

University of Florida: April 2013

University Faculty Senate – Welfare Council Recommendation: Ombuds

The University Faculty Senate Faculty Welfare Council recommends the establishment of a University Faculty Ombuds Office at the University of Florida.

Background

The University of Florida established a student ombuds office a number of years ago but UF does not have an ombuds office either for faculty or for staff. The absence of a faculty ombuds puts UF in a small minority among comparable large state flagship institutions. One recent estimate indicates that over 200 US universities have faculty ombuds offices, and every one of a sample of eight flagship state universities have one or more faculty ombuds offices (see attachments). In the absence of an ombuds office at UF, some of the functions such an office might perform – including impartially informing faculty of dispute- related rights and procedures and mediating a range of potential disputes and grievances – have been brought by default to people and offices that are neither trained nor empowered to perform such functions as well as others who might be compromised in attempting to fill these roles.

Based on Council discussions in Fall 2012 and Spring 2013 and a review of ombuds offices at other comparable universities, the UF Faculty Senate Welfare Council has voted to recommend the establishment of a Faculty Ombuds Office at the University of Florida.

Attachment I is an overview of the functions and limits of this office as well as desired qualifications for the position. (Note that the Senate and the Welfare Council are not authorized to recommend an ombuds office for staff. The lack of recommendation for a staff ombuds does not indicate that we believe a staff ombuds would be inappropriate.)

Attachment II is a table of key elements in place at faculty ombuds offices at a sample of eight comparable flagship universities; the information is taken from the ombuds websites for these universities. These include the flagship universities at Berkeley, Colorado, Michigan, North Carolina, Ohio State, Pennsylvania State, Texas, and Wisconsin. Further information about these and comparable offices at other universities is available at the respective university websites (listed on page 2 of Attachment I).

As an example of the kinds of issues an ombuds office would be likely to address is provided: **Attachment III** is the 2011-12 annual report of the ombuds office at the Ohio State University, which is the most recent of the offices established at our sample of universities.