

Introduction:

At the most fundamental level, an ombuds [*ombudsman or ombudsperson*] is one who assists individuals and groups in the resolution of conflicts or concerns. Ombuds work in all types of organizations, including governmental agencies, colleges and universities, corporations, hospitals and other medical facilities, and news organizations.

- The principles under which the Faculty Ombuds functions are consistent with the [Standards of Practice](#) and the [IOA Code of Ethics](#) of the International Ombudsman Association.
- The services of the Faculty Ombuds completely voluntary and are available to tenured, tenure track and non-tenure track faculty on all USC system-wide campuses except for [USC Upstate](#) which has its own Faculty Ombuds.
- The Division of Student Affairs has a student ombudsperson, Lisa Jerald (777.4172) who deals directly with conflicts and concerns of undergraduate students.
- Graduate students with conflicts or concerns are encouraged to contact Dale Moore in the Graduate School at 777.8237
- The Faculty Civility Advocate is charged with resolving complaints of faculty-on-faculty workplace bullying under ACAF 1.80. To meet with the Faculty Civility Advocate, please contact Dr. Susan Bon at 777-2907 or fca@mailbox.sc.edu
- The University offers free and confidential support for faculty who need to address personal or work-related challenges and concerns through the Employee Assistance Program (EAP). The EAP program offers financial counseling, marriage counseling, free legal assistance, and supervisory support 24/7 by logging into the EAP website (username “USC” and password “guest”) or by calling 800-633-3353.

Ombuds practice is guided by four ethical standards:

- **INDEPENDENT:** The faculty ombuds is independent in structure, function, and appearance to the highest degree possible within the organization.
- **INFORMAL:** The faculty ombuds, as an informal resource, does not participate in any formal adjudicative or administrative procedure related to concerns brought to his/her attention. The faculty ombuds has no administrative decision-making power.
- **NEUTRAL:** The faculty ombuds, as a designated neutral, remains unaligned and impartial. The faculty ombuds does not engage in any situation which could create a conflict of interest.
- **CONFIDENTIAL:** The faculty ombuds holds all communications with those seeking assistance in strict confidence and does not disclose confidential communications unless given permission to do so. The only exception to this privilege of confidentiality is where there appears to be imminent risk of serious harm.

What we do:

- Actively and respectfully listen to every type of conflict or concern raised by members of the faculty allowing all an opportunity to be heard.
- Maintain confidentiality to the maximum extent consonant with the law.
- Providing and explaining information about University policies and procedures
- Discuss the visitor's concerns and clarify the issues and then address their issues in a fair and equitable way, reframing issues as appropriate
- Help identify and evaluate a range of options – both formal and informal as well as resources available within the University that visitors may use to resolve their problem
- Gather information and offer referrals to key people, relevant offices, or support services
- Help visitors prepare for a difficult conversation
- Facilitate communication, indirectly or through shuttle diplomacy with concerned parties
- Work for collaborative agreements
- Track perceived issues and trends and make recommendations for institutional change
- Do all our work informally, neutrally, and confidentially
- Help faculty members help themselves

What we do not do:

- We do not make decisions for a visitor.
- We do not establish, change, or set aside policies.
- We do not offer legal advice.
- We do not offer psychological counseling.
- We do not participate in formal processes such as Academic Grievance Procedures and resist testifying in formal procedures inside and outside the University.
- We do not serve as an agent of notice for the University.
- We do not serve as an advocate for any individual.
- We do not participate in formal investigations or write case reports.
- We do not serve as a neutral adjudicator of complaints.
- We do not create or maintain records or reports for the organization except for an annual report to the Faculty Senate.

Some activities in 2019-2020:

- Met in person with 38 faculty visitors (before early March when COVID-19 arrived in SC).
- Responded to phone calls and email requests, participated in several Zoom calls, and responded to consultation requests from faculty, staff, and students (and their parents) for information. By virtue of our presence on the university website the Faculty Ombuds often receives calls for non-faculty sources which are often referred to the appropriate office.
- Most cases resolved without initiating a formal grievance process.
- The Faculty Ombuds continued his participation as a member of the Certified Organizational Ombudsman Practitioner (CO-OP) Appeals Committee of International Ombudsman Association.
- The Faculty Ombuds served as a mentor for several newly appointed faculty ombuds at other academic institutions.
- In January and August, the Faculty Ombuds provided written materials to attendees at the New Faculty Orientation describing the work of the Faculty Ombuds.
- The Faculty Ombuds posted the annual report of the Faculty Ombuds for 2018-2019 in October. This and all previous annual reports are available on the faculty ombuds website: <http://www.sc.edu/ombuds/annual.shtml>

14-year summary (2006-2020):

- Over the past 14 years the Faculty Ombuds has assisted 685 faculty members for an average of 49 visitors per year. See page 6 of this report for a summary of all cases, all years.
- The number of faculty members utilizing the services of the Faculty Ombuds seems to be in keeping with many Carnegie Foundation Tier I institutions who publish an annual report and who I have been tracking over the past 14 years (average about 54 visitors per year based on 197 annual reports).
- A review of the most recent 5 years of visitors to the faculty ombuds reveals that about half are male faculty members and the other half are female faculty members.

Uniform Reporting Categories

- The only information retained from contacts between faculty visitors and the faculty ombuds is related to the nature of the issue discussed. The International Ombudsman Association (IOA) has developed a set of categories and subcategories (listed on the next page) under which issues, questions, concerns, or inquiries can be tracked. This information is then used to classify the issues for which faculty members use the faculty ombuds services, identify trends in requests for services and develop professional development needs. The "case issues, questions, or concerns" counted are only those for which the Faculty Ombuds provides information or for which options are explored.

Annual Report – IOA Uniform Data Reporting Categories

These same categories were used in this report and in our 13 previous annual reports.

(1) Evaluative Relationships - (187 visitors all years – 27%) - 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). (9 visitors in 2019-2020)

(2) Career Progression and Development - (128 visitors all years - 19%) - 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). (6 in 2019-2020)

(3) Peer and Colleague Relationships - (81 visitors all years - 12%) - 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). (3 visitors in 2019-2020)

(4) Legal, Regulatory, Financial and Compliance - (73 visitors all years – 11%) - 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. (5 visitors in 2019-2020)

(5) Compensation & Benefits - (60 visitors all years - 9%) - Questions, concerns, issues or inquiries about the equity, appropriateness and competitiveness of employee compensation, benefits, and other benefit programs. (3 visitors in 2019-2020)

(6) Values, Ethics, and Standards - (53 visitors all years - 8%) - 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. (0 visitors in 2019-2020)

(7) Safety, Health, and Physical Environment - (38 visitors all years – 5%) - Questions, concerns, issues or inquiries about Safety, Health, and Infrastructure-related issues. (5 visitors in 2019-2020)

(8) Services/Administrative Issues - (36 visitors all years - 5%) - Questions, concerns, issues or inquiries about services or administrative offices. (4 visitors in 2019-2020)

(9) Organizational, Strategic, and Mission Related - (29 visitors all years - 4%) - Questions, concerns, issues, or inquiries that relate to the whole or some part of an organization. (3 visitors in 2019-2020)

See page 6 of this report for a year by year summary of all cases, all years.

Final Comments:

The Coronavirus made its appearance in South Carolina in early March. The resulting pandemic has affected almost every aspect of our academic and personal lives and work including that of our colleagues, family members and friends. These past six months have been characterized by a colleague as a “season of uncertainty.” While the Faculty Ombuds consistently met in person with some 50 faculty members per year during the past 13 years, there have been no in person meetings since early March. The majority of the concerns expressed to this office by the faculty were by phone and centered upon the manner in which the University would respond or was responding to the pandemic and how it would influence teaching, research and other duties and responsibilities of the faculty. As the University’s plans unfolded and more and more faculty became involved in various aspects of decision making and making their own plans for the near future, it seemed that the faculty was devoting its full energies to doing what needed to be done to insure that our students continued to receive the best possible education under these extraordinary circumstances and remain, if at all possible, on track to complete their studies in a timely manner. Whatever conflicts and concerns were ongoing took a back seat to the job at hand.

The University is a complex and demanding workplace, a dynamic community of scholars with faculty members being added or moving on or transferring internally. Few of those who seek assistance understand all their options when they have a problem. The Faculty Ombuds reviews all formal and informal options and resources available to the faculty member. In this process we seek to respond in a timely manner and help invisibly and informally so that each faculty member can continue to reach their own personal and professional goals.

Whatever success has been achieved during these past fourteen years by the Faculty Ombuds is 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 Faculty Ombuds is particularly appreciative of interim Provost Harding’s and new UofSC provost Bill Tate’s willingness to support the work of this office without violating the independence, neutrality, informality, or confidentiality of the ombuds process.

Previous annual reports by the Faculty Ombuds may be found at
<http://www.sc.edu/ombuds/annual.shtml>

The Faculty Ombuds website may be found at:
www.sc.edu/ombuds/

	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4	Year 5	Year 6	Year 7	Year 8	Year 9	Year 10	Year 11	Year 12	Year 13	Year 14	All years
Reporting categories	2006-2007	2007-2008	2008-2009	2009-2010	2010-2011	2011-2012	2012-2013	2013-2014	2014-2015	2015-2016	2016-2017	2017-2018	2018-2019	2019-2020	2006-2020
<i>Evaluative Relationships</i>	23	12	16	7	4	15	15	13	9	15	17	17	15	9	187 (27%)
<i>Career Progress & Development</i>	12	18	8	15	6	14	8	9	8	3	5	12	4	6	128 (19%)
<i>Peer and Colleague Relationships</i>	0	5	9	10	9	6	8	9	5	6	6	3	2	3	81 (12%)
<i>Legal, Regulatory, Financial and Compliance</i>	0	1	3	3	4	8	5	5	8	8	3	8	12	5	73 (11%)
<i>Compensation and Benefits</i>	6	4	0	3	3	4	3	3	6	7	7	6	5	3	60 (9%)
<i>Values, Ethics, and Standards</i>	9	3	11	0	6	4	5	5	1	1	1	3	4	0	53 (8%)
<i>Safety, Health, and Physical Environment</i>	5	4	0	0	8	1	3	2	1	3	3	1	2	5	38 (5%)
<i>Services Administrative Issues</i>	6	4	0	5	4	3	2	2	2	1	3	0	0	4	36 (5%)
<i>Organizational, Strategic, and Mission Related</i>	0	2	2	5	1	0	0	5	5	3	0	0	3	3	29 (4%)
	61	53	49	48	45	55	49	53	45	47	45	50	47	38	685

Met in person with 38 faculty visitors (before early March when COVID-19 arrived in SC). Over the past 14 years the Faculty Ombuds has assisted 685 faculty members for an average of 49 visitors per year.