

SOU FACULTY OMBUDS REPORT - 2021

This report summarizes the activity and budget status for calendar year 2021.

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.

Cody Christopherson became the Faculty Ombuds beginning in January 2021, agreeing to serve a two-year term. With his acceptance, the model for the Faculty Ombuds position shifted back to being a service role within the existing faculty ranks rather than a volunteer position by a retiree. There was a slight decrease in usage in 2021 from 2020.

This report covers the first year of Cody's term.

2020 ACTIVITY

Visitors

In 2021, there have been 7 visitors involving 8 separate “sessions” (by 2 by email alone & 6 by zoom). There were no face-to-face sessions, following COVID-19. Visitors came from 6 different programs within 5 different divisions. Total time spent by the Faculty Ombuds in direct interaction with visitors was just over 400 minutes total, and thus an average of 57 minutes per visitor. This compares to 9 visitors, 10 “sessions”, from 7 programs within 5 divisions, for a total of 430 minutes at 48 minutes per session average in 2020. It is possible that downturn is related to COVID 19 protocols and less face-to-face availability.

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. In 2021, we continued at a higher rate than this estimate, similar to 2019 and 2020. It is encouraging to note that visitors came from across most divisions, indicating cross-campus awareness, despite little marketing of the function.

As in 2020, with only 7 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 as a neutral listening space and to help visitors identify and navigate the possible routes within the SOU organization in order to seek resolution.

Other Activity

There was some additional significant activity in 2021 beyond the visitor sessions summarized above. The incumbent has created and established an anonymous feedback mechanism to gather effectiveness data on the Ombuds function. This survey consisted of three questions: "How satisfied are you with your experience with the Ombuds office? (1-5 scale with anchors "completely unsatisfied" and "completely satisfied"). What was the most useful aspect of your visit? How might the Ombuds office improve for future visitors?" The survey is administered using Google Forms.

Two visitors responded to the survey, both of whom ranked their experience 5/5. In regards to what was most useful, they said "The ability to talk openly about a concern with an impartial party. Being a junior faculty member can be isolating in normal circumstances and this has been exacerbated this past year, which makes it difficult to know what is "right" sometimes" and "Sharing ideas; hearing other perspectives; receiving affirmation on some thoughts already considered." Neither respondent offered suggestions for improvement. The incumbent will continue to use this survey in the coming year to gather feedback.

Expenses Incured (2021)

At the end of 2021, it was discovered that the Ombuds office does not have a budget per se. Rather, the financial support of Ombuds activities came from an informal agreement between the Ombuds office and the Office of the President. Expenses were submitted directly to the Office of the President for reimbursement. As a result, the "Budget" section of this report has been eliminated in favor of a simple report of expenses from the prior year and anticipated expenses for the coming year. If a budget is established, the section will be reinstated in next year's report.

Expenses for 2021 were down compared to 2020, due to the initial ombuds training being unavailable and the dedicated phone line being deemed unnecessary. The solitary expense was a membership fee for joining the International Ombuds Association, which cost \$220. Total expenses for 2021, therefore, are \$220.

Expected (2022)

The initial training for Ombuds (“The Foundations” course) was moved completely online in 2021 and filled up extremely quickly. The incumbent was unable to register for this course. However, the international Ombuds Association has recognized the demand and added additional opportunities for the training. The incumbent is now registered for training in February 2022. The cost of this training is \$1795. The annual conference is April 4-6 and registration is \$395. The conference is virtual and therefore will not require lodging, travel, or per diem expenses. Total anticipated expenses for 2022, therefore, are \$2190.

LOOKING FORWARD: 2022

At the time of writing this report, Cody Christopherson will remain in the role of SOU Faculty Ombuds for calendar year 2022. This will complete his two-year term.

Respectfully submitted,

Cody Christopherson
SOU Faculty Ombuds (2021)