
Student Advisor Winter Term Report – 2011

It is important to note that each of the three Advisors independently draft their term and annual reports based on their own experiences serving students. The statistical information provided below does not reflect all students served by the program this winter, but only those that I served directly.

In accordance with the criteria for the Term Report set out in the Memorandum of Agreement, please find below an account of the following for the Fall term:

-
1. Statistics on number of cases, including a distinction between the new and continuing cases
 2. Statistics on types of cases
 3. Statistics on offices to which referrals were made or from which information was provided
 4. Description of follow-up taken
-

1. Statistics on number of cases

- 10 new cases total

2. Statistics on types of cases

(Note: total number exceeds number of cases because some cases involve multiple issues)

- 3 cases involved conflict with a supervisor or faculty member
- 2 cases involved a supervisor/program change
- 1 cases involved a grade appeal
- 1 case involved housing issues
- 3 cases involved funding challenges

3. Statistics on offices to which referrals were made (including discussed or suggested as options) or from which information was provided

- Dept head/grad coordinator: 5
- SGS (deans/registrar/staff/website): 1
- Department office/website: 4
- SGPS: 2
- Health, Counseling and Disability Services: 3

4. Description of follow-up taken:

- Most cases involved some or all of the following:
 - Online research
 - Contacting an admin/staff/SGPS person to ask general questions on behalf of an anonymous student

- Providing information, strategic advice or communication skills coaching
 - Clarifying or finding SGS/Senate policies regarding a certain situation
 - Providing a friendly and receptive ear for student clients
 - Referring students to University services like HCDS, Community Housing or the Human Rights Office
 - Accompanying students to meetings with University personnel
- All of the cases involving conflict with supervisors required multiple meetings and referrals to other departments such as Counselling. Conflicts with supervisors continue to play the biggest role in problems in the academic lives of graduate students not enrolled in professional programs.
 - Guidelines around supervisor-student relationships are unclear and in cases of supervisor conflict, students were interested in finding out why formal mechanisms/rules did not exist to which they could refer. Additionally, issues regarding patents were recurrent over the semester.
 - One case involved accompanying a student to a meeting of Financial Services to renegotiate OSAP assistance.
 - One case involved accompanying a student to a meeting with Community Housing to renegotiate a rental agreement.

Recommendations:

- **Program Awareness:** As mentioned in my previous term report, the number one problem facing the Student Advisor program is marketing. An increased effort needs to be made on the part of the School of Graduate Studies and Society of Graduate and Professional students to advertise the service. The Student Advisors should participate in Welcome Week events in both the Fall and Winter terms to ensure that students know that they have access to a strategic advice service. Furthermore, Student Advisor pamphlets should be distributed within orientation materials as well as through the biweekly SGPS newsletter. Often times, students are unaware of Student Advisor services until it is too late to adequately address concerns, mitigate future problems and coach students in interpersonal relationships. Awareness of the Student Advisor program is critical in filling this gap between the beginning of problems and the search for solutions.
- **Counselling Services:** Throughout the term, I felt that access to counselling services was limited on campus. A series of traumatic incidents over the course of the semester seemed to exacerbate the situation of the highly demanded HCDS. Certain students recounted that they were turned away from counselling because their problems were not serious enough to warrant attention which is highly problematic. Mental health within a world-renowned institution such as Queen's is important to the on-campus culture as well as the academic and research success of the university as a whole. Repeatedly students who were facing challenges with a supervisor also lacked access to mental health support services which can potentially be addressed through SGPS/Student Advisor sponsored support groups.
- **Part-time Student Advisor:** The SGPS should endeavour to create a relationship with the School of Policy Studies to create an additional part-time student advisor position. This student advisor would review and redraft existing policies based on the systemic challenges that certain groups of students are facing. Furthermore, the policy based student advisor would function as a policy resource to other student advisors who needed further help with researching the options available for a case. This position would provide the Student Advisor program with a policy liaison to accompany the Vice-President Graduate to meetings in which policy recommendations were being initiated. The broader scope of this position would help rectify the myopia that may set in when dealing with students at an individual level.
- **Confidentiality:** The SGS should ensure that all individuals who are dealing with student issues are reminded that conversations are completely confidential. There have been far too many incidents where action was taken on behalf of the student without their explicit consent. The reputation of Student Advisor program and the degree to which it is accessed by students is highly dependent on the guarantee of privacy and respect for the wishes of the client. All parties involved in such tenuous situations should work together to ensure that the student feels that they have a safe environment in which to openly discuss their problems.