

**ANNUAL REPORT
OF THE
OMBUDS OFFICE
FOR THE PERIOD
JULY 1, 2010 TO JUNE 30, 2011**

**Presented at the
717th Regular Meeting of the Faculty Senate
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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 member of the larger University community with a University-related problem--generally problems that had not been resolved through normal channels, or for which there are no well-defined normal channels. It can provide information and advice at any stage of a problem. When someone does not know how to handle a situation, he/she can 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 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, and negotiate resolutions, informally mediate conflicts and issue reports, 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 staff, as well as clients, respects 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 several initiatives to respond to campus needs and improve our services. Some highlights are:

- Worked with a coalition of campus stakeholders on a new workplace bullying initiative
- Gave presentations on Academic Honesty for a variety of classes and campus groups
- Increased our visibility by hosting a display and distributing materials at RA Training, New Students Orientation and the Employee Health Fair
- Updated our outreach materials including our website, public service announcements, and print materials designed by Creative Services
- Established a new records retention policy in consultation with University Counsel
- Attended the annual conference of the International Ombudsman Association in Portland, Oregon and the bi-annual meetings of the East Coast Ombuds Group held at MIT

APPOINTMENTS

The Ombuds Office, located in Room 823 of the Campus Center, 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 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.

ACADEMIC HONESTY OFFICE

The Ombuds Office has also been designated as the Academic Honesty Office. As such, we process all cases of academic dishonesty and offer advice to both students and faculty about the University Academic Honesty Policy and the procedures related to handling either an informal resolution or a formal charge of dishonesty. We strongly encourage departments to arrange a session with one of the staff to review the Policy. Faculty are encouraged to contact the office whenever a case of dishonesty is discovered and a staff member will review the policy and outline the procedures. Faculty should note that all cases of dishonesty and recommended sanctions must follow the official Academic Honesty Policy as it is the only policy that is recognized on this campus.

STAFFING

The permanent staff of the Ombuds Office consists of the University Ombudsperson, Assistant Ombudsperson, a full-time administrative assistant and one graduate intern during the school year. Catharine Porter currently serves as Ombudsperson, Martha Patrick is the Assistant Ombudsperson and Kay Politella is the Administrative Assistant. Our Graduate Assistant for the reporting year was Scott Howard. 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 always on hand at various information fairs for students and employees, providing information about the services available and will continue to work on outreach to the campus.

Clients Served (467)

Employees

Classified Employee	24
Faculty	72
Professional	44
03 Employee	2
Sub-total	142

Others

Alumnus/a	5
Off-campus	7
Parent	28
Unknown	27
Sub-total	67

Graduate Students

Masters	15
Doctoral	17
Other	0
Unknown class	3
Non-degree	0
Sub-total	35

Undergraduate Students

Freshman	21
Sophomore	33
Junior	70
Senior	87
Unknown	2
Sub-total	213

Other Students

Inactive	4
Special	1
Continuing Education	5
Sub-total	10

Types of Grievance (525)

Academic

Admission to Program	4
Admission to Course	4
Course Requirements	9
Degree Requirements	17
Program Requirements	7
Grade Disputes	71
Grading Policy & Practice	18
Academic Honesty Question	38
Exam Policy	14
Academic Discipline	2
Late Drop/Retro Withdrawal	8
Student/Teacher	40
Learning Disability	3
Continuation in Program	5
Miscellaneous Academic	45
Sub-total Academic	285

Diversity

Discrimination	4
Harassment	6
Racial Harassment	1
Sexual Harassment	2
Racism	1
Interpersonal Conflict	20
Conflict of Interest	3
ADA non-compliance	2
Miscellaneous Civility	9
Sub-total Diversity	48

General Miscellaneous

General Miscellaneous	36
Sub-total General Miscellaneous	36

Administration

Health Fee/Coverage	6
Medical Judgment	1
Financial Aid	16
Housing Assignment	9
Administrative Discipline	2
Parking Enforcement/Assignment	2
Bursar/Billing	16
Meal Plan	3
Delay in Service	1
Administrative Withdrawal	1
Eviction/Housing Removal	4
Miscellaneous Administrative	7
Sub-total Administration	68

Personnel

Termination	4
Assessment/Evaluation	4
Appointment/Reappointment	2
Misuse of Authority	3
Student Employment	1
Payroll	2
Working Conditions	7
Supervisor/Employee	32
Employee/Employee	12
Promotion/Demotion	5
Salary	2
Miscellaneous Personnel	14
Sub-total Personnel	88

Action Taken (546)

Advice Only	159
Information with Referral	66
Investigation with Information	162
Expedited	53
Mediated (Informal)	44
Mediated (Formal)	0
Negotiated Settlement	28
Other	34
Sub-total	546

Disposition (465)

Resolved	315
Unresolved	20
Unknown	35
Formal Hearing	7
Withdrawn	3
In Process	17
Other	5
No Client Follow-Up	63
Sub-total	465

Academic Honesty (157)

Consultations	38
Formal Charges	13
<i>Appeals – 10</i>	
<i>(Charges Upheld – 2)</i>	
<i>(Charges Overturned – 8)</i>	
Informal Resolutions	106
Sub-total	157