



OMBUDSPERSON ANNUAL REPORT 2021

January 2022

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

2021 was the first year of the ombudsperson position at Dakota State University (DSU). The ombudsperson serves as a resource between faculty and administration on issues related to DSU or South Dakota Board of Regents (BOR) policies and procedures. Time was spent at the beginning of the year to develop the procedures and protocols related to the expectations, responsibilities, and reporting structure of this new position. The development of the position was completed with the details shared via a public website and brochure. The ombudsperson also presented an overview on the position at the President's Cabinet and at a General Faculty meeting in April.

Throughout the 2021 year, faculty members brought forth 29 cases to the ombudsperson. These dealt with a range of different policies and procedures. Basic data was collected on the cases including: date, general issue, policy or procedure addressed, population impacted, time spent, and case status.

In looking for specific areas of concern across the cases brought forward, there are four recommendations made that may aid faculty / administration relations in the future. These include revisions to the workload document, promoting additional clarity between deans and faculty regarding expectations, working toward the development of a personal rather than corporate culture, and offering training sessions on additional topics.

Overall, I personally feel that the first year of the ombudsperson position has been successful. The structure of the position is now in place. Despite the fact this was a new position, faculty were able to bring forth a range of cases. I believe they will utilize the position more in the future resulting in a deeper understanding of the policies and better relationships between faculty and administration.

Mary Francis
DSU Ombudsperson
January 2022

BACKGROUND

The ombudsperson position at Dakota State University (DSU) was established in February 2021 to serve as a resource between faculty and administration on issues related to DSU or South Dakota Board of Regents (BOR) policies and procedures. The ombudsperson is a current faculty member who is assigned to a three-year term by the University President from a slate of individuals selected by the General Faculty.

In 2020, the South Dakota Legislature passed SB 147 which prohibited collective bargaining at the BOR institutions. The passage of this bill meant that some procedures and agreements covered under the contract now had to be covered by either statewide BOR policies or DSU specific policies. The ombudsperson position was meant to help fill some needs left open by the removal of the negotiated contract.

The ombudsperson provides confidential, impartial, and informal assistance. The goal of the ombudsperson is to help resolve cases with the faculty member at the lowest level. This may be accomplished by providing information on policies and providing suggestions on courses of action. All final decisions on actions are made by the faculty member.

The first individual selected to serve as the DSU ombudsperson was Mary Francis, Associate Professor, Reference Instruction Librarian.

ACTIVITIES

Establish Protocol

2021 was the first year that DSU had an individual in an ombudsperson position. While the basic responsibilities of the position were recognized, much of the early part of the year was spent establishing the protocol for the position. In laying out the structure for the position, resources from the International Ombudsman Association were consulted. Specifically, the document *Nuts and bolts: Establishing and operating a college or university ombuds office* was influential.

Expectations of the ombudsperson were established. These include: providing confidential, impartial, and informal assistance to individuals and groups. Guidelines were also developed for those meeting with the ombudsperson in order to protect the faculty member, ombudsperson, and the process. While the ombudsperson drafted these documents, they were reviewed and approved by the Human Resources Director. Full details on the expectations and meeting guidelines can be found on the ombudsperson website and physical brochure detailed below.

Website

After developing language surrounding the position, the ombudsperson worked with the DSU Marketing team to create a website. The website, available at <https://dsu.edu/Ombuds/>, provides complete details on the expectations of the ombudsperson; guidelines for meeting with the ombudsperson; details on resolution of cases; links to BOR policies, SD Academic Affairs guidelines, and DSU policies; links to training videos; contact information; and a form to submit anonymous comments.

Brochure

In conjunction with the information available on the ombudsperson website, a physical brochure was also developed as a means to share details about the position and inform faculty on how they can contact and work with the ombudsperson.

Reports

The ombudsperson reports to the Human Resources Director. During this initial year, one-on-one meetings were held quarterly in order to provide a check-in on the position and the cases brought forward.

The ombudsperson also provided a report to the President's Cabinet and the General Faculty during April 2021. These oral reports provided a summary of the work done by the ombudsperson, an overview of the number and types of cases brought forward, and allowed time for questions. This procedure of providing a report at the end of the spring semester will continue in addition to the annual report which will be shared at the end of the fall semester.

Training Session

In the fall 2021, the ombudsperson offered a training session which covered how instruction workload units are determined. This session was offered as a hybrid session with over 50 individuals attending either in-person or via Zoom. A recording of the session was made and linked from the ombuds website. The recording has been viewed 20 times. Attendees included faculty members, deans, and college program assistants. Overall, the feedback on the session was very positive with several attendees requesting the Powerpoint slides for future reference.

CASES

From the beginning of February 2021 until the end of the year, 29 cases were brought to the ombudsperson from various faculty members. Basic data was collected on the cases including: date, general issue, policy or procedure addressed, population impacted, time spent, and case status. The following charts provide a breakdown of the 2021 cases.

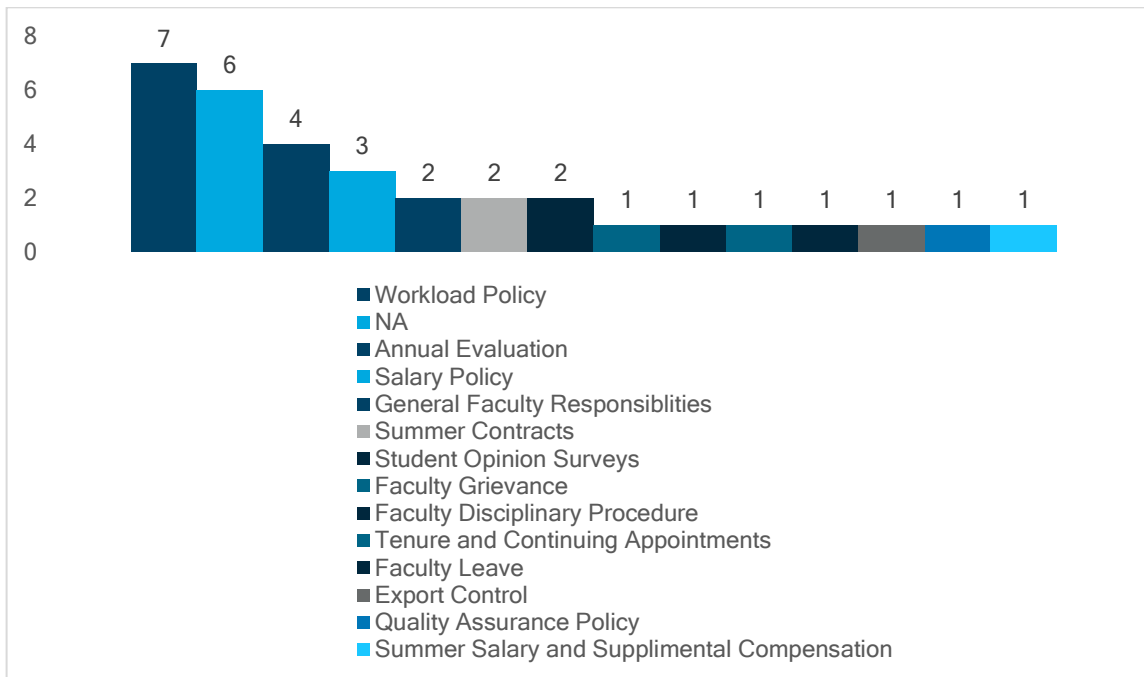
Polices/Procedures Addressed

There were a number of polices or procedures that were addressed in the cases brought forward by the faculty members. Note the total number is higher than 29 due to the fact that some cases touched upon more than one policy or procedure. The NA designation was given to cases that did not fall under a specific policy or procedure. These cases often dealt with specific working conditions. The following polices and procedures were addressed

- Workload policy (7)
- NA (6)
- Annual evaluation (4)
- Salary Policy (3)
- General Faculty responsibilities (2)
- Summer contracts (2)
- Student opinion surveys (2)
- Faculty grievance (1)
- Faculty disciplinary procedure (1)
- Tenure and continuing appointments (1)
- Faculty leave (1)
- Export control (1)
- Quality assurance policy (1)
- Summer Salary and Supplemental Compensation (1)

Table 1.

Polices/Procedures Addressed

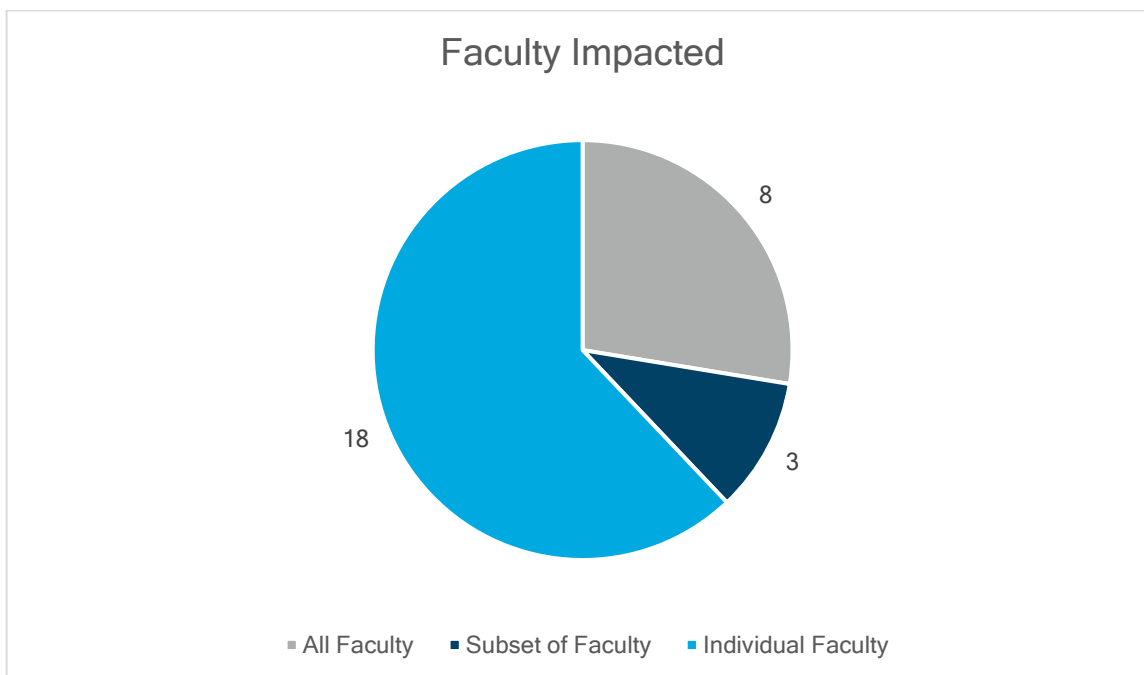


Population Impacted

Depending on the issue, each case was classified as impacting either all faculty members, a subset of the faculty, or an individual faculty member. Of the 29 cases, 8 cases impacted all faculty, 3 cases impacted a subset of the faculty, and 18 cases impacted an individual faculty member.

Table 2.

Faculty impacted

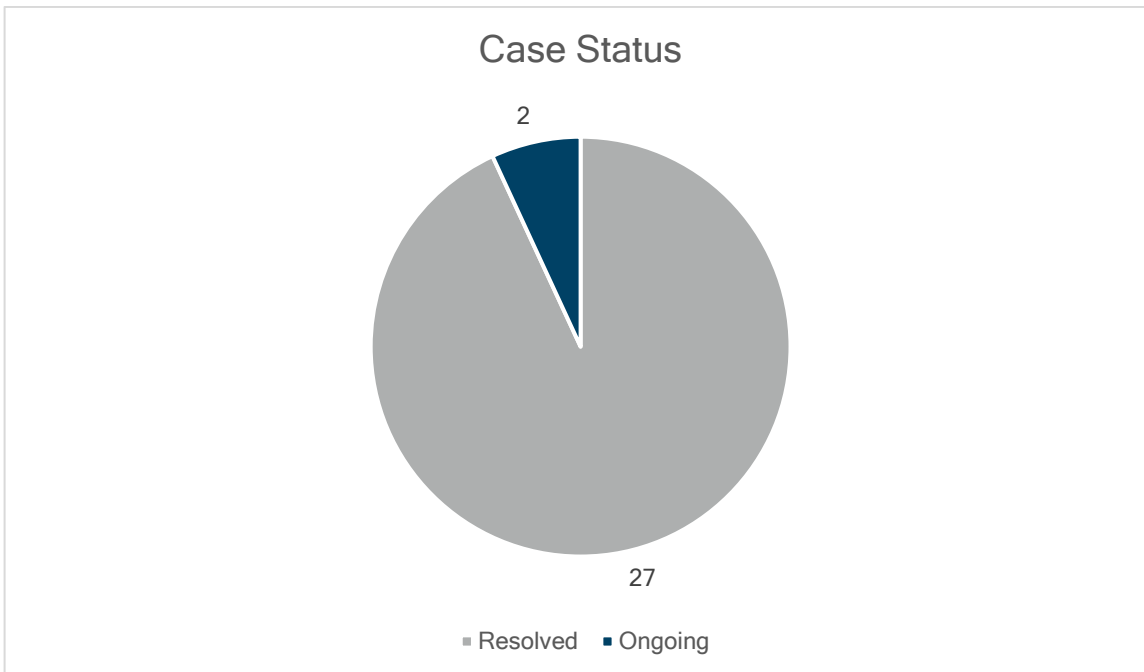


Case Status

As cases were worked on, they were designated as either ongoing or resolved. This status refers solely to the ombudsperson's relationship to the case and whether it is expected that they will need to spend more time working on the issue. A case may be classified resolved while the faculty member continues to deal with the case. Of the 29 cases, as of the end of 2021, 27 cases are resolved and 2 are ongoing.

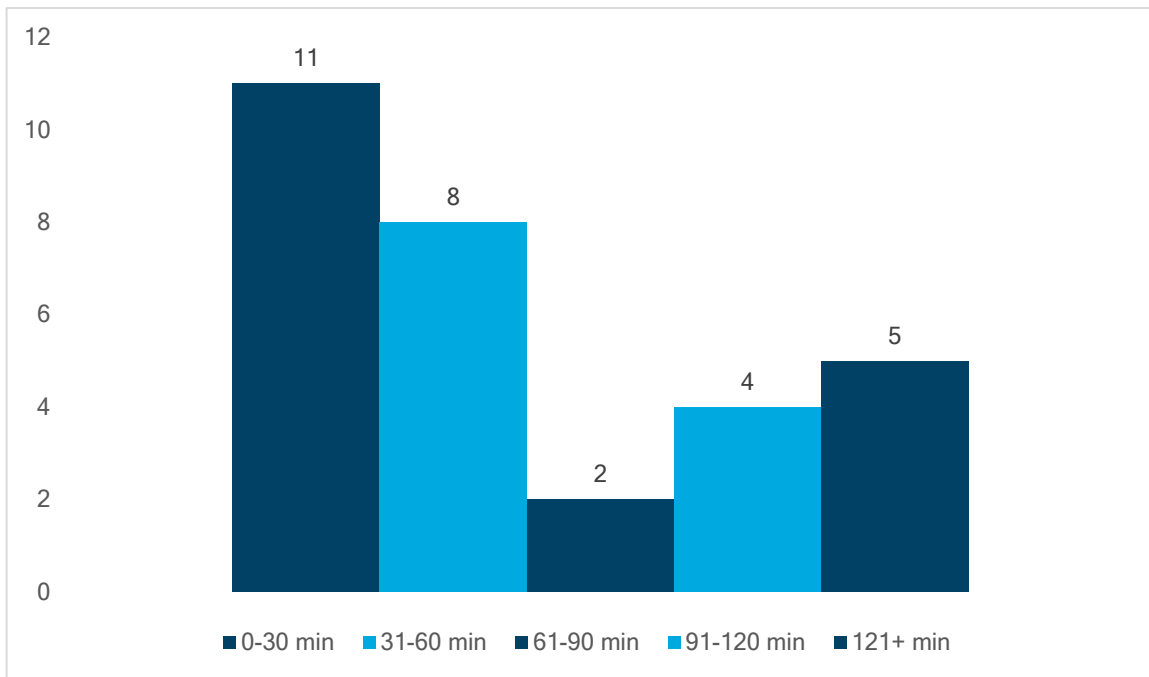
Table 3.

Case Status



Time Spent

Data was also collected on the time spent by the ombudsperson on each case. Time ranged from 10 minutes to 330 minutes. On average, each case took 80 minutes. 11 cases took 0-30 minutes. 8 cases took 31-60 minutes. 2 cases took 61-90 minutes. 4 cases took 91-120 minutes. 5 cases took 121 or more minutes. Given the familiarity of the ombudsperson with the assorted policies and procedures addressed, the time spent was lower than what would be expected by an individual with less knowledge of the documents.

*Table 4.**Time spent*

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Workload Revisions

The highest percentage of cases brought forward by faculty dealt with the Workload Policy. While some of these cases simply required an explanation of the policy, there were others that stemmed from confusion or omissions in the policy. It is recommended that several additions and clarifications are made to the workload policy in order to ensure that these instances are understandable by both faculty and those assigning workload units. Some areas that need additional clarification

- A section for small class sections should be added which will include: a definition of what it means for a class to be classified as a small section, any equated course types that do not fall under the small section rule, and the formulas that are used when determining workload units for small sections.
- Course sections that are taught by more than one faculty member.
- Some clarification on additional workload for those with 6+ preps.
- Details on when overload is determined and paid out to faculty.
- Clarification on summer salary for equated workload courses.
- Clarify overload in relation to a full instructional workload and course credit or workload unit.
- Cross-listing of on-campus and online sections needs details on what occurs if both sections fall below minimum enrollment.
- Instructional method M should be changed to a per student formula.

2. Clarity Between Deans and Faculty

Cases related to workload and annual evaluations often arose due to unclear expectations between deans and faculty members. There are multiple methods that such uncertainties could be clarified. Some recommended approaches

- Discussions during the annual evaluation process should include expectations of what should be done in the future and recommendations from the dean for faculty members on how they can improve and receive higher ratings in each area of responsibility.
- The new annual evaluation and promotion and tenure documents include areas where disciplines can include specific expectations. In developing these sections, the faculty members and deans can collaborate to find agreement on research expectations.

Another opportunity to ensure clarity of expectations between faculty and deans is the current revision of the annual evaluation process. Due to changes in the length requirements and inclusion of specific practices, faculty and deans must agree to the amount of written detail that can be included and what can be expected.

3. Nurture a Personal Rather than Corporate Culture

A theme that emerged in discussions with the faculty through some of the working condition cases as well as some of the workload cases was the idea that decisions were being made from a corporate mindset without any regard for personal considerations or extenuating circumstances. The idea was that DSU was becoming impersonal by not considering the individual. The suggestion was made by faculty that DSU should consider providing more localized power to groups and individuals to find solutions and solve their own problems rather than moving concerns to the highest-level policy. One of the benefits of a small campus is the ability to make personal connections with individuals and make accommodations as necessary.

A recommendation to address this concern is for the administration to put forth a call requesting faculty and staff to bring forth actionable items and suggestions for ways to empower faculty and staff to promote a personal rather than corporate culture.

4. Training Sessions

The training session offered by the ombudsperson was well received. It was an efficient method to explain important concepts to a large number of faculty members. Additional training sessions should be offered each year. Especially with changes coming to faculty procedures such as annual evaluations, these training sessions are an important method to help share details with faculty. These sessions are also a method to provide information to deans in order to help ensure consistent understanding at all levels across the entire campus. Some additional training sessions that can be offered

- Understanding salary policy.
- Changes to annual evaluation process.
- Changes to promotion and tenure process.