

**Annual Report  
The University Ombudsman  
The University of South Carolina  
August 15, 2009 to August 14, 2010**

## **I. Background**

The University Ombudsman serves as a **confidential, neutral, informal and independent** resource for faculty concerns and conflicts. The University ombudsman adheres to the Code of Ethics and the Standards of Practice of the International Ombudsman Association (IOA). The University ombudsman serves approximately 2,132 faculty members (tenured and non-tenured) on the flagship campus in Columbia, the four-year campuses in Aiken, Beaufort, and Upstate, and the two-year campuses in Lancaster, Sumter, Salkehatchie, and Union. The interested reader is referred to the ombuds website at [www.sc.edu/ombuds](http://www.sc.edu/ombuds) where you will find previous annual reports, historical information regarding the establishment of the Office of the University Ombudsman at USC, a definition of the word “Ombudsman”, and information on the *International Ombudsman Association (IOA)*.

## **II. 2009-2010 Activities**

On August 31, 2009 the University ombudsman gave a presentation on the work of the ombudsman and on the topic of “*Bullying*” to participants in the Academic Leadership Development Program (ALDP), established by the Southeastern Conference Academic Consortium (SECAC) to help develop the leadership skills of tenured faculty on SEC campuses.

On October 7, 2009, the University ombudsman made a presentation to the Faculty Senate on the role of the office and provided senators with a copy of the third annual report of the University ombudsman. [http://www.sc.edu/ombuds/doc/2008\\_2009AnnualReport.pdf](http://www.sc.edu/ombuds/doc/2008_2009AnnualReport.pdf) On October 22, 2009, the University ombudsman made a presentation on the topic of “*Faculty Bullying and Other Passive-Aggressive Pressures*” to the Women’s Faculty Organization.

The University ombudsman participated in a specialized training course on *Conflict Resolution* sponsored by the *International Ombudsman Association* on October 29, 2009. The course was held in Charlotte, NC. Finally, on Thursday, January 7 and again on August 12, 2010 the University ombudsman made a presentation introducing attendees at the New Faculty Orientation to the work of the University ombudsman.

## **III. Visitors and Topics of Concern**

During the period of this report (August 15, 2009 to August 14, 2010) the University ombudsman met with 48 faculty members who were first time visitors to the ombuds office. These cases may have involved the University ombudsman’s simply listening to a visitor’s concern, offering information about University policies and procedures, discussing a concern and clarifying an issue, helping identify and evaluate a range of options for resolving a problem,

gathering information and offering referrals to other resources, helping visitors prepare for a difficult conversation or writing a letter as needed, facilitating communication - indirectly or through shuttle diplomacy, or working for collaborative agreements between those involved in a dispute. The University ombudsman also tracks perceived issues and trends and makes recommendations for institutional change as appropriate. I have done an informal survey of a number of Carnegie Foundation Tier I institutions and the average number of **faculty visitors** to the ombuds office at those institutions based primarily on annual reports, self-reports or reports in the *Ombuds Blog*. The number of faculty visitors to the ombuds office at these academic institutions averaged 49 in 2006-2007 (n = 26 schools), 46 for 2007-2008 (n = 29) and 42 in 2008-2009 (n = 23). Over the past four years this office has assisted some 212 faculty members for an average of 53 visitors per year. Thus, the number of faculty members utilizing the services of the University ombudsman seems to be in keeping with other Carnegie Foundation Tier I institutions.

In order to preserve the confidentiality of visitors to the University ombudsman, no notes, documents, or records of any kind are maintained related to the identity of individual faculty members including their gender, race, department, college or school. The only information retained from contacts by faculty visitors with the University ombudsman is that regarding the nature of the issue discussed. The *International Ombudsman Association* has a series of nine standardized reporting categories under which are an extensive series of subcategories that permit placement of any issue, question, concern, or inquiry. This system will permit comparison with the annual report from last year that followed the same nine "Uniform Reporting Categories" of the IOA. A copy of these Uniform Reporting Categories is available on the [Ombuds website](#) with previous annual reports. In this report, categories are listed in decreasing order based on the number of visitors whose concern fell under that category.

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

The largest number of visitors to the University ombudsman was in this category. In particular there were questions and concerns about career progression (promotion, reappointment or tenure), resignation (concerns about whether or how to voluntarily terminate employment or how such a decision might be communicated appropriately without future repercussions). Other concerns included job security, dual career opportunities for contingent faculty, elimination of tenure track position with funding elimination for a program, extension of the tenure clock, and the effective date of resignation with regard to compensation for a 9 month employee.

**(2) Peers and Colleague Relationships** - *Questions, concerns, issues or inquiries involving peers or colleagues who do not have a direct supervisory relationship (e.g., two faculty members within the same department or conflict involving faculty members of the same college or unit).*

In this category were issues related to respect/treatment of peers and colleagues (demonstrations of inappropriate regard for others, not listening, rudeness, crudeness), bullying (targeted abusive, threatening, and intimidating behaviors), diversity related

comments or behaviors perceived to be insensitive and offensive on the basis of race and similar behaviors related to gender, as well as perceived threats of physical violence. Issues in this category are troubling and difficult to resolve. In many cases while faculty may report these concerns to the ombudsman they may be unwilling to come forward or make their concerns public.

**(3) Evaluative Relationships** - *Questions, concerns, issues or inquiries arising between people in evaluative relationships (i.e. senior faculty-junior faculty, program director-faculty, chair-faculty, dean-faculty, faculty-student)*

A number of questions, concerns and issues arose in this category during the past year including problems related to respect/treatment including demonstrations of inappropriate regard for people, bullying (abusive behavior), departmental climate (prevailing behaviors being condoned or unchallenged within a department for which a chair or program director has responsibility), supervisory effectiveness (management of the department, failure to address issues), and equity of treatment (favoritism where one or more individuals receive preferential treatment).

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

A number of faculty members brought concerns to the University ombudsman related to leadership and management decisions (organizational, college, school, or departmental changes), organizational climate (issues related to organizational, college, school or departmental morale), change management (quality of leadership in facilitating organizational change), and interdepartmental/interorganizational disputes about transfer of equipment and resources.

**(5) Services/Administrative Issues** - *Questions, concerns, issues or inquiries about services or administrative offices.*

The questions and concerns in this category related to the quality of service, responsiveness, administrative decisions and the interpretation/application of policies and procedures.

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

In this category faculty brought forth concerns regarding the obligation of the University to fund the base salary of faculty on the tenure track in the face of serious budgetary downturns and the role of salary supplements involving clinical faculty.

**(7) 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.*

Most troubling are instances of unwelcome physical or sexual conduct that create a hostile or intimidating environment for faculty or graduate students.

#### **IV. Final Comments**

It is worth reminding our colleagues on the senior and regional campuses that the University ombudsman is available to help them with their concerns and conflicts. It also bears repeating that the services of the University ombudsman are available to tenured, tenure track and non tenure track faculty on all campuses.

In the first annual report of the University ombudsman (August 2007) several faculty members expressed concern about the need to establish standards of conduct for all members of the faculty in the workplace and in the promotion and tenure process. It was encouraging to note in last year's report that in April 2009 the General Faculty approved changes in the Faculty Manual including a faculty commitment to the Carolinian Creed - an expression of the University's values and standards that sets forth expectations for members of the University community, including the importance of personal and academic integrity and a respect for the dignity, rights, and property of others. The preface to the Faculty Manual now states that the "faculty of the University of South Carolina recognize our special responsibility to honor and exemplify the values and principles expressed in the Carolinian Creed."

It might be appropriate for the University to think creatively about how to promote civility and strengthen faculty commitment to the Carolinian Creed and hold one another accountable to it when issues related to respect/treatment of peers and colleagues, bullying, abusive, threatening, or coercive behaviors occur.

As noted above, alleged instances of unwelcome physical or sexual conduct that may create a hostile or intimidating environment for faculty or graduate students are most troubling. Although the recipients of this behavior often are reluctant to come forward, faculty, staff and students are strongly encouraged to assert their rights and protect themselves and others from such harassment. The University ombudsman is an informal and confidential resource available to assist faculty and graduate students identify and evaluate options for how such situations can be handled including formal actions that can be taken.

Whatever success was achieved during this past year by the University ombudsman was attributable to the cooperation and support of faculty and administrative leaders in the University who were willing to listen to various matters brought to their attention and work with all parties concerned to find a fair and just resolution to the issues at hand. The University ombudsman is particularly appreciative of the administration's willingness to support the work of this office without violating the independence, neutrality, informality or confidentiality of the ombuds process.