

SENATE STUDY COMMITTEE B REPORT

Study Committee B was asked to look into the desirability of appointing a Faculty Ombudsperson at Texas Tech. Faculty Ombudspersons, found at a number of other universities around the country, function as neutral mediators in cases of conflicts between faculty members or between faculty members and administrators or staff. Texas Tech currently has a Student Ombudsman (Kathryn Quilliam) to serve the needs of students, and the question is whether the faculty and the University would be well served by the provision of a similar office dedicated to faculty concerns.

After looking at a number of other institutions as models, and discussing the issue with representatives of faculty organizations (specifically, AAUP) as well as other members of the faculty and administration, our committee remains neutral with regard to the advisability of developing a faculty ombuds office here. We recognize several potential benefits (see below) to having such an office, and have some suggested requirements as to its structure (also below) should the Senate decide to recommend in its favor, however, we recommend AGAINST it at present for two basic reasons. First, we lack any evidence that the faculty desire it. The suggestion and encouragement for the office came at the behest of the Provost's office; it did not arise at the initiation of the faculty. This suggests that perhaps (unlike other institutions in which the faculty demanded the provision of an ombudsperson) the current structure is informally providing for the mediation needs of the faculty through the services of the Employee Assistance Program, colleagues, Deans, and Chairpersons. One might also find support for this supposition in the extremely small number of cases that reach the level of a formal grievance in the University. Secondly, in those institutions that do have ombudspersons, the usage by faculty seems quite low, far outnumbered by staff and student contacts respectively. So the question is raised whether the financial resources required to set up and staff an office with a faculty ombudsperson would be justified by its anticipated use.

That said, it is worth noting the potential benefits of having an ombuds office.

- To serve as a source of information for faculty about the grievance process and procedures and other concerns, or as a general referral source
- To help better facilitate faculty and faculty-administration communication
- To help mediate actual conflicts when the existing informal structure fails
- To help faculty evaluate their options in response to conflict
- To track the presence of patterns of problems and report such to the Faculty Senate for its attention

Finally, should the Senate decide to recommend the creation of a faculty ombuds office, we recommend that it only follow upon a survey of faculty adequately establishing a need, and that it only be considered under the following conditions:

- The appointment of the Faculty Ombudsperson should be drawn from the ranks of current or emeritus Texas Tech faculty
- That the Faculty Senate play the central role in appointing the Ombudsperson
- That the position be part-time and for a fixed 3-year renewable term
- That the Ombudsperson report to the Faculty Senate, not the Administration
- That there be provisions in place to guarantee the Ombudsperson's independence and freedom from possible retaliation in performance of the office's duties
- That any policy revisions consequent upon the creation and role of the Ombudsperson be returned to the Senate for approval

Respectfully submitted,

Members of Senate Study Committee B:

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MOTION: That Texas Tech University not create an office of Faculty Ombudsperson unless and until a faculty survey indicates a need or desire for such an office.