

KEY EVENTS IN THE HISTORY OF THE UT OMBUDSPERSONS PROGRAM

During the drafting of the *UTK Faculty Handbook* (between 2001 and 2003), Chancellor Crabtree, in consultation with members of the Faculty Senate leadership, proposed the creation of faculty ombudspersons to assist in resolving faculty disputes informally. The Faculty Handbook Committee supported this proposal. Language for the resulting program (calling for three ombudspersons to be chosen from the faculty, each to serve a staggered three-year term) was drafted for Chapter Five of the *Faculty Handbook*. The ombudspersons program was formalized with the approval of the revised *Faculty Handbook*.

Selection criteria for faculty ombudspersons were presented to the Faculty Senate in September 2004. The first three ombudspersons were selected by the campus administration from names forwarded by the Senate's Executive Committee.

The first faculty ombudspersons' report was produced in October 2006. It presented a number of issues encountered by the faculty ombudspersons and their recommendations for related changes in departmental, college, and university policies and procedures.

In the spring of 2007, in consultation with the Provost's office, the Faculty Senate Faculty Affairs Committee proposed changing the language of the *Faculty Handbook* to alter the number of ombudspersons from three to "two or more" to enable adjustments to the number of ombudspersons based on workload. This proposal failed on second reading in the Senate, principally because the existence of three ombudspersons provides more flexibility in the event of gender issues or conflicts of interest than two.

In the spring of 2007, the Provost's office decided to alter the compensation of ombudspersons from an hourly rate to a fixed amount per semester equivalent to the compensation for teaching a one-hour Freshman seminar. Attempts to negotiate this change in the ombudspersons' compensation method were unsuccessful. These discussions, in which the complex professional demands of the role of a faculty ombudsperson were equated to the demands of teaching a one-hour, Freshman course, eventually resulted in the resignations of all three of the then existing faculty ombudspersons last summer.

Subsequent discussions between the Chancellor and the outgoing Faculty Senate President and President-elect resulted in a plan to (1) ask the ombudspersons to continue in their roles until their existing cases were resolved, (2) continue their hourly compensation during that time, (3) conduct a study of university "best practices" for ombudsperson programs, and (4) seek an interim ombudsperson to handle new cases.

An interim faculty ombudsperson was selected following a university wide call for applicants.

The Faculty Senate's graduate assistant produced a study of university best practices for ombudsperson programs. This study was reviewed by the Faculty Senate Executive Committee with the Chancellor and the Provost last fall. There was general consensus at that time that creation of university staff position for a professional faculty ombudsperson, funded by the Chancellor's office and housed in the Office of Equity and Diversity (OED), might be a viable alternate to the existing structure of the ombudsperson program. This proposal was reviewed by the Faculty Senate Executive Committee and referred to the Faculty Affairs Committee. The Chancellor, the Director of OED, the Executive Director of Human Resources, and the Faculty Senate President had subsequent discussions regarding expansion of the role of a professional ombudsperson to handle staff grievances as well as faculty grievances.

A revised resolution, a copy of the existing version of the Faculty Handbook provision marked to show the proposed changes, and a copy the memorandum of the Faculty Senate's graduate assistant on ombudsperson best practices are being circulated with this background document. Please review these materials and present any questions to the Faculty Affairs Committee at or before our meeting tomorrow (February 25th) or as soon as possible thereafter so that we can attempt to ensure the uninterrupted service of an ombudsperson for our faculty.

The resolution of the Faculty Affairs Committee included in the materials for the Faculty Senate's February 25th meeting represents several months of work by the Faculty Affairs Committee is reviewing this proposal. Approval is being requested on the same basis as an amendment to the Senate's

bylaws. Accordingly, it is before you today on first reading.