

THE INDEPENDENT VOICE

News from the International Ombudsman Association

PRESIDENT'S LETTER

A Systems Perspective on **IOA's Organizational Dynamics**

BY KEVIN JESSAR, IOA PRESIDENT



KEVIN JESSAR

"The most erroneous stories are those we think we know best — and therefore never scrutinize or question." — Stephen Jay Gould

It is customary in these kinds of articles to speak of our diversity, our vitality, and our unique strengths. No doubt, IOA possesses these attributes. But IOA has always struck me as an unusual organization. We are a collection of practitioners from various offices, entities, and even sectors.

The values, visions and missions of our employers have no formal relation to each other and are as diverse as the economy and society in which we live. In addition, we do not have the history, norms and structures of more well-established professions and fields. Nor do we share the same professional route — we have not all been through the same educational and socializing graduate programs and developmental clerkships, internships or residencies. So much seems to me fluid when we discuss the world of Ombudsmen. Perhaps all of this is context for the tensions I see inside IOA.

I determined when I became President to help us think through and address the fissures that run through IOA

— the misgivings, apprehensions, and dissatisfactions. Indeed, since I have become President I have had expressed to me or come to suspect the following: some academic members pine for the closeness and ethos of UCOA, some corporate members feel appreciated mostly if not solely for their ability to conjure corporate sponsorships for our conference and programs, some consultant/contractor ombudsmen feel disenfranchised altogether, some members feel IOA is filled with conspiracy theorists who are suspicious beyond reason, others members feel IOA is an exclusive club run by a self-perpetuating elite. Many members, perhaps a significant majority that includes supporters of certification, are apprehensive about certification — for themselves, for IOA, for the field. And even our name — what it is and what it ought to be — is not an uncomplicated issue — emotionally, substantively, professionally. Moreover, IOA struggles with what it means to be international and whether we are sufficiently defined as organizational or ought to be something broader. Taken together this range of concerns can be seen to cover almost every element of our name and all aspects of our identity.

The picture I get, frankly, when I consider the myriad issues and questions above, is of sky-diving towards something that grows louder and more cacophonous

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the faster it approaches. But I do not despair and I do not want you to either. In fact, as I reflect on our culture, history, structure, interactions, and challenges, I believe that what I will call the manifold anxieties in IOA are entirely customary in complex organizations and systems. In particular, I raise these questions because I do not want us to sacrifice new opportunities and fresh vantage points to a reflexive tendency to return to the safe harbor of our accustomed differences and recursive conversations. I want to offer a new kind of perspective, one less driven by our anxieties and fissures. Indeed, I believe that various fields such as cybernetics, family systems theory, and social constructivism can provide us different and useful insights on the questions and challenges we face as a community. So forgive me as I turn to these more theoretical models for perspective on IOA.

Organizations are usually understood and characterized by reference to concepts such as structure, hierarchy, and power. But, any system — be it a family, a corporation, a university, or

an association — must be further conceived in terms of its inherent and natural anxiety. Systems theory conceives of anxiety as a characteristic of any system and demonstrates, indeed, that anxiety is fostered and sustained by the system itself and reflected in various behavioral and “interactive sequences” and processes.

We know, in fact, from family systems theory and research done on families at the National Institutes of Mental Health in the 1950s (and other institutions since) that anxiety is a “basic variable” that “affects both individuals and . . . organization[s] as a whole” (*Papero 45-6*). While people customarily think of anxiety as a psychological or “mental” state afflicting individuals, research demonstrates that beyond comprising an “expression of the condition of the individual organism” it is a reflection of the social context and the “relationship network in which the individual lives and functions” (*Papero 45-6*). In short, “the markers of the condition of the individual . . . mark the condition of the relationship network” and there is a strong and reciprocal commerce between the two (*Papero 45-6*).

IOA is not immune to such anxiety. And understanding more about how systems work may assist us all in gaining some critical distance on how together we often

engage in recursive conversations and re-stimulate long held sensitivities. There are no easy answers to these questions and tensions and I do not pretend to be able to dispel them with a simple newsletter article. I would suggest, though, that we can reflect how IOA is not an “either or” association, nor should we be — we need to recognize and appreciate the richness of our diverse history and membership. We are a system made up of various subsystems — leadership, committees, members, and sectors, all of which add value and form our composite identity.

Beyond this we can observe the “complementarities” of our dynamics — each end of any particular pole or axis stimulates or activates the other. Espying the “circular causality” and “reciprocal functioning” between different

parts of our membership and culture enables us to move the issue from one of blame and a “logical but unproductive search for who started what” to

. . . a healthy, reflective understanding of our own systemic dimensions and dynamics will better enable us to harness the shared passion, integrity, and talents of our members. . .

a consideration of how “problems are sustained by an ongoing series of actions and reactions” (*Nichols 66*). There are cybernetic or feedback loops in our interactions and conversations throughout IOA that are being constantly re-stimulated and beg for a kind of meta-communication — a consideration of, and communication about, how we communicate. A greater appreciation of these kinds of process dynamics and questions may make us a bit less reactive to content differences and give us beneficial perspective on ourselves.

Two issues, in particular, IOA’s name and certification, precipitate predictable patterns of interaction and are both concrete examples and causes of considerable anxiety. The question of what the name for the association should be was deliberately included by the Board in the membership survey or needs assessment that was distributed in the first week of September. Preliminary results suggest that members are closely divided on the issue and that there is no overwhelming majority for one name variant over another. I recognize that there are strongly held feelings and views on both sides, and that given the relatively even split among membership there may be a significant portion of members who will not be entirely satisfied with the outcome. It is worth noting

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that the differences over the name issue reflect to some extent existing polarities in the membership and thus the issue and discussions around it play out in predictable interactive sequences along these various pre-existing axes. However this issue is ultimately resolved I do not expect that the anxiety it provokes and the pre-existing tensions it reflects to magically dissipate overnight. Nevertheless, the Board will assess the final results of the member needs assessment and fulfill its fiduciary and ethical responsibilities to grapple with this issue as reasonably and fairly as possible within the parameters of existing legal requirements.

As for certification, you will find in this newsletter an update from the Certification Taskforce indicating its charge from the Board and its progress. Certification is a complex multi-tiered endeavor requiring many aspects in planning and many steps in implementation. The various dimensions of a successful program extend beyond designing an exam to assessing the long term viability of a certification program, designing an appeal process, exploring the relationship of individual practitioner certification to programmatic accreditation, structuring the relationship between the IOA Board and a certification board responsible for administering a certification program, staffing a certification program, and identifying and reaching various audiences of people who might be interested in attaining certification and communicating its benefits and value to them. The Certification Taskforce has been tasked to investigate and design a certification program and, in particular, to make recommendations directly to the Board regarding its structure, cost and "feasibility."

Beyond these programmatic points on certification, I believe that there is another point here as well. We know from research on families and organizations that change does not always come in "a smooth, gradual process of evolution, but rather in discontinuous leaps" and that there is no formulaic, "fixed and standard version of the family [or organizational] life cycle" (*Nichols 68-9*). It is possible for an office unit, cabinet agency or an association to become stuck at any point in its developmental cycle. But we know too that necessary transitions and emerging challenges require further readjustments – they push us to "accommodate [our] structure to the changed circumstances" (*Nichols 68-9*). Certification pushes us to consider what it means to change and grow and how best to do that. The ultimate impact is uncertain — we can no more say what the effect of certification will be than we can reliably predict the outcome of the November election and what the next four years will

bring. We are necessarily navigating uncharted waters as we try to build and professionalize the field of organizational ombudsmen. The Board, ultimately, is committed to a principled exploration of certification. We will assess its utility and determine at each significant juncture of planning and development whether it is a viable and feasible goal for IOA to pursue.

In a related vein, the board has asked the Strategic Planning Committee to explore the potential benefits of hiring an executive director, building our leadership development and succession planning capacities, securing further avenues and developing strategies for revenue generation, and strategically engaging other professions to develop alliances and relationships, as appropriate, with groups such as human resource professionals, the legal profession, ethics and compliance officers, and unions. We do not know for certain the outcomes of these possible initiatives either, but as we accommodate our structure to changing internal and external circumstances, we must look ahead now to secure our future, as an association and as a profession. What we fail to plan for today we will fail to realize and develop tomorrow . . . and in the next several years ahead.

In closing I want to encourage us to cultivate a greater critical distance on our own dynamics, interactions – and yes, anxiety, as an association. This will be critical as we consider our shared tasks ahead and the differences between us that we must navigate. As it is "not only actions and interactions that shape families' lives but also the stories they construct and tell," so it is true with IOA (*Nichols 69-70*). Systems "narratives organize and make sense out of experience" (*Nichols 69-70*). But no matter which subsystem or perspective our different or differing narratives are constructed from and for, they invariably "emphasize events that reinforce the plot line and screen out other occurrences that don't fit" (*Nichols 69-70*). These narratives, in our system as in any other, are best appreciated with a small dose of skepticism. What researchers know of families is no less true of other systems, including IOA – that a family's or an association's "interactions and . . . narrative of events are related in circular fashion. Behavioral elements are perceived and organized in narrative form, and this narrative in turn shapes expectations that influence behavior" (*Nichols 69-70*). In short, I believe a healthy, reflective understanding of our own systemic dimensions and dynamics will better enable us to harness the shared passion, integrity, and talents of our members and to

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build the organizational ombudsman profession in a meaningful and lasting way. As I attended the sessions at our Boston conference and as I work with colleagues throughout IOA, I am repeatedly struck by our commitment, savvy, wisdom, humor, depth, and skills. I want us to bring these manifold attributes to bear in the fullest, least reflexive and most unencumbered way so that individually and collec-

tively we can fulfill the potential of our association and profession to the utmost. ●

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IOA Board Update

Since the last Board Update in the July edition of **The Independent Voice**, the Board has met monthly and held an in-person Board retreat in Houston hosted by **Gary Yamashita** (IOA Treasurer) and Chevron. The Houston retreat focused on the strategic planning process as a tool for guiding the activities and strategic direction of the Association. The Board worked through an exercise to create a new Vision Statement for IOA to ensure that it accurately and fully reflects the aspirations of the organization. The Board is working to align projects and committee efforts under the Strategic Plan with the new IOA vision and mission statements.

In a related vein, The Board reviewed the various Committees' portfolios and priorities under the Strategic Plan. The Board is now sharing feedback and giving guidance to each Committee to ensure that duplication of efforts are reduced, that collaboration among Committees be maximized when appropriate, and to align Committee and Board expectations within the larger context of the Strategic Plan. Board members who are Committee Liaisons will continue to work closely with their respective committees to serve as a resource and support the Committees' work.

The final business item discussed at the Board retreat was a progress review of the Certification Taskforce and an in-depth and critical analysis of the issues, questions and challenges that will determine the feasibility of the Certification program. The Board provided its feedback to the Taskforce to ensure that all aspects of a successful program are considered at an early stage. More details regarding the status of Certification are in the Taskforce's update in this newsletter. Just as the Board is helping to coordinate Committee efforts, **Judy Bruner** recently initiated a periodic conference call for Committee Chairs to discuss ongoing projects and areas of possible collaboration. Judy hosted the first such meeting in September and an additional meeting is being planned for January 2009. The first call was very helpful since it allowed Chairs to share information on ongoing projects and consider how Committees might partner on various initiatives.

Finally, the Board is now receiving the results of the membership survey that was distributed in August. Once the Board has an opportunity to review the responses the results will be shared with the membership. ●

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Fairness and the Brain

BY KATHLEEN H. CANUL

Ombudspersons intuitively know that people may be emotionally affected when experiencing perceived unfairness and also witness first-hand the ramifications of unresolved issues of equity. Less is known, however, about actual, evidenced-based biological responses to perceived unfairness. Recent research in the field of neuroscience offers examination of the relationship between brain activity and perceived fairness.

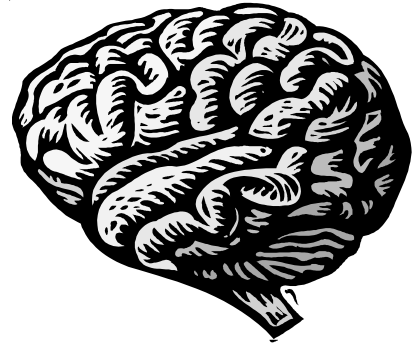
Researchers **Hsu, Anen** and **Quartz** at the California Institute of Technology authored a study in which participants were asked to make difficult decisions about meal distributions to Ugandan orphans in a children's home. After reading short autobiographies on each of the 60 orphans, subjects had to decide how much and who should be fed. For example, in one scenario subjects had to choose between giving four extra meals to each of two orphans or six extra meals to a single child. The children not chosen would receive nothing. The decisions made then would determine how much the orphanage would receive in donations. Using a functional magnetic resonance imaging machine, researchers scanned the subjects' brains searching for regions of elevated activity. When allowed to give food to the orphans, a more "fair" scenario, increased activity was identified in the orbital frontal

cortex, one of the brain's reward centers. In essence, it felt good to give. Upon making the choice to take food away, the insula region, a brain processor associated with negative emotion, showed increased activity. This work suggests that the insula comes in to play when one has to make an "unfair" choice.

Also examining brain region activity and perceived fairness, University of California, Los Angeles colleagues **Tabibnia, Satpute** and **Lieberman** asked subjects to participate in the

The role of an ombudsperson as a facilitator of equity may thus have an important function in helping maintain emotional equilibrium.

"ultimatum game" which included several scenarios of varying degrees of perceived fairness. In this activity Person A has a sum of money to share with Person B. Person A decides the amount to be offered to Person B and Person B can either accept or decline the offer with no negotiation allowed. Should Person B reject the offer, neither party will receive any money. Person B, for all intents and purposes, always wins when the offer is accepted because regardless of the amount of money, it is a windfall. One example of the stakes involved (*there were several with varying amounts of money being*



offered in different scenarios) is as follows: Person A has either \$23 or \$10 to share and offers Person B \$5 in each case. When offered \$5 in the \$10 condition, subjects rated themselves happier and less disdainful than those offered \$5 in the \$23 condition. Additionally, when scanning the subjects' brains under this \$23 condition, the insula, as with the previously discussed study, again was triggered, in this case, the anterior insula, also associated with negative emotions.

Furthermore, investigators found that once again reward regions of the brain were activated when perceived fairness prevailed in the \$10 condition.

In a later study by the University of Cambridge and UCLA, again using the "ultimatum game," researchers now examined the role serotonin, a neurotransmitter associated with emotion modulation and social behavior, plays in perceived fairness. As in the earlier research, Person A made either perceived fair or unfair offers to Person B, and if Person B rejected the offer neither party received any money. In this study

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Person B played the game twice after drinking a cocktail to reduce serotonin levels and also after drinking a placebo cocktail. The offers were presented and when playing with reduced serotonin levels, the “unfair” offers were rejected at a higher rate (82%) of the time versus (67%) when the serotonin levels were normal. In sum, it appears that lower serotonin levels sensitized participant’s perception of unfairness. **Matthew Lieberman**, one of the UCLA authors, is quoted in *UCLA Magazine Online*, “The same person may experience the same thing as fair and unfair on different days based on how the neurochemistry of the brain is functioning”. He also adds “A sense of fair play is not a purely rational process... It seems not to be the case that, like a math formula, if something is fair, it’s fair for all time, in all situations.”

Golnaz Tabibnia, another UCLA co-author of this study and presenter at the upcoming Southern California Mediation Association Conference at Pepperdine University in November is interested in the role of emotions and decision making. She will be lecturing on the neurobiology of fairness and cooperation. Tabibnia offers that future directions of research in this area may include the effects of early experience on

perceptions of fairness. She asks, “Do low SES and past social trauma sensitize or harden a person to unfairness/injustice?” In other words, what other factors may predispose individuals to how they perceive and cognitively process fairness.

Can there be implications for the work of ombudspersons and alternative dispute resolution specialists based on these research findings? Two ideas come to mind in reviewing these studies:

1) First, it appears that the brain regions triggered by both perceived unfairness and fairness are different and thus are associated with different emotional responses. Fairness activates the reward center while unfairness stimulates the area of the brain involved with negative emotion. Also, being asked to behave in an unfair or fair manner also creates similar respective responses. The role of an ombudsperson as a facilitator of equity may thus have an important function in helping maintain emotional equilibrium. Of course, most ombudspersons would already agree on this point, but it is nice to have research to help support this argument.

2) Second, lowered levels of serotonin may alter perceptions of unfairness. An offer one may have accept-

ed while having normal levels of this chemical messenger in the brain may seem unfair after serotonin is lowered. Reduced levels of serotonin are also associated with depression and anxiety, which many ombuds visitors experience as either a consequence or precursor to their reported problem. Knowing that a visitor’s sad affect or anxious state may sensitize him or her more to the perceived unfair dilemma is important to know when facilitating resolutions.

In sum, because an ombudsperson may have the ability to mitigate unfairness and its potential ramifications, and also recognizing that this research seems to suggest that fairness is associated with more positive emotions as evidenced by activity in reward centers of the brain, it stands to reason that ombudspersons have the potential to significantly enhance a sense of contentment in people’s lives, and the “rewards” that follow benefit both the giver and receiver of fairness. On another note, this work may also explain why ombudspersons enjoy resolving conflict. There could be vicarious reward center activity in our brains, as well.

Research project, anyone? ●

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CONFERENCE

Joint Ombudsman Conference to be held April 15-18, 2009

The International Ombudsman Association (IOA) will join forces with the Association of Canadian College & University Ombudspersons (ACCUO) and the Forum of Canadian Ombudsman (FCO) to hold a "super-conference" in beautiful Montréal, Québec, Canada **April 15-18, 2009.**

(www.tourism-montreal.org)

Conference headquarters will be The Fairmont-Queen Elizabeth Hotel, a grand landmark in downtown Montréal. Countless opportunities for shopping, sightseeing, and dining are within walking distance or minutes by underground transit.

Nearly 400 attendees are expected to participate in this unique event as ombudsmen from around the globe come together to celebrate the 200th anniversary of the creation of the ombudsman in Sweden in 1809. Value-

added professional education sessions will be presented to help attendees improve professional knowledge and skills, as well as allow opportunities to visit with old friends and network with new colleagues. Consistent with the growing number of our international members and in recognition of Québec's official language, several conference sessions will be bilingual with simultaneous translations available in French and English.

Pre-conference courses and workshops will take place on Wednesday April 15 and *tentative* half-day and full-day offerings include *"Four Generations of Inquirers"*; *"Fairness Awareness"*; *"Ombudsman Contributions to Organizational Effectiveness"*; *"Interviewing Skills with Difficult Visitors"*; *"An Introduction to the Ombudsman Role and Function to Include the Intake Process"*; and *"A Master Ombudsman Course."*

Thursday, Friday, and Saturday morning of the conference will feature keynote speakers, plenary speakers, and concurrent sessions that will support conference goals. Additionally, each of the three sponsoring organizations will have its own business meeting, however all of our breakfasts and lunches will be offered together.

For more information about The Montreal Joint Conference, please visit:

www.ombudsassociation.org

It is advisable to make travel plans and hotel reservations early.

Prospective attendees are reminded that a passport is now required to enter Canada from the U.S. as well as other nations.

Conférence Conjointe Des Ombudsmans, Du 15 Au 18 Avril 2009

C'est confirmé: la prochaine rencontre annuelle de IOA aura lieu conjointement avec l'Association des Ombudsmans des Universités et Collèges du Canada (AOUCC) et le Forum Canadien des Ombudsman (FCO) dans le cadre d'une 'super-conférence' prévue à Montréal, Québec, Canada, du 15 au 18 avril 2009 (www.tourisme-montreal.org). Cet événement exceptionnel aura lieu à l'Hôtel Fairmont-Le Reine Élisabeth, au cœur du centre ville, à distance de marche des plus beaux magasins, des

restaurants les plus prestigieux et des attractions touristiques qui font le charme de Montréal.

Près de 400 participants des 4 coins du monde sont attendus dans le cadre de cette manifestation inédite qui sera l'occasion de souligner le 200^{ème} anniversaire de la création du premier poste d'ombudsman des temps modernes, en Suède, en 1809.

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De nombreuses sessions d'enrichissement professionnel seront offertes au cours desquelles les participants auront l'occasion d'élargir leurs compétences et leurs habiletés. Les activités prévues favoriseront également les retrouvailles entre amis et l'indispensable réseautage.

De plus, afin de mieux refléter le caractère international de notre association et en hommage au français, langue officielle du Québec, plusieurs sessions seront offertes en français et en anglais, avec possibilité d'avoir accès à la traduction simultanée.

Les cours et ateliers de la pré-conférence seront offerts dès le mercredi 15 avril. Les choix de sujets s'étendront d'une 'Introduction à la profession' jusqu'à une 'Classe de Maître' pour ombudsmans d'expérience, en passant par les 'Techniques de promotion de l'équité', les 'Différences entre les 4 générations', les 'Conseils pour traiter les cas les plus difficiles', le 'Processus de réception des demandes' et la 'Contribution des ombudsmans à l'efficacité des organisations'.

Les jeudi, vendredi et samedi matins de la conférence seront consacrés aux conférenciers vedettes tandis qu'une alternance de séances plénières et d'ateliers thématiques offerts au cours des 3 jours permettront de compléter l'atteinte des objectifs de la 'super-conférence'.

Chacune des 3 organisations pourra organiser sa rencontre d'affaires privée avec ses membres mais les petits-déjeuners et les déjeuners se prendront en commun afin de faciliter les échanges.

Pour plus de renseignements sur la 'super conférence' rendez-vous sur le site: www.ombudsassociation.org

Pour profiter de tarifs raisonnables, il est recommandé d'effectuer vos réservations de voyage le plus tôt possible. Enfin, nous vous rappelons qu'un passeport est désormais requis pour voyager entre le Canada et les USA ainsi que la plupart des autres pays, tandis que les délais d'obtention de ce document sont parfois très longs. ●

MEETINGS

The following reports cover two regional ombudsman meetings held independently from IOA during the summer of 2008

6th Annual Meeting of College and University Ombudspersons a Success!

BY TIM GRIFFIN

Eighteen college and university ombudspersons, representing eleven institutions from five states, gathered on the campus of Northern Illinois University on July 14 for the 6th annual Midwest Meeting of College and University Ombudspersons. While this summer event is held annually in the Midwest area of the U.S., all college and university ombudspersons (and staff members) are welcome to attend. The attendee who traveled the farthest to attend this year's meeting was **Kathie Gilbert** from Western New Mexico University. The meeting was preceded by a special one-day workshop for new ombudspersons on Sunday, July 13, that was attended by six folks who are becoming acclimated to the field of ombudsing in higher education.

In keeping with tradition, the meeting provided opportunities for plenary discussions of topics suggested by

those in attendance. Among the discussion topics were office and incumbent evaluation methods, techniques for handling protracted cases and repeat visitors, the acceptable use of interns in the office, accompanying visitors to meetings, ombudsperson involvement in the development or implementation of campus drug and alcohol policies, pitfalls for new ombudspersons to avoid, and annual reports. These opportunities to quickly gain ideas and insights into ombuds practice from other ombudspersons in an interactive and structured format are always described as highly useful by participants.

In addition to these plenary discussions, breakout sessions were also offered. **David Carver**, licensed psychologist and ombudsperson at the University of Nebraska Medical Center, presented a breakout session

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entitled “College Mental Health Concerns: Red Flags for Ombuds.” This session covered some of the common psychological issues that visitors bring to the ombuds office. The basic warning signs of substance abuse, major depression, anxiety disorders (social anxiety, OCD, panic disorder, test anxiety) were reviewed and personality disorders (especially borderline and narcissistic patterns) that may be significant roadblocks in an informal dispute resolution process were described. When and how to make an appropriate mental health referral was discussed. Participants shared examples related to their own campus environments.

Craig Mousin, ombudsperson at DePaul University, presented a breakout session on bullying. This session was based on some of the recent research highlighted in the

first IOA Journal, addressed research findings on bullying in the workplace or the academy, examined ways ombuds can assist visitors to respond to bullying, and explored methods by which institutions can minimize these hurtful practices.

Recent legislative proposals through which states are seeking to hold employers responsible for workplace bullying were also examined. In keeping with the participatory spirit of the meeting, both sessions were highly interactive.

There were also breakout sessions that allowed participants to analyze and discuss case study scenarios. These three concurrent sessions provided the opportunity to delve deeply into hypothetical situations that primarily involved student, faculty, or staff issues and concerns

and to consider potential ombudsperson responses within the context of our unique environments.

In addition, **Tim Griffin**, ombudsperson at Northern Illinois University, spoke on “Responding to Campus Tragedy—A Journal.” During this presentation, the NIU Ombudsman shared observations and trends that were noted on his campus and in his office in the hours, days, and months following the classroom shootings of February 14, 2008.

Planning is already underway for the 7th Annual Midwest Meeting of College and University Ombudspersons. If you would like to be a presenter or if you have questions regarding your potential attendance, please contact **Tim Griffin** or **Mary Ann Erickson** at 815.753.1414 or ombuds@niu.edu. ●

3rd Annual Mid-Atlantic Ombuds Meeting

BY MICHAEL EISNER

After being hosted the previous two years at Princeton University, this year’s meeting was hosted by **Isabel Calderon** at MARS in Hackettstown, New Jersey. Isabel did a wonderful job making all the arrangements.

The morning session began with everyone separating into sectors (corporate, academic and public) to discuss the following questions:

- 1) How can IOA as an organization help sector practitioners in their practices now and in the future?
- 2) How can IOA help the profession grow? and
- 3) How can the Annual IOA Conference be improved to become more beneficial to each sector.

The conversations focused on the return on investment received from IOA membership and from attending the conference. After the separate discussions the group came back together and we all shared the results of our conversations. The contents of the conversations are being organized and will be presented to the IOA President, **Kevin Jessar** for his review.

After a wonderful lunch prepared by the head Chef from MARS we took a brief trip into the MARS cafeteria to purchase some of MARS wonderful chocolate and candies.

The afternoon session was highlighted by a presentation from **Roger Carthew** who is in the Personnel and

Organization Department of MARS. This is the Human Resource Department equivalent for MARS. Mr. Carthew gave some background about the organization, its future and how his office works with the MARS Ombudsman office. He also gave his thoughts on what Human Resources needs to hear to support a new ombuds office, such as it being another way for employees to be heard.

At the end of the day attendees were treated to an exciting tour of the MARS plant. The meeting was well received as it was the past two years and left us all looking forward to next year’s meeting. ●

IOA Certification Update

In July 2008 the Board approved a charge for the newly formed Certification Taskforce: The Certification Taskforce is charged to continue the work of the former Certification Subcommittee: to investigate, design and plan an organizational ombudsman certification and an accreditation for organizational ombudsman programs. The Certification Taskforce is to make recommendations directly to the Board about the feasibility, content, structure, cost and timetables to launch these programs. The Certification Taskforce will sunset in one year, consistent with IOA policies, or will sunset once the structure and constituent elements, including governance, of the new certification and accreditation programs are in place and operational, whichever comes first. If the work of the Task Force needs to continue beyond one year, the Board may renew it at the end of the one-year period. The chair the Taskforce is **Marsha Wagner**; the deputy chairs are **Carolyn Noorbakhsh** (IOA Board liaison) and **Jennifer Wolf**.

Members of the Certification Taskforce are: **Marsha Wagner** (chair), **Carolyn Noorbakhsh** and **Jennifer Wolf** (deputy chairs), **Sean Banks**, **Tom Barnette**, **Ilene Butensky**, **Mary Chavez-Rudolph**, **Joanne De Siato**, **Wilbur Hicks**, **Janis Schonauer**, **Merle Waxman**, and **Gary Yamashita**.

During the summer, the Certification Taskforce distributed to members and associate members of IOA a Job Analysis Survey. This Survey is intended to identify the Knowledge, Skills, and Abilities necessary to perform the job of organizational ombudsman. The response rate was high, indeed, 199 people, or 44% of those who received the survey, responded. That broad participation is very helpful in incorporating the insights and experience from IOA

members across multiple sectors and practice environments. Our consultants, SMT (Schroeder Measurement Technologies, Inc.) are analyzing the survey results and will meet again with a group of ombudsmen "subject matter experts" to further refine the subject matter in mid-October as a final step in completing the report on the Job Analysis. The outcome of the Job Analysis will determine the content of an individual certification examination — that is, the relevant areas to be covered by an

examination. The IOA Board approved the Certification Taskforce's plan to schedule a workshop with our SMT consultants in November or early December to train volunteers to write psychometrically appropriate questions or "items" for a certification examination. Assuming that the Job Analysis Survey results indicate that a written multiple-choice examination is a reasonable and appropriate certification measure, we will proceed with the examination "item" writing workshop.

The Certification Taskforce has also been working with the Board to identify and think through other elements of a successful certification program aside from the preparation of an examination. These elements include investigating the long term

viability of a certification program, structuring the relationship between the IOA Board and a certification board responsible for administering a certification program, designing an appeal process, exploring the relationship of individual practitioner certification to programmatic accreditation, identifying and reaching various audiences of possible examinees, staffing the certification program, and other issues. We will keep you posted on further developments in the months ahead.

That broad participation is very helpful in incorporating the insights and experience from IOA members across multiple sectors and practice environments.

Members of the Certification Taskforce are: **Marsha Wagner** (chair), **Carolyn Noorbakhsh** and **Jennifer Wolf** (deputy chairs), **Sean Banks**, **Tom Barnette**, **Ilene Butensky**, **Mary Chavez-Rudolph**, **Joanne De Siato**, **Wilbur Hicks**, **Janis Schonauer**, **Merle Waxman**, and **Gary Yamashita**.



COMMUNICATIONS COMMITTEE UPDATE:

New Website Launched!



The Communications Committee is proud to announce the release of the new IOA website at <http://www.ombudsassociation.org/>.

The new website has enhanced graphics, design, and functionality. A heartfelt thanks goes out to all task force members who volunteered their time to develop this new website, including **Tom Ward, Tom Barnette, Tom Kosakowski, Janis**

Schonauer, Marie Cortsen, Nick Diehl and Sara Thacker.

The Communications Committee is now working to update the website with valuable and timely resources, including:

- Information for organizations interested in developing an ombudsman office or whose office is at risk of closure.

- Examples of job descriptions, charters, marketing materials, PowerPoint presentations, satisfaction surveys, and office manuals.
- A resource library that provides direct access to ombudsman related articles on-line.
- A user-friendly and accurate membership database.
- Key IOA organizational documents.

Please look for these enhancements to the website by the end of the year. If you have any ideas or suggestions for improvements to the website, please email our website project leader **Tom Ward** at tomward@clemson.edu.

We appreciate your feedback. ●

Mentorship Program

The Membership Committee is delighted to announce that the IOA Mentorship Program is up and running with 13 new IOA members who have requested and received a mentor. As you may recall, the goal of this program is to help ease the transition of a new ombudsman practitioner into the profession and make the first year as an ombudsman a positive experience. The mentor relationship offers new ombudsman practitioners opportunities to discuss cases, and the profession in general, with someone who has at least three years experience as an ombudsman.

Although it is not always possible, the Mentorship Taskforce tries very hard to match mentees to mentors in similar organizations within the

same geographical area and sector. Our goal is to build a rich and diverse list of mentors from which to draw. Please consider volunteering — the program needs you! As a mentor, you will have the unique opportunity to provide information you might have welcomed during your first year on the job. You're just a click away from becoming a valuable resource to a new ombudsman.

IOA is accepting applications for mentors (*ombudsmen with at least three years of experience*) and mentees (*ombudsmen with less than one year experience*).

Click here <http://www.ombudsassociation.org/membership/mentsignup.pdf> for the mentorship sign-up form or visit the IOA website under the Membership page.

If you have any questions, please feel free to contact any of the members of the Mentorship Taskforce.

Vicky Brown, University of Central Florida
vbrown@mail.ucf.edu

Mary Chavez Rudolph, University of Colorado Denver
mary.chavezrudolph@cudenver.edu

Claudia D'Albini, University of Arizona
[dalbinic@email.arizona.edu](mailto:dalbini@email.arizona.edu)

Justine Sentenne, Hydro Quebec
Sentenne.justine@hydro.qc.ca ●



What Are You Going To Do?

Here is a hypothetical scenario that an Ombudsman might face. We invite you to weigh-in with what you would do next by “voting” on line. We will publish the cumulative results of the responses in our next issue.

We recognize that limiting Ombuds to one, exclusive option is a bit artificial and not what you typically do in your Ombuds practice, but to keep this manageable, please select the one option that you would choose among those listed. Comments are welcome, but keep in mind that they may be printed in the next newsletter, at the co-editors’ discretion.

INSTRUCTIONS

Please review the following scenario. To record your response, click on the link below or copy and paste it into your web browser.

SURVEY LINK

<http://www.zoomerang.com/Survey/?p=WEB228E86QEDFF>

SCENARIO

You are having one of your periodic meetings with a high level executive in your organization. Toward the end of the meeting the executive says, “By the way, while I have you here I wanted to get your opinion. We are considering promoting Pat and since I know you have your ear to the ground I thought you might be able to share what you know of Pat’s management style and if this is a good idea.”

As it happens, you know a fair amount about Pat since several of Pat’s employees have come to your office with concerns. There have been a number of consistent accounts of Pat’s disrespect and mistreatment of employees but since they are afraid of retaliation none of them have given you permission to speak to anyone else about the situation.

HOW WOULD YOU RESPOND TO THE QUESTION?

A. Say that you are not in a position to give feedback in relation to a promotion decision.

OR

B. Let the executive know that you have heard about some issues but you have no first-hand knowledge.

OR

C. Tell the executive that you can’t give any details but that you think it would be a bad decision to promote Pat.



Welcome New Members

The International Ombudsman Association welcomes its newest members:

MEMBERS

Lavada Austin, Ombuds Director, California State Polytechnic University, Pomona, Pomona, CA

Frank Baskind, Faculty and Staff Ombudsperson, Virginia Commonwealth University, Richmond, VA

Gregory Burke, Silver Spring, MD

William Callen, Graduate Student Ombuds, Georgia Institute of Technology, Atlanta, GA

Drew Canham, Ombudsman for Students, Texas Tech University, Lubbock, TX

Maria Carneiro Ribeiro, Ombudsman, Petroleo Brasileiro SA-Petrobras, Andar, Brazil

Jeffrey Dawson, Faculty Ombudsman, Duke University, Durham, NC

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(New Members continued from page 12)

Nwadinafor De Souza, Ombudsperson, African Development Bank, Tunis, Belvedere, Tunisia

Linda Falkson, Assistant Ombudsman, Cornell University, Ithaca, NY

Merle Graybill, Ombudsman, Ohio Univers., Athens, OH

Gene Greene, American Student Assistance, Boston, MA

Dina Jansenson, Ombudsman, Flemming Zulack Williamson Zauderer LLP, New York, NY

Rosemary Mundhenk, Ombudsperson, Lehigh University, Bethlehem, PA

Sophia Qiao, Asia Pacific Ombuds, Eaton Corporation, Shanghai, China

Larry Singell, Faculty Ombuds, University of Colorado at Boulder, Boulder, CO

Charles Smith, Ombudsperson, Lehigh University, Bethlehem, PA

Keith Smith, Ombudsperson, Stanford School of Medicine, Stanford, CA

Michael Welsh, Ombuds, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, MI

John Woods, Ombudsperson, Ramapo College of New Jersey, Mahwah, NJ

AFFILIATE MEMBERS

Klaus-Peter Blobel, Guetersloh, Germany

Meena Cabral De Mello, Senior Scientist, World Health Organization, Geneva, Switzerland

Mariarosaria Cardines, Chambesy, Geneva, Switzerland

Lawrie Cherniack, Cherniack & Cherniack, Winnipeg, MB, Canada

Judy Clearihue, Employee Ombudsman, TD Bank Financial Group, Toronto, ON, Canada

Bernadette Cohen, Director of Human Resources, Spelman College, Atlanta, GA

Adriana DeJong, Student Grievance Resolution Coordinator, Bridgepoint Education, San Diego, CA

Rotsendara Diya, Kennesaw, GA

Diane Engster, Alexandria, VA

Michele Goldfarb, Associate Ombudsman, University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia, PA

Jayla Henry, Program Assistant, Halliburton - Dispute Resolution Program, Houston, TX

Jon Humiston, Student Ombuds Officer, Central Michigan University, Mt. Pleasant, MI

Fatima Johnson, Executive Officer, NASA, Washington, DC

Karen Johnson, Corporate Ombudsman, Bristol-Myers Squibb, Princeton, NJ

Ruthy Kohorn Rosenberg, Director Student Mediation, MIT, Cambridge, MA

Lesley Perkins, iSource Consulting Group, Reston, VA

Jean-Paul Proulx, Chief Conduct & Discipline Officer, United Nations, St-Wallier, QC, Canada

Neil Schorr, University of Medicine & Dentistry of New Jersey, Hillsborough, NJ

Richard Sussman, Attorney/Mediator, New York, NY

Syed Tauhid, Mediator/Professor, Peace International, Allston, MA

Willie Thomas, Kennesaw State University, Hixson, TN

James Wright, Deputy Assistant Administrator, NASA, Washington, DC

Magali Zeiters, Psychologist, Merritt Island, FL

ASSOCIATE MEMBERS

Roberta Coates, Assistant to the President/Staff Ombuds, University of Maryland, College Park, MD

Donald Cote, Salem State College, Salem, MA

Julian De Meyrick, Dean of Students, Macquarie University, Australia

Seran Dogancay-Aktuna, Associate Professor, Southern Illinois Univers., Edwardsville, IL

Grace Meyer, Office of Attorney General, Austin, TX

Kyle Pybus, Assistant to the VP/ Executive Director, Central Michigan University, Mt. Pleasant, MI