

**OMBUDS OFFICE FOR ARTS AND SCIENCES GRADUATE STUDENTS
ANNUAL REPORT TO THE FACULTY OF ARTS AND SCIENCES
MAY 2001**

Summary

The Ombuds office for Arts and Sciences graduate students was established as a response to recommendations from the Task Force on the Learning Climate for Arts and Sciences graduate students. This Task Force was appointed in April 1998, reported to the COGS in March 1999 and the chair of the Task Force, Gina Hoatson (Physics) reported to the Faculty in May 1999. The purpose of establishing the Ombuds Office was to create a confidential venue within which students can discuss questions, complaints and concerns and to offer an option other than formal grievance procedures to resolve disputes. Thus, the main purpose of the Ombudsperson and Ombuds Office is to open avenues of communication and help informally and confidentially resolve conflicts.

The initial appointment of an Ombudsperson, Leisa Meyer (History, Women's Studies), was made in April 1999; however, the formal approval for the charter of the office was not granted until April 2000. Thus, the Ombuds Office began its official function on April 24, 2000 with Leisa Meyer functioning as the Ombudsperson. The Ombuds Office is located within Graduate House, 234 Jamestown Road, and the Manager of Graduate House acts as the Ombudsperson's confidential secretary.

The main responsibility of the Ombudsperson is to be available for meeting with graduate students to discuss concerns and questions. Because of the lengthy delay in initial startup, during the first official year of service the Ombudsperson also focused on publicizing the office, its function and charge to graduate faculty and students. What follows is a brief summary of the major activities of the Ombudsperson this year:

Education and Publicity

- ◆ Developed a brochure, along with the Manager of Graduate House (Carol Arnette), outlining the purposes and functions of the Office.
- ◆ Participated in graduate student orientation sessions for Graduate Dean (Steve Park) and some departments.
- ◆ Coordinated and facilitated workshops (along with Roxanne Pickens, graduate student, AMST) on learning climate for teaching assistants and teaching fellows.
- ◆ Met with each graduate department/program faculty, the Graduate Student Association, first year graduate students in some departments/programs, and graduate student associations of some departments/programs to outline the functions of the office and answer any questions faculty might have about its operation.
- ◆ Attended COGS meetings.

Record Keeping

- ◆ The Ombudsperson is responsible for keeping confidential records of all conversations with graduate students.

Summary of Contacts

During the first year of operation 35 graduate students (8% of the A&S graduate student population) contacted the Ombudsperson at least once. Of these 35 initial contacts, 18 (4% of the A&S graduate student population) became multiple contacts. A breakdown of these multiple contacts, numbers of individuals involved, and time spent follows:

Demographics

Type of Graduate Program

Social Sciences/Humanities: 12

Sciences: 6

Sex

Female : 16

Male : 2

Race/National Origin

African American: 3

Asian American or

Pacific Islander: 1

White: 10

Hispanic: 1

International: 3

Contact Breakdown

No Outside Parties Involved: 10

Time Spent: 24 hours

Outside Parties Involved: 8

Time Spent: 47.25 hours

CASE NUMBER	TIME SPENT (HRS)	NUMBER OF OUTSIDE PARTIES INVOLVED (EXCLUDING OMBUDSPERSON AND STUDENT)
001	2.25	0
002	4.00	1
003	3.75	2
004	17.00	3
005	5.00	0
006	7.50	2
007	2.00	0
008	7.00	1
009	5.75	0
010	2.00	0
011	5.00	1
012	2.25	0 (still active)
013	1.00	1 (still active)
014	2.00	0
015	.75	0
016	2.00	3
017	1.50	0
018	.50	0 (still active)
Totals: 18	71.25	14

Qualitative Summary

Contacts not involving outside parties were generally seeking information and advice from the Ombudsperson on aspects of students' graduate careers. These contacts also sometimes involved concerns with specific faculty practices for which the student wanted advice and help developing a plan or strategy to address these concerns. None of these contacts requested that the Ombudsperson participate beyond this level.

Contacts involving outside parties generally concerned conflicts between students and faculty advisors, graduate directors or program directors/department chairs. In these situations students explicitly requested that the Ombudsperson contact these outside parties and seek a resolution of the conflict.

Conclusions

Despite the delay in opening its doors the Ombuds Office has functioned as both a resource for graduate students seeking information and advice as well as those seeking a venue for conflict resolution. Faculty with whom this office has worked to resolve conflicts have been extremely responsive to the process and are a major reason for the successful implementation of this initiative to this point.

The Ombudsperson's meetings with students have especially highlighted the importance of having adequate mechanisms for communication between faculty and graduate students within departments and programs. Equally clear is the necessity of having clear written guidelines and procedures under which graduate students operate.

The challenges for next year are twofold: First, to continue efforts to make this office visible to graduate students as a resource. And second, to create a pool of faculty who would be willing to serve as the Ombudsperson in the future. The University and College Ombuds Association (UCOA) offers training sessions and workshops on a regular basis at its annual meeting as well as over the summer months that would be a good beginning for faculty interested in possible future service as the Ombudsperson at the College of William and Mary. Moreover, the UCOA runs a listserv for members through which general issues facing Ombudspeople at colleges and universities are raised for discussion and suggestions. This venue provides yet another "training" resource for faculty who are interested in the possibility of serving as the Ombudsperson for Arts and Sciences graduate students.

Respectfully Submitted,

Leisa Meyer, History/Women's Studies
Ombudsperson

