

**Annual Report  
The University Ombudsman  
August 15, 2008 to August 14, 2009**

## **I. Background**

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 University ombudsman office at USC, a definition of the word "Ombudsman", and information on the International Ombudsman Association (IOA). The University ombudsman adheres to the Code of Ethics and the Standards of Practice of the [International Ombudsman Association \(IOA\)](#).

## **II. 2008-2009 Activities**

Because of state budget cuts, the University ombudsman did not travel in 2009 to the 4<sup>th</sup> Annual IOA Conference in Montreal, Canada nor did the University ombudsman participate in any additional professional training this year sponsored by the International Ombudsman Association.

In February of 2009, the University ombudsman made a presentation to the Faculty Senate on the role of that office and provided senators with a copy of the annual report of the University ombudsman.

In April of 2009 an online Visitor Satisfaction Survey [http://www.sc.edu/ombuds/survey\\_splash.shtml](http://www.sc.edu/ombuds/survey_splash.shtml) was established with the assistance of Ivanka Todorova in the Office of the Provost and Michael Cathcart, EA Web Services Manager. This provides an opportunity for visitors to submit anonymous feedback to the University ombudsman.

In August of 2009, the University ombudsman made a presentation on the work of the Office of the University Ombudsman to a group of pre-doctoral students at the Counseling and Human Development Center, Byrnes Building.

Finally, at the end of this third year of operation, the University ombudsman made a presentation to some 50 new faculty members at the New Faculty Orientation on August 12, 2009.

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

During the period of this report (August 15, 2008 to August 14, 2009) the University ombudsman met with some 49 faculty members who were first time visitors to the ombuds office (with over a hundred contacts - in person, via email, or by phone). In last year's annual report (2007-2008), there were 53 first time faculty visitors and in 2006-2007, there were 61 first time faculty visitors to the University ombudsman. Thus, this office has assisted some 163 faculty members over the past three years for an average of 54 visitors per year. I have done a short survey of 25 academic institutions and the number of faculty visitors over the past two years and the average number of faculty visitors for those 25 academic institutions was 50 in 2006-2007 and 48 for 2007-2008. Thus, the number of faculty members utilizing the services of the University ombudsman seems to be in keeping with that at other academic institutions in this unscientific survey.

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. Evaluative Relationships.** *Questions, concerns, issues or inquiries arising between people in evaluative relationships (i.e. supervisor, faculty).* This was the category with largest number of visitors to the ombudsman office this year (16 in this category). There were requests for help in dealing with matters pertaining to: annual performance reviews, access of staff members to faculty evaluations and reviews, respect/treatment of faculty members, suspicion that others are not being honest, diversity related comments or behaviors as a part of performance reviews that were perceived to be insensitive on the basis of an identity related difference such as race or gender, and feared retaliation for previous comments or actions in private or at faculty meetings.

**2. Values, Ethics, and Standards.** *Questions, concerns, issues or inquiries about the fairness or need for revision of policies, values, and standards of conduct.* There were 11 visitors to the ombuds office in this category this year. Under this category issues were raised regarding the values or culture of the organization at the unit level, policies and procedures not followed, unwillingness to allow faculty to take advantage of existing policies, and the inappropriate use of the internet including social networking sites and blogs.

**3. Peers, Colleagues or Co-workers Relationships.** *Questions, concerns, issues or inquiries involving peers or colleagues who do not have a supervisory-employee or student-professor relationship (e.g., two staff members within the same department or conflict involving members of a student organization).* In this category, there were nine visitors this year. Concerns raised under this category included a student-professor relationship, comments or behaviors between and among peers, colleagues, and co-workers perceived to be insensitive, offensive or intolerant based on an identity-related difference such as race or gender or nationality.

**4. 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 eight visitors in this category this year. Concerns were raised related to disputed decisions linked to recruitment and selection of new faculty, disagreement over requirements of assignments and the appropriate amount of work and/or tasks assigned. Other issues included procedural concerns related to the promotion and tenure process, how a decision of termination is communicated and the ownership of computer data under those circumstances, the termination/non-renewal process. Two other areas of concern were perceived comments about, and behaviors toward a former faculty member seeking a position outside the university and the re-employment of former or retired faculty and staff.

**5. 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.* Three visitors expressed concerns under this category which included matters related to the infringement of intellectual property rights as well as behavior that creates a hostile or intimidating environment.

**6. Organizational, Strategic, and Mission Related.** *Questions, concerns, issues or inquiries that relate to the whole or some part of an organization.* Two visitors expressed concern under this category that involved questioning leadership reassessments and reorganization as well as the allegation of abuse of positional power.

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

Visitors from the senior and regional campuses are often uncertain as to whether the University ombudsman is available to assist them. The role of the University ombudsman on the senior and regional campuses needs clarification to the faculty and administration on these campuses. In addition, there needs to be clarification of the role of the University ombudsman in relation to nontenure 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. In last year's report (August 2008), it was noted that the ombudsman was asked to deal with bullying, threatening or coercive behavior. Thus, it is encouraging to note that the Special Issues Subcommittee of the Faculty Senate (chaired by Professor Rivers) charged with discussing/drafting language regarding a Code of Conduct for faculty made a recommendation to the Faculty Senate on this matter. The Subcommittee recommended 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. This change was voted upon and approved by the General Faculty in April 2009. 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." All of us who are members of the faculty need to do our part to promote and model the tenets of the Creed and hold one another accountable to it.

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 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.