



DALHOUSIE UNIVERSITY



OFFICE OF THE OMBUDSPERSON

2024 - 2025

**ANNUAL
REPORT**

Commitment to Equity, Diversity, Inclusion, and Accessibility

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

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

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

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

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FROM THE OMBUDSPERSON

It is my privilege to present the 2024–2025 Annual Report of the Office of the Ombudsperson at Dalhousie University. This report provides a summary of the work carried out over the past academic year in supporting students of the Dalhousie community, who seek a fair and respectful environment in which to study, work, and grow.

In this my first year as the Ombudsperson for Dalhousie University, I was humbled by the trust that members of this campus community place in the Office. Every conversation, concern, and consultation are reminders of the complexity of university life and of the strength and resilience of the people who make up Dalhousie.

Over the past year, I have heard from individuals navigating academic challenges, administrative processes, interpersonal conflicts, and equity-related concerns. Many reached out not just for information or advice, but for the chance to be heard in a judgment-free, safe, confidential space. That is the core of what this Office offers: an opportunity to pause, reflect, and consider constructive ways forward.

In addition to serving as a source of support, this year has also been one of significant learning for me - gained through meaningful engagement with our faculty, staff, and students. Through active listening, thoughtful dialogue, and collaborative efforts, I have developed (and continue to grow) a deeper understanding of the needs within our campus community, so I am better equipped to serve effectively.

I remain deeply dedicated to ensuring that the Ombudsperson Office is accessible to everyone, especially those who may feel unheard or uncertain about how to advocate for themselves. While I do not take sides, I remain committed to being on the side of fairness. I advocate strongly for just treatment, transparent systems, and respectful discourse. I continue to work with university partners to identify patterns, clarify misunderstandings, and encourage systemic improvements.

I would like to extend my sincere thanks to those who have engaged with the Office over the past year, be they students, faculty, staff, or other visitors. Your voices shape not only this report but the broader conversations around fairness, equity, and accountability at Dalhousie.

As we move forward, I encourage all members of our community to continue seeking clarity, to speak up when things don't feel right, and to treat one another with the respect and dignity that should define our institution.

Jessica Chubb

JESSICA CHUBB
OMBUDSPERSON



ABOUT THE OFFICE

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

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

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

What Does the Ombudsperson Do?

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

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

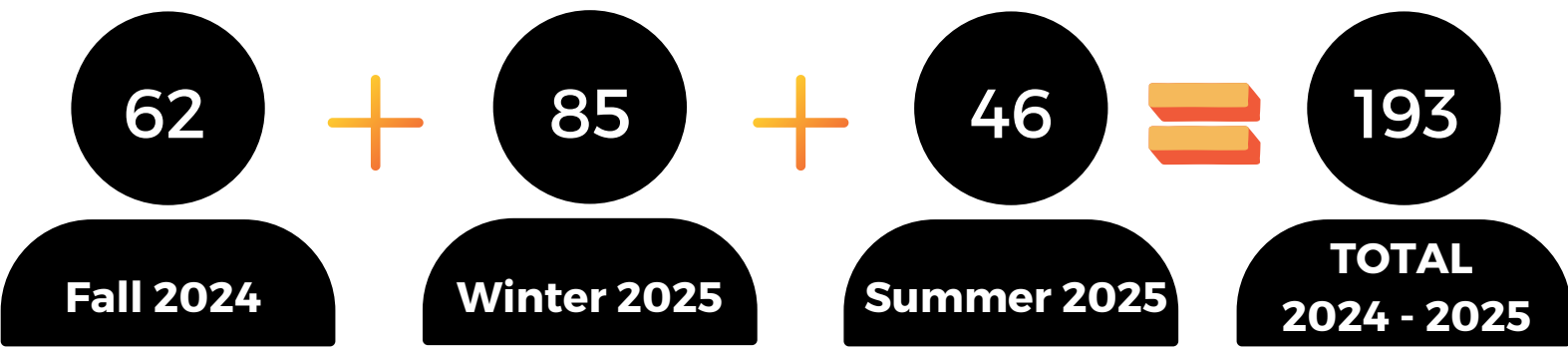
- **Independence**
- **Impartiality**
- **Confidentiality**
- **Accessibility**

2024 - 2025 STATISTICAL DATA

The following numbers and statistics outline the experience at the Ombudsperson Office in the 2024 - 2025 academic year.

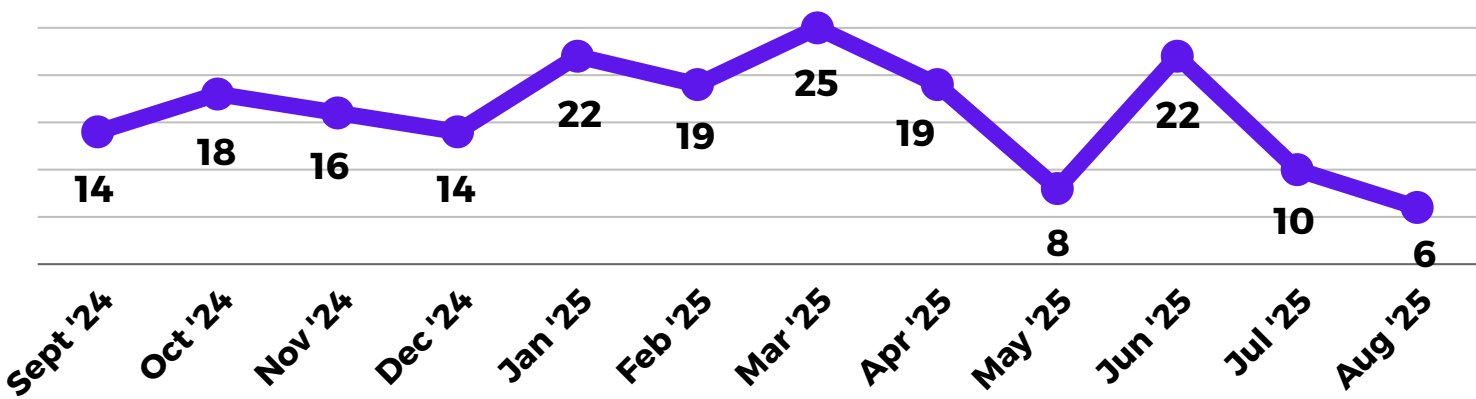
Numbers and statistics are representative of September 1st, 2024 to August 30th, 2025.

VISITOR NUMBERS BY SEMESTER



In the previous academic year, between September 2023 and June 2024, the Ombudsperson Office had 161 visitors. While those numbers do not represent a full academic year (as the Office was in transition), a 19.8% increase in reported visitors can be noted for 2024 - 2025.

VISITOR NUMBERS BY MONTH



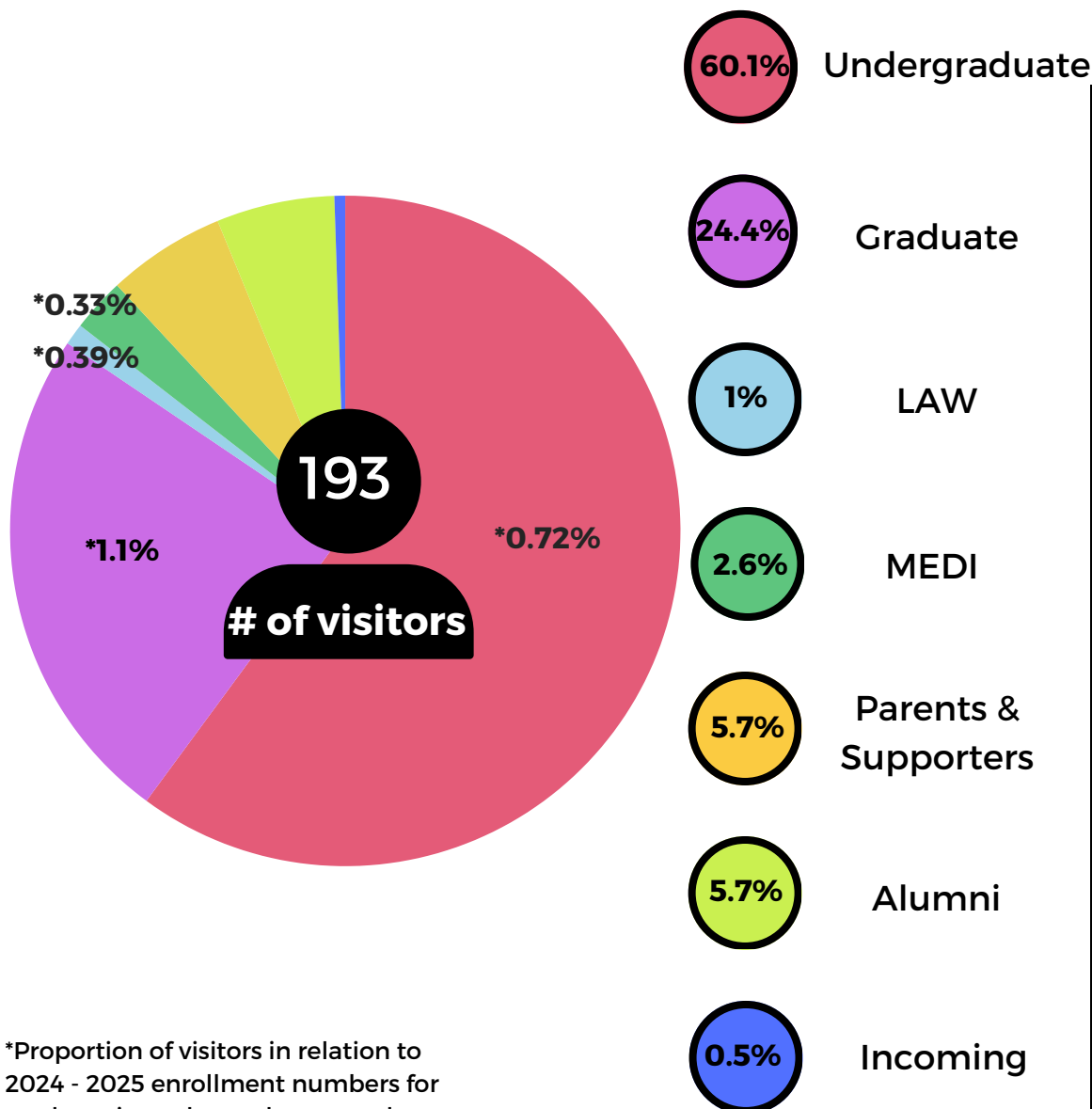
March 2025 was the most active month at the Ombudsperson Office accounting for 13% of appointments in the 2024-2025 academic year. January and June tied for second place, each with 11.4% of appointments.

Follow-up appointments and meetings with visitors for the same complaint or concern were not included in appointment numbers in these statistics.

2024 - 2025 STATISTICAL DATA



WHO VISITED THE OMBUDSPERSON OFFICE



**Enrollment
Numbers**

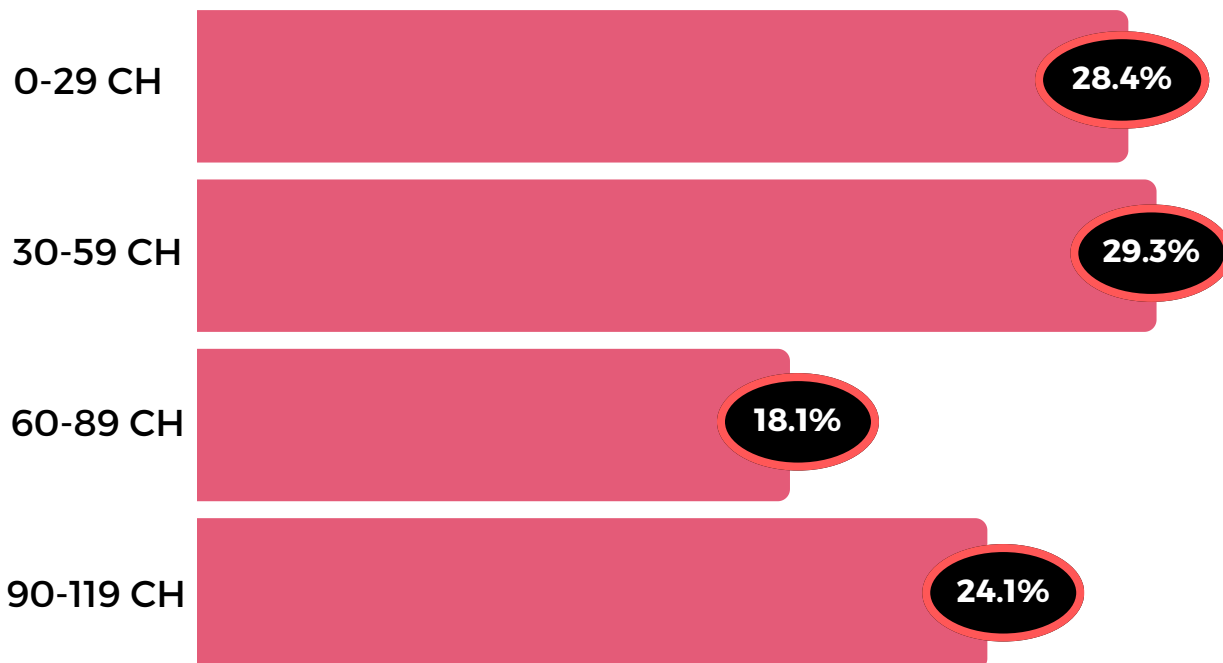
60.1% of visitors were undergraduate students, accounting for 0.72% of enrolled students.

24.4% of visitors were graduate students, representing the largest proportion of enrolled student visitors at 1.1%.

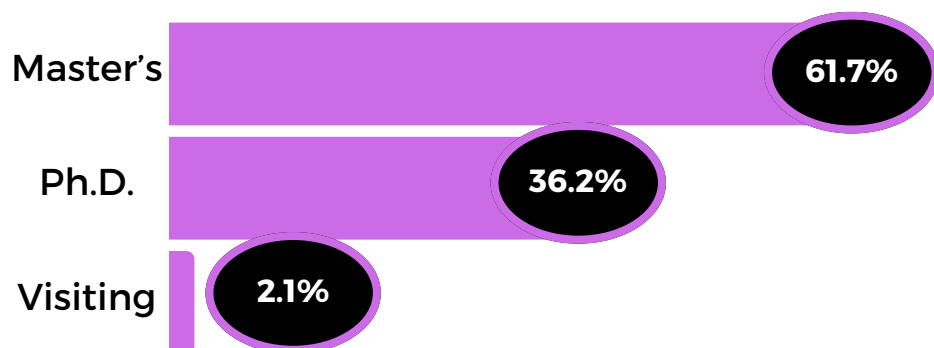
2.6% of visitors were MEDI students, representing 0.33% of enrolled students.

1% of visitors were LAW students, accounting for 0.39% of enrolled students.

*Proportion of visitors in relation to 2024 - 2025 enrollment numbers for students in undergraduate, graduate, MEDI, and LAW programs.

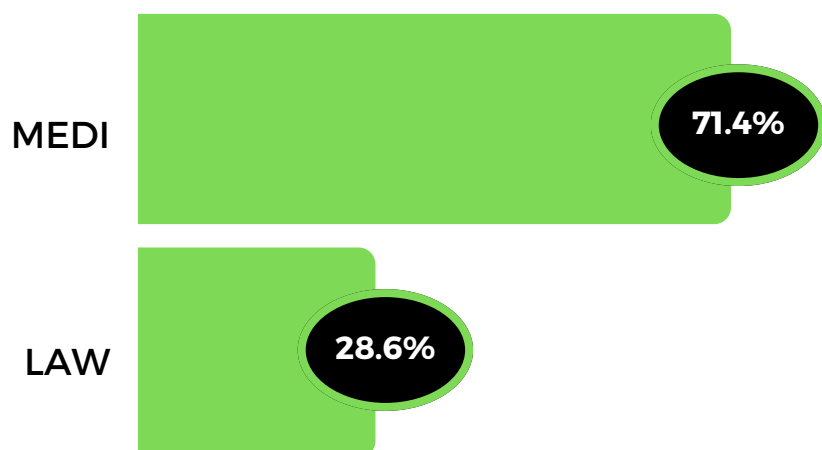
UNDERGRADUATE STUDENTS

The largest proportion of undergraduate student visitors who connected with the Ombudsperson Office (29.3%) were students in the 30-59 credit hour level of study.

GRADUATE STUDENTS

Students completing their Master's degree accounted for 61.7% of all graduate student visitors who connected with the Ombudsperson Office.

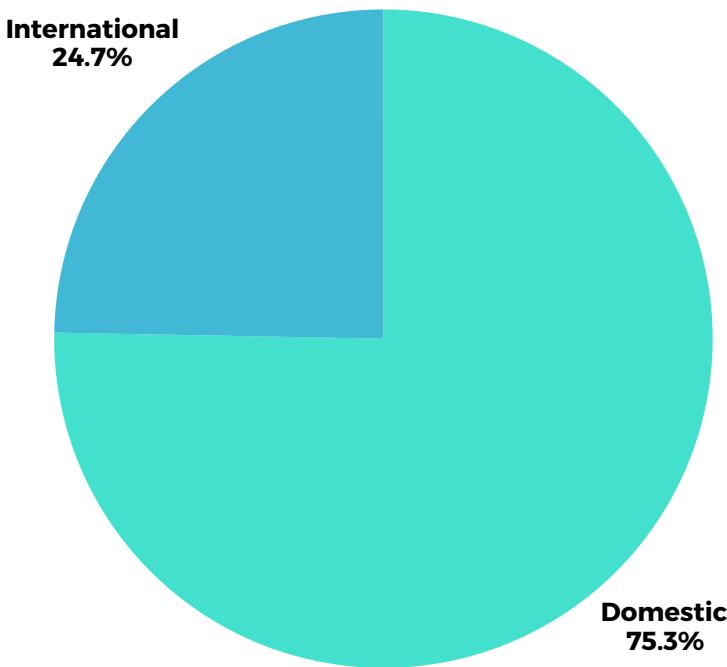
Master's students in course-based study represented 38.3% of all graduate students, while those in research represented 23.4% of all graduate students.

MEDI, LAW & DENT STUDENTS

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

The Office saw no students in the Faculty of Dentistry this academic year, unlike in the 2023-24 academic year when students in DENT represented 7.7% of student visitors in that category.

STUDENT STATUS

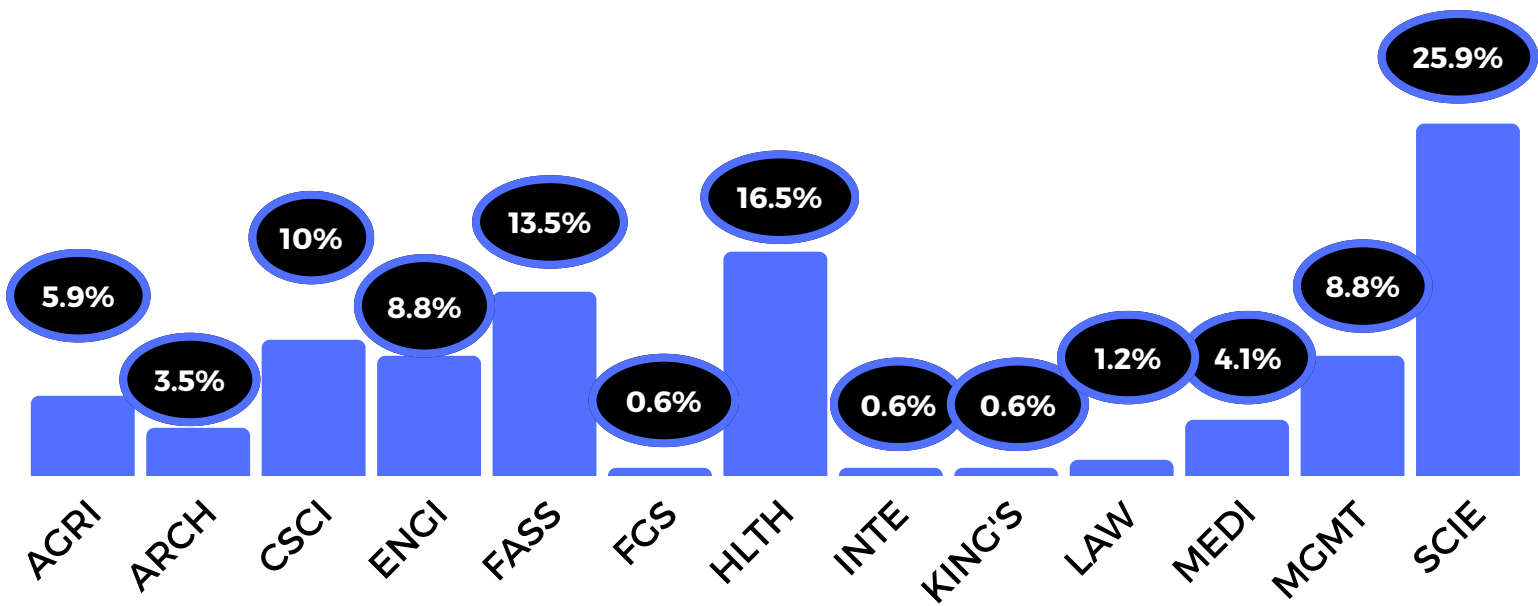


Of the 170 student visitors, 42 students were international students, accounting for 24.7% of all student visitors to the Ombudsperson Office.

Based on enrollment:
The proportion of international student visitors represented 1.1% of international students and 0.20% of the entire student population.

Domestic student visitors accounted for 0.74% of overall domestic students and 0.61% of the entire student population.

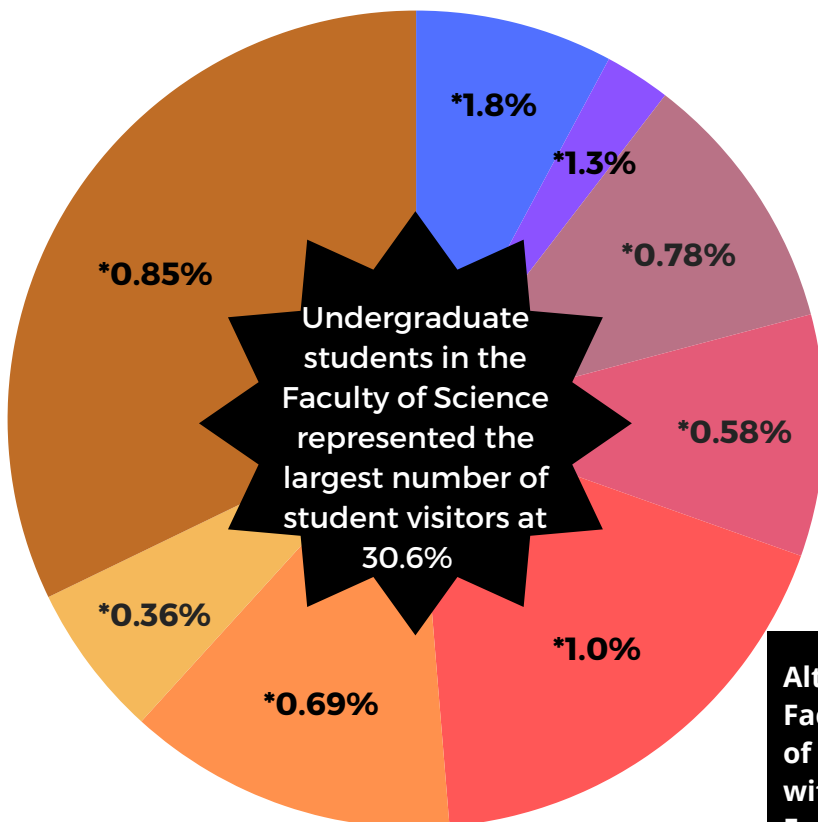
STUDENT VISITOR BREAKDOWN BY FACULTY



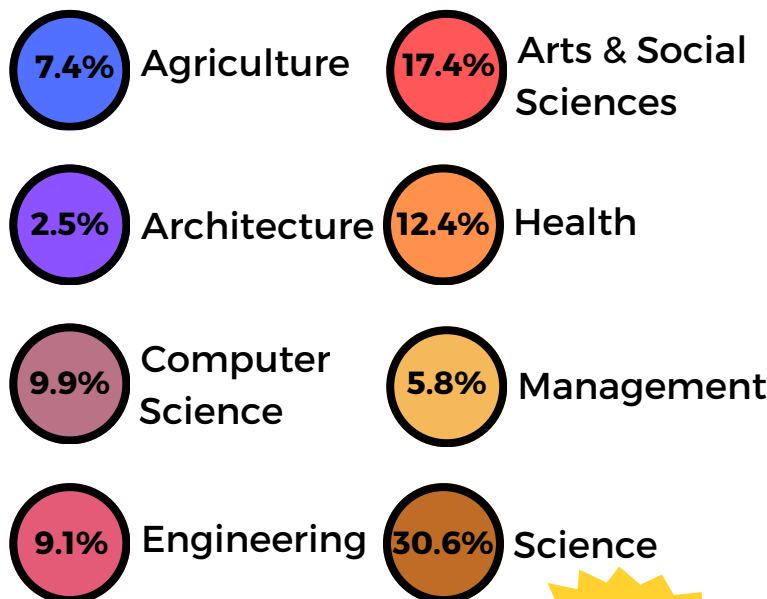
Student visitors from the Faculty of Science represented the largest overall faculty to connect to the Ombudsperson Office, accounting for nearly 26% of all visitors.

There was 1 student from King's, 1 student in an interdisciplinary field, and 1 visiting student (none of whom were associated with a distinct faculty).

UNDERGRADUATE STUDENTS BY FACULTY



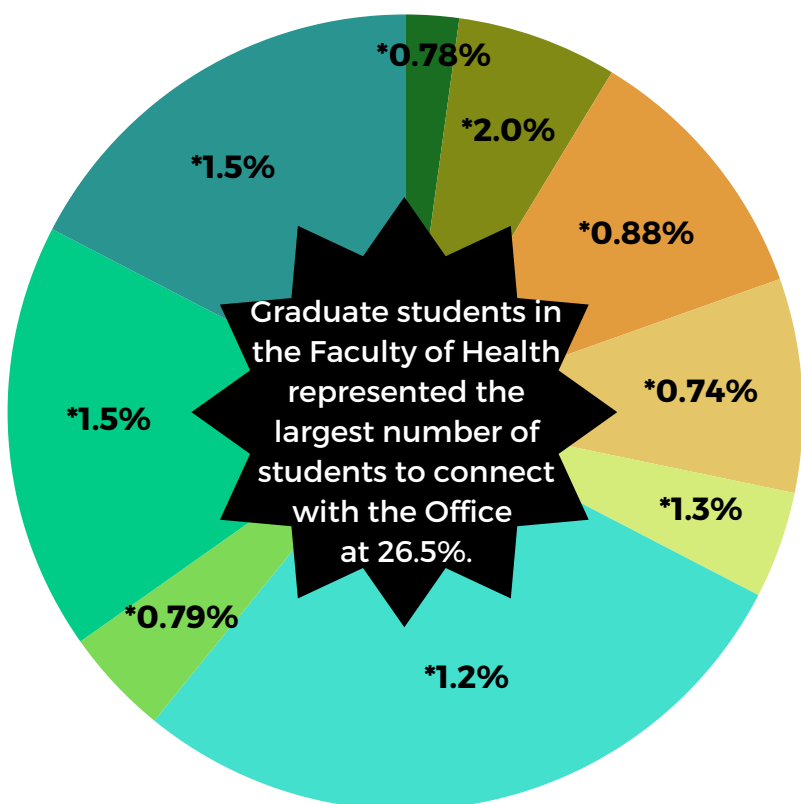
*Proportion of visitors in relation to number of undergraduate students enrolled in each faculty.



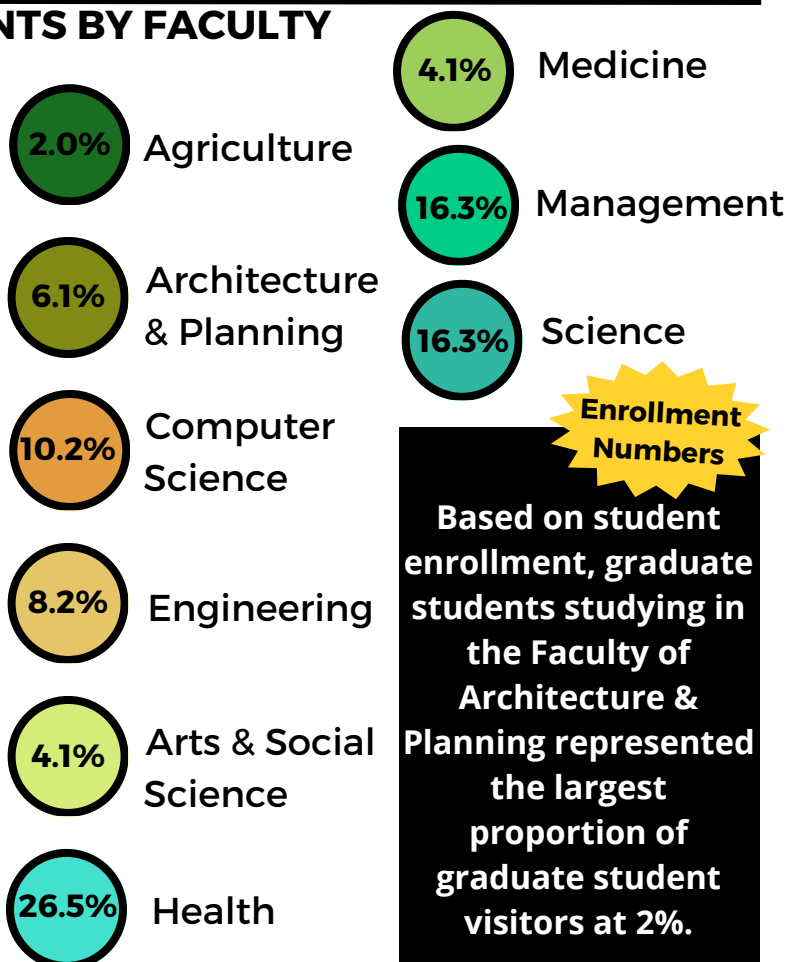
Although undergraduate students in the Faculty of Science were the largest number of visitors to the office, based on student enrollment within each faculty, undergraduate students in the Faculty of Agriculture represented the largest proportion of undergraduate student visitors at 1.8%.

Enrollment Numbers

GRADUATE STUDENTS BY FACULTY



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



Based on student enrollment, graduate students studying in the Faculty of Architecture & Planning represented the largest proportion of graduate student visitors at 2%.

Enrollment Numbers

In the 2024-25 academic year, both the numbers of undergraduate and graduate student visitors very closely resembled visitor figures from the previous two academic years. It seems that the proportion of students in each category who connect with the Ombudsperson Office has barely changed over the years.

The nature of their inquiries, which will be addressed below, also remained very similar from year to year, with academic concerns unsurprisingly representing the bulk of all inquiries.

NATURE OF INQUIRY

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

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

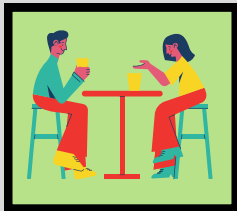
CONCERN/COMPLAINT CLASSIFICATION



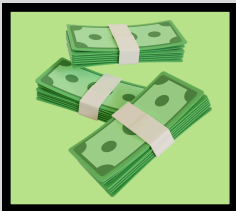
ACADEMIC
44%



NON-ACADEMIC
24.5%



INTERPERSONAL
19%



FINANCES
6.9%

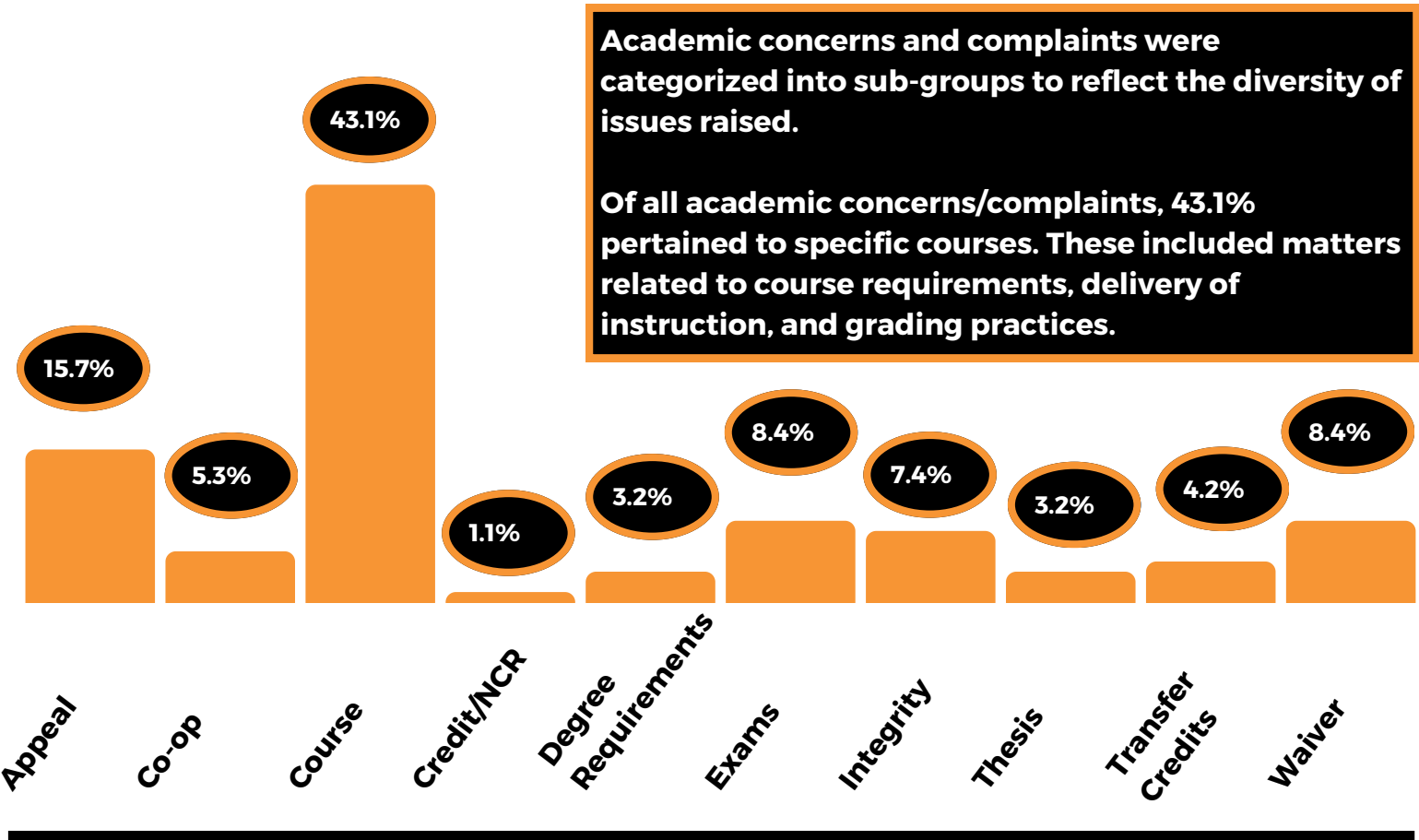


ACCOMMODATIONS
AND EQUITY
4.2%

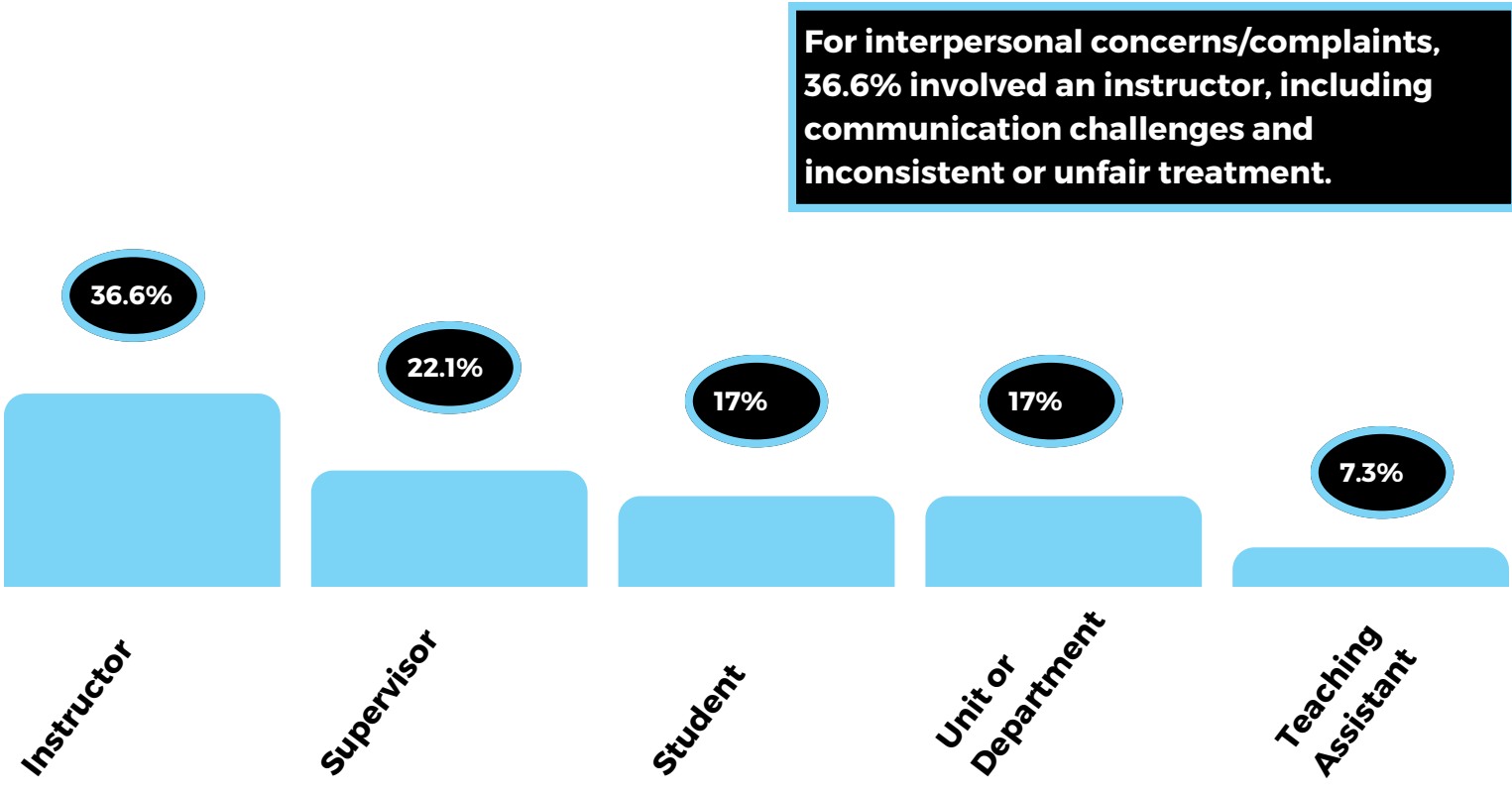


ADMISSIONS
1.4%

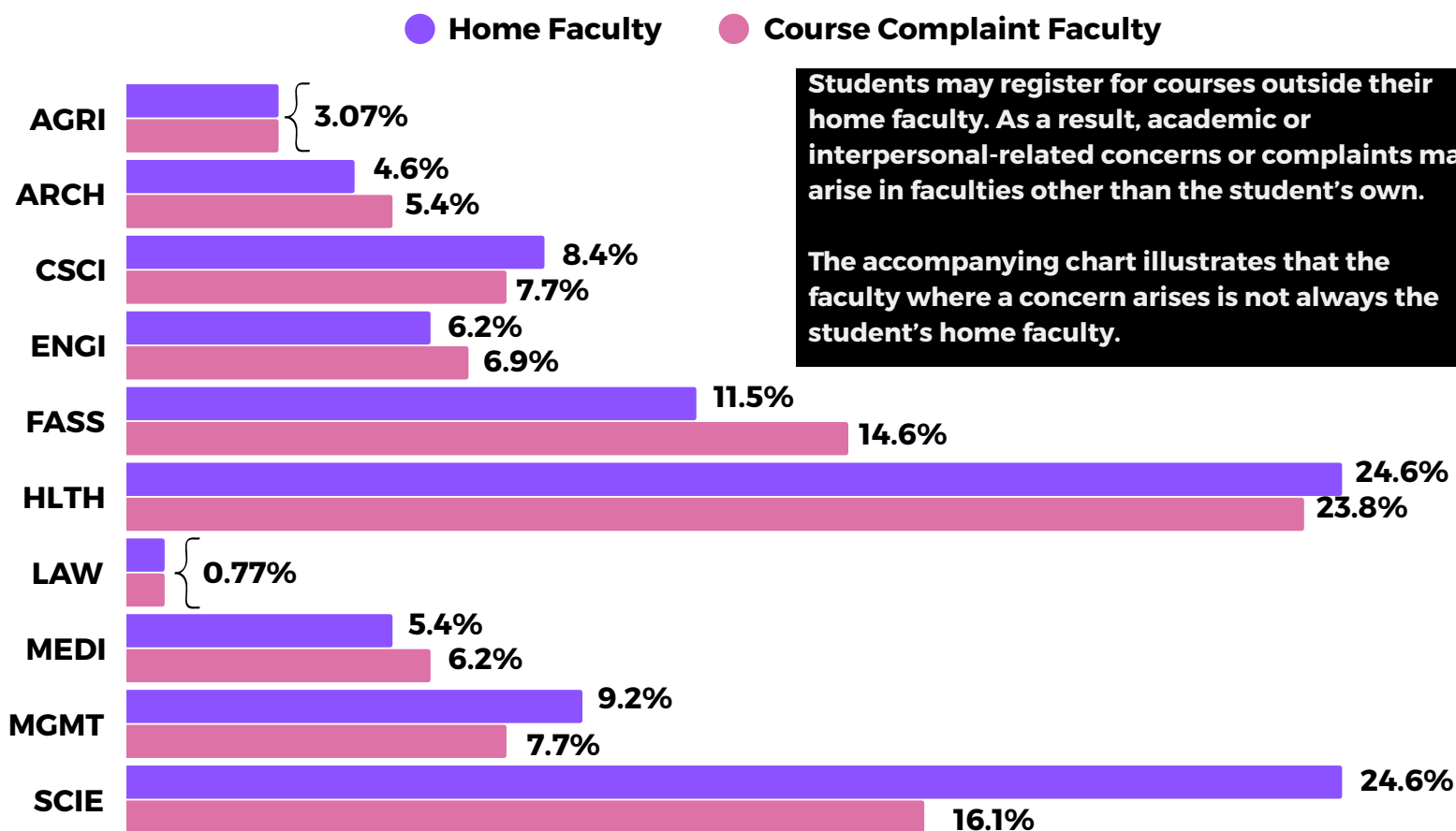
ACADEMIC CONCERNS/COMPLAINTS



INTERPERSONAL CONCERNS/COMPLAINTS



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



It can be noted that 11.5% of academic and interpersonal concerns/complaints were shared by visitors whose home faculty is Arts and Social Sciences, but 14.6% of overall academic and interpersonal concerns/complaints concerned the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences.

Similarly, there were more academic and interpersonal concerns/complaints levied against the Faculties of Architecture and Planning (5.4%), Engineering (6.9%), and Medicine (6.2%) than there were student visitors registered in those faculties (4.6%, 6.2%, and 5.4% respectively) who brought forth academic and interpersonal concerns/complaints.

Conversely, 9.2% of academic and interpersonal concerns/complaints were shared by visitors whose home faculty is Management, but there were fewer academic and interpersonal concerns/complaints (7.7%) against the Faculty of Management.

Similarly, 24.6% of academic and interpersonal concerns/complaints were shared by visitors whose home faculty is Science, but there were fewer academic and interpersonal concerns/complaints (16.1%) against the Faculty of Science.

The same can be seen with the Faculties of Computer Science and Health, where home faculty representation of visitors who brought forth academic and interpersonal concerns/complaints (8.4% and 24.6% respectively) were in larger proportions to the academic and interpersonal concerns/complaints faculty representation (7.7% and 23.8% respectively).

SUPPORT PROVIDED

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

In the 2024–2025 academic year, the most common type of appointment involved providing visitors with advice, information, and referral, accounting for 33.2% of all appointments. Appointments that involved only advice and information were the second most frequent, comprising 31.6% of the total.



**Advice, Information
& Referral**
33.2%



**Advice &
Information**
31.6%



Intervention
22.3%



Coaching
12.9%

APPOINTMENT TYPE

During the 2024-25 academic year, visitors engaged with the Ombudsperson Office through a variety of formats. The type of appointment/communication was determined by each visitor's preference, as well as the method's suitability for effective discussion and problem-solving.

In-person appointments were the most widely used, accounting for 32.1%. This was followed by appointments via email, which represented 27.9%.



32.1%
**appointments
in-person**



27.9%
**appointments
by email**

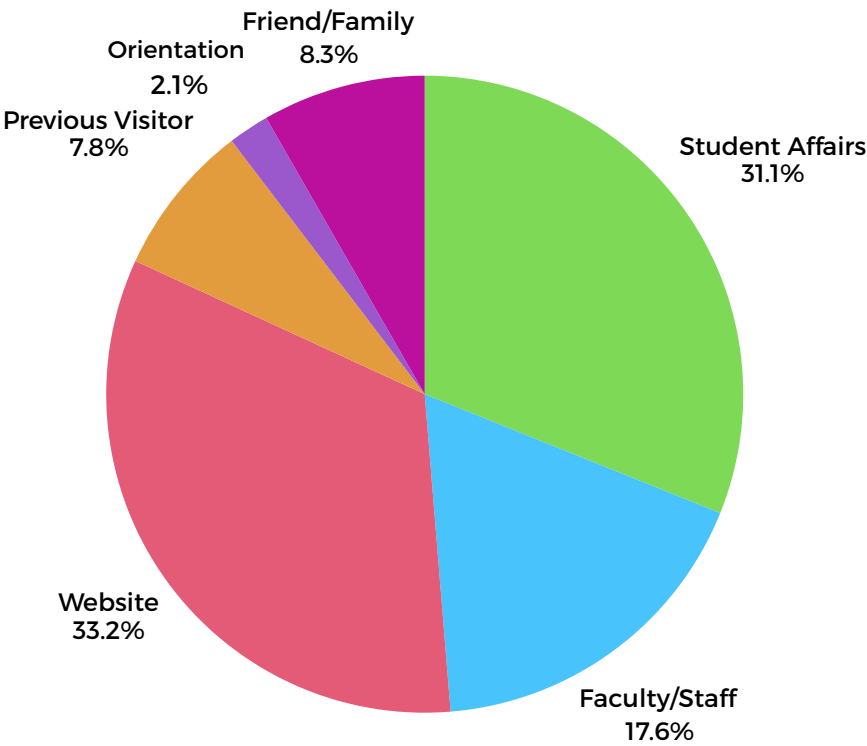


21.8%
**appointments
on Teams**



18.1%
**appointments
by phone**

KNOWLEDGE OF THE OFFICE



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

In the 2024–25 academic year, the most common source of awareness was the university website, accounting for 33.2% of visitors. This was followed closely by referrals and interactions with Student Affairs units, which represented 31.1% of visitor sources.

PRESENTATIONS/WORKSHOPS

Workshops and presentations play a vital role in raising awareness among students about the Ombudsperson Office. These outreach efforts help inform students of their rights, available support services, and how the Office can assist with resolving academic and other institutional concerns.



- **An information session for the Faculty of Graduate Studies’ Together@Dal Grad Mentors was conducted in the Fall semester, in collaboration with colleagues from HRES (Lyndsay Anderson and Rhema Ferguson) and the Student Support Team (Kerrin Duggan).**
- **An Ombuds Office Information Session was held at the Melda Murray Student Centre (on the Sexton campus) in the Winter semester.**
- **A Lightning Talk Presentation: The Role of the Ombudsperson and HRES was conducted for the BIPOC Graduate Student Mentoring Academy, and conducted with Amina Abawajy (Education Advisor, HRES), also in the Winter semester.**
- **A workshop on Managing the Student/Supervisor Relationship was conducted and open to all graduate students in the Winter semester.**

BUILDING CAMPUS CONNECTIONS

- People and Culture
- Admissions
- Privacy Office
- Registrar's Office
- Records Management
- DSU/DSAS
- Human Rights and Equity Services
- Centre for Learning and Teaching
- Multiple Faculty, and Associate/Assistant Deans
- Student Accessibility Centre
- Bissett Student Success Centre
- International Centre
- Facilities Management
- Security Services
- Numerous other departments and Student Affairs Offices

Participation in campus events is essential for the Ombudsperson Office, helping to increase visibility and foster connections with students. Involvement in these events also strengthens collaboration with campus services and supports, providing opportunities to stay informed about new initiatives, ongoing developments, and emerging student needs.

Consultations are a vital aspect of the Ombudsperson Office's work, supporting informed and effective service. The Office values the collaboration and expertise shared by campus partners and acknowledges their willingness to engage in follow-up and contribute knowledge to supporting student concerns.

- Able@Dal orientation
- Welcome Fair (Halifax)
- TA Lunch Days
- Indigenous Student Centre Welcome Fair
- Promoting Community Connections (Sexton Campus)
- Mental Health Forum (monthly)
- Monthly meetings with representatives from Dal Student Advocacy Services & Student Affairs

- From Awareness to Action: Combating Ableism & Embracing Disability Inclusion in Medical Education
- Mastering Difficult Conversations
- Resilience – The Science & True Path to Success vs. the Limits
- Email Best Practices
- Student Affairs Advising Summit
- Managing Conflict in the Workplace
- Shared Drive Cleanups - Things to Think About (Records Management Office)
- Nutrition & Digestive Health (Accessibility, Accommodations and Wellness, People and Culture)
- A Very Magical PowerPoint Workshop (DPMG)
- Eating Well (Accessibility, Accommodations and Wellness, People and Culture)
- The Erasure of IDEIA (Human Rights and Equity Services Film Screening and Conference)
- The Canadian Anti-Racism Imperative (Schulich School of Law)

Professional development remains a key priority, ensuring the Ombudsperson stays informed of current practices and emerging issues. Ongoing learning supports continuous growth and enhances the Office's ability to effectively serve students.

VISITOR TESTIMONIALS

I want to thank you again for meeting with me - it was genuinely wonderful to talk to you; you did a fantastic job of making me feel welcome and heard! The Dalhousie community is very fortunate to have you as a resource when conflicts arise!

I am very grateful for how kind and considerate you have been throughout this process. It has been a relief to finally have some answers and be able to get on with this term.

Your immediate action to assist truly made me feel supported, and it significantly reduced my stress and anxiety regarding the situation.

It was fabulous meeting with you. You were so kind!

I really appreciate all of your assistance in this matter.

Thank you so much for your support, understanding, and efficiency through this entire situation. You have been a pleasure to work with.

I want you to know how deeply I appreciate your kindness, responsiveness, and the reassurance your support provided me. I am genuinely grateful, and your assistance made all the difference - I truly felt I wasn't alone.

TRENDS



Identifying trends on campus helps the Ombudsperson Office highlight areas that may require further attention and informs recommendations for positive change. These trends are often shaped by various factors, including budget constraints, cultural and global events, and decisions at the provincial and federal levels. Some common concerns from this semester are outlined below.

A recurring theme in many visitor appointments was communication challenges across departments, faculties, and administrative offices. While not always the primary concern brought forward, issues with delayed, inconsistent, inaccurate, or unhelpful communication often emerged as a significant barrier to resolving other problems. Another trend that has continued from previous years was the concern that emerged from the lack of an Undergraduate Leave of Absence Policy.

These particular trends were also noted in prior academic years and have continued. Given their persistence, it is important to address them again. These ongoing issues go beyond individual cases; they undermine students' academic experiences, affect procedural fairness, and can negatively impact Dalhousie's reputation and can contribute to student attrition.

Equity Considerations in the Academic Forgiveness Policy:

In meeting with student-supporting staff members, I had a chance to review the Academic Forgiveness Policy (AFP), which has proven to be less than inclusive to all students. During these meetings, concerns were raised about the current Academic Forgiveness Policy and its unintended impact on equity-deserving student groups. In one case, a student was unable to meet the required three-year absence period due to valid personal reasons. Despite demonstrating significant academic improvement in their new program, the student was deemed ineligible for CGPA forgiveness, leading to ripple negative effects in their academic and career journeys.

While reviewing the AFP, it was noted that the three-year absence requirement may disproportionately affect Black, Indigenous, and international students. A clear rationale for the three-year time frame was not identified and the basis of this requirement has been brought into question. While the policy is well-intentioned in supporting academic redemption, it does not fully account for the diverse circumstances of Dalhousie's student population.

Considerations in the Development of an Undergraduate Leave of Absence (LOA) Policy:

As part of ongoing efforts to improve student support and institutional clarity, the Ombudsperson has been gathering information to support the development of a formal Undergraduate Leave of Absence (LOA) Policy. This work has included consultations with Assistant Deans, academic advisors, and other key stakeholders. While LOA Policies exist in many professional programs and in the Faculty of Graduate Studies, the absence of a standard Undergraduate LOA Policy has resulted in inconsistent advising and, at times, misinformation, or no information, leaving students without the necessary guidance to make informed decisions about stepping away from their studies.

The absence of this Undergraduate LOA Policy has affected both domestic and international students, but with added immigration repercussions for the latter group of students. The Dalhousie Student Advocacy Services (DSAS) and International Centre teams also recognize the impacts of the lack of an Undergraduate LOA Policy, as these teams have worked to support a number of students on such matters. Accordingly, DSAS and the International Centre advisors worked closely with the Ombudsperson Office, discussing and understanding the process as it currently exists and identifying key elements that should be considered for the creation of any such policy to ensure accuracy and alignment with immigration regulations.

Student Example: An international student had taken some time away from their studies for personal reasons and returned to university after an extended absence. In discussing another matter with them, it became clear that the student was not aware of the Immigration, Refugees, and Citizenship Canada (IRCC)'s guidelines on leaves of absences; that the IRCC requires any leave of absence to be authorized by the student's learning institution. Furthermore, the student did not fully understand the impact their absence from university would have on their immigration status. With no formal undergraduate policy or process in place, this student was not privy to the necessary information that would precede making an informed decision.

The need for an Undergraduate LOA Policy has previously been flagged (in the 2022-2023 annual report), and this need persists. Having such a policy would create clarity and consistency, thereby closing the current gap in student support.

Communication Challenges:

Students have consistently reported ongoing challenges with institutional communication, which are not limited to a single academic term. These concerns include the provision of inconsistent or unclear information across various faculties, departments, and administrative units.

In addition to receiving conflicting guidance, many students have experienced significant delays in responses or no responses at all. When communication does occur, it is sometimes vague and lacks sufficient detail to support informed decision-making. These issues have hindered students' ability to manage academic processes throughout all stages of their academic journey.

Closely related to the communication challenges are the difficulties associated with proper referral. Students have noted being mis-directed between departments only to be re-directed to the initial unit they contacted, after visits/phone calls to multiple other units. Such instances impede students' abilities to function in an efficient manner with regard to university-related tasks. These instances emphasize the need for clearer interdepartmental coordination, knowledge, and practices.

Inconsistent/Vague Assessment Frameworks:

A significant portion (43.9%) of course-related academic complaints related to grading and assessments, which students largely attributed to the lack of meaningful academic support. Many students reported difficulties in receiving timely and adequate guidance and feedback for their coursework. Concerns included delayed or unhelpful responses to questions, and minimal or vague feedback on assignments and assessments.

In several faculties, students reported inconsistent assessment practices, contributing to confusion around learner promotion and progression. Many expressed difficulties understanding how grades were calculated and often received little to no explanation from instructors. Even when seeking clarification, students found it challenging to learn from past exams or understand grading criteria.

Concerns also emerged around subjective evaluations in labs, clinicals, and practicums, areas where students expected objective, clearly defined standards. In some cases, policies on student retention and remediation were vague or inconsistently applied, negatively affecting students.

Without defined and consistent policies, students are left vulnerable to overly subjective judgment, undermining fairness in academic evaluation.

Transparency Concerns:

Another concern closely tied to communication issues is a perceived lack of transparency in university decision-making, which has had negative academic impacts on students. While some institutional decisions may inherently be difficult, the way these decisions are communicated and implemented has often been more detrimental than the decisions themselves. Importantly, these concerns reflect the experiences of a broad base of students.

One prominent example is the reduction of language studies in the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences, particularly the pending suspension of the Russian program. Students reported receiving little notice or explanation regarding these changes, which directly affected their ability to complete their majors or minors. In some cases, required courses (which students had already registered for) were removed without clear and accessible alternatives, leaving students without viable paths to graduation.

Another example of student concern regarding transparency is the upcoming change to the Graduate Funding Payment system, set to take effect in September 2025. Under the new model, graduate students will be paid every four months instead of monthly. Many graduate students expressed disappointment and shock that such a significant change, one with considerable financial implications, was made without sufficient consultation or prior communication with the graduate student community.

Transparency is essential for fostering trust, preventing misunderstandings, supporting informed decision-making, and ensuring procedural and substantive fairness. Without it, students are left confused and academically disadvantaged and are not able to proactively problem-solve. Such lack of transparency in university-related processes and decisions runs counter to Dalhousie's stated commitment in its Mission Statement to provide a world-class student experience grounded in respect and inclusion.



RECOMMENDATIONS



The concerns raised by students highlight ongoing challenges in communication, institutional responsiveness, transparency, and academic fairness. As visitors presented their concerns, the Ombudsperson Office reached out to the various faculties/programs/departments for information, clarification, and insight, as it is always essential to fully explore all concerns. In discussions with the various campus units, it was clear that for the most part, both faculty and staff were eager and accepting of engaging in those discussions and enacting positive change where necessary. Our university environment is a dynamic one and in putting forth the following recommendations, I recognize that there needs to be continual exploration and learning. These preliminary suggestions aim to initiate dialogue and reflection and are by no means final. What is proposed will continue to develop as new discussions are had, additional input is received from students and other stakeholders, and trends are further analyzed.

Recommendation #1: Review and Amend the Academic Forgiveness Policy to Enhance Equity and Accessibility

It is recommended that the University undertake a comprehensive review and potential amendment of the Academic Forgiveness Policy to better support fairness, inclusivity, and student success. Concerns raised during recent consultations (discussed earlier in this report) indicate that the current policy, specifically the three-year absence requirement, may disproportionately impact equity-deserving student groups, including Black, Indigenous, and international students.

The policy, while intended to facilitate academic redemption, does not adequately reflect the complex personal, financial, and immigration-related barriers some students face. These challenges can include the loss of band funding or sponsorship, ineligibility to maintain or apply for study or work permits, and long-term effects on access to student loans or permanent residency pathways. Notably, no clear rationale for the current three-year requirement was identified during our review.

Amending the policy to provide more flexible but reasonable pathways for CGPA forgiveness (upon a student's demonstrated substantial academic improvement in their current program of study) would promote greater fairness and responsiveness to the diverse realities of Dalhousie students. In addition, it would align with institutional commitments to equity, diversity, and inclusion in academic processes. Finally, amending the policy would support institutional efforts toward improving student retention, well-being, and long-term academic and career outcomes.

Recommendation #2: Establish a Comprehensive Undergraduate Leave of Absence (LOA) Policy

It is recommended that the University develop and implement a formal Undergraduate Leave of Absence (LOA) Policy to provide clear, consistent, and equitable guidance for all undergraduate students, domestic and international, who need to take time away from their studies.

The absence of such a policy has led to significant challenges, particularly for international students, who face serious consequences, including risks to their study permits, post-graduate work permit eligibility, and permanent residency pathways, when not provided with timely or accurate information related to academic leave. The International Centre has reported multiple instances where unclear or delayed guidance (or no guidance at all) has had direct immigration-related impacts.

Domestic students are also negatively affected, particularly those taking leave to prioritize mental health, access gender-affirming care, or manage physical illness. Without a formal policy, students are often unaware of the implications that taking time off has on their academic standing, health insurance, and program continuity, leaving them vulnerable during already challenging periods.

A clear and accessible Undergraduate LOA Policy would promote transparency and consistency in institutional processes. It would mitigate risks for international students navigating immigration requirements, and ensure domestic students receive appropriate support during health-related or personal leaves. Equally as important, it would align with institutional commitments to student well-being, equity, and success.

Recommendation #3: Revise and Clarify Teaching-Related Policies

It is recommended that the University strengthen and clarify existing policies around grading, syllabi, and holistic teaching standards to ensure consistent, equitable academic practices. The Syllabus Policy and the Grading Practices Policy do provide frameworks that professors can follow. However, these policies are so general in parts that their openness to interpretation leaves room for inconsistent applications of the policies. It is understandable that instructors need to be given freedom to conduct their classes in their specific manner. However, the liberties the policies provide should not also enable inconsistencies and potential unfairness.

For instance, in the Syllabus Policy, it states that grading rubrics are optional. While this may have no negative effect in certain classes, where professors are open to providing detailed guidance, in other classes, understanding how they're evaluated may present a problem for students whose professors provide little to no feedback. In the Grading Practices Policy, it states that instructors are supposed to engage in practices that are "valid, consistent, reliable, timely..." and that "adequate feedback on the student performance is provided to support student academic success". However, this policy seems to be left open to interpretation in ascertaining what adequate feedback is.

These policies need to be strengthened by making them more precise. Ensuring the policies are specific, enforceable, and consistently applied will protect academic teaching integrity and student learning outcomes.

Recommendation #4: Ensure Student-Centred Decision-Making

The institution should establish clear protocols to provide students with timely, accessible information and resources when academic or administrative changes are being introduced. More than that, Dal needs to commit to consistently shifting decision-making processes to be more student-focused, particularly in decisions that significantly affect students' academic and financial wellbeing.

What is needed is to engage students early in consultations and allow students to have the opportunity to present their perspective. Providing notice of the criteria used to make decisions also promotes transparency. This supports procedural fairness and helps students navigate transitions more effectively. Upholding these practices not only supports students' wellbeing but also reinforces the institution's commitment to equity and integrity in its practices.

The Ombudsperson Office operates with a lens of fairness. For most people, a sense of fairness is often shaped less by the outcome itself and more by how individuals are treated throughout the decision-making process (Główczewski, 2023). For students, being privy to transparent procedures and being consistently treated with respect by those in positions of authority have a meaningful impact on their overall experience, academic success, and likelihood of staying at the institution. The recommendations above aim to improve the student experience and reinforce institutional trust and fairness.

STRATEGIC & OPERATIONAL PLANNING 2025-2026

**1**

Enhance Awareness and Accessibility

One

Conduct regular outreach through workshops, presentations, and campus events, ensuring services are accessible to all students. Continue to develop materials for the online Tool Kit to enhance students' knowledge of their rights and responsibilities.

2

Foster Collaborative Relationships across Campus

Two

Seek out opportunities to collaborate, especially with the units within Student Affairs and also with the DSU leadership, to support fairness in policies/processes and in providing student support.

3

Invest in Professional Development

Three

Remain current on best practices and higher education trends. Engage in training on conflict resolution, DEIA (diversity, equity, inclusion, accessibility), and trauma-informed practices.

4

Workshop Creation and Offerings

Four

Develop new workshops, as needed, and expand offerings of existing workshops. Provide education and guidance to university staff and faculty on fair practices.

5

Regular Strategic Discussions with Academic Leadership

Five

Share systemic trends and findings with senior leadership to inform institutional policy and procedural improvements.

A Note of Thanks

I would like to extend my profound appreciation to the members of the Ombudsperson Advisory Committee for their invaluable insight, guidance, support, and expertise: **Bob Mann, Patricia Laws, Isabelle French, Lisa DeLong, Rick Ezekiel, Mariam Knakriah, Nick D'Entremont**, as well as the new DSU representatives: **Maren Mealey and Ethan Leckie**.

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I would like to acknowledge all **Dalhousie students and visitors** who engaged with the Office this year. Your openness, authenticity, and courage in bringing forward your concerns are appreciated. It is through your willingness to share that we are all able to learn, problem-solve, and continue growing as an institution.

I am also grateful to the many colleagues across campus, including (but not limited to) in **Student Affairs, Human Rights and Equity Services, Legal Counsel, People and Culture, the Centre for Learning and Teaching, other departments, faculties, and university administrators, and the Dalhousie Student Union and Dalhousie Student Advocacy Services** for their collaboration, insight, and ongoing willingness to engage in meaningful dialogue.

A heartfelt thank you to **Jennifer Murray** and **Jacqui Langille**, in the Provost Office, for their continued encouragement and support over this year. Their thoughtfulness, wisdom, and steady presence have been deeply valued and never went unnoticed.

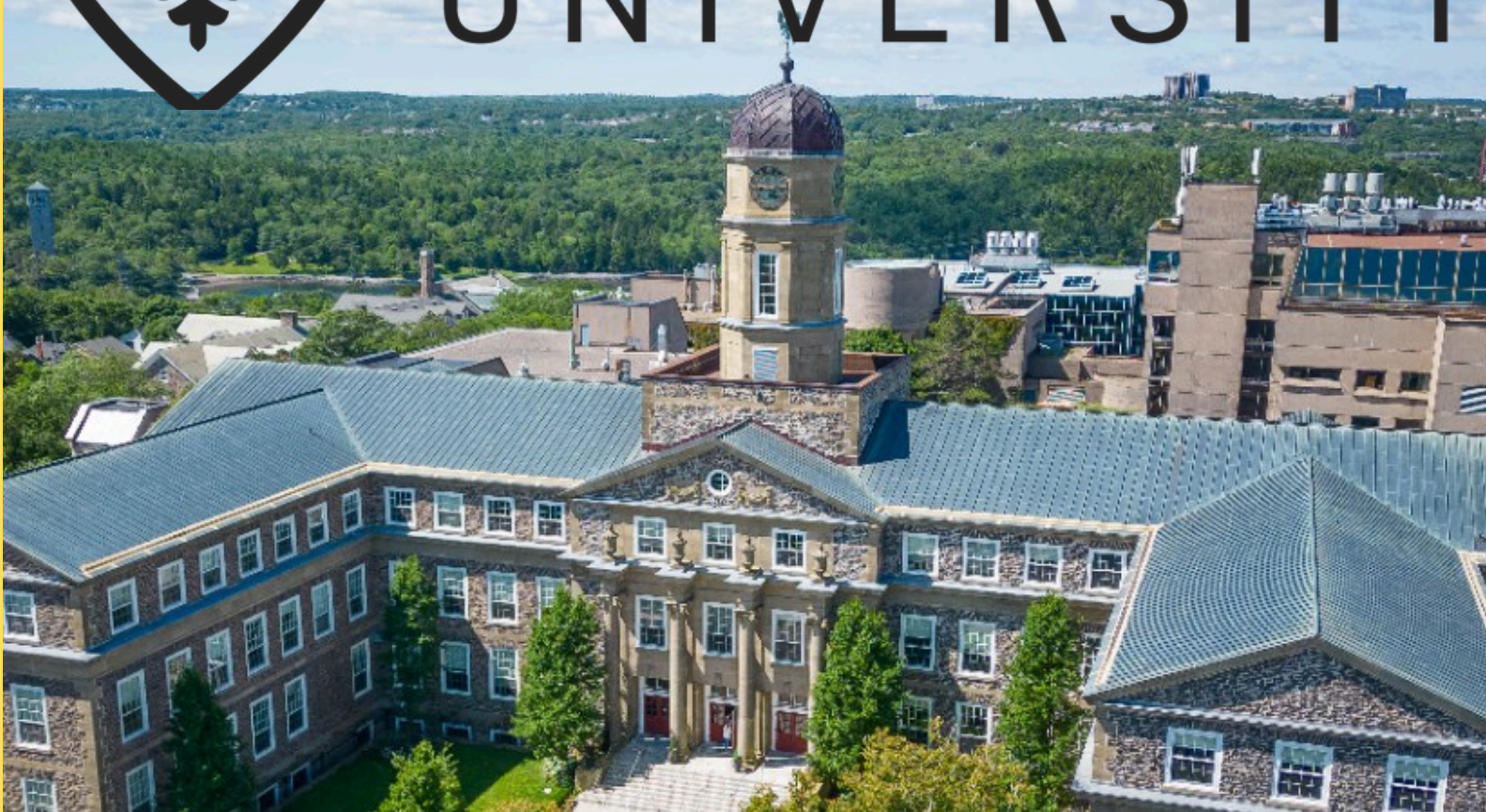
Finally, I would like to offer my sincere gratitude to **Dr. Wanda Costen, Provost and Vice-President Academic**, for her support in championing both the Ombudsperson Office and my role within it. I am truly grateful for her willingness to foster collaboration, engage in thoughtful discourse, uphold the Office's independence, and recognize the value of the Ombudsperson Office. Thank you!



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