

**ANNUAL REPORT
OF THE
OMBUDS OFFICE
FOR THE PERIOD
JULY 1, 2014 TO JUNE 30, 2015**

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Visitors to the Ombuds Office appreciate being able to have a confidential discussion with a neutral party about a personal, academic and/or workplace concern. We listen, ask questions and help individuals consider their options. When appropriate we can offer informal mediation and facilitate communication.

The Ombuds Office is informal, meaning that contact with us does not put the university “on notice.” We work to resolve issues informally; we do not judge, reward or punish. If a visitor decides to pursue formal channels, we can refer them to the appropriate office.

The mandate of the Ombuds Office is to ensure that faculty, staff and students receive fair and equitable treatment within the campus system. Our best work is often behind the scenes, and we are pleased that we can be of real assistance in this manner.

OVERVIEW

The Ombuds Office was established by the Board of Trustees (Trustee Document T70-025, Fall, 1969) as a neutral, confidential office on the campus available to assist any member of the larger university community with a university-related problem. The majority of the visitors to our office come because of problems that they were unable to resolve through normal channels, or for which there are no well-defined normal channels. The office can provide information and advice at any stage of a problem. When someone does not know how to handle a situation, we can help him/her survey the resources that are available in the University, and explore possible options for action under existing policies and procedures.

The cases the office deals with run the gamut from academic problems to personnel issues to administrative problems to interpersonal conflicts. Initial discussions in the Ombuds Office are treated as confidential to the extent that the law allows and decisions about what to do are made by the person (or persons) who contacted the office, in consultation with office staff. In addition to offering suggestions, the Ombuds Office can look into a situation, negotiate resolutions, informally mediate conflicts and make recommendations, depending on what seems appropriate in a given situation. Often visitors simply want advice and help in exploring strategies for handling their problems by themselves. At times, such exploration results in a decision to drop issues after discussion has clarified the situation and their options. The Ombuds Office provides staff for any department or work group of the University that wishes to undertake a group discussion of issues that are dealt with by the Ombuds Office.

With respect to the issue of sexual harassment, confidential discussion is available in the Ombuds Office as to the nature of sexual harassment and the University policy that addresses it. After an informal discussion, an individual who concludes that he/she has been subjected to sexual harassment would be referred to an appropriate University reporting point to place the University on notice.

The Faculty Senate and the Trustees are to be commended for the extraordinary job they have done in preserving structural integrity and autonomy of the office. The Ombuds Office could not function without the assurance from the upper administration that such autonomy would be the policy. Ombuds Office staff, as well as visitors, respect the hands-off policy as it leads to a dimension of trust that could not otherwise be developed.

INITIATIVES

During this reporting period, the Ombuds Office undertook a number of initiatives to respond to campus needs and improve our services. Some highlights are:

- Worked toward bringing the operations of the office into alignment with the professional standards of the International Ombudsman Association.
- Worked with the Office of Academic Planning and Assessment to develop and administer surveys to students and faculty on academic honesty
- Prepared to transfer the Academic Honesty and Academic Grievance processing to the Provost's Office

APPOINTMENTS

The Ombuds Office, located in Room 823 of the Campus Center, is open from 9:00 A.M. to 5:00 P.M. In addition, the staff is very willing to attend meetings with faculty, staff, and students in residence halls, classrooms, or other locations convenient to our visitors. When possible, walk-ins are seen but most visitors call ahead for an appointment. Communication with some visitors may take place entirely through e-mail or telephone discussions. Although a personal meeting is the preferred method, some people are unable to come to the campus for such a meeting and are accommodated accordingly.

STAFFING

During the reporting period, the staff of the Ombuds Office consisted of the University Ombudsperson, Assistant Ombudsperson, a full-time administrative assistant and a 20-hour graduate intern during the school year. Catharine Porter was serving in a post-retirement status as Ombudsperson, Martha Patrick as the Assistant Ombudsperson and Kay Politella as the Administrative Assistant. Our Graduate Assistant for the academic year was Elizabeth Vassallo. The Ombuds Office continues to promote its services to the campus community and raise the awareness of students, staff, and faculty that there is a place for them to come for advice and counsel. Staff is on hand at various resource fairs for students and employees, providing general outreach and information about the services available through the Ombuds Office.

VISITOR DATA

During the year 2014/15, the office had 691 visitors, the highest number on record. This represents a 48% increase in visitors compared to 5 years ago. Notable increases during this period: the number of faculty, first-year and sophomore student visitors more than doubled.

Visitor Category	2014/15	2013/14	2012/13	2011/12	2010/11
Employees					
03 Employee	4	8	6	0	2
Classified Employee	43	42	41	25	24
Faculty Member	153	100	90	90	72
Graduate Student Employee	1	1	2	4	0
Professional Employee	49	53	44	50	44
Undergraduate Student Employee	0	3	5	0	0
Sub-total	250	207	188	169	142
Others					
Alumnus/a	8	8	8	9	5
Off-campus	9	17	9	11	7
Parent	34	21	29	44	28
Unknown	1	1	3	50	27
Sub-total	52	47	49	114	67
Undergraduate Students					
Unknown class	21	19	33	1	2
Freshman	44	42	27	35	21
Sophomore	76	65	65	47	33
Junior	92	73	53	77	70
Senior	82	128	105	108	87
Sub-total	315	327	283	268	213
Graduate Students					
Masters	29	26	14	28	15
Doctoral	28	25	36	26	17
Other	0	1	0	0	0
Unknown class	2	5	1	1	3
Non-degree	1	2	3	1	0
Sub-total	60	59	54	56	35
Other Students					
Continuing Ed	6	8	5	8	5
Inactive	6	1	7	1	4
Special	2	0	2	2	1
Sub-total	14	9	14	11	10
TOTAL VISITORS	691	649	588	618	467

TYPES OF CONCERNS

In comparing the data on the types of concerns brought to our office from 2014/15 with the data from 5 years ago, we see a 57% increase in employment-related concerns – this roughly corresponds to the increase in employee visitors. Most notably we see a 133% increase in civility concerns. This may be, in part, due to increasing awareness of the campus’ stand on workplace bullying. The one category with a marked decrease was Administration, most likely the result of improvements in communication and transparency around a number of administrative processes.

TYPE OF CONCERN	2014/15	2013/14	2012 /13	2011/12	2010/11
Academic					
Admission to Program	5	9	2	5	4
Admission to Course	5	3	6	4	4
Course Requirements	1	10	27	12	9
Degree Requirements	11	20	19	24	17
Program Requirements	6	4	8	10	7
Grade Disputes	91	86	88	79	71
Grading Policy & Practice	23	37	44	26	18
Academic Honesty Question	98	76	40	69	38
Exam Policy	28	29	30	25	14
Academic Discipline	6	4	2	8	2
Late Drop/Retro Withdrawal	13	7	23	24	8
Student/Teacher	50	64	44	54	40
Learning Disability	6	6	3	5	3
Continuation in Program	16	13	18	11	5
Miscellaneous Academic	69	76	74	58	45
Quality of Instruction (<i>new</i>)	38	-	-	-	-
Quality of Advising (<i>new</i>)	2	-	-	-	-
Absences (<i>new</i>)	57	-	-	-	-
Total	525	444	428	414	285
Civility					
Discrimination	2	9	2	4	4
Harassment/Bullying	36	27	17	11	6
Racial Harassment	4	4	1	1	1
Sexual Harassment	6	4	2	1	2
Gender Harassment	2	0	1	0	0
Racism	0	1	0	0	1
Interpersonal Conflict	22	21	27	18	20
Conflict of Interest	0	0	0	1	3
LGB Harassment	0	0	1	0	0
ADA non-compliance	4	6	5	3	2
Miscellaneous Civility	36	9	7	3	9
Total	112	81	63	42	48
	2014/15	2013/14	2012 /13	2011/12	2010/11

TYPE OF CONCERN (continued)					
Administration					
Health Fee/Coverage	4	4	3	14	6
Medical Judgment (<i>dropped</i>)	-	0	0	2	1
Financial Aid	19	11	11	14	16
Housing Assignment/Removal	3	3	6	13	9
Discipline/Code of Conduct	5	7	5	15	2
Parking Enforcement/Assignment	5	0	2	5	2
Bursar/Billing	9	13	14	20	16
Meal Plan	2	0	2	0	3
Delay in Service (<i>dropped</i>)	-	0	1	0	1
Administrative Withdrawal (<i>dropped</i>)	-	0	0	1	1
Conflict of Interest	2	0	0	0	0
Eviction/Housing Removal (<i>dropped</i>)	-	2	0	0	4
Miscellaneous Administrative	12	21	10	16	7
Total	61	61	54	100	68
Personnel					
Termination	5	10	2	6	4
Layoff	1	1	1	0	0
Assessment/Evaluation	2	2	1	6	4
Appointment/Reappointment	4	5	2	4	2
Misuse of Authority	3	3	15	4	3
Student Employment	1	4	5	8	1
Payroll	2	3	1	2	2
Working Conditions (<i>dropped</i>)	-	10	9	5	7
Supervisor/Employee	45	43	54	39	32
Employee/Employee	10	9	14	9	12
Promotion/Demotion	8	3	2	1	5
Insurance	0	0	0	0	0
Salary	2	3	2	0	2
Miscellaneous Personnel	30	45	39	26	14
Workplace <i>Climate (new)</i>	25	-	-	-	-
Total	138	141	147	110	88
Miscellaneous					
General Miscellaneous	38	50	29	35	36
Total	38	50	29	35	36

ACADEMIC HONESTY OFFICE

Through the reporting year, the Ombuds Office continued to be designated as the Academic Honesty Office. As such, we served as the “process managers” for all cases of academic dishonesty. We made no judgments, but offered advice to both students and faculty about the University Academic Honesty Policy and the procedures related to informal resolutions, formal charges and appeals. We were available to meet with departments to discuss the policy and faculty members were encouraged to contact the office for guidance whenever a case of dishonesty was discovered. We were pleased to note the continuing trend of faculty following the policy and utilizing the “Informal Resolution” option with an increase of 120% over the number of resolutions filed 5 years ago.

ACADEMIC HONESTY DATA	2014/15	2013/14	2012 /13	2011/12	2010/11
<i>Academic Honesty Charges</i>					
Informal Resolutions	234	172	133	155	106
Formal Charges	4	6	2	3	13
Appeal Hearings	1	3	0	3	10
Charge Upheld	1	3	2	3	2
Charge Overturned	0	0	0	0	8

ACADEMIC GRIEVANCES

Through the reporting year, the Ombuds Office was also designated as the “process manager” for the Academic Grievance Policy. Before a formal grievance was accepted, the Ombuds Office would work with the grievant to attempt to negotiate a resolution. During 2014/15, our office handled the following related concerns: 50 student/teacher conflicts, 23 concerns about grading policy, 28 issues with exam policy, and 91 grade disputes. In almost every case, we were able to negotiate resolutions and settle grievances informally. We convened one academic grievance hearing during the reporting years; the grievance was not upheld.

ACADEMIC GRIEVANCE DATA	2014/15	2013/14	2012 /13	2011/12	2010/11
<i>Academic Grievances</i>					
Grievance Hearings	1	1	0	2	0
Grievance Upheld	0	0	0	0	0
Grievance Dismissed	1	1	0	2	0