



Report on the
Faculty Ombuds Office
July 2011- June 2012

*Prepared by Charmaine Tomczyk, Faculty Ombuds
June 25, 2012*

Executive Summary

Background

Established jointly by the Faculty Senate and the Provost in March 2008, the Faculty Ombuds Office operations and services are based on the International Ombudsman Association's (IOA) Standards of Practice, Code of Ethics and Best Practices. As such it follows the principles of confidentiality, independence, impartiality and informality. These principles and the services offered by the Ombuds office are explained online www.coastal.edu/ombuds (also linked from the Faculty Senate webpage www.coastal.edu/facsenate), in print by a tri-fold brochure (available in Sands Hall 111 and distributed to academic offices) and through the New Faculty Orientation program and College meetings. In the May 2012 Faculty Senate meeting, the Faculty Ombuds position was approved to become permanent effective December 2012.

Activities

The Faculty Ombuds, Charmaine Tomczyk, earned International Ombudsman Association (IOA) certification as a certified organizational ombuds practitioner (CO-OPSM) in January 2012. Following a two-hour exam and extensive interview with a member of the Board of Certification, the CCU Faculty Ombuds became one of approximately eighty-five (85) IOA certified ombuds internationally. The CO-OPSM 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. The Faculty Ombuds also co-presented informational sessions with CCU's EEOC Officer at approximately 30 faculty search committee meetings during 2011/12 to discuss confidentiality and fairness in the search process. She also presented information about ombuds services at CCU New Faculty Orientation and College meetings at the beginnings of semesters.

During 2011/2012, there were 56 contacts to the Ombuds Office (compared to 63 last year) totaling about 46 hours. This level of activity has decreased slightly from past years. The five most frequently presented issues by contacts were Evaluative Relationships (32 times), Peer and Colleague Relationships (32 times), Career Progression and Development (29 times), Organizational, Strategic and Mission Related issues (32 times) and Values, Ethics and Standards (29 times). Details on these and other issues are available later in this report.

The predominant types of assistance provided were individual consultations (offering strategies and options to help the visitor solve their problems) and general information (answering questions regarding policy, procedures and practices). Other assistance involved meetings with two or more individuals for conflict resolution and/or mediation, 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 concerns.

Recommendations

- A. It is recommended that all faculty members be given easy access to the policies and procedures, specific to their department and college, especially those relating to promotion and tenure "patterns of elaboration" or "performance expectations." If these documents are not yet available electronically, it is recommended that they be made available in paper format within the college and/or department until they can be digitized. Particularly as department Chair positions have limited terms, the continuity of access and sharing of revisions of these documents is essential to faculty and for effective management and supervision.

- B. Based on the Ombuds' four years of visitors' issues and concerns, it is recommended that the university consider identifying a common space for faculty to engage in informal conversations and interactions outside of their respective departments. To foster collegial communication and opportunities for building relationships, a Faculty House or similarly designated location is a typical campus venue lacking at Coastal. Workloads and personal responsibilities tend to minimize opportunities for faculty interactions and collaboration. A designated on campus meeting space reserved for faculty could offer beneficial interchanges and champion collegiality.
- C. Given the recently-approved permanent status of the Faculty Ombuds position and the Ombuds' certification status, a Charter Agreement should be drafted and approved for the Ombuds Office along with a relevant university policy and office procedures. The Charter, or terms of reference, is an expected IOA standard for established Ombuds Offices which affirms the essential characteristics of the ombuds function and sets forth the authority and responsibilities of the office within the university. The Charter should also states the understanding about the ombuds office not accepting notice on behalf of the university.

July 2011 - June 2012 Activities

I. Contacts

Fifty-six (56) contacts were made to the Faculty Ombuds from July 2011 to late June 2012.. This year's contacts expressed 188 issues which are categorized using the *Uniform Reporting Categories*, as endorsed by the International Ombudsman Association. This year's contacts were initiated from various academic units and indicated a distribution similar to past years, and reflective of unit size. (See Figure 1.)

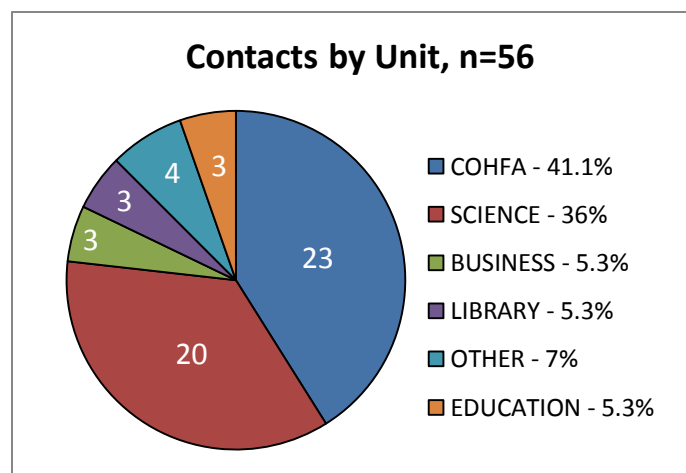


Figure 1

The prevalent method of contacting the Ombuds was by visiting the office in Sands Hall room 111. (See Figure 2.) As email is not considered a confidential method, faculty were encouraged to phone and/or visit the Ombuds office. Now that phone messages are linked to the email system, faculty should continue to be discrete when leaving messages. The Other category includes meetings elsewhere on campus and email.

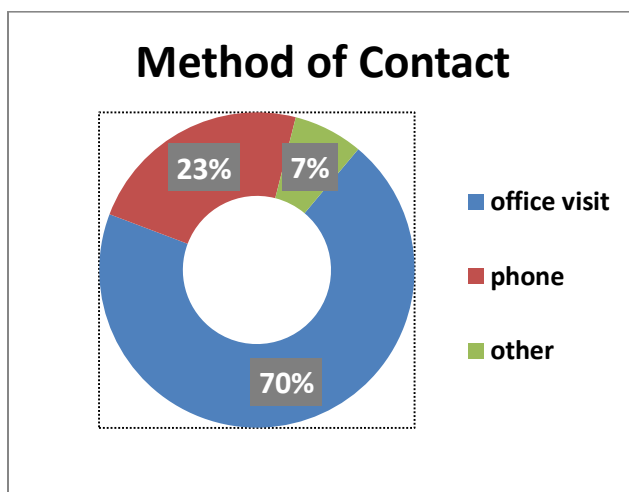


Figure 2

The Ombuds website pages are regularly updated. This year the site’s pages were visited 732 times compared to 561 times noted in last year’s report.

II. Topics of Concern / Issues Presented

In keeping with the IOA principles and standards, no names, detailed records, or documents are maintained on any contacts, cases or issues. Statistics are collected as aggregate data to identify trends or patterns that may demonstrate needs to address in a broader context.

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. Individual contacts often contain multiple issues simultaneously and all are counted.

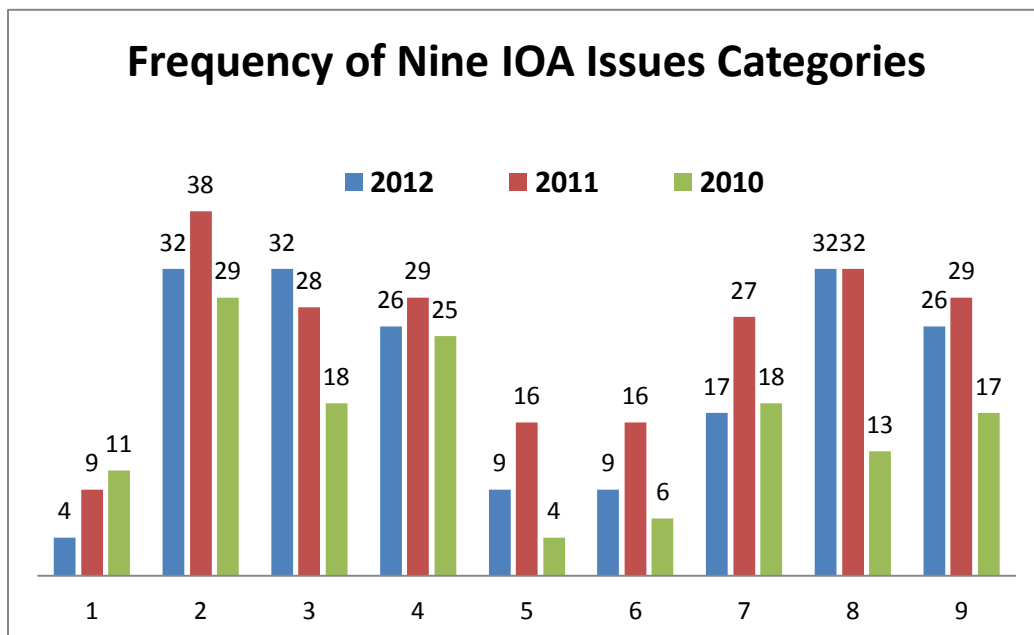


Figure 3

1. Compensation & Benefits (Presented 4 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: compensation in terms of merit or cost-of-living increases and salary compressions; extra compensation for additional work.

2. Evaluative Relationships (Presented 32 times)

Defined as: Questions, concerns, issues or inquiries arising between people in evaluative relationships (i.e. supervisor-employee, faculty-student.)

Most frequent concerns: department climate, collegiality between Chair and faculty member and/or among faculty members; concerns over inequity of treatment, assignments and schedules; disagreements over performance appraisals and evaluation

3. Peer and Colleague Relationships (Presented 32 times; *the only issue category that has been rising since 2010 – includes 4 cases of bullying and/or mobbing.*)

Defined as: 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.)

Most frequent concerns: disrespect or unfair treatment in written or verbal communication leading to distrust and loss of integrity

4. Career Progression and Development (Presented 26 times)

Defined as: 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.)

Most frequent concerns: questions and concerns about job expectations, tenure processes and avenues for career development (mentorship and travel funds)

5. Legal, Regulatory, Financial and Compliance (Presented 9 times)

Defined as: 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.

Most frequent concerns: perceived harassment (sexual, racial)

6. Safety, Health, and Physical Environment (Presented 9 times)

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

Most frequent concerns: work-related stress and work-life balance; work environment (air quality, mold)

7. Services/Administrative Issues (Presented 17 times)

Defined as: Questions, concerns, issues or inquiries about services or administrative offices including from external parties.

Most frequent concerns: administrative decisions and interpretation / application of policies; lack of responsiveness to concerns raised

8. Organizational, Strategic, and Mission Related (Presented 32 times)

Defined as: Questions, concerns or issues that relate to the whole or some part of an organization.

Most frequent concerns: use of positional power / authority; organizational and departmental climates.

9. Values, Ethics, and Standards (Presented 26 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: shifts in values and campus culture; standards of conduct.

III. International Ombudsman Association (IOA) Activities

The CCU Faculty Ombuds is one of over 600 active members of the International Ombudsman Association (IOA) and participates in several related activities, including participation in two webinars: one on bullying and mobbing and another on non-defensive communication. Also, she completed her 2-year term as a mentee in the IOA mentor program.

Summary

Unsolicited feedback from Ombuds Office visitors validates the need and usefulness of the services offered. Many express thanks for helping them to clarify issues and identify viable options for their consideration. Some simply need an impartial resource to listen to their circumstance and review the analyses that led to their conclusions. In most cases new information or perspectives are introduced to guide them in their “next steps.” While Coastal has a “no retaliation” policy, the realities of positional power and fears of reprisal influence visitors to seek the independence, confidentiality, neutrality and informality practiced at the ombuds office.

As Coastal Carolina continues to progress and transform its culture to that of a larger institution, attention to the growth, development and nurturing of its faculty members is paramount to providing a quality education to its students. Just as we recognize the need for our students to make connections with the campus community to improve retention and to interact in a respectful manner as per our “community standard”, Coastal should provide campus-wide opportunities and resources for its faculty to exercise similar collegial interactions with their peers, both within and outside of their departments. While these are challenges of growth, a university priority for such faculty venues could prove beneficial in many ways.

As Faculty Ombuds, I remain grateful for the support of the Faculty Senate Executive Committee and the Provost in making ombuds services available to all faculty and for respecting the International Ombudsmen Association principles and operations practiced by the CCU Ombuds Office. By making the Faculty Ombuds position a permanent one, the university has expressed its commitment to providing alternative channels in support of helping faculty resolve workplace conflicts and clarifying answers to their workplace concerns. It continues to be my privilege to assist in these efforts.