

Ombuds Presentation to the Faculty of Arts & Sciences

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Report for Fall 2001-Summer 2002

Sources of Contact with Graduate Students

Introduction for new graduate students

Introduction for TAs and teachers – dealing with problem students, learning climate

Website (<http://www.wm.edu/~srnels/ombuds/>)

Looking for suggestions for other venues

Overview of Activities for 2001-2 Academic Year

22 informal discussions, resulting in no appointment

15 students with one or more formal appointments

37 total discussions with students

Issues Raised (in increasing frequency)

1. appropriateness of graduate study to student careers
2. physical dangers in work environment
3. problems with teaching or research assignments (not suited to research).
 - Some times apparent promises of one assignment & then switch
 - Other times promise of pay & then reduction in pay.
- 4 verbal abuse by advisor (public humiliation, private humiliation)
5. relationships with advisor
 - apparent changes in thesis requirements
 - delays requiring extensions of thesis deadlines
 - advisors' refusal to read chapters or drafts
 - advisors' delay in reading, over two months

The last is the most serious problem, more pronounced in PhD programs. Informal discussion with advisors or with graduate directors have fixed these problems in some cases.

Recommendations

Reviewing spring letters of admission, to verify language in them. Students should be informed that assignments may change before the beginning of the fall.

Directors of Graduate Studies should be more active in investigating complaints of faculty shouting, publicly berating, or abusing advisees. These cannot be ascribed to personality: Oh, Professor X, she's just like that. Legal action against the college for assault and slander is possible. A legal case might be quickly settled, but the danger to the reputation of programs could be serious.

Adding a clause to regulations either at the graduate level or by department that establishes a turnaround time for thesis or dissertation work. My suggestion: five weeks with the expectation that faculty will not be expected to constantly revise student work.