

## Ombuds Annual Report (2012-2013)

### I. Background Information

#### Appointment of a Graduate Student Ombudsman at USC

On July 1, 2012, the new office of Graduate Student Ombudsman was created by Provost Amiridis. Assistant Dean Dale Moore, former Director of Graduate Admissions, was appointed as the first Graduate Student Ombudsman. The Graduate Student Ombudsman deals with problems and concerns outside formal channels that may include grievances, appeals, or petitions.

The Ombudsman adheres to the Code of Ethics and the Standards of Practice of the International Ombudsman Association (IOA) and serves as a confidential, neutral, informal and independent resource for graduate student concerns and conflicts.

The Ombudsman is a member in good standing of the IOA. The Ombudsman adheres to the *Code of Ethics* and the *Standards of Practice* of the *International Ombudsman Association* and serves as a confidential, neutral, informal and independent resource for graduate student concerns and conflicts.

A website for the Ombudsman is located at this URL: <http://gradschool.sc.edu/students/ombs.asp> and provides information about the office of the ombudsman, annual reports, the *IOA Standards of Practice* and the *IOA Code of Ethics* as well as links to other ombuds-related resources.

#### *International Ombudsman Association*

The IOA was formed in July 2005 following the merger of the University and College Ombuds Association (UCOA) and The Ombudsman Association (TOA). The Association supports organizational Ombudsmen worldwide working in corporations, universities, non-profit organizations, government entities and non-governmental organizations. IOA is the largest international association of professional organizational Ombudsmen practitioners in the world. About a third of the total membership belongs to the academic sector.

The IOA is dedicated to excellence in the practice of Ombudsman work. The IOA Code of Ethics provides a common set of professional ethical principles to which members adhere in their organizational Ombudsman practice. Based on the traditions and values of Ombudsman practice, the Code of Ethics reflects a commitment to promote ethical conduct in the performance of the Ombudsman role and to maintain the integrity of the Ombudsman profession.

### II. Ethical Principles of the International Ombudsman Association

#### *Confidentiality*

The Ombudsman holds all communications with those seeking assistance in strict confidence, and does not disclose confidential communications unless given permission to do so. The only exception to this privilege of confidentiality is when such disclosure is required by law or where there appears to be imminent risk of serious harm.

#### *Neutrality and Impartiality*

The Ombudsman, as a designated neutral, remains unaligned and impartial. The Ombudsman does not engage in any situation which could create a conflict of interest.

### ***Informality***

The Ombudsman, as an informal resource, does not participate in any formal adjudicative or administrative procedure related to concerns brought to his/her attention.

### ***Independence***

The Ombudsman is independent in structure, function, and appearance to the highest degree possible within the organization.

## **III. Standards of Practice and Code of Ethics of the International Ombudsman Association**

The IOA Standards of Practice are based upon and derived from the ethical principles stated in the IOA Code of Ethics.

Links to these documents are located here:

[https://www.ombudsassociation.org/IOA\\_Main/media/SiteFiles/IOA\\_Standards\\_of\\_Practice\\_Oct09.pdf](https://www.ombudsassociation.org/IOA_Main/media/SiteFiles/IOA_Standards_of_Practice_Oct09.pdf) [https://www.ombudsassociation.org/IOA\\_Main/media/SiteFiles/Code\\_Ethics\\_1-07.pdf](https://www.ombudsassociation.org/IOA_Main/media/SiteFiles/Code_Ethics_1-07.pdf)

## **IV. Activities of the Graduate Student Ombudsman (2012-2013)**

Completed the IOA Foundations of Organizational Ombudsman Practice course in Baltimore October 15-19, 2012.

Attended the Seminar: Dealing with a Difficult Workplace on bullying, incivility, and conflict delivered by University Ombudsman, Dr. Jim Augustine, on October 23, 2012.

Attended the 8<sup>th</sup> Annual Conference of the International Ombudsman Association in Miami April 19-24, 2013, and completed the Knowledge and Skills Series course.

Delivered a presentation on the role duties of the ombudsman to graduate directors and administrative staff from the School of Medicine and the School of Social Work on July 25, 2013.

### **Visitors and Topics of Concern (2012-2013)**

During the period of this report (July 1, 2012 to July 31, 2013) the Graduate School Ombudsman met with 143 graduate students, most of whom were first time visitors to the office of the ombuds. Many visits involved listening to the student's concerns and offering information about University policies and procedures, clarifying issues, identifying and evaluating a range of options for resolving a problem, gathering information and offering referrals to other resources, or working collaboratively between those involved in a dispute to reconcile differences. The ombuds also tracks perceived issues and trends and makes recommendations for departmental, college, or institutional change as appropriate.

In order to preserve the confidentiality of visitors to the Graduate Student Ombudsman, no notes, documents, or records of any kind are maintained related to the identity of the individual student including their gender, race, department, college or school. The only information retained from

contacts by student visitors with the Graduate Student Ombudsman is that regarding the nature of the issue discussed.

### **Uniform Reporting Categories – student concerns in each category (2012-2013)**

(1) Compensation & Benefits - *Questions, concerns, issues or inquiries about the equity, appropriateness and competitiveness of employee compensation, benefits and other benefit programs.* 5 visitors in this category.

(2) Evaluative Relationships - *Questions, concerns, issues or inquiries arising between people in evaluative relationships (i.e. senior faculty-junior faculty, program director-faculty, chair-faculty, dean-faculty, faculty-student).* 26 visitors in this category.

(3) Peer and Colleague Relationships - *Questions, concerns, issues or inquiries involving peers or colleagues who do not have a direct supervisory relationship (e.g., two faculty members within the same department or conflict involving faculty members of the same college or unit).* 3 visitors in this category.

(4) Career Progression and Development - *Questions, concerns, issues or inquiries about administrative processes and decisions regarding entering and leaving a job, or what it entails, (i.e., recruitment, nature and place of assignment, job security, and separation).* 17 visitors in this category.

(5) Legal, Regulatory, Financial and Compliance - *Questions, concerns, issues or inquiries that may create a legal risk (financial, sanction etc.) for the organization or its members if not addressed, including issues related to waste, fraud or abuse.* 22 visitors in this category.

(6) Safety, Health, and Physical Environment - *Questions, concerns, issues or inquiries about Safety, Health and Infrastructure-related issues.* 1 visitor in this category.

(7) Services/Administrative Issues - *Questions, concerns, issues or inquiries about services or administrative offices.* 51 visitors in this category.

(8) Organizational, Strategic, and Mission Related - *Questions, concerns, issues or inquiries that relate to the whole or some part of an organization.* 0 visitors in this category.

(9) Values, Ethics, and Standards - *Questions, concerns, issues or inquiries about the fairness of organizational values, ethics, and/or standards, the application of related policies and/or procedures, or the need for creation or revision of policies, and/or standards.* 18 visitors in this category.

### **Annual Report 2012-2013**

Reporting Categories	2012-2013	%
1. Compensation and Benefits	5	3.5
2. Evaluative Relationships	26	18.2
3. Peer and Colleague Relationships	3	2.1
4. Career Progression and Development	17	11.9
5. Legal, Regulatory, Financial, and Compliance	22	15.4
6. Safety, Health, and Physical Environment	1	.01
7. Services/Administrative Issues	51	35.7
8. Organizational, Strategic, and Mission Related	0	0
9. Values, Ethics, and Standards	18	12.6

Totals

143

99.41%

### **Final Comments**

Student concerns that represented patterns or trends were clustered around faculty/student conflicts, issues with legal implications including harassment, discrimination, and intellectual property, and the perceived fairness of policies, standards, and standards, but the significant majority of student concerns involved service/administrative issues. While they were often conflicts most easily reconciled, they had a profound influence on the student's general impressions of their graduate school experience.

Whatever success has been achieved during the inaugural year of the Graduate Student Ombudsman is attributable to the cooperation and support of faculty and administrative leaders in the University who were willing to listen to various matters brought to their attention and work with all parties concerned to find a fair and just resolution to conflicts. The ombuds is appreciative of the faculty and administration's willingness to support the work of this office without violating the independence, neutrality, informality, or confidence of the ombuds process.