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**VANCOUVER  
COMMUNITY  
COLLEGE**

**ARBITER  
OF  
STUDENT  
ISSUES  
OFFICE**

**2023  
Annual  
Report**

**Compiled &  
Written By  
Tanny Marks**

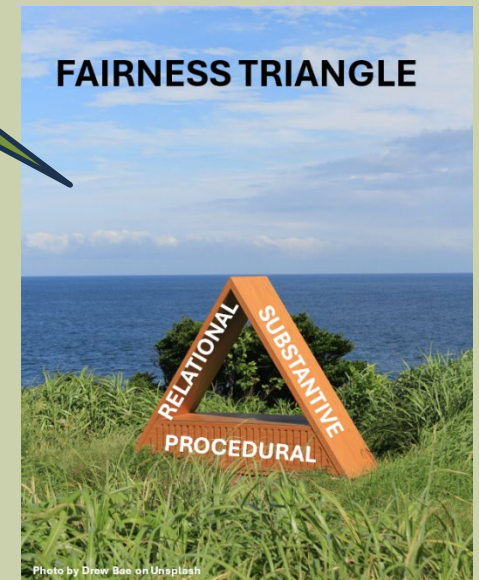
**VCC**

## 2023: A YEAR FOCUSED ON EQUITY, COLLEGIAL DIALOGUE AROUND INDIGENIZATION & DECOLONIZATION, DECONFLATING STUDENT SERVICES & DIFFERENTIATING THE OFFICE'S MANDATE AND REINFORCING FAIRNESS THROUGHOUT THE COLLEGE COMMUNITY



2023 marked the beginning of Vancouver Community College's (VCC; College) Arbitrator of Student Issues Office's (ASI; Office) thirteenth year on campus. Offering ombuds like services to the VCC community, the ASI continued to work with multiple interest holders to address systemic barriers and with individual clients (both student and employee alike) on resolving student centred issues. The Office's privileged objective, neutral and impartial position continues to

CURRENT



enable it to provide the College with sober second look recommendations on fairness issues impacting students and students with collaborative insight into their disputes with College actors or systems. As has always been the case, the ASI continued to refer students to the Students' Union of Vancouver Community College (SUVCC) in order to access the support of an advocate around complaints and appeals.

As an understanding of the intersectionality of Justice, Equity, Diversity, Inclusion (JEDI), Indigenization and decolonization continues to evolve within and impact the post-secondary sector, so too has it begun to inform the work of ombuds. In 2023, the ASI continued to collaborate both internally and externally to better integrate JEDI, Indigenization and decolonization into the ombuds' fairness promise. To date, fairness (procedural, relational and substantive) remains the core focus of ombuds' offices throughout the Canadian post-secondary sector. Through its work within the Equity, Diversity and Inclusion committee of the Association of Canadian Colleges and University Ombudspersons (ACCUO), the ASI is supporting and being supported to inquire whether a shift in this classical understanding of fairness is required to better

POTENTIAL



## ASI MANDATE

Supporting the College Community Around Specific Student Complaints/Appeals (Relative to Policy)

Providing Briefings on Roles, Rights & Responsibilities

Facilitating Alternative Dispute Resolution

Addressing Student Centred Systemic Barriers Through Inquiry & Recommendation

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align it with modern expectations around justice and equity. While the jury is still out on whether this paradigm shift is needed, the exploration itself is proving extremely valuable for both the higher education ombuds and the ASI's work.

The ASI's work within ACCUO is inextricably linked to the Office's quality of service to the VCC community. As a one-person Office, the ASI is dependent on the ACCUO network to provide

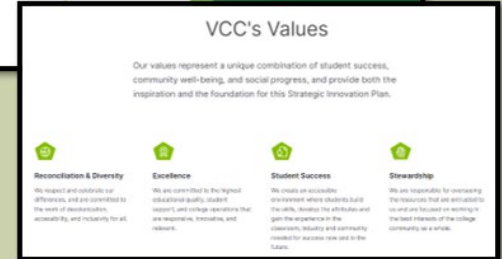
collaboration and insight into best practices and service standards and to act as a sounding board in general. The ASI expects 2024 to be marked by increased involvement in ACCUO in order to properly assess and shore-up the Office's services.

Finally, 2023 once again saw a decline in students accessing the Office. The ASI has still been unable to ascertain the reasons behind this continued decrease in student case numbers.

The Arbitrer of Student Issues Office continues to align with VCC's Values by striving to reflect on the Office's and Ombuds' precepts relative to Indigenization and Decolonization, learning and implementing equitable practices, supporting student success and being mindful to use resources responsibly and sustainably. The Office contributes to VCC's Strategic Priorities of Academic Innovation, Operational Excellence and Engaged Communities by supporting an infusion of fairness, equity and sustainability into College action, curriculum and initiatives, and by holding itself accountable to these principles alongside the College.



The five priorities in this Strategic Innovation Plan represent VCC's ambitions as a leading post-secondary institution in B.C. while also establishing tangible, shared goals.



## 2023 OFFICE OPERATIONS

- ☞ Funded Exclusively by the College
- ☞ One Person Office
- ☞ Open 4 Days/28 Hours per Week
- ☞ Services Provided in Person or Remotely
- ☞ Servicing Broadway & Downtown Campuses
- ☞ Access to Limited Expert & Casual Administrative Support

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## REPORTING STRUCTURE & AFFILIATION

- ☞ Excluded College Administrator
- ☞ Unofficial seat at the Student & Enrolment Services table

Collaboration with associated student services enhances procedural, relational and substantive fairness for students, both at an individual level for each case and systemically within the College.

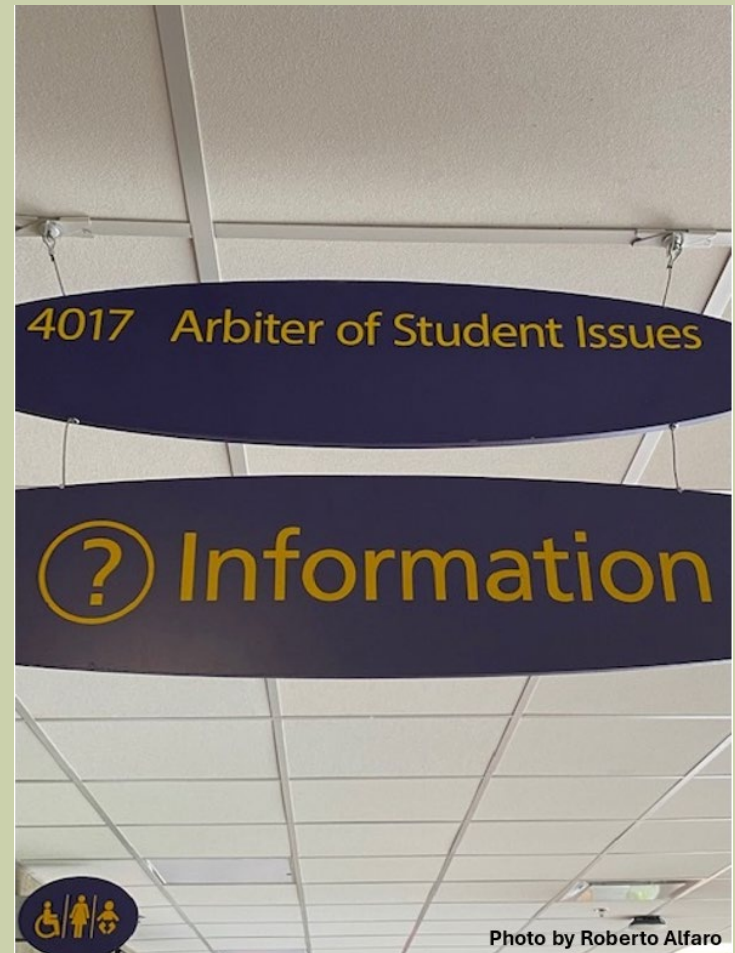


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## 2023 MARKETING & COMMUNICATIONS HIGHLIGHTS

### STUDENT CONNECT NEWSLETTER: “RETURNING A LITRE OF MILK!”

In the Fall of 2023, the ASI wrote a short thought experiment for new and returning students to ponder in the *VCC Connect Student News* bulletin. The Office routinely uses the intellectual exercise to provoke a relatable understanding of the difference between having a right and enforcing a right.

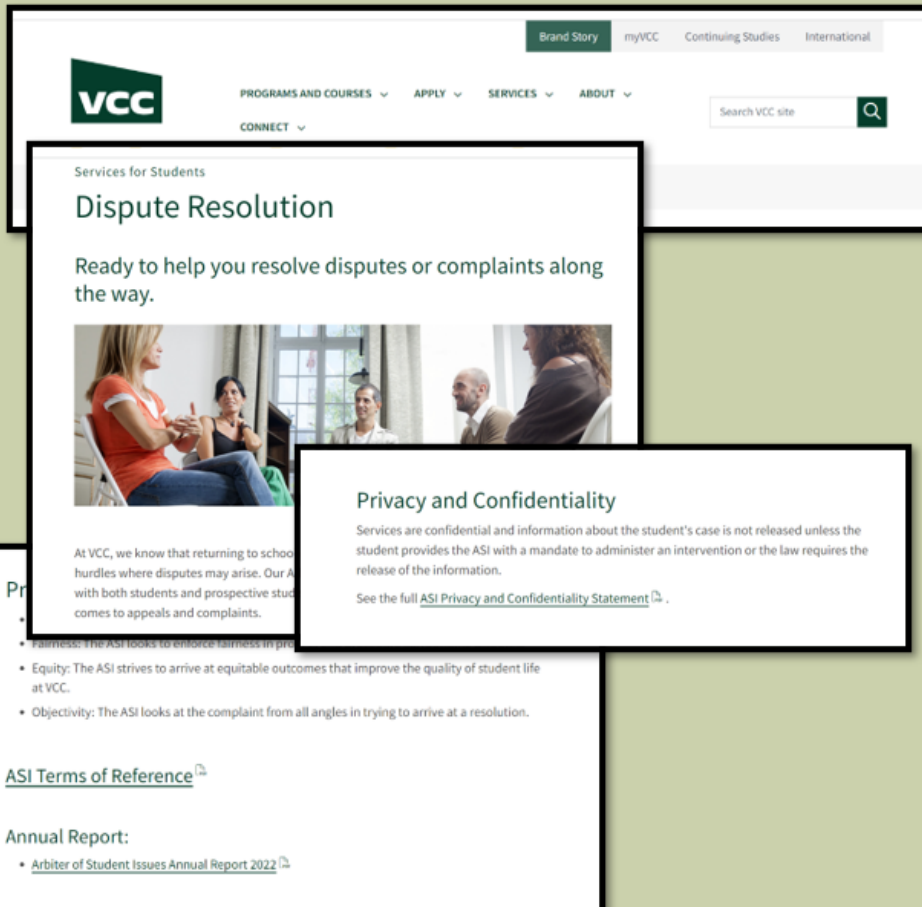


### ASI OFFICE SIGNAGE: SUCCESS!

In 2023, after years of requests and conversations dating back to 2018, the Office was finally provided with wayfinding signage for the ASI at the Broadway Campus where the Office is seated. As reported in previous annual reports, the ASI had encountered numerous barriers in getting signage installed. At long last, in its thirteenth year, the Office can now provide the VCC community with visual support in finding ombuds-like services on campus.

**UPDATE OF EXTERNAL VCC ASI WEBSITE:**

In 2023, the Office was permitted to add its Terms of Reference to its external VCC webpage. Notification of the private nature of the service, alongside the Office’s statement on its privacy and confidentiality parameters, was additionally appended to the site.



**MEETING, GREETING & GRATITUDE:**

The Office reached out on 40 different occasions to welcome, congratulate or thank colleagues for their new appointments to the College, in recognition of milestones reached, successes achieved and outstanding support provided to the VCC community and beyond. The individuals lauded span VCC’s domestic and international portfolios, academic and service departments, faculty, staff, administrators and external partners. This once again provided a valuable opportunity to applaud achievements and connect individuals with the Office’s services for future collaboration and support.



**40 INDIVIDUALS AMONG.....**

**PERSONNEL**

- Accessibility Assistants
- Administrative Assistants
- Assistant Registrars
- Associate Directors
- Associate Registrars
- Auxiliary Faculty
- Coordinators
- Counsellors
- Deans
- Department Heads
- Directors
- Instructional Associates
- Instructors
- Library Staff
- Managers
- Practicum Students
- President
- Program Assistants
- Program Coordinators
- Service Desk Technicians

- Student Aides
- Student Service Centre Staff
- Supervisors
- Vice Presidents

**DEPARTMENTS & PORTFOLIOS**

- Centre For Teaching, Learning & Research
- Counselling Services
- Disability Services
- Indigenous Education & Community Engagement
- Indigenous Initiatives
- Information Technology
- International Education
- International Student Services
- Interpreting Services
- Library
- Partnership Development Office
- People Services (Human Resources)
- Registrar’s Office
- Student Recruitment & Learner Engagement

- Student Service Centre

**ACADEMIC PROGRAM AREAS**

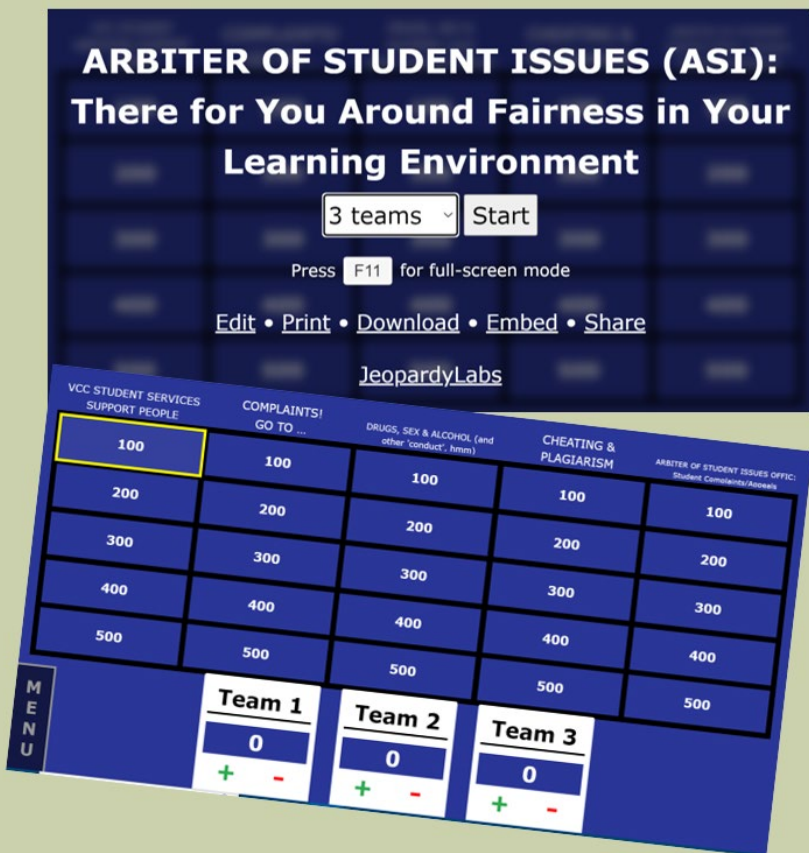
- Asian Culinary Arts
- Automotive Service Technician
- Bachelor Of Science in Nursing
- Baking & Pastry Arts
- Business Management
- Counselling Skills
- Digital Media Design
- Practical Nursing
- Project Management
- Trades Success Centre

**SCHOOLS**

- School of Arts & Sciences
- School of Health Sciences

**EXTERNAL PARTNERS**

- ACCUO Communications Team

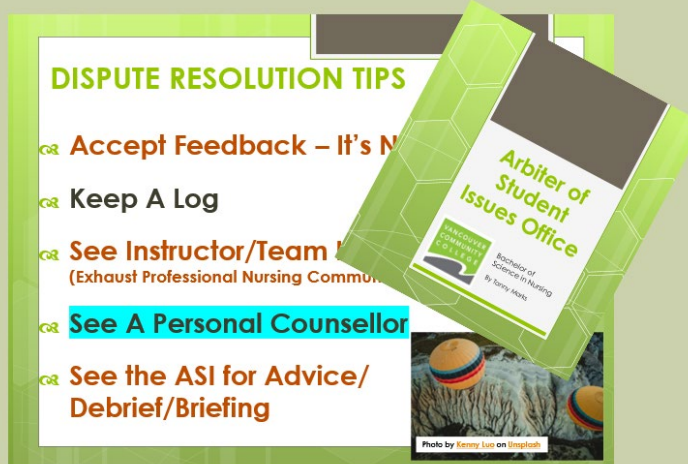
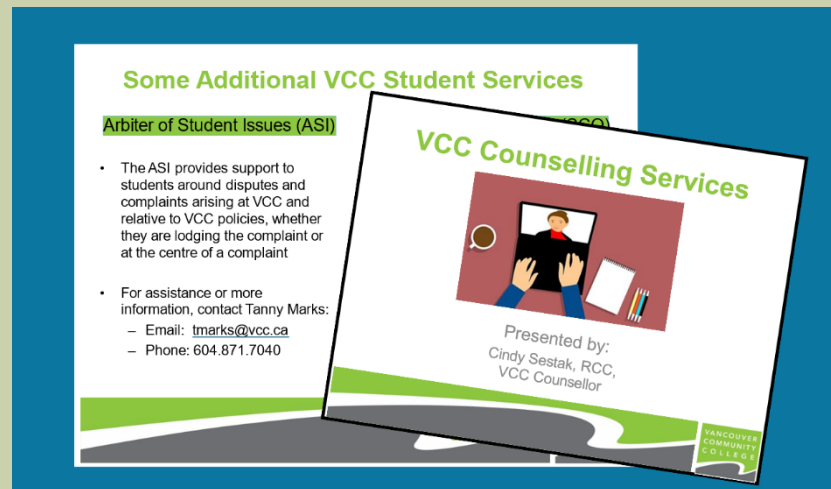


**THIS. IS. JEOPARDY→ASI STUDENT INFO SESSIONS DURING ORIENTATION WEEK:**

Having had success with deploying a *Jeopardy* game to familiarize personnel with the ASI’s services in the past, the Office piloted the deployment of a *Jeopardy* game to promote services to students during their in-class student services orientations. The game was played with select cohorts from the Health Care Assistant, Bachelor of Science in Nursing and Dental Hygiene programs. While the game had been deployed in 2016 in collaboration with the Student Conduct portfolio during one of the VCC Welcome Days Carnivals, this was the first time the ASI used the game during in-class presentations. Students within each class were divided into teams to play. Fun was had by all!

**CROSS PROMOTIONAL EFFORTS:**








The cross-promotion of various student services throughout various activities is key to informing students of the array of services available to them. Whether it be listings in college calendars or ‘Viewbooks’, outlining of services within individual program student success onboarding modules in Moodle, listings in student newsletters, academic program handbooks or students’ union collateral, the value of outlining various student services next to each other further reinforces the ability for students to access the right supports and demonstrates the ability for student services to come together and wrap around the student if and when the student requests it.





Given the increasing low numbers of students that access the Office, the ASI has canvassed with both internal and external partners and colleagues to see whether there is any further action that can be taken to generate student uptake of services. As an example, the ASI met with Faculty member Sara Yuen, Coordinator of VCC's Learning Centre, to generate ideas on how to increase visibility of the Office. The ASI remains open to feedback on how to increase student traffic to the Office.

**PROGRAMS**

-  **ASL and Deaf Studies**
-  **Bachelor of Science in Nursing**
-  **Dental Hygiene**
-  **English as an Additional Language**
-  **Health Care Assistant**
-  **International Students (Pre-Arrival)**
-  **Language Instruction for Newcomers to Canada**
-  **Practical Nursing**

**ASI SERVICES PRESENTATIONS TO STUDENTS**

**WITH A HUMAN RIGHTS PRESENTATION ADDED**



-  **Practical Nursing**
-  **Health Care Assistant**

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## 2023 INTERDEPARTMENTAL COLLABORATION

### SUPPORTING EMPLOYERS & FACULTY SHIFT PARADIGMS WHEN INTEGRATING STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES INTO THE WORKPLACE: INCLUSIVE WIL HIRING GUIDE → UPDATE

Long perceived as a challenge, the act of placing students with disabilities in work experience positions or work-integrated learning (WIL) settings (such as practicums and clinicals) is now demonstrating how equity in the public post-secondary sector can move from thought to action.

Culminating a multi-year collaborative project led by Rachel Warick, CareerLAB Lead from the Partnership Development Office, VCC is now equipped with the newly redeveloped *Inclusive WIL Hiring Guide*. The guide supports the adoption of inclusive and equitable practices in securing WIL positions for students with disabilities, taking us further and further away from ableism and the charitable model of work-related components of education. It also supports future employers in recognizing that integrating disabled employees into the workforce is no different from integrating non-disabled employees who also come with varying needs.

The first draft of the guide was developed as part of the Stepping up WIL @ VCC project, in partnership with the disability employment specialists at the Open Door Group. Springboarding from feedback provided by the ASI and VCC Disability Services in 2022, various VCC departments subsequently collaborated in 2023 to edit, shape and finalize the guide alongside Rachel, including Disability Services, the Community & Career Education Department, the Digital Media Design Department and the ASI. Part of the objective of reshaping the guide included recasting the

guide in a social model of disability and moving it away from the medical model of disability. The medical model of disability is anchored in the understanding that the person with a disability (PWD) is (medically) deficient and in need of treatment or a cure in order to fit into the existing world around them. The burden of integration into society is here placed on the PWD and not on their environment or community (Disability Nottinghamshire, “Social Model vs Medical Model of disability,” para. 5-7). Whereas “[t]he Social Model of Disability ... describes people as being disabled by barriers in society, not by [their] impairment or difference” (Disability Rights UK, “The Social Model of Disability: Language,” para. 1). Here the burden of integration into the environment or community is placed on society, away from the PWD.

**EMPLOYEE ONBOARDING:**

The ASI continues to act as the lead in presenting on the array of student services to new VCC employees during human resources onboarding sessions.

**ASI SERVICES ORIENTATION:**

ASI Services were presented to the:

- VCC Student Services Centre
- VCC Registrar's Office
- Participants were invited to complete an ASI crossword puzzle to win a prize.
- VCC Digital Media Design Department
- The presentation focussed on, among other things, the differences between the ASI and the Student Conduct & Judicial Affairs Office.

**ASI PRESENTATIONS TO PERSONNEL IN 2023**

**PRIVACY + CONFIDENTIALITY PARAMETERS: STUDENT LATE/NO SHOW POLICIES: AND STUDENT COMPLAINTS AGAINST COUNSELLORS**

In an interactive session, the ASI provided VCC's counselling guidelines working group with consultation on various competing rights issues.

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In September 2023, led by Rachel, the guide was preliminarily introduced and socialized to VCC personnel via a lunch-and-learn Zoom presentation entitled *Intro to the VCC Inclusive WIL Hiring Guide - Building Best Practice with Employer Hosts*. The session was co-facilitated alongside Rachel by Brianna Higgins, Department Head of Disability Services; Beth Beeching, Department Head of Community & Career Education; and the ASI. The guide will be officially launched in the new year.

### ACADEMIC INTEGRITY:

Further to the 2022 collaboration with faculty and the VCC Centre for Teaching, Learning, and Research (CTRL) on students' perceptions regarding alternative assessment and academic integrity research, and pursuant to the ASI's ability to weigh in given its completion of the Tri-Council Policy Statement: Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans Course on Research Ethics (TCPS 2: CORE), the ASI was asked to review the intended survey and focus group Research and Ethics Board draft application. ASI comments and questions revolved primarily around: student participant anonymity; moving questions away from participant-specific experiences to general feedback about academic integrity (to ensure participants do not implicate themselves in academic integrity violations); clarifying questions centered around authentic assessment as an alternative to traditional assessment; student participant access to the final report resulting from the survey; and ensuring that student participants understand

the potential of authentic assessments to reduce student educational stress and anxiety. Recommendations were well received.

The ASI was further engaged by faculty to contribute to a definition of academic integrity for the aforementioned research. As the Office had done the previous year for a different request, based on its work with the Restorative Justice & Post-Secondary Education Collective, in the spirit of EDI, Indigenization & decolonization and in alignment with VCC's Strategic Innovation Plan, the ASI once again emphasized the importance of framing academic integrity as a social construct. This construct is a system in which individuals become bound when they opt into that particular system of study, rather than an indictment of someone's character or core values of 'honesty'. The ASI also highlighted the importance of recognizing and respecting that systems of academic integrity vary throughout the world.

### IMPLICATIONS OF AI AS A SOCIAL CONSTRUCT

- One should be careful in framing terms such as 'honesty' and 'integrity' as absolute terms relative to Western AI.
- One should validate that there are diverse AI systems around the world; that while a participant in the Canadian system of AI is bound to its rules and protocols, the system itself is nothing more than a social construct, a cultural norm, a subscription to a particular philosophy.

### RESTORATIVE JUSTICE & ACADEMIC INTEGRITY

Restorative Justice & Post-Secondary Education Collective  
British Columbia  
December, 2021  
DRAFT

### ACADEMIC INTEGRITY AS A SOCIAL CONSTRUCT

- Academic Integrity (AI) is a Social Construct and is not in and of itself an absolute value; no one AI system can claim superordinate correlation to the values of integrity and honesty.
- Rather, an AI system attributes to it named precepts such as honesty and integrity. Within the system such precepts are **culturally** defined by a) the system itself, b) the culture in which the system dwells. - is **culturally bound**
- Not same across culture - For example, a Westernized view of AI equates the intention and fact of plagiarism with dishonesty and a breach of integrity. In another system, within another culture, plagiarism, or the act of using someone's work without attributing or crediting it to the author, demonstrates deference, respect or honor. In that system plagiarism equates to the very opposite of dishonesty and a breach of integrity.

## WORKING WITH STUDENTS ON THE AUTISM SPECTRUM:



In 2022, the Office, along with other student services, was asked to collaborate with VCC's

Disability Services and Counselling Department to bring an Autism Spectrum expert to campus in order to learn how to work effectively with students on the spectrum and address their unique needs. The ASI was very eager to support this initiative and submitted several questions and issues to help shape the topics for a presentation on the subject.

Dr. David Worling, a practicing physician for 25 years with a particular interest in Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD), was selected by VCC's Disability Services and Counselling Department as the relevant subject matter expert. Dr. Worling presented in May 2023, addressing personnel from VCC's Disability Services,

Counselling Services, Student Conduct & Judicial Affairs Office and the ASI on various patterns and topics related to students living and thriving on the spectrum.

The ASI was disappointed that the presentation did not allow for a comprehensive discussion on successful service provision approaches for working with people on the spectrum or what constitutes undue hardship when working with ASD students. Nonetheless, the session was a start to better understanding diverse students, given the significant increase in ASD and neurodiverse students in the public post-secondary sector.

## RIGHTS, ROLES, AND OBLIGATIONS OF THE COLLEGE & STUDENTS IN AN ADULT LEARNING ENVIRONMENT: STUDENT SERVICES PRESENTATION TO THE CULINARY ARTS DEPARTMENT

In 2023, the ASI collaborated with Counselling Services, Disability Services and the Student Conduct & Judicial Affairs Office to address key rights,

freedoms and responsibilities in the modern adult public post-secondary education environment with the Culinary Arts Department. The Office frequently fields questions from departments regarding personnel (especially faculty) and student entitlements concerning choice, limits of expression and conduct. While VCC policy provides substantial direction, employees often need support to find or interpret relevant policies or to



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### SURVEYS, SURVEYS, SURVEYS:

The Office participated in several college surveys this year, as is its custom. Participating in these questionnaires allows the ASI to extend its recommendations on a variety of issues affecting the college.

In 2023 the ASI participated in surveys on:

- VCC Well-Being
- VCC's Brand Refresh
- VCC Leadership
- Help Desk/Information Technology Support
- VCC's New Website
- Employee Benefits
- VCC Day (Annual College-Wide Professional Development Day)
- Disability Services Department Review/Renewal

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understand when policies do not sufficiently address fairness (procedural, relational, and substantive) or equity matters.

In May 2023, the aforementioned student services, alongside the ASI, presented to the Culinary Arts Department on navigating student rights and institutional responsibilities while meeting curriculum and student conduct standards in higher education. The presentation reviewed the department's work, scope, and limits; pathways, supports, and resources regarding various student issues; and roles and responsibilities surrounding student concerns. The presentation was framed within the context of universal design for learning, mental health and wellbeing, neurodiversity, justice, equity and diversity, Indigenization, decolonization and the legal landscape. Additionally, the presentation acknowledged, validated and honoured

faculty confusion, frustration, fatigue and effort. Presenters concluded by offering suggestions on how to mitigate these issues.

### BACHELOR OF SCIENCE ACCREDITATION:

In 2023, the ASI was asked by the Bachelor of Science in Nursing (BSN) program if the Office would meet with the Canadian Association for Schools of Nursing (CASN) as part of VCC's BSN accreditation process. The ASI was among several departments, personnel and students canvassed by the association for accreditation purposes. The ASI was able to identify key themes and issues emerging from the BSN portfolio/program. The opportunity to collaborate with an external body on



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student-centered issues was very valuable, especially in light of the fact that equity and fairness can be either hampered or enhanced by external authorities directing the College's curriculum.



### VCC ACCESSIBILITY PLAN:

In 2023, pursuant to the 2022 Accessibility BC Act, the College was busy developing its institutional Accessibility Plan. As dictated by the Act, VCC held broad consultations among College departments and personnel before developing the plan. This decolonized approach, involving a multitude of interest holders, was completed in record

time, largely due to the College's institutional lead on the plan for students, Nigel Scott, Associate Director of Student Accessibility and Co-chair of the Accessibility Committee. As an interest holder, the Office was consulted on the plan and was able to surface a variety of considerations moving forward.

The ASI highlighted positive College initiatives, including the Centre for Teaching, Learning & Research's Universal Design for Learning efforts, Disability Services' free Supporting Students with Disabilities in Post-Secondary course (a multi-post-secondary collaboration including VCC's Disability Services), the Accessible Field-Trip Research Project and Disability Services' ability and talent to engage and collaborate with a variety of internal and external partners.

The Office additionally highlighted several challenges impeding an accessible learning environment, including but not limited to: resistance from some faculty to implement Disability Services adjudicated accommodations; assumptions or stereotypes held by some personnel about certain student

disabilities (e.g., that students with disabilities (SWD) will not be able to secure work in their field or avail themselves of an accommodation in the 'real world'; that certain curriculum requirements are immutable when they are, in fact, tied to an ableist perspective where alternatives are possible); resistance to accommodating in the practicum or clinical environment; lack of an SWD policy with enforcement mechanisms to, for example, allow for intervention when faculty refuse to implement duly adjudicated accommodations; lack of defined and consistent Disability Services protocols; resistance from academic programs to modify entrance requirements to meet accessibility standards (e.g., typing speed to get into a program); and lack of appropriate resources for proper and timely consultations around disability-related matters (e.g., for policy review/renewal or curriculum design). The ASI also emphasized the need for VCC to invest in 'pre-educational/college' programming to support students (including some SWD) with non-academic education skills (soft skills) such as policy/rights navigation, self-advocacy,

resilience and independence, etc., in response to a demonstrated pattern of student sense of entitlement or expectations inconsistent with the post-secondary environment.

### CASE MANAGER



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In 2023, conversations continued to be held regarding the potential of onboarding a case manager as a new role within the VCC Student Services portfolio, a discussion that has been reported by the Office dating back to 2017. In 2023, the ASI touched base with both the Associate

Registrar of Admissions and Enrolment and the Student Conduct & Judicial Affairs Officer about the value of a case manager role at VCC to support student success and fill gaps currently experienced in student services. These gaps include particular types of student follow-up and support that are not specifically part of Academic Advising Services, Counselling Services, Disability Services, the Student Conduct & Judicial Affairs Office or the ASI. The ASI has always strongly recommended, and continues to recommend, that the College consider developing such a service to both increase student retention and decrease pressure on allied services. A case manager role, developed comprehensively with an eye to providing support inclusive of, but, most importantly, not limited to, academic integrity and student conduct, would significantly reinforce VCC's commitments to EDI and decolonization.

#### ADDITIONAL COLLABORATION IN 2023:

##### With:

- Associate Director, People Relations
- Associate Director, Student Accessibility
- Co-Chair, Accessibility Committee
- Dean, School of Health Sciences
- Department Head, Disability Services
- Disability Counsellor
- Instructional Assistant, Culinary Arts
- Senior Program Coordinator, Continuing Studies
- Student Conduct & Judicial Affairs Officer

##### About:

- Approach to Accessibility at VCC, within Disability Service & the Community at Large
- Community Gaps for People with Disabilities
- Competing Rights Between EDI & Indigenization and Academic Freedom & Freedom of Expression
- Controversial Paper/Research Topics → Student Rights
- Disability Legislation
- Dual Student/Employee Roles & Rights
- Duty to Accommodate Students with Disabilities in Health Sciences
- Duty to Accommodate Students with Disabilities in the Provincial Instructor Diploma Program
- Formal Student Complaints About Employees → Best Practices, Protocols When Interviewing Students
- Implementing EDI in a Union Environment, Inability to Compel Employees to Take EDI Training
- Online vs. In-Person Course Delivery → Pros & Cons for Students
- Potential 'Pets on Campus' Policy
- Student Appeals/Complaints-In General
- Systemic Issues Mitigation; Best Practices & Sustainable Ways to Integrate EDI and Trauma Informed Approaches While Mitigating Misapprehensions of These Approaches
- Typing Requirements in Academic Programming & the Duty to Accommodate
- Use of Metacognition to Address Accessibility Issues
- VCC Student Volunteer Code of Conduct

### EXTENSIVE WRAPAROUND MEETING: SUPPORTING THE STUDENT AT THEIR REQUEST



Photo by Stephanie Harvey on Unsplash

In 2023, the ASI was asked to join a comprehensive team meeting to support a student experiencing multiple stumbling blocks. Participants in the wraparound meeting included the student, personnel from the relevant academic department (including the Assistant Department Head who coordinated the meeting), Disability Services, the Student Conduct & Judicial

Affairs Officer and the ASI. This enabled the student to access multiple student services in one sitting and to hear information about, and ask questions regarding, both the student's and the academic department's roles, rights, and obligations.

The ASI introduced the Assistant Department Head to the idea of a collaborative learning agreement (used in nursing programs). The ASI outlined the value of modifying the tool to meet the specific student's needs. The tool, or contract, developed between the academic area and the student lends itself to a holistic and trauma-informed approach, providing the student with transparent boundaries, choices and pathways to supportive services. The Office advised that the agreement should be collaboratively developed with the student, ensuring that the draft is provided to the student, who is encouraged to provide feedback, suggestions or edits to the agreement. It is imperative that the student's feedback be negotiated and incorporated into the agreement as appropriate. The ASI

emphasized that the ultimate goal is for the student to voluntarily opt into or concur with the agreement. The ASI recommended that the agreement:

- Be constructed in an alternative format to a written document to facilitate the student's way of knowing and being.
- Centre the student's voice by using 'I' language vs. 'you' language.
- Incorporate flexible due dates for assignments if an accommodation from Disability Services is subsequently approved.
- Provide the student with options and allow the student to self-select those options rather than prescribing which options are best, thereby relocating the locus of control back to the student.
- Use plain language.

Ultimately, the Assistant Department Head did develop an agreement, though

how much of the agreement was co-developed by the student is not clear. Additionally, the Assistant Department Head used a visual PowerPoint slide deck to construct the agreement rather than producing a written document, which rendered the agreement very accessible.

This type of approach between faculty and students, inclusive of a wraparound meeting at the student’s request and a co-developed collaborative agreement (aka a ‘student success plan’), would ideally be supported by the addition of a case manager role to Student Services at

VCC. A case manager could become the key actor who engenders and facilitates this type of activity at the College, positioning it for more regular deployment.

**2023 ASI MEMBERSHIP & COMMITTEE, WORKING GROUP & REGULAR MEETING PARTICIPATION:**

- ✦ Association of Canadian College & University Ombudspersons (ACCUO)
- ✦ ACCUO: Western Region
- ✦ ACCUO: EDI Committee
- ✦ Community College Ombuds Group – United States & Canada (CCOG)
- ✦ Restorative Justice Post-Secondary Collective (RJ-PSEC)
- ✦ Student Conduct Administrators’ Roundtable (SCAR)
- ✦ VCC: Administrative Policy Committee to Operations Council
- ✦ VCC: Appeals Working Group (Legacy Forum of the Former Appeals Oversight Committee To Education Council)
- ✦ VCC: ASI/Disability Services Duty to Accommodate/Duty to Inquire in Health Sciences – Working Group
- ✦ VCC: Committee Concerned with Student Behaviour (CCSB)
- ✦ VCC: EDI Committee
- ✦ VCC: EDI Committee - EDI Impact Assessment Tool Working Group
- ✦ VCC: EDI Committee - Environmental Scan Working Group
- ✦ VCC: EDI Committee – Equity Hiring Working Group
- ✦ VCC: Gender-Based Violence Education & Prevention Committee
- ✦ VCC: Inclusive Work Integrated Learning (WIL) Hiring Guide – Working Group
- ✦ VCC: Policy Committee to Education Council
- ✦ VCC: Privacy Working Group (Counselling/Disability Services/ASI)
- ✦ VCC: Student & Enrolment Services Forum
- ✦ VCC: Viewpoint Diversity – Working Group

Photo by Kelly Sikkema on Unsplash

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As has been the Office’s custom, the ASI sat on a number of committees and working groups in 2023, all supporting the Office’s ability to address systemic issues within the College. The Office enjoys membership on these committees and working groups as a member with a voice but without the ability to vote on issues. This allows the ASI to provide insight into, and recommendations on, student-centered matters without compromising its impartiality and neutrality.

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### OFFICE LAND ACKNOWLEDGMENT & SUSTAINED JOURNEY:

The Office recognizes that it works and serves on the unceded and traditional territories of the Coast Salish peoples, namely the Skwxwú7mesh (Squamish), Stó:lō and Səlílwətaʔ/Selilwitulh (Tsleil-Waututh) and xʷməθkʷəy̓əm (Musqueam) nations.

The ASI continues to pursue its quest to better understand how its ombuds-like services can better align with and serve VCC's Indigenous communities. The Office serves very few self-identified Indigenous students and notes that the type of assistance available through the ASI does not seem to speak to Indigenous students' needs around dispute resolution.

The ASI takes an open, inquisitive and reflective stance when contemplating the way forward to decolonize and Indigenize its practice. It is encouraging to note that various facets of the ombuds fairness triangle align with EDI, Indigenization and decolonization. In particular, relational and substantive fairness capitalize on the intrinsic value and worth of an individual complainant by focussing on how the person was treated and the substance and rationale of the decision made about the student. Elements of relational fairness, such as the decision maker's approachability, honesty and forthrightness, and their affording of dignity and respect to the student, align with EDI, Indigenization and decolonization principles.

As was the case in 2022, the Office continues to look forward to the College unveiling its institutional framework on Indigenization and decolonization, thereby moving the VCC community into a more action-oriented phase regarding these efforts. The ASI hopes to glean from such a framework better direction on how it can Indigenize and decolonize its processes.

In the interim, the ASI continues to engage in dialogue with colleagues on Indigenization and decolonization. In 2023, the Office set aside time to discuss relevant presentations, information and insights with personnel from the Student Conduct & Judicial Affairs Office, Student Counselling Services, the Registrar's Office, the Department of Indigenous Education & Community Engagement and Rob Thompson, Ombudsperson at





Camosun College. Discussions included reviewing tensions that exist between Indigenized perspectives and procedural fairness, the rule of law and limited resources on the one hand, and the opportunities to examine and unlearn certain Western and colonized precepts underpinning long-held structures, such as academic integrity, that completely discount Indigenous ways of knowing and being, impeding us from embracing healthier, more integrated ways of teaching, learning and providing services on the other.

The ASI additionally had the opportunity, during the Indigenization and decolonization best practices segment of the May 2023 Student & Enrolment Services Forum, to (re)share Yukon University's student conduct policy that embraces a decolonized and Indigenized approach to addressing student conduct. The policy's procedures include, in their alternative dispute resolution pathway, the potential option to have the conduct matter settled by the relevant Indigenous host nation's "traditional laws, practices, and values" (Yukon University 10, 11).

The ASI attended a variety of related presentations and seminars in 2023:

~ ***Broken Circle: Exploring Indigenous Perspectives of Academic Integrity***, presented by Dawn Cunningham Hall, hosted by the Restorative Justice Post-Secondary Education Collective.

~ ***Indigenizing and Decolonizing Teaching and Learning Speaker Session***, presented by Ta7taliya Michelle Nahanee, put on by VCC's Centre for Teaching, Learning & Research.

~ ***Supporting Indigenous Learners in the Class***, workshop facilitated by David Kirk, Dean of the VCC School of Education Excellence, put on by the VCC Centre for Teaching, Learning & Research.



Photo by Kea Mowat on Unsplash

### EQUITY IN THE ASI'S WORK:

The ASI continues to enjoy the privilege and the responsibility of sitting on a multitude of committees and working groups engaged in matters of equity, not least of which on the Association of Canadian College and University

Ombudsperson's (ACCUO) EDI Committee. While ombuds and equity offices in public post-secondary have striven to maintain a dividing line between matters of fairness and those of justice, equity, diversity and inclusion (JEDI), the recognition that these matters intersect is undeniable.

Furthermore, it is becoming increasingly difficult for ombuds to ignore the need to review their work against the context of JEDI and to reevaluate ombuds principles and standards against this context. The ASI occupies a unique vantage point where, by virtue of its designation as an office other than

strictly an ombuds, but inclusive of ombuds principles and standards, it is permitted to support the College community both around fairness and equity and to look at student issues through both lenses -- lenses which are increasingly becoming one and the same.

### DISCONNECT IN EQUITY WORK:

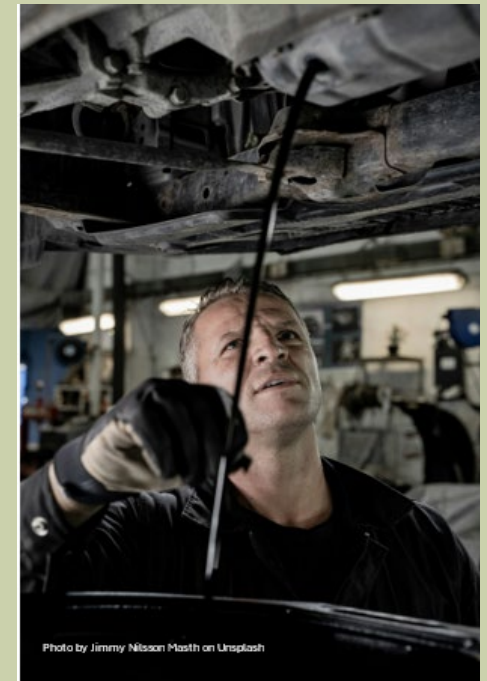
The Office is struck by the inability of the College to connect its varied equity initiatives in order to support a more coordinated and comprehensive approach to making the College a more equitable place to work and learn.

By accident, the ASI learned of a valuable undertaking by Lucy Griffith, Acting Dean of the School of Trades, Technology & Design, that showcases not only VCC's efforts but also initiative and ingenuity in



moving the College, and in this case, the Canadian and British Columbia trades sector, toward equity. Accustomed to the United Kingdom's model of trades, Lucy is now introducing a shift in the Canadian and British Columbian paradigm when defining and collecting data on trades, promoting such not only for those dominated by men ('blue' trades), such as transportation trades, but also for those dominated by women ('pink' trades), such as hair design and esthetics. When trades most occupied by women are duly counted as part of the trades sector in Canada and British Columbia, the understanding of the trades landscape changes dramatically. For example, the increased potential for funding women-dominated trades opens up and so too does the increase in parity between men and women in trades. The ASI connected the work to VCC's EDI Committee, where Lucy subsequently presented her initiative to committee members.

This work exemplifies VCC equity in action, and yet the work has been kept largely under wraps throughout the College. This is but one example of



where VCC is engaged in equity work, but the work is divorced from other equity initiatives throughout the College. Consequently, it becomes very difficult not only to coordinate efforts, but also exposes the potential for doubling efforts.

### VCC EDI COMMITTEE:

The ASI continued its membership on the VCC EDI Committee in 2023. As cited in the Office's 2022 Annual Report, the Committee continues to work without a terms of reference or a yearly work plan, which makes it difficult to understand the

committee's place in the College or its ability to affect EDI issues at VCC.

As indicated in the Office's 2022 Annual Report, the ASI met with the co-chairs of the committee late in 2023 to address these concerns. The ASI surfaced issues including the lack of a defined committee mandate and terms of reference; the vagueness of the committee's authority; issues surrounding communication with, and involvement of, senior leadership and the relay and transparency of information between committee co-chairs and senior leadership to committee members; and committee working groups' mandates to initiate and complete projects with senior leadership approval and support.

The co-chairs were receptive to the ASI's criticisms and framing of potential solutions. The ASI further offered its services to support a general review and renewal of the committee.

The ASI will reassess the value of the committee to the Office's work in the new year, once the co-chairs are able to canvass issues outlined above with the entire committee and the College

sponsors of the committee (namely, the Vice Presidents of Students & Community Development and People Services, respectively).

### VCC: EDI Committee - Equity Hiring Working Group:

In 2023, the ASI, along with other VCC EDI Committee members, formed an Equity Hiring Working Group due to the lag in the labor market, including within public post-secondary institutions such as VCC,

to implement equitable hiring practices and diversify the workforce.

While VCC, as with most other employers, commits to and is in line with human rights legislation and refrains from discriminating against individuals based on an equity dimension (i.e., deploys an equal opportunity mandate), the College does not approach hiring through an affirmative action lens. This has had the unintended potential result of marginalizing candidates from equity-deserving groups who are unable to compete precisely due to their equity dimension. For example, a physically disabled individual from birth who is kept out of the traditional 'first job' market due to their physical disability (e.g., unable to mow lawns or work at a fast-food chain) may experience stunted employment growth. Such an individual may only attain their first job in their early 30s. In such a case, the individual's resume inevitably pales in comparison to their non-disabled counterpart who has spent previous decades building and evolving their labour market experience. In this instance, the disabled candidate will always be outrun by their able-



bodied peers who can readily satisfy a job posting seeking a decade or more of experience.

The new working group was initially made up of individuals from the academic side of the house, human resources, student disability services and the ASI. The group hit a snag early on when some members of the group elected to cultivate the work through an “affirmative action” lens, while others preferred to maintain the human rights/non-discrimination approach to the work. However, the issue was soon resolved as the working group suddenly shifted in membership.

The remaining members agreed to pilot the work within the VCC faculty environment by creating an equitable faculty hiring guide outlining equitable hiring practices that go beyond upholding human rights requirements. The luxury of the faculty environment is that it permits academic areas to select their own faculty hiring criteria. This then becomes the perfect test environment to deploy the guide. Area faculty hiring allows the flexibility to implement the guide’s recommendations without first

having to vet the guide through any governing body. In this regard, the guide is deployed at will, with discretion left to each faculty area about which parts of the guide they will use and which parts they are not ready for.

The bulk of the guide was drafted and developed by Shantel Ivits, Department Head of Adult Basic Education Fundamentals, with support and ongoing reflections from the rest of the working group. The guide touches on what employment equity and equitable hiring are; why equitable hiring practices matter; assumptions, stereotypes and implicit biases hidden in our understanding of the “best candidate” for the job; and conducting an equitable hiring process (including job description development, job posting, application screening, job interviewing and developing questions, reference checking, selecting a candidate and following up with all candidates). The guide challenges users to reflect on individual, group and area bias and inequitable carry-overs ingrained over time. The guide, still in its draft phase, will take a “living tree” approach once

launched, inviting individuals to provide continuous feedback and suggestions for change.

The Office looks forward to continuing work on the guide in the new year.



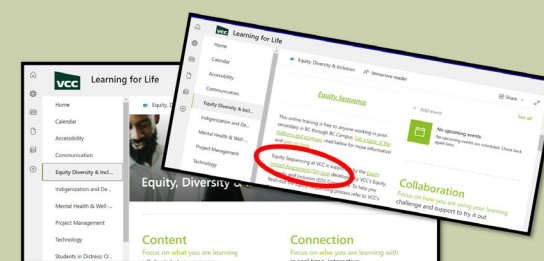
### EDI IMPACT ASSESSMENT (EIA) TOOL: CONTINUED ACTIVITY & WRAP-UP IN 2023:

Pursuant to the 2021 VCC EDI Committee EIA Tool Working Group’s formulation, work plan and EIA tool development, the ASI and other working group members updated and continued to promote the tool in 2023. In particular, the working group, based on feedback received in 2022, researched how the tool’s effectiveness could be measured.

The ASI, on behalf of the group, reached out to several organizations that have developed an equity impact assessment protocol, some of which the working group based their tool on. The ASI attempted to connect with the University of Edinburgh, the University of Stirling, UK Research and Innovation, Mind for Better Mental Health, the Government of Wales and the Darlington Borough Council to query if and how these organizations assess the effectiveness of their equity assessment guides, and whether they have a mechanism by which they can gather data on how effective each organization's departments or initiatives that have leveraged the equity guides/templates are in moving their institution to a more equitable place. As was pointed out to the working group through feedback received in 2022, it is one thing to assess a program's/initiative's potential implications on equity, but quite another to actually measure if these impact assessments are actually working to make an institution more equitable. Subsequent measuring or data processes that collect information on the actual success of applying an equity impact

assessment process are as, if not more, important than deploying an equity assessment tool itself. Anthony J Pugh, Strategic Equality Plan Policy Manager from the Equality and Human Rights Division of the Welsh Government was the only individual who responded to our query. Anthony indicated that they are in the process of reviewing and renewing their equity impact assessment process with the hope of including efficacy and reach measuring methods in the future to fully gauge and demonstrate outcomes (Pugh). As such, the working group remains at a loss to answer these qualitative questions but remains open to reviving the discussion if and when information surfaces to support the tool's qualitative assessment.

In 2023, the working group's tool was linked to VCC's People Services (human resources) 'Learning for Life' platform, an online space where VCC showcases all of its professional development opportunities, under the platform's 'Equity, Diversity & Inclusion' page.



The group was also provided the opportunity to present the tool to VCC's Leadership Team in May 2023. While the Senior Leadership Team applauded the work, it was not prepared to endorse the tool for voluntary use throughout the College.

The tool was subsequently presented to VCC's college-wide Leaders' Forum, including Deans, Directors, Department Heads and other leaders, in June 2023.

All told, the tool has been:

#### Presented to:

- ❖ VCC's Education Council
- ❖ VCC's Curriculum Committee to Education Council
- ❖ VCC's Leadership Team (inclusive of senior leaders)

## ❖ VCC's Leaders' Forum

**Shared upon request with:**

## ❖ VCC's Partnership Development Office

**Uploaded to:**

- ❖ The internal MyVCC.ca 'Policies' website page
- ❖ VCC's People Services (human resources) 'Learning for Life' platform

After a final briefing on the tool and the working group's activities to the larger VCC EDI Committee, the working group wrapped up its work. The Office was very grateful to have been part of, and worked with, the EDI Impact Assessment working group in developing the EDI Impact Assessment tool for the College and would like to commend its major contributors, alongside the ASI, Caralee Maloney, Manager, Safety & Security and Francesco Barillaro, Instructional Associate, Centre for Teaching, Learning & Research.

### **DUTY TO INQUIRE & ACCOMMODATE IN HEALTH SCIENCES PROGRAMS:**

The ASI, once again, collaborated extensively with VCC's Disability Services to unpack and address the misunderstanding and misapplication of the duty to inquire (DTI) with, and the duty to accommodate (DTA), students with disabilities in health sciences programming at VCC.

As Disability Services was gaining little to no traction with the School of Health Sciences in this regard, the ASI offered to, and subsequently did, reach out to the Dean of Health Sciences to outline some of the hiccups being faced by the School's students with disabilities (SWD) who were facing pushback from relevant academic departments regarding the implementation of duly adjudicated accommodations by VCC Disability Services. The Dean was very receptive to the criticism raised and was fully supportive and collaborative in planned interventions to address the pushback.

Disability Services and the ASI worked together to develop a workshop on the DTI and the DTA and began planning a roll-out of the presentation to the School of Health Sciences.

In the end, the School became very receptive to better understanding their duty towards SWD, and Disability Services felt the DTI and DTA presentations/workshops would be better served by being delivered solely by Disability Services. The ASI was happy to cede this ground to Disability Services and was pleased to have been called upon by Disability Services to lubricate the issue with the Dean of Health Sciences.



## EXTERNAL COLLABORATIVE ACTIVITY

**The Office was again grateful for the host of external collaborative opportunities presented in 2023. As a one-person Office, the ASI not only enjoys these occasions to share best practices, learn from colleagues and tease out ways to best support students and institutions in shifting educational paradigms to ensure fair educational environments, but also relies on such.**

**In 2023, the ASI continued its membership in the Association of Canadian College & University Ombudspersons (ACCUO), continued to sit on the ACCUO Equity, Diversity & Inclusion Committee, held membership in the Restorative Justice & Post-Secondary Education Collective; collaborated with the United States Community College Ombuds Group (CCOG) and liaised with the Students' Union of Vancouver Community College (SUVCC).**

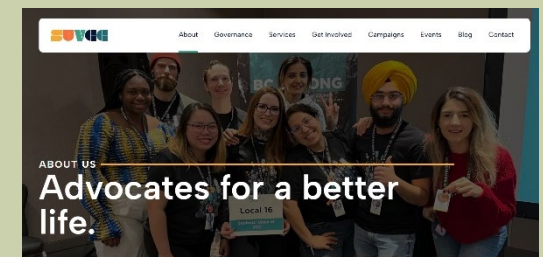
Photo by Anne Nygård on Unsplash

### STUDENTS' UNION OF VANCOUVER COMMUNITY COLLEGE (SUVCC):

As the ASI is a neutral and impartial actor, it cannot represent the student's interests over the College's interests in a dispute. The SUVCC Student Advocate is thus integral in supporting students to strategize about and win their College complaints and appeals, and in accompany students to their tribunal hearings. The collaboration between the ASI and the SUVCC Student Advocate in wrapping around the student is, therefore, vital to providing fulsome support in upholding student rights.

The ASI collaborated with the SUVCC on the following items in 2023:

- 🌀 Better understanding of which students are members of the SUVCC and therefore eligible for the SUVCC's Student Advocate Services. As outlined in the Office's 2022 Annual Report, the map of eligibility is not as straightforward as one would think. The ASI is pleased to be able to fill gaps for ineligible students, notwithstanding the fact that, as an impartial and neutral party, the Office does not provide individual advocate services for student cases.
- 🌀 Supporting SUVCC students and Advocate replacement in the SUVCC Advocate's absence.
- 🌀 Tribunal training gaps in the face of the dissolution of the VCC Appeals Oversight Committee to Education Council; conflict of interest issues with the SUVCC providing training to student panelists/tribunal members, given the SUVCC's role as student advocate at tribunal hearings.



## ACCUO EDI COMMITTEE:

### 🌀 Ombuds' Hesitance to Incorporate EDI into Their

**Practice**→**Zoominar**: Continuing on from 2022's work, the ACCUO EDI Committee finished developing a seminar aimed at supporting ACCUO members to identify, validate and address their reluctance to implement EDI into ombuds' work. Pursuant to a request-for-proposal (RFP) process, the Committee selected a facilitator based on their proposal's alignment with the Committee's goals for the seminar, discharged the marketing plan for the event, including highlighting Black History Month, and held the session in February 2023. The event was poised to provide a safe and brave space for members to voice concerns with EDI in their work and to address member apprehensions voiced in the 2021 ACCUO EDI Survey. The session's goals included using a mix of anonymous technology and plenary and break-out sessions to provide a voice-rich environment to:

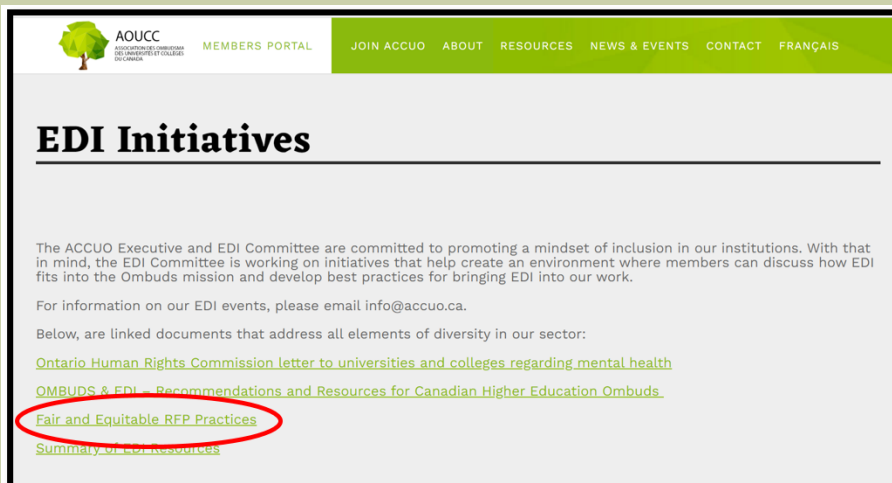
- Address what makes members nervous about EDI in ombudsing;
- Surface what works well and what does not, and why;
- Examine members' misgivings about EDI in their work; and
- Provide room, in general, for difficult conversations around EDI.



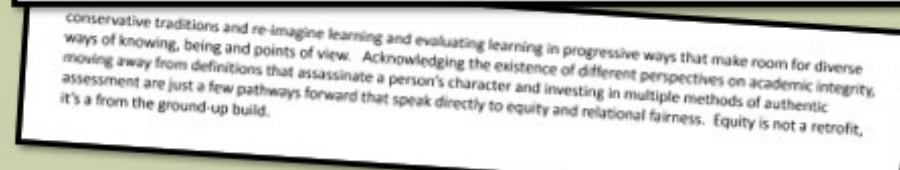
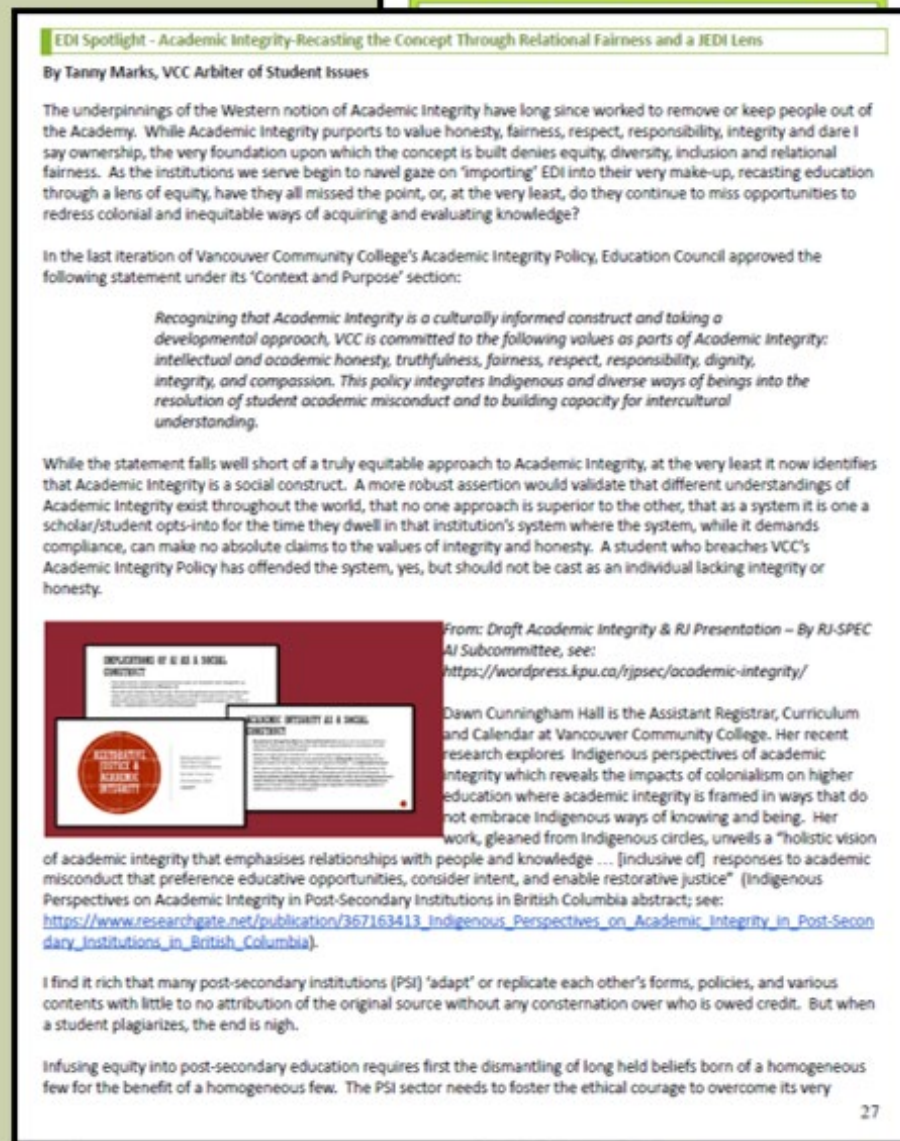
While the session was well attended by ACCUO members, the facilitator was unable to manage time or intuit that certain segments were running too long, and so the seminar's agenda ran quite short of its overall goals. This was reflected in participant feedback received after the seminar. In the end, the ultimate objective of the seminar, to address ACCUO members' hesitancy and concerns around EDI in a brave, safe and non-judgmental environment, was scuttled. The ACCUO EDI Committee held a postmortem after the seminar and is prepared to implement lessons learned moving forward with its work.



**Equitable RFP Processes:** Pursuant to the issue having surfaced during the RFP process of the above event and the discussion held at the 2022 ACCUO Annual General Meeting, the ASI compiled and circulated among ACCUO EDI Committee members a summary of fair and equitable RFP approaches or alternatives. Themes include alternatives to RFPs, the pros and cons of these alternatives and new RFP practices. The Committee’s University of British Columbia (UBC) member subsequently circulated the UBC Equity & Inclusion Office’s draft equity and inclusion considerations for RFPs. The Committee will look to review all of these more in-depth in the future to potentially provide recommendations to the ACCUO Executive on ACCUO’s Policy on the Procurement of Materials and Services and Conflict of Interest Guidelines.



**ACCUO Bulletin - EDI Spotlight:** In 2023, the ASI contributed to the November ACCUO newsletter’s EDI column with a piece entitled “Academic Integrity-Recasting the Concept Through Relational Fairness and a JEDI Lens.”



## COMMUNING WITH OMBUDS:

As always, the Office collaborated with ombudspersons from across the post-secondary sector during a number of meetings and events in 2023. In particular, the ASI exchanged information and ideas in 2023 with Rob Thompson, Ombudsperson at Camosun College, Amanda Dean, Director of the Office of the Ombudsperson at Austin Community College, George Cole, Ombudsperson at Algonquin College and Jerry Nuesell, Ombudsperson at Wake Tech. Thank you for the exchange and your support!

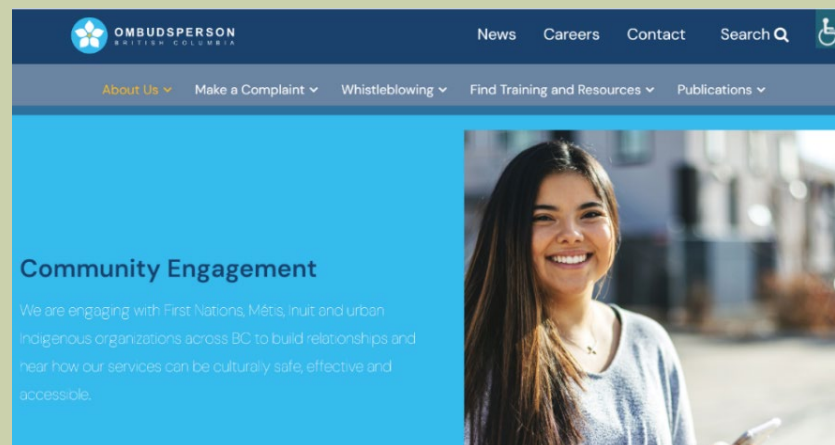
## THE ASI MEETS WITH THE BC OMBUDS OFFICE RE THEIR APPROACH TO INDIGENIZATION & DECOLONIZATION:

After hearing Jay Chalke from the British Columbia (BC) Office of the Ombudsperson co-present the segment “How Can Ombuds Contribute to Reconciliation?” with Paul Dubé, Ombudsman of Ontario, at the 2022 ACCUO/Forum of Canadian Ombudsman (FCO) Conference, the ASI reached out to the BC Ombuds to better understand the office’s approach to Indigenizing and decolonizing ombuds work. The ASI met with Sara Darling, Communications Lead from the BC Ombuds, in February 2023.

While much discussion has centred around the relational approach to reconciling ombuds services with Indigenous communities, little light has been shed on changes required to Indigenize and decolonize substantive or procedural fairness precepts upon which ombuds practice rests. The ASI sought to understand how the BC Ombuds Office is tackling these issues and was grateful for the opportunity to meet with Sara. Sara

confirmed that currently, all attention is focused on building trust and relationships with Indigenous peoples, expanding services and making them culturally appropriate for Indigenous complainants and making room for Indigenous voices within the BC Ombuds Office. Sara confirmed that the ombuds principles of procedural and substantive fairness have yet to be reviewed or analyzed through an Indigenous or decolonized lens.

Sara did point the ASI to the BC Ombuds website to review comments gleaned through engagement with Indigenous interest holders for preliminary insight into how the Ombuds precepts (fairness triangle) may be Indigenized or decolonized. A review of the comments captured in the British Columbia Ombudsperson *Indigenous Communities Services Plan Phase I 2022-2023* pointed out, in particular, the need for redefining ‘fairness’ or making the concept mutable depending on which peoples are being served and ceasing to divorce fairness from equity (BC Ombudsperson). The ASI took the liberty of circulating the comments among members of the ACCUO EDI Committee. The ASI looks forward to the BC Ombuds delving deeper into how the actual underpinnings of ombuds work (e.g., the facets of the ombuds fairness triangle) can be Indigenized and decolonized.



## 2023 STUDENT CENTRED POLICY & PROTOCOL: ASI CONSULTATION, COMMENT & RECOMMENDATIONS



All facets of fairness (procedural, substantive and relational) are expressed in formal VCC policy and procedure, department protocols and guidelines and College practices and processes. These collectively inform individual student complaints and systemic issues at VCC. It is therefore essential for the ASI to engage in policy work in order to offer recommendations to help foster a fair environment in which students can thrive. As an office with a voice without the ability to vote on policy or compel actors, the ASI is grateful to have access to the various committees, working groups and

decision makers at the College that develop these directives.

The Office supports the VCC community at all levels around student and College rights, roles and responsibilities, helping to interpret, guide and advise on issues related to student procedural, relational and substantive fairness. Its policy and committee work, coupled with themes pulled from individual student complaints, permit the ASI to prevent or address systemic issues. This additionally improves and reinforces the Office's individual student complaint work.

### COMPASSIONATE WITHDRAWAL/MANDATED LEAVE POLICY:

The College has been considering implementing a policy for student compassionate withdrawal or mandated leave for a number of years, given the gap in current VCC policy to manage issues that arise amidst

circumstances ill-fitted to be dealt with under student conduct policies. The Student Conduct & Judicial Affairs Office (SCJA) has been tasked with developing this policy. The policy is often the subject matter of the Committee Concerned with Student Behaviour (CCSB), a committee chaired by the SCJA.

In 2023, the ASI took the liberty of forwarding and sharing compassionate withdrawal or mandated leave resources with the CCSB, including the University of Toronto's Supportive Leaves Policy, coupled with the issues cited about this policy by the Ontario Human Rights Commission (see "OHRC Letter to University of Toronto on the University Mandated Leave of Absence Policy Review".)

The ASI has a number of concerns about such a policy and recommends that the CCSB and SCJA review the following questions as the policy is being developed:

- ☞ What differentiates a ‘forced’ student withdrawal under such a policy from the College or a program from a suspension per the College & Institute Act; whether such a policy allows for a *de facto* suspension unauthorized by the President?
- ☞ What triggers such a policy and what defines when the policy is to be used; what process of student conduct escalation occurs prior to the policy being triggered (i.e., what interventions are deployed prior to its trigger)?
- ☞ Whether, under the appropriate circumstances, such a policy can be leveraged by the student as a ‘diversion’ program in lieu of suspension or a failing grade; whether the student can request processing under this policy (rather than face suspension or a failing grade)?
- ☞ Whether there is a defined rubric directing how medical

reasons (e.g., mental health) for student withdrawal are adjudicated?

- ☞ What documentation accompanies a process or decision under such a policy?
- ☞ Whether the student has rights to appeal a withdrawal under such a policy?
- ☞ How students with disabilities (SWD) will not be biased or discriminated against under such a policy; how SWD will not be treated under a ‘separate but equal’ doctrine under this policy?

The ASI remains at the CCSB’s and the SCJA’s disposal to discuss these above items.

**TUITION AND FEE REFUND POLICY:**

In 2023, pursuant to confusion and inconsistent application of refunding non-refundable deposits for international students, the ASI collaborated with International Education and the Coordinator,

ASI Working to Set a Culture of:

- ☞ **TIMELINESS**
- ☞ **TRANSPARENCY**
- ☞ **REASONABILITY**
- ☞ **CONSISTENCY**
- ☞ **ACCOUNTABILITY**
- ☞ **FAIRNESS**

Supporting the College to Mitigate Institutional Risk

Curriculum & Policy to address relevant gaps present in VCC’s Tuition and Fee Refund Policy. The Office recommended clearer and consistent language in the policy’s procedures document regarding the inability for all students (domestic and international alike) to appeal non-refundable portions of their tuition.

Recommendations were ultimately adopted by VCC’s Operations Council, the body responsible for VCC’s Tuition and Fee Refund Policy. This now provides transparent and consistent

information on non-refundable portions of tuition.

### SEXUAL VIOLENCE & MISCONDUCT POLICY:

In 2023, the ASI, alongside the Gender-Based Violence Education & Prevention Committee (GBVEP), provided feedback on the renewal of VCC's Sexual Violence & Misconduct Policy. The ASI met with the Manager, Safety & Security (chair of the GBVEP and institutional lead on the policy) to review the following issues and Office recommendations: (Note: Feedback was provided, in part, in response to the mishandling of a relevant case in 2021.)

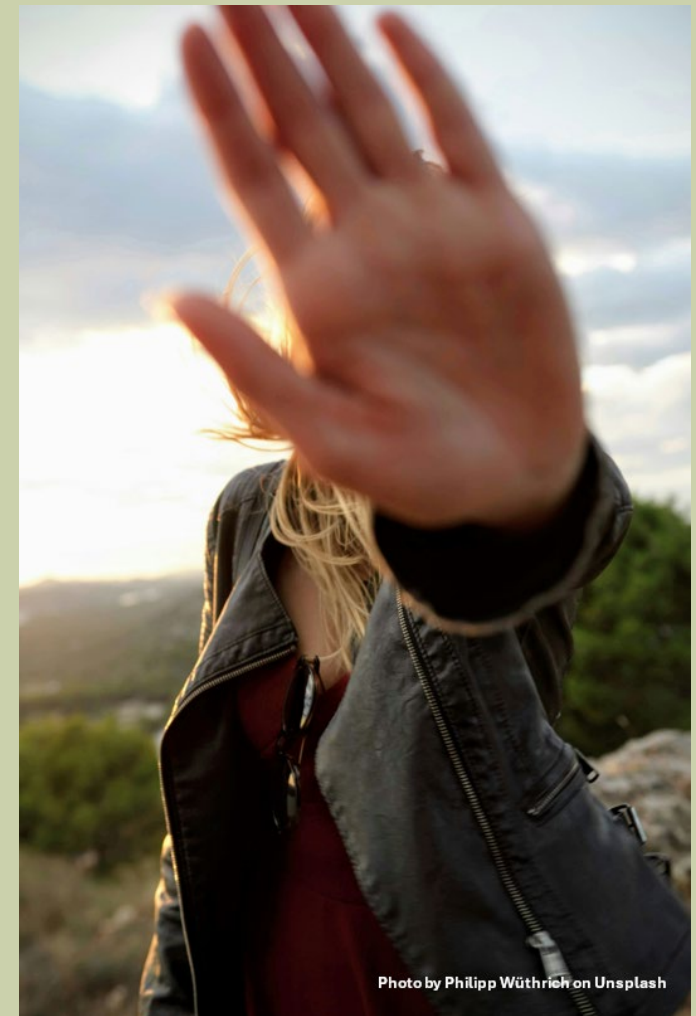
- ☞ The conflict of interest for the sexual violence investigator to additionally decide a matter under the policy, thereby rendering the final decision to the respondent; the ambiguity and clumsiness of the relevant policy section;
- ☞ The need for clear differentiation among the roles

of the investigator, the decision-maker and the student conduct officer (as the actor responsible for implementing student sanctions); or, alternatively, the possibility of merging roles into one role with a clearly articulated process;

- ☞ The need for clear articulation of the Student Conduct & Judicial Affairs Office's role in the institution of sanctions post-adjudication of misconduct;
- ☞ The lack of advocate services for students alleged to have contravened the policy; the lack of advocate services provided by the Students' Union of Vancouver Community College in these cases;
- ☞ The requirement to provide the respondent with full details of an allegation, including the survivor's identity; the offence to procedural fairness in

keeping information from the respondent; the inability for the respondent to answer allegations fully without facts of the case being disclosed;

- ☞ The need to shift paradigms from 'rule breaking' to 'harm caused';



- ☞ The need to cover Board Member and President misconduct;
- ☞ The need to refer the respondent to relevant College resources for support; the need to flesh out the definition of an advisor; and
- ☞ The need for a determination/decision to include a rationale, next steps and relevant actors, if any.

The vast majority of the ASI's recommendations were adopted by the institutional lead and now form part of the policy.

### ACCOMMODATIONS FOR STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES POLICY-RENEWAL:

In 2023, the Office began providing substantive feedback on the new VCC Accommodations for Students with Disabilities Policy, collaborating with Disability Services, the Associate Director of Accessibility and the Education Policy Committee. Preliminary ASI policy notations and

recommendations included:

- ☞ Clarifying whether the policy speaks to non-significant/non-permanent/non-persistent disabilities;
- ☞ Listing the Accessible British Columbia Act as relevant legislation;
- ☞ Surfacing that the duty to inquire, as defined in the policy, is ongoing in nature;
- ☞ Highlighting the obligation of employees to maintain the confidentiality of a student's

disability and attendant activity surrounding accommodation;

- ☞ Ensuring that the policy not only underscores the need to welcome students with disabilities (SWD), but also to be inclusive of them both inside and outside the classroom;
- ☞ Reframing the policy to disabuse the notion that disabilities bring with them safety concerns above and beyond those found with any student;

## 2023 ASI POLICY REVIEW, COMMENT & RECOMMENDATIONS

- ☞ Accommodations for Students with Disabilities Policy
- ☞ Archives Policy
- ☞ Education Services Renewal Policy
- ☞ Emergency Management Policy
- ☞ Ethics and Integrity in Research and Scholarly Activity Policy
- ☞ Granting of Credentials Policy
- ☞ Gratuities Policy
- ☞ International Travel Risk and Security Policy
- ☞ Named Recognition of Assets Policy
- ☞ Prior Learning Assessment and Recognition Policy
- ☞ Sexual Violence & Misconduct Policy
- ☞ Transfer Credit Policy
- ☞ Tuition and Fee Refund Policy



Photo by Beatriz Pérez Moya on Unsplash

- Ensuring that employees do not step outside of their scope and try to negotiate accommodations directly with SWD without involving Disability Services;
- Outlining responsibilities of SWD to meet not only program entrance or course prerequisites, but also course requirements;
- Shifting requirements away from the need for a ‘diagnosis’ of a disability to the ‘functional impact’ of a disability; and
- Clarifying SWD rights to appeal an accommodation decision by Disability Services (e.g., on procedural fairness grounds).

### ARCHIVES POLICY:

The Office recommended that materials captured by this policy be preserved regardless of whether the materials paint the College in a positive or negative light. This is essential to preserving the institutional record on matters such as equity and to allow for eventual redress when relevant. The inclusion of this as a policy principle permits the College to truly demonstrate where it has been, what the College community has learned and where VCC is at any given moment. Only in this regard can VCC accurately measure its progress and move towards truth and reconciliation.

The Office’s recommendation was accepted and is reflected in the renewed policy.

### ETHICS & INTEGRITY IN RESEARCH & SCHOLARLY ACTIVITY POLICY (EIRSA):

The Office noted the level of detail in the procedures document of the EIRSA as compared to what is usually permitted in policy, especially in

student-centred policy. The ASI has often advocated that student policies be more specific and itemized in their procedures documents but has met pushback with the indication that such details are more appropriately housed in attendant supporting documents to policy (i.e., protocols, guidelines, etc.). Such attendant documents do not form part of the policy and are generally not readily available to students. The ASI has raised concerns around inconsistency in the level of detail between student-centred policies and employee-focused policies, pointing to this as a fairness issue.

The EIRSA’s dependence on meeting third-party requirements was pointed to as a key difference in this instance; since the policy is directed by external requirements to VCC (i.e., the 2022 Tri-Council Policy Statement 2: Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans) it is imperative that it align with these requirements, not least of which to avail of benefits such as funding.



**PRIOR LEARNING ASSESSMENT & RECOGNITION POLICY (PLAR):**

The Office raised questions about PLAR from an equity, diversity, and inclusion (EDI) standpoint and made recommendations regarding the potential for the PLAR policy to extend to admission requirements in order to reduce barriers to programming for students. Program admission requirements and course prerequisites are currently not eligible for PLAR, although some departments may accept

equivalent training or experience in lieu of specific course prerequisites and, to some degree, admission requirements. It was agreed that more discussion is needed in this area.

**APPEALS WORKING GROUP → LEGACY OF THE FORMER APPEALS OVERSIGHT COMMITTEE TO EDUCATION COUNCIL:**

The ASI maintained its membership in the VCC Appeals Working Group in 2023, a group led by the Associate Vice President, Student & Enrolment Services. The group did not adopt the Office’s central 2022 recommendations or complete any substantive undertakings in 2023. The ASI will reevaluate its membership in the group in 2024.

In 2023, the ASI continued to circulate among VCC decision-makers fair decision-making workshop opportunities from the BC Office of the Ombudsperson.

**RECOMMENDATIONS, RECOMMENDATIONS**

In 2023, the VP, Students & Community Development and the Chair of Education Council at VCC sought from, and were provided by, the ASI formal recommendations on the following:

- 👉 Student Tribunal Hearing Panel (Committee) Member or Chair Recusal



Photo by Florian Klauer on Unsplash

- 👉 Interpretation of Student Non-Academic Conduct policy timelines for hearings to be called by the Tribunal Hearing Panel (Committee) Chair.
- 👉 Engagement of a Professional Tribunal Hearing Panel (Committee) Member in lieu of VCC-trained panelists for hearings pursuant to student-centred policies.

2023  
TRIBUNAL TRAINING PROVIDED BY THE ASI  
&  
ASI SILENT OBSERVER STATUS

The ASI provided training on tribunal processes, relevant institutional policy and procedural, relational and substantive fairness on three separate occasions in 2023 in order to prepare VCC panelists for upcoming student hearings.

The Office is routinely invited to train hearing adjudicators, sit in on pre-hearing meetings and hearings for students as a silent observer and provide debriefs of hearings to panelists upon request once a final decision has been rendered and submitted to all relevant parties.

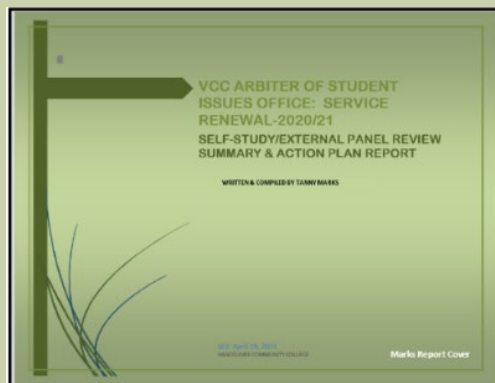
The ASI observed one pre-hearing meeting and two tribunal hearings in 2023. Tribunal processes were heard under the Appeal to Education Council on Educational Matters policy and the Student Non-Academic Conduct policy.

Silent observer status for the ASI during hearing processes and opportunities to debrief with tribunal adjudicators post-decision rendering provides the Office with great reach in surfacing any unfair student tribunal practices. The ASI is grateful for its silent observer status enshrined in policy and the willingness of panelists, students and employees alike, to train and debrief with the Office.

Photo by Nellie Adamyan on Unsplash



## 2020/2021 ASI OFFICE SERVICE REVIEW & RENEWAL → 2023 ACTIVITY UPDATE



In 2023, the ASI continued work on its renewal action plan, generated by the Office's qualitative service review completed in 2021 and pursuant to VCC's Education Services Renewal Policy.

### HIGHLIGHTS

#### OFFICE PERSONNEL ABSENCE COVERAGE

In 2023, pursuant to the groundwork laid in 2022, the Office continued to use an external consultant to partially cover extended ASI leaves (personnel leaves, conference attendance or when the ASI is working on annual or special projects) rather than close the office during these periods. As a one-person office, it is not possible to

provide the College community with uninterrupted service throughout the year. The addition of the external coverage consultant during these times was important in order to strive to provide students and employees with some level of support. The ASI continued to work with the consultant to provide pre- and post-deployment briefings, the Vice President, Students & Community Development's office to extend the consultant's general service agreement and the VCC Information Technology Department to provide the consultant with required electronic access.

Unfortunately, after piloting the coverage for about a year and a half, the Office has had to terminate the arrangement. The student uptake of services during coverage periods was insufficient to warrant the outlay. Very few students actually availed themselves of the Office's services during these times. While the model provided a degree of connection to Office services during ASI absences, it

was severely underutilized and, when utilized, not very effective as the ASI often had to re-ignite processes from the beginning upon return. These issues were not at all reflective of the consultant's ability, but, rather, of the great difficulty for an external individual to slide into a position sporadically without the benefit of true consistency with the organization. The Office was quick to point these items out to the consultant upon termination of the model.

The Office will continue to review and discuss with the Vice President, Students & Community Development ways to provide coverage during extended ASI leaves. In the interim,



Photo by Tim Mossholder on Unsplash

students during these absences are directed to ASI self-help materials and the Students' Union of Vancouver Community College for temporary support.

The ASI would like to express its gratitude to Jane Jae Kyung Shin, Vice President, Students & Community Development, Sharifa Ma, Coordinator of Students & Community Development, Saifeddin Saif from VCC's Information Technology Department and to the consultant for pulling together to support the Office for this initiative. The Office could not have engaged in such an undertaking without their collective expertise.

### STUDENT PRIVACY PARAMETERS – WORKING GROUP

As outlined in the 2022 ASI Annual Report, the Office joined the other similarly situated VCC departments of Counselling and Disability Services to identify and explore student privacy and confidentiality imperatives in the face of occasions where VCC departments or personnel seek out

private student information from one of these departments. As outlined in the Office's 2022 Annual Report, the Office has resisted requests from the College and its legal counsel to turn over Office information on students (Marks, 2022 Annual Report, 32-33).



In 2022, the group engaged the services of privacy consultant Bev Hooper from Hooper Access and Privacy Consulting Ltd. to confirm privacy rights and responsibilities under the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act. As a result, the group's departments, including the ASI, are now fortified with clear rights and obligations around maintaining the privacy and confidentiality of student information, including responsibilities regarding requests from within the College to pierce through to students'

information.

In 2023, the group offered to present the information to the VCC Leadership and Senior Leadership Teams but was not taken up on its offer.

### OFFICE EVALUATIONS

In 2023, in addition to surveys deployed to students, the ASI began regularly surveying employees who access the Office for support around student-centred issues, systemic barriers, consultations on rights, roles, responsibilities and curriculum design or delivery. The uptake on employee surveys is very encouraging, allowing the ASI to better gauge how relevant services are to employees' needs.

The ASI uses the same SurveyMonkey platform, account and evaluation for personnel as it does for students to more easily administer employee surveys and collect responses.

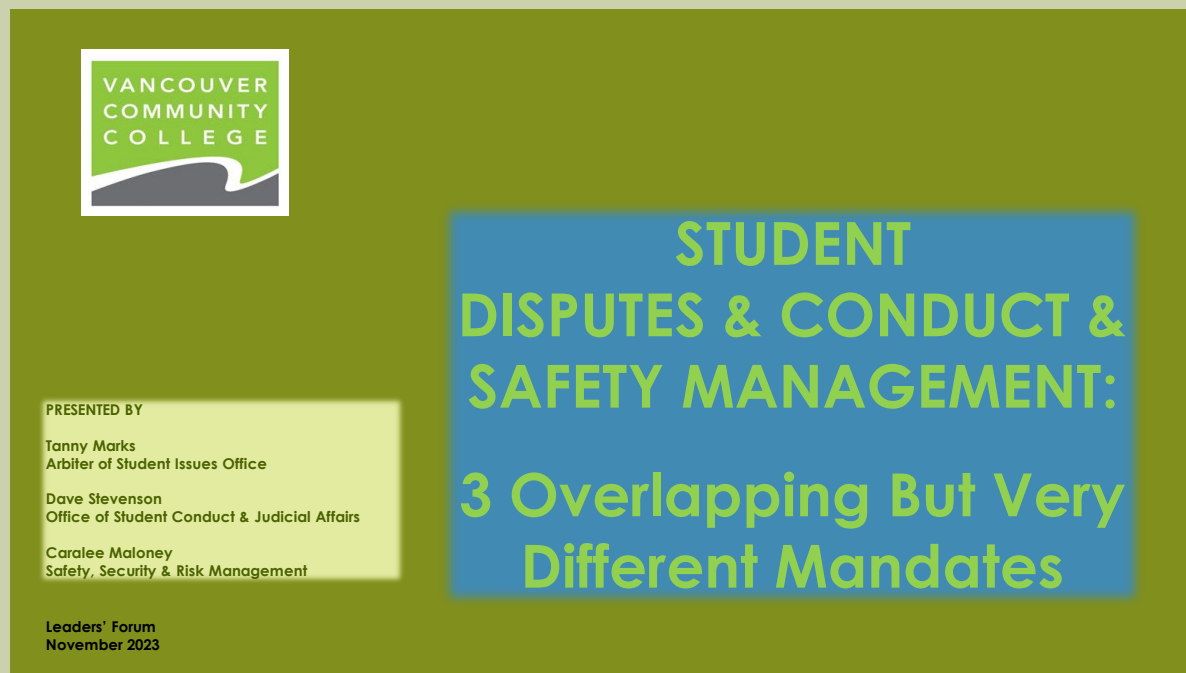
### DECONFLATING SERVICES FROM 3 DISTINCT PORTFOLIOS: STUDENT CONDUCT & JUDICIAL AFFAIRS, SAFETY, SECURITY & RISK MANAGEMENT AND ASI

In 2023, the ASI revived the discussion to better parse out the Office's services from those of the Student Conduct & Judicial Affairs Office (SCJA) and Safety, Security & Risk Management (SSRM). The discussion and collaboration first began in 2018 when all three departments briefed the College community on student conflict management. The Office has subsequently discovered a number of instances in which personnel sought consultations from other departments on matters better served by the Office, leading to their misapprehension of, and failure to discharge, fairness obligations. The ASI was happy to collaborate once again with the SCJA and SSRM to help unpack for the College the differences in subject matter expertise among the three offices.

In November 2023, the three partners delivered a seminar to the College's Leaders' Forum, a monthly college-wide meeting held for academic and student services' deans, directors, department heads, managers and other personnel on relevant issues and

topics common throughout the College and affecting both the academic and student services sides of the house. The seminar comprised a presentation on the various differences in services and subject matter expertise among the SCJA, the SSRM and the ASI, and engaged participants in smaller groups to work through a fact pattern reflecting a complex student profile requiring the leveraging of all three departments. Participants were subsequently provided with an answer key to the fact pattern.

The ASI was very pleased to see how well participants did in digesting the scenario. The Office hopes to create additional spaces and opportunities for the SCJA, SSRM and ASI to come together to further deconflate services within the College community.



## PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

### PROFESSIONAL ASSOCIATION REGIONAL MEETING

- **Association of Canadian College and University Ombudspersons (ACCUO) – Western Division Regional Meeting** [Hosted by the Southern Alberta Institute of Technology (SAIT), Office of the Ombudsperson. Online: September 19, 2023.]
  - **“Academic Integrity: Considerations for the Ombudspersons”** [Association of Canadian College and University Ombudspersons (ACCUO) – Western Division Regional Meeting Keynote. Delivered by Professor Sarah Elaine Eaton, PhD, Werklund School of Education, University of Calgary. Online: September 19, 2023.]

### VCC PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT DAYS

- **“Academic Freedom and Education Council at VCC”** [Vancouver Community College (VCC) Education Council Planning Session. Presented by Andy Sellwood, Instructional Associate, VCC Centre for Teaching, Learning & Research. Online: June 12, 2023.]
- **VCC DAY 2023 - Building Connections** [Vancouver Community College (VCC) Employee Professional Development Day. Vancouver Playhouse Theatre & VCC Downtown Campus: November 2, 2023.]
  - **“The Other People - Making a World of Difference”** [VCC DAY 2023 - Building Connections Session. Facilitators: Philip Bregman, Rabbi Emeritus, Temple Sholom Vancouver; Jahmira Lovemore, Co-founder, Black in BC Aid; Rev Gary Gaudin, Ordained minister (retired), United Church of Canada; Tariq Tyab, Co-Founder, Muslim Food Bank and Community Services and Muslim Care Centre; Terry Yung, Board Chair, S.U.C.C.E.S.S.; Board Governor, Justice Institute of BC; Inspector, Vancouver Police Diversity, Inclusion and Indigenous Relations; Inderjeet Singh, Sikh Chaplain, University of British Columbia; Multifaith Chaplain, Kwantlen Polytechnique University; Director, Alpha Excel; Laurie Sterritt, Founder and partner, Pathways Executive Search; Oren Askew, Afro-Indigenous female Hip Hop and R&B, DJ O Show. Vancouver Playhouse Theatre: November 2, 2023.]
- **VCC Curriculum Committee & VCC Education Policy Committee Planning Session** [Professional Development Session for Committees of the Vancouver Community College (VCC) Education Council. VCC, Broadway Campus: December 1, 2023.]
  - **“Cultivating Trauma-Informed Spaces in Education Dialogue”** [VCC Committees of Education Council Planning Session Segment. Presented by, Nicole Johnson, M.Ed. Professor, Social Service Worker Program and Ida Gianvito, M.Ed., RP, Counsellor, Wellness from Sheridan College. VCC, Broadway Campus: December 1, 2023.]

## VCC HOSTED WORKSHOPS & PRESENTATIONS

- ***Indigenizing and Decolonizing Teaching and Learning speaker series: Guest speaker: Ta7taliya Michelle Nahanee, founder and CEO of Nahanee Creative*** [Put on by Vancouver Community College (VCC) Centre for Teaching, Learning & Research. Online: March 22, 2023.]
- ***Supporting Student Success for Post-Secondary Students with Autism Spectrum Disorder*** [Presentation. Put on by Vancouver Community College (VCC) Counselling Services and Disability Services. Presented by Dr. David Worling, Registered Psychologist, Director of the Westcoast Child Development Group and the Spectrum Works Consulting Group. VCC, Broadway Campus, Vancouver, BC: May 4, 2023.]
- ***Supporting Indigenous Learners in the Class*** [Workshop. Facilitated by David Kirk, Dean, Curriculum and Pedagogy, Centre for Teaching, Learning & Research, Vancouver Community College. Online: November 14, 2023.]

## PRESENTATIONS & WEBINARS & PRACTICE GROUPS

- ***Be Part of Changing the Ombuds Landscape: Come Find Your EDI Voice in the World of Ombuds*** [Webinar. Put on by the Association of Canadian College & University Ombudspersons (ACCUO) Equity, Diversity & Inclusion Committee. Facilitated by Gilary Guzman, Strategist, Canadian Equality Consulting. Online: February 21, 2023.]
- ***ACCUO 'Virtual Water Cooler Chat': "Case Review - 2022 ONSC 6828 Shaune Ford v. University of Ottawa"*** [Practice Group Session. Put on by the Association of Canadian College & University Ombudspersons (ACCUO) Professional Development Committee. Facilitated by Maureen Helt, Ombudsperson, Office of the Ombudsperson, Toronto Metropolitan University. Online: April 4, 2023.]
- ***Broken circle: Exploring Indigenous perspectives of academic integrity*** [Presentation by Dawn Cunningham Hall. Hosted by the Restorative Justice & Post-Secondary Education Collective. Online: October 3, 2023.]
- ***ACCUO 'Virtual Water Cooler Chat': "Human Rights Investigations - Delays in the Process and Early Resolution Options"*** [Practice Group Session. Put on by the Association of Canadian College & University Ombudspersons (ACCUO) Professional Development Committee. Facilitated by Edmun Natkunarajah, Administrative & Outreach Officer, Office of the Ombudsperson, Toronto Metropolitan and Gemma Kerr, Assistant Ombudsperson, Office of the Ombudsperson, Toronto Metropolitan University. Online: November 16, 2023.]

**PERSONNEL**

- Academic Advising Staff
- Academic Assistant Department Heads
- Academic Department Heads
- Admissions Personnel
- Associate Directors
- Continuing Studies Associate Registrar
- Continuing Studies Personnel
- Continuing Studies Program Coordinators
- Counsellors
- Disability Services Counsellors
- Disability Services Department Head
- Executive Assistant, President's Office
- Executive Directors
- Instructors
- International Education Advisors
- International Education Associate Registrar
- International Education Assistant Registrar
- International Education Personnel
- International Education Student Services Assistant
- Library Staff
- Registrar's Office Staff
- Student Service Centre Staff
- SUVCC Student Advocate

**2023 SOURCES OF STUDENT REFERRALS TO THE ASI**

**DIVISIONS**

- Centre for Continuing Studies
- International Education
- Safety Security & Risk Management
- School of Arts & Sciences
- School of Health Sciences
- School of Hospitality, Food Studies & Applied Business
- School of Trades, Technology & Design
- Student & Enrolment Services
- Student Recruitment & Learning Engagement
- Students & Community Development

**NON-INSTRUCTIONAL DEPARTMENTS**

- Academic Advising
- Continuing Studies Registrar's Office
- Counselling Services
- Disability Services
- International Education Registrar's Office
- Library
- Registrar's Office
- Continuing Studies Registrar's Office
- Safety Security & Risk Management
- Student Service Centre

**EXTERNAL ACTORS**

Students' Union of Vancouver Community College (SUVCC)



**INTEREST HOLDERS**

- Administrators
- Staff
- Faculty
- Students
- Former Students
- Repeat Users
- Fellow Classmates
- Peers
- Friends
- Family members

**ACADEMIC PROGRAM AREAS**

- Adult Basic Education Fundamentals
- Automotive Collision Repair
- Bachelor of Science in Nursing
- Business Project Management-Post Degree Diploma
- College Foundations/University Transfer - Mathematics
- Continuing Care
- Counselling Skills
- Culinary Arts
- Early Childhood Care & Education
- English as an Additional Language
- Hair Design & Skin & Body Therapy & Cosmetology

**MISCELLANEOUS**

- ASI Info Presentation
- External VCC ASI Webpage
- General VCC Mailbox
- International Refund Decision Letter
- Internet Search
- Word of Mouth

**STUDENT REFERRALS:**

Referrals to the ASI by the VCC community are essential to ensuring that students are empowered with support through their complaints and appeals. An array of VCC actors, connection touchpoints and resources provide students with pathway finding to the ASI. Referrals are made from across the College, from both the academic and service sides of the house.

The ASI is grateful for the level of College engagement with the Office, as demonstrated by the breadth of referral sources. However, the ASI will need to turn its attention to the corners of the institution that seldom refer students, if at all.

## STATISTICS 2023

# STUDENTS BY PROGRAM/AREA

Access to Practical Nursing

ACE-IT Automotive Refinishing Prep Technician Foundation

Adult Basic Education

College & Career Access (COCA)

Automotive Service Technician

Bachelor of Science in Nursing

Bachelor of Science in Nursing-Advanced Entry

Baking and Pastry Arts

Business and Project Management Post-Degree Diploma

Computer-Aided Drafting (CAD) and Building Information Modelling (BIM)

Cosmetology

Counselling Skills Foundations Certificate

Culinary Arts

Culinary Arts (Professional Cook 1)

Culinary Arts Diploma (International Cohort)

Early Childhood Care and Education

Electronics Repair Technology

ESL Pathways Certificate

Esthetics and Spa Therapy

Graphic Design Certificate

Health Care Assistant

Health Unit Coordinator

Medical Device/Reprocessing Technician Certificate

Individual Course - Unassigned

Occupational/Physical Therapist Assistant

Optician Program

Paralegal & Office Administration Certificate

Pharmacy Technician

Practical Nursing Diploma

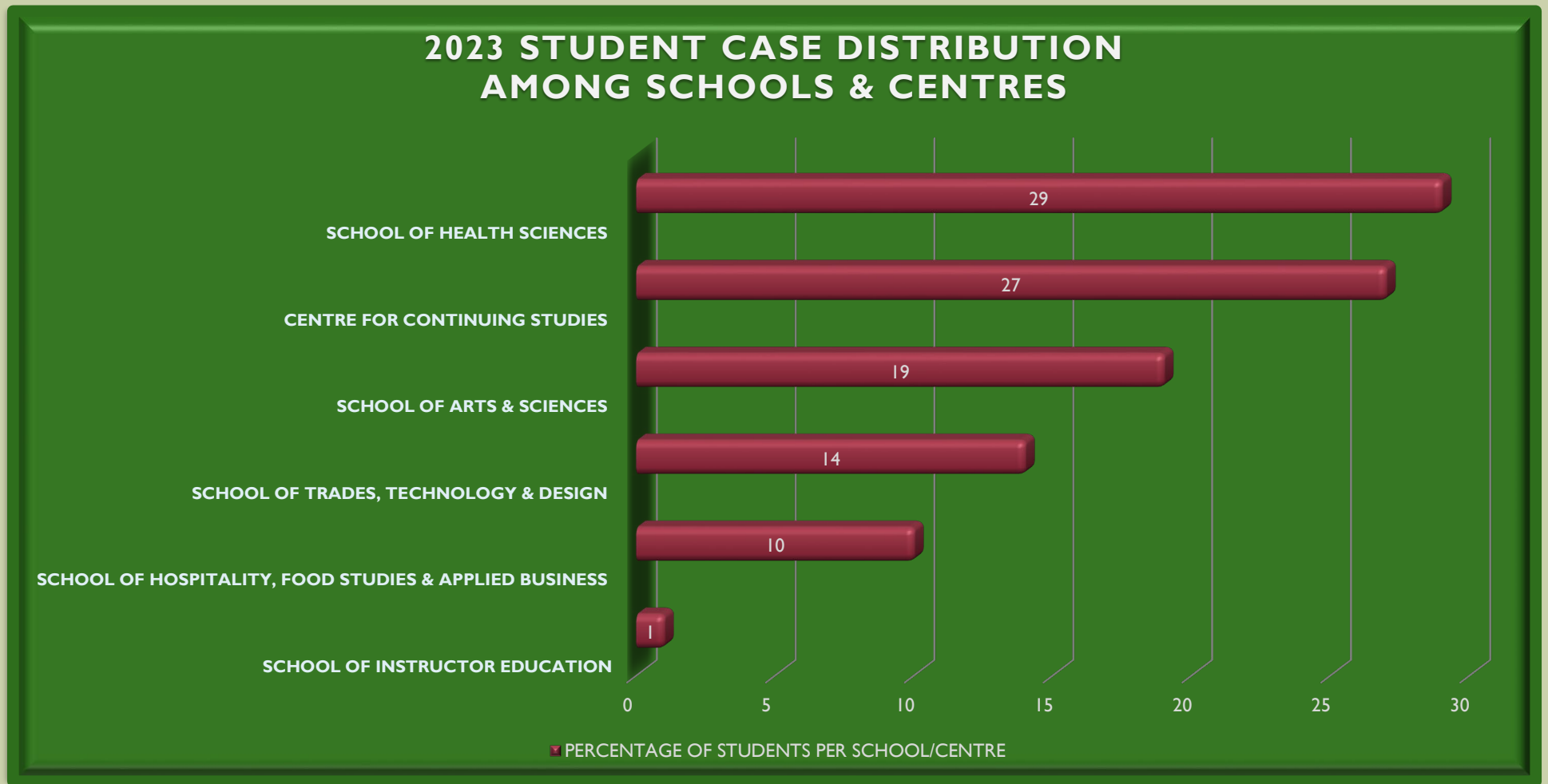
Provincial Instructor Diploma Program

University Transfer

University Transfer Science Certificate

University Transfer Engineering Science to SFU

Virtual Reality (VR)/Augmented Reality (AR) Design and Development Diploma



Students from the Centre for Continuing Studies and every Academic School at VCC again accessed the Office in 2023. The ASI continued to support both domestic and international students from these areas. There was a notable increase in visits to the Office from continuing studies students in 2023. In reviewing the various issues that were presented, the Office was very pleased to collaborate more extensively this year with continuing studies students, the Dean of Continuing Studies, the Associate Director of Continuing Studies and instructors and program coordinators from this portfolio.



	TOTALS 2023	RELATIVE TO 2022
STUDENT ENQUIRIES/CONTACTS	36	41
STUDENT INTAKES/CASES	59	67
STUDENT FOLLOW-UPS	237	124

Student complaints manifested themselves as individual student complaints or groups of students consisting of two or more students. [Note: each individual student is counted in the tally.]

The ASI tracked:

- ☞ **Student Enquiries/Contacts:** Students who connected with the Office but did not pursue their issue further through the Office;
- ☞ **Student Intakes/Cases:** Students with whom the ASI completed an intake, including students who accessed the Office for more than one case (note: each new case/intake is added separately into the count); and
- ☞ **Student Follow-Ups:** Number of follow-up meetings (held in-person, over the phone, using Zoom or via email [where emails constituted a complete, comprehensive and fulsome briefing]) conducted with or on behalf of the student.

TYPE OF ISSUE	2023	Relative to 2022
Final Grade Appeals	19	20
Assessment Testing	1	0
'Incomplete' Contract	0	0
Grievance/Complaint	39	47
Employee Conduct/ Professionalism/ Ethics/Conflict of Interest	28	32
Human Rights/Bullying	33	32
Freedom of Expression	4	0
Duty To Accommodate	18	9
Student Conduct (self)	4	3
Student Conduct (Other)	2	3
Student Educational Conduct	2	4
Appeal To Education Council	2	2
Appeal to the Board	0	0
Freedom of Information & Protection of Privacy (FOIPPA)	3	7
Required to Withdraw	6	4
Refund	14	8
Funding Appeal	0	0
Admissions/Insertions/Holds	5	7
Permission to Repeat Course A 3rd Time	1	N/A
Gender Based Violence	4	3
Safety & Security	2	2
Withdrawal	2	1
OTHER	12	6

As always, in 2023 students expressed several distinct issues upon intake. The Office continued to support students to disentangle their varied types of issues in order to channel them into the proper formal or informal complaint or appeal processes. NOTE: a student case, while potentially surfacing several different issues, is only counted as one case at intake.

STUDENT HOME CAMPUS	2023	2022
Broadway	30	36
Downtown	29	31
Off Site (Enrolled in VCC Program Delivered with External Partner Outside VCC Campuses OR Taking a Correspondence Course)	0	0

Student interest in the **Formal Dispute Resolution** process in 2023 again outpaced that in **Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR)**.

Final outcomes of student case resolutions are not tracked by the Office as it has no ability to compel the final decision-maker to report back to the Office on resolutions and students do not always report complaint/appeal results. The ASI thus tracks the student’s initial interest in either a formal or informal resolution or both (including decisions to start ‘informal’ and progress to ‘formal’ processes should ADR not culminate in a satisfactory conclusion for the student).

TYPE OF RESOLUTION SOUGHT OR OPEN TO	2023	RELATIVE TO 2022
Formal	18	16
ADR	8	7
Both	29	39
Not Applicable to a Complaint or Appeal/Information Only	4	5

The Office tracks a student’s program ‘**home campus**’ regardless of whether the student’s courses are delivered online, on campus or in a blended format. While the modality of course delivery is ever - changing, the College still attaches a student’s program to a specific campus.

While the ASI serves both Broadway and Downtown campus students, the Office is housed at VCC’s Broadway campus. Without a dedicated space for the ASI at the Downtown campus, access by Downtown students to ASI services has traditionally lagged behind that of Broadway campus students.

2023 saw almost complete parity between Downtown and Broadway campus students leveraging the Office. Anecdotally, one can attribute the uptake of ASI services by Downtown students to the advent of video conferencing for meetings.

Students are always provided a choice in **meeting method**. The ASI strives to accommodate students’ choice of meeting as best as possible given other capacity or logistical considerations.

2023 INTAKE MEETING METHOD	BROADWAY CAMPUS STUDENTS	DOWNTOWN CAMPUS STUDENTS
IN-PERSON	21	10
PHONE CONFERENCE	4	3
VIDEO CONFERENCE	34	16

The Office provides **consultations to VCC personnel (faculty, staff, administrators)** about **specific students** independently of those provided to students.

- The Office maintains an **‘ethical wall’** to ensure the rights and privacy of all parties that access it are upheld. These consultations usually occur as part of the investigation, resolution or advancement of a student situation by personnel and so are triggered by personnel vs. the student. Sometimes both the student and the employee will access the ASI for support around the same situation or issue. However, Office consultations are provided to the specific client (personnel OR student) and appropriate confidentiality and disclosure measures are employed in each circumstance where, unless specific permission is granted by the client, one is not made aware that the other accessed the Office. Further, information gleaned from one client is not used for, or disclosed to, the other client.

The ASI also provides briefings to personnel on **issues not related to a specific student** but within the scope of the ASI’s mandate. These briefings provide opportunities to shore up procedural, relational and substantive fairness within the College.

**ASI CONSULTATIONS PROVIDED TO PERSONNEL ABOUT A SPECIFIC STUDENT &/OR GENERAL BRIEFINGS/CONSULTS PROVIDED ON STUDENT RELATED COLLEGE ISSUES/POLICY/FAIRNESS/ETC.**

**2023** 143

**2022** 95

2023 OFFICE EVALUATIONS RETURNED	STUDENTS	PERSONNEL		
		STAFF	FACULTY	ADMINISTRATORS
	7	2	14	7

As in past years, very few students returned **Office evaluations** pursuant to the ASI’s routine administration of them. Evaluations returned reflected high degrees of satisfaction with the Office. However, as in previous years, the extremely small numbers of returned evaluations cannot provide any real understanding of students’ satisfaction with the Office.

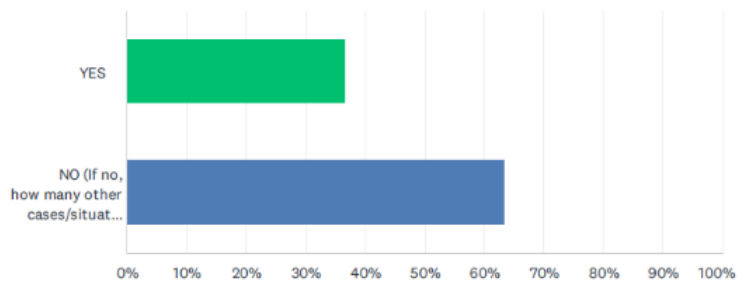
In 2023, the Office began robustly surveying personnel satisfaction with the Office. Here, the response rate was significantly higher than that of students. Respondents here, too, demonstrated a relatively high satisfaction with the Office.

That said, the number of total respondents does not represent a significant sample size. See below for 2023 survey results for the ASI.

VCC Arbiter of Student Issues Office-Survey

Q4 Was this the first time you used the Arbiter of Student Issues Office?

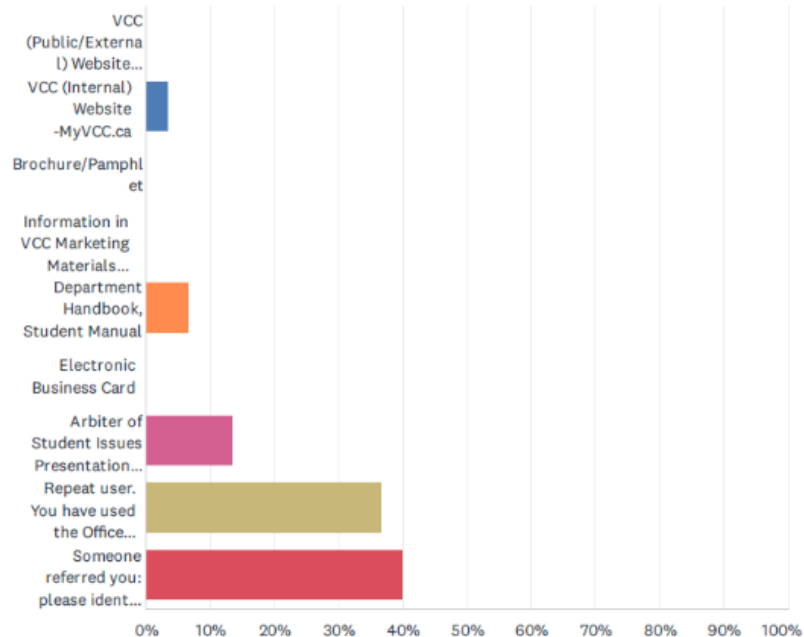
Answered: 30 Skipped: 0



VCC Arbiter of Student Issues Office-Survey

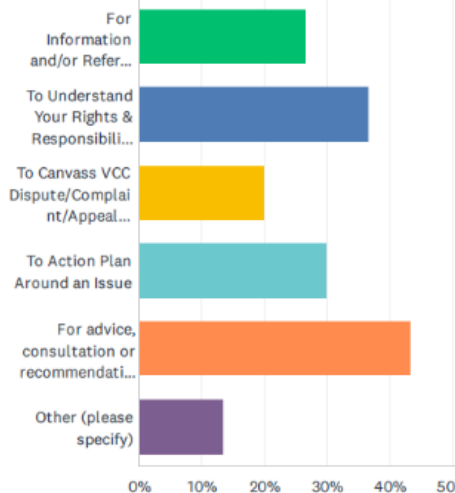
Q5 How did you find out about the Arbiter of Student Issues Office?

Answered: 30 Skipped: 0



Q6 For which of the following reason(s) did you access the Arbiter of Student Issues Office? (Choose all that apply.)

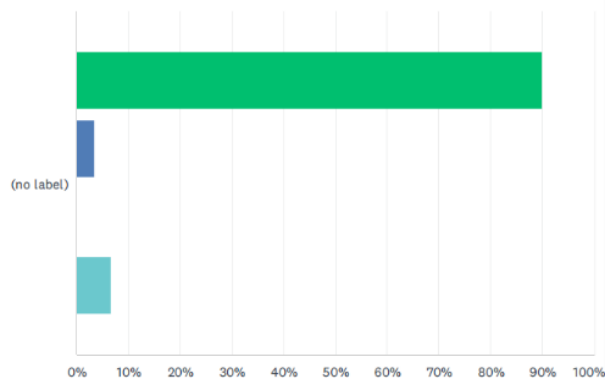
Answered: 30 Skipped: 0



VCC Arbiter of Student Issues Office-Survey

Q7 Q: Did the Arbiter of Student Issues make their role clear to you?

Answered: 30 Skipped: 0

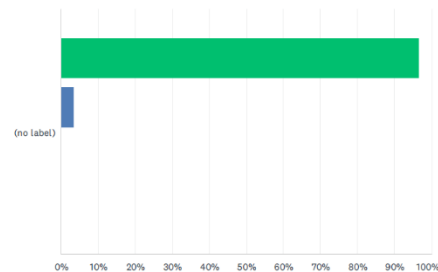


YES SOMEWHAT NO NOT APPL...

VCC Arbiter of Student Issues Office-Survey

Q12 Q: Did the Office exercise integrity (provide professional service, demonstrate respectful treatment, maintain confidentiality of information, exhibit fairness in service and approach to the case/situation, etc.)?

Answered: 30 Skipped: 0

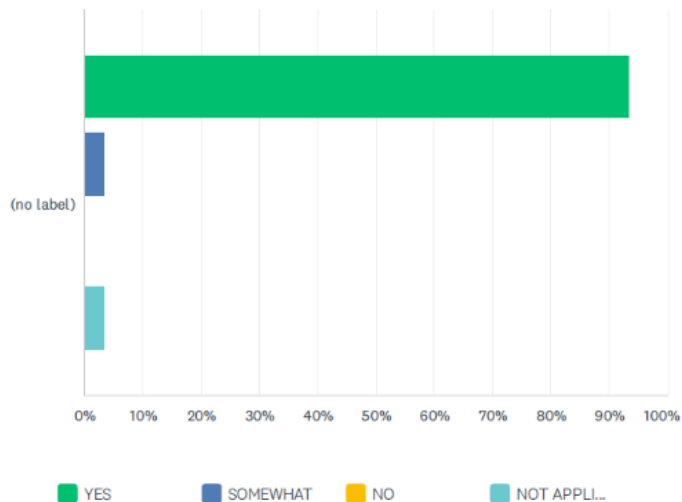


YES SOMEWHAT NO NOT APPL...

VCC Arbiter of Student Issues Office-Survey

Q8 Q: Did the Arbiter of Student Issues remain impartial and neutral in the situation?

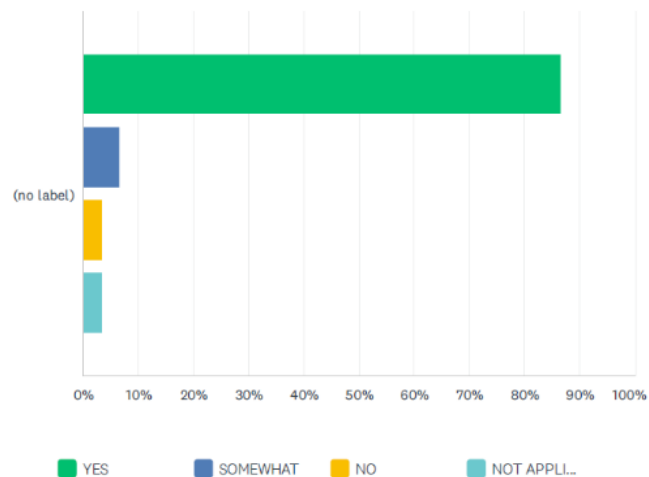
Answered: 30 Skipped: 0



VCC Arbiter of Student Issues Office-Survey

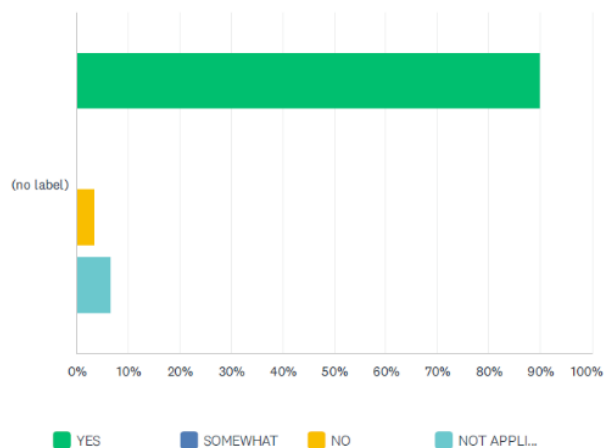
Q9 Q: Did the Arbiter of Student Issues (ASI) provide timely service (e.g. were you able to meet with the ASI when you needed to; did the ASI provide follow-up information in a timely manner; was ASI action on your issue timely, etc.)?

Answered: 30 Skipped: 0



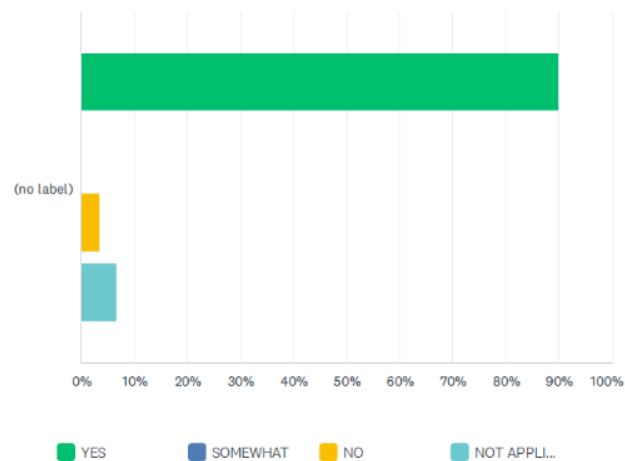
Q10 Q: Was the Arbiter of Student Issues helpful in framing the issue(s) for you?

Answered: 30 Skipped: 0



Q11 Q: Was the addition of the ASI as an impartial and neutral party helpful in the situation?

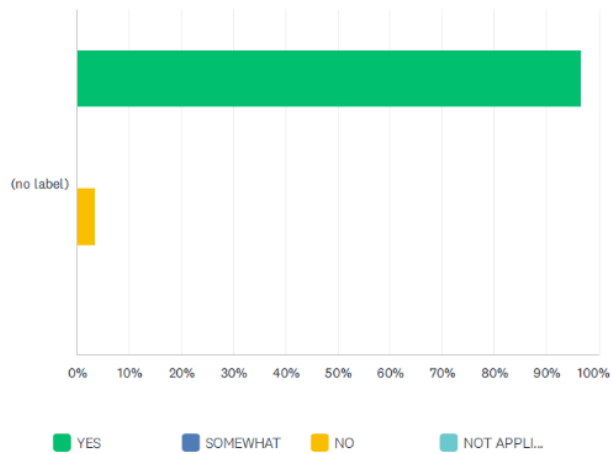
Answered: 30 Skipped: 0



VCC Arbiter of Student Issues Office-Survey

Q13 Q: Would you be inclined to seek/use the services of the Arbiter of Student Issues again if needed in the future?

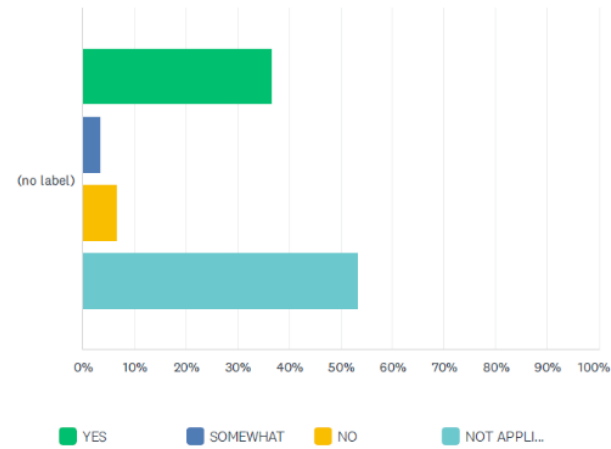
Answered: 30 Skipped: 0



VCC Arbiter of Student Issues Office-Survey

Q14 Q: Were you interested in resolving your issue informally as opposed to formally with the assistance of the Arbiter of Student Issues?

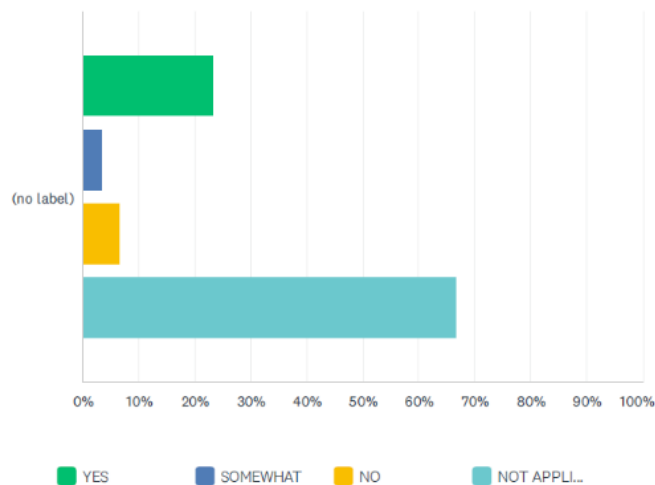
Answered: 30 Skipped: 0



VCC Arbiter of Student Issues Office-Survey

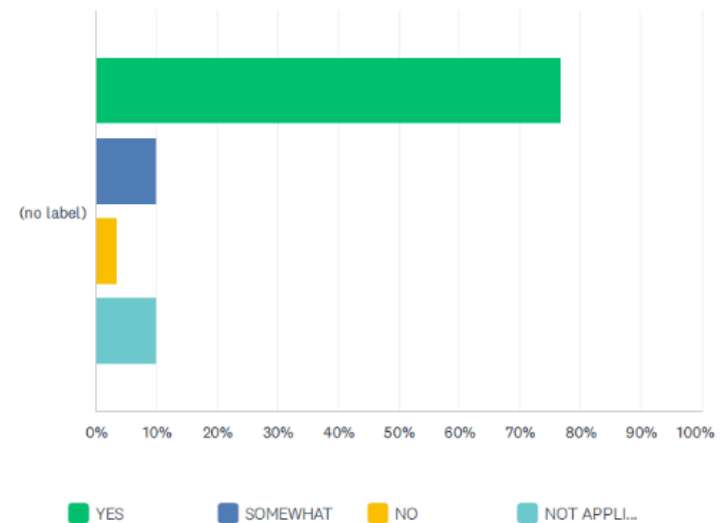
Q15 Q: Did you first try to resolve your issue informally with the assistance of the Arbiter of Student Issues?

Answered: 30 Skipped: 0



Q17 Q: Did you implement the advice or recommendations provided to you by the Arbiter of Student Issues?

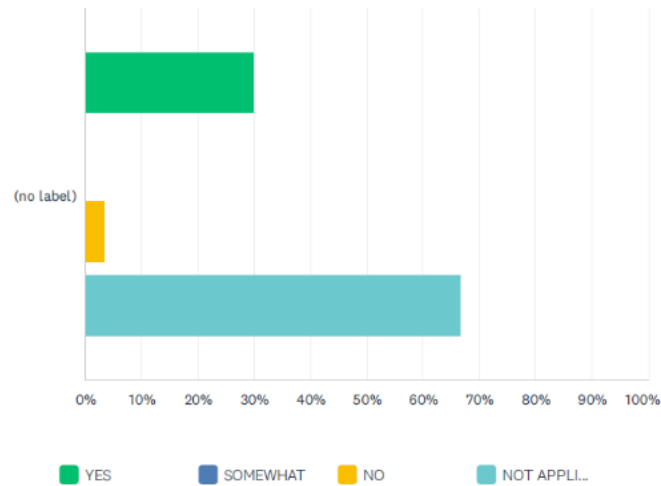
Answered: 30 Skipped: 0



VCC Arbiter of Student Issues Office-Survey

Q18 Q: If the case has been concluded, and whether or not the issue was resolved in the way you hoped, were you provided the opportunity to be heard?

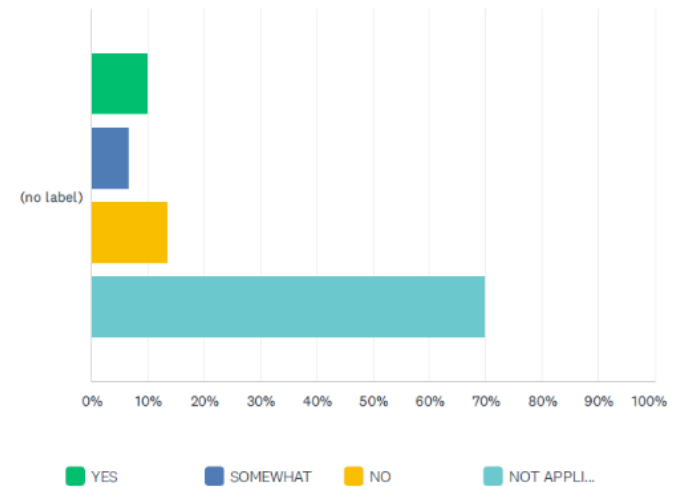
Answered: 30 Skipped: 0



VCC Arbiter of Student Issues Office-Survey

Q19 Q: If applicable, was the issue resolved before it moved into the formal VCC dispute resolution channels (i.e., before a Formal Complaint or Final Grade Appeal was filed)?

Answered: 30 Skipped: 0



Q22 Overall Satisfaction of the Arbiter of Student Issues Office (ASI) Service: Please indicate your rating of the ASI's Service by selecting the circle that best describes your experience in using the ASI.

Answered: 30 Skipped: 0

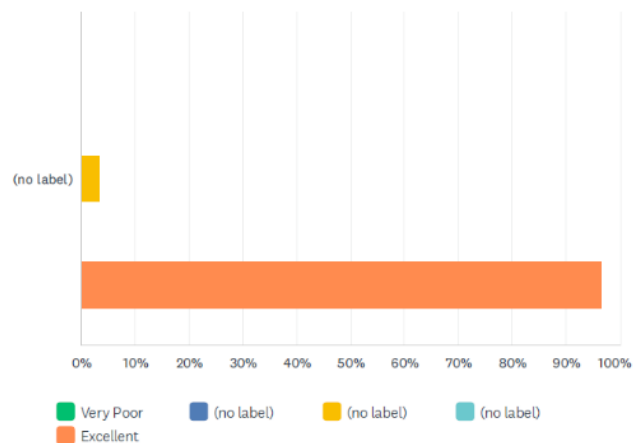


Photo by Luba Erel on Unsplash

## FINAL THOUGHTS ... AND LOOKING AHEAD



Photo by Andrew Neel on Unsplash

It is clear that students are no longer accessing the Office in the same numbers as they have in the past. However, the increased complexity of student cases can likely account for the steep rise in student follow-up sessions in 2023. Furthermore, the ASI also saw a significant increase in consultations provided to personnel regarding student issues in 2023.

The Office will continue to examine how EDI aligns with the Office's values and practices. In 2024, the ASI hopes to collaborate specifically with colleagues on how viewpoint diversity, freedom of expression, academic freedom and the rule of law can continue to find voice within the new EDI context.

The Office expects to collaborate extensively with the Association of Canadian Colleges & University Ombudspersons (ACCUO) in 2024, in particular to address whether and how EDI should and will impact ombudsing in the public post-secondary sector in the coming future.

The level of access by the ASI to College actors and information when pursuing student case inquiries or own-motion investigations was stellar in 2023. The Office would like to express its gratitude for the support and collaboration it received in 2023 from colleagues both inside and outside the institution. The ASI appreciates VCC's continued investment in the Office, and by extension its students, and the institution's appetite to address fairness issues as they surface. The ASI is very gratified by the extensive support provided, and the interest in fairness demonstrated, by the VCC Vice President, Students & Community Development. The independence afforded the Office by the Vice President and the College is integral to its work.

Finally, the Office is continually impressed by students who have the courage and fortitude to meet with the ASI to review the varied and complex issues that make up their complaints, and their ability to prioritize what action is best based on their best interest.

The ASI looks forward to serving students, faculty, staff, administrators and the College at large on student-centred issues again in 2024.



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Issues remain impartial and neutral in the situation?"; "Did the Arbiter of Student Issues (ASI) provide timely service (e.g. were you able to meet with the ASI when you needed to; did the ASI provide follow-up information in a timely manner; was ASI action on your issue timely, etc.)?"; "Was the Arbiter of Student Issues helpful in framing the issue(s) for you?"; "Was the addition of the ASI as an impartial and neutral party helpful in the situation?"; "Did the Office exercise integrity (provide professional service, demonstrate respectful treatment, maintain confidentiality of information, exhibit fairness in service and approach to the case/situation, etc.)?"; "Would you be inclined to seek/use the services of the Arbiter of Student Issues again if needed in the future?"; "Were you interested in resolving your issue informally as opposed to formally with the assistance of the Arbiter of Student Issues?"; "Did you first try to resolve your issue informally with the assistance of the Arbiter of Student Issues?"; "Did you implement the advice or recommendations provided to you by the Arbiter of Student Issues?"; "If the case has been concluded, and whether or not the issue was resolved in the way you hoped, were you provided the opportunity to be heard?"; "If applicable, was the issue resolved before it moved into the formal VCC dispute resolution channels (i.e., before a Formal Complaint or Final Grade Appeal was filed)?"; and "Overall Satisfaction of the Arbiter of Student Issues Office (ASI) Service: Please indicate your rating of the ASI's Service by selecting the circle that best describes your experience in using the ASI." Vancouver Community College Arbiter of Student Issues Office. 2023. Report. Screenshots: Aug. 2024.

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