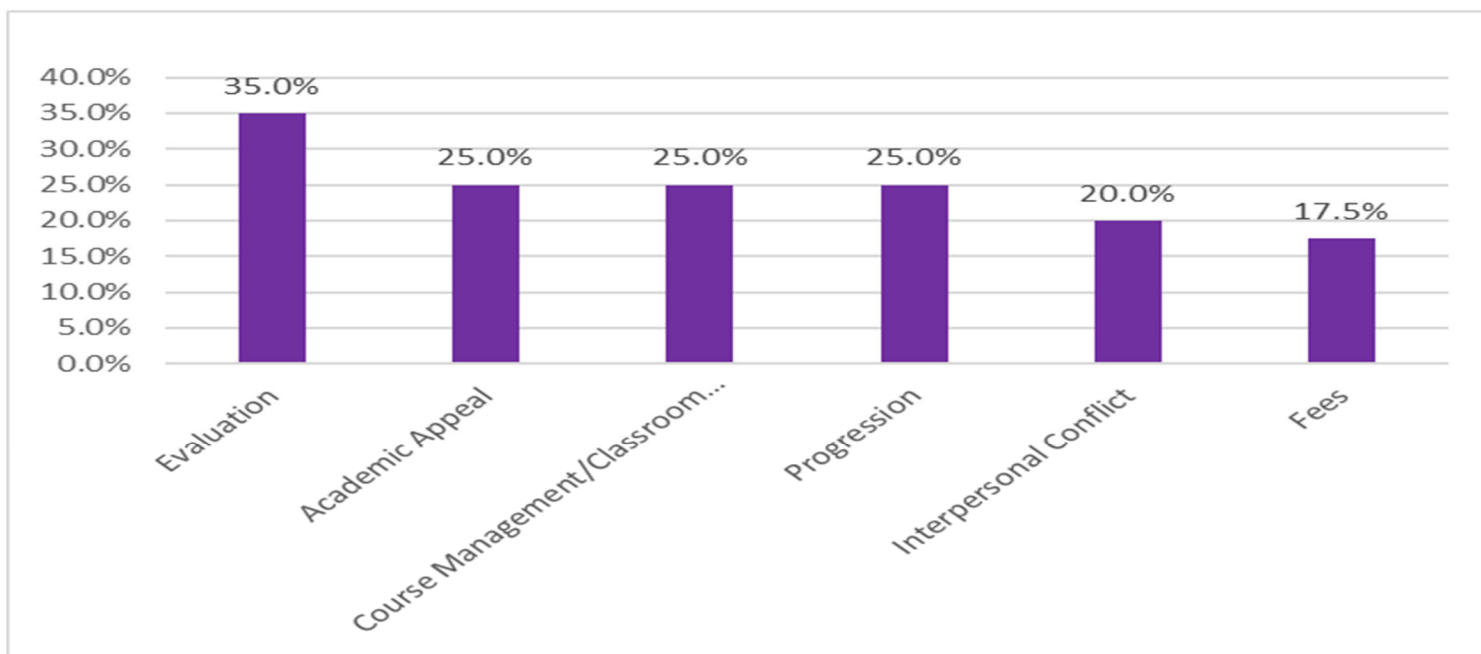
- a) on one hand, a reluctance to engage in self-advocacy in using the College's informal resolution and recourse process for fear of being perceived as disrespectful or a "trouble-maker", or attracting a retaliatory response, while at the same time, the impact of not progressing may lead to an increased motivation to escalate matters through Academic Appeal and Review of Final Grade policies. This may explain the higher rate of appeals from international students than domestic students who visit our Office,
- b) perception of unfairness by students who have passed the language requirement for admission, but face barriers related to language for which no accommodation is available — for instance, timed evaluations which limit the ability of students not at the level of fluency of a native speaker to truly demonstrate their knowledge of course material,
- c) language/cultural differences creating friction or disconnects in assigned group work settings, such as the submission of a contribution to a group assignment that is substantively sound but requires considerable editing of language or grammar by a group member, or alienation in the group then perceived to be reflected in graded peer reviews, and
- d) social separation and potential isolation from familiar support networks, aggravated this year with the impact of the pandemic and particularly the loss of loved ones, for students who had left their home country.

Based on our experience working with students, it appears that oftentimes the consequence of an adverse academic decision related to grades/progression may be more severe than that experienced by a domestic student in an (otherwise) identical situation, although for this reporting period that risk was mitigated for those international students who were able to study remotely. Repeating a course or being removed from a program may have visa or work permit implications, or even having to return home if a course will not be offered for several semesters. The cost of living in Canada and paying tuition at the international premium sometimes limits their ability to fund unanticipated delays in their intended path to academic success.

These realities appear to be reflected in the nature of the top concerns which international students brought to our Office. The top caseload topics for international students are evaluation (35%), followed by academic appeal, course management, and progression (all at 25%), and interpersonal conflict (20%). Not surprisingly, 60% of work permit, visa and IRCC (Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada) related cases were brought by international students. Conversely, unlike the overall student body, we received almost no requests for help by international students related to accommodation or withdrawal, and virtually no requests related to financial aid (as opposed to financial concerns) or clinical/placement matters. Fig. 16 (see page 43 in the Appendices) shows a comparison of international student visitors to our Office in proportional comparison to international students by academic areas at the College in Fall 2020.

NOTE: * For the purposes of our report, an international student is considered to be one paying the international premium on tuition. Issues experienced by international students, such as challenges of language, isolation from familiar social networks, and cultural issues may also affect other students, such as refugees and newly-landed immigrants, who might be perceived as international students despite their Canadian status.

Fig. 5 Top 6 Presenting Concerns Raised by International Students



Against the context of the reduced number of international students visiting our Office this year over last, there was relative stability in the number of cases regarding plagiarism, academic dishonesty and academic discipline. Of the academic integrity cases brought to our Office, 32% of these were raised by international students; of these, 23% regarded plagiarism. (For clarity, we have no indicators to suggest that academic dishonesty cases are greater among international than domestic students.) Similarly there was stability in admission-related matters (if we discount the two cases involving multiple students which, as stated then, may have inflated last year's admission percentage) and in fees/financial matters as well. As you may have noticed, Academic Accommodation was not among the top 6 presenting concerns by international students.

The case summary below provides context, although limited, on some of our caseload in this category.

Case Summary: Room for compromise?

Zachary was in his final term of a three-year program when he realized he was missing a General Education (GenEd) credit to graduate in December 2020. He was informed he could register for a compressed GenEd course in early January 2021, and still graduate on time with his cohort. Because this was his last credit, he would also be allowed to take the course at the domestic student fee rate rather than the international student premium he would otherwise pay. Zachary thought it was unfair he had to pay anything as the cost of the course was already subsumed in his Fall 2020 full-time tuition fees.

Zachary said he followed the advice of his academic department to register for the GenEd course over the summer in order to take the course in the Fall term; however, his several attempts to register were unsuccessful. Subsequently, he mistakenly assumed the GenEd course had been cancelled due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Due to a glitch in the registration system that affected "off cycle" and co-op students, Zachary's assertion was correct that electronic registration for the GenEd course was not working over the summer. The academic department acknowledged the system error, but concluded that Zachary did nothing to mitigate the situation despite having ample time and opportunity to do so. Firstly, Zachary did not contact the Student Success Specialist whose name had been provided as the contact person for any assistance with registration. Secondly, he did not contact his academic department about the missing course when the Fall term started. Thirdly, as a student in his final term, he was familiar with the Algonquin College Student Information System (ACSIS), and had he checked his progression screen he would have seen that it showed a missing GenEd credit requirement. Finally, students in his program had been repeatedly advised that they were responsible for their own progression.

Zachary was correct that had he registered for the GenEd course, the cost would have been subsumed in his Fall 2020 term fees. However, the academic department did not agree to waive the associated fee considering that Zachary made no attempt to resolve the issue by contacting the people he had been advised to; they had arranged for him to take a compressed GenEd course (which was normally unavailable in the winter term) primarily to enable him graduate on time with his cohort; and the course fee had been reduced to the domestic student fee rate. Zachary appealed to the Refund Exception Committee for a fee waiver but was unsuccessful.

Our Office reviewed the available information on this matter and concluded that the resolution was reasonable, under the circumstances. We explained our reasoning to Zachary, and provided information about his other recourses for a resolution if he still perceived unfairness and wanted to further pursue the matter.



Emerging Issue

Several issues did not make the list of top presenting concerns but are noteworthy, nonetheless. Our Office has been monitoring some issues and hereby present one, namely – **students with parental responsibilities**.

Mature students with parental responsibilities

Over time, as the student demographic continues to evolve, we have heard more frequently from “parent students” whose responsibility for children adds an additional challenge to their ability to succeed academically. The “Algonquin College Difference” strategic document references the shifting demographics in Ontario and a projection that the student population could become older, and more career-focused. Specifically, it states, inter alia, that “mature learners have high need for a personalized college experience: their circumstances often differ from the traditional, just-out-of-high-school cohort most post-secondary programs are structured around. Many mature learners have decades of career experience, **inflexible schedules, and family obligations**. Personalization can help us take factors like these into account and “meet students where they are” – for example, by offering micro-credentialing, online education and worksite training” (*emphasis mine*.) While the examples in the quote above focuses on program delivery, it captures some of the unique challenges mature students face – including, inflexible schedules, and family obligations. These challenges persist with students within this demographic, including those currently enrolled in programs at the College.

During this COVID-19 pandemic, additional issues have emerged for students directly related to their parental responsibilities. Sometimes childcare responsibilities were the primary reason for the request. Other concerns relayed included being exposed to the COVID-19 virus as a result of placements/clinicals and inadvertently exposing their children in turn; having childcare responsibilities while being required to write online exams in which movement was restricted to the camera’s scope; having limited or no quiet space when sharing cramped quarters with children; having no “library” to escape to for study time; sharing laptops, bandwidth and other technology with children; having no reliable access to daycare or babysitters, care giving time conflicting with class schedules, and little ability to plan and mitigate the impact of changing health care directives. The following two case summaries provide separate but relatively similar examples:

Case Summary 1

Student Winny is a single parent of two young children. Winny’s classes were proceeding remotely and synchronously. Once the Ontario government’s state-of-emergency was declared to combat COVID-19, elementary schools closed and Winny, like all parents, was suddenly required to home school the eldest, conflicting with her course schedule. The second child’s preschool closed, and Winny often struggled to find childcare to cover the evening class time, particularly when the youngest had a runny nose or cough. Such potential COVID-19 symptoms also required the child to both get a negative COVID-19 test and for the family to quarantine before the child could return to daycare. Quarantine eliminated parenting/supervision support, including from her parents. She needed to take her two children for testing multiple times within the term already. With such daunting parenting and academic challenges, Winny felt it was unfair that one of her professors would not provide asynchronous options and she was asking for support to post videos of the lectures in order to learn the material flexibly while parenting during the pandemic.

Winny further explained that withdrawing and continuing her studies in the future was not an option, since she had left work to return to school and relied on OSAP funding, which would be affected if she postponed studies. In addition, unforeseen issues with internet were causing barriers to submit exams on time as Winny was spending more time to navigate using technology with what she described as a “basic” technological skill.

Winy felt it was unrealistic to expect, with all of these circumstances beyond her control (parenting, governmental restrictions, school closures, testing requirements, and internet and computer trouble), adherence to deadlines for assignments and tests. Winy was asking for accommodation based on family status for the deadlines to submit course work, for flexibility when technical difficulties occurred, and for posted learning materials to allow for asynchronous learning. As a student who is also a parent, Winy perceived these accommodations as essential to survival and success in the program.

Case Summary 2

Kim is in the final level of a three-year program and is also a single parent sharing care of a young child. He had arranged for help in watching his child on weekends when he catches up on his schoolwork. When the Ontario government, trying to limit the spread of COVID-19, instituted the stay-at-home order and required that people restrict themselves to their immediate family units, Kim found himself scrambling to make new childcare arrangements, with no time to complete the assignments which he had intended to work on that weekend. Kim's request to the professor did not fully describe the situation, and so did not appear to meet any of the policy reasons to allow an extension; the professor directed the student to the Office of the Ombudsman.

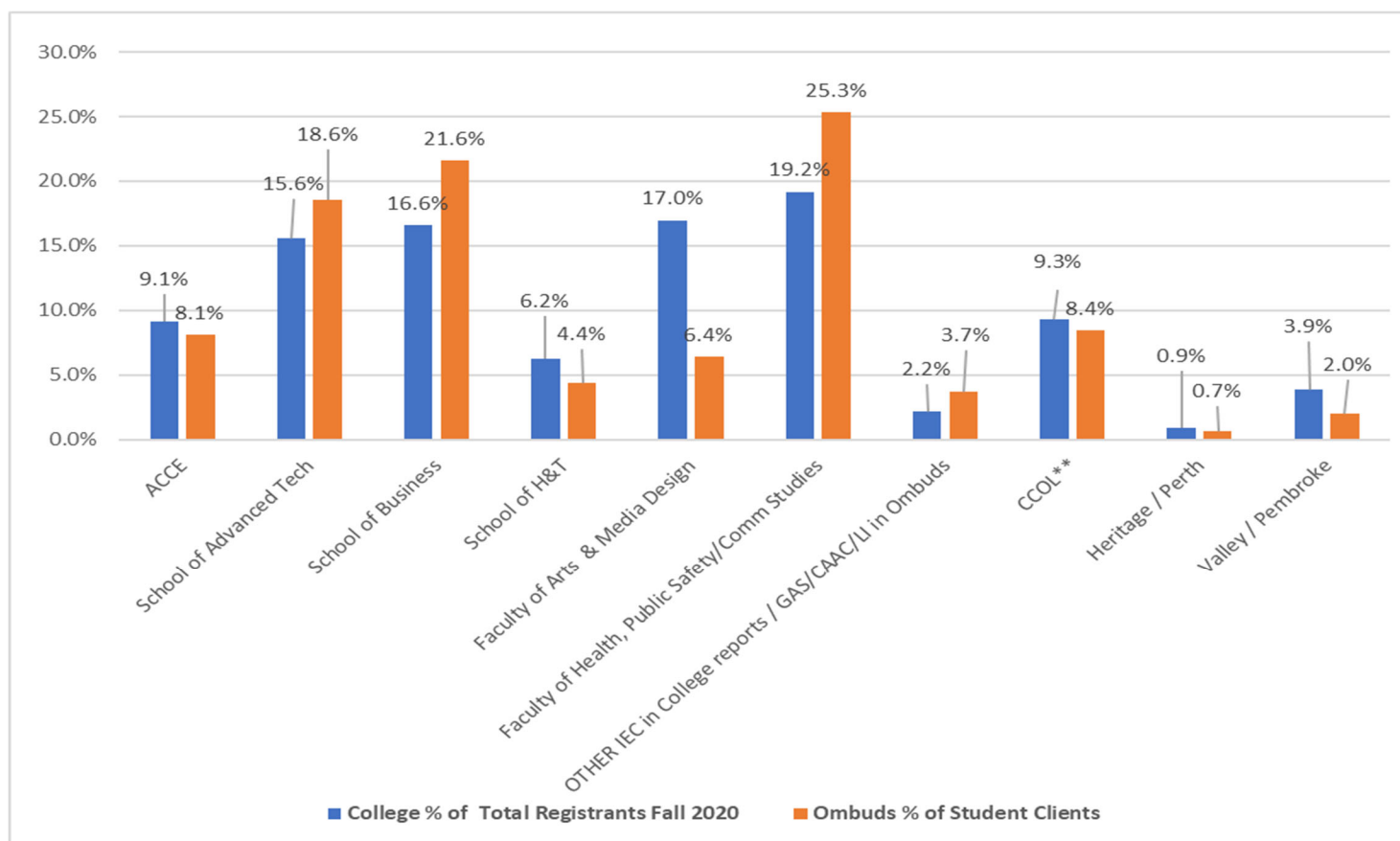
Once the Office of the Ombudsman explained the impact of the stay-at-home order on the parent, and the childcare needs that suddenly arose, the professor readily agreed to allow the extension. The Office also explained to the student that once the instructor had been given sufficient information to understand the connection between the stay-at-home order and the basis for the request, the response had immediately been positive and supportive.

Comment(s)/Feedback: As the College seeks to address the needs of its evolving demographic and become a learner-driven organization, it is advisable to continue to monitor the increasing need of this student demographic. This important demographic is within the Algonquin College student population and our efforts to promote success in their educational journey is our collective contribution to improving their health, social and economic wellbeing.



APPENDICES

Figure 6: Comparison of Students Registered by Academic Area to our Student Caseload (May 2020 to April 2021)



Over the years, it has been challenging to accurately compare our caseload to the entire student population. This is due to several minor but significant differences in how the College determines the number of registered students, and how our Office classify the status of our visitors. Per our mandate, we:

- retain the discretion to accept complaints from alumni who seek to address matters arising from and during their former student status. Alumni are not accounted for in the College's *official number of registered students*.
- retain the discretion to accept complaints from 'applicants or prospective students who are in the process of enrolling in a course or program' and who raise legitimate fairness related matters. Some of them end up postponing their studies so are not accounted for in the *official number of students* in a given academic year.
- some academic programs do not necessarily follow the normal academic year cycle. For example, the Language Institute runs short courses in English and/or French as a second language. Because they run several levels in any given academic semester, a student may be registered several times in one academic semester; hence, depending on the semester, determining where they fit in the overall student population – *and particularly avoiding double counting within in a semester* – can be challenging.
- the AC Online student population include students who take one or more courses but do not follow a specific program of study. It gets more complicated with short courses that run several times in any given academic semester, as there is the risk of double counting students within a single semester. Hence, some of our visitors are not necessarily included in the *official number of registered students* for an accurate comparison to our caseload.

Therefore, in the interest of accuracy, we rather compare the proportional distribution by academic area of our student visitors to the proportional distribution of registered students by their academic areas, as shown in Fig 6.

Fig. 7 Course Management Related Concerns by Academic Area/Department

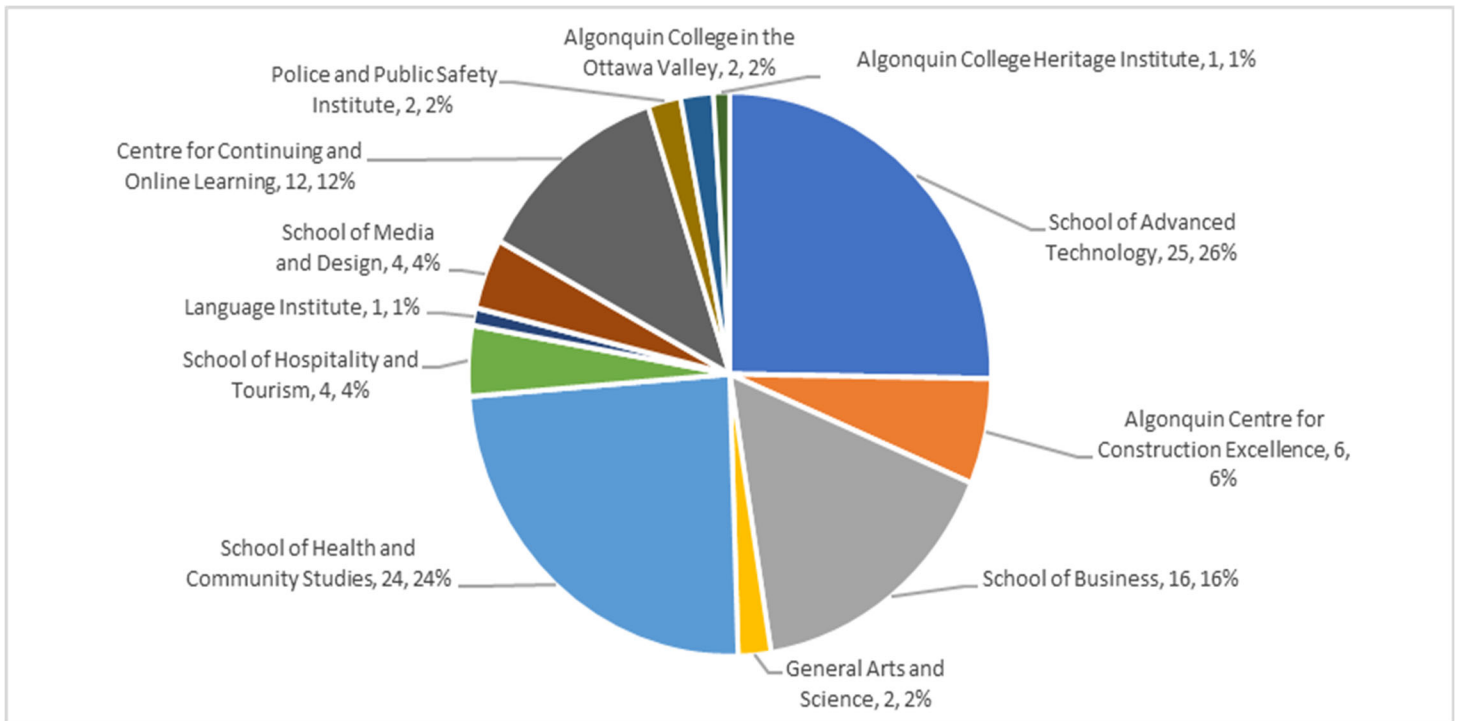


Fig 8. Total Registered Students by Academic Area/Department (Fall 2020)

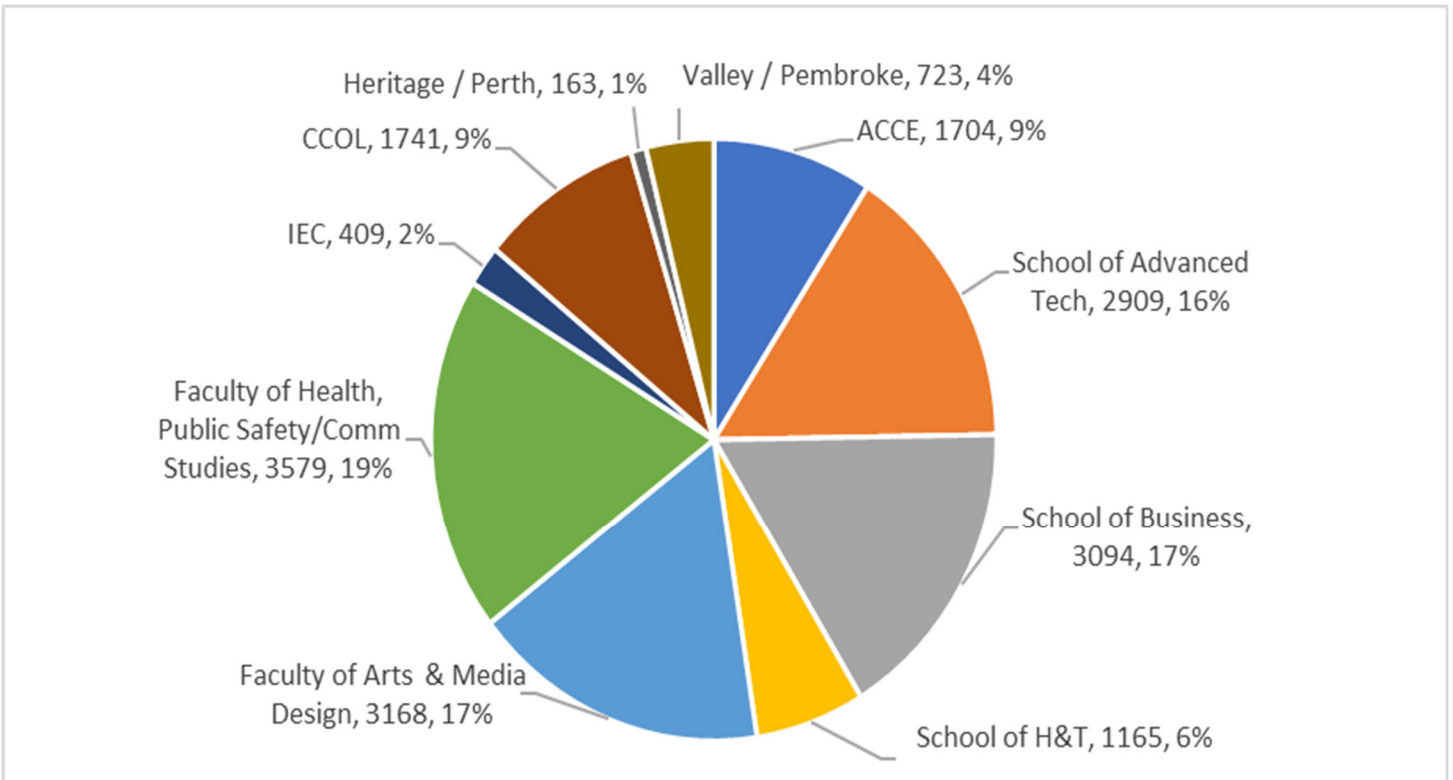


Fig. 9 Caseload on Academic Appeal / Review of Final Grades by Academic Area/Department

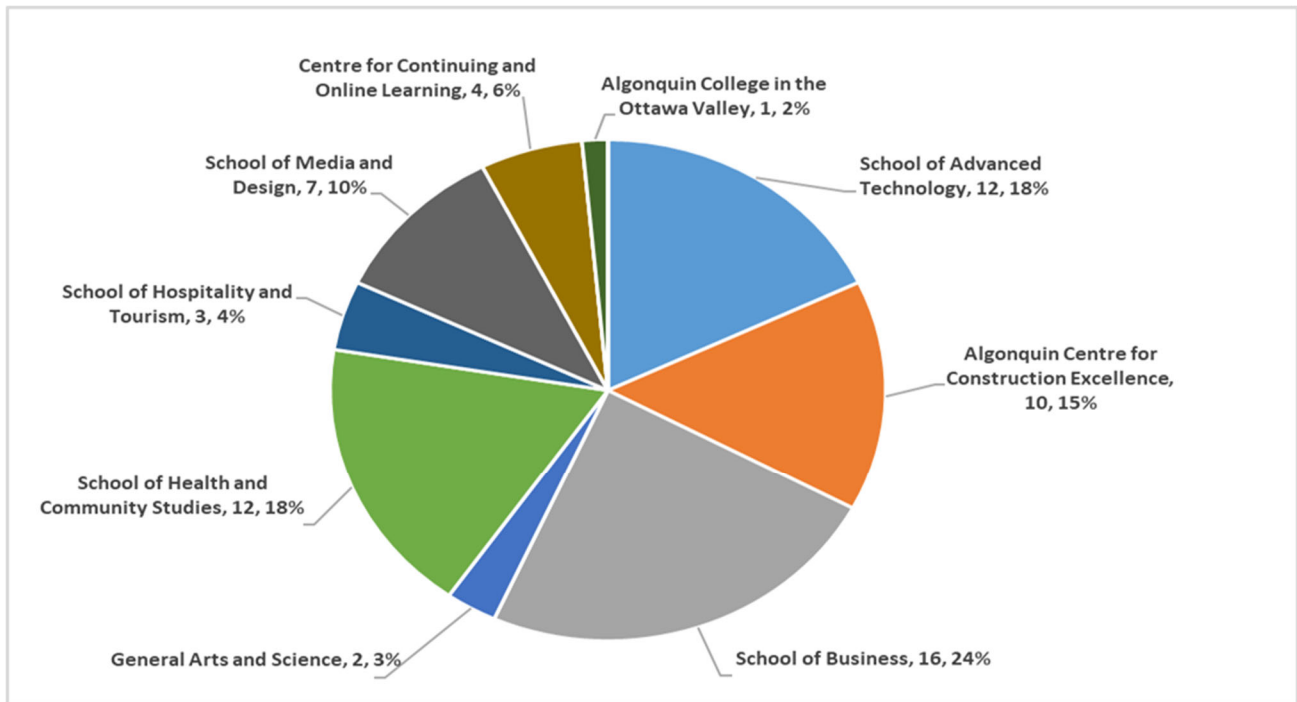


Fig. 10: Total Registered Students by Academic Area/Department (Fall 2020)

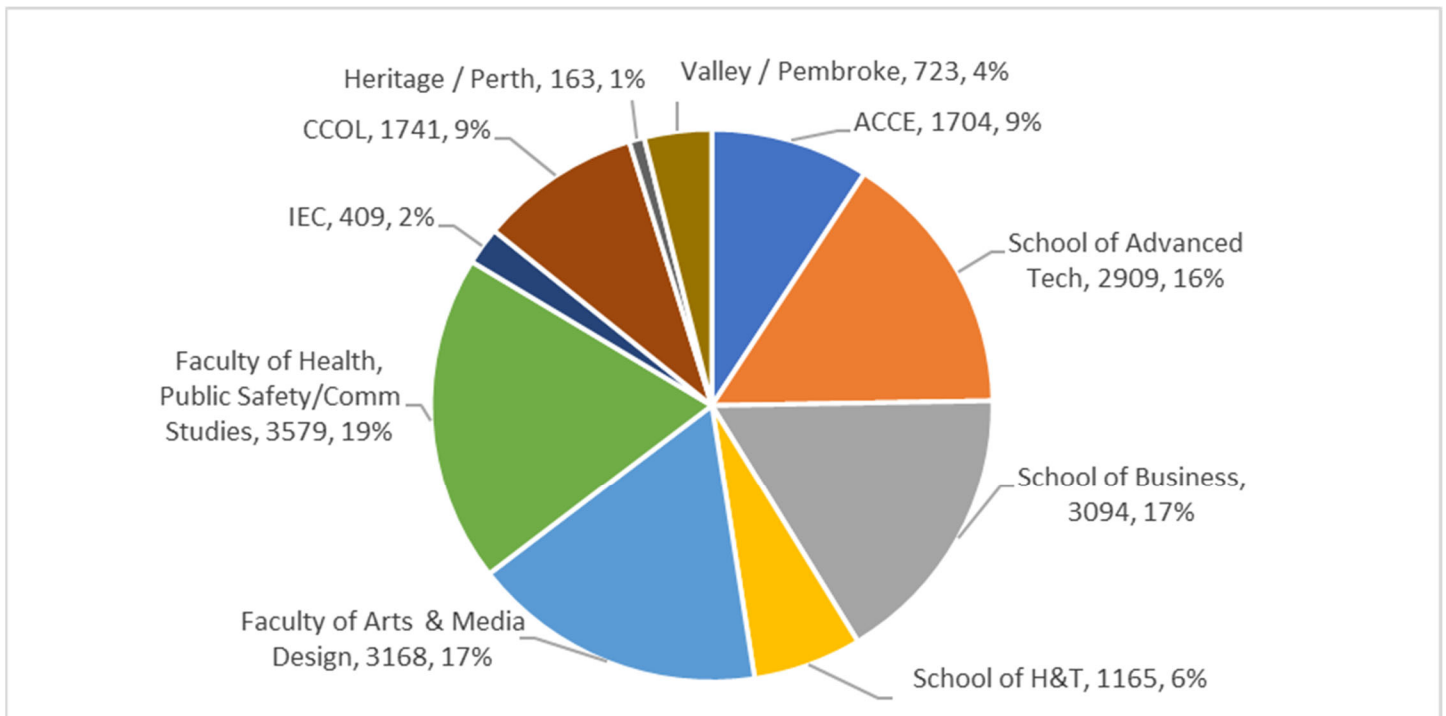


Fig. 11 Accommodation Related Cases by Academic Area/Department

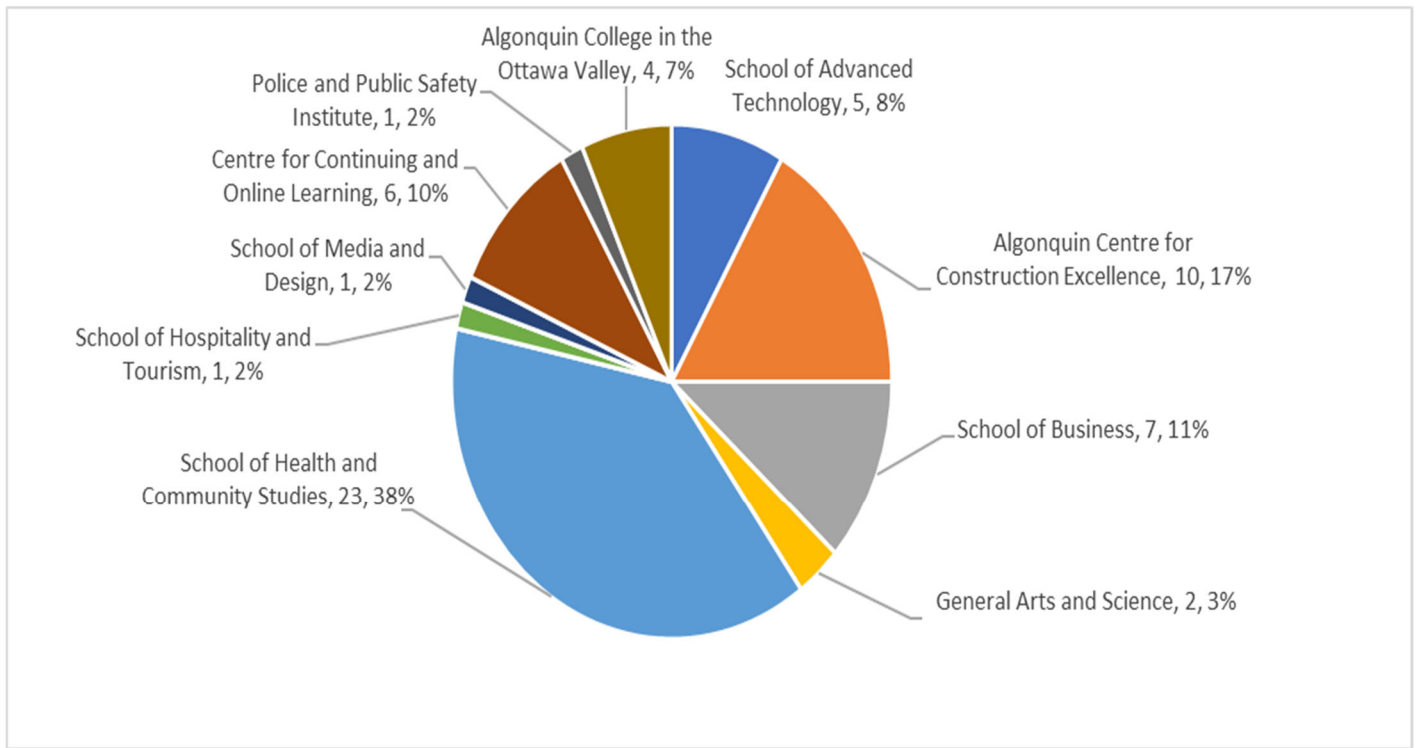


Fig 12: Total Registered Students by Academic Area/Department (Fall 2020)

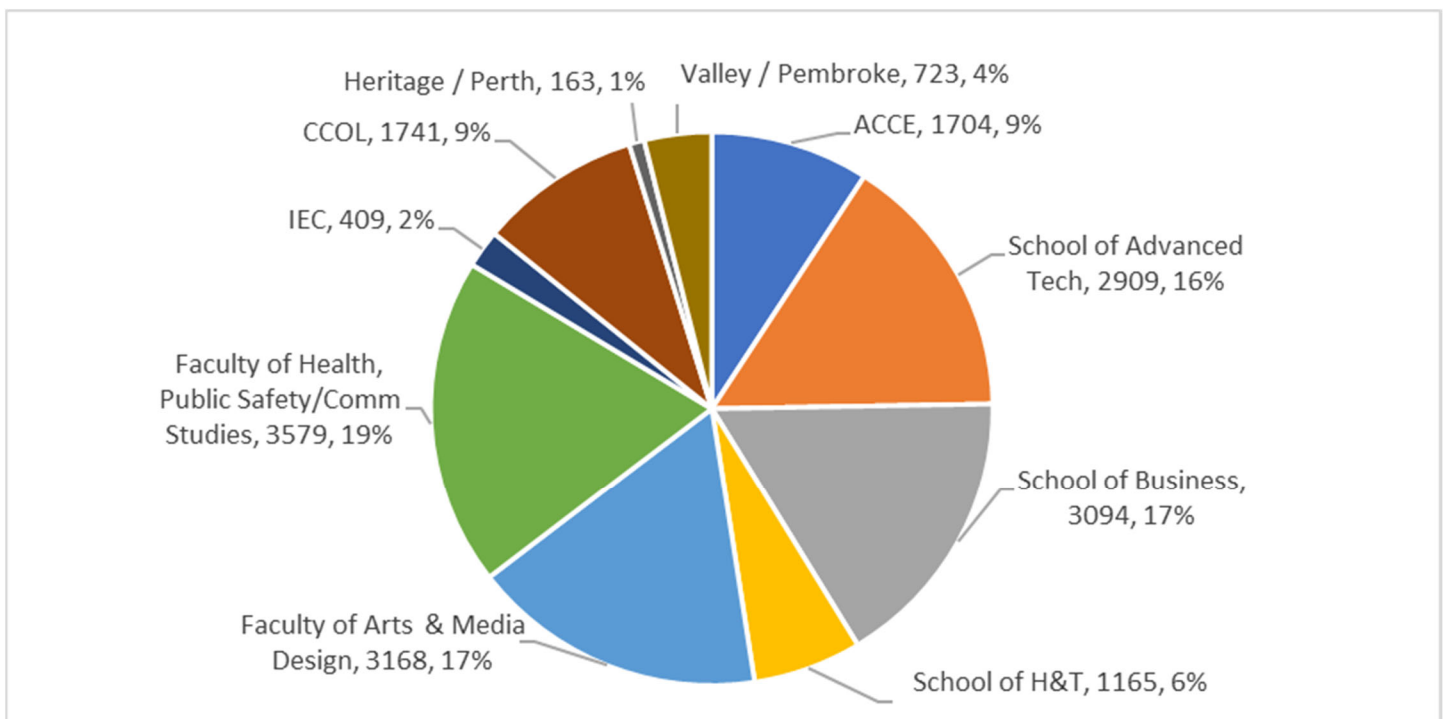


Fig. 13 Client Type by Status, 2020-2021

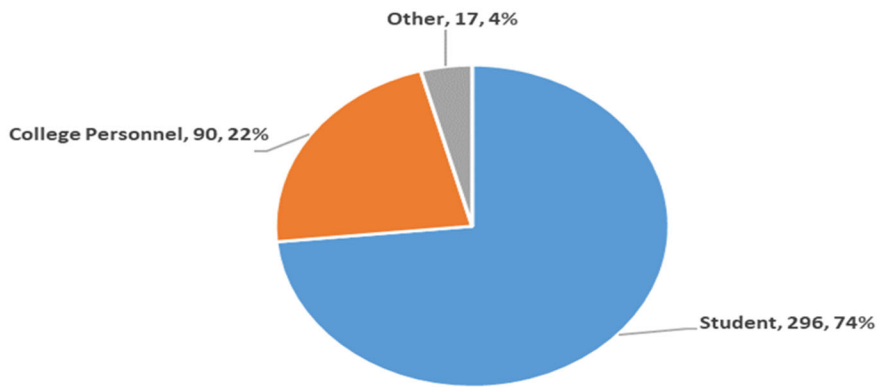


Figure 14: Client Type by Student Status (Percentage of Total Files) 2020-2021

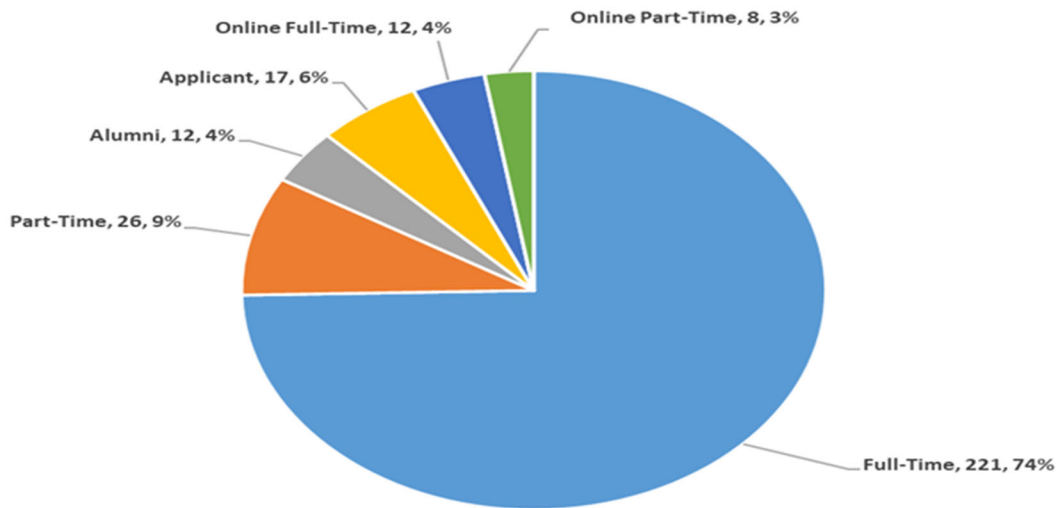


Figure 15: Client Type by Non-Student Status (Percentage of Total Files) 2020-2021

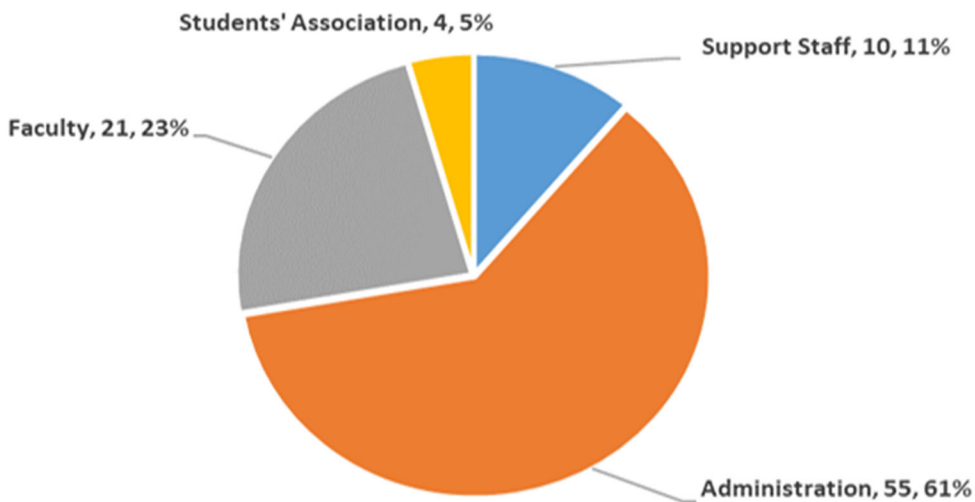


Figure 16: Comparison of International Student Visitors to the Office of the Ombudsman in Proportional Comparison of International Students by Academic Area/Department (May 2020 to April 2021)

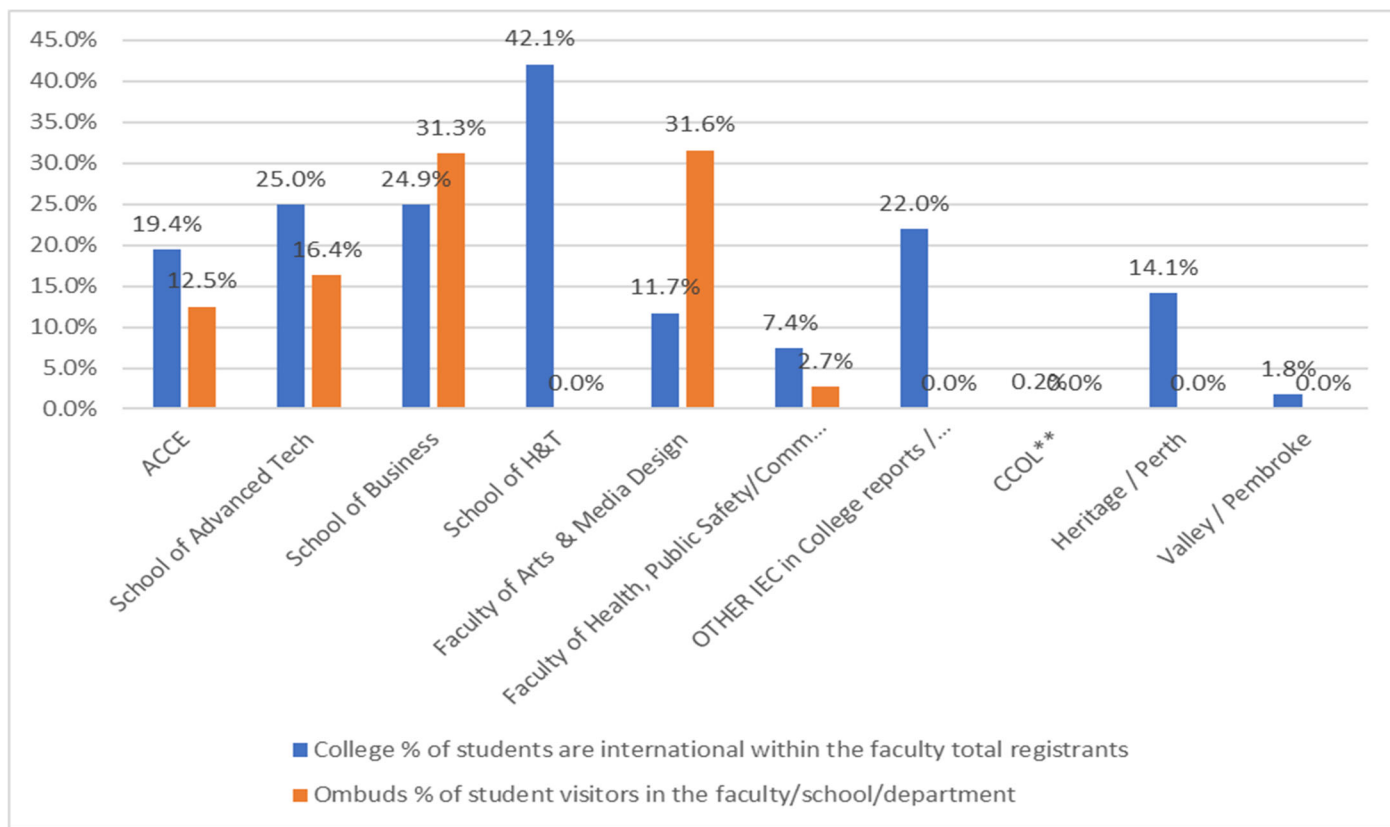


Figure 17: Services Provided, by percentage of Total Caseload, 2020-2021

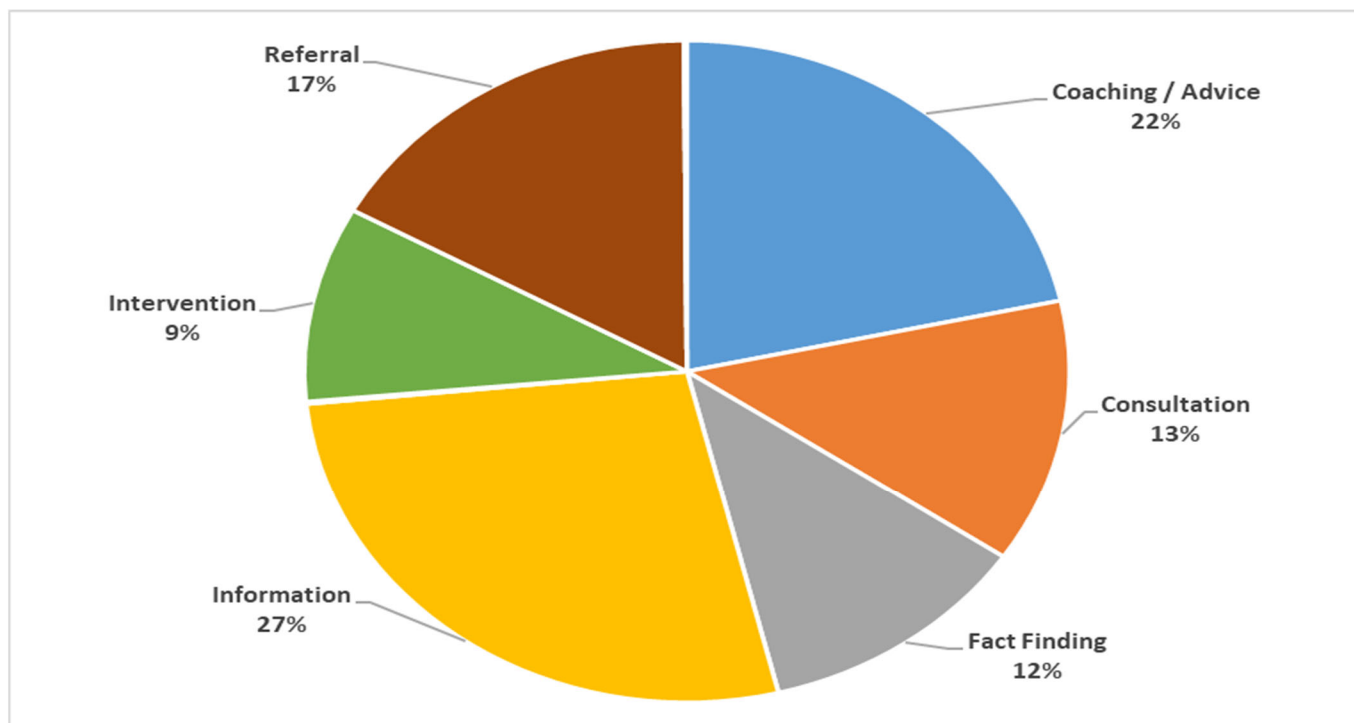
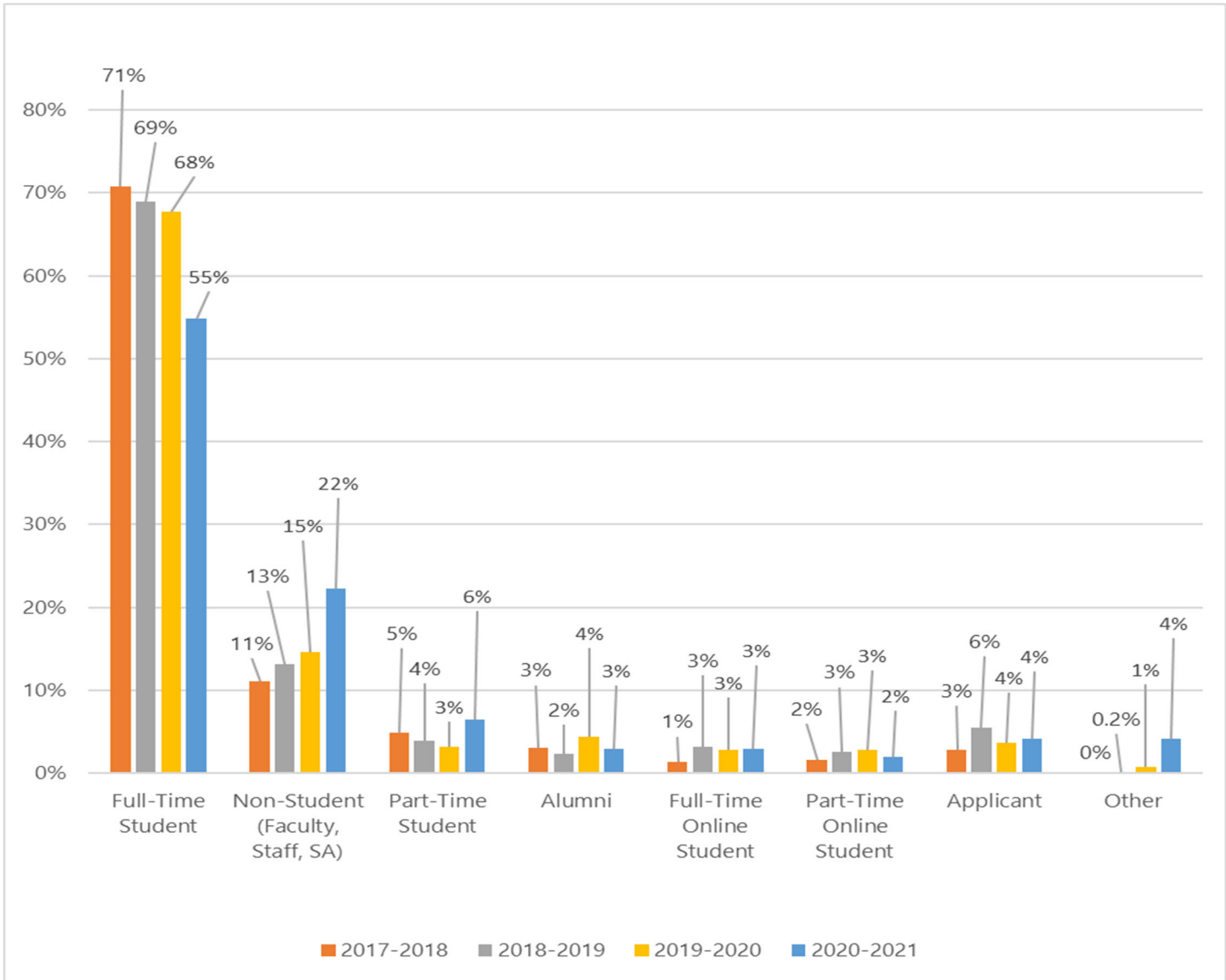


Fig. 18: Percentage of Files by Client Type – Annual Comparison 2017 – 2021



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9. Pictures Courtesy of Algonquin Students' Association



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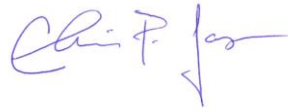
Date: December 22, 2021

To: George E. Cole, Ombudsman

From: Chris Janzen, Senior Vice President, Academic
Laura Stanbra, Vice President, Student Services

Cc: Ben Bridgstock, Director, Student Support Services & Co-Chair, Ombudsman Review Committee
Emily Ferguson, President, Students' Association & Co-Chair, Ombudsman Review Committee

Subject: Ombudsman's Annual Report 2020-21



This is to acknowledge receipt of the annual report of the activities and observations of the Ombudsman for the period of May 1, 2020 to April 30, 2021. Thank you also for providing a presentation of this report to the Algonquin College Executive Team on December 15, 2021.

On behalf of the Executive Team, we would like to thank you and your staff for this report and acknowledge the value of your work in support of the College community, guided by the College's core values of caring, learning, integrity and respect. As always, the Executive Team welcomes suggested proactive solutions to reoccurring issues in the Ombudsman's reports.

While we recognize that the COVID-19 pandemic has continued to contribute to ongoing challenges and uncertainties for our learners and staff (as noted in your report), we remain dedicated to serving our college community through the use of modern and informed strategies. Our approach to most effectively supporting our learners both in-person, and virtually continues to center around our goal of making Algonquin College a leader in personalized education among Ontario colleges.

In response to your recommendation:

1. *The College increase its efforts in clarifying the meaning and terminology of "flexibility" and "personalized learning" to reconcile the expectations of students with the College's commitments and capacity to deliver on such commitments"*

We certainly acknowledge that while we continue to seek new, innovative ways of supporting our learners, and ensuring that course offerings are tailored to meet their individual needs and circumstances, there is more work to be done.

The College's Learner Driven strategy document, *The Algonquin Difference: Changing Lives with Personalized College Experience* identifies flexibility as the primary strategy for the personalization of learning and for personalizing the overall College experience for learners. Throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, this document has remained the beacon of our efforts to continually ensure our learners are provided with as many *options* as possible, when it comes to their learning experience. Similarly,

personalization has been a mainstay in our thinking for many years – from improved outreach strategies, to augmented program delivery options, we will continue to build on our strong foundation in achieving the College’s learner driven goals. Given your recommendation, continuing to articulate awareness and understanding of these objectives will be helpful as we craft communication, activities and events for our learners.

In particular, as the Academic Area begins the work to develop an academic strategic plan for the next six years, we will incorporate the whole of the Learner Driven Plan and build on that foundation. We will endeavor to provide clear goals and outcomes in the plan in order to provide context for personalized learning and flexibility at Algonquin College.

At this time, we are pleased to report that a cross-college Flexible Learning and Multimodal Classrooms Working Group has been established and is currently working through various pain points reflected in the report including improved timetabling processes and communications, as well as next step information for academic deliveries.

Once again, thank you for this year’s report; it will serve us well as we continue to build on our strategic objective of being a more learner-driven organization. Your report, as well as this response will be provided for information, to the Academic and Student Affairs, sub-committee of the Board of Governors, on January 25, 2022.

