

**Annual Report of the Faculty and Staff Ombudsperson
September 1, 2007 through August 31, 2008**

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Mission and Functions of the Office of Ombuds Services

The Office of Ombuds Services provides the University of Houston faculty and staff with an informal mechanism for resolving workplace conflicts and addressing questions and concerns related to their employment with the University. To ensure the highest quality and most effective services, the Faculty and Staff Ombudsperson is independent, neutral, and maintains confidentiality to the extent allowed by law.

The Ombudsperson strives to promote fairness and foster a positive work environment by offering a number of mechanisms for early conflict resolution and problem-solving including: listening to faculty and staff members' concerns and complaints regarding workplace and employment issues; providing information and assistance in accessing and interpreting University policies and procedures; making referrals to appropriate University resources; helping faculty and staff analyze complaints by identifying issues and outlining available options; coaching faculty and staff in addressing and managing conflict; facilitating communication and mediating conflict between disputing parties; reviewing and analyzing trends in concerns and complaints; and making recommendations to the President and Provost regarding changes to University policies and procedures that may eliminate or reduce recurring workplace problems, enhance the effectiveness of University resources, or increase the quality of work life for University employees.

Because ombuds services are informal, neutral, and confidential, the ombudsperson does not: represent faculty or staff in any formal hearings, processes, or procedures; engage in administrative decision-making; determine the merits of a faculty or staff member's complaint; conduct formal investigations; provide legal representation or advice; or provide psychological counseling.

Communication, Outreach, and Service Activities

To provide the campus with information regarding the Office of Ombuds Services, I have spoken at faculty and staff meetings including:

Faculty Senate meeting, November 28, 2007
Staff Council meeting, December 6, 2007
Council of Deans meeting, April 22, 2008

I welcome invitations to speak to groups regarding my position as ombudsperson, ombuds services provided, and other related topics. Please do not hesitate to contact me to meet with any employee group.

I wrote a column for the December 2007 issue of UH Campus News titled, “Conquering Your Fear of Conflict.”

I am serving on the 2008-2009 Faculty Handbook Revision Committee.

Summary of Cases

Visitor is the term used to refer to faculty and staff who bring cases to the ombudsperson. To date, I have received 58 cases from 27 faculty, 27 staff, and 4 students (see Table 1). College and division affiliations of visitors include the Gerald D. Hines College of Architecture (2), C.T. Bauer College of Business (8), Cullen College of Engineering (4), College of Education (1), College of Liberal Arts and Social Sciences (9), College of Natural Science and Mathematics (5), College of Pharmacy (2), College of Technology (1), Division of Administration and Finance (3), Division of Academic Affairs (3), Libraries (2), Division of Research (3), Division of Student Affairs (3), and Information Technology (2), College of Optometry (1), and Office of the Provost (1) (see Table 2).

A significant number of cases involved issues related to interpersonal conflict, career management, communication strategies, and policy/procedure inquiries. Concerns regarding problematic management styles and the physical work environment were also expressed by a number of visitors. A smaller number of cases involved academic concerns, compensation, group dynamics, discrimination (race, age, and sex, sexual harassment, and disability), course assignments and scheduling, and faculty/staff relations (see Table 3). Faculty complaints were against deans/associate deans, department chairs, faculty subordinates, and staff. Most staff complaints were against staff supervisors, deans/associate deans, and department chairs. A smaller number of staff cases involved complaints related to staff subordinates (see Table 4).

Phone calls and coaching were the most frequently used strategies to address faculty and staff members' issues and concerns. I also used email, engaged in shuttle diplomacy, provided policy and procedure information, facilitated meetings, and made referrals in a number of cases (see Table 5). Referrals were made to the Dean of Students Office, Human Resources, Office of Affirmative Action/Equal Employment Opportunity, Office of General Counsel, and UH and other websites (see Table 6).

Trends and Recommendations

- (1) In 2006-2007, 44% of my cases involved interpersonal conflict between employees. During the past year (2007-2008), cases involving interpersonal conflict rose slightly to 46.5%. Thus, civility continues to be an important and frequently cited issue in faculty and staff cases. I therefore, reiterate my previous recommendation that the University explore developing more comprehensive civility policies for faculty and staff that set clear expectations regarding employee interactions. I also recommend providing

employees with training that communicates the University's civility expectations, assists employees in assessing and appropriately addressing uncivil behavior, and offers advice on dealing with incivility from peers, subordinates, and supervisors.

- (2) A number of visitors have expressed concerns that faculty reward structures do not strongly support high quality multidisciplinary research. Given the University's research cluster concept which encourages collaboration across disciplines, the value that departments and colleges place on publications in journals outside of their primary disciplines should be examined.
- (3) Visitors have expressed concerns that some college-level policies are not easily accessible to faculty and staff. I recommend that college and department-level policies be made readily available to faculty and staff and posted on college websites if possible.
- (4) I have had some questions and complaints regarding employees and students smoking near the entrances and exits of University buildings. The University's smoking policy (MAPP 06.03.04) currently does not specify the distance from buildings' entrances and exits that smoking is permitted. I recommend revising this MAPP to indicate an appropriate distance.
- (5) Departments and colleges do not use a common template in writing post-doc appointment letters and do not always systematically review post-doc appointments for renewal. This has created issues regarding perceptions of termination for cause and automatic continued employment. I recommend creating a post-doc appointment letter template that clearly delineates the nature of the employment relationship. Colleges and departments should also annually review post-doc appointments and issue appropriate renewal and nonrenewal letters.
- (6) The inconsistent enforcement of policies requiring employees to submit leave requests when taking vacation time has led to sometimes costly disagreements regarding the amount of leave deducted. Thus, I recommend that administrators clearly communicate leave request policies and require the submission of leave requests by all employees.

Table 1**University Positions of Visitors**

Position of Visitor	Number of Cases				Annual Totals
	9/1/07-11/30/07	12/1/07-2/28/08	3/1/08-5/31/08	6/1/08-8/31/08	
Faculty Dean	0	0	0	0	0
Faculty Associate Dean	1	1	0	1	3
Faculty Department Chair	1	0	0	0	1
Faculty Full Professor	1	2	4	0	7
Faculty Associate Professor	1	0	6	1	8
Faculty Assistant Professor	2	0	1	1	4
Faculty Visiting Assistant Prof.	0	0	0	0	0
Faculty Clinical Assistant Prof.	1	0	1	0	2
Librarian	1	0	1	0	2
Staff	7	6	10	4	27
Student	0	2	1	1	4
Total Cases	15	11	24	8	58

Table 2
Visitor's College or Division Affiliations

College or Division Affiliation	Number of Cases				
	9/1/07- 11/30/07	12/1/07- 2/28/08	3/1/08- 5/31/08	6/1/08- 8/31/08	Annual Totals
Gerald D. Hines College of Architecture	1	0	1	0	2
C.T. Bauer College of Business	1	4	8	0	13
College of Education	0	0	0	1	1
Cullen College of Engineering	3	0	1	0	4
Conrad Hilton College of Hotel and Restaurant Management	0	0	0	0	0
College of Liberal Arts and Sciences	2	2	4	1	9
College of Natural Sciences and Mathematics	2	1	1	1	5
College of Optometry	0	0	0	1	1
College of Pharmacy	2	0	0	0	2
College of Technology	1	0	0	0	1
Graduate College of Social Work	0	0	0	0	0
Honors College	0	0	0	0	0
Law Center	0	0	0	0	0
Department of Athletics	0	0	0	0	0
Division of Academic Affairs	1	2	0	0	3
Division of Administration and Finance	1	1	1	0	3
Division of Research	0	0	1	3	4
Division of Student Affairs	0	0	2	0	2
Division of University Advancement	0	0	0	0	0
Human Resources	0	0	0	0	0
Information Technology	0	0	2	0	2
KUHF/KUHT	0	0	0	0	0
Office of Affirmative Action	0	0	0	0	0
Office of Contract Administration / Office of Contract Compliance	0	0	0	0	0
Office of General Counsel	0	0	0	0	0
Office of the President	0	0	0	0	0
Office of the Provost	0	0	1	0	1
University Studies Division	0	0	0	0	0
Libraries	1	0	1	0	1

Table 3
Visitors' Issues and Concerns

Issues and Concerns	Number of Cases				
	9/1/07- 11/30/07	12/1/07- 2/28/08	3/1/08- 5/31/08	6/1/08- 8/31/08	Annual Totals
Academic	2	3	2	2	9
Career management	7	1	3	0	10
Compensation	2	0	1	0	3
Communication strategies	7	5	7	4	23
Course assignments/scheduling	1	1	0	0	2
Discrimination					
Age	0	1	0	0	1
Race	1	0	0	0	1
Disability	0	0	1	1	2
Sex	1	0	1	0	2
Sexual harassment	0	0	2	0	2
Faculty/Staff Relations	2	0	0	0	2
Group dynamics	2	0	0	1	3
Interpersonal conflict	8	6	10	3	27
Personal issues	0	0	1	0	1
Policies and procedures					
Staff Discipline	2	1	1	2	6
Faculty promotion and tenure	3	1	2	1	7
Faculty teaching/performance	0	1	0	0	1
Faculty merit evaluation	0	0	1	0	1
Academic	1	0	1	0	2
Faculty grievance	2	0	2	1	5
Staff grievance	3	1	2	0	6
Sick leave/vacation	2	0	0	2	4
Performance evaluation	0	0	2	1	3
Immigration/visa	1	0	0	0	1
Dept. chair appointment	1	0	0	0	1
Staff promotion/classification	1	0	1	0	2
Staff transfer	0	1	1	0	2
Staff work schedule	0	0	1	0	1
Staff termination	0	0	1	0	1
Smoking	1	1	0	0	2
UC Facility Use	0	1	0	0	1
Resignation	0	0	2	0	2
TA reappointment	0	2	0	0	2
Free speech	0	0	1	0	1
Committee procedures	0	0	2	0	2
Problematic management style	3	1	3	1	8

Work environment (physical)					
Security	0	0	0	0	0
Space allocation	0	1	0	0	1
Air Quality	0	1	0	0	1
Fire Safety	0	1	0	0	1

**Table 4
Individuals Complained Against by Position**

Complaints Against	Number of Cases				
	9/1/07- 11/30/07	12/1/07- 2/28/08	3/1/08- 5/31/08	6/1/08- 8/31/08	Annual Totals
Faculty Complaints					
Higher Administration	0	0	0	1	1
Dean / Associate Dean	2	0	2	0	4
Department Chair	1	0	4	0	5
Faculty Peer	0	0	2	0	2
Faculty Subordinate	0	2	0	0	2
Staff Member	1	1	1	1	4
Student	0	1	1	0	2
Staff Complaints					
Higher Administration	0	0	0	0	0
Dean / Associate Dean	2	0	0	0	2
Department Chair	3	0	0	0	3
Faculty	1	0	1	0	2
Staff Supervisor	2	2	5	1	10
Staff Peer	0	0	2	1	3
Staff Subordinate	1	0	1	0	2

**Table 5
Strategies Utilized by the Ombudsperson in Working with Visitors**

Type of Strategy	Times Utilized				
	9/1/07- 11/30/07	12/1/07- 2/28/08	3/1/08- 5/31/08	6/1/08- 8/31/08	Annual Totals
Calls made	9	3	12	3	27
Coaching	15	8	17	5	45
Emails sent	6	1	1	2	10
Facilitated meeting	3	2	2	1	8
Policy / procedure information provided	6	5	13	5	29
Referrals	6	5	6	4	21
Shuttle diplomacy	4	2	3	1	10

Table 6
Referrals Made by the Ombudsperson

Referrals	Number				
	9/1/07- 11/30/07	12/1/07- 2/28/08	3/1/08- 5/31/08	6/1/08- 8/31/08	Annual Totals
Dean of Students	1	3	0	1	5
Employee Assistance Program	0	1	0	0	1
Human Resources	2	0	3	1	6
OAA/EEO	1	1	2	1	5
Office of General Counsel	0	0	0	0	0
UH website	1	0	1	1	3
Other websites	1	0	0	0	1
UH Commission on Women Pilot Mentoring Project	0	0	0	0	0