Report on the Faculty Ombuds Office

December 2009 - June 2010

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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. Some staff and students also contacted the office for services.

Evaluative Review of Ombuds Office
The Ombuds Office was created as a pilot program for 18-months after which it would be evaluated to determine its continuation (with or without stipulations) or its discontinuation. In late fall 2009, the Senate Executive Committee and the Provost selected faculty members from each college and the Provost’s Office to serve on an ad hoc Review Committee to make a recommendation. Committee members included Erin Burge (Chair), Sallie Clarkson, Florence Eliza Glaze, Emory Helms, Brandon Palmer, Darlene Slusher, and Yoav Wachsman.

The committee received the Ombuds Interim and Annual Reports as posted on the Ombuds website http://www.coastal.edu/ombuds/reports.html and the results of the online survey to all faculty about the office. (The survey had 95 respondents.) The Committee also interviewed the Faculty Ombuds with questions relating to the report and survey data and other questions for further clarifications. The Committee submitted its report to the Faculty Senate in December 2009, recommending the continuation of the Office for three (3) years on a pilot basis after which time the office would be reviewed again by a faculty committee. The committee further recommended that Charmaine Tomczyk continue as the Faculty Ombuds on a part-time (one-third) basis.

Promoting the Services
The Faculty Ombuds tri-fold brochure, website and written reports describe the principles of practice, services offered, reference resources, and contact information. The Ombuds gave presentations at various faculty meetings throughout the academic year and presented and facilitate discussion at the New Faculty Orientations. Given the positive results of last year’s survey and word-of-mouth, the use and effectiveness of the Office increased.

Ombuds’ Contacts
Forty-seven (47) contacts were made to the Ombuds office during this approximately six-month period from mid-December through mid June. The number of staff contacts increased from 2 to 8 and are represented in this report’s data. Both the number of contacts and time spent on issues increased since the last reporting cycle. There were 141 unique issues reported by these 47 contacts. (See Figure 1 below.) The website was visited 222 times (on 11 pages) during this period as compared to 400 times during the initial 18-month time period.
Figure 3

Recommendations

- Increased awareness of the Ombuds office and its services should continue through publicity and programs. It is recommended that the Ombuds Office offer information sessions on concerns that have shown trends. These could be offered independently or in conjunction with other programs in human resources or public safety.
- It is recommended that attendance at New Faculty Orientation sessions become mandatory (if not in total then by a high percentage) so that new faculty can be better informed about the campus, its policies and expectations.
- As new academic policies and procedures are approved, they should be widely disseminated to faculty, similar to broadcast emails to all faculty regarding new policies or new updates. This process should also be followed by individual colleges regarding their college policies and procedures, particularly those related to faculty evaluations, promotion and tenure and post-tenure.
- When eligible, the Ombuds should seek IOA certification.

December 2009-June 2010 Activities

I. Contacts

Forty-seven (47) contacts were made to the Ombuds office during this approximately six-month period from mid-December through mid June compared to 54 contacts recorded during the first 18 months of Ombuds office operation. These contacts were initiated from various academic units. (See Figure 2 below) These contacts include eight (8) staff contacts, eight (8) administrators, two (2) mid-management administrators and one (1) Associate (temporary) Faculty member. Figure 2 below also indicates the number of hours spent with contacts. For
example thirteen (13) contacts were made from the Edwards College of Humanities and Fine Arts and a total of thirteen (13) hours were spent during these contacts.

**Figure 2**

Most of the contacts started with an appointment to visit the Ombuds Office. Some were phone contacts and a handful were meetings elsewhere on campus (offices or common areas). This latter type of contact is noted as “other” in the chart below.

**Figure 3**

### II. Topics of Concern / Issues Presented

As expressed to each contact to the Ombuds office, 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 as aggregate data to identify trends or patterns that may indicate a need to address issues in a broader context.
It is only the visitor’s privilege to break confidentiality if he/she chooses. However, there may be exceptions to the confidentiality protocol. Alleged cases of legal, regulatory, financial or compliance violations (such as criminal activities, discrimination against federally protected classes, etc) that demonstrate a preponderance of evidence may be formally reported to the University.

Further it is the visitor’s responsibility to present data on relating to one’s own concerns and not represent the perceptions or views of others. The Ombuds’ role is to provide information, help re-frame issues, and suggest options and strategies for the visitor to consider in solving his/her concerns.

The rubric used to categorize issues of concern is the *Uniform Reporting Categories* (2007) as endorsed by the International Ombudsman Association. They consist of nine broad categories.


1. **Compensation & Benefits**
   Questions, concerns, issues or inquiries about the equity, appropriateness and competitiveness of employee compensation, benefits and other benefit programs.

2. **Evaluative Relationships**
   Questions, concerns, issues or inquiries arising between people in evaluative relationships (i.e. supervisor-employee, faculty-student.)

3. **Peer and Colleague Relationships**
   Questions, concerns, issues or inquiries involving peers or colleagues who do not have a supervisory-employee or student-professor relationship (e.g., two staff members within the same department or conflict involving members of a student organization.)

4. **Career Progression and Development**
   Questions, concerns, issues or inquiries about administrative processes and decisions regarding entering and leaving a job, what it entails, (i.e., recruitment, nature and place of assignment, job security, and separation.)

5. **Legal, Regulatory, Financial and Compliance**
   Questions, concerns, issues or inquiries that may create a legal risk (financial, sanction etc.) for the organization or its members if not addressed, including issues related to waste, fraud or abuse.

6. **Safety, Health, and Physical Environment**
   Questions, concerns, issues or inquiries about Safety, Health and Infrastructure-related issues.

7. **Services/Administrative Issues**
   Questions, concerns, issues or inquiries about services or administrative offices including from external parties.

8. **Organizational, Strategic, and Mission Related**
   Questions, concerns, issues or inquiries that relate to the whole or some part of an organization.

9. **Values, Ethics, and Standards**
   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.

*Figure 4*
IOA Categories 2, 4, 7 and 9 (highlighted in gray above) indicate those issues most frequently voiced to the CCU Faculty Ombuds. Figure 5 below represents the frequency of these categories reported to the CCU Faculty Ombuds for the period Dec 2009-June 2010.

![Frequency of Issues: Dec. 2009 - June 2010](chart.png)

**IOA Categories**

**Figure 5**

The **predominant** concerns and issues reported by CCU visitors within these four frequent Categories were:

**Issue 2 Evaluative Relationships** (29 reports):
- Disagreements involving performance appraisals / evaluations and interpretations of “what counts” (**8 reports**)
- Lack of Communication (quality and/or quantity) from supervisors; absence of “transparency” (**6 reports**)
- Lack of Respect or poor treatment by supervisors, demonstrations of inappropriate behavior, disregard for people, rudeness, and/or crudeness (**4 reports**)

**Issue 4 Career Progression and Development** (25 reports):
- Lack of campus opportunities for career development, coaching and mentoring (**4 reports**)
- Questions regarding Promotion and Tenure policies and procedures and college’s “patterns of elaboration” as several revisions were endorsed or are in progress (**3 reports**).
- Concerns and questions about termination and/or non-renewal (**3 reports**).
- Changes in assignments (teaching and non-teaching (**3 reports**).
- Disputed decisions linked to recruitment and selection (**3 reports**).
Issue 7 Services / Administrative Issues (18 reports)
- Disagreements with Administrative Decisions and Interpretation/Application of Rules - impact of non-disciplinary decisions, decisions about requests for administrative and academic services, (12 reports)
- Responsiveness/Timeliness (time involved in getting a response or return call or about the time for a complete response to be provided) (4 reports)

Issue 9 Values, Ethics, and Standards (17 reports)
- Standards of conduct (fairness, applicability or lack of behavioral guidelines, e.g., Academic Honesty, plagiarism, Codes of Conduct, conflict of interest, etc. (12 reports)

The top two issues most reported (12 times each) were:
- “Disagreements with Administrative Decisions and Interpretation/Application of Rules”
  In many cases, employees were unaware of the rules or the sanctions for violations or non-adherence.
- “Standards of conduct (fairness, applicability or lack of behavioral guidelines and/or Codes of Conduct, e.g., Academic Honesty, plagiarism)” This is an area that has lacked policies and guidelines until most recently with the Statement on Academic Integrity, Student code of Conduct revision, policy on non-violence in the workplace, research misconduct and others that can affect faculty.

III. Strategies and Options

The Ombuds provided individual consultation and general information regarding application of policies, procedures and practice as well as facilitated joint or team meetings to help facilitate reconciliation through conflict resolutions. 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.

![Type of Assistance Provided](image-url)
IV. International Ombudsman Association (IOA) activities

The CCU Ombuds is one of over 600 members of the International Ombudsman Association (IOA) and participates in several of the organization’s activities:

- Serves as a liaison member of the Legal and Legislative Affairs Committee (LLAC) which has temporarily merged with the Professional Ethics, Standards and Best Practices Committee. The LLAC Committee conducts teleconference meetings each month and its agenda include a range of topics, such as revision of confidentiality principles to posting resources for practitioners on the IOA website.
- Subscribes to the IOA Journal and is an active participant on the IOA academic listserv, an important information exchange for Ombuds in academic settings.
- Continues to be a mentee in the IOA Mentor Program and has contacted her academic mentor on several occasions for advice and feedback.
- Participated in roundtable discussions at the Fifth Annual IOA Conference, April 2010.

The IOA worked for several years to establish a certification for Ombuds. The Board of Certification for Certified Organizational Ombudsman Practitioners was established in 2009 for the purpose of awarding the Certified Organizational Ombudsman Practitioner℠ or CO-OP℠ credential. The eligibility criteria and credentialing process involve an application and satisfactory completion of a written exam which is administered annually. Criteria include an earned bachelor’s degree from an accredited institution and one year of full-time work (or equivalent) as a practicing Ombuds. Once certified, one must accumulate 60 units of professional continuing education for re-certification within four years of certification. The CO-OP℠ credential is intended to be used exclusively as a designation of an individual professional's knowledge and experience and their adherence to IOA standards and best practices.

V. 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. During Dec 2009 – June 2010, four referrals were made to individual colleges (deans/department chairs) and to Human Resources and Equal Opportunity for more information. The Ombuds met quarterly with the Provost to review observed trends or patterns in Ombuds cases.

Summary

The campus community has become more aware of the Ombuds Office as evidenced by the increase in contacts. The range of workplace concerns and questions has expanded as Coastal Carolina continues to transform into a larger institution with more employees, more opportunities and more challenges.

As University policies are created and/or revised, notification to the campus community is essential for proper adherence and best practices. This would help to validate the stated Values
of the university, its stance on “transparency” and reduce arbitrary actions due to lack of information. In addition to email broadcasts, more workshops and information sessions should be offered to all employees, particularly new faculty and those in supervisory roles.

Works Cited

Coastal Carolina University, *Faculty Ombuds Survey*. Fall 2009 Snap Survey. Web.

Review Board for the Faculty Ombuds Office Pilot Project (Erin Burge, Chair), *Recommendations to the Faculty Senate and Provost Office*. Coastal Carolina University Faculty Senate Minutes, December 2009. Print.