Student Advocacy Annual Report

2018-2019

Executive Summary

Student Advocacy[1] provides confidential services for receiving student complaints and grievances. This unit serves as a general information source for students regarding their rights and responsibilities. Students are assisted in the resolution of concerns or conflicts arising from actions or decisions taken by the University. Students are advised of policies and procedures to follow, both informally and formally. Staff work collaboratively with other campus resources to provide support and education to students and other members of the University community.

This report provides selected data and highlights of the Student Advocacy office activities for the reporting period from September 1, 2018 to August 31, 2019.

The demand for services continues to increase year to year, with the number of office contacts totaling over 2,800 for this reporting year.   The percentage of international students accessing services was 49%, remaining relatively consistent with previous reporting years. Although many students are self-referred, the office continues to receive a large number of referrals from other offices on campus.

The issues presented to the office are categorized into academic, misconduct, administrative, admissions and complaints. There was a slight decrease in the number of academic issues and an increase in administrative issues, likely related to an increase in tuition fee appeals.

In addition to assisting students in the resolution of individual issues, the Student Advocacy team remains busy with its educational and outreach activities.

Office Contacts

Table 1 provides a summary of the total number of office contacts from students, staff and faculty over the last 3 years. While there have been fluctuations, the demand for services continues to increase year to year.

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[1] Student Advocacy policy http://umanitoba.ca/admin/governance/governing_documents/students/280.html

Table 1: Office Contacts	2018-2019	2017-2018	2016-2017
Student			
Front Desk Contacts	863	788	759
Individual Student Cases	1,942	1,814	1,457
Total Student Contacts	**2,805**	**2,602**	**2,216**
Faculty/Staff Consultations	**81**	**52**	**128**
Total	**2,886**	**2,654**	**2,344**

Front Desk Contacts includes all contacts that do not result in an active student case file. Inquiries, potential cases, and cancelled or no-showed appointments are examples of front desk contacts.

The *Individual Student Cases[2]* count is the total number of students who had an active case file opened during the reporting year or whose issue was carried forward from the previous reporting year. There were 143 issues carried forward from the previous reporting year. Issues may be carried forward for the following reasons: (1) the issue is complex and continues past the end of the reporting year, (2) the appeal or request is pending a decision or scheduling of hearing, or (3) the case was opened just before the closing of files for the previous reporting year, but the student started working with the Advocate in the next reporting year. We have noted a significant increase in the number of issues that are carrying forward (143 issues for the current reporting year compared to 65 cases carried forward in the previous reporting year).

Faculty/Staff Consultations are the total number of faculty, staff and administrators who contacted Student Advocates or the Director for advice on handling student matters.

Demographics[3]

Of the students for whom a case file was opened during the reporting years, there were slightly more females (51%) than males (49%). This is consistent with previous years.

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[2] The number of reported individual student cases is different than the specific issues that are presented to the office by individual students, which will be discussed later in this report.

[3] Demographic statistics are based on number of students.

For 2018-2019, 49% of student issues involved international students. Although this is consistent with demographics from previous reporting years, it is still disproportionate to the total number of international students at the U of M (approximately 19% of the U of M population during 2018-2019)[4].

Historically, students presenting to Student Advocacy are enrolled in faculties that have the largest number of students: University 1, Science, Arts, and Faculty of Graduate Studies[5]. See Table 2 for a breakdown of students by faculty of registration. A continuing trend from the previous reporting year is that Extended Education is one of the top 5 faculties. It is important to note that the majority of Extended Education students who sought assistance from Student Advocacy were enrolled in certificate programs as opposed to General Studies.

Table 2: Student Cases by Faculty of Registration	2018-2019	2017-2018	2016-2017
Faculty of Science	23%	24%	25%
Faculty of Arts	23%	21%	21%
Faculty of Graduate Studies	10.5%	9%	12%
University 1	11%	13%	10%
Extended Education	8.5%	9%	4%
Health Sciences[6]	5%	5%	5%
Other[7]	19%	19%	23%
Total	100%	100%	100%

Student Advocacy appreciates the high number of referrals we continue to receive from the University community. In the current reporting year, approximately 31% of students contacting our office came from referrals. Although this is lower than previous years, this figure represents only new student referrals. It is important to note that if a student has worked with the office previously, and a new issue arises, they will self-refer themselves vs. being referred by others. The source of the majority of these referrals (80%) is notably from academic units (faculties, colleges, schools or departments).

Categorization of Issues

As part of the intake and case file management process, we identify the issue(s) the student is presenting to the office. In some cases, a student may return for assistance with new or different issues, or the situations that some students present are complex and may involve multiple pathways to resolution,

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[4] Office of Institutional Analysis reports as of Fall 2018.

[5] Office of Institutional Analysis reports for Fall 2018.

[6] Undergraduate faculties only.

[7] Other is comprised of the remainder of the Faculties/Colleges/Schools

require coordination of other services, and/or span more than one academic year. Table 3 provides the total number of issues over the last 3 reporting years. As noted, there have been significant increases over time in the number of issues presented.

Table 3: Student Issues	2018-2019	2017-2018	2016-2017
	2,080	1,843	1,504

Each issue is categorized as academic, misconduct (academic and non-academic), administrative, admissions, and complaint. Figure 1 provides the proportion of issues by category[8].

Figure 1. Categorization of Issues
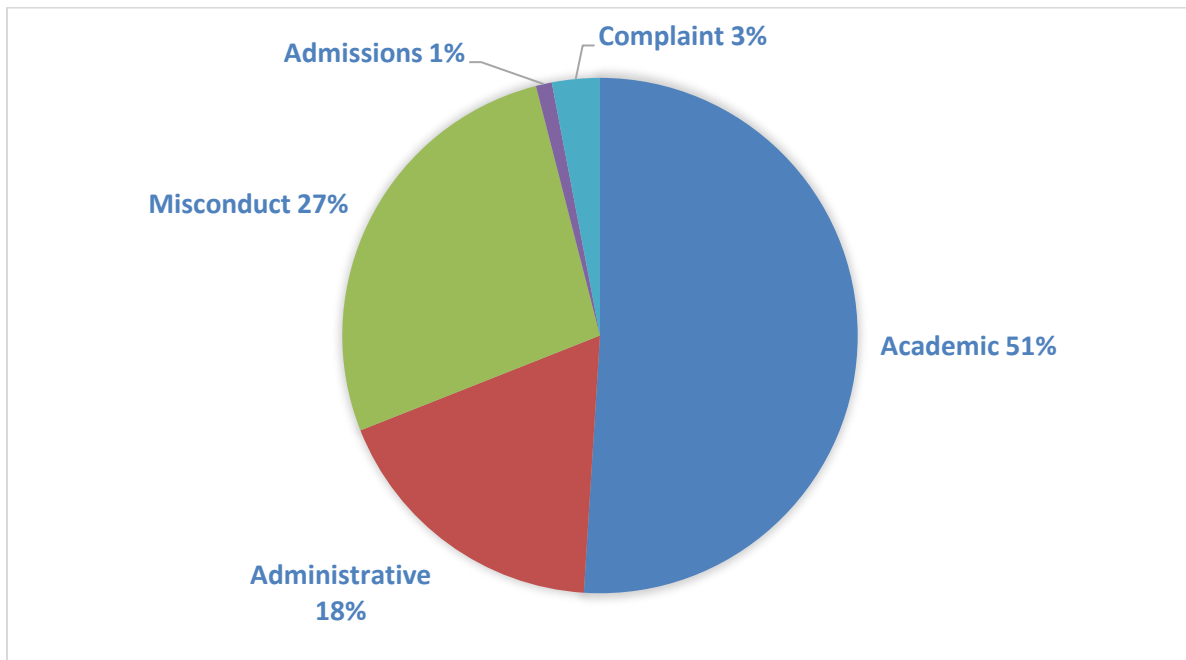
Each category is explained below and, in some instances, broken down further into subcategories.

Academic Issues

Academic issues are further organized into four sub-categories, described below. See Table 4 for comparison of issues between reporting years.

1. *Special requests* include requests for academic concessions that a student makes to their home faculty, typically based on medical or compassionate circumstances (e.g., authorized withdrawals, deferred examinations, term work extensions, or leaves of absence). Authorized Withdrawals (AW) tend to be the most common academic issue, and have increased significantly over the last few years. For example, in 2017-2018, there were 593 AW requests (almost double the amount from 2015-2016) and in 2018-2019, there were 772 AW requests.

2. *Academic complaints* are concerns and grievances related to courses or course administration (e.g., term work or final grade appeals, or breaches of ROASS[9]). Note that in previous years, this category included professor-student conflict and graduate advisor-student conflict. These 2 areas have been moved to a new category, *Complaint*, described later in the report.

3. *Academic deficiency* involves situations where a program has determined a student has not met the academic performance requirements and a decision is made that prevents progression (e.g., academic suspension, ineligible to proceed).

4. *Professional conduct* or *experiential learning* includes breaches of program-specific academic policies (e.g., professional unsuitability bylaw or unsafe practice or debarment) and/or issues that arise in experiential learning environments (e.g., practicum, clinical, field, or co-op placements).

Table 4: Academic Issues	2018-2019	2017-2018	2016-2017
Special Requests	878	739	602
Academic Complaints	132	201*	174*
Academic Deficiency	50	62	45
Professional Conduct/Experiential Learning	5	6	21
Total	**1065**	**1008**	**842**

*These numbers include professor/student conflict and graduate advisor/student conflict which are also included in Table 7.

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[9] Responsibilities Of Academic Staff With Regards To Students (ROASS)

Misconduct Issues

Misconduct issues are divided into two categories: academic misconduct and non-academic misconduct. Table 5 provides information about academic misconduct cases in comparison to the previous reporting year.

Table 5: Academic Misconduct	2018-2019	2017-2018	2016-2017
Academic Fraud	0	5	1
Application Fraud	8	7	5
Documentation Fraud	4	1	4
Personation	10	20	21
Inappropriate Collaboration	141	132	96
Plagiarism	279	208	153
Cheating	81	61	48
Duplicate Submission	3	2	1
Unauthorized Material	12	27	19
Other Academic Discipline	3	7	19*
Total	**541**	**470**	**367**

*Due to some issues being categorized as both personation and plagiarism by the Faculty, they were coded into the 'other' category for this reporting year.

Non-Academic Misconduct

Non-academic misconduct issues involve student behavior that falls under the Non-Academic Misconduct and Concerning Student Behaviour Procedure (e.g., inappropriate/disruptive behavior, inappropriate use of computer, unprofessional behaviour, etc.). There were 24 non-academic misconduct issues in 2018-2019. This is fairly consistent with the previous 2 reporting years (2016-2017 had 17 issues and 2017-2018 had 23 issues).

Administrative and Admissions Issues

The *Administrative* category includes matters that involve an administrative office. Examples include tuition fee appeals and transcript notation removal requests submitted through the Registrar's Office. Table 6 shows an increase in Administrative issues over the last three reporting years. This is primarily due to an increase in tuition fee appeals our office assisted students with (approximately 275 of administrative issues below were for tuition fee appeals, compared to179 tuition fee appeals in 2017-2018). As previously noted, the office also saw an increase in Authorized Withdrawal requests over these years, which may also account for the increase in the number of tuition fee appeals.

The *Admission* category involves requests for reconsideration or appeals of denied entry to a prospective faculty or program. Table 6 shows the number of students presenting with admissions-related concerns over the past three years, remaining fairly consistent.

Table 6: Administrative and Admissions	2018-2019	2017-2018	2016-2017
Administrative	363	257	171
Admission	21	23	31
Total	**384**	**280**	**202**

Complaint Issues

This is a new category commencing this reporting year. Previously, we had a category of *RWLE/SA Issues*, which pertained to concerns brought forward under the Respectful Work and Learning Environment Policy as well as the Sexual Assault Policy.

For this reporting year, we have broadened this category to include conflict between students and professors (mainly from an interpersonal interaction perspective), conflict between graduate advisors and graduate students, and general complaints about staff or students on campus (i.e., that may not necessarily fall within the definitions of the RWLE or SA policies). In previous reporting years, these areas were included under either Academic or Administrative issues.

Respectful Work and Learning Environment (RWLE) and Sexual Assault (SA) issues involve referral to or coordination with the Office of Human Rights and Conflict Management. These cases include students who wish to make a complaint (informal or formal) or who are seeking assistance in responding to a complaint. It is worth noting that the Student Support Case Manager/Worker will often provide support to students, particularly regarding sexual violence cases, and so some students may have opted to work with that unit for support and assistance through an investigation process.

Note that the majority of these issues involve a student bringing forward a concern or complaint, but some involve a student responding to a complaint made against them.

For the purpose of this report, in order to allow some comparison of these numbers with the previous reporting year, we have provided a breakdown of the areas in Table 7.

Table 7: Complaints	2018-2019	2017-2018	2016-2017
RWLE/SA Issues	22	20	37
Professor/Student Conflict	11	14	17
Graduate Advisor/Student Conflict	25	25	14
Complaint re: staff or student	7	9	11
Total	**65**	**68**	**79**

Resolution of Issues

Table 8 presents resolutions for issues according to the different types of outcomes. Although the majority of cases are handled through a formal process, there are still a large number that are resolved informally.

Informal Resolution means the Advocate aided the student by providing information and advice, worked on behalf of a student to make a request and/or to mediate an issue or made a referral to another office. It also includes situations where the student decided not to pursue a resolution to his/her concern.

Formal Resolution means that there was a formal discipline or academic meeting and/or hearing involved in the case. The large majority of requests and appeals had a positive resolution (i.e., the student's request was granted, or they received a modification to the outcome, over 80%). *Other* involves situations wherein a student retains a lawyer, the Advocate withdraws services, the matter proceeds to an external investigation, or a student withdraws his/her appeal after it is submitted.

Table 8: Resolution of Issues	2018-2019		2017-2018		2016-2017	
Informal	43%		43%		46%	
Formal	57%		56%		53%	
Discipline Investigation		455		396		384
Appeal/Request		488		464		310
Other	<1%		<1%		1%	
Total		100%		100%		100%

Office

Staff

The Student Advocacy staff team during this reporting year included:

- Director, Student Advocacy and Case Management[10];
- Four full-time Student Advocates
- Two administrative positions shared with Student Accessibility Services:
  - Assistant to the Directors
  - Confidential Intake Assistant
- Student positions- Junior Student Advocate, Junior Confidential Intake Assistant, and Social Work Field Placement student

As evidenced by this report, the volume and complexity of student issues presented to Student Advocacy continue to increase significantly each year. This is reflected in the growing number of individual students assisted, as well as the need to coordinate supports with other offices on campus (e.g., Student Accessibility Services, Case Management, International Centre) and the length of time required to resolve complex issues. Although this underscores the importance of the services provided by Student Advocacy to the University community, it also results in administrative challenges such as increased wait times for a student to meet with a Student Advocate (i.e., 3 weeks during peak periods). We have developed (and continue to adjust) internal practices to mitigate the impact on students. This includes holding specific appointment spots each week for 'urgent' matters that come up, as well as working with individual faculties to receive early notification of discipline allegation letters being sent out, so that appointment spots with Advocates and discipline investigation meetings can be pre-booked. These strategies have proven helpful in managing the influx of students and referrals, but they are not without additional challenges. For example, the 'urgent hold' time slots do fill up quickly, leaving less room for additional urgent matters and having to move an existing student's appointment to wait even longer. These procedures also create additional administrative work for the Confidential Intake Assistant, who manages the intake processes for Case Management and Student Accessibility Services (which has also

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[10] As of January 2019, Student Advocacy merged with Student Support Case Management into the unit, Student Advocacy and Case Management.

experienced a notable increase in student contacts). We appreciate the support and understanding we have received from our campus partners as we continue to work toward managing the increasing student contacts and referrals within our existing resources.

Professional Development

Julia Osso attended Strangers in New Homelands conference, Black History Month discussion panel, and presented at Academic Integrity Inter-institutional Meeting of Manitoba post-secondary schools.

Matthew Carvell attended the annual conference for Manitoba Advising Professionals, and presented on the topic *Back to Basics: Maintaining Fairness in Challenging Times* at the Canadian Association of College and University Student Services Annual Conference.

Staff in the office also attended sessions offered during Indigenous People's Day, Live Well @ Work Week, and Student Affairs PD sessions.

Presentations and Workshops

An important mandate of the office is education for and outreach to the University community. Student Advocacy staff prepared and delivered approximately 70 presentations and workshops in 2018-2019. Student Advocacy staff were invited to speak at student orientations, to present in classes or to groups of students on student rights and responsibilities, academic integrity, and student conduct. Staff also offered workshops to faculty, staff and administrators on fairness, student discipline process, student behaviour, and academic integrity. It is important to note that the total number of workshops and presentations is slightly lower than in previous years. The main reason for this is that many presentations on the topic of Academic Integrity are facilitated by the Academic Integrity Coordinator, who is now a member of the Student Engagement and Success team.

Student Advocacy has continued to partner with other offices on campus (i.e., Office of Fair Practices and Legal Affairs, Academic Learning Centre, and Office of Human Rights and Conflict Management) to deliver joint presentations and workshops. The office offered continued training to student appeals committee chairs, members, and support staff and those responsible for investigating student academic or non-academic misconduct. These workshops – C*onducting Fair Hearings*, and *Conducting Fair Investigations* – were offered throughout the academic year at both campuses and scheduled through Learning and Organizational Development or upon request to Student Advocacy.

Student Advocacy staff were also involved in presentations on *Responding to Sexual Violence Disclosures* for faculty and staff (jointly presented with Student Support, Health and Wellness, Student Residences, and Office of Human Rights & Conflict Management).

Outreach

Student Advocacy participated in Academic Integrity Month in October 2018, with an interactive booth for students to engage in activities for a chance to win a prize, as well as receive information about academic integrity and resources to assist them with writing. We also had a social media contest for students to participate in for a chance to win a prize.

Student Advocacy also maintained a presence at Migizii Agamik for the second year in a row, with the *Ask an Advocate* booth. Heather Morris staffed this booth bi-weekly during each regular session term in order to connect with Indigenous students and be available to answer questions or concerns they may have related to student policies, or student rights and responsibilities at the U of M.

Committee Work

Heather Morris was a member of the Faculty of Graduate Studies Policy & Guidelines Committee, RWLE & SA Policy Revision Working Group, Senate Committee on Instruction and Evaluation, Academic Integrity Advisory Committee, and Students with Family Responsibilities working group. She also chairs the Medical Documentation Committee.

Julia Osso is a member of the International Student Advisors Network, Campus Resource Education and Support Team, and contributed to the Cite Right working group.

Matthew Carvell was a member of the Sexual Violence Student Sub-committee.

Matthew Carvell, Caleb Hans, Julia Osso and Desiree Wengrowich attend meetings of the U of M Advisor Exchange.

Scholarly and Teaching Activities

- Heather Morris, Julia Osso and Matthew Carvell co-taught *Role of the Student and Student Needs*, a core course for the Certificate in University and College Administration (CUCA) level 1[11] offered through CHERD.
- Heather Morris supervised a social work student doing her field placement credit towards her Bachelor of Social Work degree.

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[11] Certificate in University and College Administration (CUCA) level 1

Recommendations

As mentioned earlier in this report, there can be lengthy wait times for students to have a meeting with a Student Advocate. This can be particularly challenging for cases involving academic (or non-academic) misconduct, resulting in processes that take extended time to come to a resolution, and causing students stress and anxiety in the interim. The current discipline process involves students receiving an allegation letter and being directed to Student Advocacy for assistance in preparing for and arranging the discipline investigation meeting. The student may then wait 2-3 weeks to meet with a Student Advocate, and the scheduling of the discipline investigation meeting may be 2-3 weeks after that. It can take another week for a student to receive a decision letter following the investigation meeting. In all, from start to finish, a basic discipline process can take 4-6 weeks. During this time, students experience stress and anxiety, along with other practical challenges regarding continuation in current courses (depending on what the outcome is) and potential financial implications if they are withdrawn from courses part-way through the term. Should a student decide to appeal a decision, another 2-4 months' time can be added to this timeline.

Currently, the same process is followed for every allegation of misconduct, ranging from inappropriate collaboration on an assignment, to exam personation, to non-academic misconduct such as inappropriate behavior. The disciplinary action for these examples can also range from a grade of "0" on an assignment, to a suspension, to an expulsion or campus ban.

The Academic Integrity Advisory Committee is aware of the issue and is working with various stakeholders on campus to explore whether a modified process can be considered for misconduct cases that fall on the lower end of the 'spectrum' of misconduct (e.g., first offenses, departmental level investigations, resulting in lower disciplinary actions) in order to balance fair and case-specific outcomes with timely and supportive resolution processes. Student Advocacy is supportive of this approach, and would encourage faculties, departments, and programs to consider the advantages of developing modified processes that appropriately address the misconduct issue within our policies, but avoid unnecessary delays and prolonged processes. This would allow staff time and resources (not only in Student Advocacy, but within Faculties and Departments) to allocate more time to complex misconduct cases.