

★ **USC Faculty Ombuds – Jim Augustine** ★
★ **17th Annual Report** ★ **8.15.2023** ★

Introduction

This is the seventeenth and final annual report for the USC Faculty Ombuds (Jim Augustine). Because of that this will be a summary of the past 17 years along with an expression of thanks and appreciation to the almost 825 faculty members I have had the privilege to speak to since I began as the inaugural ombuds at USC in 2006.

At the most fundamental level, an ombuds is one who assists individuals and groups in the resolution of questions, concerns, issues, or inquiries. Ombuds work in all types of organizations, including governmental agencies, colleges and universities, corporations, hospitals and other medical facilities, and news organizations. Of the 1047 members of the International Ombuds Association, 510 work in colleges and universities. The International Ombuds Association (IOA) has its own Standards of Practice and Code of Ethics that guide their work.

Throughout the past 17 years, the Faculty Ombuds has been guided by four IOA ethical standards. **INDEPENDENT:** The faculty ombuds is independent in structure, function, and appearance to the highest degree possible within the university. **INFORMAL:** The faculty ombuds, as an informal resource, does not participate in any formal adjudicative or administrative procedure related to those seeking assistance. The faculty ombuds has no administrative decision-making power. **IMPARTIAL:** 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.

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 from the Faculty Ombuds understand all their options when they have a conflict or concern. The Faculty Ombuds reviews all formal and informal options and resources available to the faculty member. 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.

Activities in 2022-2023

- The Faculty Ombuds met in person or via phone or Zoom call with forty-seven faculty members referred to in this document as “visitors.”
- The Faculty Ombuds responded to phone calls and email requests, participated in one-on-one Zoom meetings, 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 receives calls from various nonfaculty sources which are often referred to the appropriate office. These nonfaculty calls are not counted in this report.

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- Most cases involving the Faculty Ombuds are resolved without initiating a formal grievance process or without legal counsel being retained by the faculty member.
- The Faculty Ombuds served as a mentor for several newly appointed faculty ombuds at other academic institutions under the auspices of a mentoring program that is conducted under the direction of the International Ombuds Association.
- The Faculty Ombuds gave a presentation at the New Faculty Academy on 4.14.2023 on Navigating Challenges in Higher Education: Understanding the Role of the Faculty Ombuds.
- This annual report for 2022-2023 and all previous sixteen annual reports are available on the faculty ombuds website: <http://www.sc.edu/ombuds/annual.shtml>

17-year summary (2006-2023)

- Over the past 17 years the Faculty Ombuds has personally assisted 825 faculty members for an average of forty-nine visitors per year. 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 16 years (average sixty-one visitors per year based on 103 published annual reports (some 7014 visitors surveyed).
- *“Annual reports remain a rarity for organizational ombuds, and public reports are rarer still. Whether this is deliberate or simply the result of insufficient resources is difficult to know.”* -Tom Kosakowski writing in [The Ombuds Blog](#).
- A review of the most recent 5 years of visitors to the faculty ombuds reveals that equal numbers of men and women on the university faculty seek assistance from the faculty ombuds.

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 an **IOA Uniform Data Reporting Categories** - a set of categories and subcategories (listed on the next page) under which questions, concerns, issues, 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 questions, concerns, issues, or inquiries counted are those for which the Faculty Ombuds provides information related to the various uniform reporting categories or for which options are explored.

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Annual Report – IOA Uniform Data Reporting Categories – this year and all years

These same categories were used in this report and in all previous sixteen annual reports prepared by the inaugural faculty ombuds. There were 825 visitors to this office in the past 17 years.

(1) Evaluative Relationships - (232 visitors all years – 28.1%) - 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). **(15 visitors in 2022-23)**

(2) Career Progression and Development - (143 visitors all years – 17.3%) - 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 visitors in 2022-2023)**

(3) Peer and Colleague Relationships - (97 visitors all years – 11.8%) - 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). **(5 visitors in 2022-2023+)**

(4) Legal, Regulatory, Financial and Compliance - (86 visitors all years – 10.4%) - 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. **(6 visitors in 2022-2023)**

(5) Compensation & Benefits - (68 visitors all years – 8.24%) - Questions, concerns, issues or inquiries about the equity, appropriateness and competitiveness of employee compensation, benefits, and other benefit programs. **(3 visitors in 2022-2023)**

(6) Values, Ethics, and Standards - (64 visitors all years – 7.8%) - 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. **(3 visitors in 2022-2023)**

(7) Safety, Health, and Physical Environment - (48 visitors all years – 5.8%) - Questions, concerns, issues or inquiries about Safety, Health, and Infrastructure-related issues. **(2 visitors in 2022-2023)**

(8) Services/Administrative Issues - (47 visitors all years – 5.7%) - Questions, concerns, issues or inquiries about services or administrative offices. **(4 visitors in 2022-2023)**

(9) Organizational, Strategic, and Mission Related - (40 visitors all years – 4.84%) - Questions, concerns, issues, or inquiries that relate to the whole or some part of an organization. **(3 visitors in 2022-2023)**

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Faculty Ombuds Survey Comments

The Office of the Faculty Ombuds has created an online Faculty Ombuds Survey that allows those who contact the faculty ombuds to submit anonymous feedback regarding their experience and interaction with the Faculty Ombuds. On this and the following page of this annual report are comments taken from surveys in the past year using two questions on that survey that receive the most comments.

What did you find most beneficial about the services provided by the Faculty Ombuds?

- He is an excellent listener and helpful in identifying solutions that decrease conflict.
- I felt heard at a time when that was truly critical to my wellbeing. I also gained information and perspective on the options available to me for trying to resolve the situation I am experiencing. Finally, our conversation helped to normalize my feelings of distress given what is happening to me and led me to feel more comfortable so that I can talk about what is happening without fear of judgement.
- The trust that I have in the Ombuds made it comfortable to share details with him and listen to his suggestions.
- Allow faculty to talk to someone.
- To have the neutral and extremely supportive opinion from someone outside my college who has a lot of experience and knowledge about the University was extremely beneficial. He knew university level procedures and asked about details. He was a very patient listener. He was extremely accessible even in summer. It was refreshing and supported my resolve to have my issue handled fairly and gave me the pathway and proper channels to do so. I am immensely grateful.
- A neutral party
- Learning that many faculty deal with awful department chairs.
- His neutral advice
- His ability to listen and to not judge.
- The most beneficial service was the Ombuds role as a person to listen to my problems. However, this catharsis was the only outcome of the meeting.
- Confidentiality; systemic understanding
- Experience, wisdom, perception, and a safe zone.
- Treated me with respect, concern, and fairness. Encouraged me to connect with Dr. Bon.
- The resources shared that I would have not known about, as well as specific guidelines for conduct.
- The impartial help as I dealt with a highly emotional matter.
- He helped sort through the problem and gave good advice about how to address it and who to talk to. It is clear he cares.
- It was very valuable to discuss my problem with someone with a long history at the university who is external to the situation, and to get reassurance that my reading of the situation I am facing is not an overreaction. This was very reassuring and gave me some measure of confidence that the next steps I take will be successful.

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Faculty Ombuds Survey Comments

Please comment why or why you were not satisfied with the way the Faculty Ombuds handled your concern.:

- Jim Augustine was exceptionally helpful and professional. He is an excellent listener and he had good advice that gave me insight into finding a solution and maintaining a professional atmosphere while the matter was resolved.
- I'm disappointed to learn that our Faculty Ombuds is being replaced - I hope whoever steps into this role carries on the important work that Jim is doing and aspires to the sensitivity, accessibility, knowledge, and skill that Jim has brought to the position.
- I really appreciate the experience. Jim was very helpful with the information needed.
- He was attentive and caring about my concern. He gave me suggestions and was also realistic about what I should expect.
- He was willing to speak to me when I called to make an appointment. He listened, clarified, and gave me options.
- Fast, on point, kind, and informative.
- The Ombuds Jim Augustine was wonderful. He promptly responded to my request to meet. He gave me my options. He was very knowledgeable. His demeanor is perfect for such a position.
- My interaction was very positive and transparent about what could and could not be done.
- I met with the Faculty Ombuds more than once about different but related matters. The advice was very similar in recommending that I identify an ally/allies. This may be a consistent recommendation and therefore there is no need to seek advice.
- The Ombuds was attentive and responsive. The resolution offered was to facilitate contact between myself and an individual in upper administration, although to date there has been no substantive resolution to the problems that originally led me to the Ombuds.
- Not yet resolved but Ombud provided direction that was useful.
- I was satisfied as it gave a neutral perspective.
- Very accessible, confidential, and easy to talk to; gave useful feedback on a variety of options, as well as avenues to explore resolution, timelines for actions, and next steps. Was easy to engage with and made the process much less intimidating.
- I was satisfied with the Faculty Ombuds because he listened, summarized, and gave me the possible courses of action that were available to me. He was incredibly knowledgeable and was a great help.
- I am very satisfied with Jim's handling of my complaint. It is still not resolved but that is not due to his inaction. I must decide whether to pursue something formal. Jim has been a great sounding board, gives excellent advice, and you can tell he really cares about the faculty and the university. He has helped me through a very hard time.

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A recent note

Jim,

Thank you for your support with my work situation both times that my boss turned on me. Your advice proved helpful, and your support gave me courage to follow through with what I needed to.

I walked around our building with pepper spray all this past year. One day I decided that none of it was worth the anxiety, etc., that was coming from hyper alertness.

Since the semester has ended, my allergic reactions have resolved, my anxiety is down, and I am feeling great. I feel deeply that I made the right decision.

Thank you again for your support through the difficult times at USC.

And one more

On a personal note, you have been so helpful to me on more than one occasion, always giving me sage advice. Thank you so much for what you have added to my growth and reflective abilities!

Final Comments

Whatever success has been achieved during these past 17 years by the Faculty Ombuds is attributable to the cooperation and support of the faculty, staff, and the administrative leaders (most notably the recent five provosts and two interim provost) who were willing to support the work of this office without violating the independence, impartiality, informality, or confidentiality of the ombuds process.

It has been a great honor and privilege to serve as the Faculty Ombuds at USC during these past 17 years. I am most grateful to the 825 ombuds visitors for their willingness to share their conflicts and concerns and place their trust in me.

Thank you each and everyone.

Jim Augustine

Faculty Ombuds