

SOU FACULTY OMBUDS REPORT 2022

This report summarizes the activity and budget status for calendar year 2022.

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. 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 decrease in usage in 2022 from 2021.

This report covers the second year of Cody's term and was submitted March 21, 2023.

2022 ACTIVITY

Visitors

In 2022, there were 0 visitors. 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. After several consecutive years of a higher rate of visitors,

in 2022, we had a lower rate than this estimate, and the lowest rate since the office was established in 2016.

The lack of visitors to the office was caused by a technical malfunction. Following COVID, visitors rarely met with the faculty ombuds in-person. The faculty ombuds telephone was disconnected at the beginning of the current term. Therefore, the only method for contacting with faculty ombuds was via email. The office established a non-SOU email address which has appeared to function well in the past. However, at the beginning of 2023, a faculty member alerted the faculty ombuds that several people had attempted to contact the office and had gotten no response at all. This was curious because the ombuds email is set-up to auto-reply to all emails with additional ways of contacting the ombuds should the person not hear back promptly. Messages to the ombuds had been going to the spam folder and therefore were not redirected and had no means for contacting the ombuds office. Fortunately, two of these messages could be recovered and responded to in 2023. Unfortunately, the spam filter auto-deletes all messages after 30 days, so it was impossible to know whether they had been other attempts to contact the office. Presently, the ombuds regularly checks the spam folder and recovers any errant messages. He also sent out an email to all faculty apologizing for the mistake and inviting anyone who had been mis-shuffled into spam to contact the office. It is unknown how this may have impacted prior years.

Though not addressed in this annual report for 2022, there have been six visitors who have contacted the ombuds office in 2023 as of March. This already exceeds the estimated number of visitors for the year, and indeed exceeds the total number of visitors for some years. Complete details for these visits will be presented in the annual report for 2023.

Other Activity

In February of 2022, Cody attended the Virtual Foundations course for training new ombuds. The course lasted 15 hours over 3 days and included reading and assignments outside of meeting times.

In 2022, faculty group X-Factor met with university president Dr. Rick Bailey to request the establishment of a charter for the faculty ombuds office. This matter was referred to faculty senate to gauge faculty support for the idea. Specifically, X-Factor requested these key elements

1. “Formal recognition of and support for the Faculty ombuds Office [through the establishment of a charter]”
2. “A budget to support two faculty ombuds to avoid potential conflict of interest” (see proposed budget below)
3. “4 ELU teaching release (the equivalent of one course) each calendar year to provide ombuds time to meet with visitors, increase campus community awareness of the Office, connect with university constituents, and engage in professional development opportunities”

The motion to approve a charter was approved by the SOU Faculty Senate.

Total time spent on this office for 2022 is 39 hours. This includes the preparation of this report, testifying in faculty senate, meeting with President Bailey, consulting with X-Factor, checking emails, the foundations training, preparing and presenting materials for campus email distribution, attending all-division meetings to advertise the office at the beginning of the school year, and updating the ombuds website. Overall, the total is much lower than average due to the lack of visitors described above.

Expenses Incurred

At the time of this writing, the ombuds office does not have a formal budget and is supported with direct reimbursement from the office of the President. Although this may change in the coming year, currently there is not a budget on which to report. Instead, this section remains “expenses incurred”. Expenses for calendar year 2022 totaled \$1795, which was the cost of the “Virtual Foundations” training course taken in February 2022. There was not a membership fee or annual conference fee in 2022.

Expected (2023)

The status of this office is currently in some question. However, regardless of the number of ombuds or financial support offered, it is anticipated that there will continuously be at least one ombuds, who would be a member of The International Ombuds Association. The minimum anticipated expenses for 2023 are \$250. This would be the cost of membership renewal. However, when the status of office is clarified, the faculty ombuds is expected to resume ongoing training and conference attendance. This is likely to include a budget for two ombuds, including membership fees and cost of ongoing training and conference attendance. A single 4 ELU annual release is proposed to be shared. A single ombuds would receive the release. In the case of two ombuds, they could alternate the release. If the charter were successfully created, a budget was created, and an additional ombuds were hired, a \$10,615 annual budget could look like this:

Category (for new ombuds)	Cost	Total cost
IOA Annual Dues	\$250	\$250
IOA Foundations course in-person	\$1695	\$1695
Airfare	\$800	\$800
Food per diem	4 days x \$70	\$280
Lodging per diem	5 nights x \$125	\$625
Additional phone line	\$10/month	\$120
Advertising expenses	\$100	\$100
4 ELU Teaching Release (TxT rate, 1 ELU = 35 hours)	4 ELU x \$750/ELU	\$3000
TOTAL ANNUAL EXPENSE PER NEW OMBUDS		\$6870

Category (for continuing ombuds)	Cost	Total cost
IOA Annual Dues	\$225	\$225
Professional Development Course (3 days)	\$1695	\$1695
Airfare	\$800	\$800
Food per diem	4 days x \$70	\$280
Lodging per diem	5 nights x \$125	\$625
Additional phone line	\$10/month	\$120
TOTAL ANNUAL EXPENSE PER CONTINUING OMBUDS		\$3745

LOOKING FORWARD: 2023

At the time of writing this report, Cody Christopherson has completed his two-year term. Because the nature of the office is in flux, he has agreed to remain the faculty ombuds for an additional six months, until June 2023.

Respectfully submitted,

Cody Christopherson, March 21, 2023

SOU Faculty Ombuds (2022)