

Excerpted from August 31, 2015 SEC meeting minutes (available on October 5, 2015 SEC agenda)

- **Ombudsman**

- a. Chair Hudepohl has been receiving many emails; there are three situations that have come up. One is regarding the ombudsperson on campus. This individual is called upon as a neutral sounding board. The Senate Chair is not the best person to negotiate a solution. We have an Ombudsman now and it is appointed by the President. The perception is that this person reports to the President. In early fall last year, the Ombudsman came to Senate. Chair Hudepohl asked if we want to push for a new Ombudsman or do we want to look at peer institutions to see what they do?
- b. Vice Chair Shadoan stated that when she was the Chair of Senate, that there was a clear intent that it should be a faculty member who gets a workload reduction, and that the Ombudsman should not have a relationship with the President. The Ombudsman was intended to benefit the faculty.
- c. Patricia Minter added that the faculty asked for neutral arbitration; the current Ombudsman is a presidential appointment. Karl wrote a note to the President and reports on activities. He was sent to the Campus Regent to ask an opinion. He wondered if it was worth the money being spent to continue the program. The Ombudsman is intended to listen; not to solve problems.
- d. Regent Burch said she wonders if it is worth talking to Karl [Laves]. Perhaps he thinks there is a better way to do it; his perception is that the money being spent might not be worth it.
- e. Chair Hudepohl asked if we should invite him to come to the next meeting to know what his role is and to give clarification to questions. Patricia Minter said she wanted a tally and some categories.

Richard Greer was the first Ombudsman; Karl Laves was appointed by President Ransdell after Greer retired. There is a webpage for the role of the Ombudsman; it explains what his role is and provides his contact information. During his appointment, there have only been a few who have contacted him. Regent Burch said that talking to Karl will help us know where to go next.

Excerpted from November 2, 2014 SEC meeting minutes (available on the December 1, 2014 SEC agenda)

(from Chair Margaret Crowder's report to SEC...)

In December Karl Laves will attend SEC to talk about his position as Ombudsman at WKU. In particular he wants to discuss the guidelines of that position.

- Shadoan: Raises a question about the ombudsman position and the original intent that it be an annual appointment, not a permanent position. Did that change?
- Provost Emslie: Does the Senate charter mention it?

- Minter: No, it's not in the Senate charter. The request for an Ombudsman came from Staff Council. Faculty Senate signed on in solidarity. Then President Ransdell announced the person who would serve. Karl Laves took over the position when the original appointee retired. The ombudsman was supposed to give annual reports to Senate.
- Shadoan: There was supposed to be a reporting system in place, which is why I wondered if our position was done away with and maybe replaced by a CAD initiative.
- Provost Emslie: A Senate charter often mentions something about that.
- Minter: Staff Council and Faculty Senate intended that the Ombudsman be someone who worked within the chain of command.
- Shadoan: There is an issue of conflict of interest.
- Chair Crowder: Any documentation of the history of the position would be helpful and then we would have those guidelines.
- Minter: Staff and Faculty put forth names and President Ransdell chooses.
- Regent Burch: The person in it got in it after President Ransdell asked who was interested. There were some guidelines, but limited interest.
- Chair Crowder: Lots of issues have come before the Ombudsman lately which is what prompted this upcoming meeting.

Excerpted from December 1, 2014 SEC meeting minutes (available on the January 12, 2015 SEC agenda)

1. WKU Ombudsman Responsibilities

- Dr. Karl Laves, ombudsperson for WKU
- Note: this speaker was moved ahead of the other reports
- He spoke with staff council recently to hear their concerns, so thought he would visit SEC to get feedback from faculty senate
- Faculty he has spoken to seem to wish to have an advocate, but the ombudsperson is meant to be impartial
- Can be confusing and lonely for faculty pursuing a grievance
- Dr. Laves feels that he is sometimes not able to be as supportive as he would like to be.
- He also wonders if there is some mechanism for a faculty member to get an advocate.
- Minter: First question legally is: Have you pursued all internal remedies? My best advice to those going through this process is that I cannot act as legal counsel to faculty in this circumstance. I don't think lay-people would necessarily be best to take this role. Perhaps the faculty governance system might offer the best support.
- Laves: People sometimes choose to engage in the process, but they pretty much have to go it alone. They don't know who to talk to, or where to go for support. That's where the idea came from. I have not been involved in any scenario where legal counsel is considered. Generally speaking, they have just hit a point where all advice is suspect.
- Burch: Do you sometimes feel there is something on campus that needs to be addressed? They come to you as someone in a neutral position, but perhaps you see things that come to you in these interactions that might need to be handled at an institutional level?

- Laves: I think faculty often believe the issue they face should be dealt with on an administrative level, but usually I don't think that's the case.
- Burch: Perhaps I should clarify. Are there parts of the processes, in terms of communication or procedure, which should be considered?
- Laves: I know that often it is a feeling that they are not being heard—that it is difficult to get an audience with the right people.
- Miller: I think many of the people you're dealing with have personal issues, and I believe you listen to their concerns and in many cases you are trying to connect them with the people they need to speak with.
- Laves: Often they are just seeking an opportunity to be heard, to voice feelings of frustration...they are just mad.
- Minter: What if you are dealing with a policy issue; something that needs to be addressed—what do you do?
- Laves: Sometimes that's the frustration, that there is a process, but it moves slowly and takes a long time.
- Minter: How many people come to you?
- Laves: I think the first year or so it was about 42. I think at one point it hit 59. I do not find it overwhelming.
- Minter: Do you think there are more issues for staff than faculty, because faculty have other channels through which to communicate concerns or problems?
- Shadoan: Was there supposed to be a data collection system—not necessarily something that would fall on Dr. Laves—that would be used to report on the workload. Has that happened? I don't think I've seen anything of this sort.
- Laves: I present a report to the President, which is part of my charge.
- Minter: I think having this data made available...not individual issues, but trend-line data on the types of complaints or issues, would be extremely beneficial.
- Crowder: Yes, I think it would be helpful to be able to identify hotspots or trends. I'm wondering if it would be helpful to have some form of advocacy. I have some ideas: use of mentors, for example—perhaps a stronger presence of AAUP, or a part-time position to act as an advocate. Maybe someone with legal experience. This might give the Ombudsperson someone to send faculty to when they have problems.
- Julie: Like a union steward?
- Crowder: I didn't want to use that word...but something like that. But not at a union level, but for WKU specifically.
- Shadoan: There may be a level of distrust of the ombudsperson, if that person is appointed by, and reports to, the President.
- Minter: I do believe that people who come to my office often just want to be heard.
- Hanley: I think it would be good to have someone who can listen, and who can be supportive on a variety of issues.
- Minter: this position is frequently held by a lawyer; someone who will actually give legal advice.
- Burch: It is difficult for anyone trying to fulfill the ombudsmen's role: having to be neutral, being neither fish nor fowl.
- Miller: A really key issue is—does the faculty really respect the ombudsman? Not the person in the position, but the position itself.

- Minter: a suggestion, to draw this to a close. Maybe a faculty-all email from Dr. Laves, just making people aware of the position and what it does. Not to drum up more business, but to inform others. Also, sharing the ombudsperson's report, and sharing information as part of the faculty governance system.