

Administrators reject independent office

By Colleen Pohlig
Emerald Associate Editor

University administrators rejected a proposal last week for an autonomous office that would investigate and decide disciplinary actions in cases of discrimination.

ASUO President Bobby Lee informally proposed that an office, separate from the University's Office of Affirmative Action, be established to conduct investigations because a "conflict of interest" exists in the current structure of the affirmative action office.

Currently, the office handles investigations and data collecting on compliance for federal purposes and maintains affirmative action plans. Lee said although the office deals with discrimination cases from students and others, it must also protect the "reputation or liability of the institution."

Lee said he wants the Office of Affirmative Action to continue its current duties. However, the new office would conduct investigations instead of the affirmative action office.

An office that is separate from the University and is not under the administration's control isn't likely to be biased, Lee said.

The proposal was triggered by last December's findings by a federal auditor of deficiencies in the University's affirmative action programs, Lee said.

The auditor found eight areas of noncompliance with federal law and recently entered into a conciliation agreement with the University to begin working on the areas.

In addition to the separate office, Lee said

the ASUO wants affirmative action responsibilities recentralized so students and the University can make the most of those trained specifically in the areas of affirmative action.

Last year, Brand decentralized the Office of Affirmative Action, doling out affirmative action responsibilities to vice presidents, deans and department heads.

One of the benefits of decentralizing the office, Brand said, is affirmative action responsibilities are spread out among the institution.

"If affirmative action is centralized, there's a tendency for people to say, 'It's not my problem,' and treat it as a side issue," Brand said. "The goal is to have as many people as possible responsible for it. We want our deans and department heads to be responsible for hiring as well."

The idea of centralizing affirmative action duties is an outdated one, Brand said, and this is the reason why Lee's proposal was denied.

"This is an old model that is outdated for the University, and it doesn't work," Brand said. "We need to stop talking about process and start talking about progress."

Judging by the eight deficient areas the federal auditor found, Lee said he believes the University's affirmative action programs aren't working because the responsibilities are spread among people who don't have the training or the time to be efficient.

Alison Baker, Brand's executive assistant, said the lack of training of the two vice pres-

idents who decide and make the disciplinary decisions in discrimination cases is irrelevant.

Baker said the two vice presidents, Dan Williams and Norm Wessells, have had "face-to-face advice" from the affirmative action office staff and have had legal counsel.

"(The vice presidents) know, as well as any sensible administrator, what sexual harassment and other forms of discrimination are," Baker said. "One doesn't have to receive training — one reads and listens."

Formal complaints involving discrimination cases, which are filed with the Office of Affirmative Action, proceed through an extensive investigation.

The investigative findings then go to the Affirmative Action Administration Council, which consists of six University officials.

The council reviews the findings and makes recommendations to the two vice presidents, who then decide if it is indeed a discrimination violation. If a violation was found, the appropriate vice president will then decide on disciplinary action.

Lee said he won't be satisfied until the office is recentralized to cover such things as data collecting and training and until there is a separate office formed to handle investigations and disciplinary decisions.

"We'll never be able to comply and provide a fair grievance procedure to students until we have a neutral body that enforces investigations and due process," Lee said.

VIOLATIONS

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we will do, and we'll be in compliance."

The internal procedures that need to be improved include better data collection of affirmative action plans, the implementation of the internal audit and reporting system, and measuring the effectiveness of the total program.

Also, the University must establish policies that give the diverse campus groups and individuals a structured procedure to access affirmative action support and activities.

In a mandatory departmental work force analysis given to the

OFCCP prior to the audit, the University lumped all teaching faculty into one group. The OFCCP told the University that the procedure, which was used in the 1981 analysis prior to the first audit, was a violation.

The grouping of teaching faculty in one group prevents any meaningful analysis of distribution by rank, according to the conciliation agreement.

Lee, whose recent proposal for restructuring the affirmative action office was refused by the administration, said the failure to designate between the various job titles was intentional.

"The work force analysis was manipulated by the University to show everything was fair and balanced," Lee said. "That is a

sign of lack of integrity, and I question the University's commitment to the spirit of affirmative action equal opportunity."

Affirmative action Director Everett Wells, who was not at the University a year ago when the analysis was written, denied that it was intentional. He said the people responsible for preparing the analysis probably didn't realize they should avoid aggregating the job groups.

Another violation said the University failed to adequately communicate to departmental supervisors its obligations.

The agreement says that within 45 days, the University must submit specific action programs that will be implemented to ensure equal opportunity to

those applicants and employees with disabilities.

As part of the conciliation agreement, a mentor program through the provost's office is in the works that would support and counsel women with respect to tenure, Brand said. The University must submit a results-oriented program plan designed to promote women faculty.

The conciliation agreement is not an admission by the University of any of the violations, Wells said.

"If we admitted (the violations), we'd be in court forever," Wells said. "We're not admitting these things, but to get it under way, we entered into the conciliation agreement."

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- March 19 - Deadline for:
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 - voter's guide statements
 - pollworker applications
- March 29 - Candidates meeting
- April 13 - Deadline for ballot measure filing
- April 20, 21 - Primary Election
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