

Ombudsman makes life easier

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Over the past two years that she has held the office of MSU ombudsman, Carolyn Stieber has tried to make life a little easier for the 2,000 students that have brought their gripes to her, ranging from how to survive in a triple to how to ease back into the financial graces of Mom and Dad.

Stieber's job involves aiding MSU students with any campus-related problem the student may have. She also acts as a referral agent for students with problems unrelated to the University.

More than 60 per cent of student problems that Stieber is confronted with are academic ones, but not all are grade-related. Some students come to the ombudsman when they have repeatedly had difficulty gaining entrance to a class.

Students' academic gripes generally include the unfairness of exams given under pressure of time limitation and receiving lower grades than what they think they deserve. Incompletes are a hassle, too.

Stieber thinks that shifting interpretation of what grades are based on creates unnecessary problems.

"Students are entitled to know what grades and exams will count for at the beginning of the term," Stieber said.

Students who have been accused of cheating on exams come to the ombudsman, often as a last resort after penalties have been administered. Stieber will then advise the student of his or her rights and let them know that they are entitled to a hearing.

In all matters, Stieber said she has learned that sometimes the student is at fault and sometimes an unfair policy has been exercised against the student.

Nonacademic problems brought to the ombudsman's attention deal largely with financial



Stieber

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aid, parking permits and regulations and dormitory policy problems, as well as personal problems.

The complaint of tripled dormitory dwellers was so overwhelming that Stieber suggested that all students in triples — those tripled voluntarily and those tripled against their will — be given rebates. Shortly afterward, Stieber's suggestion became University policy.

Another University practice in which Stieber sought changes was the policy involving Fee Hall Apartments. She felt it unfair that if all but one resident of an apartment moved out, the remaining person was responsible for the same amount of rent. The policy has since been changed.

The friendly ombudsman said she bases all her cases on the idea of fairness and realism. She admitted that she has problems.

"I try always to give students a realistic assessment of what their chances are in the case. Some people feel, however, that I have magic powers," Stieber said, smiling. "Sometimes I just don't have a remedy for them."

Students occasionally expect too much from Stieber and get angry when she does not give a definite commitment or a firm promise of being able to fulfill their wishes.

Often Stieber finds that students will have good cases, but they simply want to talk problems over with someone who understands and are not willing to take action against anyone.

Though Stieber's office is where she conducts one-to-one conferences with students, she is also involved in a number of activities that take her out of the office.