2019-2020 REPORT

FROM THE OMBUDS OFFICE
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A MESSAGE FROM THE OMBUDSPERSON

I am thrilled to be Villanova’s Ombuds! As a lifelong area local and Wildcat fan, I am excited to be part of the University that has been a keystone for my family. I am honored to be entrusted with the critical issues confronting Villanova’s faculty and to assist faculty through their troubling times. This role has allowed me to use my unique skill set—an empathetic heart and an analytical mind. Through this role, I have assisted faculty with improving their circumstances, and I am grateful to have been a part of their successes. I look forward to helping faculty address the challenges of the upcoming academic year.

OMBUDS ROLE

The cornerstones of the Ombuds role are Confidentiality, Independence, Neutrality and Informality. The Office adheres to these principles, which are outlined in the Standards of Practice issued by the International Ombudsman Association, attached as Addendum A to this Report. As I interpret this new role at Villanova, I welcome full-time faculty to bring their “concerns” to me, which I describe to them as anything troubling them that interferes with their ability to be productive faculty.

When faculty brought cases to the Ombuds Office this academic year, we assessed their concerns and considered their options. In doing so, I made no determination on the validity of their concerns. Rather, we attempted to define the resolution they sought and strategize a way for them to attain it, so they could return to focusing on their work. To me, a case was successful when those elements were achieved. The related successes for faculty were many: repaired relationships, improved working conditions, changed procedures, and a greater understanding about Villanova’s functioning and how that affects their positions within it.

MISSION

Putting those cornerstone values into practice, I see the mission of the Ombuds role at Villanova to be based in reconciliation. My focus is to elevate discourse and encourage faculty to act as their best selves, striving to consider the implications of their actions on our colleagues, University and society. As a confidential source of advice and assistance, I help Villanova ensure that its faculty are fairly treated by their peers and University offices. By engaging in this work, we rebalance perceived inequities, which is in direct alignment with Villanova’s mission and Augustinian Catholic values.

PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

This report serves to convey synthesized data from individual cases. It provides information from a confidential feedback tool that faculty completed at the outset and completion of their cases, which I have compiled in the aggregate to track patterns. It also provides information I have culled from cases for insight into how the Ombuds Office is being used, what services were provided, what types of concerns were presented and any broader implications beyond those concerns. I also address the outreach efforts and priorities for the upcoming academic year. Last, testimonials are included to demonstrate the value of the position to faculty and the University.
CASE DATA

During the academic year, from August 2019 through June 2020, faculty brought 25 cases to the Ombuds Office for assistance. Most cases were comprised of multiple concerns. All 21 cases that have reached a conclusion were resolved successfully, with 4 remaining in active status as of June 2020. The timeframe for resolution has ranged from 1 to 226 days, with an average length of 80 days. The duration of cases may have been affected by my quarter-time employment status.

SERVICES PROVIDED

Working independently, I have treated each matter with confidentiality and neutrality, attempting to deescalate concerns while assisting faculty with resolving their issues at the lowest level. I conducted multiple case consultations with faculty on their issues (43) and interacted with faculty throughout the pendency of the cases. In some cases, I researched applicable policy and procedure and discerned how they have been interpreted and applied previously (20). In many, I met with participants or individuals with related knowledge (31). After reporting back to faculty on those steps, some cases resolved. In others, I continued to draft documents (7), conduct shuttle diplomacy between individuals (6) and facilitate mediations (5). Once the desired outcomes were achieved and the cases were closed, I monitored the effectiveness of the resolutions by checking in with faculty and helping as needed.

DISTRIBUTION OF ISSUES

Cases that were brought to the Ombuds Office were evenly split between issues with academia and non-academia. While most issues were individual in nature, many raised systemic concerns. Most issues occurred at the University level although some emerged from the college or department levels. Case resolution was facilitated through information and assistance provided by various constituencies throughout the University community: Human Resources, VITAL, Compliance Office, Counseling Center, Villanova Chapter of the AAUP, Office of Diversity, Equity and Inclusion, Public Safety, Office of Strategic Planning and Institutional Effectiveness, UNIT, Athletics, VISIBLE, Office of Research Protections, Parking and Transportation, Office of the Provost and Faculty Congress.
FACULTY FEEDBACK

Most faculty responding to my request for feedback consulted with the Ombuds Office due to a colleague’s recommendation:

At the outset of their cases, all responding faculty highly agreed or agreed that they were sufficiently informed about the Ombuds Office. Most faculty had an above-average belief that the Ombuds Process would help resolve their concern. Their average rating of this was 3.35, on a scale of 1 to 5, with 5 as the highest score.

Prior to our initial consultations, I asked faculty to identify what options they had been considering to resolve the concern that caused them to contact the Ombuds Office. As set forth in the graphic below, only roughly a quarter of responding faculty had considered not talking to someone about the issue. Nearly half had considered giving up and leaving the issue unresolved, while close to another half had not. Few faculty had considered filing a lawsuit, but over a third had considered filing an internal grievance or complaint. Almost a quarter of responding faculty had considered leaving their position.

After completing the Ombuds Process, all responding faculty highly agreed or agreed that the Process was easy to use, fair and confidential. They responded that:

- Using the Ombuds Process resolved their concern. (4.0 average rating)
- They intend to use the Ombuds Process again to resolve a concern that arises in the future. (4.69 average rating)
- They would recommend the Ombuds Process to a colleague. (4.92 average rating)

At the conclusion of their cases, all responding faculty highly agreed or agreed that the Ombudsperson assisted them in identifying their concerns, developing options to address them, and implementing a plan to resolve them. See Addendum B for Testimonials.
**FACULTY USE**

Faculty at all levels utilized the Ombuds services. More than a third of faculty I consulted with were tenured (11), while approximately another third were not eligible for tenure (9), and the remainder were on the tenure track (5).

I collected optional demographic information from faculty who brought cases to the Ombuds Office. Of the responding individuals, 7 were female while 9 were male. Most individuals responding were Caucasian, were not Hispanic, did not identify as having a disability and were not veterans. The most common age group was 40-59.

Faculty from all the University’s colleges sought the services of the Ombuds Office. The vast majority were from the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences, Villanova’s largest college. Its dean has embraced the Ombuds Office, welcoming me to present at a meeting of her chairpersons, motivating the chairpersons to invite me to their department meetings, encouraging faculty to utilize the Ombuds services and collaborating with the Ombuds Office to resolve issues.

**OUTREACH**

Throughout the 2019-2020 academic year, I presented information about the Ombuds Office to raise faculty awareness about their opportunity to utilize this resource. The presentations reached over 250 faculty members in academic department meetings, the New Faculty Orientation and Faculty Congress, as well as the Deans Council. I also provided this information through the Ombuds web page (ombuds.villanova.edu), which is linked to the web pages of Faculty Congress and the Office of the Provost.

**PRIORITIES FOR 2020-2021**

I will prioritize issues involving the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic to assist faculty and the University with navigating emerging concerns. Additionally, I intend to utilize the online meeting structure to conduct case processing, as well as to present information about the Ombuds Office. I will seek invitations to faculty meetings and will offer opportunities for faculty to Meet the Ombuds to convey this information and build relationships. My priority is to increase the visibility of the Ombuds Office at the University and provide enhanced access to its services.
I joined Villanova in 2019 as the University’s first professional Faculty Ombuds. I am a member of the International Ombudsman Association. I also serve as Senior Attorney and Subject Matter Expert in the U.S. Department of Education, Office for Civil Rights, where I have practiced since 2005, after working as a litigation associate handling civil rights and commercial matters at Stradley, Ronon, Stevens & Young LLP. I received a JD from Rutgers University, Camden School of Law; a MS in Public Affairs and Politics from Rutgers University, Bloustein School of Planning and Public Policy; and a BS in Marketing from Boston College.

To best support the confidential nature of this work, I am based out of a remote office on West Campus in St. Mary’s Hall, Suite 2L. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, I am available to meet with faculty by Zoom or other online platforms, as well as by phone and email. If in-person meetings are required, they will be held in accordance with all safety guidance.

Faculty Ombuds: Megan Willoughby
To schedule a consultation: ombuds@villanova.edu | 610-519-3273

For more information, visit ombuds.villanova.edu.
INDEPENDENCE

1.1 The Ombudsman Office and the Ombudsman are independent from other organizational entities.
1.2 The Ombudsman holds no other position within the organization which might compromise independence.
1.3 The Ombudsman exercises sole discretion over whether or how to act regarding an individual’s concern, a trend or concerns of multiple individuals over time. The Ombudsman may also initiate action on a concern identified through the Ombudsman’s direct observation.
1.4 The Ombudsman has access to all information and all individuals in the organization, as permitted by law.
1.5 The Ombudsman has authority to select Ombudsman Office staff and manage Ombudsman Office budget and operations.

NEUTRALITY AND IMPARTIALITY

2.1 The Ombudsman is neutral, impartial, and unaligned.
2.2 The Ombudsman strives for impartiality, fairness and objectivity in the treatment of people and the consideration of issues. The Ombudsman advocates for fair and equitably administered processes, and does not advocate on behalf of any individual within the organization.
2.3 The Ombudsman is a designated neutral reporting to the highest possible level of the organization and operating independent of ordinary line and staff structures. The Ombudsman should not report to nor be structurally affiliated with any compliance function of the organization.
2.4 The Ombudsman serves in no additional role within the organization which would compromise the Ombudsman’s neutrality. The Ombudsman should not be aligned with any formal or informal associations within the organization in a way that might create actual or perceived conflicts of interest for the Ombudsman. The Ombudsman should have no personal interest or stake in, and incur no gain or loss from, the outcome of an issue.
2.5 The Ombudsman has a responsibility to consider the legitimate concerns and interests of all individuals affected by the matter under consideration.
2.6 The Ombudsman helps develop a range of responsible options to resolve problems and facilitate discussion to identify the best options.

CONFIDENTIALITY

3.1 The Ombudsman holds all communications with those seeking assistance in strict confidence and takes all reasonable steps to safeguard confidentiality, including the following: The Ombudsman does not reveal, and must not be required to reveal, the identity of any individual contacting the Ombudsman Office, nor does the Ombudsman reveal information provided in confidence that could lead to the identification of any individual contacting the Ombudsman Office, without that individual’s express permission, given in the course of informal discussions with the Ombudsman; the Ombudsman takes specific action related to an individual’s issue only with the individual’s express permission and only to the extent permitted, and even then at the sole discretion of the Ombudsman, unless such action can be taken in a way that safeguards the identity of the individual contacting the Ombudsman Office. The only exception to this privilege of confidentiality is where there appears to be imminent risk of serious harm, and where there is no other reasonable option. Whether this risk exists is a determination to be made by the Ombudsman.
3.2 Communications between the Ombudsman and others (made while the Ombudsman is serving in that capacity) are considered privileged. The privilege belongs to the Ombudsman and the Ombudsman Office, rather than to any party to an issue. Others cannot waive this privilege.
3.3 The Ombudsman does not testify in any formal process inside the organization and resists testifying in any formal process outside of the organization regarding a visitor’s contact with the Ombudsman or confidential information communicated to the Ombudsman, even if given permission or requested to do so. The Ombudsman may, however, provide general, non-confidential information about the Ombudsman Office or the Ombudsman profession.
3.4 If the Ombudsman pursues an issue systematically (e.g., provides feedback on trends, issues, policies and practices) the Ombudsman does so in a way that safeguards the identity of individuals.
3.5 The Ombudsman keeps no records containing identifying information on behalf of the organization.
3.6 The Ombudsman maintains information (e.g., notes, phone messages, appointment calendars) in a secure location and manner, protected from inspection by others (including management), and has a consistent and standard practice for the destruction of such information.
3.7 The Ombudsman prepares any data and/or reports in a manner that protects confidentiality.
3.8 Communications made to the ombudsman are not notice to the organization. The ombudsman neither acts as agent for, nor accepts notice on behalf of, the organization and shall not serve in a position or role that is designated by the organization as a place to receive notice on behalf of the organization. However, the ombudsman may refer individuals to the appropriate place where formal notice can be made.

INFORMALITY AND OTHER STANDARDS

4.1 The Ombudsman functions on an informal basis by such means as: listening, providing and receiving information, identifying and reframing issues, developing a range of responsible options, and – with permission and at Ombudsman discretion – engaging in informal third-party intervention. When possible, the Ombudsman helps people develop new ways to solve problems themselves.
4.2 The Ombudsman as an informal and off-the-record resource pursues resolution of concerns and looks into procedural irregularities and/or broader systemic problems when appropriate.
4.3 The Ombudsman does not make binding decisions, mandate policies, or formally adjudicate issues for the organization.
4.4 The Ombudsman supplements, but does not replace, any formal channels. Use of the Ombudsman Office is voluntary, and is not a required step in any grievance process or organizational policy.
4.5 The Ombudsman does not participate in any formal investigative or adjudicative procedures. Formal investigations should be conducted by others. When a formal investigation is requested, the Ombudsman refers individuals to the appropriate offices or individual.
4.6 The Ombudsman identifies trends, issues and concerns about policies and procedures, including potential future issues and concerns, without breaching confidentiality or anonymity, and provides recommendations for responsibly addressing them.
4.7 The Ombudsman acts in accordance with the IOA Code of Ethics and Standards of Practice, keeps professionally current by pursuing continuing education, and provides opportunities for staff to pursue professional training.
4.8 The Ombudsman endeavors to be worthy of the trust placed in the Ombudsman Office.
TESTIMONIALS FROM FACULTY ABOUT THE OMBUDS PROCESS

• I’m very glad to hear that there is such a process within the University.
• I am very pleased that the University offers this method of conflict resolution. I felt comfortable, safe and heard. The Ombuds was an excellent resource and presented herself with the highest degree of professionalism.
• The process was well-organized and easy to work through. One of the most important things about the process is that it made me feel as though my concern had truly been heard. On top of that, it helped me to take a step back and evaluate my strategy to resolve the issue with greater objectivity than I might have otherwise.
• I will tell my faculty colleagues about this and recommend it to them if they need assistance in the future.
• I felt bad when I found out (after the fact) that the Ombuds was generally available on Tuesdays and I had contacted her on a different day. I am thankful that she was able to respond so quickly, given that I did have a matter that needed to be resolved that day. I don’t know how many other faculty issues might also need such a quick resolution.
• I am glad that I went through the Ombuds Process because I do hope that it will mean a change in policy University-wide.
• The process worked very well!
• I cannot overstate how valuable the Ombuds Process (and person!) is. Before realizing I had a confidential and neutral source to speak with I was worried I was going to either have to quit or be fired. Through the Ombuds I was able to more than satisfactorily resolve my issue with all parties (including myself).
• I don’t think [others] would have agreed to meeting without the third-party visibility to the request for a meeting provided by the Ombuds position. It is especially challenging dealing with contentious relationships in a Zoom environment, so the Ombuds help was especially appreciated.

TESTIMONIALS FROM FACULTY ABOUT THE OMBUDSPERSON

• I think Meg is an outstanding hire—Villanova is very lucky to have her. She has created a welcoming office space. Every aspect of the process feels discreet, which made it easier for me to share. I felt truly heard. At the same time, she helped me formulate a series of complaints into a cohesive request—in other words, she was very effective at getting to the heart of my concern and what could feasibly be addressed. And then she moved forward with addressing it. I was extremely happy with the outcome of the situation I brought to her attention, and I am especially grateful that the process was confidential. Without Meg, I would not have come forward because I would have felt that I was putting my career at risk.
• Meeting with Meg was easy and comfortable. She took action regarding my concern in a timely manner and reached out to me to follow up with results of her inquiries as soon as she had obtained them. Would absolutely use this again if I had a confidential issue and have already recommended the process to others when hearing about their complaints.
• Megan is easy to talk with, which helps in resolving emotionally charged issues between people. Her service is of great value and faculty should be made more aware of the types of things she can and has helped with and the fact that no “penalties” result from meeting with her.
• Very helpful. Meg is a curious, attentive listener who asks insightful follow up questions and whom I trust to follow up on the concerns I raised, while also advising me appropriately and thoughtfully on how I can move forward.
• She was responsive and listened to my concerns.
• I found the Ombudsperson to be highly professional and responsive. She listened carefully and gave me detailed information that helped resolve my issue. I found my interactions, both in person and through the email very productive and useful. I will readily consult her in the future if the need should arise.
• Meg was kind and professional. I appreciated her listening to my concerns.
• Megan was amazing. I felt very welcomed, heard and understood. She provided objective advice and a perspective that helped me greatly.
• The Ombudsperson is an outstanding resource to this University and is quite frankly the only reason I am still employed at this point. They are not only a professional and tireless advocate but also a sympathetic and helpful ear who is motivating and can help plan and strategize in a difficult moment. They are beyond excellent and an outstanding person in which to confide and discuss options and help work through difficult feedback. I think every faculty should be made more aware of their role and have the opportunity to meet with the Ombudsperson more often and get information more quickly (due to their currently limited time). I believe they already do such an outstanding job that they should be on campus more often, ideally as a full time resource to faculty and potentially others.
• My issue [seems] resolved for now, with many thanks to Meg. I cannot say however with 100 percent certainty whether a similar issue might occur in the future with the same people.
• Thank you for your professionalism and conscientiousness, Meg!
• I found having an impartial, level-headed, and thoughtful peer helping me to evaluate my situation and consider options for resolving it to be incredibly helpful. [Meg’s] advice was reasoned and sound. It gave me great peace of mind to know that I had someone who I could turn to for advice who did not have a stake in my future at the University.