

OMBUDS OFFICE ANNUAL REPORT 2004-2005

The ombudsperson handled 17 cases during the 2004-2005 calendar year.

Student Based Complaints

There were nine student based complaints where the complainant was either a graduate or undergraduate student or the parent of a student.

Only one complaint involved academic dishonesty (a steep decrease from the previous year) which the Ombud interprets as meaning that cases involving academic dishonesty have decreased and/or members of the community are simply doing a better job in utilizing the established procedures at WPI for handling such incidents.

Most student complaints occur within student-faculty relationships but two were tied to specific episodes, involving conflict with WPI support staff. As mentioned in previous years, student based complaints have proved reasonably easy to resolve either by helping the complainant to see another viewpoint and by coaching and rehearsing the complainant in effective ways to interact and follow up with the individual(s) where conflict exists. On two occasions, the complainant asked the ombud service to be their voice in speaking with the target of the complaint.

Faculty/Staff Based Complaints

There were eight faculty/staff based complaints. While the names and faces of complainants change from one year to the next the nature of complaints remain the same: (1) perceived pay inequities, (2) perceived process inequities (3) situations involving emotional abuse from a co-worker or supervisor. Most often the ombud service was to listen and coach and, less frequently, to undertake mediation sessions between the parties in conflict.

A Brief Reflection on Power

Many of us within the WPI community hold power over others in various relationships. As such, we certainly have responsibility to exercise that power in a way that our mission is pursued and quality standards are maintained and we will, on occasion, be required to give someone (someone under our power) 'bad news'. In doing so, I ask that we consider that we also have a responsibility to be aware of how our power based actions will be received, that we have responsibility to show compassion and regard for the 'golden rule' when giving someone 'bad news'. Pursuing our mission and our standards for quality can co-exist with compassion.