

# 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>)

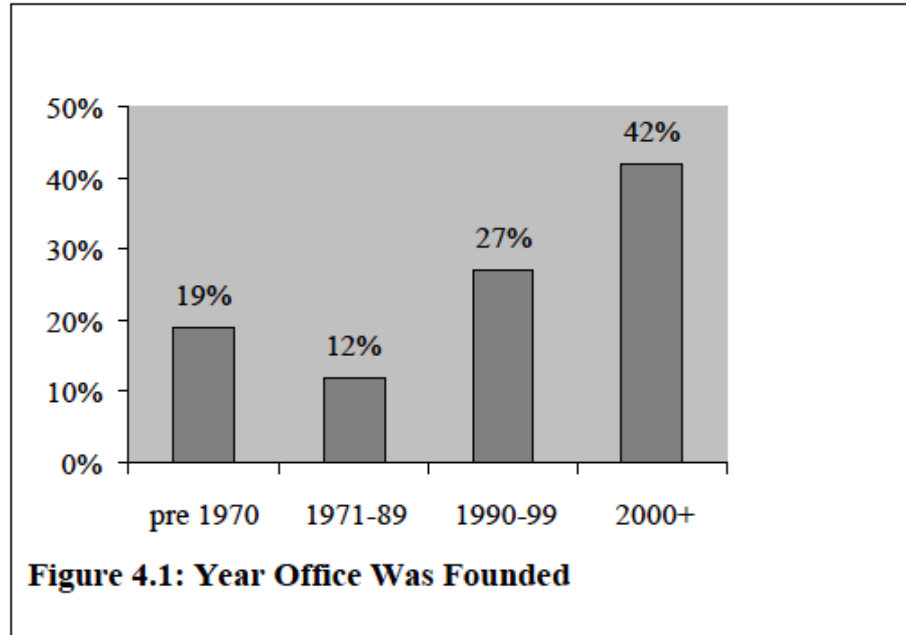
## Trends

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?**

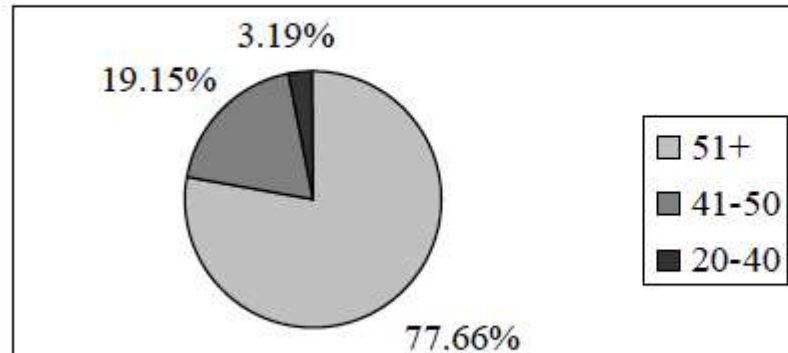
|       |                          | Frequency | Percent | Valid Percent | Cumulative Percent |
|-------|--------------------------|-----------|---------|---------------|--------------------|
| Valid | Entire community         | 34        | 34.7    | 34.7          | 34.7               |
|       | Staff 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:

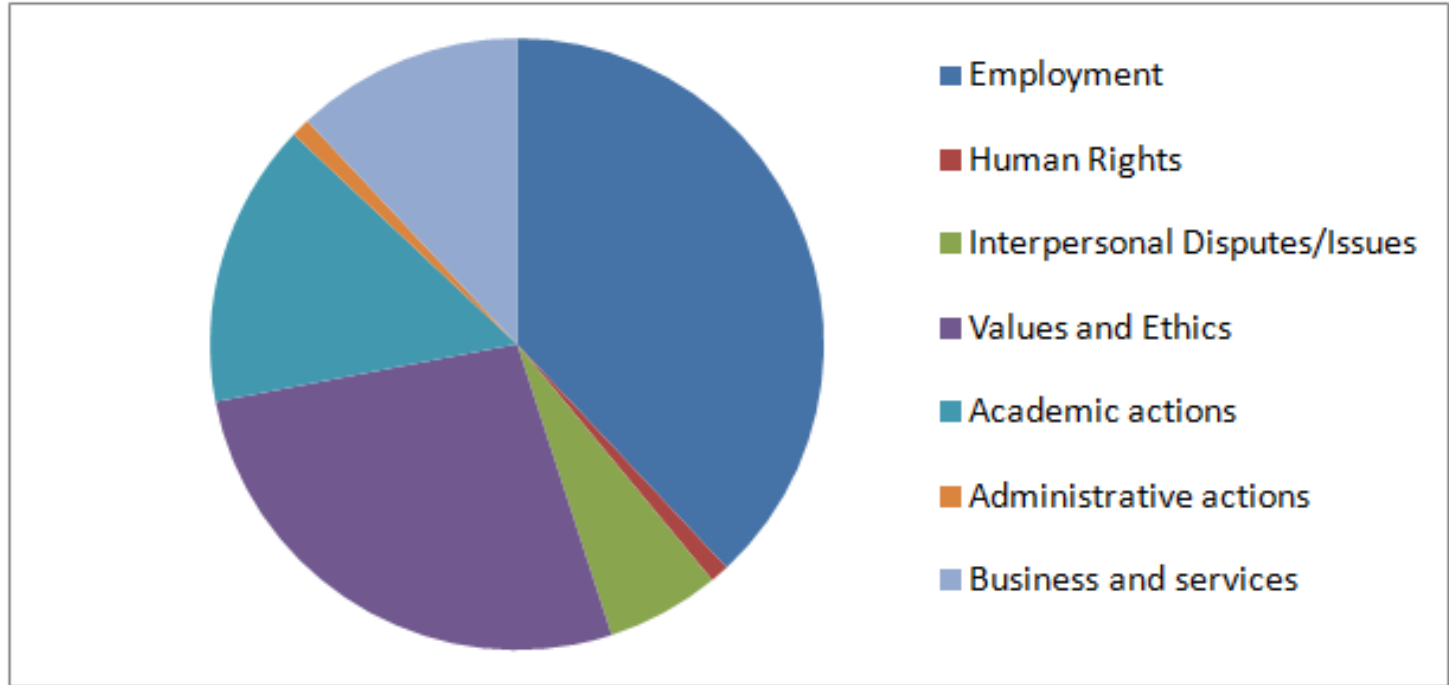
- Most Ombuds offices in our peer/aspirant institutions report to the President (sometimes “through the Provost”)

**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?