

**ANNUAL REPORT
OF THE
UNIVERSITY OMBUDS OFFICE
FOR THE PERIOD
JULY 1, 2001 TO JUNE 30, 2002**

**Presented at the
614th Regular Meeting of the Faculty Senate
February 13, 2003**

**Submitted by Catharine Porter
University Ombudsperson
December 26, 2002**

OVERVIEW

The Ombuds Office was established by the Board of Trustees (Trustee Document T70-025, Fall, 1969) as a neutral, confidential agency available to assist any person with a university related problem. The problems are generally those that have not been resolved through normal channels, or for which there are no well defined normal channels. The Office can provide information and advice at any stage of the process. When someone does not know how to handle a situation, he/she can survey the resources that are available within 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 complaints of harassment and discrimination. 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 advice, the Ombuds Office can investigate a situation, make recommendations, negotiate resolutions, mediate conflicts, and issue reports, depending on what seems appropriate in a given situation. Often clients who approach the office decide that they do not want any active involvement by the Ombuds Office, but 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 appropriately 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 Board of Trustees are to be commended for the extraordinary job they have done in preserving the 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 staff, as well as clients, appreciate this hands off policy as it fosters a dimension of trust that could not otherwise be developed.

APPOINTMENTS

The Ombuds Office is open from 8:00 A.M. to 5:00 P.M. In addition, the staff is very willing to attend meetings with faculty, staff, and students in dorms, classrooms or other locations convenient to our clients. When possible, walk-ins are seen but most clients call ahead for an appointment. Communication with some clients may take place entirely through e-mail or telephone discussions. Although a personal meeting is the preferred method, some clients are unable to come to the campus for such a meeting and are accommodated accordingly.

STAFFING

The permanent staff of the Ombuds Office consists of the University Ombudsperson, Assistant Ombudsperson, a full time secretary, one graduate intern and a part-time student receptionist. Catharine Porter currently serves on Ombudsperson and Mary Wardwell is the Assistant Ombudsperson. Kay Politella is the secretary and Nadine Waterson is the graduate intern.

Both the Ombudsperson and Assistant Ombudsperson serve on various standing committees as well as temporary committees, depending upon the needs of the campus. Catharine Porter serves on SAJIC (Student affairs Judicial Issues Committee) as well as the Affirmative Action Advisory Board. Mary Wardwell serves on the Affirmative Action Advisory Board, Workplace Violence Management Team, Undergraduate Dean's Advisory Group, the Chancellor's Area CDSJ Team, and the Chancellor's Task Force on the Prevention of Alcohol Abuse.

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. Additionally, student viewers of the closed circuit cable channel will see an advertisement for the Ombuds Office, giving information about the location of the office and examples of the types of student oriented issues that the staff handles. Members of the staff are always on hand at various university information fairs for students and employees, providing information about the services available and will continue to work on outreach to the campus. When appropriate, the staff will work with representatives from other areas of the campus to develop policy and provide information and support to faculty and students. For example, the concerns about academic dishonesty have prompted more questions from faculty and students about the University's policy regarding this matter.

Faculty should have received a guide to the *Policy and Procedures Concerning Academic Honesty*. This guide was designed to clarify some of the misconceptions about the current policy and to lead faculty through the process of handling a dishonesty case. Additionally, the office has prepared a handout for students, alerting them to the consequences of being charged with academic dishonesty plus advice on what they should do when they find themselves in such a situation.

SUMMARY OF CASES

Since 1994 when a new database was instituted to record cases handled by the Ombuds Office, 3391 cases have been recorded. This year the staff handled 310 cases as compared to 281 for the previous year. As routine business the staff handled several hundred calls and e-mails requesting general information and advice. Those contacts were not included in the client base.

Clients Served (310)

Employees

Classified Employee	17
Professional Employee	19
Faculty Member	35
Undergraduate Employee	<u>4</u>
Sub-Total	75

Graduate Students

Masters	16
Doctoral	14
Grad Other	<u>6</u>
Sub-Total	36

Others

Alumnus/A	3
Off-Campus Person	4
Parent	10
Unknown	<u>30</u>
Sub-Total	47

Undergraduate Students

Freshman	14
Sophomore	41
Junior	33
Senior	62
Inactive	<u>2</u>
Sub-Total	152

Types of Grievance

Academic

Admission to Program	5	Academic Dishonesty	31
Admission to Course	6	Exam Policy	6
Course Requirements	8	Academic Discipline	10
Degree Requirements	12	Late Drop/Retro "W"	9
Program Requirements	5	Student/Professor	17
Grade Disputes	44	Continuation in Program	4
Grading Policy & Practice	34	Miscellaneous	<u>20</u>
		Sub-Total	211

Diversity

Discrimination	9
Harassment	3
Sexual Harassment	2
Interpersonal Conflict	6
Conflict of Interest	1
Miscellaneous Civility	<u>7</u>
Sub-Total	28

Administration

Health Fee/Coverage	2
Medical Judgment	2
Reduction/Denial Fin. Aid	2
Housing Assignment	12
Administrative Discipline	1
Parking Enforcement/Assign	1
Bursar/Billing	2
Meal Plan	4
Delay in Service	3
Administrative "W"	1
Eviction/Housing Removal	2
Miscellaneous	<u>14</u>
Sub-Total	46

Personnel

Termination	6
Lay Off	3
Assessment/Eval	
Appointment/Reapp.	3
Misuse of Authority	2
Student Employment	8
Payroll	1
Working Conditions	4
Supervisor/Employee	18
Employee/Employee	3
Promotion/Demotion	2
Insurance	1
Salary	2
Miscellaneous	4
Sub-Total	60

General Miscellaneous

Sub-Total	10
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Actions Taken (352)

Advice Only	96
Information/Referral	43
Investigation/Information	114
Expedited	60
Informal Mediation	31
Negotiated Settlement	4
Other	<u>4</u>
Sub-Total	352

Case Resolution (318)

Resolved	173
Unresolved	37
Unknown	6
Formal Hearing	19
Withdrawn	1
In Process	20
No Client Follow-Up	<u>62</u>
Sub-Total	318