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CSU Advocacy Centre

ANNUAL REPORT

2019-2020

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At a glance...

Academic Misconduct: 73 cases

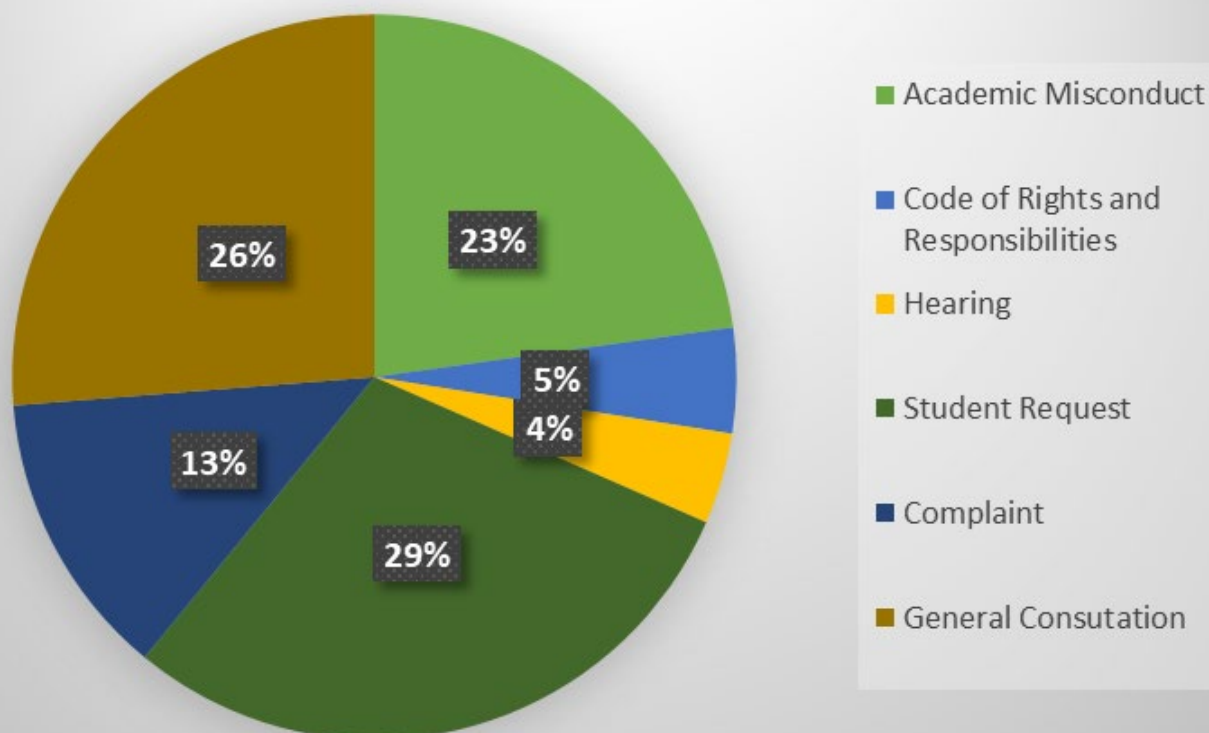
Code of Rights and Responsibilities: 15 cases

Tribunal Hearings: 13 cases

Student Requests: 94 cases

Complaints and General Consultations: 125 cases

Overall: Case Distribution by Type 2019-2020



320 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 six (6) fields:

Academic Misconduct
Code of Rights and Responsibilities
Tribunal Hearings
Student Requests
Complaints
General Consultations

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 2019-2020, the CSU Advocacy Centre supported Concordia students with 320 cases and 34 inquiries, adapting to remote operations during COVID-19, for a total of 354 Consults. Key developments included launching a new Client Relationship Manager (CRM) system and increasing social media outreach. The Centre’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 Centre handled a total of 320 cases and 34 inquiries in the 2019-2020 academic year. Cases and Inquiries numbers continuing to increase, especially because of the pandemic. CoRR cases, complaints and Hearings take longer to resolve during the pandemic because of delays and/or restrictions, so though it does not increase the case number it certainly increases the workload.

Operating remotely has at least meant that since student advocates are not working on site in the open-plan office, students feel a bit more comfortable discussing cases of a sensitive nature like most CoRR cases. There was a high number of complaint cases, many of which were recorded during the pandemic.

Contact Type →	Graduate	Undergraduate	Total
Primary University Faculty	Record Count	Record Count	Record Count
Faculty of Arts and Science	5	156	161
Faculty of Fine Arts	1	13	14
Gina Cody School of Engineering and Computer Science (GCS) (GCSECS)	32	58	90
John Molson School of Business (JMSB)	2	48	50
N/A or Independent or Individualised Program or Unknown	0	5	5
Total	40	280	320

Highlights

- Case numbers remained stable and constant throughout 2019 and the beginning of 2020.
- The Advocacy Centre also resumed doing class presentations in the beginning of Fall 2019 in large lecture courses to advertise our services.
- Case and Inquiries numbers continuing to increase, especially because of the pandemic.
- CoRR cases, complaints and Hearings take longer to resolve during the pandemic because of delays and/or restrictions, so though it does not increase the case number it certainly increases the workload.

- Operating remotely has at least meant that since student advocates are not working on site in the open-plan office, students feel a bit more comfortable discussing cases of a sensitive nature like most CoRR cases.
- There was a high number of complaint cases, many of which were recorded during the pandemic.

COVID-19 Impact on Operations

When the campus closed on March 13, 2020, the CSU transitioned to remote operations, primarily using Microsoft Teams for student advocacy sessions. To maintain phone accessibility, the CSU Advocacy Centre utilized Concordia's Forticlient VPN and Cisco Jabber to manage calls and messages. Due to limited access to printers, intakes were processed electronically. The reliance on memory-intensive software sometimes hindered staff productivity, leading some to use CSU equipment from the office.

The pandemic significantly slowed operations as a surge in inquiries overwhelmed departments, delaying case resolutions. The new CRM, launched on June 15, 2020, compounded initial tracking challenges, requiring increased administrative efforts to monitor case statuses amid decentralized operations. Consequently, the Advocacy Centre shifted to appointment-only consultations, allowing advocates to focus on follow-ups and outreach to university departments.

Remote training for new staff occurred in Summer 2020, and to mitigate delays, more student advocates were hired. As operations remained remote, administrative staff prioritized triaging inquiries to ensure advocates could effectively assist students.

The Advocacy Centre had to differentiate between inquiries and cases due to limited resources, often struggling to respond to same-day requests made via email. Despite these challenges, case numbers rose, with 130 cases in Winter 2020 and an increase to 183 inquiries in Spring 2020. Many inquiries focused on broader university issues rather than individual situations, which were forwarded to the CSU for further consideration.

New Initiatives

- It took most of the 2019-2020 academic year, but the CSU completed building the new Client Relationship Manager (CRM) for the CSU Services: LIC, HOJO and the Advocacy Centre.
- The new CRM went live on June 15th, 2020.
- Staff now have to be trained to use the new CRM correctly and to also report bugs and issues as given the very recent build, there is still a lot of troubleshooting. The Academic Code of Conduct was expected to go under review in 2020, however has been put on hold due to the pandemic
- The Advocacy Centre resumed completing Hiring and Training during the Summer Semester. Summer 2019, student advocates were trained in person, ready for the Fall 2019 start.

- The Advocacy Centre also made a push on Social Media, via Instagram, Facebook and the CSU Newsletter to make people more aware of the Advocacy Centre, the services it offers, through posts, stories and a few videos.
- The CSU and GSA renewed their agreement for graduate students to have access to the Advocacy Centre services for another 2 years until end of Summer 2022.

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.