
University Council Report – November 2024

USSU Executive Visit the Prince Albert Campus

The USSU executive recently visited the Prince Albert campus, engaging directly with students in classrooms and informal settings to better understand their experiences. This visit marked a successful interaction between the USSU and students at the PA Campus, highlighting the importance of face-to-face dialogue. Safety emerged as the top concern, and the USSU is committed to addressing this critical issue. Beyond that, fostering a stronger sense of community was a key focus, with plans to support student leaders in creating a more connected and inclusive environment. This visit underscores the USSU's dedication to amplifying student voices and driving meaningful change.

USSU Joins the Canadian Alliance of Student Associations (CASA)

The USSU is proud to join the Canadian Alliance of Student Associations (CASA), uniting with 365,000 students from coast to coast to amplify our collective voice. The USSU will join other post-secondary institutions to lobby the federal government as part of CASA. University of Saskatchewan students will have a direct and influential role in shaping national policies that impact students' daily lives. In a time when government relations are more critical than ever, this move signifies our unwavering commitment to advocating for students at the highest levels of decision-making. By joining CASA, we are not just adding our voice—we are making it impossible to ignore. The USSU stands resolute: we will champion our students' needs, from affordability to accessibility, and ensure their priorities are heard in Ottawa.

Promoting Campus Culture Through Campus Groups

Campus groups are an essential part of our campus ecosystem. Vice President of Operations and Finance Moses Ahiabu is working tirelessly to give campus groups and their leaders all the support and resources they need. Till now, USSU has given an amount of \$16,000 as grants for campus groups and ratified more than 118 campus groups. This highlights our commitment to student life and making students feel a part of the greater community.

Teaching Excellence Awards

Each year, USSU celebrates teaching excellence on our campus. A few weeks ago, students nominated professors and teaching assistants they feel deserve a Teaching Excellence Award because of their enthusiasm, organization and fairness. This year, we received 85 nominations from students who nominated their professors and teaching assistants. We are conducting the surveys with the award ceremony happening in March celebrating those award winners.

Campus Safety Walk

USSU Vice President of Student Affairs Upkar Singh recently joined Vice-Provost Students and Learning Dr. Jerome Cranston and Brad Niven, Director of Protective Services, for a campus safety walk to better understand the challenges students face. This walk was more than just an assessment—it was a commitment to making our campus safer and more welcoming for everyone. We deeply appreciate the Usask administration's genuine dedication to addressing safety concerns and creating an environment where students feel secure and supported. Together, we're taking meaningful steps to ensure safety remains more than a goal—it's a reality.

Remembrance Day

On November 11th, President Krunal Chavda and Vice President of Student Affairs Upkar Singh participated in the 96th Remembrance Day Ceremony at the Memorial Gates, honouring those who sacrificed their lives for this nation. Their presence was a heartfelt tribute to the courage and selflessness that shaped our freedoms. This annual ceremony is a powerful reminder of the cost of peace, and through it, we ensure that the legacy of these brave individuals continues to inspire future generations.

Louis Riel Day

President Krunal Chavda and Vice President of Student Affairs Upkar Singh participated in the Louis Riel Day flag-raising ceremony at Nobel Plaza, hosted by the Office of the Vice-Provost of Indigenous Engagement. Honouring the legacy of Métis leader Louis Riel, the event reflected a shared commitment to reconciliation and celebrating the diversity that strengthens our campus. By standing with Métis leaders and students, they reaffirmed their dedication to respect, inclusion, and unity.

Academic Advocacy

The USSU's Academic Advocacy Office has become the lifeline for students navigating an increasingly complex and inconsistent academic support system. The USSU Academic Report created by Vice President of Academic Affairs Elisabeth Bauman highlights a stark reality: students in crisis are often left vulnerable by unclear processes and a lack of accessible, timely conflict resolution. The stories reflect distress, fatigue, and systemic gaps that demand urgent attention. It's a call for the University of Saskatchewan to step forward and invest in equitable, transparent structures—ensuring that every student, regardless of their situation, feels heard, valued, and supported. Change isn't just necessary; it's overdue. Let this report be the catalyst for a better future for all students. The report can be found at the end of this report.

USSU's Academic Advocacy Office Brief & Report

September 2024

Elisabeth Bauman

Vice President of Academic Affairs

University of Saskatchewan Students' Union





USSU Academic Advocacy Brief:

The USSU’s Academic Advocacy Office is overseen by the VP Academic, which is an annually elected position with many responsibilities, only one of which is the Office. The Office’s mandate is to provide academic advice and advocacy for students, not systems navigation or conflict mediation.

The problem, as identified by the USSU’s Academic Advocacy Office, is the university’s misplaced overreliance on the USSU to provide important and needed university services to students in crisis. USSU’s Vice President Academic Affairs is an annually elected position, and there is a huge variability of interest, skill level, motivation, and support for fulfilling the kind of role that the USSU currently does. The university should not rely on an undergraduate student who is not employed by them to oversee these risks.

This brief and the following table summarize the nature of the concerns reported in the USSU’s Academic Advocacy Report, which details observations and trends based on supporting students from May 2023 to August 2024. The table provides links to relevant sections of the report.

Problems Noted in May 2023-August 2024 by VP Bauman	Core Student Needs	<u>Recommendations to help Address the Needs¹</u>
<p>Many students struggle to find support for their concerns² or appropriate avenues of advocacy and end up at the USSU.³</p> <p>See Table 1 Case Type accessing USSU; Table 3 Policies; Figure 5 Resolution record; Figure 6 Cases according to students’ year of study; Appendix A Case 1.</p>	<p>Access to appropriate advice. Units that can give this advice exist and are available.</p> <p>Appropriate mediation and conflict resolution and mediation support.</p> <p>Clear pathways to find relevant support.</p>	<p>Identifiable and continuing staff or offices that assist students to navigate systems, processes (e.g., academic integrity office, student rights office, ombuds office, student legal services, conflict resolution office), and a website that directs students to appropriate offices.⁴</p> <p>Recommendations 1, 2, 3, 4, and 14</p>

¹ Taken from the list of 14 Recommendations from the Report.

² Academic grievances, Academic Misconduct,

³ This is particularly detrimental to student well-being in situations that do not fit into pre-determined processes, such as academic misconduct or appeals. Even in predetermined processes, students need additional support to navigate systems.

⁴ See also [“Parallel Structures”](#) and the websites of the University of Regina and Queen’s University.

<p>Some students say they feel dismissed and disrespected as they try to get answers or solutions.</p> <p>See Figure 2 Current student conflict-resolution process; Figure 3 Recommended conflict-resolution process.</p>	<p>Effective and respectful advice and interactions. Processes that allow students to feel listened to,⁵ and structures that help students feel valued by the institution. Limited gossip within units that gets back to students.</p>	<p>Conflict training for leadership and those offering support, record keeping of advice provided to students.</p> <p>Recommendations 2, 4, 5, 7, 8, 9, 10, and 11.</p>
<p>Many students report distress levels exacerbated by time frames and referral processes, and some appear to abandon the process due to fatigue.⁶</p> <p>See Table 8 Distress levels; Table 10 Time to resolve cases. Table 4 Referrals; Table 5 USSU contacts in support of cases; Table 6 Student contacts; Figure 2 Student Networks; Appendix A Case 2, Appendix A Case 7.</p>	<p>Timely, understandable processes that attend to implications for students’ academic plans and well-being, and reliable referral mechanisms.</p> <p>Support for engaging in processes according to student rights and responsibilities.</p>	<p>Timely support, and a centralized system so various support units across campus are not giving conflicting advice, or being played against each other.</p> <p>Recommendations 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 10, 12, 13, and 14.</p>
<p>Often, students seeking conflict resolution discover that there are no consistent conflict-engagement processes. They question fairness and perceive a bias in favour of instructors/the institution.</p> <p>Undefined or poorly defined processes result in inconsistency, delays, and lack of fairness.</p> <p>See Table 1 Case Types; Table 6 Number of Offices Student is in Contact with, and Figures 3 and 4 Conflict Processes.</p>	<p>Trust in the fairness of processes. Mediators, advocates, and support personnel that value the student and do not have to make judgements about the specific situation themselves.</p> <p>A consistent conflict resolution process.</p> <p>Students know what support is available to them and where to go for help (Figure 1).</p>	<p>Conflict engagement supports for students when encountering vulnerable situations, with a consistent processes.</p> <p>Recommendations 2, 4, 5, 8, 9, 10, 11, and 14.</p>
<p>Inappropriate Support: Students seek support from the USSU; however, the USSU is not the appropriate position, nor is appropriately resourced to be mediating in many of</p>	<p>Supports appropriate to the type, scale, severity, and complexity of each case.</p>	<p>Support positions that are adequately resourced, and have authority to mediate; supports that are recognized by the university.</p>

⁵ E.g. in formal academic misconduct hearings, students feel heard because there is a structure which allows them to share all relevant information in an allocated time frame that is equal to the time given to their instructor.

⁶ Referral processes: Referral processes: where students seek clarity of direction, and are passed among offices without finding resolution.

<p>these situations; the USSU should advocate, not mediate. The USSU's Academic Advocacy Office is currently the only student-centric support system on campus to help students navigate a full range of academic crises.⁷</p> <p>See Figure 1 Referrals; Tables 4, 5, and 6 Offices Involved; Appendix A Case 5; Appendix A Case 7.</p>	<p>Supports that have the knowledge, experience, wisdom, and networks to navigate systems on campus.</p>	<p>Recommendations 2, 3, 4, 5, and 6.</p>
<p>Vulnerable Support: Both students and their advocates within the USSU are vulnerable (and students are made more vulnerable by their advocate's precarious positions), reducing their ability to have timely or effective mediation.⁸</p> <p>See Tables 1 and 2 Types of Cases; Figure 2 Student Networks; Figures 3-4 Conflict Professes; Appendix A Case 4.</p>	<p>Students need support that is not only empowered to help them but also makes a safe enough⁹ place for students to work through challenges.</p> <p>Support that has the power and authority to mediate complex situations with various power dynamics between students, instructors, and senior leadership.</p>	<p>Support that is equipped to safely navigate power dynamics, having the ability/authority to create an environment that empowers both parties to engage in meaningful problem solving - the position should create expectancy of procedural fairness and integral spaces.</p> <p>Recommendation 2, 4, and 5.</p>
<p>Limited/Insufficient Support: Students seek support from the USSU, but as the USSU is limited in its capacity,¹⁰ it cannot sufficiently meet the needs of students.</p> <p>Poor resourcing, lack of clarity, and limited trust increases student frustration and costs to the university, as students reach out to many units to find the support the current system is failing to provide.</p>	<p>Students need support that has enough capacity to give them adequate time and advice.</p> <p>Support that can attend meetings with students when needed.</p>	<p>Permanent student support position employed by the university. Authority to mediate conflicts between university employees and students, with the structural expectation that both parties are on equal footing. Allows for appropriate challenging of policies: disagreeing and problem solving in a timely way.</p> <p>Recommendations 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, and 8.</p>

⁷ The Office is overseen by the VP Academic, which is an annually elected position with many responsibilities, only one of which is the Office. Furthermore, student leaders are not immune to conflicts, errors, and academic misconduct.

⁸ The USSU's Academic Advocacy Office is staffed by students who take classes from professors who they may need to mediate conflicts with, and are still students under college leadership that they may have to confront.

⁹ Safe enough: not fearing retribution if they face a concern, not being talked over, not fearing internal politics affecting their decisions

¹⁰ Both VP Academic and Academic Governance Assistant have many other responsibilities, see introduction of the Report.

<p>See Figure 2 Student Networks; Table 7 Amount of Time to Resolve; Table 8 Hours the USSU Spends, and Figure 5 Resolution; Appendix A Case 7.</p>	<p>Support that has access to power, knowledge, and networks that can help student cases, and support that is outside of the USSU.</p>	
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Students need for the university to invest in a system of transparent, timely, and appropriate conflict resolution and system navigation. The USSU recommends that the units involved at the university consider these options and build better systems to help students. The USSU is calling on the University to invest in and streamline student conflict resolution and student support processes so that students receive consistent support.

The USSU is available to discuss ideas and to provide input into what students currently need.

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- Advice on summarizing problems, needs, and ideas for change: Susan Bens (TLSE)
- Advice on describing and anonymizing representative student cases: Beau Gallerneault (TLSE - SAO)

USSU’s Academic Advocacy Report:

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Introduction

The USSU's Academic Advocacy report is designed to comment on the student experience as witnessed by the USSU's Academic Advocacy Office.

The USSU's Academic Advocacy Office, consisting of the Vice President of Academic Affairs and the USSU's Academic Governance Assistant, serves as a source of information and support for undergraduate students in academic crises.¹¹

Between May 2023 and August 2024, VP Bauman was involved in 140 student [academic cases](#) (including conflicts, academic misconduct, academic appeals, and numerous complaints that do not fit into any predefined process), and the following problems and recommendations are conclusions reached from first-hand experience.

Context and Background

The University of Saskatchewan Students' Union exists to represent, serve and support the academic and non-academic needs of undergraduate students, and has been doing so for 115 years. The USSU's Academic Advocacy Office provides advice and advocacy for students facing academic challenges.¹² The USSU is a non-profit corporation governed by an elected four-member student Executive and University Students' Council (USC).

The Vice President of Academic Affairs (VP Academic)'s mandate states that the position is "responsible for academic advocacy on behalf of the students." The VP Academic acts as a liaison with the University's Senior Administration and University Council. They are responsible for dealing with student grievances, academic appeals, curriculum issues and student computing," and they "ensure students receive proper information and guidance when faced with academic grievances."¹³

The VP Academic and the USSU's Academic Advocacy Office meet with students seeking academic support one-on-one in a confidential space.

Note:

The USSU acknowledges that the problems named in the report should not be interpreted to mean that we think all students are in the right or that consequences for their actions have been inappropriate. We are naming procedural and support issues, not attempting to weigh in on the substance of decisions or judgements in either the academic or non-academic realm.

¹¹ The website states that the office is "a general information source for students regarding their rights and responsibilities," and provides "[advice] on the policies and procedures of the University of Saskatchewan." <https://ussu.ca/academic-advocacy/>

¹² "advise you on the policies and procedures of the University of Saskatchewan, both informally and formally." <https://ussu.ca/academic-advocacy/>

¹³ USSU Vice-President Academic Affairs Portfolio, 1

Students may sometimes engage in academic misconduct and may contribute to some of the challenges they encounter. We do not advocate for overlooking or excusing irresponsible behavior. We do, however, advocate for the university to improve its structures and processes that support students when they face difficulties (regardless of the origin of the difficulties).

Methods/Metrics

The data provided within the report comes directly from the USSU Academic Advocacy Office. It is not representative of all students but rather shows distressed students seeking help. The data is taken from the office's records from May 2023-August 2024.

Metrics:

- Number of offices involved
 - Note: one office can have multiple people involved for the same case.
 - It is challenging to show the complexity of the power dynamics involved.
- Length of time per case (including meetings, emails answers, resolution)
- Policies involved
- Resolution
- Student demographic
- Office referrals: linking networks
 - Who does the USSU refer to most often, who refers students to the USSU
- Colleges
- Distress level of students
- What kind of case: Misconduct, appeal, complaints, conflicts.

Data / Findings

All findings are based on anonymized data gathered by VP Bauman. Students seeking help from the USSU's Academic Advocacy Office have signed confidentiality forms, giving the USSU permission to use case information for various purposes.

Tables 1 & 2: Types of Cases

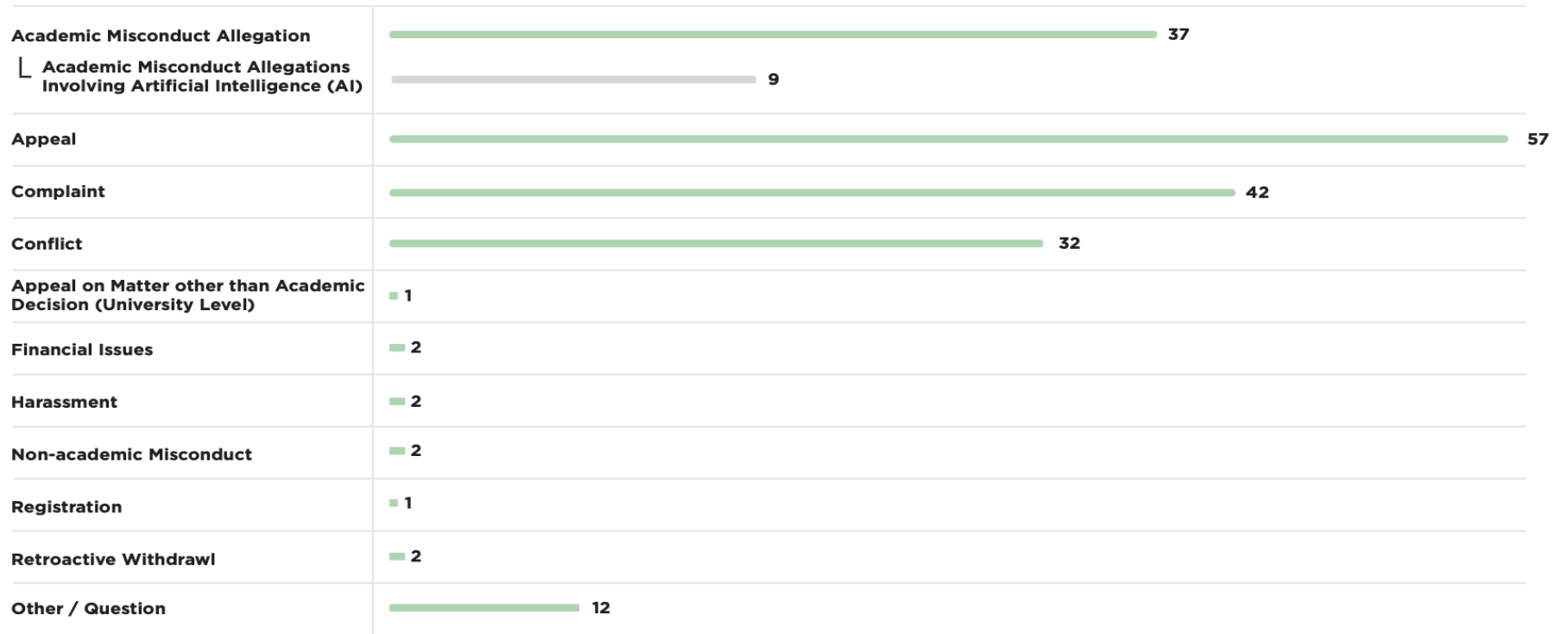
Table 1. Sorted by Case Type:

Academic Case Statistics

Case Types



Sorted by Case Type



In more complex situations, students might engage in multiple formal and informal processes. The following table illustrates the various types of cases a single student might encounter.

The University saw 135 academic misconduct cases in 2023-2024, according to the Governance Office's 2023-2024 Statistics report.¹⁴ The USSU was involved in 27% of these cases, which means that the majority of students either received support elsewhere, or did not receive support at all. The USSU does not have capacity to support all these students.

The 57 appeal cases that the USSU Office supported include academic misconduct appeals and academic appeals, informal appeals and appeals that were never submitted (both at the college and university levels).

The 2023-2024 Governance Committee Report from June 2024 states that there were 14 applications to appeal decisions related to academic misconduct, and there were 2 student appeals in academic matters.¹⁵ The USSU's VP Academic Affairs was involved in 12 of these cases, including the one successful appeal (and potentially more - there are some students whom the office never heard back from, but who were planning on submitting appeals). That means over 75% of all formal appeals receive support from the USSU.

¹⁴ Governance Office Statistics: <https://governance.usask.ca/student-conduct-appeals/index.php#Statistics>, Misconduct and Academic Appeal Cases: <https://governance.usask.ca/documents/student-conduct-appeals/stats/2023-24-honesty-report.pdf>.

¹⁵ 2023-2024 Governance Committee Report on Appeals: "SUMMARY: 1. Student appeals in academic matters: From May 1, 2023 to April 30, 2024 there were two applications for appeals in academic matters that were submitted to the University Secretary. One did not proceed to a hearing as the notice of appeal was submitted outside the 30-day limit for filing appeals. The other proceeded to a hearing and the appellant was successful. This consistent with the number of appeals filed in 2022-23, when there were also two applications for appeal received. 2. Appeals of decisions related to academic misconduct: From May 1, 2023 to April 30, 2024 there were fourteen applications for an appeal of a decision of a college hearing board under the Student Academic Misconduct Regulations. This compares to just three applications for appeal received from May 1, 2022 to April 30, 2023. Of the fourteen applications received, all but one were denied as the applicant did not present valid grounds of appeal or the appeal was filed outside of the 30-day appeal period. One appeal went forward to an appeal board and was dismissed. Under Council's regulations on student misconduct, allegations of academic misconduct are heard first at the college level." <https://governance.usask.ca/council/meetings.php> or <https://governance.usask.ca/documents/council/agenda/2023-2024/june24-agenda-package.pdf>

Table 2. Sorted by Student:

Academic Case Statistics



Case Types

Sorted by Student

Academic Misconduct Allegation	31
└ Academic Misconduct Allegations Involving Artificial Intelligence (AI)	9
Academic Misconduct Allegation + Appeal	3
Appeal	36
Appeal + Complaint	5
Appeal + Complaint + Conflict	16
Complaint	15
Complaint + Conflict	12
Appeal on Matter Other Than Academic Decision (University level)	1
Misconduct + Complaint + Conflict	2
Conflict	3
Conflict + Non-academic Misconduct	1
Financial Issues	2
Academic Misconduct + Complaint + Conflict	1
Complaint + Conflict + Non-academic Misconduct	2
Other / Questions	14

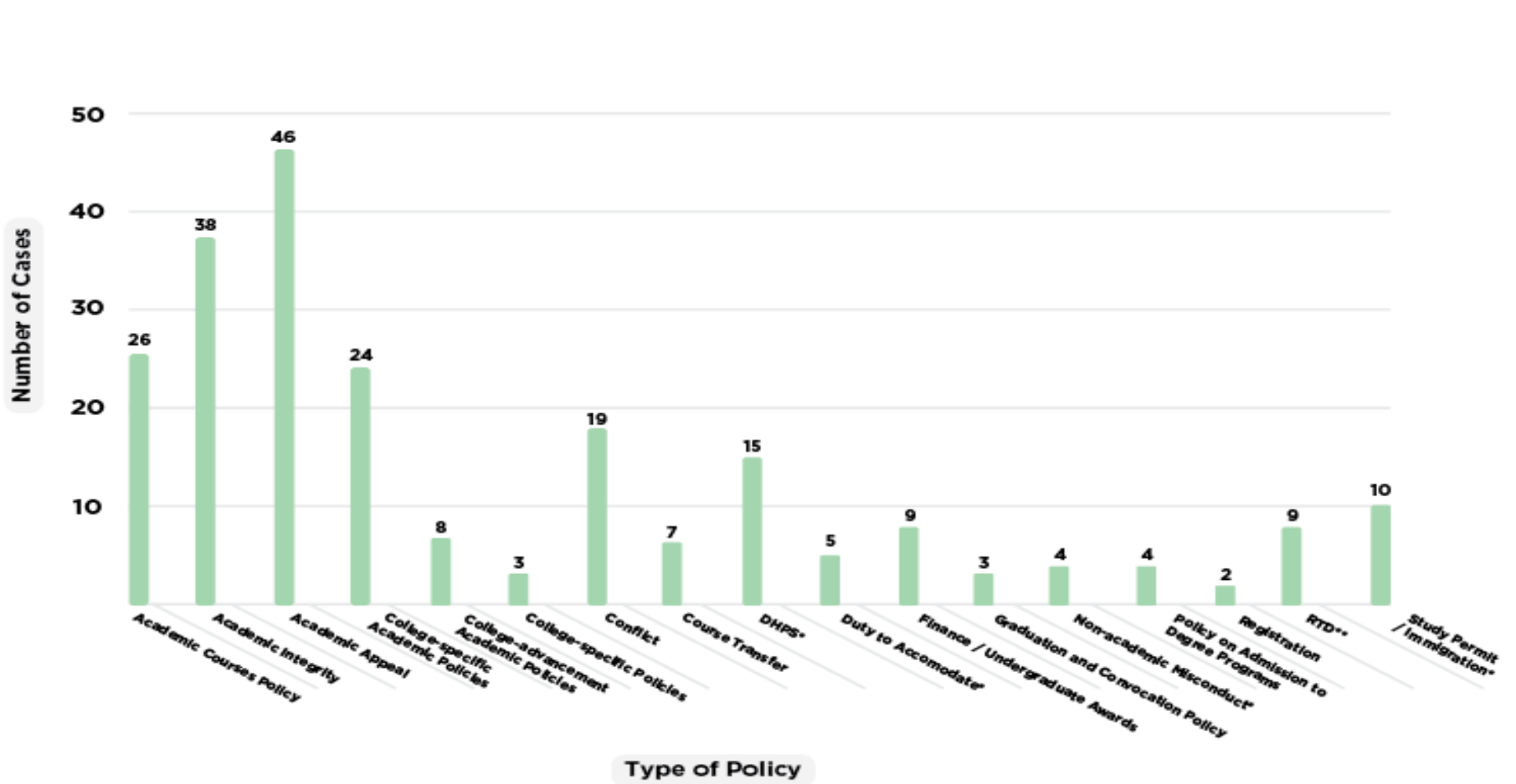
The above table depicts how many of the 140 students were dealing with multiple case types (or academic complaint processes). For example, 16 students were simultaneously doing an appeal, a complaint, and a conflict.

Table 3: Policies Involved

Policies involved in each case (organized not by case number. Many cases involve more than one policy).

Table 3.

Academic Case Statistics
Policies

* Outside of USSU's Academic Office's Mandate
 ** Additional Information

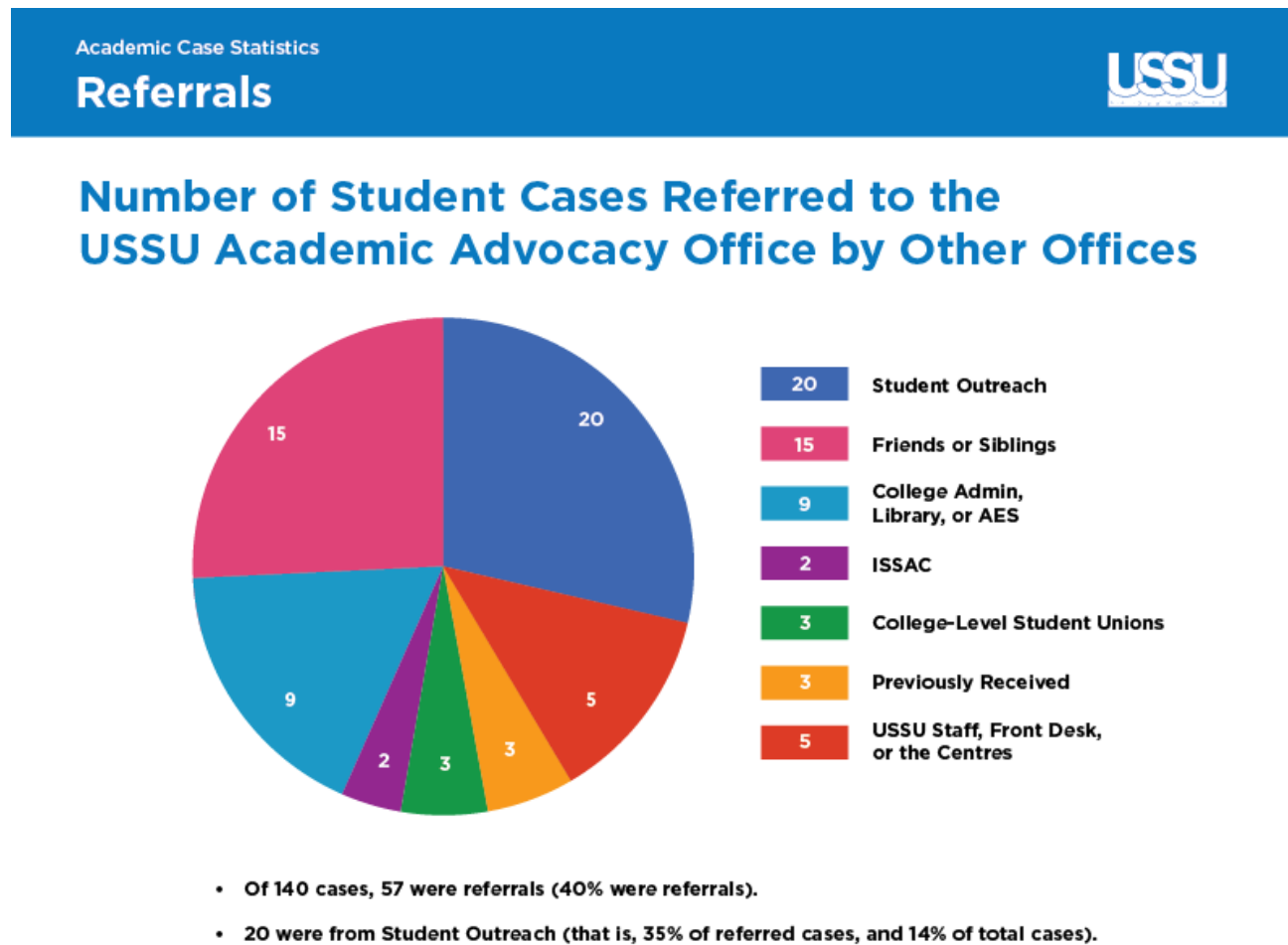
The 19 cases categorized as 'conflict' do not align with any specific University policy; instead, they represent situations where a conflict-resolution policy would have been beneficial. These cases often rely on a mix of various college or program-specific policies or informal procedures.

Although it falls outside the USSU’s scope to provide guidance on study permits, work permits, or immigration matters for international students, it is helpful to highlight the significant role these issues play in certain cases. ISSAC and Student Affairs and Outreach have Regulated International Student Immigration Advisors (RISIA) on staff to help provide immigration consultation; students with concerns receive advice on Canadian immigration and how this may impact their studies and non-academic concerns. The USSU is often brought in when academic concerns or advocacy are involved.

Figure 1: Referrals

The USSU receives students who have been referred from other offices across campus.

Figure 1.



Tables 4-6: Offices Involved

On average, the USSU reaches out to 1.27 offices per case (this typically consists of, at minimum, an email thread; more often this means a phone call, meeting, or series of meetings, both with and without the student present).

This is a much smaller number than the actual number of offices involved, as the USSU usually simply refers students, due to limited capacity.

The table below only shows the instances where the USSU has to directly engage with an external office, anything from a series of meetings with that office to being included in an email thread, NOT referrals.

Table 4.

Academic Case Statistics

Offices



Offices the USSU is in Contact with

Academic Advisors	5 Instances
Academic Hearing Board	8 Instances
Academic Integrity Specialist	4 Instances
Admissions	1 Instance
Associate Dean / Associate Dean's Office	28 Instances
College Undergraduate Office	14 Instances
College's Student Union	5 Instances
Conflict Engagement Office	6 Instances
Dean	7 Instances
Department Head / Undergraduate Chair	13 Instances
Experiential Learning Office	4 Instances
Governance Office	8 Instances
Registrar's Office	5 Instances
Student Central	5 Instances
Student Outreach	60 Instances
Student Wellness	2 Instances
Student Finance	1 Instance
Transfer Credit Office	1 Instance
VP Indigenous Engagement	1 Instance
Vice-Provost Teaching, Learning, and Student Experience	7 Instances



Note: One case can require the USSU to engage with multiple offices; in some cases the USSU has no need to reach out to any external office on behalf of the student. In some highly complicated cases, the USSU can be in contact with more than 10 different offices.

On average, students contact 3.5 offices per case, a significantly higher number than those being contacted by the USSU. When processes are unclear or students struggle to find timely and clear support, they tend to reach out to multiple offices across campus in an effort to advocate for themselves. However, the USSU lacks the capacity to manage cases and coordinate with all the offices involved in these situations.

Table 5.

Academic Case Statistics

Offices



Offices Student is in Contact With

Academic Advising	18 Instances
Admissions	1 Instance
Access and Equity Services (AES)	19 Instances
Associate Dean / Dean's Office	46 Instances
Career Services	1 Instance
College Undergraduate Office	67 Instances
College's Student Union	6 Instances
Conflict Engagement Office	6 Instances
Dean	16 Instances
Department Head	37 Instances
Discrimination and Harassment Prevention (DHPS)	3 Instances
Experiential Learning Offices	8 Instances
Finance	6 Instances
Governance	12 Instances
ISSAC	12 Instances
Registrar's Office	5 Instances
Student Central	10 Instances
Student Outreach	61 Instances
Student Wellness	10 Instances
Transfer Credit Office	2 Instances
University of Saskatchewan Students' Union (USSU)	140 Instances
Vice-Provost	8 Instances
VP Indigenous Engagement	2 Instances

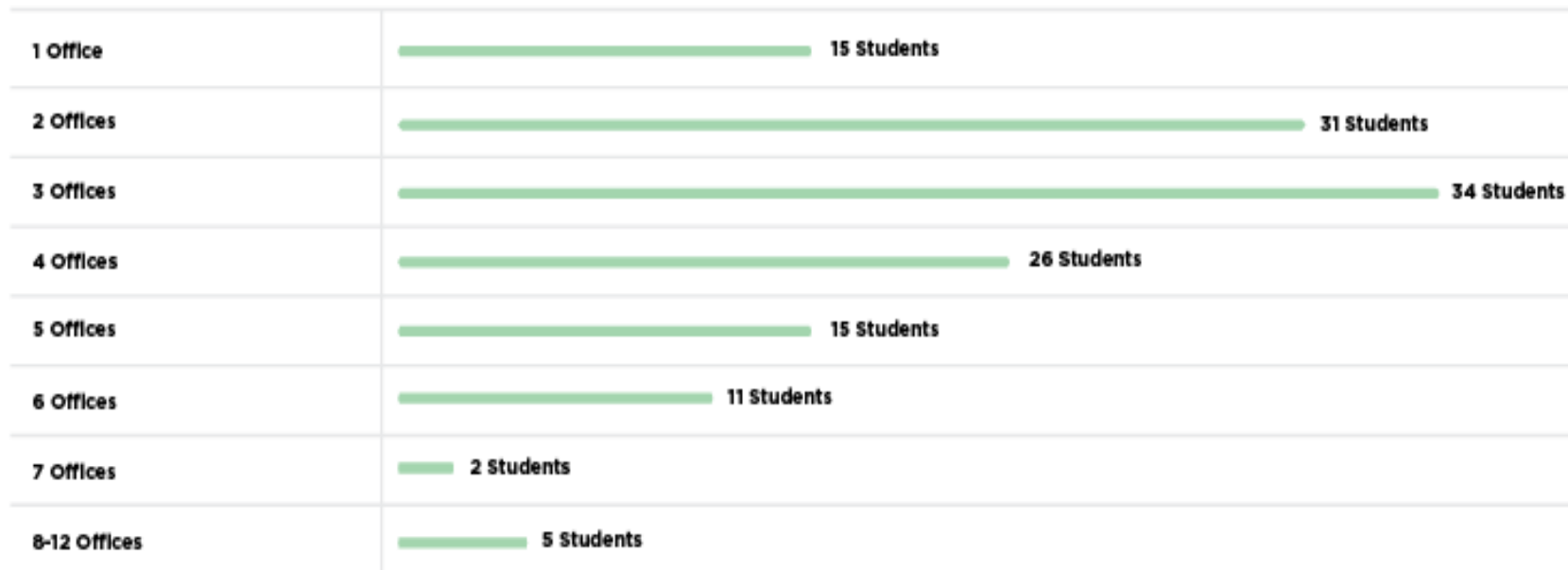
Table 6.

Academic Case Statistics

Offices



Number of Offices the Student is in Contact with



This table is a conservative estimate of the number of offices students engage with. Each interaction with an office takes between 30-60 minutes of staff time, and in many cases, students will meet with Academic Advisors, Student Outreach, and the USSU multiple times. This also does not consider time spent in email communication.

Supporting students in crisis requires many resources, including time and personnel. For example, 15 students met with 5 different offices for each of their cases; if each interaction takes a minimum of 1 hour, and we will assume, for the sake of this example, that only 1 staff employee is involved in each interaction and there is only one interaction per office: this is already 75 hours of university employee time.

This data is only from the cases that the USSU is involved in; we assume that there are many other cases ongoing at the university, requiring similar numbers of university employee time.

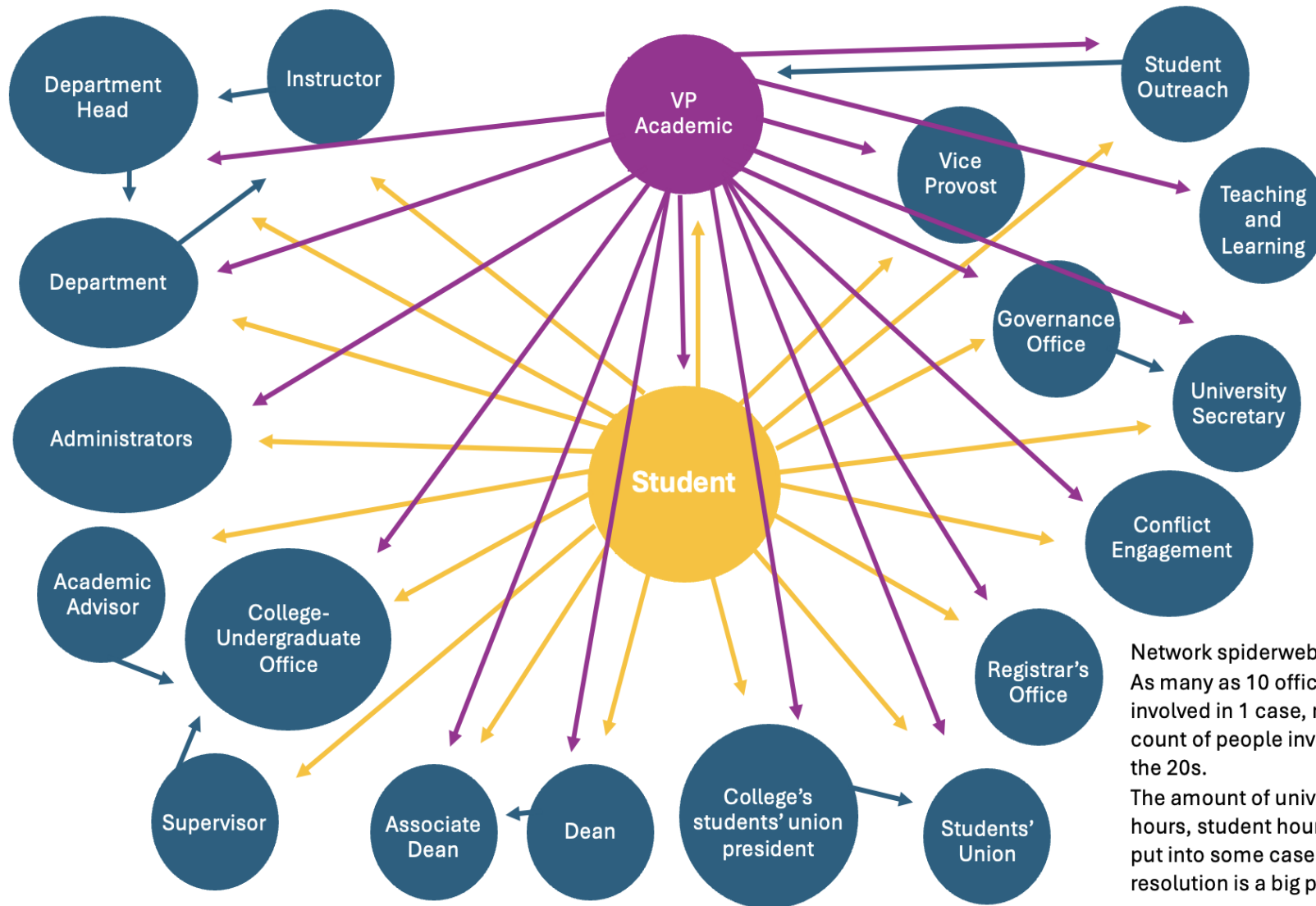
Figure 2: Student Networks:

When in crisis, when seeking answers, and when in high conflict escalation, some students reach out to anyone who may be able to provide them with clarity or answers. This can create complicated networks, where each office or unit may receive different details from the student and may or may not be aware of the other units already involved in the case.

The USSU supports students in seeking answers, but particularly when processes are unclear, the USSU can also be involved in extended and convoluted networks of communication.

The following figure attempts to illustrate how one of these cases may look.

Figure 2: Depiction of Fragmented System for Resolution



Network spiderweb:
 As many as 10 offices/ units can be involved in 1 case, meaning that the count of people involved could be in the 20s.
 The amount of university employee hours, student hours, and heartache put into some cases to not have a resolution is a big problem.

Example spiderweb, of the networks students might create in their attempts to advocate for themselves and seek answers.

While only a few cases may actually involve all the offices depicted above, there have been cases that involve many, or all of these offices. These cases tend to be highly complicated, and involve appeals, complaints, and conflicts.

Figures 3-4: Conflict Process:

Figure 3 provides a visual depiction of some typical steps in students' attempts to seek conflict resolution. As the current conflict-resolution processes for students are limited, inconsistent, and most students are not aware of them, this path (or one similar) is what most students who stick with the processes encounter.

The red question mark boxes indicate steps in the process where the student, the USSU, and other support units are at a loss for how to proceed, and do not know where it would be appropriate to take the student. These are the areas that are most urgently in need of addressing.

Figure 3.

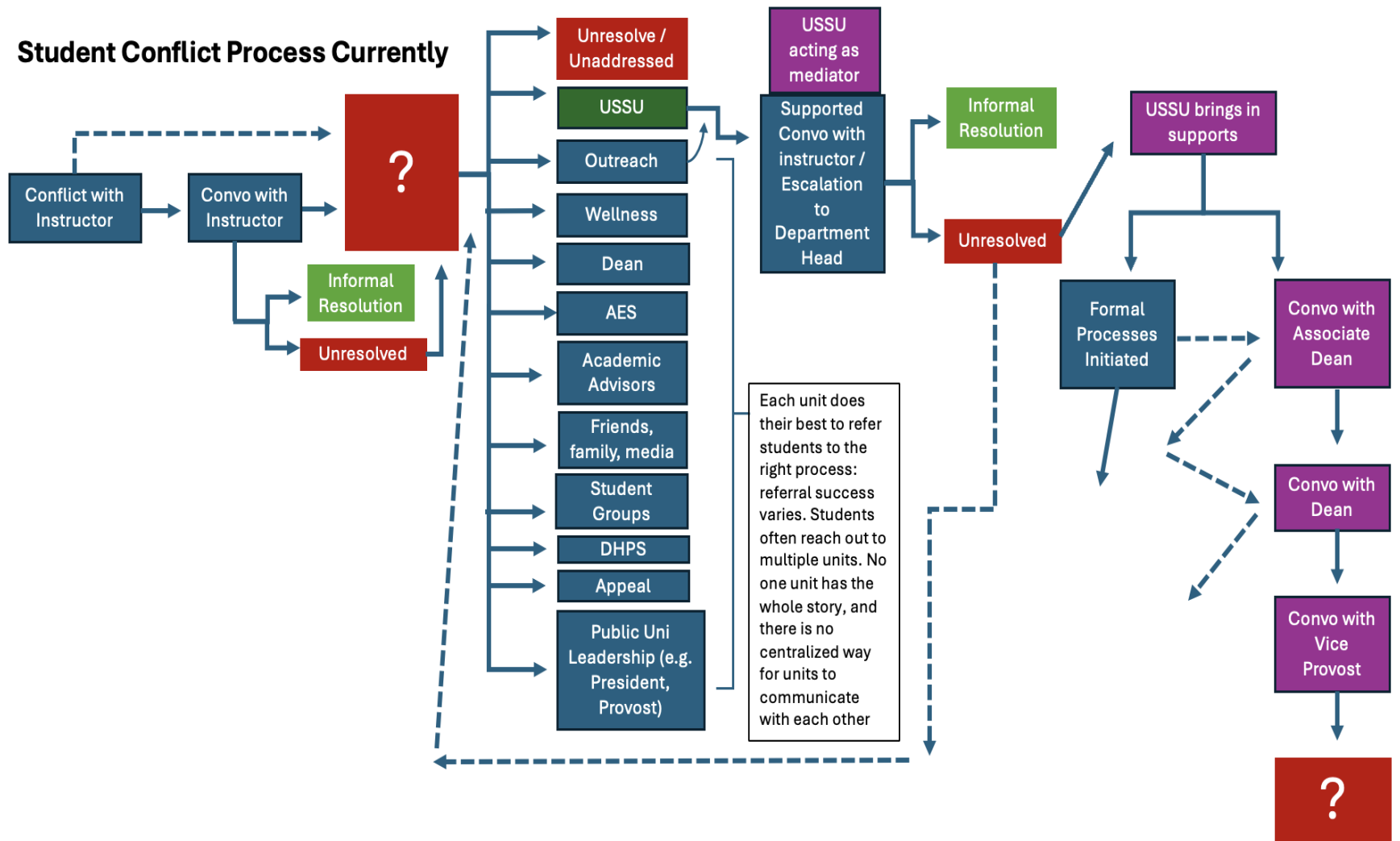
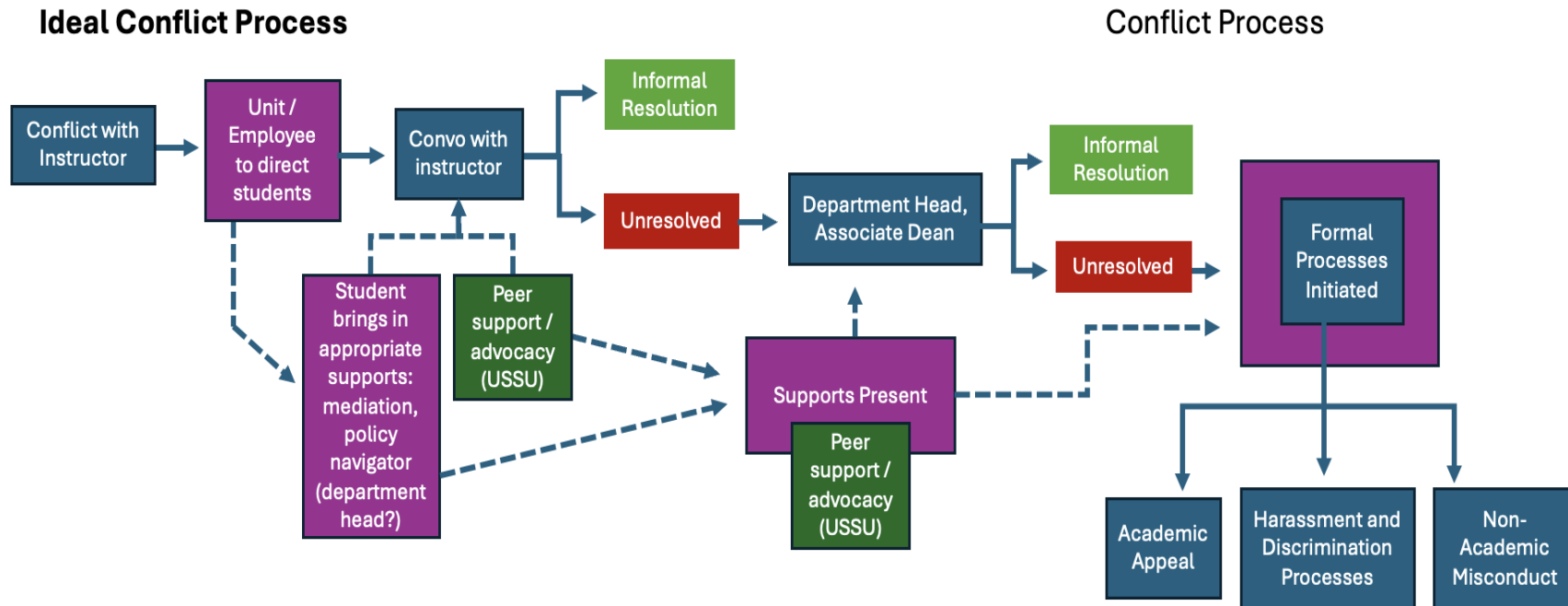


Figure 4.



What is required:

- The purple box: this mediator should be university employees, not a student leader elected annually.
- Mediator or third party available to support student conflicts
- Student knows WHAT student support to bring in, and where that support can be found (this means permanent positions that have built trust with both faculty and students)
- Dean's Office of each college? – Student, in each college first.
- So many variations about the conflict: cases are multi-layered (Dean's offices are poorly equipped)

Table 6: Distress Levels:

On a scale of 1 to 5, how distressed is a student.¹⁶

- 1 = minimal to no distress. Student is performing well academically, taking care of themselves, and expressing very few signs of stress or anxiety.
- 2 = Low levels of distress: student is still performing well academically. They are relying on support systems, communicating with friends and family about their situation. They seek supports.
- 3 = Medium levels of distress. Student is having trouble regulating their emotions and is displaying signs of anxiety and depression. They are losing capacity to deal with stress in their life, including academic stress and conflicts.
- 4 = Student is in high distress, which may look like: outbursts of anger, emotional instability, anxiety, depression, negative attitude, trouble focusing, skipping class, decreased performance academically, not going out, avoiding friends, tiredness.
- 5 = Student is in the highest form of distress, which may look like a combination of these symptoms: excessive anxiety/panic about the situation (panic attacks, uncontrollable crying, thinking they will vomit or faint), depression, suicidal thoughts/intent, may be hospitalized at points, cannot perform academically, cannot sleep, eat, or care for themselves, and they have significant trouble socializing.

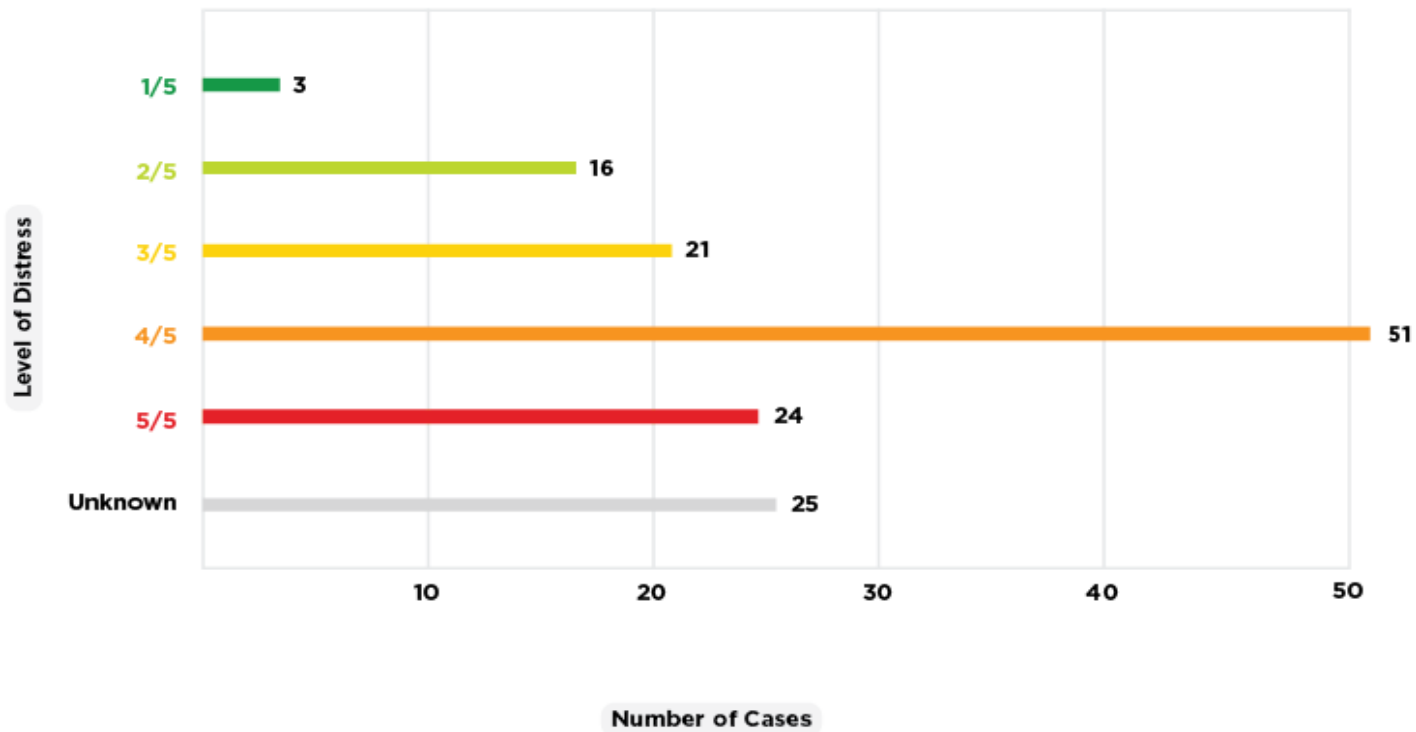
A student is considered to be in “distress” between levels 3 and 5.

¹⁶ This scale of evaluation is based on USask’s “Taking Care of your Mental Health” mental health continuum’s definitions. <https://students.usask.ca/documents/counselling/mental-health-tear-sheet.pdf>

Table 7.

Academic Case Statistics

Distress Levels



Unknown: not enough data to accurately estimate the student's level of distress.

50% of students seeking help from the USSU's Academic Advocacy Office are in high distress (levels 4 and 5).

- There is not always a correlation between distress levels and case complexity.
- When a student enters the USSU's Academic Advocacy Office with a low level of distress, this does not always mean that the case will be simple. Likewise, a student in high distress does not mean that the case will be complex.
- Some of the students who last longest in the process (or with the most complex cases) actually begin the process among the least distressed. They are able to be self-contained and are most resourceful, able to manage emotions. However, they almost always increase their distress levels because of the length and complexity of the process of seeking help.
- Cases with the potential to be complex often do not get there because the student bows out and has no capacity to deal with the challenges navigating the system.
- If students who are mentally and emotionally fully equipped are the only ones able to navigate the system, then students experiencing depression, anxiety, or other mental health issues are more likely to self-select out of the process, increasing systemic inequalities.
- It is appropriate to assume that the 140 students who made it to the USSU are already some of the most well-resourced at the University. The students with fewer supports, and who enter a conflict process already in high distress, rarely have the capacity to reach out to the USSU or Student Outreach to even begin the process.

Table 7: Amount of Time it takes to resolve cases:

Table 7.

Academic Case Statistics

Time to Resolve Cases

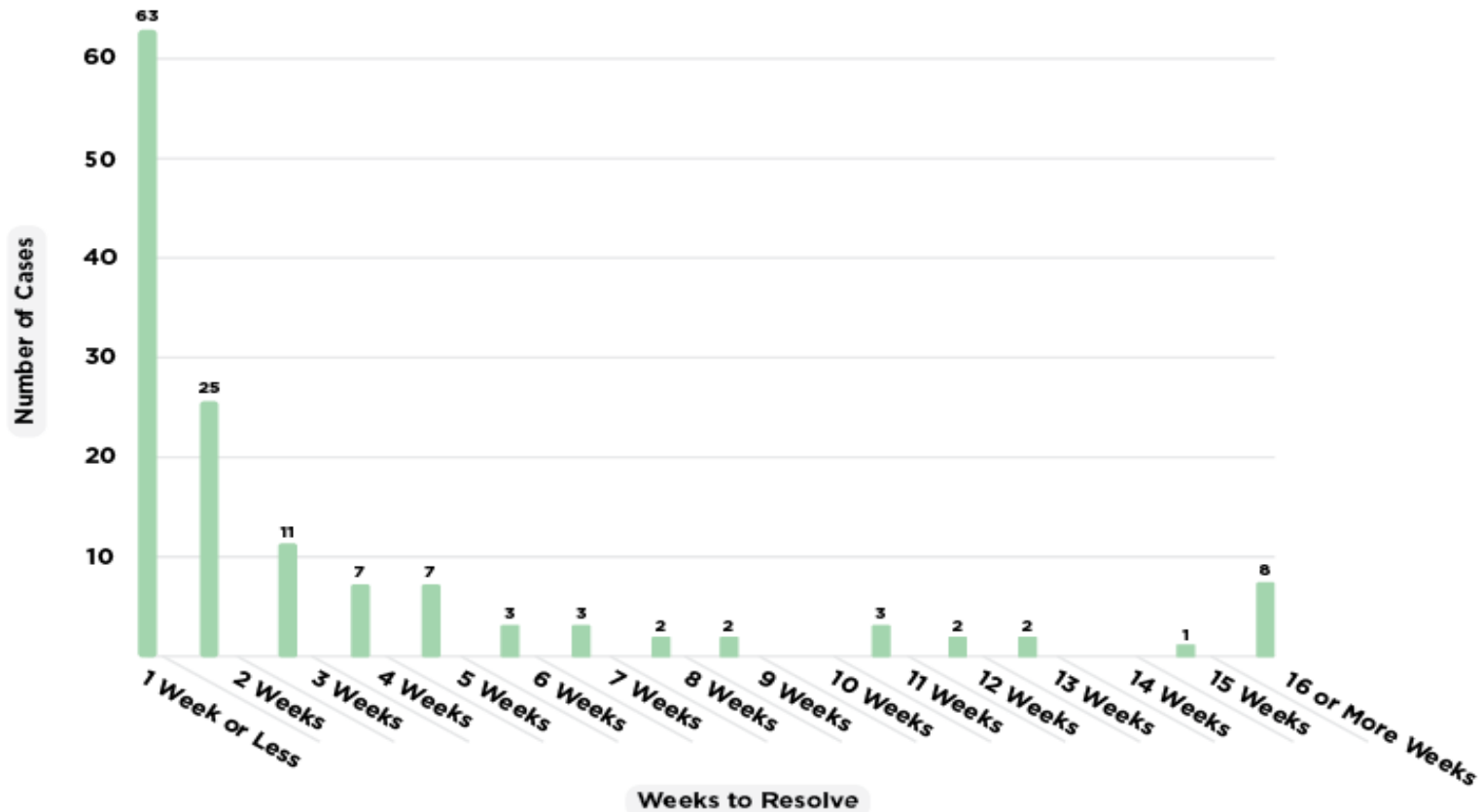
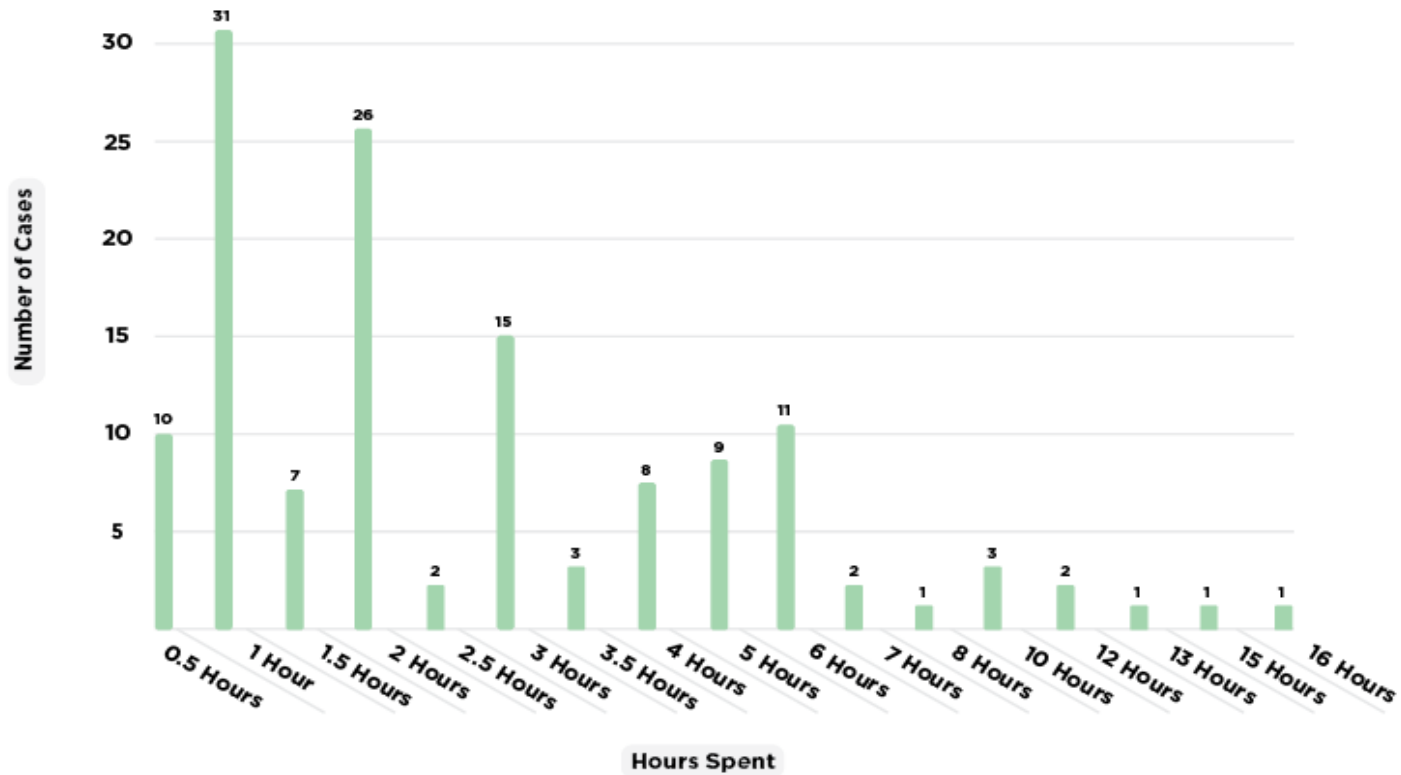



Table 8: Hours the USSU Spends Per Case:

Table 8.

Academic Case Statistics

Time Spent on Cases

Half of the student cases handled by the USSU are resolved in less than two hours, typically through multiple 30-minute meetings spread over several days. This is due to many students seeking support from the USSU, and once the USSU responds with referrals and resource links, no further follow-up occurs from the students.

Figure 5: Resolution of Cases:

For 40 cases, students receive supports, resources, explanations, answers, and referrals from the USSU, and the USSU never heard back from them. These cases are also reflected in the Table 7 Time Involved and Table 8 Hours the USSU Spent on Each Case.

Figure 5.

Academic Case Statistics 

Resolution

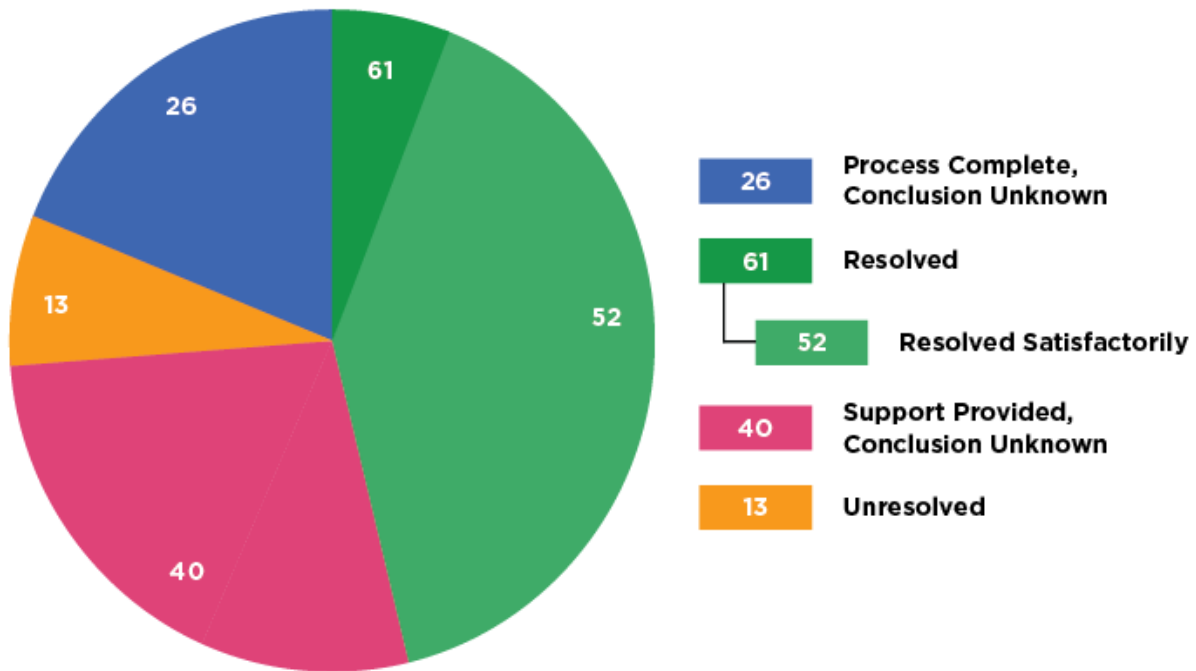


Table 9: Primary College:

The primary college status is defined as the college with administrative authority over the student. The primary college does not always correspond to the college responsible for overseeing the academic misconduct hearing or a conflict with an instructor.

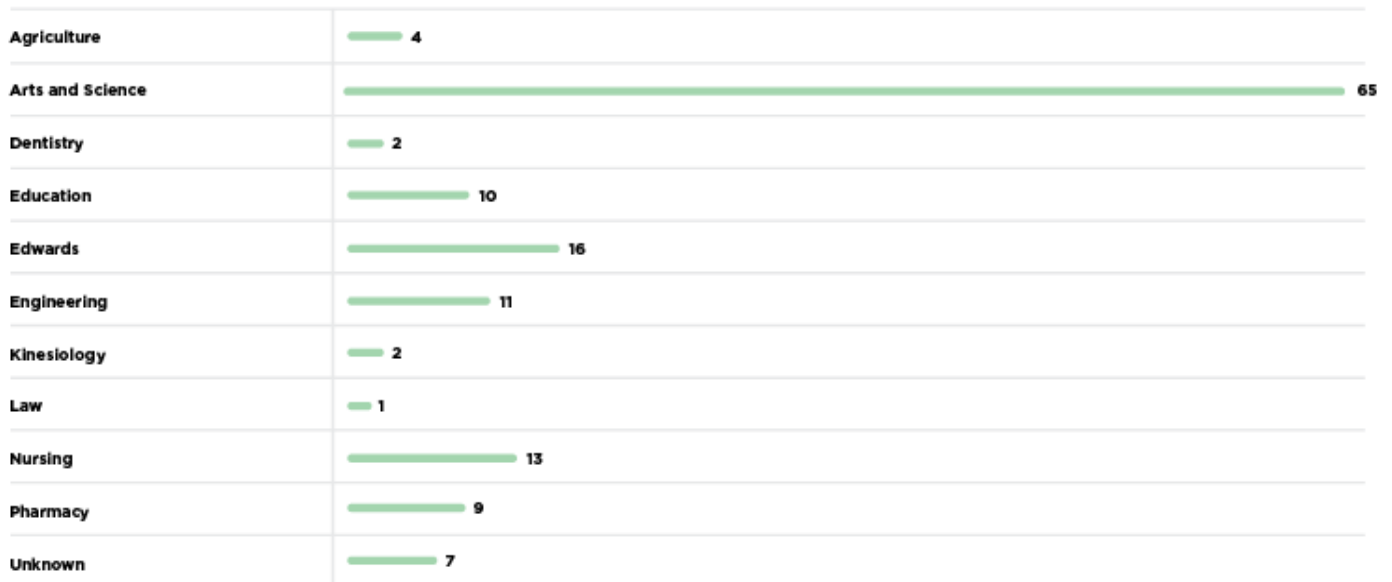
Figure 15.

Academic Case Statistics

College Statistics



Number of Cases in Each Primary College



Breakdown of Cases in Arts and Science



13 of the cases had an additional college as a significant player in their case. Colleges have different policies and procedures, and students often find themselves confused and caught in the middle of these processes.

Many other students were either a student of a college not directly involved in their case, or were taking classes from a college that was not involved in their case, but these are not shown in the data. Cross-college course work is inevitable, and Arts and Science bears the brunt of these cases, as Arts and Science classes are foundational for the majority of degrees on campus.

Figure 6: Year of Study:

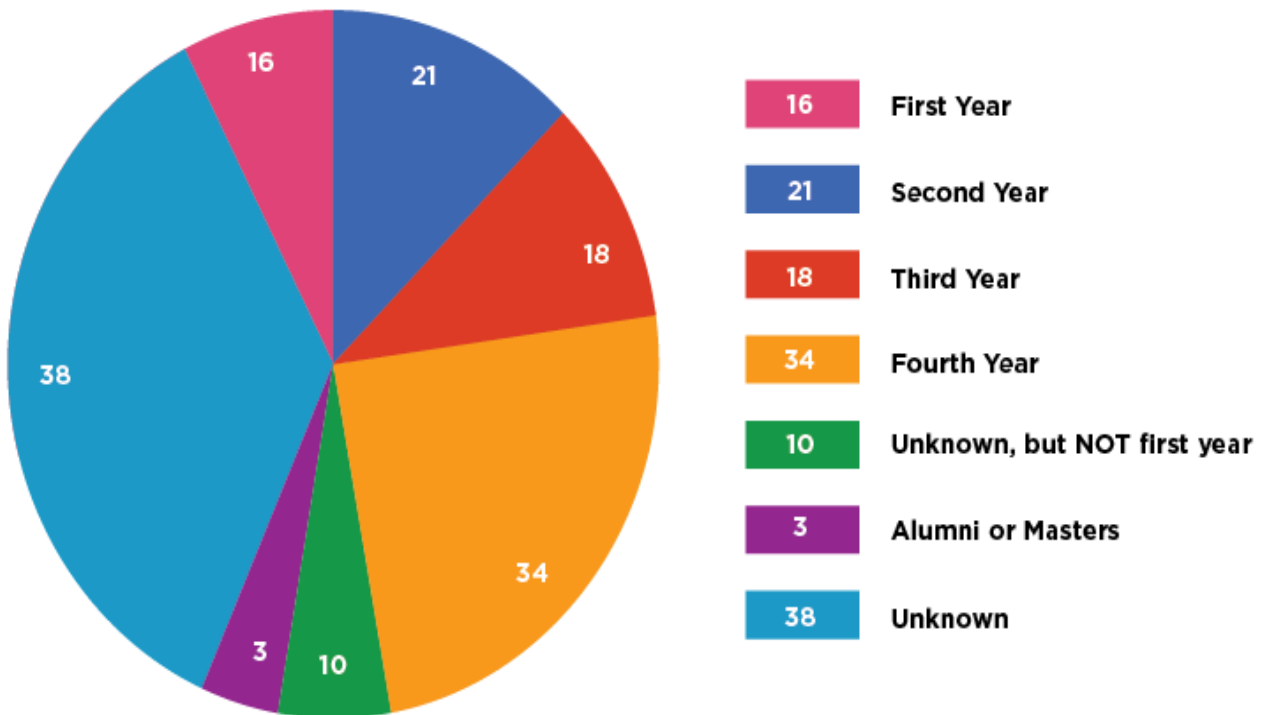
More than 50% of students who reach out to the USSU office have been at the University for more than 2 years.

Figure 6.

Academic Case Statistics


Student's Year of Study

Cases According to Student's Year of Study



This is one of the indicators that the University needs clearer support processes for students facing a crisis or academic concern.

It is also interesting to note that relatively few first years are involved in these cases. This does not mean that academic misconduct allegations occur less frequently among first-years, though perhaps first-years are more likely to be offered informal resolutions. However, this does mean that first-year students are not aware of as many supports and are less well resourced for dealing with academic concerns and conflicts.

Data Analysis

Student Experiences:

- Students are struggling to find appropriate avenues and support for their concerns (academic or otherwise). This is particularly detrimental to student well-being in situations that do not fit into pre-determined processes, such as academic misconduct or appeals. Even in predetermined processes, students need additional support to navigate systems.
 - Because students are wanting to advocate for themselves, they are seeking tools, structures, and supports that allow them to do so effectively and appropriately.¹⁷
- Students report feeling dismissed and disrespected when they do engage in appropriate processes. Many students choose not to pursue concerns further due to fatigue with the system and the energy required to find answers.
- Often students feel that the processes that do not actually give them a fair chance. For example, sometimes when students are looking for answers or for directions in a process, they are referred in a continuous loop from office A to office B, and back again to office A (at times, this may be due to administration not knowing the appropriate place to refer them). This not only consumes a great deal of USask employee and student time, but is emotionally draining for the student.
 - Students feel like processes are biased towards instructors or the institution, counter to procedural fairness.
- The result of these concerns is that students are feeling unvalued (unheard, humiliated, and dehumanized) at the University.

The USSU's Involvement:

- Both students and their advocates within the USSU are incredibly vulnerable due to navigating relationships with university staff and leadership who have power over them academically. Grades are a currency for students, as is the ability to graduate, and as such, students are in difficult positions in which to be mediating conflicts between other students and instructors.

¹⁷ Students are becoming increasingly aware of their own needs, but do not yet have the tools or structures with which to advocate effectively for themselves.

- Students seek support from the USSU, but as the USSU is limited in its capacity (both VP Academic and Academic Governance Assistant have many other responsibilities), and it cannot sufficiently meet the needs of students.
 - The USSU's Academic Advocacy Office is currently the only student-centric support system on campus to help students navigate a full range of academic crises. The Office is overseen by the VP Academic, which is an annually elected position with many responsibilities, only one of which is the Office. The Office's mandate is to provide academic advice and advocacy for students, not systems navigation or conflict mediation.¹⁸
- As need increases, the USSU will not be able to fill the gaps as their involvement is not sustainable, and student needs will not be met.
 - Due to poor resourcing, lack of clarity, and limited trust, the student need increases risk and cost to the university, as students reach out to many offices looking for answers or support, and become frustrated with the systems currently in place.
- Unlike other offices, when an issue escalates, the USSU office has no one to refer the case up to. The Office relies heavily on Student Outreach to provide the support and experience we cannot provide. However, our mandates are very different.
- To be effective in these cases, the office, and specifically the VP Academic, have had to learn numerous skills in a short period of time. These are not required by the USSU of its employees, and because they require time and effort to learn and practice, may not be engaged in by future members.
 - How to navigate complex cases and high conflict cases with varied power dynamics.
 - How to hold in tension multiple conflicting impressions of and experiences with a person or unit, and find a way to work together. Students will come with strong (and sometimes negative) perspectives of university staff and units, and it is the mediator's role to remain open to other perspectives and stories to facilitate productive dialogue.
 - How to support and calm highly distressed students, including being confided in for suicidal ideation and being treated with aggression.
 - How to facilitate healthy conflict engagement on various levels of university administration and with large power dynamic fluctuations.
 - How to interpret university policies, learn how they are most frequently applied, and help students navigate these policies.
- The USSU's Academic Advocacy Office's involvement in some of these cases can be considered a conflict of interest, and this also increases the risk for the undergraduate students mediating. For example, when the VP Academic is asked to mediate a conflict between a student and an instructor they are taking classes from, their relationship to that instructor could be jeopardized. Furthermore, the undergraduate students running the Academic Advocacy Office are vulnerable to retaliation from instructors, department heads, or even deans whom they interact with professionally, and who are also their academic administrators.
 - While advocating for a student, if a senior leader asks the VP Academic to withhold information about the student that they are advocating for, the VP's ability to advocate is compromised.
- The VP Academic's primary supports in learning these skills have been:
 - Student Outreach
 - Gwenna Moss Centre
 - The Office of Teaching and Learning: Academic Integrity Strategist

¹⁸ Furthermore, student leaders are not immune to conflicts, errors, and academic misconduct.

- Conflict Engagement
- Library Learning Specialists
- Associate Deans

Processes and Structures:

- When a situation/case does not fall into a specific policy area (appeal, academic courses policy, academic integrity), or predefined procedure (informal appeal) both the student, their support team, and other offices involved are left without clear guidelines on how to proceed. Clear procedures for students (or supports) for what to do when conflict occurs would certainly help.
- Informal appeals and conversations are encouraged, but few students are equipped to know how to do this well.
 - Emotionally equipped: most students in these situations are highly stressed, and do not have the emotional tools for managing intense conversations well.
 - Practically equipped: students do not know where to go to, or even where to find the information or who to ask.
- Inconsistency:
 - There is inconsistency in procedures from department to department, and college to college.
 - This inconsistency is particularly harmful for students who take classes from colleges different from their own college.
 - Not only can these cases be a gray-area for processes and policies, but it is particularly difficult to track down information. In the USSU's experience, administrative staff and academic leads within both colleges may not know how these cases that span multiple colleges work.¹⁹
- Many processes are not timely.²⁰

Conflict Experiences:

- The data suggests that there are no consistent conflict-engagement or complaint processes across the University.
- Currently, the USSU's Academic Advocacy Office is being asked to wear multiple hats: advocates and mediators.
 - Advocates: the USSU's role, as imagined by the university and through the USSU's mandate, is to advocate for the students.
 - Mediators: however, sometimes/often structures are not in place that allow for civil or productive conversations when students look for informal resolution. This means that, if the USSU wants the student to be heard and treated fairly, they have to actually act as a mediator and manage meetings as a third party. This takes away from their ability to be an advocate, and speak on behalf of the student.
 - Wearing two hats also complicates and confuses interactions with university administration and leadership.

¹⁹ Appendix A [Cases 6](#)

²⁰ Appendix A [Case 2](#); Appendix A [Case 3](#); Appendix A [Case 6](#)

- Specifically, when seeking information, sometimes college personnel become defensive, thinking that the USSU is acting as an advocate (accusatory, judgmental, very much on a “side”), while the USSU is actually trying to be a mediator and hear both sides of the story.
- This confusion shuts down conversations early.
- There is need for conflict engagement authority that is built into a position at the University, rather than asking the USSU to flip into this.
 - Positional expectations for a conflict engagement position:
 - Equipped to safely navigate power dynamics
 - The position has the authority to create an environment that empowers both parties to engage in meaningful problem solving.
 - Authority to mediate conflicts between university employees and students
 - Allows for appropriate challenging of policies: to disagree and problem solve in a timely way
 - The position needs safeguards to have freedom to disagree and challenge policies and procedures (or individuals), without risk of retaliation or job loss. They need to be positioned as employees of the University of Saskatchewan, but operate like a third-party advocate who has a degree of autonomy (within reason: they must follow institutional policies and procedures, perform professionally, and adhere to HR protocols).
 - A comparative analysis of U15 Universities reveals how these positions function in similar structures.
 - Structural expectations for a conflict engagement position:
 - Both parties are on equal footing
 - Each person’s interests are held with equivalent value
 - Not spaces to make judgements, but to make sure that what is of value makes it to the table
 - Procedural fairness

Parallel Structures:

An examination of other university's advocacy offices, Ombudsperson offices, and equivalents gives some insight into these gaps. It also reveals that USask is currently behind in terms of structures and policies that support students, particularly when compared to U15 Universities, as USask is the only one without an ombuds office. See also, [Recommendations 4, 5, 9, and 13.](#)

- (1) University of Alberta:
 - Webpage dedicated to “supports available during a crisis,” including academic support and mental wellbeing. <https://www.ualberta.ca/en/campus-life/supports-available-during-a-crisis.html>
 - Office of the Student Ombuds is an accessible, confidential third-party service that works to “ensure that university processes related to students operate as fairly as possible.” They also make sure student voices are heard and they “help to mediate disputes and resolve conflicts.”²¹ <https://www.ualberta.ca/en/current-students/ombuds/index.html>
- (2) University of Calgary:
 - Calgary has a Student Ombuds Office, which is a “safe place for all students of the University of Calgary to discuss student related issues, interpersonal conflict, academic and non-academic concerns, and many other problems.” <https://www.ucalgary.ca/student-services/ombuds>
 - The Student Ombuds Office serves between 400-600 student cases a year.²²
 - These services fall under the Vice-Provost Student Experience: “The Ombuds is accountable to the broad University community and the Vice Provost (Student Experience) for fulfilling the terms of the office established in this Terms of Reference.”²³
- (3) University of British Columbia:
 - UBC’s ombuds office is a jointly funded office that is independent and confidential: <https://ombudsoffice.ubc.ca/>
- (4) Dalhousie University:
 - On their “Campus Life” webpage, there is a direct link to the Ombudsperson office https://www.dal.ca/campus_life.html
 - Their Ombuds office offers “impartial, and independent support to help resolve any university-related concerns.” The Ombudsperson does not act as an advocate nor replace existing structures, but rather facilitates discussions, gives advice, and explains university policies and procedures. https://www.dal.ca/campus_life/safety-respect/student-rights-and-responsibilities/where-to-get-help/ombudsperson.html

²¹ <https://www.ualberta.ca/en/current-students/ombuds/about/index.html>

²² <https://www.ucalgary.ca/live-uc-ucalgary-site/sites/default/files/teams/29/ombudsreport-2021-2022.pdf>

²³ 2.b <https://www.ucalgary.ca/live-uc-ucalgary-site/sites/default/files/teams/9/student-ombuds-office-terms-of-reference-november-2016.pdf>

- “Not sure where to go? Contact the Ombudsperson”

Where to get help

- | | |
|---|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • DalSAFE app • Academic appeals • Human Rights & Equity Services • LGBTQ2SIA+ support | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Personal harassment • Student Health & Wellness • Student Conduct Office • Not sure where to go? Contact the Ombudsperson |
|---|--|

- Under “Where to Get Help,” they also have some FAQ for Academic concerns: https://www.dal.ca/campus_life/safety-respect/student-rights-and-responsibilities/where-to-get-help/on-campus-academic.html
- (5) University of Manitoba:
 - Student Advocacy Office: <https://umanitoba.ca/student-supports/academic-supports/student-advocacy>
 - Housed within student supports/services
 - Structure and personnel:
 - Director, Assistant Director, Confidential intake: professionals, permanent employees of the University (NOT students)
 - 6 student advocates
 - The university also has a Conflict Management Office with clear process flowcharts: <https://umanitoba.ca/human-rights-and-conflict-management/>
- (6) McGill University:
 - McGill’s Ombudsperson office: <https://www.mcgill.ca/ombudsperson/>
 - In 2022-2023, the Ombudsperson office supported 307 cases. https://www.mcgill.ca/ombudsperson/files/ombudsperson/annual_report_2022-2023_0.pdf
- (7) Queen’s university:
 - Resource page, including specific information for students in crisis: <https://www.queensu.ca/inclusive/resources/general>
 - Queen’s Ombudsperson’s Office: <https://www.queensu.ca/ombuds/>
 - The small Ombudsperson’s office has a full time ombudsperson, and an intake officer, both employees of the University
- (8) Laval University
 - Laval’s Ombuds office: <https://ombudsman.ulaval.ca/>
 - The Ombudsman “does not have decision-making power, but a power of recommendation according to the *Regulation concerning the ombudsman* : this is the very essence of his function.”
- (9) McMaster University
 - McMaster’s Ombuds Office: <https://ombuds.mcmaster.ca/>
 - Hey have an entire page with policy resource links: <https://ombuds.mcmaster.ca/about-page/#tab-content-policy-links>
 - In 2022-2023 the office supported 372 cases.

- (10) University of Ottawa
 - Office of the Ombudsperson: <https://www.uottawa.ca/about-us/office-ombudsperson>
 - Their team is made of the ombudsperson, assistant ombudsperson, and an eight-person advisory committee. This committee “provides support to the Ombudsperson in his or her functions with particular attention to ensuring the independent and confidential nature of that function.”
- (11) University of Toronto:
 - Office of the Ombudsperson: <https://ombudsperson.utoronto.ca/>
 - UofT has an ombuds officer based at each of its three campuses.
 - The office has the authority to “Investigate problems when regular channels have been exhausted and there is evidence of procedural unfairness.”
- (12) University of Waterloo
 - The University of Waterloo has a conflict management office: <https://uwaterloo.ca/conflict-management-human-rights>
 - The office provides supports for a variety of situations, including various complaints: <https://uwaterloo.ca/conflict-management-human-rights/frequently-asked-questions>
- (13) Western University
 - Office of the Ombudsperson: <https://uwo.ca/ombuds//index.html>

In addition, a comparison with the other university in the province is insightful.

University of Regina:

- <https://www.uregina.ca/students/>
- On their “Students” Page, have a link to “Concerns and Complaints” info
- The webpage breaks down the process of complaints: <https://www.uregina.ca/students/concerns-complaints.html>
 - If USask had a page like this, and included some contact information and links to things like Student Outreach, Student Wellness, and appeal policies, this would both expedite concerns, reduce the amount of time spent referring students, and reduce student distress.
- Services for Respectful University: <https://www.uregina.ca/respectful-university/>
 - Outlines the complaint process

Recommendations:

14 Recommendations for the University:

Students need the university to invest in a system of transparent, timely, appropriate conflict resolution and system navigation. Here are areas of investment that occur to the USSU based on the needs of the students who sought help from the Academic Advocacy Office.

Note: many of these are overlapping. For example, if recommendation 4 is implemented, recommendations 2, 3, and 8 would be redundant.

Changes to Structure (Positions)

1. Intake unit to triage and direct students (either within each college or one for the entire university)
2. Permanent student support position, university employee not within a college.²⁴
3. Position within each college's Dean's Office specializing in supporting students through misconduct, appeals, conflicts, complaints, and other processes.
4. Ombudsperson office: addresses student need for system navigation, and allows a third party to be present for conflicts.
5. Expand the conflict engagement office to allow support for students: e.g., a permanent conflict engagement authority or position at the University that holds space for both parties in a conflict, allowing the USSU to act as an advocate, not a mediator.
6. Establish an academic integrity office to allow capacity to support student cases
7. Campus Legal Service
 - a. Law students supervised to help support students through specific policies and procedures

Changes to Policy

8. Conflict training for department heads and academic leads.²⁵
9. Revise policies so students can make complaints other than DHPS.
10. Undue harm clause for appeals: the expectation that if university processes or administrative/clerical errors cause undue harm to students, an effort will be made to support the student.²⁶

Changes to Software

11. Written records of all interactions between students, staff, instructors, advisors, administrators, etc. Students and university employees have access to the centralized system.
12. Centralized system of record keeping and case management, and internal mechanisms for inter-unit communication between supports to ensure all units involved have relevant information and are giving advice that aligns with what else has been done with the case.

²⁴ Unknown where this position might reside (Governance Office? TLSE? Legal Services? Student Central? Student Affairs and Outreach?).

²⁵ While this still does not provide a sense of safety for students with high conflict escalation, it might allow for fewer cases being escalated so severely.

²⁶ This would require a definition of what constitutes "harm."

- a. Access to an appropriate and confidential case management and record-keeping platform to support timely response and procedures.
 - b. An advocate or support person/office could help advance the sharing of information in relevant cases for academic misconduct.
13. Better digital communication: webpages that explain where students can go with concerns and complaints. Webpage on the “Students” website with clear directions for crisis aid.
- a. On the University’s Student Page, there is NOTHING clearly marked for concerns, complaints, appeals, or even for immediate crisis: <https://students.usask.ca/>. We recommend clearer direction for when students go looking for support. (Student Affairs and Outreach is not labeled clearly enough).

Of the recommended permanent positions, we are seeking to address the following needs, which are currently being met insufficiently by the USSU’s Academic Advocacy Office due to yearly turnover and inexperience. USSU’s Vice President Academic Affairs is an annual elected position and there is huge variability of interest, skill level, motivation, and support for fulfilling the kind of role that the USSU currently does. The university should not rely on an undergraduate student not in their employment to manage these risks. Instead, there should be University positions that have:

- Continuity of relationship with academic leaders across campus
- Expertise in relevant policies
- Rapport with students (and consistency in what supports are offered, word of mouth)
- The power and influence to stand on equal footing with academic leads.
- Equipped to safely navigate power differentials; having the authority to create an environment that empowers both parties to engage in meaningful problem solving. The position should create neural expectancy of procedural fairness and integral spaces.
- Authority to mediate conflicts between university employees and students, with the structural expectation that both parties are equally heard.
 - Allows for appropriate challenging of policies: to disagree and problem solve in a timely way

In conclusion, the Vice President Academic Affairs, Elisabeth Bauman, is available to discuss ideas and further engage in constructive dialogue regarding the report. Please feel free to reach out for any clarifications, feedback, or additional suggestions.

Appendix A: Selected Representative Anonymized Cases

The Vice President Academic Affairs has received permission from these individual students to describe their case in these words.

Case 1: Convoluted Networks

- Student struggles to find avenues to bring forward concerns and complaints about the quality of education in their college (citing specific examples). They faced what they called “incidents of perceived intimidation,” by instructional and administrative staff, and said, “I feel targeted and attacked.”
- Student feels unheard by the department head and Associate Dean (who was unwilling to meet with them).
- USSU helps facilitate a meeting between the student and the Vice Provost, and then the student and the Dean, as the Vice Provost “validated that we were raising legitimate issues that were worthy of a meeting with the college administration, and encouraged the administration at the College of Education to meet.” (Student’s words)
- The college-specific student union, Student Outreach, and the Conflict Engagement Office all become involved as the student looks for ways to enact change in their college.
- The student is concerned that many other students have been encountering similar problems, but there is not enough trust (and a fear of retaliation) which hinders students bringing concerns forward.
- USSU and Dean cannot do anything if concerns are not raised; however, the absence of vocal complaints does not equate absence of problems; it “can mean that students just don’t want to talk anymore” (Student’s words). The goal is to create an environment where student voices are heard and valued.

Case 2: Fatigue caused by long processes

- Student receives incorrect advice from an academic advisor; experiences confusion and miscommunication with college administration about class requirements for graduation over the course of 2 years.
- Student, Undergraduate Chair, and USSU suspect administrative errors.
- Student contacted the Associate Dean for both a formal and informal appeal.
- Student and VP Bauman sought clarity about the proceedings and the appropriate means to get answers. They contacted over the course of 6 months: the Governance Office, Registrar’s Office, college-specific undergraduate office, Academic Advisors, Department Head, Conflict Engagement Office, and the Associate Dean (each unit referred on to another unit, cyclically). No straightforward answers were provided regarding the policy or the missing documents.
- Throughout the process, references to policies were inconsistent (including which policy was being applied, and how it was being applied to the student’s case).
- Student was not able to graduate on time.
- Timelines are convoluted, and processes are not clear (e.g. what was assumed was an informal appeal was actually considered a formal appeal by the college, meaning that the student’s

university-level appeal was denied due to it being more than 30-days past the denial of the college-level appeal).

- The student's mental and emotional health was significantly impacted by the entire process. The time spent seeking answers, the preparation of documentation for each meeting, and the frustrating cyclical conversations with various units caused extreme exhaustion and distress to the student.

Case 3: Challenges for International Students

- Student(s) commit academic misconduct in a summer term class, which is a prerequisite for numerous fall-term classes in the program.
- Student(s) register in fall term classes, and in October are informed of an academic misconduct allegation against them for the summer term class.
- The scheduled hearings take place after the add-drop deadline for courses.
- Student(s) are found guilty of academic misconduct, and receive a failing grade in the summer term class. As a result, they lose the prerequisite for numerous of their fall-term classes, and are dropped from those courses. As the add-drop deadline has passed, student(s) are unable to register in other classes, and some drop from full-time to part-time students.
- Student(s) are international students, and in order to work during their study terms and for eligibility for a post-graduate work permit, they are required to be full-time students in all regular academic sessions.²⁷
- Due to the timing of the academic misconduct hearings, student(s) are no longer able to work, no longer meet the criteria for a post-graduate-work-permit, and faced various other challenges, including severe mental, emotional, and financial repercussions that had the potential to have long-lasting effects on their lives.²⁸
- Because of additional stress caused by the pace of the hearings and the impacts the timing had on futures, the college changed its internal process. It is unfortunate that it took so many students in distress and USSU advocacy to prompt change, but change did happen.

Case 4: Need for Centralized Communication Systems

- Student is RTDed from their college for one year.
- Part way through the RTD year, they meet with the Associate Dean, who gives them advice and instructions for re-applying to the college. The student follows the advice.
- Admissions and college administration makes the student jump through administrative hoops, which the student does.
- When the student's re-application is denied on grounds that confuse the student and some advising staff, they reach out to the USSU, who provides support through the appeal process. The USSU also tries to find some answers for the student about why their application and appeal were denied.
- USSU reaches out to 11 different people in an attempt to find some answers and clarity about what process the student should attempt next (multiple academic administrators, academic advisor, Student Outreach, Associate Dean, conflict engagement, governance office, admissions

²⁷ An international student's study permit comes with a work clause attached, that specifies the circumstances under which the student can work while studying.

²⁸ While the students will have an opportunity to make a case to the immigration officer for their post-graduate work permit, odds are against them.

office). There seemed to be much confusion about processes and how policies were being applied by various units. The USSU received conflicting advice and instructions (on the same day the USSU was told, by two different college administrators aware of the case, where the appropriate place to submit the appeal was: it was not the same place).

- Clarity is never achieved, though the case is resolved satisfactorily after involving the Dean.

Case 5: Undue Harm Clause

- Student seeks advice from college's academic advisor, department head, and a student central administrative office about a course-related process.
- Student follows the advice. This advice is later revealed to be inaccurate (and a misunderstanding occurred with the administrative office). As a result, the student faces consequences and is not able to graduate on time.
- Student appeals the decision on the college level. They receive conflicting information about why the appeal is denied.
- Student appeals on the University level. Due to the timing, the appeal is denied.
- Student and USSU meet with various offices to try to figure out (1) what went wrong with the process, (2) why the appeals were denied, and (3) if anything can be done to remediate the situation. These offices included: Associate Dean's Office, Academic Advisors, Course Transfer, Student Central, and the Governance Office.
- While it is acknowledged that the student received bad advice, because they did not do one small procedure required by college processes, they were still not able to graduate on time (and despite various administrators wishing they could do something, there is no undue harm clause).

Case 6: Process Unclear, Timing of Academic Processes

- Student(s) were finishing a degree in one college. One of their last courses was offered through a different college at the university.
- Student(s) received an allegation of academic misconduct on the final exam, but from the initial notice, the length of time it took to receive information about the hearing (formal or informal, when?) increased the student(s)' distress.
- If found guilty, and given a sanction in which the course grade became a fail, student(s) would face life-altering consequences (including losing their eligibility to convocate on time).
- On top of being scheduled to graduate in a month, student(s) were also facing a combination of these factors that increased their stress:
 - (1) Study permit expiring
 - (2) Financial challenges (more courses)
 - (3) Applications to professional schools
- The USSU reached out to administrators, Associate Deans, and heads of college-specific undergraduate offices in both the home college of the student(s), and the college in which the course was offered, trying to find information. Administrators in both colleges were uncertain of the process for students in this particular situation (or if priority was given to student hearings in situations where the students were scheduled to convocate shortly).
- Formal hearings were finally scheduled one week before convocation. Student(s) were unsure if the outcome of the Academic Misconduct hearings would be sanctions that would affect their

passing grade in the class, and thus their eligibility to graduate. Most students, as a safeguard, withdrew their application to graduate.

- The timing of academic processes can be detrimental to student wellbeing and their ability to make wise academic decisions

Case 7: Miscommunicating Causing Distress

- Student was in conflict with the Experiential Learning (EL) office, and was in high distress. The EL office and the college arranged a meeting with the student, and gave the student the date and time of the meeting two days prior to the meeting itself. The meeting time was then changed the afternoon before the 8:30 am meeting.
- The timing of this meeting limited the student's ability to bring an advocate or mediator to the meeting. The student was uncertain about their ability to be heard, and felt the need of external support to ensure they were taken seriously. The student reached out to the USSU, but the USSU personnel usually supporting students in high crisis situations had a prior commitment that could not be rescheduled.
- The student requested that the meeting time be adjusted, but was denied this request. The student explained their desire to have a mediator present to help support them in the conflict with people with power over them, and was informed that the Associate Dean would act as mediator.
- Not only did the student have limited time to prepare their defense, but the USSU felt helpless with their limited capacity to support a highly distressed student.
- The student writes, "Emotionally, this situation has taken a heavy toll. Navigating the university system has been confusing and overwhelming. The process moves slowly, and I have been unable to find the necessary support or timely guidance to resolve the issue, leaving me feeling isolated and helpless. This stress has extended beyond me, affecting my family as well. The financial pressure and uncertainty have created an immense emotional burden for both me and those who depend on me. Delaying my coursework has also put me behind in graduating, which will require additional student loans to finish my education."

Case 8: Vulnerability of English-as-a-Second-Language students

- Student was accused of using AI to complete an assignment.
- The complainant cited certain long/complicated words present in the essay as their burden of proof: the student was an international student, and English was not their first language - since these words were used in the essay, this was evidence of AI engagement.
- The student successfully defended their case by drawing upon multiple years of their writing (academic and personal) to show their familiarity with the specific words, and more complex English words in general.
- This accusation was humiliating and degrading to the student: it was harmful to suggest that for international students or English-as-a-second-language students, a correct and complex use of the English language is evidence of academic misconduct.

Case 9: Emotional Toll

While students may not have the full story or understand why administration makes certain decisions, their experience, and the emotions that result from it, are valid. This is an example (with permission from the student) of some of the thoughts, feelings, and emotions a student may counter while trying to navigate the system.

The student used these phrases over the course of a meeting with the VP Academic Affairs, who took notes: “I feel like I’m completely worthless in the eyes of the university. ... I’m treated like I’m diseased or something. It feels like I’m being treated like I’m a criminal.... It is no longer just an appalling case. It implies that there is something that justifies what I’ve been going through. This has been six months, consuming me, destroying me, and I’m right back... I have suicidal ideation; I lose all hope. I want to bash my head into a wall – I hang out in the depths of despair. ... I don’t know what I am doing wrong! I cannot know if no one tells me. I cannot know what justifies me being treated this way. I want a chance for my case to be heard. ... The thought of giving up makes me want to throw up.... I feel stuck.... I wish they could understand how harmful this is... I’ll fantasize about not being alive anymore, but I’m not intending to act on it.”

In a meeting a few weeks later, the student said, “I feel like they are trying to make it as difficult as possible to get through the process. Some of the emails were belittling... I was prevented from being able to successfully advocate for myself.”

In a written statement three months later, the student recorded: “This process has been incredibly triggering. I have PTSD, major depression, and an anxiety disorder, which are largely connected to abusive relationships and bullying I have experienced in the past. The emails I have received from [redacted] have contained statements that are akin to gaslighting... This feels very similar to when I was bullied very badly in my early teens. Unlike that time, I am now trying to stand up for myself, but every step of the way seems to reinforce to me the message: don’t even try, they will just hit you back harder. Being given number to Wellness Centre feels like an afterthought, and also like, ‘in case you kill yourself, we’re not liable.’ I have spent so much time and effort just trying to be acknowledged and treated like a human being. This process has made me entirely lose faith in the university’s ability to adequately support students, as well as allow students to advocate for themselves. I appreciate that there are supportive people on campus, such as Elisabeth and counsellors, but when it comes to the people who hold power over my degree and the policies that surround completing it, I am appalled.”

These statements are included as an example of how some students feel while navigating the processes at the university. This is language that students use (more often than is comfortable) while in the USSU’s Advocacy Office – this is not an isolated case, nor is this language unusual. While it is not an accurate representation of the University, it *is* a lived student experience here on campus.

Statements like these tell us that some of our students in crisis are feeling under supported, and that the systems we have in place for conflict resolution may be exacerbating these challenges.

Appendix B: Consultation, Acknowledgements

The USSU's VP Academic Affairs would like to thank those at the USSU and the University who have provided support and advice in the 2023-2024 school year and the first months of the 2024-2025 school year.

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Supportive Statements Received from key partners:

Beau Gallerneault, Director of Student Affairs and Outreach:

"The University of Saskatchewan has been very fortunate to have such a dedicated Vice President of Academic Affairs with the USSU over the past year and for the upcoming academic year, as they have been very skilled and diligent in their support students needing advocacy and support in academic related challenges. As an annually elected position, not all incoming Incumbents will be able to draw on the same skills or experiences. A formal position external to the colleges and USSU will be beneficial for students to be able access a policy expert as well as position them to work with current university supports."

Dr. Susan Bens, Academic Integrity Strategist:

"I commend Vice President Baumann in the effort she has gone to summarize and evaluate her work in supporting USask students navigating a range of issues this past year. She has served students, and ultimately the University, at a level rarely seen in an undergraduate student leader. The insight and advice in the report makes the case that we need to correct an over-reliance on the USSU in this area immediately." ~ Susan Bens, Academic Integrity Strategist, Office of Teaching and Learning