Report on the Faculty Ombuds Office

July 2017 through June 2018

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Executive Summary

This is the tenth report from the Faculty Ombuds Office to the Faculty Senate Executive Committee and the Provost and Executive Vice President. This is my third report as the current ombuds and it is intended to serve as a continuation (yearly activities report), an evaluation of trends and issues affecting faculty, and my recommendations for consideration towards positive change for the faculty, the campus community and the ombuds office. This report and earlier reports can be accessed at http://www.coastal.edu/ombuds/reports.html.

Background

The Coastal Carolina University (CCU) Faculty Ombuds Office was established in March 2008 as a pilot at the recommendation of the Faculty Welfare and Development Committee, a standing committee of the Faculty Senate. Since 2008 the office has offered services to all faculty members with Charmaine Tomczyk initiating and serving as faculty ombuds on a part-time basis. She earned her certification as an Organizational Ombuds Practitioner (CO-OP) from the International Ombudsman Association in January 2012.

In the May 2012 Faculty Senate meeting, the Faculty Ombuds position was approved to become a permanent position effective December 2012. The approved motion, stipulated “the individual serving as Faculty Ombuds would serve no more than two consecutive three-year terms.” This faculty position administratively reports to the provost and serves the Faculty Senate. In April 2015, an internal search conducted by the Faculty, Welfare and Development Committee, voted by the Faculty Senators and approved by Provost Byington, Steve Madden, professor of communication, was appointed faculty ombuds beginning July 2015.

Ombuds services at CCU strive to adhere to the International Ombudsman Association’s (IOA) Standards of Practice, Code of Ethics and Best Practices (www.internationalombudsmanassociation.org). These include the principles of confidentiality, independence, impartiality and informality. The Faculty Ombuds Office is not a “place of notice” for official University reporting, as stated in its charter http://www.coastal.edu/ombuds/charter.html.
Activities

Consultations and Facilitations

During 2017-2018 (July through June) there were 52 contacts made for ombuds services, which is slightly lower than the previous year but are similar with visits going back to 2012-2013. The bar graph below illustrates the numbers of contact each year since the inception of the office.

![Number of Contacts for Ombuds Services by Year](image)

Figure 1

The three most frequently presented categories (this has been generally consistent over the last five years) of issues as classified by the International Ombudsman Association (IOA) for 2017-2018 were Peer and Colleague Relationships; Evaluative Relationships; and Values, Ethics and Standards. The first two listed here continue to be in the top three over this period of time as well. Details regarding these issues are noted later in this report.

The types of ombuds assistance provided (in order of prevalence) continued to be:

- Individual consultations - Offering strategies and options to help a visitor resolve his/her issues and analyzing the entire scope and ramifications of the issues involved to develop effective strategies and action plans,
- General information - Answering questions regarding policy, procedures and practices or referring faculty to specific departments or policies and procedures relevant to their expressed concerns,
- Group facilitation and/or informal mediation - Meeting with two or more faculty members to analyze common concerns, encouraging positive communication between and among colleagues and supervisors or within departmental units for improved workplace relationships and productivity, and
- Shuttle diplomacy wherein the ombuds (with the permission of the visitor) serves as a go-between for third party intervention to clarify issues and facilitate resolutions between individuals.
Faculty Development / Informational Events

During Fall 2017 New Faculty Orientation, the ombuds staffed an EXPO table distributing brochures and general information about CCU ombuds services. Increasingly, new faculty members are more familiar with or aware of ombuds services and their beneficial role in the workplace. The Spring 2018 ombuds survey showed that the majority of respondents found out about the ombuds office, largely through three methods: a faculty colleague, the Faculty Senate, or the new faculty orientation.

Campus Service

The ombuds continues to contribute as a member of the standing committee to review and revise the Faculty Manual. Several recommended revisions were forwarded to the Faculty Senate and subsequently approved with the continuing purpose of reviewing and improving the Faculty Manual.

The ombuds attended a meeting sponsored by the CCU AARP chapter and presented brochures.

A video was set up last year where the services of the ombuds office can now be viewed online buy all faculty.

The ombuds continues to keep informed about the CCU Anti-Bullying Working Group and researching reliable methods of measuring and assessing campus climate.

Satisfaction Survey

The annual spring ombuds survey administered by the Office of Institutional Research, Assessment and Analysis yielded 193 respondents. The 2018 survey showed that approximately 76% of those who contacted the ombuds office last year were satisfied or very satisfied with the services provided.

When asked if they would refer others to the ombuds office 73% said yes and if they needed the services of the ombuds although never having gone there 87% agreed. The results of this survey are noted in Appendix A of this report.

Ombuds Training

The current faculty ombuds attended the International Ombudsman Association’s annual conference in April 2018 participating in workshops covering “communicating through conflict, organizing the ombuds office, operationalizing fairness as an organizational ombuds, the ombuds role in creating a more compassionate workplace as well as other meetings.” Additionally serving one year as a reviewer for the JIOA (The Journal for the International Ombudsman Association) the current ombuds is now one of seven journal board members.

Recommendations

The following recommendations made for last year are still the most relevant and have been noted for several years now.
1. Given that evaluative and peer relationships have been the highest areas of concern over several years, although efforts have been made it is evident that effective interpersonal communication is still a concern, both verbal and written, among and between colleagues and supervisors. The protocol might include guidelines for email communiqués – both style and content – (especially as more online faculty and programs are developed), guidelines for conducting collaborative meetings, and respectful conversations; all of which uphold the CCU Code of Ethical Conduct and promote professional courtesy. The continuance of abrasive workplace behaviors and disrespectful treatment should be noted, examined and sanctions enforced for such conduct.

2. A proposal to expand the Faculty Ombuds Office services to staff / has now been instituted (Summer 2018) with an interim Staff Ombuds. Conversations for a Student Ombuds should continue.

3. It is recommended that all campus units connected to teaching develop and provide personnel development training to explore examples of and sanctions for violations of the CCU Code of Ethical Conduct. This excellent document is a foundation and framework for a responsible, healthy workplace upholding ethical behavior. The CCU Code of Ethical Conduct interpretations and applications require a more wide-reaching dialogue for better intervention. Further, examples of sanctions for violations of this Code (and the processes leading to sanctions and appeals) must be clearly written and explained. If the campus community currently does this for its students’ Code of Conduct, then we should lead by example and clarify protocol for employees, too. Through these efforts, I too believe, our community will function more effectively and follow these codified CCU professional standards.

4. It is recommended that the university continue the expansion of its’ mandatory training to include scenarios that focus on how to identify behaviors (cognitive and affective) that may lead to abusive behaviors and how to take action to reduce an escalating scene or to seek intervention to reduce risk of harm. Interpersonal communication training and other constructive activities promoted as a positive approach. Also, creation and wide distribution of a preparedness plan and resources for this and related emergencies would be reassuring for the campus community (in combination with active shooter training). Also, expanded instruction on Title IX that includes scenarios and case studies to exemplify appropriate action by “responsible persons” could be beneficial.

July 2017 - June 2018 Activities

I. Contacts

One contact is defined as one visit to the Faculty Ombuds Office: an email, a phone call or another communication to the ombuds. This year there were fifty two (52) contacts (not including staff visitors). These contacts represented individuals from all colleges and other academic offices. The distribution of contacts by unit varied compared to last year as illustrated in Figures 2a and 2b below.
Figure 3 below shows the distribution by unit of total hours provided to faculty contacts.

The prevalent method of contacting the ombuds continues to be visits to the office in Sands Hall 111. Whenever possible and most convenient, face-to-face meetings are the ombuds’ preferred method of contact. Because email and voicemail are not considered confidential methods, and knowing that phone messages are linked to the email system, faculty members are encouraged to leave messages that simply provide their names, numbers and convenient times for a return call.
The Faculty Ombuds Office location is ideal for inconspicuous meetings that require confidentiality and anonymity. Visitors have no difficulty finding the office. The Other data category tracked in Figure 4 below includes meetings elsewhere on and off campus. Whichever method of contact is used, the ombuds’ response time is typically within 24 hours, or sooner.

![Methods of Contact, 2017/2018](image)

Figure 4

The Faculty Ombuds Office website [www.coastal.edu/ombuds](http://www.coastal.edu/ombuds) has been regularly updated to include links to other CCU and current external resources as well as new book materials added to the ombuds bibliography available in Sands Hall 111 and some in the Kimbel Library collections (with call numbers provided).

II. Topics of Concern / Issues Presented In keeping with the IOA Principles and Standards, no individuals’ names, detailed records, or related documents are maintained on any contacts, cases or issues presented to the ombuds. Statistics are collected as aggregate data to identify trends or patterns that may demonstrate needs to be addressed in broader contexts.

The rubric used to categorize issues of concern is the *Uniform Reporting Categories of the International Ombudsman Association (IOA).* These nine IOA broad categories are defined below and their frequency is expressed in Figure 5. Individual contacts often contain multiple issues simultaneously and all are counted in the data presented here. This year comparisons of categories are shown numerically but not as approximate trends.
1. Compensation & Benefits - (Presented 5 times)

*Defined as: Questions, concerns, issues or inquiries about the equity, appropriateness and competitiveness of employee compensation, benefits and other benefit programs.*

**Most frequent concerns:** Delays in processing compensation paperwork; COBRA option is expensive, especially for families), Increase in faculty contributions.

2. Evaluative Relationships - (Presented 40 times)

*Defined as: Questions, concerns, issues or inquiries arising between people in evaluative relationships (i.e. dean-department chair, department chair – faculty member and peer review groups - faculty member)*

**Most frequent concerns:** Disagreements between faculty members and supervisors regarding performance appraisals and ratings; summative not formative reviews with little advice on improvements; department’s priorities are perceived to be misaligned with individual performance expectations and career progression; minimal timely feedback provided to faculty throughout year. Advances for administrative positions that don’t include all faculty affected. Perceived supervisor preference toward certain faculty over others.

3. Peer and Colleague Relationships - (Presented 31 times; *includes cases of bullying and/or abrasive*)
Defined as: Questions, concerns, issues or inquiries involving peers or colleagues who do not have a supervisory-employee relationship (e.g., two faculty members within the same department or conflict involving members of a faculty group).

Most frequent concerns: Unprofessional behaviors including disrespect and poor treatment, perceived ruthless competition; yelling and harsh language; avoidance of communication leading to mistrust, loss of cooperation and integrity.

4. Career Progression and Development (Presented 21 times)

Defined as: Questions, concerns, issues or inquiries about dismissals for cause and non-reappointment or tenure denial, as well as processes and decisions regarding entering and / or leaving a position or added responsibilities, (i.e., nature of and changes in current assignments, job security, and separation).

Most frequent concerns: Career options after non-reappointment, especially when termination is immediate; frequent changes or additions to job expectations and performance levels; lack of clarity in some evaluative rubrics; lack of or absence of mentorship. Increased paperwork and expectations for 3rd year and 5th year reviews as well as post tenure reviews.

5. Legal, Regulatory, Financial and Compliance (Presented 8 times)

Defined as: Questions, concerns, issues or inquiries that may create a legal risk (financial, sanctions, etc.) for the organization or its members if not addressed, including issues related to waste, fraud or abuse; federally mandated compliance requirements (such as Title IX, harassment, hostile work environment, active shooter protocol).

Most frequent concerns: Over 1/4 of these concerns were perceived harassment; others were perceived hostile work environment including abrasive, bullying treatment by colleagues and supervisors.

6. Safety, Health, and Physical Environment (Presented 3 times)

Defined as: Questions, concerns, or issues about Safety, Health and Infrastructure-related issues.

Most frequent concerns: Work-related stress and work-life balance due to a pattern of unprofessional treatment; insufficient mandatory training addressing only reactive moves (such as, after the violation or incident) instead of teaching preventative measures to be proactive.

7. Services/Administrative Issues (Presented 26 times)

Defined as: Questions, concerns, issues or inquiries about services or administrative offices including from external parties.
Most frequent concerns: Perceived arbitrary judgments by administrators who disregard faculty recommendations. Perceptions of preferential treatment for certain people over others.

8. Organizational, Strategic, and Mission Related (Presented 7 times)

Defined as: Questions, concerns or issues that relate to the whole or some part of an organization’s mission, goals, objectives and/or initiatives.

Most frequent concerns: Excessive use of positional power and authority without faculty input prior to decisions; lack of rationale expressed or without request for feedback before implementation; negative organizational and departmental climates.

9. Values, Ethics, and Standards (Presented 22 times)

Defined as: Questions, concerns, issues or inquiries about the fairness of organizational values, ethics, and/or standards, the application of related policies and/or procedures, or the need for creation or revision of policies, and/or standards.

Most frequent concerns: Concerns dealing with shifts in values and campus culture due to rapid growth; no apparent sanctions imposed for violations of Code of Ethical Conduct, no apparent oversight on administration at all levels.

Summary

Activities and services of the Faculty Ombuds Office continue to provide a benefit to CCU faculty and to exercise fairness, respect, integrity and confidentiality. The 2018 Ombuds Faculty Survey confirms the satisfaction of faculty contacts to the office and its programs. Faculty contacts to the Ombuds Office expressing concerns over evaluative relationships and colleague interactions continue to be areas of strong and frequent conflict. Monitoring related campus climate issues from employees’ viewpoints should be measured regularly through reliable surveys and other methods.

Serving as faculty ombuds I am appreciative of the support from the Faculty Senate Executive Committee and the Provost in making ombuds services available to all faculty. It is my sincere hope that the office’s services will be sustained, utilized, and expanded based on the needs of the faculty and that the staff – and eventually CCU students to have a student ombuds. With this comprehensive model, evident at many academic institutions, the CCU community will gain the advantages of ombuds services and extend service equitably to all of its members.