

UMKC Faculty Ombudsperson Annual Report 2019

Nancy E. Day, Faculty Ombudsperson

This academic year is my eighth and final year as UMKC Faculty Ombudsperson. This report summarizes this year's activities and makes recommendations for UMKC leadership to enhance the climate and culture of UMKC.

2018-2019 Ombuds Activities

Assisting visitors

To date, I have seen 13 faculty visitors from six different colleges/schools. Interactions included emails, telephone and face-to-face meetings. Other activities included researching cases, referrals, or conferring with other professionals. Several visitors requested multiple meetings. Prior year counts are:

2017-2018: 17 visitors, 7 units
2016-2017: 18 visitors, 9 units
2015-2016: 13 visitors, 5 units
2014-2015: 9 visitors, 5 units
2013-2014: 13 visitors, 7 units
2012-2013: 24 visitors, 9 units
2011-2012: 14 visitors, 6 units
2010-2011: 6 visitors, 5 units

Promoting Ombuds activities

In the fall of 2018, I decided to retire. Not knowing the future status of the Faculty Ombuds position, I did not do much promoting of the service. If a new Faculty Ombuds is chosen, this is something s/he should ramp up.

Education and networking

I served an extra one-year term on the Academy of Management's Ombudsperson Committee in order to preserve smooth succession. AOM is a 15,000-member academic association for scholars in the management field. This Committee is part of the AOM Ethics initiatives and seeks to assist Academy members in resolving members' issues that occur within the jurisdiction of the association. As in past years, this role allows me to frequently network with the two other trained faculty ombudspersons on the committee.

Coordinating with the UMKC Staff Ombuds

I continued to periodically collaborate with Dr. Marita Barkis, the UMKC Staff Ombudsperson. This is helpful to both of us in sharing ideas and relevant information. We continued to share the office at 4747 Troost.

Visitors' Issues

Over my eight years as the Faculty Ombuds at UMKC, the same issues continue to recur. Obviously, personal identities and affiliations of visitors and other specifics are confidential. However, during my tenure in the role, the most recurrent theme relates to conflicts and communication problems with faculty supervisors, particularly regarding decisions about performance evaluations, promotion and tenure review, or the five-year post-tenure review process. These issues continue to be the most frequently presented, in some schools more than others.

My analysis of these difficulties leads me to the conclusion that both faculty and their supervisors at multiple levels often lack the communication and conflict-management skills needed to work together positively. School leadership does not seem to be able to help manage these internal conflicts effectively.

Recommendations for University/School/Department/Faculty Responses

The following three recommendations have been carried over from nearly every previous year. I continue to recommend that these programs be initiated. I also recommend that Deans be held accountable for ensuring that these activities are successfully undertaken at each School/College.

1. ***Department chairs and other faculty supervisors should receive full, ongoing supervisory training.*** These are high-risk positions and the lack of consistency in performance across departments and schools creates inequities and inefficiencies that limit the university's effectiveness as well as faculty motivation and productivity.
2. ***Conflict management and communication training for all faculty*** should be incorporated into faculty meetings and other required activities. These have the potential to greatly enhance our working environment. While some relevant training is available in the MyLearn modules, few faculty will seek these out. Incorporating them in small "bites" into faculty meetings would spread these skills more broadly and effectively.
3. ***All Schools/College/Departments to ensure their bylaws and policies are clear, updated, and complete.*** The absence of clear, complete, and up-to-date policies, conflicts become much more difficult to resolve.

Finally, as in the past several years, I recommend that UMKC add an ***appeals process to its performance evaluation system***. An appeals process is a best practice in sophisticated HR systems. Faculty who come to me with issues or disagreements about their performance appraisal outcomes would benefit from having a clear means to achieve due process regarding their dispute. I understand this entails changing the CRRs, but in my opinion it would be a significant improvement to enhancing the faculty's sense of procedural justice at UMKC.

I am grateful to both the Provost's office as well as the Faculty Senate for their ongoing support in my role for the past eight years. It's been extremely rewarding to be helpful to faculty who seek assistance in resolving their workplace problems productively and civilly. I very much hope that a successor to this role will be appointed.

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