

From [Dean Saitta <dsaitta@du.edu>](mailto:dsaitta@du.edu)
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To AAUP Chapter
Re Ombuds Report

Hi all—

Here's that report on my conversation with the university ombuds, Jenna Brown. Recall from our chapter organizing meeting that we had a long conversation about the ombud office and its effectiveness in handling various grievance issues. It was suggested that the office's existence is not well known, that it's not well-integrated into the university, that it doesn't guarantee that anything will come of its independent meetings with the parties that are in conflict, that it perhaps needs restructuring and more resources to increase its effectiveness, and that it needs to wield a little more power such as the power to mandate that parties sit down to reach agreements on issues.

I had a long conversation with Jenna in which she addressed these concerns. I was meeting her as the Faculty Senate president but she's aware that we now have an AAUP chapter on campus. Some of what we discussed needed to be confidential but I think I'm OK reporting the following. I didn't take a lot of notes but here's the gist. Jenna said that her office can't be integrated structurally because of the ombuds model that's used in this country ("Organizational" Ombuds, which has no investigative power, as opposed to "Governmental" Ombuds, which has the power to conduct its own investigations). The fact that the ombuds office has physically moved around quite a bit hasn't helped, but she's working to overcome that by talking regularly with the Faculty Senate, AUSA, and GSAC. Jenna suggested that the Senate appoint an "Ombuds Liaison" in its Personnel Committee who can maintain regular contact with her, which is probably a good idea. Jenna said that "mandated mediation" can be used well but also abused. And, it also depends on both parties wanting to talk. Mandate mediation also raises the question of who would be the "acceptable third party" in the mediation since ombuds couldn't play that role. The mediator would have to be someone "remarkable" from the outside.

The most interesting part of the conversation was when we shared perceptions about "patterns" and "themes" that are important to faculty. Jenna looks to detect these in her line of work, for reporting to the Chancellor. The Senate Prez does the same, especially when we meet with the Chancellor and Provost to discuss administrator evaluations. We seem to be hearing and/or detecting some of the same themes. Faculty are reporting (1) pressure to give high grades, (2) pressure to get outside

finding (even as the sources dry up or become much more competitive), and (3) pressure to treat students as "customers". There are concerns about the clarity and/or transparency of the criteria for promotion and tenure, and about what our quest to be "the best" means. Jenna said that she would be keen to come to a Faculty Senate Executive Committee meeting to talk about these themes, or to raise them with the whole Senate. I suspect that she would also agree to come to an AAUP chapter meeting, too.

That's pretty much it. I suspect that none of this is too surprising to us. I'm reading through the administrator evaluation data as we speak. That data indicate another fairly significant concern about administrator "micromanagement" of faculty, which of course is worse in some units than others. Response rates for Chancellor and Provost were 19%. For the deans, rates are in the mid 20s and 30s. Rates are all over the place for the department chairs, but you can still get a pretty good idea of where the problems are. By my calculations tenured faculty are evaluating their bosses at a rate of around 58%, while untenured faculty are only evaluating at a rate of around 14%. I'm not sure how out-of-kilter this tenured vs. untenured response rate is, but it seems like something to worry about. Any thoughts? Perhaps most strikingly, there are 0% untenured faculty response rates in units where I know, from conversations with the faculty in those units, that there are serious concerns about micromanagement, disenfranchisement, the requirements for promotion, etc.

So...I'm open for suggestions about how we might proceed as an AAUP chapter. As noted in my previous email, it seems that one thing we can do is work on the Faculty Grievance Policy that the Senate Personnel Committee didn't quite get around to during the past year. Perhaps draft something clarifying the steps that one takes that can be shared with the Personnel Committee in the fall. I'll be raising concerns about various "social relations of work/governance culture" issues when I report to the Trustees, but I'd value your input on these things as well. Thanks!

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