

June 21, 2016

Report to President Crow

Annual Activity Summary of the University Ombudspersons Committee

2015-2016

This report is a brief overview of the services rendered by members of the university Ombudspersons Committee during the 2015-2016 academic year and summer. Individuals serving as Ombudspersons provide informal dispute resolution and mediation when complaints are received from faculty, academic professional, students, or staff. Ombudspersons also provide consultation and referral when the issues raised fall outside the range of eligible committee services.

Faculty Cases

A total of **16** issues, complaints, or requests for information/consultation were received from full- or part-time faculty, up considerably from last year's total of 6. Four ombudspersons (including the committee chair) handled the bulk of the cases. As in the past, tenure denial issues and conflicts with administrators or unit directors comprised the majority of complaints or information-gathering inquiries. The issues were handled, in most cases, via email or phone consultation, but several involved face-to-face meetings. Two new forms of conflict (for our committee) arose this year: (1) administrator diversion of funds assumed to be under faculty control, and (2) administrator nepotism. These sensitive issues were not subject to mediation; and the complainants had to find creative methods of dealing with them. Of the two problem areas, resolution was easier and more direct in the first case. The nepotism issue (involving an administrator placing a relative [allegedly performing poorly] in a hard money position amidst downsizing) is currently being handled at a level higher than the Ombudspersons Committee.

Staff and Academic Professional Cases

As was true last, only **1** case came to our attention this year. A newly hired staff member complained of arbitrary and unfair treatment on the part of supervisors. After consulting with several Ombudspersons, the individual is taking a "wait-and-see" approach, hoping the situation will resolve itself in time.

Student Cases

In contrast to last year, when 9 student cases came to our attention, **16** arose for 2015-2016. These complaints were handled by two Ombudspersons, and roughly half were satisfactorily resolved. The cases were varied, and included a mother intervening for her child who was seeking admission to a particular program and several graduate students unhappy with their interactions with professors over grading policies or program dismissal procedures. In one instance, gender discrimination was raised as an issue. As noted last year, there is a need for graduate students to be better informed about their rights and about the procedures for mediation

or grievance. Finally, it should be noted that no evidence of Title IX violations emerged for graduate or undergraduate students.

Directions

Having dealt with 33 cases, the Ombudsperson Committee has had a busy year. It is therefore important that another Ombudsperson for staff be added to our group and that the student advising role so ably performed by P.F. Lengel (who is assuming new duties) be filled by a qualified individual for the coming year. Although the retirement of one of the Temp-based Ombudspersons (Ron Rutowski) is a loss, we are not yet recommending that another person be recruited to take his place. We plan to again hold a beginning-of-the-year meeting of all Ombudspersons in the fall to gather data on the effectiveness/ineffectiveness of the committee's mission and to consider future directions.

Submitted by: Paul Karoly and P.F. Lengel

cc. Deborah Clarke