

## ***Ombuds Presentation to Committee on Graduate Studies***

***December 2003***

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### **Report for May 1, 2003-Dec, 11, 2003 (7 ½ months)**

#### **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/> )

#### **Overview of Activities for May – December 2003**

18 informal discussions, resulting in no appointment

9 students with one or more formal appointments

27 total discussions with students (last year 37)

Suggestions for the next ombudsperson:

Stronger outreach in CS & Physics

Meeting students at more informal gatherings

#### **Issues Raised (in decreasing frequency)**

1. problems with teaching or research assignments.
  - Receiving assignments late (late in summer for fall assignments)
  - Negative reviews from off-campus assignments
  - Difficulties with off-campus assignments
2. appropriateness of graduate study to student careers
3. relationships with advisor
  - delays requiring extensions of thesis deadlines
  - advisors' refusal to read chapters or drafts
  - advisors' delay in reading, over two months
4. intellectual property issues
  - responsibilities and rights with multiple-author articles
  - student 'poaching' of other students' syllabi
5. verbal abuse by advisor (public humiliation, private humiliation)

Number one is more pronounced in places when graduate students are not on faculty grants, but on assignments that take them off campus. Informal discussion with advisors or with graduate directors have fixed these problems in some cases.

### **Recommendations**

Students should be informed of fall assignments early in the summer.

Repeating last year's recommendation: 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.

Some programs are already evaluating off-campus assignments. I would recommend a regular retrospective review system (perhaps every four years) of graduate assignments to determine if they are

- useful for graduate training
- challenging
- allowing students to create a measurable product
- safe