

**ANNUAL REPORT  
OF THE  
OMBUDS OFFICE  
FOR THE PERIOD  
JULY 1, 2012 TO JUNE 30, 2014**

**Presented at the  
741<sup>st</sup> Regular Meeting of the Faculty Senate  
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**Prepared by  
Catharine Porter, University Ombudsperson and  
Martha Patrick, Assistant University Ombudsperson  
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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 complaints of bullying 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 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:

- Served on the Committee on Workplace Climate and Bullying and assisted with the mandatory workshops for employees
- Implemented a new visitor database system with the help of the Office of Informational Technology
- Developed and presented a workshop for incoming international students entitled “Understanding Academic Honesty Standards at UMass Amherst”
- Developed new handouts for students and faculty about academic honesty
- Instituted a protocol for tracking notifications and meetings with first- and second-offenders of the Academic Honesty Policy

## 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.

## STAFFING

The staff of the Ombuds Office consists of the University Ombudsperson, Assistant Ombudsperson, a full-time administrative assistant and a 20-hour 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 Assistants for the reporting years were John Ramos (2012/13) and Elizabeth Vassallo (2013/14). 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**

During the year 2013/14, the office had 649 visitors, the highest number on record. This represents a 30% overall increase in visitors from 5 years ago. Most notable in comparing these years - we saw a 70% increase in employees and a 57% increase in undergraduate students.

<b>Visitor Category</b>	<b>2013/14</b>	<b>2012/13</b>	<b>2011/12</b>	<b>2010/11</b>	<b>2009/10</b>
<b>Employees</b>					
03 Employee	8	6	0	2	3
Classified Employee	42	41	25	24	25
Faculty Member	100	90	90	72	55
Graduate Student Employee	1	2	4	0	0
Professional Employee	53	44	50	44	39
Undergraduate Student Employee	3	5	0	0	0
<b>Sub-total</b>	<b>207</b>	<b>188</b>	<b>169</b>	<b>142</b>	<b>122</b>
<b>Others</b>					
Alumnus/a	8	8	9	5	5
Off-campus	17	9	11	7	14
Parent	21	29	44	28	30
Unknown	1	3	50	27	64
<b>Sub-total</b>	<b>47</b>	<b>49</b>	<b>114</b>	<b>67</b>	<b>113</b>
<b>Undergraduate Students</b>					
Unknown class	19	33	1	2	1
Freshman	42	27	35	21	18
Sophomore	65	65	47	33	50
Junior	73	53	77	70	46
Senior	128	105	108	87	93
<b>Sub-total</b>	<b>327</b>	<b>283</b>	<b>268</b>	<b>213</b>	<b>208</b>
<b>Graduate Students</b>					
Masters	26	14	28	15	17
CAGS	0	0	0	0	0
Doctoral	25	36	26	17	23
Other	1	0	0	0	0
Unknown class	5	1	1	3	1
Non-degree	2	3	1	0	2
<b>Sub-total</b>	<b>59</b>	<b>54</b>	<b>56</b>	<b>35</b>	<b>43</b>
<b>Other Students</b>					
Continuing Ed	8	5	8	5	3
Inactive	1	7	1	4	3
Special	0	2	2	1	2
<b>Sub-total</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>TOTAL VISITORS</b>	<b>649</b>	<b>588</b>	<b>618</b>	<b>467</b>	<b>494</b>

## TYPES OF CONCERNS

In comparing the data on the types of concerns brought to our office from 2013/14 with the data from 5 years ago, we see a 60% increase in employment-related concerns – this roughly corresponds to the increase in employee visitors. Most notably we see a 225% 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	13/14	12 /13	11/12	10/11	09/10
<b>Academic</b>					
Admission to Program	9	2	5	4	7
Admission to Course	3	6	4	4	7
Course Requirements	10	27	12	9	14
Degree Requirements	20	19	24	17	13
Program Requirements	4	8	10	7	12
Grade Disputes	86	88	79	71	72
Grading Policy & Practice	37	44	26	18	42
Academic Honesty Question	76	40	69	38	36
Exam Policy	29	30	25	14	18
Academic Discipline	4	2	8	2	1
Late Drop/Retro Withdrawal	7	23	24	8	13
Student/Teacher	64	44	54	40	46
Learning Disability	6	3	5	3	3
Continuation in Program	13	18	11	5	8
Miscellaneous Academic	76	74	58	45	63
<b>Total</b>	<b>444</b>	<b>428</b>	<b>414</b>	<b>285</b>	<b>355</b>
<b>Civility</b>					
Discrimination	9	2	4	4	1
Harassment/Bullying	27	17	11	6	10
Racial Harassment	4	1	1	1	1
Sexual Harassment	4	2	1	2	1
Gender Harassment	0	1	0	0	
Racism	1	0	0	1	0
Interpersonal Conflict	21	27	18	20	4
Conflict of Interest	0	0	1	3	0
LGB Harassment	0	1	0	0	0
ADA non-compliance	6	5	3	2	0
Miscellaneous Civility	9	7	3	9	8
<b>Total</b>	<b>81</b>	<b>63</b>	<b>42</b>	<b>48</b>	<b>25</b>

<b>TYPE OF CONCERN (continued)</b>	<b>13/14</b>	<b>12 /13</b>	<b>11/12</b>	<b>10/11</b>	<b>09/10</b>
<b>Administration</b>					
Health Fee/Coverage	4	3	14	6	6
Medical Judgment	0	0	2	1	0
Financial Aid	11	11	14	16	7
Housing Assignment	3	6	13	9	7
Administrative Discipline	7	5	15	2	4
Parking Enforcement/Assignment	0	2	5	2	4
Bursar/Billing	13	14	20	16	15
Meal Plan	0	2	0	3	3
Delay in Service	0	1	0	1	0
Administrative Withdrawal	0	0	1	1	0
Conflict of Interest	0	0	0	0	0
Eviction/Housing Removal	2	0	0	4	0
Miscellaneous Administrative	21	10	16	7	15
<b>Total</b>	<b>61</b>	<b>54</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>68</b>	<b>61</b>
<b>Personnel</b>					
Termination	10	2	6	4	9
Layoff	1	1	0	0	0
Assessment/Evaluation	2	1	6	4	2
Appointment/Reappointment	5	2	4	2	2
Misuse of Authority	3	15	4	3	1
Student Employment	4	5	8	1	1
Payroll	3	1	2	2	0
Working Conditions	10	9	5	7	8
Supervisor/Employee	43	54	39	32	29
Employee/Employee	9	14	9	12	14
Promotion/Demotion	3	2	1	5	4
Insurance	0	0	0	0	0
Salary	3	2	0	2	3
Miscellaneous Personnel	45	39	26	14	15
<b>Total</b>	<b>141</b>	<b>147</b>	<b>110</b>	<b>88</b>	<b>88</b>
<b>Miscellaneous</b>					
General Miscellaneous	50	29	35	36	27
<b>Total</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>29</b>	<b>35</b>	<b>36</b>	<b>27</b>

## ACADEMIC HONESTY OFFICE

The Ombuds Office has also been designated as the Academic Honesty Office. As such, we serve as the “process managers” for all cases of academic dishonesty. We make no judgments, but offer advice to both students and faculty about the University Academic Honesty Policy and the procedures related to informal resolutions, formal charges and appeals. We are available to meet with departments to discuss the policy and faculty members are encouraged to contact the office for guidance whenever a case of dishonesty is discovered. We are pleased to note the continuing trend of faculty following the policy and utilizing the “Informal Resolution” option. As always, faculty should note that **no sanction may be imposed on a student for academic dishonesty without following the university’s Academic Honesty Policy.**

ACADEMIC HONESTY DATA	13/14	12 /13	11/12	10/11	09/10
<i>Academic Honesty Charges</i>					
Informal Resolutions	172	133	155	106	166
Formal Charges	6	2	3	13	24
Appeal Hearings	3	0	3	10	6
Charge Upheld	3	2	3	2	3
Charge Overturned	0	0	0	8	3

## ACADEMIC GRIEVANCES

The Ombuds Office is also designated as the “process manager” for the Academic Grievance Policy. Before a formal grievance is accepted, the Ombuds Office works with the grievant to attempt to negotiate a resolution. During the reporting years our office handled the following related concerns: 108 student/teacher conflicts, 37 complaints about course requirements, 81 concerns about grading policy, 59 issues with exam policy, and 174 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	13/14	12 /13	11/12	10/11	09/10
<i>Academic Grievances</i>					
Grievance Hearings	1	0	2	0	0
Grievance Upheld	0	0	0	0	0
Grievance Dismissed	1	0	2	0	0