



Annual Report: FY 2020-21

I. Overview

For FY 2020-21, the Ombuds Office addressed 171 cases, which involved more than a total of 341 people. This is a 46% increase in the number of cases addressed by the Ombudsperson in FY 2019-20, and a 30% increase in the number of people served by the Ombudsperson.

The Ombuds Office is a confidential, informal process for faculty, staff, administration, and students to seek assistance and to resolve conflict, off-the-record. Utilizing ombuds services gives employees and students the option of improving their own situation without creating a record of the conduct in HR.

Retha Niedecken, JD, CO-OP®, joined the LSU community in 2018 and serves as the Ombudsperson for *all* LSU campuses (including both Health Science Centers and Pennington) and serves the entire community of faculty, staff, undergraduate and graduate students, and administrators. In 2019, Retha became a Certified Organizational Ombuds Practitioner (CO-OP®) and adheres to the ethical standards and practices established by the International Ombuds Association, providing ombuds services to the LSU community based upon the following foundational principles of practice: *informality, confidentiality, neutrality, and independence.*

II. Statistical Information

Total # Cases: 171

Total # People Served: 341

Conflict or Issue:

Poor Communication	42%
Policy Question	24%
Bullying / Abuse of Power	21%
Alleged Gender and/or Race Discrimination	8%
Alleged ADA discrimination	0.5%
Alleged National Origin Discrimination	0.5%
Alleged Sexual Harassment / Hostile work environment	1%
Alleged Student Violence	0.5%
Alleged Inappropriate Behavior Involving a Minor, off campus	0.5%
Retaliation	2%

Risk Level:

Low	39%	-Fairly straight forward; concerns quickly addressed
Moderate	21%	- Increase in complexity; 2 or more parties involved
High	40%	- Increase in complexity; High Risk for legal concerns or HRM complaints; High Risk for unwanted turnover

Campus:

LSU-AM	94%
LSU-S	3%
LSU-E	1%
LSU-A	-0-
Ag Center	1%
HSC NO	1%
HSC Shreveport	-0-
Pennington	-0-

Visitor Type:

Staff	41%
Faculty	26%
Graduate Students	14%
Administrator	7%
Chair	6%
Undergraduate Students	6%

III. Summary of Issues

The cases which pass through the Ombuds Office are classified in three categories: Low, Medium, and High Risk. Low Risk is defined as fairly straightforward issues, involving one visitor, and typically resolved in one or two meetings. Medium Risk is defined as an increase in complexity, involving two or more people and multiple meetings. High Risk is defined as an increase in complexity with a high risk or likelihood for legal concerns or HRM complaints and / or high probability for unwanted turnover, and often involving numerous visits with the Ombudsperson.

Of the 171 cases this year, forty percent (40%) were deemed High Risk. Thirteen percent (13%) were the alleged discrimination, sexual harassment, student violence, and retaliation cases, which leaves 27% of the cases were comprised of bullying / abuse of power and poor communication issues that had escalated to the level of high risk by the time the matter was brought to the Ombuds Office. Not all poor communication cases rise to the level of high risk, but due to the impact of unwanted turnover and departmental disruptions, the majority of the bullying / abuse of power cases were considered high risk for LSU.

The High Risk cases were resolved through various means, including:

1. Informal mediations;
2. Professional coaching;
3. Referring the party to the LSU Ethics & Integrity Hotline;
4. Referring the party to HRM, Title IX, or (newly created) LSU Office of Civil Rights, if the party decided to pursue filing a complaint or grievance; and
5. Referring the party to the appropriate police department.

IV. Conclusion

Ideally, a case is brought to the Ombuds Office before it escalates to unlawful conduct. Wherein, it is resolved, off-the-record, and the parties move forward in a positive, professional manner. In addition to conflict resolution, the Ombudsperson is available to provide professional development training in:

1. Establishing and Maintaining Professional Boundaries;
2. Having Difficult Conversations;
3. Anti-Bullying;
4. Ethics and Professionalism;
5. Open Forum of Q & A – Ask the Ombuds Anything You Want But Are Afraid to Ask Your Supervisor; and
6. Additional topics, upon request.