

Attachment 2
2020-2021 Ombudsperson Report

August 2021
To: Faculty Senate
From: University Ombudspersons

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Anne Phillips
Andrew Smith

Re: 2020-2021 Annual Reports

This report represents the activities of the K-State Ombudspersons from mid-August 2020 to late July 2021. The information provided comes from three ombudspersons. Our activities have been combined to provide an aggregate view of our work, to protect confidentiality, and to maintain the anonymity of those with whom we work. All conversations, actions, and outcomes are privileged information. No specific information about any individual(s) or their status is provided.

There were 31 consultees who visited an ombudsperson within the 2020-2021 timeframe. Together, the three of us spent 89 hours providing consultative services. A summary of consultees who sought assistance is provided below. Consultees tended to be self-referrals or found us via a suggestion from colleagues.

Ombudspersons	#Consultees	Hours
All	31	89

*Hours may not reflect time spent researching, consulting with others across campus, and finding options to present to consultees.

Consultee concern (for some, multiple complaints were discussed):

Consultee Concern <small>*For some consultees, multiple complaints were discussed.</small>	Number	Consultee Concern <small>*For some consultees, multiple complaints were discussed.</small>	Number
ADA	1	HCS- Organizational Development	
Appeal		HCS- Payroll	
Attendance		HCS- Talent Acquisition	3
Change	1	Hearing and/or Grievance	11
COVID-19	3	Interpersonal conflict	7
Discipline		Performance	8
Discrimination/Harassment	3	Policy	1
Evaluation	11	PRC	
Furlough/layoffs	4	Promotion and Tenure	2
HCS- Benefits	1	Unfair Treatment	1
HCS- Compensation		Work Environment	18

Nature of Consultee Concerns

**For some consultees, multiple complaints were discussed.*

***Full definitions may be found at the end of this report.*

There is little doubt University Ombuds are an essential resource to employees as they seek out information, raise concerns, and work toward mutually satisfactory solutions in the workplace. Despite the fact that consultee numbers have remained relatively comparable over the last few years, the hours expended by the Ombuds have increased exponentially. Once seen as the last report, an Ombuds consultation is now considered the first step for many individuals looking to address workplace issues, interpersonal conflict, policy questions, and various other concerns.

Ombuds empathetically listen to concerns, clarify and identify pertinent policies and resources, and offer communication strategies to individuals in an effort to resolve issues that might otherwise escalate into adversarial and time-consuming formal processes. This “insider” knowledge allows the Ombuds to make recommendations for systemic change in an effort to promote transparency, clarity, and fairness across the University.

As the pandemic continues to affect individuals associated with the campus community, we expect 2021-2022 to offer a number of calls on our team for assistance in negotiating workplace issues related to personal, familial, and institutional needs.

Below are the recommendations for the 2021-2022 reporting year:

1. Additional efforts to implement Ombuds recommendations from the past two years:
 - a. Renewed focus on the University’s Principles of Community, as unprofessional actions and speech continue to contribute to interpersonal conflict.
 - b. Training about microaggressions and bullying – and how to respond to such behavior.
 - c. More training on the performance evaluation process.
**Continued delay in fully and holistically addressing the aforementioned recommendations may prolong concerns that can often be addressed at the personal, interpersonal, or unit level.*
2. Enhanced training for Dept./Unit Heads regarding University handbook compliance and interpretation.
3. Training for Dept./Unit Heads on preparing/discussions of furloughs, layoffs, and/or reorganization.
4. Review of Tenure and Promotion documents across each department/unit to ensure consistency and understanding at the individual, departmental, and Provost levels, per Provost Office requirement up to date within the five-year review cycle.
5. Additional informational outreach regarding mental health resources, economic assistance (especially given furloughs and reduced salaries), and other pandemic-related needs.

We welcome enhanced training for the individuals serving as Ombudspersons, perhaps including external resources from relevant professional organizations. We recommend as well the creation of a manual that future Ombudspersons could consult as needed. It might also be helpful to schedule occasional meetings of the team of Ombudspersons. Certainly, it has been helpful for them to stay in touch throughout the year. The Ombudspersons also look forward to collaborating with and supporting Dean Choma as he settles into his position as the Student Ombudsperson.

Concern Definitions

ADA – individuals seeking information about an accommodation

Appeal – USS employees requesting a hearing through one of the hearing bodies

Attendance – concerns about employees not attending work as expected (tardiness, excessive absences)

Change – concerns about changes to work hours, job duties, structure

Discipline – concerns about disciplinary actions and either imposing or receiving an action

Discrimination/Harassment – concerns about being treated differently based on PPM 3010 (referred to OIE)

Evaluation – concerns about how to conduct an evaluation or from an individual who has questions about an evaluation they have received.

Hearing and/or Grievance: Unclassified employees requesting information about an administrative appeal and/or grievance hearing.

HCS – Benefits – concerns about different kinds of leave, tuition assistance or other benefits

HCS – Compensation – concerns about pay

HCS – Organizational Development – concerns about changes in organizational structure, working out of one's classification

HCS – Payroll – concerns about paychecks and/or deductions from paychecks

HCS – Talent Acquisition – concerns about recruitments or applications

Interpersonal Conflict – concerns about getting along with another person or group

Performance – concerns about performance coaching and feedback and consequences of poor performance

Policy – questions about policies i.e. is there a policy, where is it located, what is the appropriate interpretation and application

PRC – USS employees appeal disciplinary actions to this body

Promotion & Tenure – concerns about the tenure clock, denial of promotion and/or tenure

Unfair Treatment – concerns about being treated differently or unfairly based on something not covered in PPM 3010

Work Environment – concerns about the work environment being uncomfortable either physically or emotionally