



Student Ombud Office

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Memorandum

To Members of Council
From Anne Simpson
Student Ombud
Date 2 December 2003
Subject 2003 Student Ombud Report

The Student Ombud Office has been operating since August 2002, and the current Ombud, Associate Professor Anne Simpson, has been in the position at .6 for seven months.

1 ENQUIRIES

1.1 Number of enquiries

A total of 135 students have approached the Office for assistance since January 2003.

Tables 1 illustrates the distribution of enquires which are categorised in terms of whether the Office offers advice to the student, refers the student on to the person or unit which can deal with their problem, or whether the complaint is pursued on behalf of the student. It can be seen that in 63 instances it was felt that the student had a grievance which warranted further investigation.

Table 1

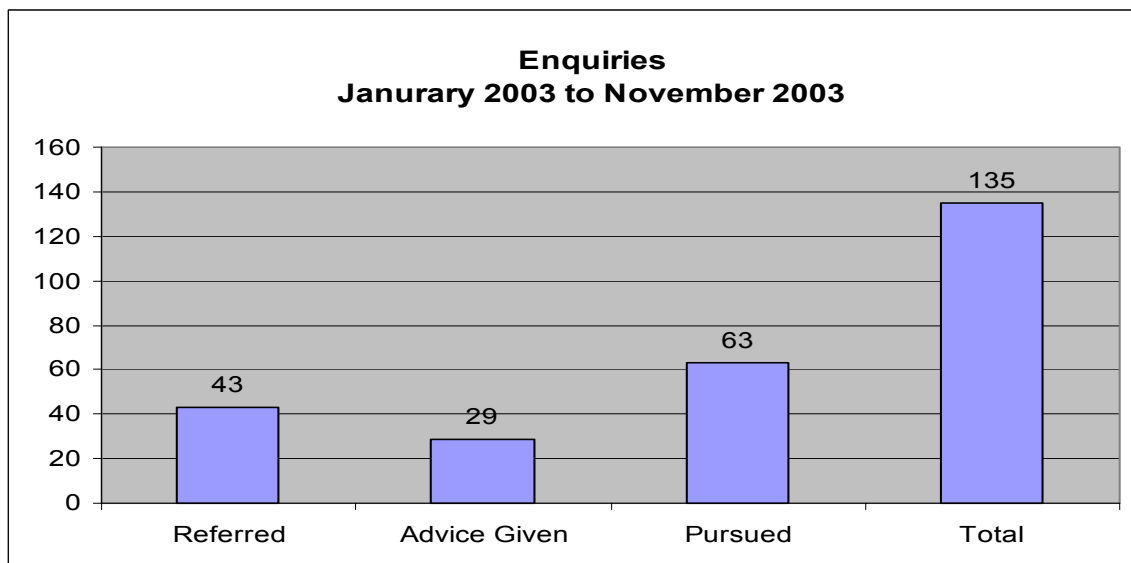
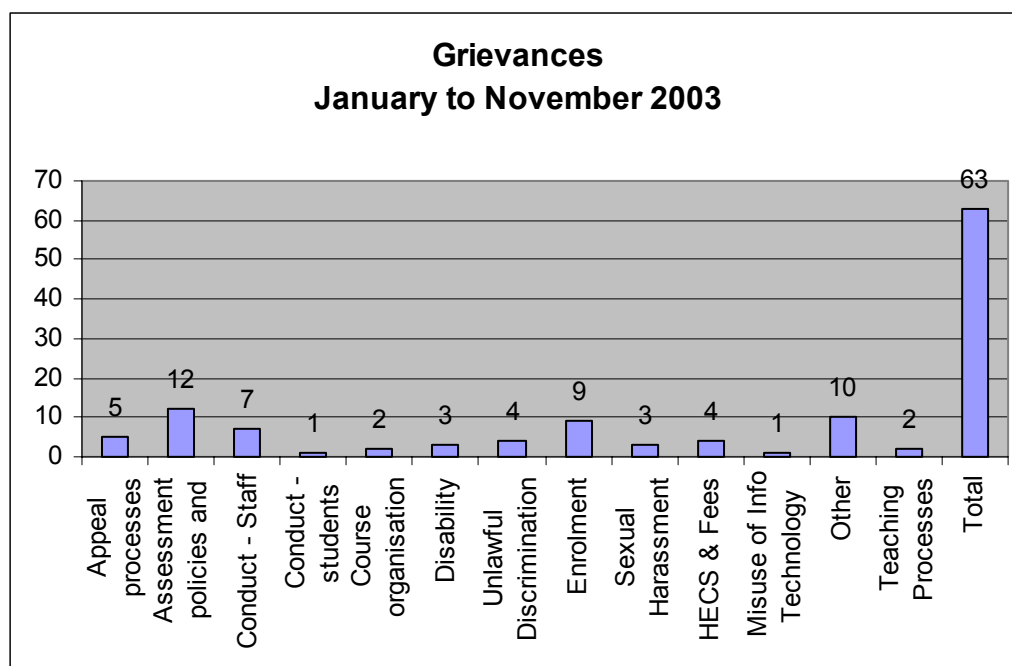


Table 2 illustrates the nature of the grievances which were investigated by the Office.

Table 2



Of the 63 complaints or grievances which were investigated by the Student Ombud, 51 were resolved in a manner which resulted in the student's situation being improved. The remaining 12 complaints were not substantiated. There is no evidence to suggest that any of the 63 complaints investigated have been taken up by any external body such as The State Ombudsman or the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission. This suggests that the students who have approached the office for assistance in the resolution of their grievances have been satisfied with the outcome achieved.

1.2 Alleged Unlawful Discrimination and Sexual Harassment cases

All cases of alleged unlawful discrimination and sexual harassment were investigated.

Unlawful Discrimination

The four complaints of alleged unlawful discrimination were investigated and found to be without substance.

Sexual Harassment

There were three cases of alleged sexual harassment. These were investigated and satisfactorily resolved through informal discussion. The Student Ombud followed up with each complainant to ensure there were no ongoing problems.

In all instances staff have been co-operative, well informed and supportive of complainants.

2 ISSUES ARISING FROM INVESTIGATIONS

There have been a number of complaints which, in the process of investigation, have revealed implications for other students, or were indicative of broader issues which needed to be

addressed. In such instances recommendations have been made to relevant staff members in Schools, Divisions or Units.

Examples where a student complaint and subsequent investigation have indicated a problem which needed to be addressed to avoid possible future problems have included :

- changes to course information on websites
- recommendation for use of simpler English in communications for overseas students
- reviewing the criteria for the appointment of invigilators at exams.

3 PROCEDURES

3.1 Policy and Procedures for the Resolution of Student Grievances (C-17.2)

The procedures of the policy for resolution of student grievances has been revised to include the role of the Student Ombud. The revised version of the policy and procedures has been approved by Senior Management, December 2003.

3.2 Procedures for the Resolution of Unlawful Discrimination And Harassment Grievances (Students) (C-12)

The revision of the Procedures for unlawful discrimination and harassment grievances (Students) (C12) to include reference to the Student Ombud has been completed and supported by the Student Ombud Advisory Group. The Procedures are currently being circulated widely within the University for feedback.

It is anticipated that these Procedures will be ready for Council approval early in 2004.

As soon as these grievance procedures have been formally approved, it is proposed that the Ombud develop guidelines for staff dealing with student complaints and attend School meetings to talk them through with academic staff. This will happen progressively during 2004 and 2005.

4 STUDENT OMBUD ADVISORY GROUP

The Advisory Group has been meeting bi-monthly. It is proposed to meet monthly in 2004 with the following membership:

Student Ombud (Convenor)
Deputy Ombud (also as Academic Staff Representative)
Director: Human Resources or nominee
Director: Council Services and Chancellery
President: USASA or nominee
Director: UniSA International Office or nominee
Director: Student and Academic Services or nominee
Coordinator: International Student Advisory Service, FLC
Dean: Graduate Studies

It is further proposed to expand the group twice yearly (or as requested) to invite other members of the University to attend to discuss matters of interest to them related to the operation of the Student Ombud Office.

5 COMMUNICATION STRATEGY

At the end of 2002, a communication strategy was put in place, including providing information in Campus Centrals on all campuses. Since the appointment of the current Student Ombud, she has met with key groups within the University to ensure as many staff as possible are aware of the role of the Office, and are familiar with relevant policies and procedures.

On September 19, in conjunction with the Human Resources Unit, the Student Ombud conducted a workshop with Equity Contacts to review the Equity legislation and grievance procedures.

The Student Ombud website, established in 2002, has been updated and provides links to Equity Contacts, Counsellors, Student Advisory Officers and related policies and procedures.

The Ombud maintains close communication with staff of the Equal Opportunity Commission and the State Ombudsman's Office.

UniSA will host the bi-annual conference of University Ombuds and Deans of Students in April 2004.

Since the inception of the Student Ombud position the incumbents of the role have worked with a small group of key staff to embed the position and its responsibilities within UniSA's structures, policies and procedures. That group, now called the Student Ombud Advisory Group, has terms of reference which have been noted by Senior Management Group and approved by the Vice Chancellor. The group is advisory only and does not affect the independence of the role.

RECOMMENDATION

That Council note the 2003 Student Ombud Report

Anne Simpson
Student Ombud