

MEMORANDUM

TO: Geoff Gamble, President
Dave Dooley, Provost
Chair, Faculty Council
Chair, Professional Council
Chair, Classified Employees Personnel Advisory Committee

FROM: Nancy G. Dodd, University Ombuds

DATE: July 19, 2005

SUBJECT: 2004-2005 Ombuds Position Report

Following is information about Ombuds office activities in FY 2004-2005. This report will cover Ombuds "visitor" activity, other Ombuds office activities, and suggestions for the future.

Activity During 2004-2005

- Cases in 2004-2005

During 2004-2005 I had 28 "cases," most of which were significant meetings (often multiple meetings) and conversations. Several of those cases have extended over several months. Last year, 2003-2004, I had 18 "cases," many of which also extended over a period of time. Continuing the trend of last year, this year's activity indicates even greater use of the office for more significant issues. Several cases are continuing into the current fiscal year. By mid July I had already had my first "visitor" for the new fiscal year, plus follow ups on cases continuing from last year and a follow up on a case still pending from 2002-2003. This last year I had three cases that have extended over 13 or more weeks, with regular contact, and some of those plus others are still active.

Of the 28 cases, 50% came from faculty, 25% from professional employees, and 25% came from classified employees and others. The percent of professional employees increased 8% from the previous year. The 28 cases came from 4 colleges and 9 other units. Sixty-one percent of the visitors were women and 39% were men, an increase in the percent of women over last year.

- Classified employees

In February arrangements were completed to allow the Ombuds office to serve Classified employees along with Faculty and Professional employees. The very day the notice went out I was contacted by the “office manager” in a department, asking for training for staff. The person had just been worrying about how he or she would go about providing some training and was very happy to learn of my availability. That training involved 7 employees, which was a nice start. I have not been overwhelmed by contacts from Classified employees, which may well be a lack of awareness on their part. Of course, it may be because the Classified employees have no complaints!

- Group activities

During the year I was asked to do more group activities. The year started with me conducting an informal mediation between two employees. Later in the year I provided training to the classified staff in a department, a group of 7 employees. This training consisted of two, two-hour sessions on personality type and communication and conflict. The year finished off with a four hour training session for a group of 9 Faculty members regarding aspects of communication.

Ombuds activity is summarized on the enclosed spreadsheet and graphs.

Recurring Issues Which Could/Should be Addressed

- Issues presented by employees

For the last two years, supervisory treatment accounted for the majority of visits to the office. The most recent year, that category was tied with job assignments/reassignments and terms of contracts. As mentioned last year, the need for supervisory training is paramount. Effective supervisory training would probably take care of the assignments and terms of contracts issues as well. This training is needed at all levels in the organization.

Compensation, particularly among Faculty, was also a popular issue this year. Concerns related to salary compression and its effect on long time faculty members as well as issues related to raises and pay equity. I am hopeful that with raises this year, some of those concerns may abate.

- Other issues

As mentioned last year, a continuing concern is the lack of a policy manual/handbook for Professional employees. This is something that would take time to remedy, but would benefit the university and employees alike.

There is one more issue which has come up recently, unrelated to employee concerns on campus. In April/May the primary ombudsman organizations, the University and College Ombuds Association and The Ombudsman Association, voted to merge into one organization. The new policy is that anyone who is not working at least 50% as an Ombuds would not be a voting member of the organization. Other than the lack of voice in the organization's direction, future, and structure, anything which protects Ombuds would not apply to the non-voting members. For example, the group has been working for several years on a shield law for Ombuds, to grant them the same sort of confidentiality as lawyers, doctors, etc. have in legal terms. If passed, it would not apply to people such as the University Ombuds at MSU, currently a 25% position.

Specific Activities for 2005-2006

The items listed below are almost identical to what was suggested for 2004-2005. Because of the continuing uncertainty about the Ombuds program's future, the more long term-oriented items have not been undertaken yet. I waited on the business cards and brochure because of the new logo process. Some items from last year, such as exploring expansion to Classified employees and making training available to specific units/departments have already been done. The list below includes items suggested for the next year, assuming the Ombuds program becomes permanent, or has a multi-year commitment:

- Ombuds business cards
- Official brochure
- Web presence, to provide greater visibility to and communication with campus
- Additional marketing of Ombuds program to groups on campus, especially Classified employees
- Modification of Faculty Handbook and other relevant policies to reflect the position of the office of Ombuds and elimination of faculty Conciliation Committee
- Regular series of short articles (for Staff Bulletin or somewhere else) on common issues and possible resolutions
- Soundproofed office
- Greater coordination with Personnel and Payroll Services, Internal Audit, Legal Counsel, and Affirmative Action
- Provide voluntary workshops on supervision
- Additional workshops/seminars on Ombuds issues/topics
- Assist in developing professional employees handbook if requested
- Keep an eye on workload

The last item is listed because although things were slow but steady last summer and fall, I essentially worked full time on Ombuds activities in the spring. Since I was not teaching, it was workable, but if that pace continues, the 25% allocation might have to be reconsidered.

I have really enjoyed the Ombuds work and training in which I have participated in the last three years. The year 2004-2005 has been especially rewarding, since I feel I have had a significant positive impact in several situations. In at least one case a lawsuit was successfully averted. A number of people have told me over and over how much help I have been, and how much worse things might have gone had I not been involved. If even one person feels that way, I feel my time has been well spent. I hope all feel the same and I thank you all for your support.

I will be meeting with the President and Provost in late July to discuss this report and the future of the Ombuds position at MSU.

Thank you for your attention to this report.