

**30 years of solitude?**  
**University Ombudsmen's Pioneering Past,  
Confident Present, Challenging Future**

**Looking back: pioneering past**

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# Multicultural roots

- Grievance bells (China, Japan, Islamic traditions, India,...); Petitioner's drums (Korea); Ombuds prototypes in Middle Eastern cultures and Medieval Germanic tribes; a Swedish king exiled in Turkey. (1)
- The “classical” or parliamentary ombudsman (Sweden 1809, Finland 1920, Denmark 1955, New Zealand and Norway 1962).
- In academia: the visitor (England and Wales + some Canadian institutions)

(1) Source: Lang, McKenna 2011. 'A Western King and an Ancient Notion: Reflections on the origins of Ombudsing'. In Journal of Conflictology, <http://journal-of-conflictology.uoc.edu>

# 1965 Canada

- Simon Fraser University (SFU) in Vancouver: the “radical” campus
- The first ombudsman: an elected student position (John Mynott)
- Inspired by the creation of the NZ ombudsman and proposals for an ombudsman in Canada
- “...the best answer for the little man’s grievances against maladministration” (2)
- Climate of change, democratization, affirmation of rights
- 1970-80s: spread of the concept; 1979 first ‘North American conference’ in Montreal; 1983: creation of the Association of Canadian College and University Ombudspersons (ACCUO).

(2) Source: Mallin, 1965 Editorial in The Peak (SFU student newspaper).

# Today in Canada

- Approx. 25% of universities incl. most of the largest) and 5% of colleges have ombuds offices
- No legislation – offices are created and funded by the institution or jointly with students
- In 3 of Canada's 10 provinces, the parliamentary ombudsman also has jurisdiction over universities
- ACCUO adopted standards of practice in 2012:  
Ombuds structures and models vary

# Challenges / why an ombuds?

- Challenges for universities: budget cuts, pressure to recruit internationally, services for increasingly diverse needs, private sector and market-focused priorities, tensions: civility-freedom of speech, technology: challenges and opportunities.
- Challenges for ombuds and for ACCUO: funding – visibility – ‘capture’?
- What are we: Student rights advocates? Neutral conflict resolvers?

-An independent voice for fairness-

“With a focus on fairness, equity and respect, the ombudsperson builds capacity to help the institution be accountable to its own value and mission statements (... and) facilitates fair resolutions that build trust and fortify the relationship between individual and institution.” (ACCUO SoPs)