

FACULTY OMBUDS REPORT: 2008-2009  
Faculty Ombudsmen: Lee Potts and Larry Singell

The purpose of this report is to identify the number of faculty served by the Ombuds Office and the nature of the issues involved. In addition, we identify important trends that, in our judgment, will impact both our future efforts and the health of the university community. The central focus of our office is to help faculty develop and implement strategies to manage, if not eliminate, unproductive conflict in the workplace. Where appropriate we also assist by obtaining information on policies or procedures, by conducting facilitated conversations, or by engaging in such activities as shuttle diplomacy.

During 2008-2009 the total number of contacts with members of the university community was 199. We had 40 cases (individual and group consultations) involving 61 people; this number includes initiators, other participants, and information contacts. Of these cases 24 involved multiple conversations, 8 of which extended over much of the academic year and were complex. Four of these cases are likely to extend into the coming academic year.

In addition to working with visitors who sought our help, we also engaged with 138 individuals through our service/outreach activities. Such activities included: (1) reporting to the Retired Faculty Association, which involved 97 retirees; (2) consulting with 12 Faculty Assembly members at UCD's Health Sciences Center regarding the development of an Ombuds program on their campus; (3) facilitating a discussion on managing conflict with 6 department Chairs, a discussion co-facilitated with the Director of Faculty Relations and sponsored by LEAP; and (4) providing information about the Faculty Ombuds Program to 23 new faculty members at the 2008 UCB New Faculty Fair.

The following issues were addressed in consultations with visitors and in facilitated conversations:

- **Evaluative relationships: 73.**

(Included were: Assignments/Schedules; Feedback/Recognition; Performance Appraisal; Departmental Climate; Supervisory Effectiveness; Insubordination; Equity of Treatment; Priorities, Values, Beliefs; Respect/Treatment; Trust/Integrity; Communication; Diversity-Related; Disruptive Behavior.)

- **Career Progression and Development: 17**

(Included were: Concern regarding the accuracy or appropriateness of written job descriptions and classifications including changes made or needed; concerns regarding promotion, tenure, and post tenure reviews; and in several cases concern about possible or eventual termination.)

- **Peer/colleague relationships: 12**

(Included were conflict issues involving peers or colleagues who do not have a supervisor-employee relationship)

- **Compensation and Benefits: 10**

(Included were concern about the inequities or the appropriateness and competitiveness of employee compensation or benefits.)

- **Organizational, Strategic, and Mission Related: 9**

(Included were concerns or conflicts that relate to the whole or major divisions of a campus organization.)

- . Services/Administrative Issues: 5

(Included concerns regarding the accessibility, effectiveness or equity of administrative services.)

- Values, Ethics, and Standards: 2

(Included issues of fairness of organizational values, ethics, and/or standards, for the applications of related policies or procedures.)

- Safety, Health and Physical Environment: 1

(Included concerns about safety, health and infrastructure related issues.)

- Legal concerns: 1

(Included issues that may create a legal risk for the organization or its members, if not addressed.)

We see three important trends that are worthy of attention:

- (1) The budget cuts or perceived cuts threaten an increase in the frequency, intensity and complexity of workplace conflict. The data above reflects this in a number of ways, including more instances of conflict within evaluative relationships, more concerns about career development, and more conflict arising from increased peer competitiveness.
- (2) Conflict avoidant behavior characterized most of the cases; that is, usually the person initiating contact with our office had avoided dealing with the problem until the conflict had escalated;
- (3) Termination of employment was used more frequently as a means of problem solving.

We recommend that the campus take thoughtful steps to respond to the trends identified above. Concerted and coordinated efforts seem desirable. In the Ombuds office we plan to: (1) conduct a marketing study to see that our resources are being most effectively utilized; (2) outreach to the Boulder Faculty Assembly leadership to consider steps that might be productively taken; (3) outreach to associate Deans and Department Chairs. We recommend that you consider: (1) expressing your awareness, understanding of and commitment to helping the campus deal with unproductive outcomes from budget cuts; (2) discussing with the Counsel of Deans the nature of the problem and steps that might be taken in this environment; and (3) consider some campus wide program to address these problems, including possible support for the BFA, should they want to develop a program or symposia to help the campus deal with the situation.