

Annual Report of the Ombud
2008-2009
July 16, 2009

Personnel:

Vincent Rose, Ombud

Office:

The Ombud was available for appointments in his office in Crawford Hall. No one was appointed as Assistant to the Ombud.

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 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 around campus. 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 to student organizations and to the deans' offices. The Ombud has attended parent orientation sessions. Flyers have been available for parents during these sessions.

The Ombud also is a member of the College of Engineering Diversity Committee <http://www.egr.uri.edu/diversity/>. Guidelines for conflict resolution are available under "policies, procedures & guidelines." The Ombud serves as an ex officio member of the Academic Standards and Calendar Committee.

Cases:

Questions have been received from students, parents, faculty, administrators and outside groups. Many of the cases are raised and resolved via the Internet or 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.

Cheating and plagiarism are continuing problems both at URI and at college and universities around the country. URI policies are spelled out in the University Manual, the Student Handbook and the Graduate School Manual, all of which may be accessed through links on the Ombud web site. Information also is available on the URI Library web site

<http://www.uri.edu/library/guides/subject/genref/plagiarism.html>. Since many students are unaware of what constitutes cheating and plagiarism it is important that instructors address these issues, 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. If cheating is suspected, faculty should discuss their concerns with the student and then, if appropriate, follow the procedures in the University Manual Sections 8.27.17-19. Basically failure in an assignment is reported to the student's dean and is appealable to the instructor's dean. The dean's decision shall be made in a timely manner and is final. If additional action is deemed appropriate a recommendation is made to the instructor's dean for approval to fail the student in the course. The dean's decision is appealable by the student or instructor to the Provost, whose action is final. The instructor or dean may refer the case to the student judicial system. Those procedures are covered in University Manual Sections 9.21.10-31.

Grading continues 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. Students need to understand the course syllabi they receive, especially the grading and attendance policies. Since examinations and papers 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.

A number of grade appeal cases were heard in various departments and colleges. Efforts were made to assist with procedures for these appeals. The grade appeal procedures are given in University Manual Section 8.26.13. The student appeal to the instructor first, then to the department chair. If the chairs feels the case has merit it should be referred to a faculty appeals committee. In colleges where there are no departments or where the faculty has voted to use the college

system the appeal goes to the dean and then a college faculty appeals committee. This procedure is different than the one for cheating and plagiarism.

Another issue that arises each semester is inappropriate end of semester activities. University Manual Section 8.51.16 states that "in courses where no final examination is to be administered, a faculty member cannot administer any other examination during the last five days that classes are in session;" the instructor "must administer that examination according to the final examination schedule." Section 8.51.16 also indicates that is inappropriate to reschedule the time, date and/or place of the final examination without authorization of the Office of Enrollment Services. Since Section 8.51.17 indicates "all work for courses, including term papers but excepting the final examination, shall be completed by the final class meeting," it is inappropriate for an instructor to permit a student to do additional work after the end of the semester to improve his/her grade.

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/students/consent_release.html) 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 web sites.

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). Normally housing is an issue during the fall semester and admissions during the summer. 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 offices and student organizations.

Efforts will continue to make people aware of the procedures for appealing grades. Another focus will be on making students and faculty aware of the issues involved in academic integrity. It is important that everyone is aware of the differences in the appeal procedures for cheating and plagiarism and for those appealing a grade.