

SOU FACULTY OMBUDS REPORT - 2019

This report summarizes the activity and budget status for calendar year 2019.

INTRODUCTION

The Office of the Faculty Ombuds at Southern Oregon University was formally established in the fall of 2016. The **Faculty Ombuds is an informal, impartial, independent, neutral and confidential resource** that faculty can voluntarily seek out to discuss a campus-related matter. The Office provides timely, off-the-record, respectful, and objective conversations regarding academic or administrative questions, concerns, and/or conflicts. The Faculty Ombuds can clarify University governance structures and identify options available to faculty but does not advocate for a particular entity. The Faculty Ombuds seeks fair process and open communication.

Dr. Lynn Kirms served as the initial Faculty Ombuds for the first two years, through the end of calendar year 2018, her relinquishing of the post coinciding with her retirement as SOU Faculty. Dominick Robertson became the new Faculty Ombuds beginning in January 2019, serving a two-year term immediately following his own SOU Faculty retirement. As a result, the model for the Faculty Ombuds position shifted from being a service role within the existing faculty ranks to a volunteer position by a retiree. It is unclear whether or how this shift does or will impact the service. So far, there has been an increase in usage in 2019 from previous years (see “Visitors” below), but the current incumbent is aware that his disconnection from the day-to-day operations of the university will only increase over time, potentially reducing visibility for the function.

This report covers the first year of Dominick’s term.

2019 ACTIVITY

Visitors

So far in 2019, there have been 10 visitors involving 17 separate “sessions” (either in person, by phone, or occasionally email exchanges). Visitors came from 9 different programs within 7 different divisions. Total time spent by the Faculty Ombuds in direct interaction with visitors was just over 600 minutes total, and thus an average of 60 minutes per visitor. In terms of number of visitors, this is double the quantity reported in each of the first two years of the program (5 visitors in AY2016-17 and 5 more in AY 2017-18, per Lynn Kirms’ 2017-2018 annual report).

According to the International Ombudsman Association (IOA), the standard for Ombuds organizations is that the office would expect to see ~2-3% of the population in any year. At SOU, this would equate to 4-5 visitors per year, as was the case in the first two years of the SOU office. It is unclear whether the doubling of visitors in 2019 represents a genuine increase in demand or greater visibility for the service. Dominick’s roles immediately prior to assuming the Faculty Ombuds role included both the faculty union presidency and a seat on the Faculty Senate. Thus he personally had some visibility across multiple divisions and programs, which may have increased awareness of the role, particularly by those to whom he was a known quantity. It is encouraging to note that visitors came from nearly all divisions, indicating cross-campus awareness.

All but one of the visitors contacting the Faculty Ombuds office occurred in the first 6 months of 2019, despite reminder flyers and marketing communications to all divisions, programs, and individual faculty members at the start of AY 2019-20.

With only 10 visitors/data points, it is inadvisable to attempt to determine any significant trends in the type of problems brought to the Ombuds office, and each visitor came with unique issues. In some cases, the primary function was to be a “listening ear” and to help visitors identify and navigate the possible routes within the SOU organization in order to seek resolution. However, to the degree that any common factors were discernable, the highest frequency related to visitors encountering interpersonal problems (with peers, subordinates, program chairs, or

directors) and not wanting to go through any formal resolution path, either due to a desire to avoid further conflict or for fear of negative consequences to the visitor of raising the visibility of the conflict within the organization. It was for this reason that the Ombuds engaged in a 40-hour Mediation training, and then added a confidential, informal mediation service to the Ombuds offerings, after discussion with the SOU President. This training has recently been completed. So far, the service has not been used by any faculty, although it is now another avenue of potential resolution for future visitors, and is reflected on the new flyer developed to communicate the Ombuds services.

Other Activity

In addition to sessions with visitors, Ombuds activity in 2019 included the 3-day IOA Foundations of Organizational Ombuds Practice course, followed by the 3-day IOA Annual Conference in March/April, the 40-hour online certificate course in Mediation, and marketing communications to faculty and administration at the start of the calendar year and again at the start of Fall term.

BUDGET

2019 Budget

The Faculty Ombuds budget allocated for 2019 was \$5,214.50, reflecting start-up costs for a new Faculty Ombuds (including the 3-day Ombuds Foundations course offered by the International Ombudsman Association (IOA), which was immediately followed by the annual conference, reducing overall travel costs).

The majority of the budget expenses (~75%) related to the combined Foundations training and annual conference. There are some recurring annual costs related to IOA membership and a dedicated phone line. The remaining discretionary expenses included some marketing materials (through the SOU Print Center), and additional training and materials related to certification in mediation (see “Other Activity” above).

<i>Date</i>	<i>Expense item</i>	<i>Amount</i>	<i>Budget Balance</i>
2019	Opening Budget		\$5,214.50
12/20/18	New Orleans travel (training and conference)	\$3,542.67	\$1,671.83
12/14/08	IOA annual membership	\$220.00	\$1,451.83
12/14/18	Line2 phone line annual	\$99.50	\$1,352.33
4/7/19	NOLA meals/per diem	\$360.00	\$992.33
5/12/19	Books from Amazon (mediation)	\$127.64	\$864.69
6/17/19	Mediation online course	\$495.00	\$369.69
7/8/19	Ombuds business cards	\$22.44	\$347.25
7/10/19	Ombuds fliers	\$144.37	\$202.88
11/5/19	IOA annual membership renewal	\$195.00	\$7.88

2020 Budget

The Faculty Ombuds budget allocated for 2020 is significantly lower than 2019 at \$2,119.50, as no new Faculty Ombuds start-up costs are necessary. Furthermore, the IOA annual membership renewal for 2020 was paid out of the remaining balance of the 2019 budget, further decreasing the anticipated expenditures for 2020. The annual IOA conference in 2020 will be held in Portland, further reducing associated travel costs.

<i>Date</i>	<i>Expense item</i>	<i>Amount</i>	<i>Budget Balance</i>
2020	Opening Budget		\$2,119.50
	IOA annual membership	(paid in 2019)	
	Line2 phone line annual		
	Portland conference registration		
	Portland conference travel and per diem		

LOOKING FORWARD: 2020

As discussed, 2020 will be the second year of the current incumbent's two-year term. A decision will be needed as to whether he continues in the role, or whether a replacement will need to be appointed for 2021. One consideration for a continuation is whether the current incumbent – as a retiree - is becoming too detached from the everyday activities of the university to be visible and effective. Alternatively, a process will need to be established - likely in Fall 2020 - to recruit and appoint a successor.

One observation I would make is that my personal background as a Licensed Professional Counselor appears to be a good skills match for the Faculty Ombuds/Mediation role: the training and experience for the former is directly applicable to the latter. It may be impractical to find another professional counselor/therapist for the next appointment, but I would suggest that the skillset might be included in criteria for selecting a replacement.

One item mentioned in Lynn Kirms' 2018 report is the absence of a follow-up survey for visitors to measure the level of satisfaction with Ombuds services received. This was not implemented in 2019, but would be an appropriate activity for 2020. Naturally, the process must absolutely protect visitors' confidentiality.

Respectfully submitted,

Dominick Robertson
SOU Faculty Ombuds