

UMKC Faculty Ombudsperson Annual Report

To: Faculty Senate & Dr. Gail Hackett, Provost

Presented by Nancy E. Day, Faculty Ombudsperson

The UMKC Faculty Ombudsperson position was created jointly by the Faculty Senate and Provost in 2010. I am the first to serve in this position, beginning work in September. I am grateful to the Senators and Dr. Hackett for choosing me as Ombudsperson and supporting my efforts throughout the 2010-2011 academic year. I am also thankful for the invaluable assistance provided throughout from Dr. Ron MacQuarrie.

This purpose of this report is first, to serve as my annual record of the activities of the ombuds office. Second, as is typical of annual ombuds reports, I will offer what I believe are significant issues at UMKC that have been raised over the course of my first year of work. Finally, I will suggest that administration consider the viability of a long-term expansion of alternative dispute resolution (ADR) functions at UMKC.

2010-2011 Ombuds Activities

Office Set-Up & Training

Much of this year's work has gone into setting up the office, promoting the function, training, and networking with relevant UMKC colleagues and other ombudsperson. My activities included:

- Setting up office at 4747 Troost
- Writing UMKC Faculty Ombudsperson Charter (currently under review at general counsel's office)
- Creating brochure and website
- Building a small library of books related to ombuds work and educating myself about ombuds practices, UMKC and UM policies, and related issues
- Presenting at faculty meetings at all UMKC College/Schools to introduce and promote services (except Conservatory of Music and Dance, and School of Biological Sciences)
- Presenting at UMKC School/College Business Managers' meeting to introduce and promote services
- Attending "Ombudsman 101," basic training course, sponsored by the International Association of Ombudsmen
- Attending the national conference of the IAO
- Meeting and coordinating with Mary Kay Kistardt, UMKC Mediation Services, Marita Barkis, UMKC Counseling, Health and Testing Center, and LaRae Elliott, UMKC Hotline

Visitors¹

I met with a total of six visitors representing five different College/Schools during this period, incorporating 12 total meetings. Meetings averaged about an hour and a half each, with additional time necessary for researching their cases. While details about the content of these visits are confidential, the following section discusses general issues raised and suggestions for addressing them at UMKC.

Issues

Future 2011 Ombuds Activities

The demand for confidentiality of ombuds practices precludes describing specific issues that were brought to me. However, all issues raised represented problems typical to academic and organizational life.

In response to the issues raised, I am organizing two developmental opportunities for faculty for the fall 2011 semester, both through FACET:

- First, a two-part series addressing student incivility. Dr. Deborah Smith, Interim Director of FACET, has identified an expert who will present at an initial session. Jeff Traiger, Assistant Dean of Students, Marita Barkis, and I will follow-up at another FACET session to facilitate discussions about specific faculty concerns related to incivility.
- Second, Doranne Hudson, Bloch School Executive in Residence, and I will present a session on “Managing Your Department Chair,” designed to teach faculty constructive and effective ways to work with their managers. (Dates are September 16 [Volker]; September 20 [Hospital Hill].)

Suggested University Responses

Also, to address matters systemically, longer-term intervention on the part of the University would be helpful. While the number of visitors I’ve seen is far too few to identify “trends,” the problems I’ve heard mirror issues that I have experienced as a UMKC faculty member and administrator. The following suggestions describe fairly standard programs and practices that I believe would improve our governing and managerial practices.

- **Ensuring Currency of Governing Regulations.** Not all UMKC College/Schools or departments may have bylaws/policies that are clearly articulated, updated, and communicated well to faculty. Some do not seem to cover all issues important to faculty activities. If the College/Schools have not reviewed bylaws and governing practices recently, doing so would be wise. Further, faculty groups should be encouraged to review all policies for relevancy, completeness, accuracy, and that they are up-to-date and readily available. Depending on the complexity and breadth of the School/College, this may be particularly important at departmental levels.

¹ In ombuds work the term “visitors” is preferred to “client.”

- ***Faculty Supervisor Training***². Training in academic supervision should be designed and delivered to faculty supervisors (department chairs, etc.). While supervisory training is offered broadly at UMKC, it is likely that few academic supervisors are required to, or actually attend, these sessions. Unfortunately, self-selection will not adequately cover those most needy of training.

In most for-profit organizations, training is an ongoing, systematic requirement for all supervisors, not only because of the potential for legal liability, but to assure organizational goals are met successfully. I suggest that UMKC consider making training mandatory for all academic supervisors, beyond the diversity training that is currently required. Specifically, skills in the following are critical:

- Conflict management and communication – how to address and resolve disagreements and interpersonal conflicts productively and collegially; how to proactively intervene when communication starts to break down.
- Performance management, including
 - How to determine performance expectations (including “what” and “how well” things should be done)
 - How to communicate performance expectations to faculty
 - How to provide ongoing performance feedback to faculty throughout the academic year
 - How to conduct performance appraisal interviews effectively
- Deeper training in legally sensitive issues, such as harassment, discrimination, etc.

Expansion of Alternative-Dispute Resolution at UMKC

Over the next year (and beyond, if my Faculty Ombudsperson appointment is continued), I plan to monitor whether or not UMKC would be better served by expanding its ADR services. In my network of other University ombudsperson, I am the only one who serves only faculty, and who has only a quarter-time appointment. For my current activities, quarter-time is sufficient. In the near future, I anticipate that the office will become more prominent and the number of visitors will increase.

Further, most universities that utilize ombuds services have an office serving students, staff, and faculty. Currently we may have some “holes” in service availability, particularly for students. While all constituents (faculty, staff, students, external constituents) are served by the UMKC Hotline for isolated questions and concerns, this service is generally (and appropriately) limited to quick answers and short interchanges. Mediation Services serves faculty and staff, but not students. The UMKC Counseling Center is the only function

² In a later communication, Provost Gail Hackett informed me that academic supervisory training is now being provided at UMKC.

besides the Hotline serving students (as well as faculty and staff). Dr. Barkis, Director of Counseling Services, reports that the Counseling Center has a substantial (over 50) waiting list, comprised mostly of students.

Thus, it seems that students in particular may not be fully served. Given that retention is a key issue for UMKC, having ADR services available to them, particularly ombuds services that help define problems and identify strategies to work through them, may be extremely beneficial in keeping students productive and engaged. It is likely that some waiting for Counseling Center services could be more efficiently and effectively supported through ombuds services.

I suggest that UMKC administration consider these issues and explore the need to expand ADR functions at UMKC. In particular, over time, this scenario should be considered:

- Hiring a full-time ombudsperson designated to address all UMKC internal constituents (students, staff, and faculty).
- Consolidating ADR functions in the University, namely ombudsperson(s), Mediation Services, and perhaps the Hotline. All have the need for confidentiality, and locating them all in one off-site location would facilitate communication among ADR staff and create a confidential, safe environment.

Conclusion

I extend my thanks for your confidence in me and your support of my efforts. I have enjoyed my first year as UMKC Faculty Ombudsperson, and hope to increase activities in the coming academic year. I welcome your comments and questions at any time.