



OMBUDSPERSON ANNUAL REPORT 2023

January 2024

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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. During the year, the Ombudsperson assisted faculty with cases brought forward and offered training sessions.

Throughout the 2023-year, faculty members brought forth 30 cases to the Ombudsperson, dealing 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. Overall, I feel that the Ombudsperson position continues to be an important part of DSU. Faculty brought forth a range of cases this year and the information provided resulted in a deeper understanding of the policies and better relationships between faculty and administration.

Mary Francis
DSU Ombudsperson
January 2024

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.

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.

ACTIVITIES

Reports

The Ombudsperson reports to the Vice president for Human Resources. During the 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 review of the 2022 Annual Report to the President's Cabinet and the General Faculty during January 2023. 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.

Training Sessions

During 2023, the Ombudsperson offered two training sessions covering the workload document in the fall. These sessions were offered as hybrid with over 50 individuals attending overall, either in-person or via Zoom. A recording of the session was made and linked from the Ombuds website. Attendees included faculty members, deans, and college program assistants. Overall, the feedback on the sessions was very positive.

CASES

Throughout 2023, 30 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 2023 cases.

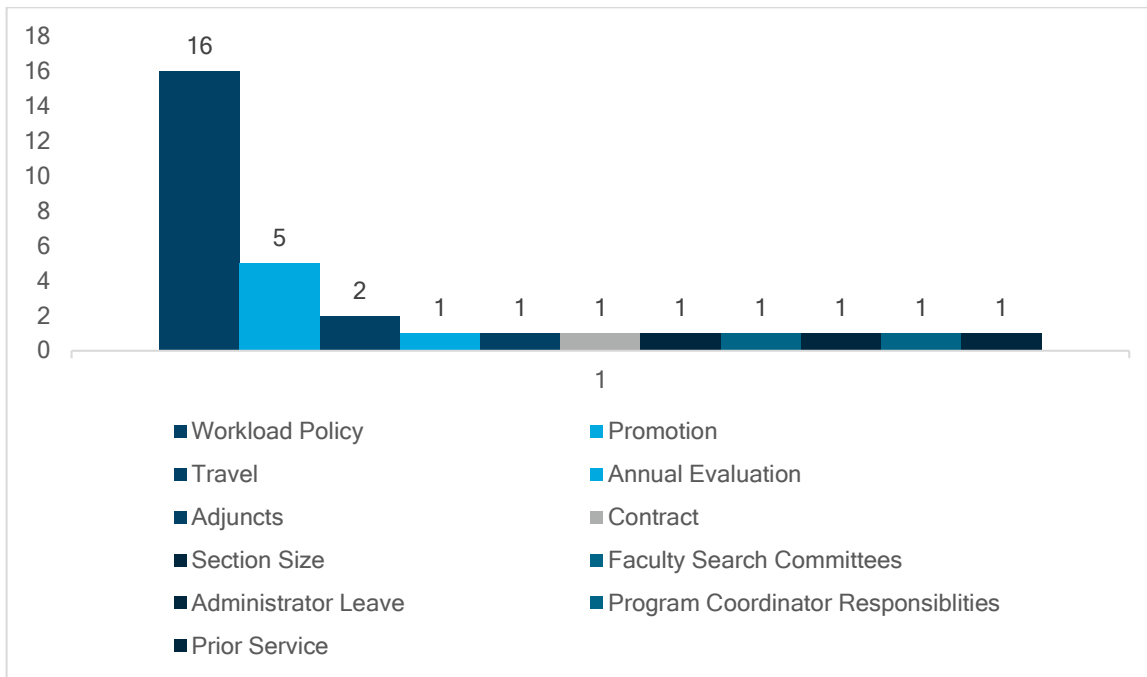
Policies/Procedures Addressed

There were a number of policies or procedures that were addressed in the cases brought forward by the faculty members. Note the total number is higher than 30 due to the fact that some cases touched upon more than one policy or procedure. The following policies and procedures were addressed:

- Workload policy (16)
- Promotion (5)
- Travel (2)
- Annual evaluation (1)
- Program coordinator responsibilities (1)
- Adjuncts (1)
- Contract (1)
- Prior Service (1)
- Section size (1)
- Faculty search committees (1)
- Administrative leave (1)

Table 1.

Policies/Procedures Addressed

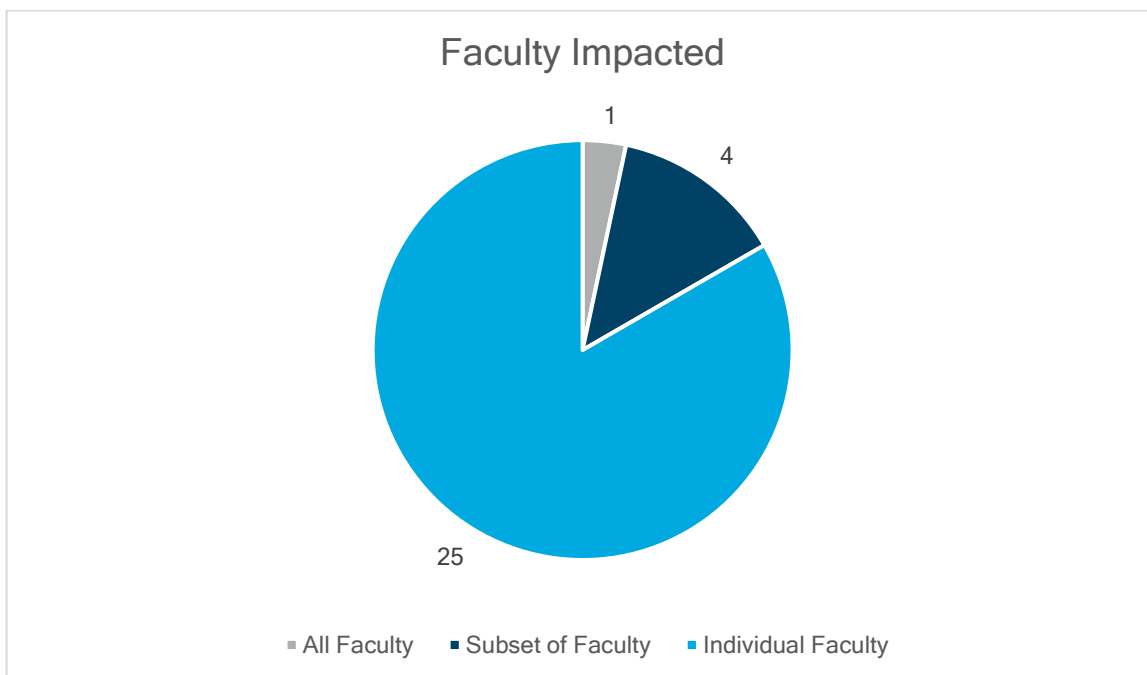


Population Impacted

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 30 cases, 1 case impacted all faculty, 4 cases impacted a subset of the faculty, and 25 cases impacted an individual faculty member.

Table 2.

Faculty impacted

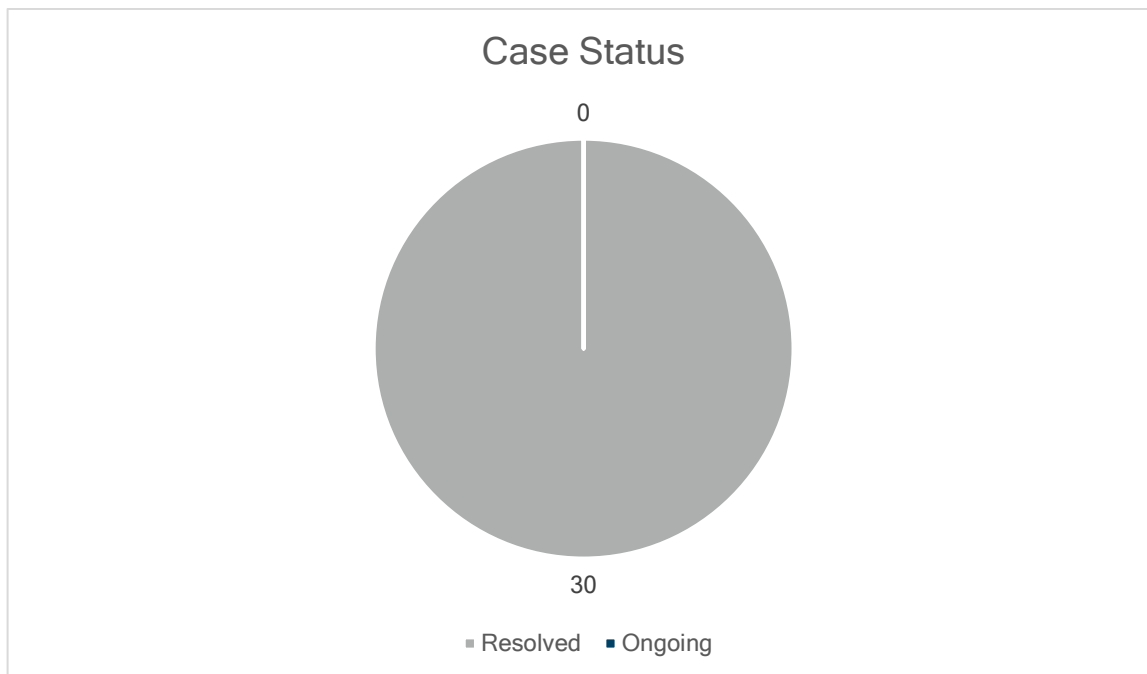


Case Status

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 outside of assistance from the Ombudsperson. Of the 30 cases, at the end of 2022, all of the cases were resolved.

Table 3.

Case Status

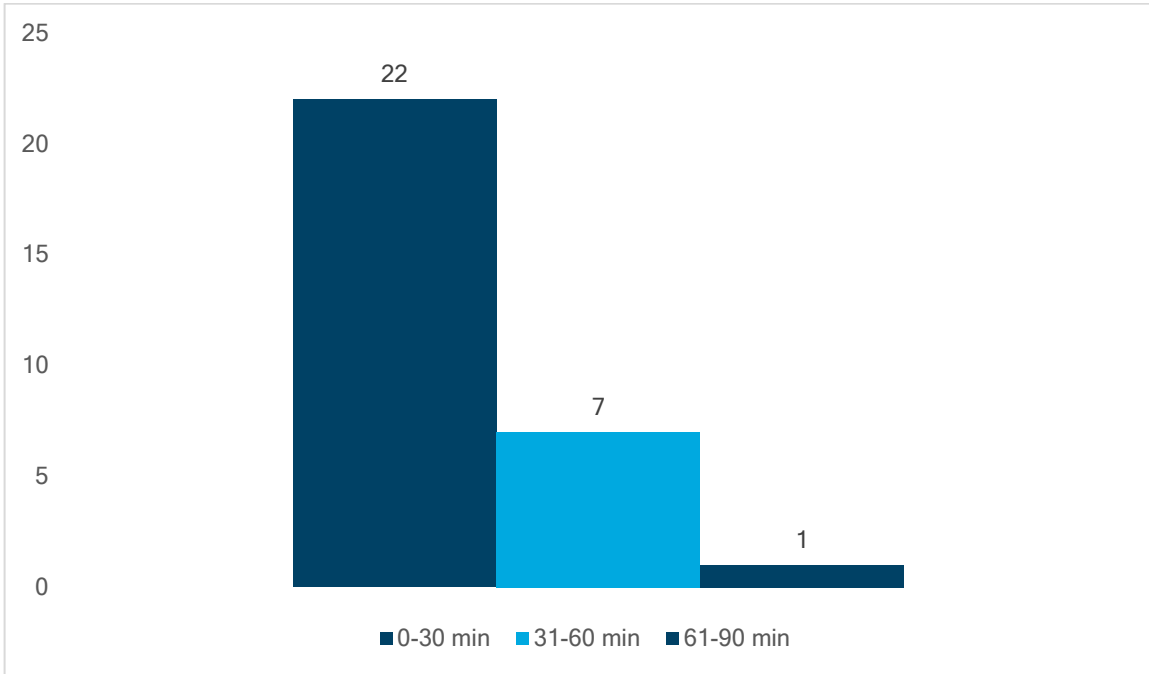


Time Spent

Data was also collected on the time spent by the Ombudsperson on each case. Time ranged from 5 minutes to 85 minutes. On average, each case took 24 minutes. 22 cases took 0-30 minutes. 7 cases took 31-60 minutes. 1 case took 61-90 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



DISCUSSION

Ombudsperson in Relation to Policies and Procedures

In looking at who is impacted by the cases brought forward, the majority relate to the individual faculty member. One explanation for this could be due to the time spent updating several major documents over the past years. There has been a joint effort with the Provost office and faculty to revise the Annual Evaluation Process, Standards Document, Workload Document, and Faculty Handbook. The attention that has been paid to creating usable guidelines provides more overall consistency for faculty leaving cases for individual faculty with more unique situations.

Consistency of Cases

The number of cases brought to the ombudsperson has remained consistent across the past three years. This highlights the continued need and usefulness of the position. While there are not many cases impacting all of the faculty as noted above, faculty still need to have a resource to address those issues that are impacting them individually. This may include looking for guidance or understanding on what a policy means or asking for assistance on what steps to take moving forward.

Training Sessions

The training sessions offered by the Ombudsperson were well received. These are an efficient method to explain important concepts to a large number of faculty members. Additional training sessions should be offered each year. It is recommended that a session on the Promotion process be offered in the spring to provide guidance for those who will submit a tenure or promotion application in the fall.