

Introduction:

At the most fundamental level, an ombuds is one who assists individuals and groups in the resolution of questions, concerns, issues, or inquiries. Ombuds work in all types of organizations, including governmental agencies, colleges and universities, corporations, hospitals and other medical facilities, and news organizations. Of the 1047 members of the International Ombuds Association, 510 work in colleges and universities.

- The principles under which the Faculty Ombuds functions are consistent with the [Standards of Practice](#) and the [IOA Code of Ethics](#) of the International Ombudsman Association.
- **Faculty Ombuds:** The services of the Faculty Ombuds are completely voluntary and are available to tenured, tenure track and non-tenure track faculty on all USC system-wide campuses except for UofSC Upstate which has its own Faculty Ombuds.
- **Student Ombuds:** The Division of Student Affairs has a student ombuds, Lisa Jerald (777-4172) who deals directly with questions, concerns, issues, or inquiries of undergraduate students.
- **Graduate Student Ombuds:** Graduate students with questions, concerns, issues, or inquiries are encouraged to contact the graduate student ombuds, Dale Moore (777-8237) in the Graduate School.
- **Faculty Civility Advocate:** The Faculty Civility Advocate is charged with resolving complaints of faculty-on-faculty workplace bullying under [ACAF 1.80](#). To meet with the Faculty Civility Advocate, please contact Dr. Susan Bon at 777-2907 or fca@mailbox.sc.edu
- **Employee Assistance Program (EAP):** The university offers free and confidential support for faculty who need to address personal or work-related challenges and concerns through the [Employee Assistance Program \(EAP\)](#). The EAP was developed as a way for the university to support its employees through times of need. The EAP can help with all kinds of life situations such as marital difficulties, parenting, stress, depression, work-related concerns, alcohol and drug use/abuse or grief and loss. Employees have access to counselors 24 hours a day, 365 days a year by calling 800-633-3353 or 704-529-1428. To access work-life services, log into mygroup.com using the username "USC" and password "guest", or download the MYgroup app.
- **Integrity Line:** The university's [Integrity Line](#) is an anonymous reporting system administered by an independent third-party provider, Lighthouse Services, Inc. for voicing concerns about questionable or unethical behavior in the workplace. The UofSC Integrity Line is available at any time, day, or night. Faculty can report questionable or unethical behavior over the phone or through an online form. You may contact them by phone at (844) 890-0006 or submit a report online.

The Faculty Ombuds is guided by four ethical standards:

- **INDEPENDENT:** The faculty ombuds is independent in structure, function, and appearance to the highest degree possible within the university.
- **INFORMAL:** The faculty ombuds, as an informal resource, does not participate in any formal adjudicative or administrative procedure related to those seeking assistance. The faculty ombuds has no administrative decision-making power.
- **IMPARTIAL:** The faculty ombuds, as a designated neutral, remains unaligned and impartial. The faculty ombuds does not engage in any situation which could create a conflict of interest.
- **CONFIDENTIAL:** The faculty ombuds holds all communications with those seeking assistance in strict confidence and does not disclose confidential communications unless given permission to do so. The only exception to this privilege of confidentiality is where there appears to be imminent risk of serious harm.

What we do:

- We actively and respectfully listen to every type of conflict or concern raised by members of the faculty allowing all an opportunity to be heard.
- We maintain confidentiality to the maximum extent consonant with the law.
- We provide and explain information about university policies and procedures.
- We discuss each visitor's questions, concerns, issues, or inquiries and seek to clarify and then address those issues in a fair and equitable way, reframing them as appropriate.
- We help identify and evaluate a range of options – both formal and informal as well as resources available within the university that visitors may use to resolve their problem.
- We gather information and offer referrals to key people, relevant offices, or support services.
- We help visitors prepare for a difficult conversation.
- We facilitate communication, indirectly or through shuttle diplomacy with concerned parties.
- We track perceived issues and trends and make recommendations for institutional change.
- We always strive to work informally, impartially, confidentially, and independently.
- We seek to help faculty members help themselves.

What we do not do:

- We do not make decisions for a visitor.
- We do not establish, change, or set aside policies.
- We do not offer legal advice.
- We do not offer psychological counseling.
- We do not participate in formal processes such as the Faculty Grievance process and resist testifying in formal procedures inside and outside the university.
- We do not serve as an agent of notice for the university.
- We do not serve as an advocate for any individual.
- We do not participate in formal investigations or write case reports.
- We do not serve as an impartial adjudicator of complaints.
- We do not create or maintain records or reports for the organization except for the preparation of an annual report provided to the Faculty Senate.

Activities in 2021-2022:

- The Faculty Ombuds met in person or via phone or Zoom call with forty-four faculty visitors.
- The Faculty Ombuds responded to phone calls and email requests, participated in one-on-one Zoom meetings, and responded to consultation requests from faculty, staff, and students (and their parents) for information. (By virtue of our presence on the university website the Faculty Ombuds receives calls from various nonfaculty sources which are often referred to the appropriate office. These nonfaculty calls are not counted in this report.
- Most cases involving the Faculty Ombuds are resolved without initiating a formal grievance process.
- The Faculty Ombuds served as a mentor for several newly appointed faculty ombuds at other academic institutions.
- The Faculty Ombuds provided the annual report for 2020-2021 to the Faculty Senate. All previous annual reports are available on the faculty ombuds website:
<http://www.sc.edu/ombuds/annual.shtml>

16-year summary (2006-2021):

- Over the past 16 years the Faculty Ombuds has personally assisted 778 faculty members for an average of forty-nine visitors per year. See page 9 of this report for a summary of all cases, all years.
- The number of faculty members utilizing the services of the Faculty Ombuds seems to be in keeping with many Carnegie Foundation Tier I institutions who publish an annual report and who I have been tracking over the past 16 years (average 61 visitors per year based on 103 published annual reports (some 7014 visitors surveyed).
- “Annual reports remain a rarity for organizational ombuds, and public reports are rarer still. Whether this is deliberate or simply the result of insufficient resources is difficult to know.” -Tom Kosakowski writing in [The Ombuds Blog](#).
- A review of the most recent 5 years of visitors to the faculty ombuds reveals that equal numbers of men and women on the university faculty seek assistance from the faculty ombuds.

Uniform Reporting Categories

- The only information retained from contacts between faculty visitors and the faculty ombuds is related to the nature of the issue discussed. The International Ombudsman Association (IOA) has developed an **IOA Uniform Data Reporting Categories** - a set of categories and subcategories (listed on the next page) under which questions, concerns, issues, or inquiries can be tracked. This information is then used to classify the issues for which faculty members use the faculty ombuds services, identify trends in requests for services and develop professional development needs. The questions, concerns, issues, or inquiries counted are those for which the Faculty Ombuds provides information related to the various uniform reporting categories or for which options are explored.

Annual Report – IOA Uniform Data Reporting Categories

These same categories were used in this report and in all previous annual reports.

(1) Evaluative Relationships - (217 visitors all years – 28%) - Questions, concerns, issues, or inquiries arising between people in evaluative relationships (i.e., senior faculty-junior faculty, program director faculty, chair-faculty, dean-faculty, faculty-student). **(17 visitors in 2021-2022)**

(2) Career Progression and Development - (137 visitors all years – 17.6%) - Questions, concerns, issues or inquiries about administrative processes and decisions regarding entering and leaving a job, or what it entails, (i.e., recruitment, nature and place of assignment, job security, and separation). **(3 visitors in 2021-2022)**

(3) Peer and Colleague Relationships - (92 visitors all years – 11.8%) - Questions, concerns, issues, or inquiries involving peers or colleagues who do not have a direct supervisory relationship (e.g., two faculty members within the same department or conflict involving faculty members of the same college or unit). **(3 visitors in 2021-2022)**

(4) Legal, Regulatory, Financial and Compliance - (80 visitors all years – 10.3%) - Questions, concerns, issues, or inquiries that may create a legal risk (financial, sanction etc.) for the organization or its members if not addressed, including issues related to waste, fraud, or abuse. **(4 visitors in 2021-2022)**

(5) Compensation & Benefits - (65 visitors all years – 8.3%) - Questions, concerns, issues or inquiries about the equity, appropriateness and competitiveness of employee compensation, benefits, and other benefit programs. **(3 visitors in 2021-2022)**

(6) Values, Ethics, and Standards - (61 visitors all years – 7.8%) - Questions, concerns, issues, or inquiries about the fairness of organizational values, ethics, and/or standards, the application of related policies and/or procedures, or the need for creation or revision of policies, and/or standards. **(4 visitors in 2021-2022)**

(7) Safety, Health, and Physical Environment - (46 visitors all years – 6%) - Questions, concerns, issues or inquiries about Safety, Health, and Infrastructure-related issues. **(3 visitors in 2021-2022)**

(8) Services/Administrative Issues - (43 visitors all years – 5.5%) - Questions, concerns, issues or inquiries about services or administrative offices. **(2 visitors in 2021-2022)**

(9) Organizational, Strategic, and Mission Related - (37 visitors all years – 4.7%) - Questions, concerns, issues, or inquiries that relate to the whole or some part of an organization. **(5 visitors in 2021-2022)**

Faculty Ombuds Survey Comments

The Office of the Faculty Ombuds has created an online Faculty Ombuds Survey that allows those who contact the faculty ombuds to submit anonymous feedback regarding their experience and interaction with the Faculty Ombuds. On this and the following page of this annual report are comments taken from surveys in the past year using two questions on that survey that receive the most comments.

What did you find most beneficial about the services provided by the Faculty Ombuds?

- Treated me with respect, concern, and fairness. Encouraged me to connect with Dr. Bon.
- The resources shared that I would have not known about, as well as specific guidelines for conduct.
- The impartial help as I dealt with a highly emotional matter.
- He helped sort through the problem and gave good advice about how to address it and who to talk to. It is clear he cares.
- Sensitivity.
- Very straight forward, yet caring
- It was very valuable to discuss my problem with someone with a long history at the university who is external to the situation, and to get reassurance that my reading of the situation I am facing is not an overreaction. This was very reassuring and also gives me some measure of confidence that the next steps I take will be successful.
- I felt HEARD. Academia is a harsh environment particularly for some groups who are treated differently given their job title and the group they are in. Some things that happened to me were cruel, unnecessary, and were meant to show power over a subordinate. Of course, not grievable. The only positive that came out of the situation was knowing that the Faculty Ombuds cared about ME, when nobody else gave a damn.
- understanding the unfair reality
- His professionalism and knowledge about the USC institution.
- He is very caring and concerned about what happens to other people. He is a good listener and neutral sounding board.
- Having a safe sounding board. Sometimes I need to know if I'm over-reacting or under-reacting.
- His knowledge and ability to communicate it.
- Faculty ombudsman was eager to understand, untiring in his efforts to clearly explain the situation. Although it was disheartening to both (Ombudsman and I) that there is no viable solution to the real problem, I was happy to have the services of the ombuds.

Faculty Ombuds Survey Comments

Please comment why or why you were not satisfied with the manner in which the Faculty Ombuds handled your concern.:

- Very accessible, confidential, and easy to talk to; gave useful feedback on a variety of options, as well as avenues to explore resolution, timelines for actions, and next steps. Was easy to engage with and made the process much less intimidating
- I was satisfied with the Faculty Ombuds because he listened, summarized, and gave me the possible courses of action that were available to me. He was incredibly knowledgeable and was a great help.
- I am very satisfied with Jim's handling of my complaint. It is still not resolved but that is not due to his inaction. I have to decide whether to pursue something formal. Jim has been a great sounding board, gives excellent advice, and you can tell he really cares about the faculty and the university. He has helped me through a very hard time
- Jim is fantastic
- seemed out of touch with the current workplace
- Being able to talk with someone at this level who could give you advice.
- The faculty ombuds gave me clear recommendations for how I can attempt to resolve the issue I am having, both in terms of the steps I can take and how I can frame things to most effectively achieve my goals.
- I just needed to meet him to get his opinion on a potential COI situation. He responded quickly, cordially, and provided useful feedback. That is all I needed.
- I decided to not pursue further to focus on my mental well-being
- Jim Augustine has a wealth of experience in dealing with so many issues and the complexity of politics of academia. I trust him when he provided me with his thoughts and suggestions as we discussed the path forward. Within the first few minutes, he was able to distill down a complex issue into the essence of the problem.
- The faculty Ombuds cannot change the university system that usually sides with administrators irrespective of what they do. It's very disappointing that mistreated faculty are left without institutional support and their only option becomes to seek legal advice and probably leave the institution.
- I am not satisfied with the result of my concern but that has nothing to do with the ombudsman. He is an excellent resource and is professional.
- The ombudsman is great, but USC has a serious problem in the way that it handles personnel concerns. Problems are ignored until they explode and then everyone appears to know nothing or never saw it coming. When will we have some leadership that is ethical, transparent, and cares about handling these issues so we are not constantly a subject of scandal?

Final Comments:

The Coronavirus made its appearance in South Carolina in early March of 2020 and it, and its variants have continued into the academic period covered in this annual report (August 15, 2021, to August 15, 2022). The resulting pandemic affected every aspect of our teaching, research, and service as well as our personal lives including that of our colleagues, staff members, students, family members and friends. These past thirty months have been characterized by a colleague as a “season of uncertainty” and by another as a “frightening roller coaster ride.”

However, as the university’s plans unfolded and more and more faculty became involved in various aspects of decision making and making plans for the near future, it seemed clear that the faculty was devoting their full energies to doing what needed to be done to insure that our students continued to receive the best possible education under these extraordinary circumstances and remain on track to complete their studies in a timely manner. Whatever questions, concerns, issues, or inquiries were ongoing in the lives of our faculty members took a back seat to the job at hand.

The university is a complex and demanding workplace, a dynamic community of scholars with faculty members being added or moving on or transferring internally. Few of those who seek assistance understand all their options when they have a conflict or concern. The Faculty Ombuds reviews all formal and informal options and resources available to the faculty member. We seek to respond in a timely manner and help invisibly and informally so that each faculty member can continue to reach their own personal and professional goals.

Whatever success has been achieved during these past 16 years by the Faculty Ombuds is attributable to the cooperation and support of faculty and administrative leaders in the university who were willing to listen to various matters brought to their attention and work with all parties concerned to find a fair and just resolution to the issues at hand. The Faculty Ombuds is particularly appreciative of former interim provost Stephen Cutler’s willingness to support the work of this office without violating the independence, impartiality, informality, or confidentiality of the ombuds process.

- The Faculty Ombuds website may be found at: www.sc.edu/ombuds/
- Previous annual reports by the Faculty Ombuds may be found at <http://www.sc.edu/ombuds/annual.shtml>

Over the past 16 years the Faculty Ombuds has assisted 778 faculty members for an average of 49 visitors per year.

	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4	Year 5	Year 6	Year 7	Year 8	Year 9	Year 10	Year 11	Year 12	Year 13	Year 14	Year 15	Year 16	All years
Reporting categories	2006-2007	2007-2008	2008-2009	2009-2010	2010-2011	2011-2012	2012-2013	2013-2014	2014-2015	2015-2016	2016-2017	2017-2018	2018-2019	2019-2020	2020-2021	2021-2022	2006-2022
<i>Evaluative Relationships</i>	23	12	16	7	4	15	15	13	9	15	17	17	15	9	13	17	217 (28%)
<i>Career Progress & Development</i>	12	18	8	15	6	14	8	9	8	3	5	12	4	6	6	3	137 (17.6%)
<i>Peer and Colleague Relationships</i>	0	5	9	10	9	6	8	9	5	6	6	3	2	3	8	3	92 (11.8%)
<i>Legal, Regulatory, Financial and Compliance</i>	0	1	3	3	4	8	5	5	8	8	3	8	12	5	3	4	80 (10.3%)
<i>Compensation and Benefits</i>	6	4	0	3	3	4	3	3	6	7	7	6	5	3	2	3	65 (8.3%)
<i>Values, Ethics, and Standards</i>	9	3	11	0	6	4	5	5	1	1	1	3	4	0	4	4	61 (7.8%)
<i>Safety, Health, and Physical Environment</i>	5	4	0	0	8	1	3	2	1	3	3	1	2	5	5	3	46 (6%)
<i>Services Administrative Issues</i>	6	4	0	5	4	3	2	2	2	1	3	0	0	4	5	2	43 (5.5%)
<i>Organizational, Strategic, and Mission Related</i>	0	2	2	5	1	0	0	5	5	3	0	0	3	3	3	5	37 (4.7%)
<i>Faculty/year</i>	61	53	49	48	45	55	49	53	45	47	45	50	47	38	49	44	778