

# Academic Ombud Services Annual Report

October 14, 2019

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On behalf of the Office of Academic Ombud Services, it is a pleasure to provide the Academic Ombud Report for the 2019 academic year. I would like to start with a short statement on Ombud practice and its establishment at the University of Kentucky.

## Academic Ombud Services at the University of Kentucky

Academic Ombud Services at the University of Kentucky is now in its 50<sup>th</sup> year, having served the University of Kentucky Community since 1970. During this time, 28 senior faculty members have served as Academic Ombud. It is of note that the University of Kentucky was among the first institutions in the United States to establish an Ombudsman position. Ombuds as a modern profession originated in Sweden and the practice spread throughout Europe. The first Ombud position in the United States was established on a college campus at Eastern Montana College in 1966, in part due to the unrest on college campuses in the 1960's. Establishment of Academic Ombud Services at the University of Kentucky in 1970, within 4 years of the first establishment an Ombuds office in the United States, was a progressive move at the time.

From college campuses, the Ombud Profession spread to government, businesses and the non-profit sectors. In government settings, Ombuds are often referred to as 'classical' Ombuds whose role more closely resembles Ombud practice in Europe. On college campuses, business and non-profits, Ombud practice has evolved with establishment of the current professional classification as Organizational Ombuds. Standards of practice for Organizational Ombuds have been established the Ombuds Professional Organization, the International Ombudsman Association (IOA). Ombud practice at the University of Kentucky encompasses the four standards of Ombudsman practice established by the IOA: confidentiality, informality, impartiality, and independence. The University of Kentucky Office of Academic Ombud Services has structured its practice to best serve the students, staff, and faculty based on the IOA Standards of Practice. Academic Ombud Services owes its success to the efforts of the individuals who have worked in Academic Ombud Services for the past 50 years and to the continued support by the administration and University Senate for the valuable service it provides.

## Academic Ombud Services Report for the 2018/2019 Year<sup>1</sup>

As charged in Senate Rule 6.2.0, the Academic Ombud is “*charged with consideration of the student grievances in connection with academic affairs.*” We serve as a resource for students, faculty, staff and administrators. The Ombud’s Office also processes academic offense findings and appeals submitted to the University Appeals Board for both academic offense and non-academic offense cases.

This report contains information on the activities of the Office of Academic Ombud Services for the 2019 academic year, as well as an analysis of caseload and contact trends over the past six years. I would like to acknowledge the excellent work of Laura Ansel in coordinating the activity of the Ombud Office. When Laura joined the office in 2013, she set up a database that has allowed us to analyze and track the types of cases handled by the office. Laura has prepared the statistical report which is included with this report. I have thoroughly enjoyed the work during my term as Ombud. Laura and I have had the opportunity to meet with and assist students, faculty, and staff from across campus. I wish to acknowledge the efforts made by many Deans, Associate Deans and Chairs in many different colleges on behalf of students and faculty. As well, I also wish to acknowledge many other offices we work with, including the CoC, DRC, Counseling Center, and the Legal Office.

The Statistical Report at the end of this document contains an analysis of the cases and contacts. The first set of numbers are the total number of matters handled the office during fiscal year 2019. Questions or referrals are matters that generally take less than 30 minutes to resolve. They are received by phone, email or by walk-ins. They encompass both academic offenses and other matters. The vast majority of these contacts are handled by Laura Ansel. In 2019, there were 2239 questions or referrals, a decrease of 13.7% from 2018. Data are also provided in this report for the previous five years. The data show a 105% increase from fiscal year 2014 to 2019.

In contrast, the number of academic cases over this period has not varied as significantly. Cases are defined as matters that require a more significant amount of time or an appointment with the Ombud. In 2019, we processed 377 cases, a reduction of 4.1% from the 393 cases processed in 2018. These cases could take from a couple of hours for the Ombud and Ms. Ansel to over forty hours for some cases. Over the five-year period cases have ranged from 370 in 2015 to 481 in 2016. The cases are further broken down into non-academic offense issues and academic offense cases. For 2019 there was a 19.4% decrease in non-academic offense issues and an increase in academic offense cases of 21.4%. The numbers are shown in the graph included below as well as in the Statistical Report. The data show that while the number of cases has remained fairly consistent over the five-year period, there has been a dramatic increase in the number of questions and referrals and total contacts.

Further information is provided on the cases and questions and referrals in pages 2 and 3 of the statistical report. For cases, the four largest categories are grades, general policies, progress/promotion, and academic offenses, accounting for 78.4% of all cases. For questions and referrals, the largest number of queries concerned policies or academic offenses. While

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<sup>1</sup> Throughout the document, the 2018/2019 academic year will be referred to as the 2019 year.

the largest number came from students (1001), a significant number come from faculty (730). We routinely assist faculty with a wide range of issues ranging from simple questions regarding syllabi, Senate Rules, etc., to more complex questions. These often include questions regarding academic offenses and how to process them.

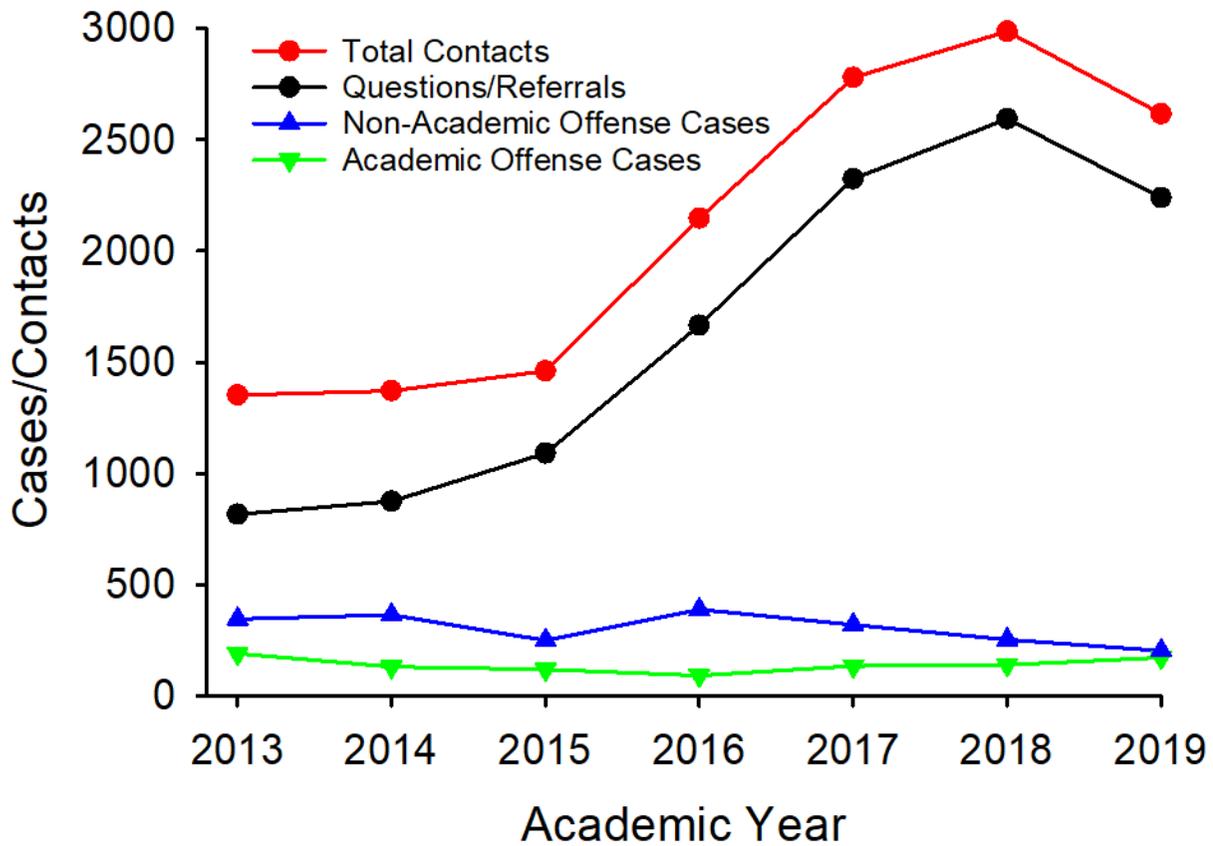
Page 2 contains a further breakdown of the 173 academic offense cases. Fifty-eight were for cheating and 115 were for plagiarism. Of those, 39 contacted the Ombud. Fifteen chose not to appeal and 24 filed appeals to be heard by the University Appeals Board. The report also breaks down the academic offenses with respect to student level and whether it was a first, second or third offense. The final breakdown of academic offenses is by originating colleges. Page three provides data on cases referred to the University Appeals Board. Of the 37 cases sent to the Appeals Board, 24 were for academic offenses and 13 were for student academic rights. In sum, 12 of the appeals were upheld for a success rate of 32.4% overall for 2019.

During my term as Ombud, I also focused on increasing outreach and education by the Ombud Office. In the previous year, we redesigned the Start of Term Notice that is sent out each semester and have received positive feedback. The reason for increasing outreach was to make the campus community more aware of services offered by as well as functions of Academic Ombud Services. I have made presentations about Academic Ombud Services to student groups, teaching assistants, colleges and departments, and the SEC ADLP Fellows. Both Laura and I have also participated in UK 101 classes for the ethics lecture. Two goals for presentations to groups of faculty and staff were to provide an overview of how we operate and to provide information on how to process academic offenses. I believe that this effort has reduced the number of errors in processing academic offenses.

During the 2019 year, I also re-evaluated the increasing role and level of responsibility Laura Ansel has played in Academic Ombud Services. During her tenure, Ms. Ansel has taken on an increasing level of responsibility in the Office of Academic Ombud Services. In addition to her role in managing the office, she is the initial point of contact for Ombud Services. In many cases she acts as an Ombud and resolves many issues without involving the Academic Ombud. This is important due to the increased workload for the Academic Ombud (the Ombud position is a 50% appointment), and the increase in the number of contacts over the last five years. As a result of the functional transition of the position from an assistant and office manager position to one that includes a significant amount of actual Ombud work, the position was restructured and reclassified as the Associate Academic Ombud. I would like to acknowledge the excellent work and dedication of Ms. Ansel in this position.

Finally, I would like to welcome Professor Kaveh Tagavi as the new Academic Ombud. Most of you are acquainted with Professor Tagavi from his extensive service as a University Senate Member. This is Professor Tagavi's third stint as Academic Ombud. He previously served as Ombud for academic years 2005-2006 and 2008-2009. I am confident that Kaveh and Laura will continue to provide offer a high level of quality service to the University of Kentucky community and wish them the best in their continued service to the University.

## Case and Contact Trends Academic Ombud Services 2013 to 2019



Academic Ombud Services Statistical Report  
Joseph McGillis 2018/19

All Matters

	2018/19	2017/18	2016/17	2015/16	2014/15	
Number of Cases	377	393	455	481	370	
Number of Questions or Referrals	2239	2594	2324	1666	1091	
	2616	2987	2779	2147	1461	Total

Types of Cases	2018/19	2017/18	2016/17	2015/16	2014/15	
Non-Academic Offense Issues	204	253	320	389	250	
Academic Offense Determinations	173	140	135	92	120	
	377	393	455	481	370	Total

Description of Cases (not including Academic Offenses)		Classification of Source	
Attendance	6	Student	137
Exam/Class Requirements	6	Faculty	42
Grades	59	Staff	13
Instruction	14	Parent	9
Personal Problems	14	Other	3
Policies: Academic Offense Issues	27		204 Total
Policies: General	46		
Progress/Promotion	28		
Retroactive Withdrawals	1		
Speaker Requests	3		
	204	Total	

Description of Questions & Referrals		Classification of Source	
Attendance	122	Student	1001
Exam/Class Requirements	62	Faculty	730
Grades	289	Staff	370
Instruction	129	Parent	95
Personal Problems	225	Other	43
Policies: Academic Offense Issues	360		2239 Total
Policies: General	873		
Progress/Promotion	171		
Retroactive Withdrawals	8		
	2239	Total	

### Determinations and Appeals of Academic Offenses

Academic Offense Determinations	2018/19	2017/18	2016/17	2015/16	2014/15	
Cheating	58	54	54	28	26	
Plagiarism	115	86	81	64	94	
	173	140	135	92	120	Total
Contact with the Ombud						
No Contact	134	107	115	78	105	
Contacted, but did not appeal	15	21	10	9	8	
Contacted, case forwarded to UAB	24	12	10	5	7	
	173	140	135	92	120	Total
Classification of the Student	First/Minor	First/Major	Second	Third	Total	
Freshman	31	2			33	
Sophomore	37	2	1		40	
Junior	35	1	3		39	
Senior	34	4	8	2	48	
Graduate Student	9				9	
Professional Student	3	1			4	
	149	15	12	2	173	Total
Origin of Offense Determination						
Agriculture, Food and Environment			1			
Arts & Sciences			97			
Business & Economics			1			
Communication & Information			23			
Dentistry			3			
Design			0			
Education			6			
Engineering			18			
Fine Arts			1			
Health Sciences			6			
Law			1			
Martin School of Public Policy			0			
Medicine			1			
Nursing			1			
Patterson School of Diplomacy			0			
Pharmacy			0			
Public Health			13			
Social Work			1			
			173			Total

## Summary of Cases Referred by the Ombud to the University Appeals Board

Total Number of Appeals	2018/19	2017/18	2016/17	2015/16	2014/15	
Academic Offense Appeals	24	12	5	5	7	
Student Academic Rights	13	18	11	20	14	
Retroactive Withdrawal Appeals	0	0	0	1	0	
Other Appeals (Suspension or Dismissal)	0	2	1	1	0	
	37	32	17	27	21	Total

Total Number of Appeals	
Academic Offense Appeals	24 (7 Upheld / 13 Denied / 4 Withdrawn)
Student Academic Rights	13 (5 Upheld / 3 Denied / 5 Uncontested)
Retroactive Withdrawal Appeals	0
Other Appeals (Suspension & Dismissal)	0
	37 Total

### Academic Offense Appeals Referred to the University Appeals Board

	Withdrawn	Upheld	Denied	Total
Plagiarism: Appealed severity of sanction	1	1	2	4
Plagiarism: Appealed determination	2*	2	3	7
Plagiarism: Appealed severity and determination		1**	2	3
Cheating: Appealed severity of sanction				0
Cheating: Appealed determination	1	1	6	8
Cheating: Appealed severity and determination		2**		2
				24 Total

*\*not yet heard    \*\*partially upheld*

### Allegation of Violation of Student Academic Rights Referred to the University Appeals Board

	Uncontested	Upheld	Denied	Total
Appeals referred and determined to have merit	n/a	5	3	8
Appeals referred and determined to lack merit	5			5
				13 Total

### Retroactive Withdrawal Appeals Referred to the University Appeals Board

	Upheld	Denied	Total
Appeal referred and determined to have merit	0	0	0
			0 Total

### Appeal of Dismissal/Suspension Referred to the University Appeals Board

	Upheld	Denied	Total
Appeal referred and determined to have merit	0	0	0
			0 Total