

**ANNUAL REPORT
OF THE
OMBUDS OFFICE
FOR THE PERIOD
JULY 1, 2011 TO JUNE 30, 2012**

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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 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 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, 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 several initiatives to respond to campus needs and improve our services. Some highlights are:

- Developed and presented a workshop for undergraduate students entitled “Friending Your Faculty”
- Developed and presented a workshop for new Teaching Assistants on promoting academic honesty and avoiding academic grievances
- Continued our work with a coalition of campus stakeholders on a workplace bullying initiative and helped administer a campus-wide survey of employees
- Conducted an extensive review of the current Academic Honesty Policy and drafted proposed changes for consideration by the Faculty Senate.

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.

ACADEMIC GRIEVANCES

The Ombuds Office is designated as the gate-keeper and process manager for campus' Academic Grievance Policy. Before a formal grievance is accepted, the Ombuds Office works with the grievant to attempt to negotiate a resolution. During this reporting year our office handled the following related concerns: 54 student/teacher conflicts, 12 complaints about course requirements, 26 concerns about grading policy, 25 issues with exam policy, and 79 grade disputes. In the vast majority of these cases we were able to negotiate resolutions. We convened 2 academic grievance hearings during the reporting year, Neither grievance was upheld.

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.

VISITOR DATA

There was a significant increase in visitors to our office during this reporting year. In FY12 the office received a total of 618 visitors, up from 467 in the previous year. This represents a 32% increase in visitors. Increases were seen in all visitor categories with the most notable increases in graduate students (60%) and parents (63%).

Clients Served (618)

<i>Employees</i>		<i>Graduate Students</i>	
Classified Employee	25	Masters	28
Faculty	90	Doctoral	26
Professional	50	Other	0
03 Employee	0	Unknown class	1
Graduate Student Employee	4	Non-degree	1
Undergraduate Employee	0	Sub-total	56
Sub-total	169		
		<i>Undergraduate Students</i>	
<i>Others</i>		Freshman	35
Alumnus/a	9	Sophomore	47
Off-campus	11	Junior	77
Parent	44	Senior	108
Unknown	50	Unknown	1
Sub-total	114	Sub-total	268
		<i>Other Students</i>	
		Inactive	1
		Special	2
		Continuing Education	8
		Sub-total	11

Action Taken (728)

Advice Only	234
Information with Referral	116
Investigation with Information	210
Expedited	69
Mediated (Informal)	38
Negotiated Settlement	30
Other	31
Sub-total	728

Disposition (616)

Resolved	500
Unresolved	16
Unknown	21
Formal Hearing	18
Withdrawn	1
In Process	10
Other	4
No Client Follow-Up	46
Sub-total	616

Academic Honesty (240)

Consultations	69
Formal Charges	3
<i>Appeals</i>	3
<i>Charge Upheld</i>	3
<i>Charge Overturned</i>	0
Informal Resolutions	155
Sub-total	240

Academic Grievances (2)

Formal Petitions Accepted	2
<i>Petition Affirmed</i>	0
<i>Petition Denied</i>	2
Sub-total	2