

Annual Report of the Ombud
2005-2006
July 15, 2006

Personnel:

Vincent Rose, Ombud
Thomas Hardiman, Assistant to the Ombud

Office:

Since the office was scheduled to be moved, the telephone message gave the telephone phone number and e-mail address of the Ombud. The Assistant to the Ombud used the Memorial Union Board Office for office hours. The Office now is scheduled to be relocated for the 2006-07 academic year.

Web page:

The web site <http://www.uri.edu/facsen/Ombud.html> has been kept up-to-date through the efforts of the Faculty Senate Office. The site emphasizes the purpose of the Ombud Office, lists the telephone number and the e-mail address of the Ombud. Additional manual sections and links of interest to both students and faculty have been added. The site can be reached from the University home page as well as through the Faculty Senate web site.

Outreach:

Posters have been placed in various locations in the Memorial Union and in University College. Contact has been maintained with the Student Senate and the Graduate Student Association, the Office of Enrollment Services, Student Life, Counseling Center, Campus Ministry, Disability Services, Graduate School and various undergraduate deans' offices. Flyers were distributed in the student organization mailboxes. The Ombud has attended parent orientation sessions each summer. Flyers have been distributed to parents during these sessions.

The Ombud has served on the College of Engineering Diversity Committee. (For further information on the College of Engineering Diversity Committee activities see the web site <http://www.egr.uri.edu/diversity/>.) The Ombud has been a participant in the USDE Change The Culture Grant, (for further information the Change the Culture web site is <http://www.uri.edu/ctc/>.) The Ombud serves as an ex officio member of the Academic Standards and Calendar Committee.

Thomas Hardiman, the Assistant to the Ombud surveyed a number of other institutions' websites to determine what information was on-line for parents.

Additionally, he and the Ombud met with John Peterson who was developing a proposal for a URI parent-portal website. Mr. Hardiman also served as coordinator for the Parent Orientation program during the summer 2006. In addition, Mr. Hardiman, who was a participant in the leadership program, received the A. Robert Rainville Leadership Award for 2006.

Cases:

Questions have been received from students, parents, faculty, administrators and outside groups. Many of the cases are raised and resolved via the Internet and by telephone. The majority of the problems have involved undergraduate students. Most of the solutions have involved informing people of the appropriate procedures and options. Meeting deadlines and timely submission of petitions would avoid many of the problems.

Alleged cheating remains a problem. It is important that instructors address the issue of cheating, both in the syllabus and in instructions for class papers and projects. Any prohibition on the use of electronic equipment in exams should be spelled out clearly in written and verbal instructions. Clear directions and frequent communications are important, especially where the final papers are expected to be completed independently. Since these projects are teaching tools it also is important that the students be allowed to review the document in question so that they can understand the grading process.

Grading continued to be a major issue. It is important that faculty indicate the method of grading in the course syllabus and adhere to the procedure outlined during the course of the semester (see section 8.52.10 of the University Manual). Any changes in these policies also must be communicated to the students in writing in a timely manner. Rules regarding placement in "professional practice" need to clearly define expectations as well as consequences if the expectations are not met. Students need to understand the course syllabi they receive, especially the grading and attendance policies. After a multi year effort by the Academic Standards and Calendar Committee under the leadership of Jim Loy, procedures for appealing grades (8.26.13) and for changes in academic records (8.56.11) have been adopted. Academic regulations that apply to grade appeals procedures have been added to a new website on "University Manual on Academic Regulations" (See http://www.uri.edu/facsen/Additional_UMan_Ombuds.html).

Interpretation of University Policy have been the issue in several cases. These cases have been discussed with personnel in Enrollment Services and with appropriate deans.

Questions regarding appropriate accommodations for students with disabilities occasionally arise. Information on the process can be

obtained from Disability Services. Students need to be evaluated by the URI Office of Disability Services so that an official letter can be sent to the appropriate faculty outlining the accommodations that are necessary. The faculty should not base their actions on what the student says, on letters from other institutions or from parents or on their own feelings.

According to the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (see <http://www.uri.edu/es/forms/pdf/faculty/ferpa.pdf>, faculty and staff can not discuss a student's performance with third parties including parents of the student without written authorization of the student. In addition, except for advisers or for official university business, faculty/staff do not have authorization to access a student's records. It also is not appropriate to log on to student's entries on "my space.com" or "facebook.com".

For off-campus housing, it is important that students understand tenants' rights and responsibilities. All renters should have a signed lease. Sample leases, information on tenants' rights and responsibilities, Narragansett housing laws, and much more information are available on the URI Commuter Office website, www.uri.edu/commuter-housing.

Timing:

Many of the cases reach the Ombud's Office before or at the start of the semester (housing, appropriate registrations, course availability, prerequisite requirements, fees, student payroll, etc.) and, at the end of the semester (grades, dropping of course, cheating, academic standing, dismissal). Housing is an issue during the fall semester and admissions during the spring semester. Cases involving personal conflicts (student-student, teacher-student, administrative office-student) occur on a more random basis.

Future Plans:

Contacts will be maintained with the various student service offices.

Efforts will be made to make people aware of the new procedures for appealing grades and to have a definition of the grade "NW" incorporated in the University Manual. The links to college appeals procedures will be updated as well.

The Office of the Ombud is in the process, again, of being relocated. As soon as the office is relocated information will be available on the website.

The student assistant to the Ombud for 2006-07 is Jared Abdirkin, a major in Human Development and Family Studies who has worked in University College and served on the Student Senate.

Links:

- **Conflict Resolution:** <http://www.egr.uri.edu/diversity>
- **Disability Services:** <http://autocrat.uri.edu/index.php?id=815>
- **Discrimination and Harassment:** http://www.uri.edu/affirmative_action/
- **Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA):**
<http://www.uri.edu/es/forms/pdf/faculty/ferpa.pdf>
- **Graduate Student Manual:** <http://www.uri.edu/gsadmis/TOC.html>
- **Ombud Home Page:** <http://www.uri.edu/facsen/Ombud.html>
- **Off Campus Housing:** http://www.uri.edu/commuter_housing/
- **Student Handbook:** <http://www.uri.edu/judicial/>