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CSU Advocacy Centre

ANNUAL REPORT

2020-2021

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At a glance...

Academic Misconduct: 124 cases

Code of Rights and Responsibilities: 6 cases

Complaint: 14 cases

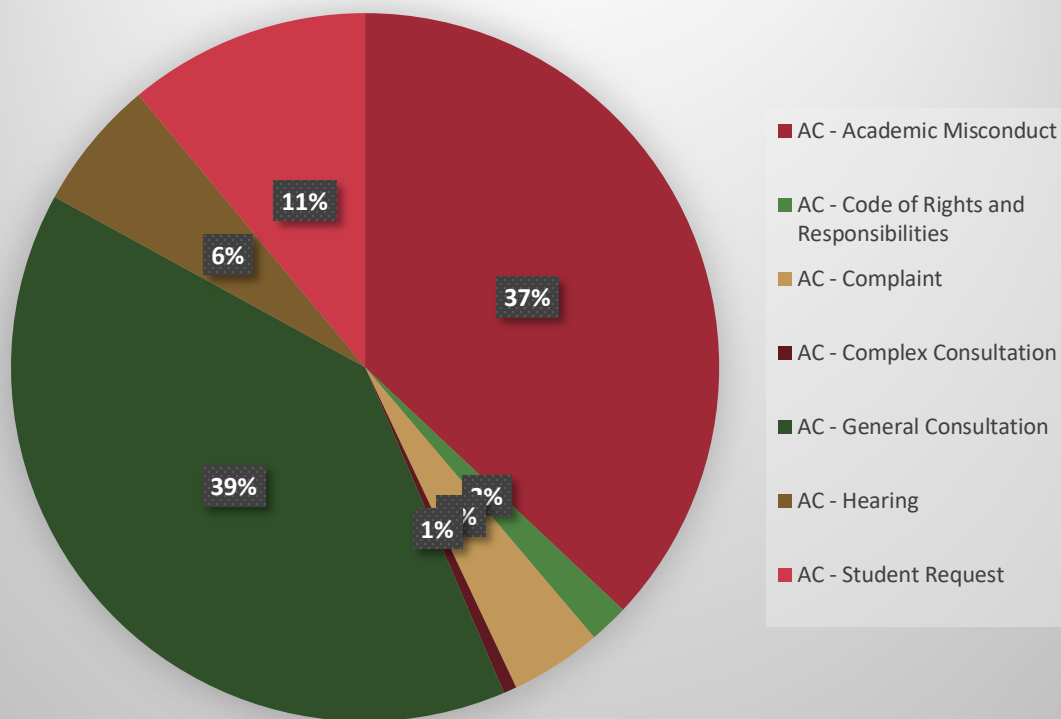
Complex Consultation: 2 cases

General Consultation: 132 cases

Hearing: 13 cases

Student Request: 94 cases

Overall: Case Distribution By Type 2020-2021



335 Cases

WHAT WE DO

The CSU Advocacy Centre is a service provided by the Concordia Student Union (CSU) to support students through obstacles encountered to their academic endeavors.

The CSU Advocacy Centre believes that students should be informed, empowered and supported in exercising their rights both in and beyond their academic environments. We are here to provide assistance to students who feel that they have been treated unfairly on campus or to help students by informing them of University policies that impact both their academic and non-academic pursuits on campus.

In addition, the Centre provides representation services to students as defined under the Academic Code of Conduct or the Code of Rights and Responsibilities. Advocates are here to listen to students and to address their concerns in a proactive manner.

Other services include a free Commissioner for Oaths for undergraduate students (and very affordable for non-undergraduate students), academic information sessions, general consultations and referrals.

The Advocacy Centre team is comprised of the Advocacy Centre Manager, the Advocacy Administrative Assistants and the Student Advocacy Assistants (student advocates). The administrative assistants and the students advocates are full-time students trained by the Advocacy Centre Manager in the services that the Advocacy Centre offers.

If a student is experiencing a problem as a result of the universities policies, regulations and procedures and come see us, we assist and where applicable accompany them in resolving the issue within the most relevant and suitable means available.

As of the 2019-2020 academic, the Advocacy Centre categorizes its registered cases into these following seven (7) fields:

Academic Misconduct
Code of Rights and Responsibilities
Complaint
Complex Consultation
General Consultation
Hearing
Student Request

Mission

The Advocacy Centre's Mission is to help sure students understand Concordia University's policies, regulations and procedures and are informed on what options they have if they encounter any obstacles regarding these. The Advocacy Center is dedicated to assisting students in the resolution of conflicts arising from actions or decisions taken by the University.

Vision

The Advocacy Centre aims to be an easy-to-access, professional and knowledgeable drop-in and consultation resource for all matters directly related to the university and its procedure *as they pertain to students*. We seek to continuously expand our reach and how we can assist students and equip them with the information and options they need to best serve them.

OUR VALUES

Respect Professionalism Accessibility Representation Education

Executive Summary

In 2020-2021, the CSU Advocacy Centre (AC) supported Concordia students with 335 cases and 438 inquiries, for a total of 779 Consults. This was the first academic year that the Advocacy Centre operated fully remotely. Services were online for all of Summer 2020, Fall 2020 and Winter 2021 semesters. Student advocates were hired and trained remotely this year as well. This year saw the largest number of consults, for both cases and inquiries.

The AC operated remotely largely in thanks to the new Client Relationship Manager (CRM) and being able to use FortiClient VPN and Cisco Jabber software to be able to take calls to our extension (7313) online. The AC's remote work setup ensured continued assistance for students, despite pandemic-related challenges, and it remains focused on enhancing services to meet evolving student needs.

Case Load and Activities

The AC handled a total of 335 cases and 438 inquiries in the 2020-2021 academic year. Case numbers and Inquiry numbers were high throughout the pandemic. GSA cases (graduate students) nearly doubled since last year from 40 to 76. Academic misconduct cases increased the most, from 73 last year to 124. There is also an increased number of cases going to Hearing. Hearings are the longest case type, and can take over a year to fully resolve and close, so many of those cases if opened in Winter 2021 will still be open and being worked on throughout the next 2021-2022 academic year.

School of Graduate Studies (SGS) and the Faculty of Arts & Science (FAS) both hired extra Code Administrators so as not fall behind dealing with high volumes of academic misconduct cases.

Contact Type →	Alumni	Graduate	Undergraduate	Total
Primary University Faculty	Record Count	Record Count	Record Count	Record Count
Faculty of Arts and Science	1	14	105	120
Faculty of Fine Arts	0	2	11	13
Gina Cody School of Engineering and Computer Science (GCS) (GCSECS)	0	56	83	139
John Molson School of Business (JMSB)	0	4	58	62
N/A or Independent or Individualised Program or Unknown	0	0	1	1
Total	1	76	258	335

Highlights

- Case and Inquiries numbers continuing to increase, especially because of the pandemic.
- In the 2020-2021 academic year, the CSU hired more student advocates, but two (2) resigned before the end of the academic year and the remaining staff took on extra hours

in Winter 2021. There were also a large number of Hearings in Winter 2021, which eat up a lot of the Advocacy Centre time, so case numbers were lower in Winter 2021, but workload was very much still high.

- At the end of the Winter 2021 semester, the Advocacy Centre joined the Academic Integrity Subcommittee for Concordia's Advisory Committee on Teaching and Learning (ACTL). The Subcommittee's mandate is to 'propose a university-wide strategy and plan of action that will contribute to inform undergraduate students about the Academic Code of Conduct and the consequences for breaking the Code'

COVID-19 Impact on Operations

CSU part-time staff are also students, therefore, working on-campus if classes are online and remote becomes challenging. In-person operations depend on Concordia's on-campus health and safety restrictions which for now do not allow for unscheduled appointments or walk-ins, even staff are approved for working on-site.

When it became clear that operations were not going to resume in-person any time soon, even when the new CRM went live, the administrative assistants continued triaging consults that would come in, especially, via e-mail, to either gather a certain minimum amount of information that would allow a student advocate to help a student more effectively in the first appointment, otherwise too many follow-ups would be required with the student advocate just to get all the documents to understand a student's situation which would then decrease the amount of time each student advocate was spending actually helping students because of gathering information still.

There were 183 inquiries in Spring 2020 (Summer I semester 2020) (that did not become cases). These were very hard to track and, unfortunately, not much was able to be done to assist these students either in the time constraints they had or with the little information they provided or also because their concerns were not about their individual situation but about the university's decisions during the pandemic in general (such as the demand for PASS options and tuition reduction). These inquiries are forwarded to the CSU as they are university-wide issues/impacts.

This year saw the same number of cases (335) as the year when the Concordia University run Student Advocacy Office (SAO) was short-staffed and going through change in management (336). Both services were likely saturated this year due to the pandemic. The Advocacy Centre, on top of the 335 cases, had 438 inquiries, of which 183 were in the short span of the first 6 weeks of the Summer 2020 semester when the effects and restrictions of the pandemic were first felt.

Student advocates first listen to the issues that a particular student presents them with, checks in with the student to make sure that there are not potentially other significant variables that could be impacting the issue brought forward and then present possible options of how the student might proceed to resolve their issue. Where necessary, the student advocate researches further options if the case is very particular on behalf of the student. If the student then wishes

to proceed with an option presented to them by a student advocate, the student advocate then helps them compile the work for their case within the whatever necessary deadlines are noted. A case is closed when the issue is deemed resolved, terminated (in that the student exhausted all the options they were willing to) or if a student ceases to reach out or respond to their student advocate. Cases are reopened when necessary.

However, in some cases, the Advocacy Centre either does not have sufficient information to assist a student in depth (eg. Phone number, availabilities for an appointment, context) so they will be given general information, as helpful as possible given whatever the student has shared, but may not meet with a student advocate. These consults are instead logged as inquiries and not cases in our records. The Advocacy Centre recorded 438 inquiries and 335 cases for a total of 773 consults this academic year.

Before the pandemic, students would first visit us in person so information gathering was always very thorough on the first encounter. Most students now contact us via e-mail. Though we request a phone number of to reach them on to better understand their situation in case there is insufficient information in their e-mail, some students are unable to e-mail back within a timeframe that makes sense to be able to resolve their situation which itself may be time-sensitive.

Future Directions and Conclusion

Looking ahead, the Advocacy Centre anticipates continued high demand for services as awareness of the Centre grows. The CSU plans to further enhance the CRM system and improve training for staff to maintain service quality in both remote and in-person environments. Sustaining adequate staffing levels will be essential to handle the workload and provide timely support. The Advocacy Centre is committed to evolving its practices to best meet student needs in a post-pandemic environment.