

SOU FACULTY OMBUDS REPORT - 2020

This report summarizes the activity and budget status for calendar year 2020.

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.

Dominick Robertson became the 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. The current incumbent is aware that his disconnection from the day-to-day operations of the university has only increased over time, potentially reducing visibility for the function. It is unclear whether or how this shift has impacted the service, given the additional extraordinary factors of COVID-19 and local wildfires in 2020. There was an increase in usage in 2019 from previous years, followed by a decrease in 2020 (see “Visitors” below),

This report covers the second (final) year of Dominick’s term.

2020 ACTIVITY

Visitors

So far in 2020, there have been 9 visitors involving 10 separate “sessions” (either in person, by phone, or email exchanges). The only face-to-face sessions were in January and February; all subsequent sessions have been by phone or email exchanges, following COVID-19. Visitors came from 7 different programs within 5 different divisions. Total time spent by the Faculty Ombuds in direct interaction with visitors was just over 430 minutes total, and thus an average of 48 minutes per visitor. This compares to 10 visitors, 17 “sessions”, from 9 programs within 7 divisions, for a total of 600 minutes at 60 minutes per session average in 2019.

There was no usage of mediation services for which the current incumbent trained in 2019.

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 and 2020 compared to the first 2 years represents a genuine increase in demand or greater visibility for the service. It is encouraging to note that visitors came from across most divisions, indicating cross-campus awareness, despite little marketing of the function.

As in 2019, with only 9 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. Most often, 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.

Other Activity

There was no significant activity in 2020 beyond the visitor sessions summarized above. The current incumbent planned to attend the 3-day IOA Annual Conference in March/April (to be held in Portland this year); however, that conference was cancelled due to COVID-19.

The incumbent had also intended to establish some form of survey/feedback mechanism to gather effectiveness data on the Ombuds function, but this project was never initiated.

A team (including the incumbent) is currently in process of recruiting a new Faculty Ombuds, to begin in January, 2021.

BUDGET

2020 Budget

The Faculty Ombuds budget allocated for 2020 was significantly lower than 2019 at \$2,119.50, as no new Faculty Ombuds start-up costs were necessary in the second year of an Ombuds' tenure. Furthermore, the IOA annual membership renewal for 2020 was paid out of the remaining balance of the 2019 budget, further decreasing the expenditures for 2020. As a result of the IOA annual conference being cancelled this year due to COVID-19, the only expense in 2020 was the dedicated Line2 phone line; the balance of the budget remained unspent.

<i>Date</i>	<i>Expense item</i>	<i>Amount</i>	<i>Budget Balance</i>
2020	Opening Budget		\$2,119.50
1/17/20	Line2 phone line annual	\$106.78	\$2,012.72
	Portland conference registration		\$2,012.72
	Portland conference travel and per diem		\$2,012.72

2021 Budget

The 2021 and 2022 budgets will be established in support of the new incoming Faculty Ombuds.

LOOKING FORWARD: 2021

At the time of writing this report, a process is under way to recruit a new Faculty Ombuds from the ranks of existing faculty, to begin serving a 2-year term beginning in January, 2021.

It has been an honor to serve in the capacity of SOU Faculty Ombuds for the past 2 years.

Respectfully submitted,

Dominick Robertson

SOU Faculty Ombuds (2019-2020)