

FS Ad Hoc Committee on Establishing an Ombuds Office

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Preliminary Report

May 12, 2016

Process

- Consulted with Dennis Gornic (in role as Ombuds for OGE)
- Electronic search and survey of 19 peer/aspirant institutions; conversations with Ombuds when possible/necessary
- Background research in relevant literature

Expanding and Professionalizing Field

in both private and non-profit sectors (incl. higher ed)

International Ombudsman Association

(<http://www.ombudsassociation.org/Home.aspx>)

IOA Journal

(<http://www.ombudsassociation.org/Resources/IOA-Publications/IOA-Journal.aspx>)

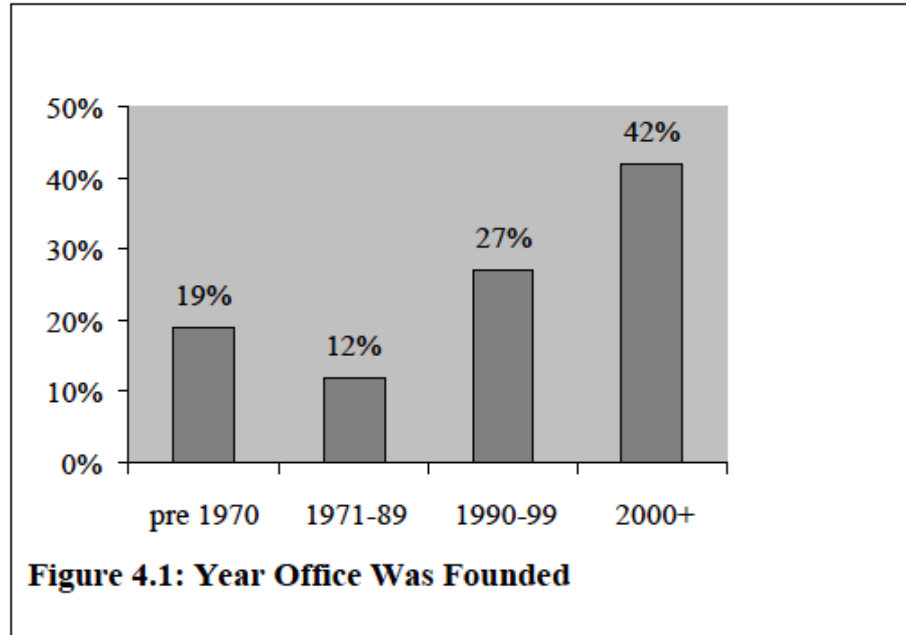
Trends

toward trained professional Ombuds

toward principles and methods of Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR)

Our preliminary findings conform to general trends in higher ed:

- Most Ombuds offices in our peer/aspirant institutions were established recently



Our preliminary findings conform to general trends in higher ed:

- Many (and perhaps most) Ombuds offices in our peer/aspirant institutions serve faculty, students, and/or staff

Only 7% of universities that had an ombuds office in 2007 restricted its jurisdiction only to faculty.

Mary Newhart, "Ombudsmen In Higher Education: Similarities, Divergences, and the Rise of Alternative Dispute Resolution," MA Thesis, Cornell University, 2007

Exceptions: Dartmouth (staff only)

Table 4.7: Who does your Office serve?

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Entire community	34	34.7	34.7	34.7
	Staff only	1	1.0	1.0	35.7
	Students, staff, faculty	21	21.4	21.4	57.1
	Faculty only	7	7.1	7.1	64.3
	Students only	20	20.4	20.4	84.7
	Staff, faculty	10	10.2	10.2	94.9
	Students, faculty	4	4.1	4.1	99.0
	Students, staff	1	1.0	1.0	100.0
	Total	98	100.0	100.0	

Mary Newhart, "Ombudsmen In Higher Education: Similarities, Divergences, and the Rise of Alternative Dispute Resolution," MA Thesis, Cornell University, 2007

Our preliminary findings conform to general trends in higher ed:

- Ombudspersons are sometimes faculty or emeriti, but are increasingly hired professionals

Of the 94 who responded, the average age was 56 and the majority of respondents (78%) were over the age of 51, see Figure 3.8.

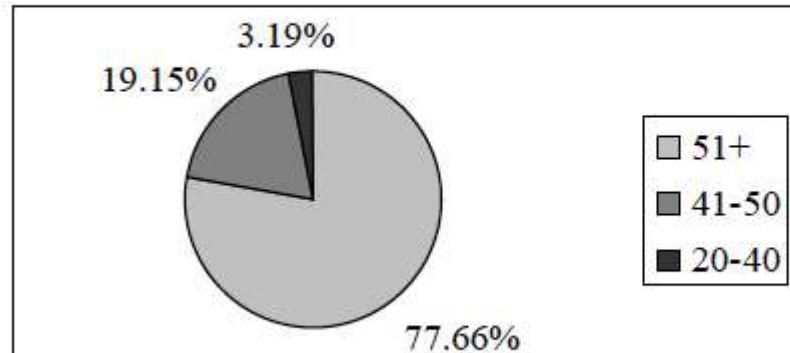


Figure 4.6: Age of the Ombudsman

Mary Newhart, "Ombudsmen In Higher Education: Similarities, Divergences, and the Rise of Alternative Dispute Resolution," MA Thesis, Cornell University, 2007

Our preliminary findings conform to general trends in higher ed:

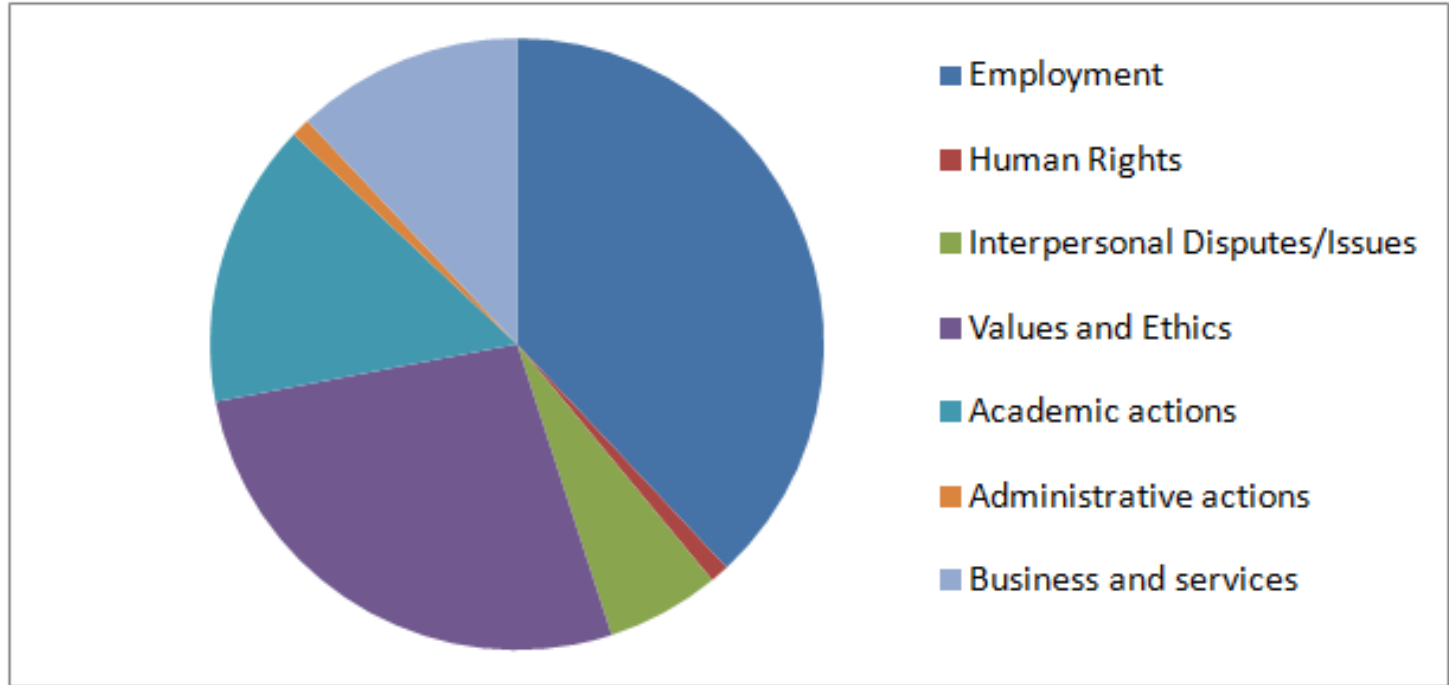
- Most Ombuds offices in our peer/aspirant institutions report to the President (sometimes “through the Provost”)

Table 4.6: To whom does your Office report?

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	President	35	35.7	35.7	35.7
	Counsel	1	1.0	1.0	36.7
	Provost	17	17.3	17.3	54.1
	Vice President	23	23.5	23.5	77.6
	Dean	8	8.2	8.2	85.7
	Other	14	14.3	14.3	100.0
	Total	98	100.0	100.0	

Mary Newhart, "Ombudsmen In Higher Education: Similarities, Divergences, and the Rise of Alternative Dispute Resolution," MA Thesis, Cornell University, 2007


Types of Disputes an Ombuds Office Handles



Serves faculty, staff, and students

Cornell ombuds 2014-15 report

Other findings of interest

 Journal of the International Ombudsman Association

Informality the Fourth Standard of Practice

MARY ROWE, OMBUDSPERSON, MASSACHUSETTS INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY

During the 1970's and early 1980's, the ombuds who are now called "organizational ombuds" recognized three basic pillars of their profession: independence, confidentiality and neutrality (impartiality). Informality was recognized as a fourth principle, or pillar of practice, somewhat later. This happened relatively slowly, over at least fifteen years, after the first three pillars were widely adopted...The article asserts that informality is an essential principle for the profession as practiced today — as essential as independence, confidentiality and neutrality.

Other findings of interest

Table 4.17: I can criticize the governance of my institution without fear of retribution

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid Strongly Disagree	1	1.0	1.0	1.0
Disagree	3	3.1	3.1	4.1
Undecided	17	17.3	17.3	21.4
Agree	43	43.9	43.9	65.3
Strongly Agree	34	34.7	34.7	100.0
Total	98	100.0	100.0	

The ability to criticize without fear of retribution can also tied to the belief their institution is committed to maintaining the ombudsman function. When asked if

Mary Newhart, "Ombudsmen In Higher Education: Similarities, Divergences, and the Rise of Alternative Dispute Resolution," MA Thesis, Cornell University, 2007

Some preliminary conclusions and questions

Most of our peer/aspirant institutions have an Ombuds office (with variation in size, length of existence, staffing, etc.); Rensselaer is behind the curve

Instituting an Ombuds office here would require thoughtful planning and entail numerous challenges

What should the role of the FS be in such a process?