

Annual Report of the Ombud
2007-2008
July 18, 2008

Personnel:

Vincent Rose, Ombud
Cristin Langworthy, Assistant to the Ombud

Office:

The office telephone message gave the telephone phone number and e-mail address of the Ombud. The Assistant to the Ombud was available in the Student Senate Office for appointments.

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 and the assistant to the Ombud, as well as pertinent sections of the University Manual and links to various offices. 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, 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 and to the Deans' Offices. The Ombud has attended parent orientation sessions each summer. Flyers have been available for 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 serves as an ex officio member of the Academic Standards and Calendar Committee.

Cristin Langworthy, the Assistant to the Ombud, has distributed the Ombud's flyer to help students and parents locate information about University procedures and to inform them of services available through the Office of the Ombud.

In addition Ms. Langworthy was active in the Student Senate during the academic year. She worked on projects to inform students of their rights and responsibilities as well as issues involving academic integrity.

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. This information is especially important where group assignments are involved. Distinctions between group and individual work should be spelled out clearly in written and verbal instructions. Clear directions and frequent communications are important, especially when the work is 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. If cheating is suspected, faculty should discuss their concerns with the student and then, if appropriate, follow the procedures in the University Manual Sections 8.27.10-27. For more information on how to deal with cheating see <http://library.msstate.edu/content/templates/?a=393&z=>

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 should be communicated to the students in writing by mid-semester so students have an opportunity to drop the course. 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.

A number of grade appeal cases were heard in various departments and colleges. Efforts were made to assist with procedures for these appeals. Incompletes only may be given when the student is passing at the time of interruption of studies. NW grades are only appropriate when the student has not attended. Academic regulations that apply to grade appeals procedures are available on the website at "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 (<http://www.uri.edu/disability/dss/>). 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. Faculty should refer students who appear to be having difficulties to the appropriate offices; Disabilities Services, Counseling (<http://www.uri.edu/coun/>) or the Academic Enhancement Center (<http://www.uri.edu/aec/>) in Roosevelt Hall.

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. Students should be cautious of what they post on the social networking websites.

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, http://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 continue to make people aware of the new procedures for appealing grades. Another focus will be on making students and faculty aware of the issues involved in academic integrity. See the College of Business website, <http://www.cba.uri.edu/home/current/AcademicHonestyandIntegrity/> for one approach.

The location of the Office of the Ombud is still undecided. As soon as the office is relocated information will be available on the website.