

GSA Referendum Questions 2022

INFO on GSA Advocacy Centre Fee-Levy

WHAT DOES THE CONCORDIA STUDENT UNION (CSU) ADVOCACY CENTRE DO?

<https://www.csu.qc.ca/services/advocacy/>

The CSU Advocacy Centre hires, trains and supervises students working as student advocates to assist other students experiencing problems with the University or unfair barriers to their academics at the University.

Students at Concordia University have the right to consult and/or be represented by an advocate in all formal proceedings related to the Academic Code of Conduct (ACC) or the Code of Rights and Responsibilities (CoRR). The right to consult or be represented by an advocate is clearly stated in both the ACC and CoRR.

The CSU Advocacy Centre endeavours to ensure students always have access to trained and experienced advocates who are well versed in both Codes, as well as many other of Concordia policies, rules and regulations such as the Undergraduate Calendar, the Academic Re-Evaluation Procedures, the Policy Regarding Sexual Violence, among others.

Types of problems with the University that a student advocate can assist with include :

- *Charges of academic misconduct under the Academic Code of Conduct (ACC);*
- *Charges of behavioural misconduct under the Code of Rights and Responsibilities (CoRR);*
- *Issues with a Faculty member;*
- *University Complaints;*

Types of barriers to academics that a student advocate can assist with include :

- *Navigating university bureaucracy;*
- *Academic Accommodations due to exceptional circumstances;*

Other services include :

- *Reviewing student complaints for grounds*
- *Reviewing Special Requests for grounds*
- *Commissioner for Oaths.*

Examples of Issues in graduate student cases specifically include:

- *Code of Rights and Responsibilities (CoRR): threatening conduct, harassment, sexual harassment, psychological harassment*
- *Policy of Student Involuntary Leave of Absence (POSILA)*
- *Withdrawal from university because of 2C or F rule*
- *Complaint against professor*
- *Grievance against supervisor*
- *Professor inputting incorrect grade*
- *Failing pre-requisite leading to program withdrawal even though GPA satisfactory*
- *Academic misconduct (ACC)*
- *ACC 2nd offence AHP, fear of suspension*

Solutions ranged and included:

- *Getting students readmitted after being withdrawn*
- *Representing students in ORR, ACC and POSILA cases/appeals (results have included dismissals or moderate sanctions that did not result in withdrawal from university)*
- *Getting the students accommodations with their GPD*
- *Salvaging a student's degree with GPD, Dean, ISO, so they can graduate*
- *Coordinating with TRAC for any academic side-effects due to a grievance*
- *Getting the professor to submit correct grade*

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

- The CSU has been providing Advocacy Services to undergraduate students for almost 20 years since **2004**.
- **For around 10 years, the GSA has collected and is currently collecting a fee levy of \$2.50/semester to provide Advocacy Services for graduate students. This fee-levy is listed as the Advocacy Centre fee-levy in your fees in your My CU portal.**
- After just 4 years of collecting this fee-levy, the GSA struggled to hire, train and supervise student advocates at the GSA and so, **in 2016**, contracted the CSU for 2 years with the money from the Advocacy Centre fee-levy (that goes to GSA) to hire, train and supervise graduate students to work as student advocates at the CSU under the condition that they assist graduate students.
- The GSA would then transfer money to the CSU Advocacy Centre so that GSA students could access their services.
- **The GSA and the CSU have renegotiated this contract every two years since 2016. However, this year the CSU has flagged that GSA members (graduate students) are accessing the advocacy services at a higher rate/frequency and have needed more work done on their cases (combined, 30+ hours a week) than what they have been paying the CSU Advocacy Centre for (1 staff graduate student advocate working 18 hours a**

week with supervision and direct consultation on all cases with the Advocacy Centre Manager). GSA members are receiving benefits for which they are not paying.

- **This means that the Graduate Advocate has had too much on their plate and that CSU undergraduate advocates have had to take on graduate cases, picking up extra work in the process. This means that the CSU is, in effect, subsidizing Graduate students who need advocacy services.**
- So, to rectify this and ensure that we do not run into this kind of problem, we are proposing the following two referendum questions.
 - a. The advocacy fees that the GSA currently collects get paid directly to the CSU from now on and **that it be increased annually in line with the CPI like all the other fee levies related to the CSU services.**
 - b. That the fee per semester is increased by \$0.50 (\$1.50 per year) and then **in this case, too, that it be increased annually in line with the CPI like all the other fee-levies related to the CSU services.**
- The first is essential because it will allow the CSU to collect the revenue directly, rather than the GSA needing to go through Concordia to get the money to the CSU Advocacy Centre. This will remove the need to renegotiate the agreement every year, providing the CSU and the GSA predictability in this arrangement. It will also remove a lot of overhead.

- The second will ease the discrepancy between what GSA members have paid for and received this year. It will allow the Advocacy Centre to predict the amount of money they receive every year and plan accordingly.

KEY THINGS THAT ARE USEFUL TO KNOW AND UNDERSTAND ABOUT THE CSU ADVOCACY CENTRE :

CONFIDENTIALITY

The CSU Advocacy Centre is strictly confidential service. Students who consult or are represented by the CSU Advocacy Centre will not have any of their information shared without their express permission.

INDEPENDENT SERVICE

The CSU Advocacy Centre is operated by the Concordia Student Union NOT the University. This means that none of the staff working at the CSU Advocacy Centre are paid by the University in their role as student advocates.

REPRESENTATION VS. CONSULTATION

The CSU Advocacy Centre offers both consultation services and representation services as allowed and defined under the ACC and CoRR. The CSU Advocacy Centre can also represent students in select non-ACC and non-CoRR cases at the discretion of the Advocacy Centre Manager. Typically these cases

will involved formal complaints that do not fall under the ACC or CoRR.

- Students do not have to be represented by us if they consult us. It is an optional service and several students still choose represent themselves in their issues and in their attempts to resolve them, while still accessing the CSU Advocacy Centre for a consultation to make sure they have correctly understood any rules, procedures or regulations in place and any consequences that may arise from their preferred course of action.

INSTITUTIONAL KNOWLEDGE

- It has been around longer than you - since 2004.
The CSU Advocacy Centre knows more than you do.
The institutional knowledge acquired over the past 2 decades by the CSU Advocacy Centre and by the current Manager who has been working in Student Advocacy for 6 continuous years, overseeing over a 1000+ cases in the last 3 years alone.
 - Since the CSU Advocacy Centre has seen way more cases than you, chances are reasonable that if a case similar to yours has happened before, we may be more aware than you of what options are available to you.
 - **YOU**, students, make the CSU Advocacy Centre a stronger, better resource for students by reporting your issues to us, any solutions you managed to get, so that we know those solutions are available to other

students. (not everything is on the record or clearly listed online)

LONG-STANDING WORKING TERMS AND CONNECTIONS

- The CSU Advocacy Centre works and collaborates repeatedly with dozens of different academic and administrative departments at the University every year to seek favourable resolutions for students. We have more professional connections and associations in this university than any one single student could ever hope to gain during even the full length of their studies.

CONSEQUENCES OF HAVING CHARGES UPHOLD

- Students charged with academic misconduct most typically lose access to internal Concordia scholarships, bursaries and research funding.
- Academic and behavioral misconduct proceedings are long and draining and for graduate students specifically they often take many months to fully resolve because of knock-on consequences like the F-Rule, C-Rule, immigration, funding, problems with supervisors,...

Q&As:

Q: What does this service provide for me? Why should I pay for this service if I don't think I'm going to need it?

A: This service provides students with the assurance that they will be able to access free, dedicated advocates trained in advocating for students in varied ways. Most students never know if they will need the services, and thus we ask all students to pay this fee just in case they may need it. This fee helps protect all members of the community. If you have any further questions and wish to know more about the CSU Advocacy Centre might be able to do for you, please call or e-mail the CSU Advocacy Centre (contact information available on the postcard or bookmark) or consult with a student advocate.

Graduate students specifically one could argue need the service much more than undergraduate students because their cases have much higher stakes, i.e. much more to lose if their cases are not resolved favourably (because of the F rule, 2C rule, no funding if charged under ACC or in poor academic standing rule, immigration terms, etc...).

More importantly, you don't know what you don't know. Many students are simply not aware of exactly what options might be available to them and simply move on with what they know, not realising that what they know is a very limited view

of what is available. Student advocates are trained to know and be aware of the broadest possible umbrella that a student's options may fall under.

#Knowyourrights #Knowyouroptions

Q: Why do we have to vote on sending the money directly to the CSU? Why can't the GSA keep doing it?

A: The GSA currently sends the fees it collects on behalf of the CSU Advocacy Centre as part of the contract we have with the CSU, and because the money goes through us in this way, the GSA and the CSU advocacy centre must take precious time every two years to renegotiate a contract. This takes time and creates uncertainty. Having the money sent directly to the CSU Advocacy Centre will establish a permanent working relationship with this organization, and there will be predictability for everyone. It will also be more efficient.

Q: If CSU advocates are working on cases for GSA members, why do we need to increase the fee levy and tie it to the CPI?

A: The increase in the fee levy is necessary because under the current system and the strain on the advocacy centre this year, CSU members are paying for the hours advocates are spending on cases not involving CSU members. If we do not increase the fee levy, the CSU Advocacy Centre will

need to turn students in need away because the resources required to help them will be unavailable. Linking the fee-levy to the CPI is standard practice on all CSU fee-levies; it accounts for annual salary increases of staff and inflation of cost of materials like office supplies, printer contracts, etc...

Q: What happens if we approve this increase and funds and there is a surplus within the CSU Advocacy Centre?

A: In the rare event of a surplus (the CSU Advocacy Centre is just getting out of a cumulative deficit it has been in since 2017/18) the CSU Advocacy Centre will be using more hours in that case on maintaining awareness of the services through outreach efforts. Consistent feedback from both GSA and CSU members has been that students are insufficiently aware of the services, including the Advocacy Centre. So problems at the university never really decrease in numbers, students simply give up on trying to resolve them because they do not know that they can come to us for help.

The CSU Advocacy Centre for the past 3 years now has been in a predominantly reactive position due to high case volume (consistently 300+ cases a year now since 2019). This means that all we have really been doing is assisting as many students as possible resolve their issues, as promptly as possible, and unfortunately, the most difficult cases take 1-2 years to fully resolve.

The CSU Advocacy Centre should not be solely reactive. Being only reactive is why students are not aware of the CSU Advocacy Centre, the services in general, and their options. A more **proactive** CSU Advocacy Centre would have a sustained outreach program, both in-person at events like - orientation, tabling, class presentations, Student Association Events - and online through our website and social media platforms. Furthermore, a more **proactive** CSU Advocacy Centre would use our online presence to share resources and tips and could maybe also hold workshops for students (like LIC and HOJO do). None of this has been possible while operating purely reactively. There technically could not be any surplus if the CSU Advocacy Centre has the staff to properly maintain online presence and in-person outreach and to facilitate workshops.

The only truly possible surplus would be as a result of such an impossibly high employee turnover that the Advocacy Centre would have to close.

Bear in mind ALSO that case numbers are not always directly proportionate to case hours on their own, i.e. case numbers overall could be low for a session, but looking at the Case Types, the Case Hours could be higher depending, which is why we publish what Case types we are dealing with in our Stats online on the Advcoacy Centre page of the CSU website. Also, as mentioned, all case types are longer if the student is both an international student and a graduate student,

which the majority of graduate students are.

- **Case Lengths:**
 - **Academic Misconduct**
 - **Average hours spent on case if sanction does not cause new problems = 3-5 hours (in a 2 week frame)**
 - **Average hours spent on case if sanction causes knock-on effect (2C rule, F rule, course required for internship) = 10-12 (in a 4-6 week frame)**
 - **Average hours spent on case if student chooses to appeal and go to AHP = 20-25 (because of waitlist for tribunal hearings, the time frame from interview to result of AHP is typically 10-12 months)**
 - **Student Request**
 - **Average Hours spent on case if 1st request is approved: 3-5 (in a 3-4 weeks span – say 1 visit a week to collect docs and send review statement with advocate)**
 - **If decision must be appealed: 6-8 (in a 3 month span from initial student request to final result of Appeal, Student Request Committee only meets once a month, and requests have to be submitted 2 weeks before the Committee and, result take 2-4 weeks before being sent to student)**
 - **If multiple student requests are submitted to try to resolve the issue via different**

departments because of the overall ask: **40+ (often the case with grad students)** (in a 10-12 month span; multiple requests will include calls and meetings with university admin and various departments – ISO, program advisor, GPD, Associate Dean, Dean of Graduate Studies, Special Advisor to the Provost)

- **Complaints**

- **Average hours spent on case = 40+ (sometimes as high as 60+)** (in a 10-12 month time span) due diligence has to be shown to be exhausted before a student takes legal action or requests compensation for a problem; this usually means submitting all the student requests that might resolve the issue, waiting for them to be denied,; going to Ombuds, waiting to be told nothing can be done, collecting all receipts, expenses, e-mails, creating detailed day to day, week to week timeline of all communications and attempts to solve issue (these can be 5-6 pages long), to have a full substantiation package to submit with complaint to demonstrably show grounds.

- **Code of Rights and Responsibilities (CoRR)**

- **Average hours spent on case = 40+ hours (sometimes as high as 100+)** (in a 10-12 month span) the longest ORR cases, if they go through Appeal, and Appeal is

granted, can last 2+ years (because each tribunal hearing – Appeals Authorization Panel, Appeals Panel, new Hearing Panel – each has to go in the tribunal hearing waitlist). ORR cases against staff or faculty sometimes much faster because there is no tribunal hearing, therefore not spending time in the tribunal hearing waitlist. ORR cases against members who are both employees and students, eg. T.A., can be long if there is no informal resolution. Informal resolution ends up long where both parties disagree repeatedly, but also do not want the stress of a tribunal hearing. Short informal resolution = 1 month (when both parties are very agreeable to resolving the case promptly and respond to all communications with 24 hours). Long informal resolution = 3-6 months where student is slow to respond to e-mails, figure out what they want, changes their mind during the case.

- **Hearings**

- **Repeat Offense Academic Hearing Panels (AHP) OR CoRR Student Hearing Panels (SHP) = 40+ hours** (in a 10-12 month span) the longest AHP cases, if they go through Appeal, and Appeal is granted, can last 2+

years (because each tribunal hearing – Appeals Authorization Panel, Appeals Panel, new Hearing Panel – each has to go in the tribunal hearing waitlist).

- **General Consultations**
 - **Average hours spent on a case = 1-3 hours (in a 2 week span)**