

Coastal Carolina University
Faculty Ombuds Interim Report
November 2008

Overview of the Office

The Office of the Faculty Ombuds is intended to serve as an information resource to faculty and to enhance the workplace and mission of the university by providing support and assistance to faculty. The Faculty Ombuds strives to insure that each faculty member is treated fairly and equitably and maintains the standards of confidentiality, impartiality, independence and informality according to the Code of Ethics and Best Practices of the International Ombudsman Association of which the Ombuds is a member.

Case Activities

Since the announcement of the Faculty Ombuds position in March 2008, there have been 23 contacts, representing 14 faculty initiators made to the office in person or by phone. Length of time of contacts varied from 10 minutes to three hours, such as a quick phone conversation to a dispute resolution session. The average time spent per contact was 35 minutes. The numbers of faculty initiators were fairly evenly distributed from among the colleges, except from the Wall College of Business from which no faculty contacted the Faculty Ombuds Office and the Library in which two contacted the Ombuds office.

Types of assistance provided included individual consultations (60%), general information (20%), shuttle diplomacy (with the Ombuds serving as a “go-between”) and dispute resolution.

The issues of concern expressed in cases included:

- benefits/ compensation
- equity of treatment
- assignments and schedules
- communication
- career progression and development
- trust and integrity
- priorities, values and beliefs
- behavior of service providers
- standards of conduct
- respect/treatment
- work-related stress and work/life balance
- policies and procedures
- administrative decisions / interpretations
- retaliation

More specifically, these concerns related to the need for improved access to information regarding benefits, policies and procedures (and their interpretations) regarding evaluations and compensation, methods of assigning summer class assignments and compensation, opportunities for career advancement and general tensions and lack of collegiality among faculty and between faculty and mid-management administrators. In about fifty percent (50%) of the cases, the Ombuds referred the faculty

initiator to another office for more information or assistance or arranged meetings with the faculty member's supervisor, sometimes with the faculty member present and other times without, to discuss their issues of concern. Other cases involved problem clarification and assessment with no referrals.

Observations

The Faculty Ombuds office represents a systemic change at Coastal. It offers another resource for faculty seeking answers to their questions about their welfare and development and their workplace environment. The International Ombudsman Association estimates that academic Ombuds offices serve an average of 2% of its entity's population. As more faculty members become aware of the office and its services, it is hoped that more will seek its assistance as appropriate. There were three (3) staff members who visited the Faculty Ombuds office seeking individual consultation. While they are not represented in the numbers or activities of this report, their concerns mirrored those of the faculty and each expressed a need for an Ombuds who serves staff.

Other Activities

Campus Collaboration

The Faculty Ombuds met with each Dean and/or Associate Dean, the Interim Associate Vice President for Student Affairs, the Chief of University Police, the Executive Director of Human Resources and Organizational Development, the Director of Benefit Services, and the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission Officers to introduce the services and standards of the Ombuds office and to discuss methods for collaboration and/or referral between and among offices where appropriate. The Faculty Ombuds served on a panel presentation with human resources staff at the Fall 2008 New Faculty Orientation program. The Faculty Ombuds regularly attends Faculty Senate, the Ad Hoc Committee to Review and Revise the Faculty Manual and local chapter meetings of the American Association of University Professors as a non-voting resource person. A printed brochure outlining the Ombuds office's services was distributed at the Fall 2008 General Faculty Meeting and at Faculty Senate.

Ombuds Training and Professional Activities

The Faculty Ombuds attended several sessions at the International Ombudsman Association (IOA) Conference and two training workshops, Ombuds 101 and Ombuds 101 Plus. As a member of the IOA, the Ombuds serves on its Standards, Ethics and Best Practices Committee and serves as a liaison to the IOA Communications Committee. Upon request through the IOA Mentoring Program, the Faculty Ombuds has been assigned a mentor who is an Ombuds at another South Carolina university.

Acknowledgements

My special thanks to the faculty and administrators, who have supported the office, used the Ombuds services, referred individuals, and/or expressed their appreciation for my assistance with their concerns.

Respectfully submitted,
Charmaine Tomczyk, Faculty Ombuds