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EAST LANSING, Mich. -- A man who will serve as one of the nation's first university Ombudsmen has been named at Michigan State University.

Dr. James D. Rust, a professor of English at MSU for the past 20 years and assistant dean of the College of Arts and Letters, will assume the duties of Ombudsman, a unique position patterned after a system operating in the national governments of Sweden, Denmark, Norway and Finland.

The word literally means "one who represents someone." And in government, this is the man who fights city hall and protects the private citizen against excesses of bureaucracy.

MSU is the first Big Ten university to establish the office. The length of his term is indefinite, but is expected to last for one or two years.

Appointment of an Ombudsman for MSU was an innovative step recommended by the Report on Academic Freedom, a document prepared by the university's faculty committee on student affairs, which received final approval from the Academic Council last spring (March 16).

Dr. Rust's appointment was announced Thursday evening (Sept. 14) at the university's annual Fall Leadership Workshop to a gathering of some 700 student leaders by MSU President John A. Hannah.

Student leaders themselves worked with MSU's Provost in drawing up a list of candidates for the position. The final decision was the President's.

In naming his choice for the office, Dr. Hannah pointed out, "The Ombudsman will be charged with responsibilities uncommon in American universities, or indeed in universities anywhere."

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His job will be to assist students in obtaining informal and speedy settlements of their problems.

He has been charged, in addition, to respect the privacy of all who seek his help and to protect them from retribution.

To accomplish these ends, he will have broad investigatory powers and direct access to all university officials from the President down.

"Obviously, an individual of uncommon talents and personal characteristics was demanded, and the choice was one in which the concurrence of student leaders was essential," he said introducing Dr. Rust.

Dr. Rust predicts that most of the students' problems will be academic -- for example, dissatisfaction with grades or other misunderstandings between professors and students.

However, he envisions that much of his work will be as "a kind of traffic cop, telling students which people to see and what procedures to follow."

He views the Ombudsman as "the conscience of the university," and proposes "to be the friend of the students and to treat them compassionately and fairly."

Though this is the first time the office has existed, the role won't be foreign to Dr. Rust. He has been handling student grievances and resolving student problems for the past five years as assistant dean for undergraduate student affairs in the College of Arts and Letters.

Rust is a graduate of Indiana University and earned the Ph.D. at Yale University in 1945. As an undergraduate he was a member of Phi Beta Kappa and other academic honoraries. And through his years as a member of the faculty has actively pursued his research and writing.

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