

Faculty Ombudsman Report 2014-2015

Covering the period from September 01, 2014 – August 31, 2015

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The office of the faculty ombudsman was established by Faculty Rule 3335-5-45.3 in 2009. I am the second person to hold the office.

Responsibilities of the faculty ombudsman are to serve as an advisor to faculty and assist them in determining the viability of their issues, to direct faculty to appropriate offices and policies, to mediate early stage complaints informally, and to present an annual report to Faculty Council. The office operates in keeping with the standards of practice established by the International Ombudsman Association, which are to maintain independence, confidentiality to the extent permitted by law, impartiality/neutrality, and informality. A more detailed description of these principles is available on the ombudsman website. The Ohio State Office of Legal Affairs has determined that the ombudsman must report allegations of sexual harassment or intended violence to self or others. Notes maintained by the ombudsman are not subject to the open records act. Faculty are not required to consult the ombudsman and the ombudsman does not advocate for either the faculty or the administration.

The ombudsman had roughly 75 interactions (meetings, phone calls or emails) with 43 different faculty during the 2014-2015 academic year. Faculty visitors came from 35 different units on campus, 11 different colleges and one regional campus. Most faculty interacted with the ombudsman only once, although several interacted with the ombudsman multiple times over the course of the year. As shown in the accompanying table, these numbers are similar to those seen in years past, although the number of faculty who contacted the ombudsman more than once increased. All faculty ranks were represented, including instructors. In general, faculty contacted the ombudsman because they:

- a. were seeking information about a university process/policy with which they were engaged or were concerned that the process was flawed;
- b. disagreed with a decision made by a chair, dean or director and wanted information on how to appeal the decision;
- c. wanted assistance in analyzing or discussing options for dealing with a situation or issue.

More specifically, issues or perceived concerns brought to the ombudsman included:

Conflict with Colleagues

- non-collegial behaviors
- research collaboration (authorship, data management, scope of work)
- bullying
- breach of confidentiality

Department/Department Chair Issues:

- working conditions (space, collegiality, lack of support, failure to make decisions in a timely manner)
- annual reviews/evaluations
- change or lack of change in work (FTE, scope, teaching, reappointment, termination)
- faculty development
- salary/compensation

Assistance with University Policies/Guidelines

- Promotion and Tenure
- Family and Workplace Violence
- Faculty Misconduct
- Retaliation
- Paid External Consulting
- Discrimination

In addition, I met with select university personnel and groups to promote the office of the faculty ombudsman, to gather information requested by visitors, to serve as a neutral third party at the request of faculty in carefully selected situations, and to mediate early stage disputes.

The following observations are based on this past years' service as faculty ombudsman:

1. There were several interactions with faculty dealing with how allegations of university policy and/or faculty rule violations are handled. Questions centered on the process for initiating and investigating allegations, the authority and rights and responsibilities of parties involved in the process, interpretation of the policies and how policies dovetail with faculty rules. Discussions among faculty, unit and university leadership, Legal Affairs, and Human Resources might help make the process more consistent and transparent.
2. From the perspective of the ombudsman (who only hears one side of the story), alleged conflicts between faculty and department or college leadership seem to be particularly difficult to manage satisfactorily, given the current customary academic operations. Discussions with persons holding ombuds-like positions at other universities suggest that there may be ways to improve how these situations are handled so that they can be resolved to the satisfaction of all parties. For example, Virginia Tech has a Senate Committee on Reconciliation that assists faculty with these issues.ⁱ
3. As noted last year, maintaining up to date patterns of administration and appointment, promotion, and tenure documents can help promote a common understanding of department and college operations and expectations.

Finally I would like to once again thank the Ohio State Chapter of the AAUP, the Office of Academic Affairs, Human Resources and the University Senate for their assistance this past year.

Respectfully submitted,

Lynne E. Olson

Faculty Ombudsman and Professor Emerita

Comparison of Ombudsman Office Interactions by Year				
Reporting Period	Number of Interactions	Number of Faculty Served	Number of Departments/ Units Served	Number of Regional Campuses Served
October 01, 2010 - June 30, 2011 (Rall)	65	35	22	2
July 01, 2011 - June 30, 2012* (Rall)	85	59	30	2
July 01, 2012 - August 31, 2013 (Gerber/Rall)	81	46	29	2
September 01, 2013 - September 15, 2013 (Rall)	0	0	0	0
September 16, 2013 - August 31, 2014 (Olson)	82	61	38	2
September 01, 2014 – August 31, 2015 (Olson)	75	43	35	1

* the faculty ombudsman appointment was increased from 9 to 12 months

ⁱ “The function of this committee is to offer advice and counsel to faculty members who seek it, particularly in relation to disputes with immediate supervisors or university administrators. The Committee on Reconciliation has a special function within the formal grievance process. It can help facilitate conversations between faculty members and their supervisors, with the goal of reaching mutually agreeable solutions. The committee can also assist faculty members in negotiating difficult situations or providing advice in relation to issues that are not eligible for resolution through the grievance process.”