



Report on the Faculty Ombuds Office:
Pilot Program
2008 – 2009

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Executive Summary

Established jointly by the Faculty Senate and the Provost in March 2008, the Faculty Ombuds office created operations and services based on the International Ombudsman Association's (IOA) Standards of Practice, Code of Ethics and Best Practices, publicized its services to the academic community, and provided assistance to all ranks and titles of faculty. Also, a handful of staff and students contacted the office for services.

Establishing the Office

Located in Kimbel Library, the office is convenient and discrete for visitors with concerns about confidentiality. The office is staffed by one faculty member whose hours are a minimum of 40 per week Monday through Friday or by appointment. The Provost provided funds for training and development of the Faculty Ombuds as well as print resources to assist in services.

Promoting the Services

The Faculty Ombuds created a tri-fold brochure and a website describing principles of practice, services offered, reference resources, and contact information. The Ombuds gave presentations at various faculty meetings and new faculty orientation.

Ombuds' Visitors

In the office's first 18 months of operation, 37 visitors created 54 sessions/contacts (by phone, visit or email) totaling 38.5 hours. Visitors presented 59 unique issues for discussion. The average time per office visit was 37 minutes and the average time spent researching the issue was 6 minutes. Using the IOA's *Uniform Reporting Categories*, issues ranged from difficulties in peer and colleague interactions to workloads and feedback in evaluative relationships.

Recommendations

Understanding that the final decision regarding the future of the office rests with the Faculty Senate and the Provost, the Ombuds recommends establishing a permanent Faculty Ombuds Office. In difficult budgetary times when workloads and responsibilities are strained, the value of an Ombuds office is paramount in addressing questions and concerns. Further, it is suggested that consideration be given to extending Ombuds services to staff when the need is assessed and when additional resources become available to offer quality assistance.

If established, a Faculty Ombuds Office must create a Charter Agreement as prescribed by the IOA as its first step. As the university continues to create and update its policies and procedures, the Ombuds office should also establish written policies and procedures that reflect professional protocol. The importance of clarity in communicating policy and procedure including sanctions and the values of creating a culture of civility are crucial to minimizing complaints.

Background

In the Fall 2008, the Faculty Welfare and Development Committee of the Faculty Senate recommended and the Provost approved a Faculty Ombuds position to serve for an 18-month pilot period to ascertain if such services would be beneficial. Following an internal search, Charmaine Tomczyk, an associate faculty librarian and former Chair of Faculty Senate and former Associate Vice President for Academic Affairs, was elected by the Senate and approved by the Provost as the first Faculty Ombuds. The status of the office and position will be determined in December 2009 through evaluation and assessment by the Senate Executive Committee and the Provost.

Swedish for “representative”, an ombudsman was a “legislative commissioner for investigating citizens' complaints of bureaucratic abuse.” (Encyclopedia Britannica 2009). Today an Ombuds serves to offer options and strategies for resolution to issues of concern between or among various parties. Over 600 Ombuds worldwide are members of the International Ombudsman Association (IOA) which sets standards and best practices for the profession.

2008-2009 Activities

Tomczyk became a member of IOA in June 2008 and completed IOA’s introductory and advanced training sessions in Washington, DC in the summer of 2008. She created an Ombuds website for Coastal Carolina University faculty which was launched in summer 2009 and has had over 400 visits.

In November 2008, Tomczyk presented an interim report www.coastal.edu/ombuds/reports.html to the Faculty Senate and Provost on the Ombuds activities and she presented information at New Faculty Orientations for Fall 2008 and Fall 2009. A tri-fold brochure was created and distributed at the Fall 2008 and Fall 2009 General Faculty Meetings and individual informational meetings were conducted with deans, associate and assistant deans of each college.

I. Visitors

Thirty-seven (37) visitors sought assistance or information from the Ombuds Office from various areas of the university. (See Figure 1. below.) In general, Ombuds tend to have visitors from 2% of their populations. With approximately 550 faculty members at Coastal Carolina University (CCU), Ombuds visitors represent nearly seven percent (7%). By comparison, the University of SC Ombuds (Augustine) reported in 2009, an average of 54 visitors per year over the past three years and he also surveyed Ombuds at 25 academic institutions and found similar numbers of faculty visitors over the past two years. (There is approximately 1,100 faculty excluding adjuncts on the Columbia campus.) Three staff members and two students visited the Faculty Ombuds

office for assistance. These visits were not recorded and subsequently appropriate referrals were made.

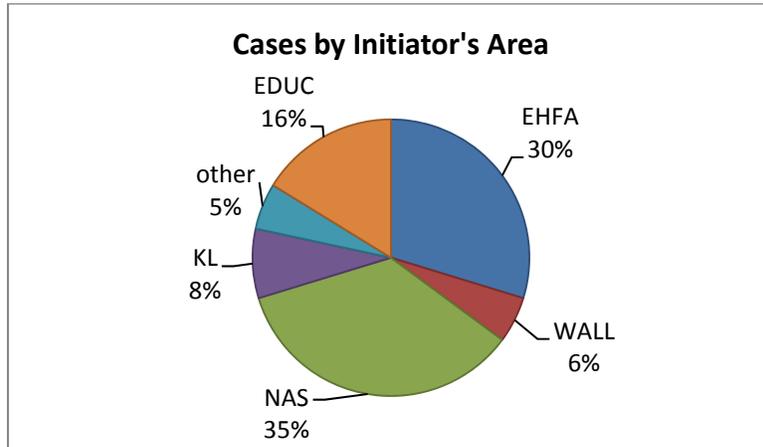


Figure 1

II. Topics of Concern

It is the standard and practice of Ombuds offices to maintain confidentiality, neutrality, independence and informality. This means that no names, detailed records, or documents are maintained on any cases or issues. Statistics are collected of aggregate data to identify trends or patterns that may indicate a need to address issues in a broader context.

Uniform Reporting Categories (2007) are endorsed by the International Ombudsman Association and consist of nine broad categories. Figure 2 below represents the frequency of related issues within these categories presented to the CCU Faculty Ombuds for 2008/09:

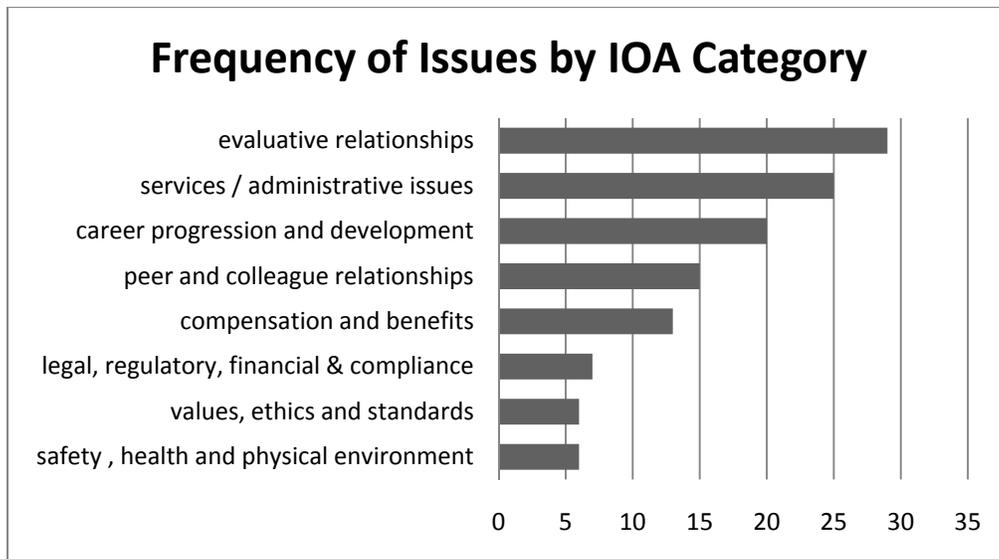


Figure 2

Some of the specific issues represented in these categories include:

- *Evaluative Relationships* focused on disagreements with the rating score or the process of performance evaluations, overall communication difficulties with supervisors and a discontent with the level of workloads.
- *Services/Administrative Issues* focused on concerns over administrative decisions and interpretations of policy and procedures (or lack thereof) relative to academics and evaluations.
- *Career Progression and Development* raised several questions and concerns regarding the P&T process and opportunities for career advancement.
- Bullying and intimidation were frequently expressed in *Peer and Colleague Relationships*.

The top five faculty concerns (which often overlapped the above categories) were:

1. Disagreements with administrative decisions (personal evaluative and campus wide),
2. Communication difficulties with peers and colleagues (admin/faculty and faculty/faculty),
3. Need for creation / revision of policies and procedures (college P&T and disciplinary sanctions),
4. Issues relating to compensation (campus wide, within college/dept, workload, summer comp), and
5. Lack of respect and/or poor treatment by peers and colleagues.

III. Strategies and Options

The Ombuds provided individual consultation regarding application of policies, procedures and practice as well as facilitated joint or team meetings to help mediate (conflict resolution). With the permission of the faculty member, the Ombuds also provided “shuttle diplomacy” in which she served as the go-between with another individual(s) to discuss shared options for solutions.

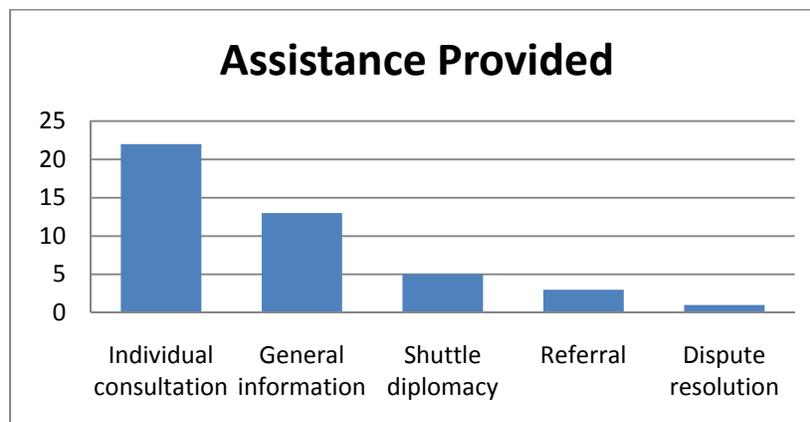


Figure 3

IV. Campus Collaboration

The Ombuds met with various unit heads on campus who may serve as referrals or advisers on Ombuds issues. These areas included Counseling, Campus Police, University Counsel, Student Affairs, and Human Resources. Each unit was cooperative and helpful in offering assistance as needed and where appropriate. All of these units were informed of the Ombuds role and responsibilities and potential referral to them regarding imminent risk of danger, including topics such as harassment (EEOC), criminal incidences and physical violence (police), mental instability (counseling), and legal matters (university counsel). All reporting lines were identified and discussed.

The Ombuds met with several academic areas on campus in 2008/09, including each College Dean, selected Associate/Assistant Deans and Department Chairs, the Faculty Senate Chair. As some of the individuals in these positions changed in 2008/2009, the Ombuds re-visited these offices to meet with the new occupants to talk about Ombuds services. The Ombuds met quarterly with the Provost to review observed trends or patterns in Ombuds cases.

In each of these meetings, the Ombuds felt honored to have been promptly scheduled and welcomed to discuss issues of concern and to work towards reasonable solutions. In meetings with faculty visitors, the Ombuds is privileged to be entrusted with the faculty members' confidences and has received several comments that these encounters have improved their work places and assisted in their decision-making. [Note: An online survey is in progress that will yield additional data for an addendum to this report.]

Summary and Recommendation

The Ombuds Office has provided services to assist faculty with their workplace concerns and questions. Continuation of the Ombuds Office will support the CCU Mission (Coastal Carolina University 7) of

“assuring fair and honest treatment of people with whom it interacts and sustainable stewardship of resources entrusted to it, adopting the highest standards of integrity and accountability, and committing itself to excellence through continuous self-improvement.”

and the values of the university, truth, respect, integrity and excellence, as exemplified in its *Statement of Community Expectations*.

“Coastal Carolina University is an academic community that expects the highest standards of honesty, integrity and personal responsibility. Members of this community are accountable for their actions and reporting the inappropriate action of others and committed to creating an atmosphere of mutual respect and trust.”

Works Cited

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