

Annual Report
The University Ombudsman
August 15, 2006 to August 15, 2007

In August of 2006, a new part-time University Ombudsman position was created by Provost Becker. Following an internal search, Jim Augustine, a School of Medicine professor and former chair of the Faculty Senate, was appointed as the first University Ombudsman. He spent time while chair of the Faculty Senate serving informally in this capacity and researching the role and function of faculty ombudspersons at other universities. The University Ombudsman deals with problems and concerns that are outside the faculty grievance process and other formal channels. Similar positions exist for dealing with staff and student concerns at the University of South Carolina.

In 2005 The Ombudsman Association and the University and College Ombuds Association merged and became the International Ombudsman Association (IOA). IOA is the largest international association of professional organizational ombudsman practitioners in the world, representing over 600 members from the United States and across the globe. The University Ombudsman adheres to the Code of Ethics and the Standards of Practice of the International Ombudsman Association and serves as a **confidential, neutral, informal** and **independent** resource for faculty concerns and conflicts.

A website for the University Ombudsman was launched in September of 2006 <http://www.sc.edu/ombuds/> providing information about the office, the Ombuds, the IOA Standards of Practice and the Code of Ethics as well as links to other ombuds-related resources. In October of 2006 the University Ombudsman successfully completed Ombudsman 101 training sponsored by the International Ombudsman Association in Arlington, Virginia. Ombudsman 101 training is a program in the basic theory and practice of the ombudsman profession. In November of 2006 the office of University Publications prepared a brochure describing the office of the University Ombuds and the services offered by that office. In December 2006, Jim Augustine became an Associate Member in good standing of the International Ombudsman Association. In February of 2007 the University Ombudsman made a presentation to the Faculty Senate on the role of that office. In April of 2007 the University Ombudsman attended the International Ombudsman Association Annual Conference in St. Louis, MO. Finally at the end of this first year of operation, the University Ombudsman made a presentation to some 100+ new faculty members at the new faculty orientation session on August 14, 2007.

During the period of this report (August 15, 2006 to August 14, 2007) the University Ombudsman met with some 61 visitors (in person, via email, or by phone) who sought assistance from the office. In a similar one year period ombuds colleagues at LSU reported 45 faculty visitors, at the University of Iowa 61 faculty visitors, and at UMass Amherst, 39 faculty visitors. In order to maintain the confidentiality of visitors to the University Ombudsman, this report follows several of the nine "Reporting Categories" of the IOA.

1. Employee Compensation & Benefits. Questions, concerns, issues or inquiries about the equity, appropriateness and competitiveness of employee compensation, benefits and other benefit programs.

There were a small number of faculty visitors whose concerns fell under this category involving salary concerns and concerns related to benefits.

2. Evaluative Relationships. Questions, concerns, issues or inquiries arising between people in evaluative relationships (i.e. supervisor, faculty)

By far this was the category with the greatest number of visitors to the ombuds office. There were requests for help in dealing with issues between individuals being supervised, visitors came with concerns about yearly performance appraisals, faculty members raised issues about the prevailing departmental climate, visitors had concerns about the management of their department or college and visitors expressed concerns about the equity of treatment of one or more individuals in their department or college. There were diversity-related issues brought to the ombudsman as well as some who came with issues related to the lack of respect in their treatment by their unit head, questions related to trust and integrity in the way faculty members were dealt with, communication problems, and bullying.

3. Career Progression and Development. 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.)

There were visitor concerns regarding a disputed decision linked to recruitment and selection of a new faculty member. Several different faculty members came to the ombuds with promotion, tenure or reappointment concerns and others had concerns about termination or non-renewal of their appointment and concerns regarding the re-employment of a former or retired faculty members.

4. Safety, Health, and Physical Environment. Questions, concerns, issues or inquiries about Safety, Health and Infrastructure-related issues.

Faculty members sought help with concerns about work related stress and work-life balance.

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

Faculty concern was expressed to the ombuds about administrative decisions and the interpretation and application of university policies and procedures including those applied to retired faculty and to the treatment of retired faculty.

6. Values, Ethics, and Standards Questions, concerns, issues or inquiries about the fairness or need for revision of policies, values, and standards of conduct.

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.

Whatever success may have been 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 Ombudsman is particularly appreciative of the University administration's willingness to support the work of this office without violating the independence, neutrality, informality or confidentiality of the ombuds process.