

## OFFICE OF RIGHTS AND RESPONSIBILITIES

Promoting Respect on Campus



**ANNUAL REPORT 2023-2024**

DECEMBER 2024

CONCORDIA  
UNIVERSITY

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## Office of Rights and Responsibilities: Annual Report 2023-2024

### Introduction

The present report covers the activities of the Office of Rights and Responsibilities (“**ORR**” or the “**Office**”) from **May 1, 2023 to April 30, 2024**. Submitted to the Secretary-General each year, the ORR’s annual report aims to do the following:

- Offer an overview of the mandate of the Office;
- Present statistics on cases and consultations during the previous academic year;
- Make recommendations with respect to policies or operations of the Office.

The report is made available to the University community via [www.concordia.ca/rights](http://www.concordia.ca/rights). It is also submitted, for information purposes, to Concordia’s Senate and Board of Governors.

### ORR’s Mandate

The Office administers the Code of Rights and Responsibilities (the “**Code**”), which sets out the behavioral expectations that apply to all members of the University, including students, faculty, and staff. It explicitly prohibits a range of behaviours, such as threatening or violent conduct, sexual violence, sexual assault, harassment, and discrimination. The Code governs behavior that takes place on campus or on other premises during University activities or events.

When any University member has a behavioural concern, they may approach the Office to obtain impartial and confidential advice and support in resolving the situation. The Office helps members by reviewing all available options and assisting in selecting the most appropriate approach. Options include:

- Helping informally resolve disputes by providing shuttle diplomacy, mediation, crafting settlement agreements, and/or providing strategies for resolution;
- Initiating the appropriate formal complaint process, such as forwarding cases to the Office of Student Tribunals or to the appropriate human resources authority;
- Directing complainants to another, more appropriate mechanism for addressing their complaints, for example: union grievance, police complaints, etc.

In addition to resolving conflicts, the Office coordinates the University’s response in handling urgent cases and managing behaviours that may pose a danger or threat to our community. Members may approach the Office to flag any such behaviour. The Office then takes immediate steps to direct an appropriate and time-sensitive response, in consultation with colleagues from across the University.

The ORR frequently participates in committees and other University bodies mandated to address behavioural issues, such as the Standing Committee on Sexual Misconduct and Sexual Violence.

## Policies that Guide ORR's Work

In addition to administering the Code, the Office is guided in its work by several related University policies, including:

- *Policy Regarding Sexual Violence*
- *Protocol on the Coordination of Urgent Cases of Threatening or Violent Conduct*
- *Policy on Student Involuntary Leave of Absence ("POSILA")*
- *Policy on Harassment*

Each policy sets out timelines, decision-making structures, and a selection of appropriate responses to potential situations. The policies aim to guide difficult decisions so that they can be made in a timely manner with input from experts from across the University.

## The ORR Team

During the 2023-2024 year, the ORR team was composed of the following staff members:

- Director and Senior Advisor: Aisha Topsakal, the undersigned;
- Associate Advisor: Sarvenaz Ezzatpour;
- Department Assistant, shared with the Ombuds office: Michelle Sarrazin.

While we have a small team at ORR, we coordinate efforts with numerous colleagues to effectively address every dossier. On a daily basis, we collaborate with: Campus Safety and Prevention Services, Campus Wellness and Support Services, Equity Office, Sexual Assault Resource Centre, Legal Services, Employee and Labour Relations, Office of the Provost, Dean's Offices and Department Chairs. By coordinating actions and relying on the expertise of our colleagues, we were able to address the 442 concerns and complaints brought to our office.

## Data Analysis and Statistical Review

### Activity Summary and Breakdown of Requests for Assistance

The Office categorizes its assistance to members in the following ways:

- **Consultations:** ORR provides information and guidance but usually does not play an active role in the conflict or concern.
- **Formal and informal cases:** ORR provides advice and may also directly intervene, review evidence or play an ongoing role in the situation. This can include forwarding a complaint to the appropriate authority. In informal cases, ORR typically assists in reaching a voluntary agreement to resolve a dispute.
- **Student of Concern ("SOC") / POSILA:** A SOC file is opened when a student is identified as presenting a potential threat or danger to themselves or others under the Policy on Student Involuntary Leave of Absence (POSILA). ORR typically assembles a Case Team to review these files and recommends appropriate actions. Measures can include various interventions, such as connecting students with appropriate resources, restricting campus access, or placing a student on a leave of absence.

An ORR dossier typically begins as a consultation. If it ultimately evolves into a case, it is only counted once when reporting the data. Cases are generally categorized as behavioural issues under the Code or as SOC files under POSILA.

In the 2023-2024 reporting period, ORR received **433 new requests for assistance**, compared to 372 new requests recorded in the previous reporting period. In addition to new files, we managed 9 ongoing files carried over from the previous year, for a **total of 442 active files**, compared to a total of 404 active files in the previous reporting period.

Below, you will find a 3-year comparison of total active files processed by ORR in the relevant reporting periods. Our file numbers have remained fairly consistent but have seen a gradual annual increase.

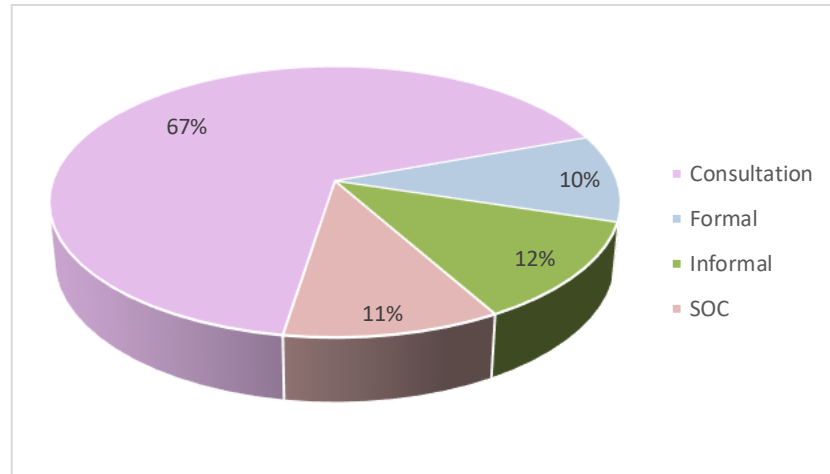
**TABLE 1: 3 YEAR ANNUAL COMPARISON OF TOTAL FILES PROCESSED IN REPORTING YEAR (NEW AND CONTINUING)**

Year	Informal	Formal	SOC	Consults	Total
<b>2023-2024</b>	53	46	47	296	<b>442</b>
<b>2022-2023</b>	44	40	40	280	<b>404</b>
<b>2021-2022</b>	68	31	44	251	<b>394</b>

SOC files represent some of the most challenging cases at ORR, often involving complex problems of mental health and requiring threat assessments in collaboration with colleagues from across the university. This year, ORR had 47 active SOC files, similar to numbers in previous years.

The relative distribution of services remained consistent with previous years. As illustrated in the chart below, consultations accounted for a vast majority of services provided in 2023-2024. The number of dossiers who opted to file formal complaints and pursued informal resolutions remained relatively consistent with previous years.

When advising members on whether to pursue informal or formal mechanisms, we weigh a multitude of factors, including the seriousness of the behaviour reported and whether there appear to be conditions favorable to reaching a voluntary agreement. Ultimately, however, it is the right of the complainant to decide whether to file an informal or formal complaint.

**CHART A: DISTRIBUTION OF SERVICES (2023-2024)**

### Complainant and Respondent Demographics

In the charts that follow, we take a closer look at our Complainant and Respondent demographics in both our complaint and consultation files.

The following definitions apply when we consider demographics:

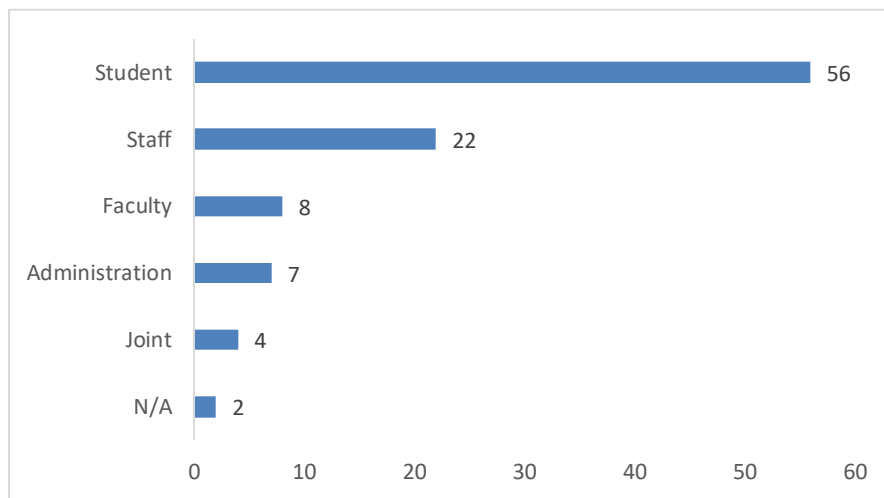
- **Student** - Members registered in any academic program on a full-time or part-time basis, independent students, members registered in non-credit courses, auditors, exchange students and visiting students.
- **Staff** - Full-time and part-time employees who are not faculty members and/or do not perform administrative and/or supervisory functions as specified in the 'Administration' category.
- **Faculty** - Full-time and part-time professors including extended and/or limited term appointments, visiting lecturers, etc.
- **Administration** - Employees and/or units who fulfill specific administrative and/or supervisory functions including Deans, Associate Deans, Department Chairs, Campus Security, Residence Life, Directors, etc.
- **Other** - Non-members including alumni, contractors, non-academic visitors, volunteers, etc.
- **Joint** - Two or more Complainants and/or Respondents from different demographic categories
- **N/A** - Complainants and/or Respondents who are unknown, unidentified, or anonymous. Complainants in the 'N/A' category are typically anonymous and seeking consultation services from the Office, while Respondents in this category are generally either unknown to the Complainant or not identified by the Complainant.

## Who is seeking assistance?

The term “Complainant” is used to refer to any member of the University community who is directly affected by someone’s behaviour and/or as part of their administrative role, raises a concern with the Office. The conduct in question should be within the scope of the Code. If warranted, a case file is opened regardless of whether informal resolution was sought or a formal complaint was launched. In 2023-2024, students most often requested assistance from the Office in both case and consultation categories, as can be seen in the following charts.

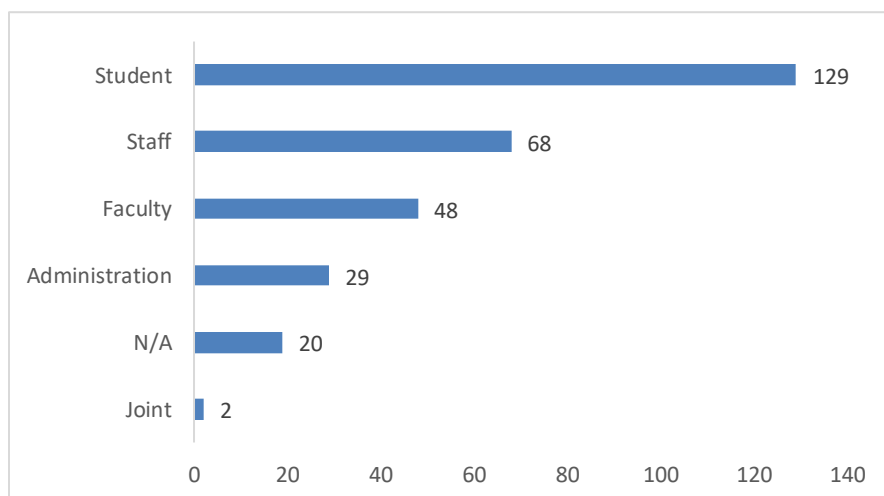
### **CHART B: COMPLAINANT DEMOGRAPHICS 2023-2024 (CASES – INFORMAL & FORMAL)**

*In cases, requests for assistance/complaints were generated by:*



### **CHART C : COMPLAINANT DEMOGRAPHICS 2023-2024 (CONSULTATIONS)**

*In consultations, requests for assistance/complaints were generated by:*

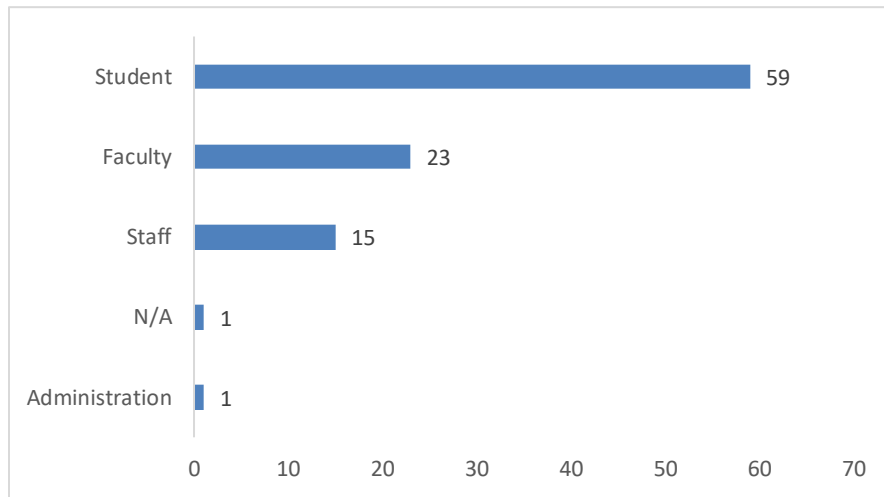


## Who are complaints being made against?

The term “Respondent” refers to the person against whom a complaint is made. A “Respondent” is any member who is alleged to be responsible for undesirable behaviour described as an offense/infraction under the Code. Students were predominantly the respondents in both complaints and consultation dossiers.

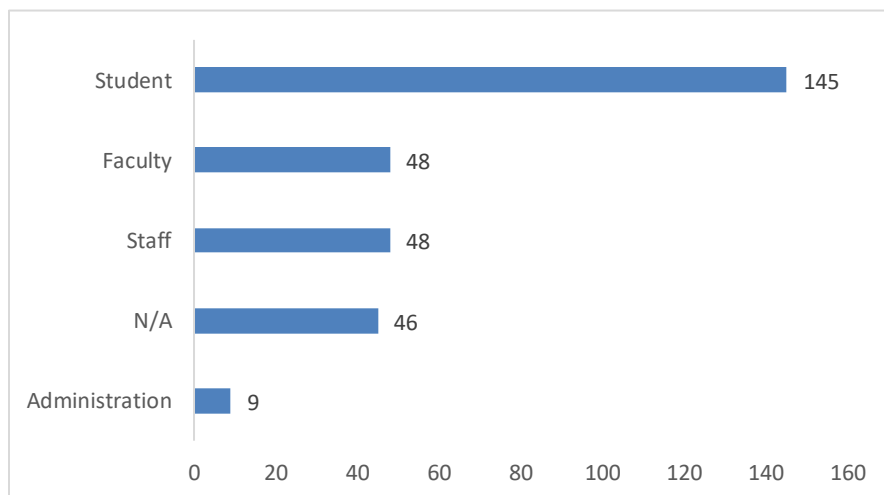
**CHART D: RESPONDENT DEMOGRAPHICS 2023-2024 (CASES – INFORMAL & FORMAL)**

*In cases, complaints were generated against:*



**CHART E: RESPONDENT DEMOGRAPHICS 2023-2024 (CONSULTATIONS)**

*In consultations, complaints were generated against:*





## What infractions are reported to ORR?

Some complaints allege multiple Code infractions. These complaints are counted as a single file, regardless of the number of offences cited. In consultations, complainants will not necessarily allege a complaint or issue that falls neatly under a specific Code article, accounting for the high number in the “Miscellaneous Consultations” category.

Below, you will see a breakdown of all infractions reported. Consistent with previous years, harassment and SOC reports accounted for the vast majority of concerns brought to ORR. Reports of discrimination and sexual violence were fairly consistent with last year’s numbers, while psychological harassment citations increased. The Office will continue to monitor if any trends emerge through future reporting periods.

**TABLE 2: BREAKDOWN OF INFRACTIONS ALLEGED IN CASES AND CONSULTATIONS (2023-2024)**

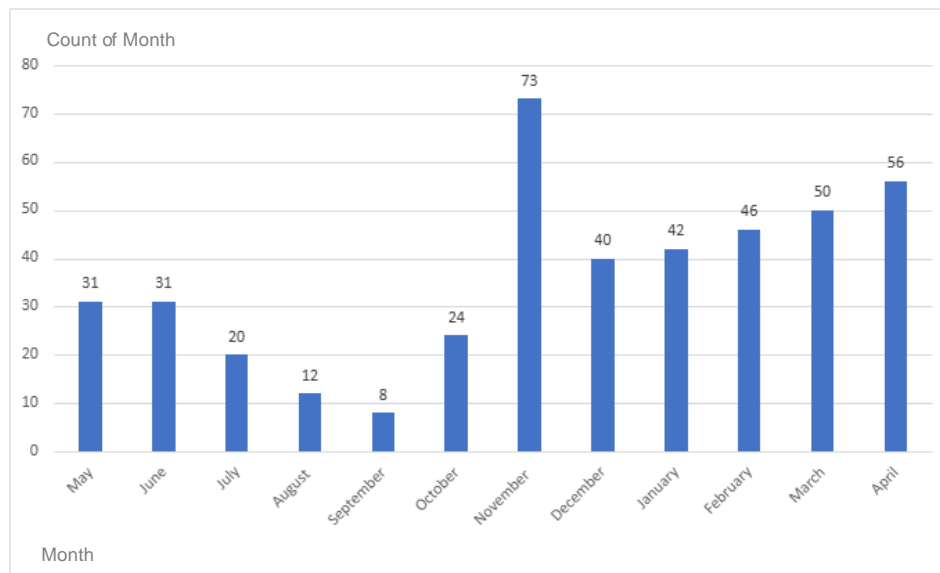
<b>Offences Reported</b>	<b>Cases</b>	<b>Consults</b>	<b>Totals 2023-2024</b>	<b>Totals Reported in Previous Year 2022-2023</b>
<b>Harassment</b>	61	158	219	125
<b>Student of Concern</b>	47	17	64	62
<b>Discrimination and Communication of Discriminatory Matter</b>	34	59	93	69
<b>*Miscellaneous Consultations</b>	4	44	48	93
<b>Threatening or Violent Conduct</b>	14	13	27	23
<b>Psychological Harassment</b>	7	12	19	23
<b>Sexual Harassment</b>	14	5	19	18
<b>Sexual Violence and Sexual Assault</b>	8	6	14	8
<b>Obstruction or disruption of teaching, research, administration</b>	3	4	7	3
<b>Knowingly furnishing false information</b>	3	4	7	0
<b>Any other action that is not specifically described in this Section but which is an offence described in any law or regulation, which occurs in the University context</b>	5	0	5	0
<b>Offences against property</b>	3	0	3	1

Offences Reported	Cases	Consults	Totals 2023-2024	Totals Reported in Previous Year 2022-2023
Unauthorized entry into any University property	2	0	2	0
Theft or abuse of computing facilities	0	1	1	0
Forging or, without authority, knowingly altering, using, receiving or possessing University supplies or documents or documents supplied to the University	0	1	1	0
<b>Total</b>	205	324	529	425

### When do members reach out to ORR?

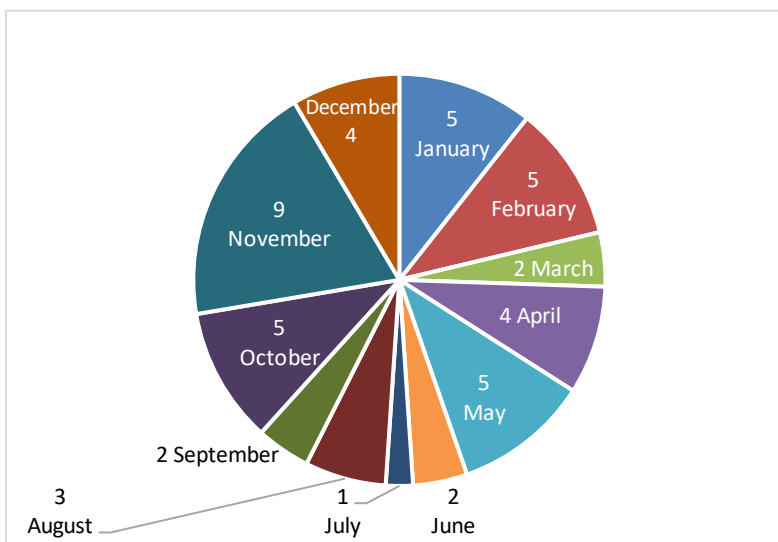
In analyzing historic requests for assistance throughout the years, we noted that the Office typically received more requests in the months of September to November. As illustrated in the chart below, this year the most requests for assistance occurred in November. Previous years displayed trends of increased requests for assistance during the Fall semester. This year, the majority of requests for assistance occurred during the Winter semester, mostly during March and April.

**CHART F: MONTHLY DISTRIBUTION OF NEW REQUESTS FOR ASSISTANCE (Total Requests: 433)**



*Note: Six ongoing requests for assistance were carried over from 2022-2023.*

**CHART G: NEW STUDENT OF CONCERN (SOC) DISTRIBUTION BY MONTH**



*Note: Four ongoing SOC files were carried over from 2022-2023.*

Of the 47 new SOC cases received in 2023-2024, the most were reported in the month of November.

No students were placed on an involuntary leave of absence in 2023-2024, while four students opted for a voluntary leave from their studies. As always, the SOC dossiers received by the Office required varying levels of intervention, coordination and/or implementation of restrictions, where appropriate.

### **Education, Outreach, Promotion and Collaboration**

ORR education and outreach takes many forms throughout the year. The staff participates in student, faculty, and employee orientations, offers workshops and training, and provides information regarding harassment, discrimination, threats and violent conduct.

Throughout 2023-2024, ORR participated in and presented at various University events and activities, primarily in person. Here are some specific examples of our activities during the reporting year:

- Orientation sessions for Concordia's New Faculty and New Chairs, in collaboration with the Office of the Provost, Ombuds, Campus Wellness and Support Services, Equity Office, SARC, and the Office of Indigenous Directions;
- Meeting academic leaders with Campus Safety and Prevention Services to

discuss concerns tied to campus safety;

- A session for faculty members on dealing with challenging behaviours in the classroom, with the Ombuds, Equity Office and Campus Wellness and Support Services, and Centre for Teaching and Learning;
- Academic Unit Heads Professional Development session on “Guiding your faculty members through challenging behaviours in the classroom,” with the Centre for Teaching and Learning;
- Spotlight Series information session for frontline student services staff;
- Information sessions for undergraduate and graduate students, alongside the Sexual Assault Resource Centre;
- EXPLORE Services Fair for students;
- Brown bag lunches with TAs to discuss questions tied to the Code;
- “Spirituali-tea” session for students hosted by the Multi-Faith & Spirituality Centre;
- Training sessions for Concordia Student Advocacy and CSU Student Advocacy.

In addition, our team also attended a variety of training sessions to develop skills needed to address our files effectively. Training during the reporting year included workshops on “Structured Interviews for Violence Risk Assessment” with Campus Safety and Prevention Services, as well as training organized by the Equity Office on various forms of discrimination.

Our team welcomes all invitations to meet with community members, including departments, units, student clubs and more. If you would like to invite our advisors to deliver a presentation or interactive workshop on a particular topic, please do not hesitate to reach out to us at [rights@concordia.ca](mailto:rights@concordia.ca).

## Campus Climate

The 2023-2024 academic year was marked by significant challenges stemming from campus tension and protests tied to the war in the Middle East. Community members and non-members reached out to our Office and other units to share concerns tied to campus climate. Our office offered confidential consultations and referred general feedback and concerns to the correct units. Reported Code violations lead to informal resolution processes, investigations and hearing panels, where appropriate.

In response to campus climate challenges, President Graham Carr announced in April 2024 the launch of a new task force aimed at providing our community with a safe and inclusive campus environment. Since its inception, the STRIVE Task Force has been initiating campus engagement initiatives, in-depth consultations and open dialogue to understand community experiences around identity-based violence. The task force is in the process of developing university-wide recommendations in several areas, such as training and complaint processes aimed at addressing identity-based violence as well as how to promote a climate of respect, empathy and compassion on our campus. I invite you to read more about STRIVE's mandate, structure and leadership on their [website](#). Anyone with concerns about campus climate is encouraged to reach out to the Task Force at [strive@concordia.ca](mailto:strive@concordia.ca).

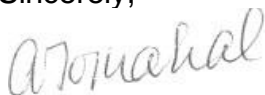
## Closing Remarks

At the time of writing, we have a new team in place at the Office of Rights and Responsibilities. Cynthia Alphonse joined us as Associate Advisor in July 2024, having previously worked with the President's Task Force on Anti-Black Racism. In October 2024, Bailey Hardy started as our new Junior Advisor, supporting both ORR and the Ombuds office. I would like to thank Cynthia and Bailey for their enthusiasm and energy as they have assumed their new responsibilities.

Looking ahead, our Office will continue to focus on equipping our community members with tools and skills needed to encourage civility, de-escalate tensions and address behavioural concerns effectively.

In closing, I would like to extend my thanks to the Secretary-General and my colleagues in the Secretariat for their invaluable guidance and support. I look forward to continuing to collaborate with community members to maintain a safe, respectful and civil environment at Concordia.

Sincerely,



Aisha Topsakal  
Director and Senior Advisor, Office of Rights and Responsibilities

DISRUPTIVE  
BEHAVIOUR  
EQUITY  
DISCRIMINATION  
COOPERATION  
COLLEGIALITY  
DIVERSITY  
TRESPASSING  
CIVILITY  
HARASSMENT  
THEFT  
THREATS  
CONNECTION  
RESPECT  
HARMONY