

ANNUAL REPORT
THE OHIO STATE UNIVERSITY FACULTY OMBUDSMAN
2017-18

The office of the Faculty Ombudsman at The Ohio State University was established on October 1, 2010. This is the eighth annual report emanating from this office and covers the period from September 1, 2017 through August 31, 2018. Including myself, three faculty have served in the ombudsman position since its inception: Jack Rall, Ph.D. (2010 – 2013); Lynne Olson, Ph.D. (2013 – 2017) and myself, (2017 – 2018).

The duties of the faculty ombudsman are defined in faculty rule 3335-5-45.3 and include: (1) helping faculty assess the viability of complaints and issues, (2) directing faculty to appropriate offices, committees, university rules and policies and (3) where appropriate serving as an informal mediator for early stage complaints.

The office of the faculty ombudsman operates under the principles of the International Ombudsman Association (IOA). These principles are as follows:

- Independence: The office is independent from other entities and operates outside of formal organizational chart of the university.
- Neutrality/Impartiality: The ombudsman does not advocate for any individual or group; rather the ombudsman remains neutral in dealing with the concerns identified by visitors to the office
- Confidentiality: The ombudsman respects the privacy of all who seek counsel and advice. Except in cases where there is imminent risk of bodily harm, all interactions are confidential to the extent allowed by law. No records are kept except for personal notes which are maintained only to assure continuity and which are destroyed at the completion of the case. Personal notes are not subject to Ohio open records law. The Ombudsman is required to report allegations of sexual harassment or intended violence to self and others.
- Informality: Interactions with faculty are on an informal basis. The ombudsman listens to faculty concerns, and helps faculty identify options for dealing with and solving their issues/concerns. The ombudsman does not participate in formal university processes such as grievance procedures, research misconduct proceedings, '04 procedures, etc.

Faculty cannot be required to consult the ombudsman.

The Faculty Ombudsman belongs to the International Ombudsman Association (IOA) and the newly formed Ohio Ombudsman Organization (OOO) and attends numerous meetings and conferences on topics germane to Ombudsman practice in higher education. Dr. Nancy Rogers

continued to serve as a mentor to the Ombudsman providing a valuable resource. The Ombudsman sought guidance and advice from numerous individuals/offices including: The Office of Legal Affairs, the Office of Academic Affairs, Human Resources, the Graduate School, the Office of Compliance and Integrity, the University Senate, and the Office of Research Compliance. The Ombudsman serves on the Ohio State University Policies Review Committee and the Research Misconduct Policy Working Group. I would like to thank those individuals who have provided ongoing advice and counsel and without whom I would not have been able to function effectively.

In 2017-18, the Ombudsman heard concerns/issues from 50 faculty members and participated in over 225 interactions (face-to-face meetings, e-mail exchanges and phone calls). Faculty were from 11 colleges and 3 regional campuses. Of the faculty who visited the office, 25 were professors, 9 were associate professors, and 8 were assistant professors; of these 13 had additional titles such as assistant associate or vice chair, director or associate director, endowed chair, graduate studies chair, etc. Other faculty appointments included visiting assistant professor, visiting professor, senior lecturer, clinical assistant professor and clinical professor. Table 1 compares the volume of case work in 2017-18 with previous years. It is noteworthy that although the number of faculty cases is similar to those reported in years past, the number of interactions is significantly greater. This may suggest that the issues and concerns expressed by faculty have grown more complex.

As in the past, many of the issues brought to the office were those emanating from evaluative relationships and related concerns (for example concerns over annual evaluations and P&T processes). Many faculty came seeking information, policies, and procedures when they felt that the process they were involved in was flawed or when they disagreed with the outcomes. Unlike some past years, few faculty came for a single conversation; the majority came back for multiple interactions generally in the form of additional phone and e-mail exchanges. In some more complex cases, multiple face-to-face meetings were required to identify a solution or to clarify goals and discuss options.

The most common issues were:

1. Conflicts with administration, most commonly the department chair and/or associate chair.
 - a. Inconsistent evaluative feedback
 - b. Non-collegial behaviors (intimidation, bullying, microaggressions)
 - c. Perceived bias or discrimination
 - d. Failure to follow policies (Departmental, College and/or University)
 - e. Failure to communicate effectively/clearly
 - f. Failure to respect confidentiality/privacy of individuals
 - g. Salary negotiations/perceived inequity
 - h. Workload
 - i. Lack of respect

2. Conflicts with colleagues/students
 - a. Non-collegial behaviors
 - b. Abrasive language
 - c. Failure to follow established rules and guidelines
3. Requests for clarification
 - a. Benefits
 - b. Salary equity appeal process
 - c. P&T
 - d. Graduate student policies
 - e. Annual evaluation
 - f. Faculty misconduct
 - g. '04 rule
 - h. Social media policies
 - i. Libel
 - j. Retaliation

Some observations from the past years' service as ombudsman include:

1. Some of the more difficult cases were those in which policies/guidelines were either silent or vague with regard to the question at hand. This allowed for a sort of freestyle approach to problems which results in misunderstandings and inequitable or inconsistent behaviors.
2. Electronic communication, although efficient, seems to have fostered a new class of problems that stem from the indiscriminant and inappropriate communication of sensitive/private and often unsubstantiated information about an individual to a larger audience. This in many cases has adversely affected the reputation of the individual among their colleagues both within and external to the university community. Use of e-mail as a substitute for face-to-face communication has, it seems, fostered miscommunication and eroded relationships.

TABLE 1: Faculty Ombudsman Office Interactions by Year – 2010 - 2018				
Reporting Period	Number of Interactions	Number of Faculty Served	Number of Departments/Units Serves	Number of Regional Campuses Served
October 1, 2010 – June 30, 2011 (Rall)	65	35	22	2
July 1, 2011 – June 30, 2012* (Rall)	85	59	30	2
July 1, 2012 – August 31, 2013 (Gerber/Rall)#	81	46	29	2
September 1, 2013 – August 31, 2014 (Rall/Olson)	82	61	38	2
September 1, 2014 – August 31, 2015 (Olson)	75	43	35	1
September 1, 2015 – August 31, 2016 (olson)	43	31	24	1
September 1, 2016 – August 31, 2017 (Olson)	76	43	37	2
September 1, 2017 – August 31, 2018 (Rudmann)	~ 200	50	38 (11 colleges)	3
# Dr. Rall became an emeritus faculty and could not carry out university business for two months (July and August 2012) as required by Ohio Law				
* The Faculty Ombudsman position was changed from 9 months to 12 months				