

Office provides a path through legal red-tape

■ **CONDUCT:** Student conduct code conflicts are one type of problem Student Advocacy handles during the year

By Doug Irving
Student Activities Reporter

Any body of laws, from the highest federal bill to the lowest institutional code, can be frustratingly complex. Laws at the University are no different.

For students, the Office of Student Advocacy is the solution to this problem.

The office was developed to guide students through bureaucratic red tape, vague laws and administrative problems.

"We are here as a service to students," said Audre Bonadea, student defender supervisor. "It's lay advocacy. We do not function as lawyers."

The office sees many Student Conduct Code violation conflicts. Conduct code cases are the most direct and easy to understand, she said.

The student is notified by mail of his or her violation. After bringing the case to the office, a defender gets the student's file and then determines whether there is a possible defense. The defender also advises the student whether to seek a formal or informal hearing. In a formal hearing, the defender would also represent the student and may negotiate for lighter sanctions.

The other major problem the office sees are grievances brought against faculty or staff.

Since the residency rules in Oregon were changed, the office has also helped students with residency disputes.

Marlene Drescher, the office supervisor, said sexual harassment cases are another problem faced by the office.

"Students often cannot get any kind of educated, fully informed support," she said.

Because campus procedure and state or federal procedure differs, the process can be extremely frustrating.

"We hate to see a student enter a complex system like that and unknowingly and without being fully informed find that his or her legal rights have expired," she said.

Drescher said that around 100 cases come through the office each term. However, the office receives only about 15 sexual harassment cases each year.

Student defenders are not lawyers. They must be able to get certification to enter a formal hearing, and only third-year law students are granted this privilege. Most use their positions in the office as an internship.

Because the office must advocate for all students, it cannot accept cases involving complaints between two students. By siding with one student, the office would necessarily not advocate for the other. In these cases, the students are referred to the Mediation office, Bonadea said.

Bonadea said that there are two peak times during the academic year when the office receives the bulk of its work. The first is within the first few weeks of the school year, when students are uneducated about the conduct code and violations abound. The second is towards the end of the year. These are mostly cases that students have put off and must be dealt with before summer.

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