



The University of Georgia

Equal Opportunity Office

1 September 2009

TO: President Michael F. Adams
213 Administration Building

FROM: J. Stephen Shi, Director
Equal Opportunity Office
3 Peabody Hall - 1622

In March of 2008, you announced the formation of The University of Georgia's Ombudspersons Program in response to incidents of alleged sexual harassment. In the announcement, you also voiced his unwavering commitment to the Non-Discrimination and Anti-Harassment (NDAH) Policy and against all types of discrimination and harassment as prohibited by the NDAH Policy. In furtherance of that commitment, Shay Davis Little was appointed as the ombudsperson for students, Anne Proffitt Dupre was appointed as the ombudsperson for faculty, and Kathryn M. Chetney was appointed ombudsperson for staff.

While initially prompted by sexual harassment allegations within the university community, the scope of the Ombudspersons Program actually provides more comprehensive support in furthering fairness within the university community and serving as a source of information and referral. The ombudspersons are an additional resource to the university's existing policies and procedures for processing and resolving student, faculty and staff complaints and concerns.

Despite difficult economic conditions, you provided financial resources needed for training the ombudspersons. Two of the three ombudspersons have already received comprehensive three-day training from the International Ombudsman Association with upcoming training in October 2009 for the third ombudsperson and the Ombudsperson Program Coordinator, the Director of the Equal Opportunity Office (EOO). This highly-regarded training focuses on the underlying principles of independence, impartiality, informality, and confidentiality that are the foundations of ombudsperson service and provides the fundamental tools required to successfully fulfill the responsibilities of an ombudsperson.

Additionally, the ombudspersons meet bi-monthly with the University System of Georgia Ombuds Network. Internally, the ombudspersons have been trained by the Office of Legal Affairs and the EOO on existing policies and laws affecting the university. The ombudspersons also meet monthly with the EOO to share and exchange information as well as to discuss issues that have arisen since the prior meeting.

The ombudspersons have also been providing information sessions on the Program throughout the university community to a variety of constituents that have proven invaluable in getting the word out to the university community about the Program. There is still a need, however, to continue and expand these efforts to inform as many members of the university community as possible about the Program. It is recommended that appropriate funding be made available to expand this information effort in order to reach as many people as possible.

The results from the first year of the Program have provided valuable information needed to make the Program even better including:

- A total of 72 persons contacted the ombudspersons. This level of contact has not proved disruptive or interfering with the ombudspersons primary responsibilities. The ombudspersons have also not experienced any conflict between program responsibilities and primary responsibilities. The ombudspersons have discussed referring contacts to another ombudsperson if any conflict arises.
- Complaints regarding harassment and discrimination constitute at most 27 of 74 reported concerns or 36.5%, indicating that most of the contacts are outside of the NDAH issues and that the ombudspersons are serving a broader function within the university community.
- “Bullying” has been identified as an ongoing problem from a number of constituents, particularly students who have commented on bullying by students and faculty. There is also a perception from students and faculty that tenure status/level of grant awards influence tolerance of bullying behavior. Members of the staff also experience bullying from co-workers and supervisors. These observations appear to be consistent with broader nationwide trends.
- Those constituents who are Graduate or Teaching Assistants have generally expressed the opinion that placement and other aspects of their progress are overly subjective without a defined process or standard.

Each of our ombudspersons has reported that their work has been extremely satisfying to her personally in that it is apparent that their assistance has been effective and well-received by those they have served. In addition, the feedback they have received suggests it is a very effective resource in facilitating a fair and respectful university environment. I recommend that the Program be continued and supported with the necessary funding as suggested in this report. I further request that the ombudspersons receive their specific charge for their work from you and that they each be commended for their excellent performance during the reporting period.

cc: COS