

**Annual Report of the Faculty and Staff Ombudsperson
September 1, 2009 through August 31, 2010**

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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

I am currently serving on the 2010-2011 Faculty Handbook Revision Committee.

To provide the campus with information regarding the Office of Ombuds Services, I spoke at the following faculty and staff meetings:

Staff Council Meeting, January 7, 2010

President's Office Staff Meeting, July 28, 2010

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.

Summary of Cases

During the 2009-2010 academic year, I received 74 cases from 32 faculty, 38 staff, and 4 students (see Table 1). College and division affiliations of visitors who utilized ombuds services include: Gerald D. Hines College of Architecture (4), C.T. Bauer College of Business (17), Cullen College of Engineering (4), College of Education (2), Conrad Hilton College of Hotel and Restaurant Management (4), College of Liberal Arts and Social Sciences (17), College of Natural Science and Mathematics (2), Law Center (6), Athletics (1), Division of Administration and Finance (6), Division of Academic Affairs (6), Division of Student Affairs (1), and Office of the President (1) (see Table 2).

A significant number of cases involved issues related to interpersonal conflict, communication strategies, policy/procedure inquiries, and problematic management style. Concerns regarding academic issues, career management, staff workload/workflow, and discrimination were also expressed by a number of visitors. A smaller number of cases involved compensation, course assignments/scheduling, faculty/staff relations, group dynamics, personal issues, the physical work environment (see Table 3). Faculty complaints were against deans/associate deans, department chairs, faculty peers, faculty subordinates, staff, and students. Most of the staff complaints were against staff supervisors with a smaller number of complaints made regarding deans/associate deans, department chairs, faculty, staff peers, and staff subordinates (see Table 4).

Coaching, making phone calls, providing policy/procedure information, and making referrals were the most frequently used strategies to address faculty and staff members' issues and concerns. I also used email, engaged in shuttle diplomacy, and facilitated meetings in a number of cases (see Table 5). Referrals were made to the Dean of Students Office, the Employee Assistance Program, Human Resources, and the Office of Affirmative Action/Equal Employment Opportunity (see Table 6).

Trends and Recommendations

- (1) The number of cases involving staff workload issues increased significantly last year. Concerns related to increased workloads resulting from layoffs, attrition, and reorganization were expressed in thirteen cases (17.5%) in 2009-2010 compared to three cases (4%) in 2008-2009 and zero in 2007-2008 and 2006-2007. Visitors voiced concerns about added job duties and responsibilities, a lack of communication and support from supervisors, and a lack of training. Human Resources provided assistance in cases by consulting with staff regarding duty allocations. I recommend providing expanded training opportunities to assist employees with difficulties associated with increased workloads.

- (2) Workplace incivility continues to be an important and frequently cited issue in faculty and staff cases. Incivility concerns were expressed in forty-six percent of cases as reflected in the categories of Communication Strategies and Interpersonal Conflict in Table 3. Cases in both categories increased in 2009-2010 compared to the past three years. 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.
- (3) In cases involving complaints against other individuals, eighty-nine percent of the staff complaints and fifty percent of the faculty complaints were related to supervisor-employee relationships. Additionally, problematic management style was cited in fifty-six percent of all cases. Possible causes of the supervisor-employee relationship issues seemed to include not understanding demands on supervisors from others, not knowing how to appropriately communicate feelings, lack of communication regarding changes, new expectations of increased performance standards, fear of job loss, and work overload. More extensive leadership training focusing on motivation, communication, teambuilding, constructive feedback, and the effective implementation of change would be helpful for staff supervisors as well as department chairs.

Table 1
University Positions of Visitors

Position of Visitor	Number of Cases				Annual Totals
	9/1/09-11/30/09	12/1/09-2/28/10	3/1/10-5/31/10	6/1/10-8/31/10	
Faculty Dean	0	0	0	1	1
Faculty Associate Dean	1	1	0	3	5
Faculty Department Chair	1	1	1	1	4
Faculty Full Professor	3	1	3	1	8
Faculty Associate Professor	2	3	2	0	7
Faculty Assistant Professor	0	1	1	0	2
Non-tenure Track Faculty	1	1	2	1	5
Librarian	0	0	0	0	0
Staff	9	9	10	10	38
Student	1	1	1	1	4
Total Cases	18	18	20	18	74

Table 2
Visitor's College or Division Affiliations

College or Division Affiliation	Number of Cases				
	9/1/09- 11/30/09	12/1/09- 2/28/10	3/1/10- 5/31/10	6/1/10- 8/31/10	Annual Totals
Gerald D. Hines College of Architecture	0	3	1	0	4
C.T. Bauer College of Business	6	5	3	3	17
College of Education	0	1	1	0	2
Cullen College of Engineering	2	1	1	0	4
Conrad Hilton College of Hotel and Restaurant Management	0	0	2	2	4
College of Liberal Arts and Sciences	4	2	7	4	17
College of Natural Sciences and Mathematics	1	0	1	0	2
College of Optometry	0	0	0	0	0
College of Pharmacy	0	0	0	0	0
College of Technology	0	0	0	0	0
Graduate College of Social Work	0	0	0	0	0
Honors College	0	0	0	0	0
Law Center	1	1	1	3	6
Department of Athletics	0	1	0	0	1
Division of Academic Affairs	1	0	1	4	6
Division of Administration and Finance	2	3	1	0	6
Division of Research	0	0	0	0	0
Division of Student Affairs	0	0	1	0	1
Division of University Advancement	0	0	0	0	0
Office of General Counsel	0	0	0	0	0
Office of the President	0	0	0	1	1
Libraries	0	0	0	0	0
Anonymous	0	0	0	0	0

**Table 3
Visitors' Issues and Concerns**

Issues and Concerns	Number of Cases				
	9/1/09- 11/30/09	12/1/09- 2/28/10	3/1/10- 5/31/10	6/1/10- 8/31/10	Annual Totals
Academic	5	4	1	1	11
Career management	4	2	4	0	10
Staff compensation	0	0	1	1	2
Communication strategies	9	7	11	7	34
Course assignments/scheduling	2	1	2	0	5
Staff workload/workflow	5	2	4	2	13
Discrimination					
Age	2	0	0	1	3
Race	0	1	0	0	1
Disability	0	1	0	2	3
Religion	0	0	0	1	1
Sex	0	0	0	1	1
Pregnancy	0	0	0	2	2
Sexual harassment	1	1	0	0	2
Retaliation	1	0	0	0	1
Faculty/Staff Relations	1	0	3	0	4
Group dynamics	4	0	1	1	6
Interpersonal conflict	9	9	10	6	34
Faculty salary	0	0	1	0	1
Personal issues	1	1	1	0	3
Policies and procedures					
Staff Discipline	2	2	1	2	7
Faculty promotion and tenure	0	0	2	0	2
Faculty classification	0	0	0	0	0
Faculty appointment	0	0	2	0	2
Faculty teaching/performance	0	2	2	1	5
Faculty merit evaluation	0	0	2	0	2
Faculty research	0	0	0	0	0
Faculty grievance	3	1	2	1	7
Staff grievance	1	0	0	1	2
Sick leave/vacation	1	1	0	0	2
Performance evaluation	0	0	3	2	5
Immigration/visa	0	0	0	0	0
Dept. chair appointment	0	1	0	0	1
Staff promotion/classification	0	0	1	1	2
Staff transfer	0	0	0	0	0
Staff work schedule	0	1	1	0	2
Staff termination	0	0	0	0	0

Smoking	0	0	0	0	0
UC Facility Use	0	0	0	0	0
Resignation	0	0	0	0	0
TA hiring/reappointment	0	1	0	0	1
Free speech	1	0	0	0	1
Committee procedures	0	0	0	0	0
Employee privacy	2	0	0	0	2
Student privacy	0	2	0	0	2
Nepotism	0	0	0	0	0
Layoffs	0	0	0	1	1
P-cards	1	0	0	0	1
Problematic management style	7	5	4	3	19
Student Organizations	0	0	0	1	1
Work environment (physical)					
General	0	0	0	1	1
Security	0	0	0	0	0
Space allocation	1	1	1	0	3
Air quality	0	0	0	0	0
Fire safety	0	0	0	0	0
Employee safety equipment	0	1	0	0	1

**Table 4
Individuals Complained Against by Position**

Complaints Against	Number of Cases				
	9/1/09- 11/30/09	12/1/09- 2/28/10	3/1/10- 5/31/10	6/1/10- 8/31/10	Annual Totals
Faculty Complaints					
Higher Administration	0	0	0	0	0
Dean / Associate Dean	0	2	0	1	3
Department Chair	2	0	4	0	6
Faculty Peer	2	2	3	0	7
Faculty Subordinate	1	1	1	0	3
Staff Member	3	0	0	1	4
Student	1	0	0	0	1
Staff Complaints					
Higher Administration	0	0	0	0	0
Dean / Associate Dean	0	0	2	0	2
Department Chair	2	0	1	1	4
Faculty	1	0	1	0	2
Staff Supervisor	7	6	3	4	20
Staff Peer	4	1	2	1	8
Staff Subordinate	1	1	1	2	5

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

Type of Strategy	Times Utilized				
	9/1/09- 11/30/09	12/1/09- 2/28/10	3/1/10- 5/31/10	6/1/10- 8/31/10	Annual Totals
Calls made	8	10	7	8	33
Coaching	16	8	15	15	54
Emails sent	3	2	2	0	7
Facilitated meeting	2	3	4	2	11
Policy / procedure information provided	7	5	4	6	22
Referrals	5	8	3	5	21
Shuttle diplomacy	2	1	4	1	8

Table 6
Referrals Made by the Ombudsperson

Referrals	Number				
	9/1/09- 11/30/09	12/1/09- 2/28/10	3/1/10- 5/31/10	6/1/10- 8/31/10	Annual Totals
Dean of Students	1	1	1	1	4
Employee Assistance Program	0	2	0	0	2
Human Resources	0	3	1	0	4
OAA/EEO	4	2	1	4	11
Office of General Counsel	0	0	0	0	0
UH website	0	0	0	0	0
Other websites	0	0	0	0	0
UH Commission on Women Pilot Mentoring Project	0	0	0	0	0