



## Office for Conflict Resolution **Fiscal Year 2020 Annual Report**

The University of Minnesota's Office for Conflict Resolution (OCR) is a resource for University faculty, staff and student employees, who are not represented by a union, to assist in the resolution of workplace disputes – either through informal problem-solving initiatives or a peer hearing process. By listening to employment concerns and offering a range of processes to respond to challenges, the OCR promotes a University culture of engagement and achievement. The [OCR](#) is a neutral and independent office; it is not part of either the [Office of Human Resources](#) or the [Office of the General Counsel](#). Conflict resolution services are offered confidentially, subject only to limited exceptions. OCR serves employees at all 5 University campuses including University Extension.

### **Director Transition and OCR Comprehensive Policy Review**

FY20 was a time of Director transitions for OCR. Eric Schnell served as Interim Director through the end of FY19 and Tamar Gronvall began as the new permanent Director starting in July 2019. In addition, immediately after starting in July 2019 Director Tamar Gronvall began and finished the comprehensive policy review of OCR's policy which had last been done in 2009-2010.

### **All Services Provided during COVID-19 Pandemic**

The COVID-19 pandemic required the OCR to deliver all of its informal and formal conflict resolution services remotely. Throughout these transitions, OCR adapted and then delivered all of its services, across the University of Minnesota system in a timely and competent manner, including numerous remote mediations and a remote live all-day hearing.

*By listening to employment concerns and offering a range of processes to respond to challenges, the OCR promotes a University culture of engagement and achievement.*



**142\***

CONSULTATIONS  
TO INDIVIDUALS

**13**

FACILITATED DIALOGUES  
& MEDIATIONS

**4**

PETITIONS CARRIED OVER  
FROM FY19

**8**

PETITIONS FILED IN FY20

**1**

OCR PEER HEARING  
CONDUCTED IN FY20

## Informal Assistance

Informal conflict resolution matters are the largest part of the office workload. Consultations are face-to-face meetings about workplace concerns or problems. The following statistics represent the number of individuals who met with OCR staff for one or more consultation meetings in FY20. Numerous consultations resulted in several meetings conducted over many months. Likewise, all phone or email inquiries are not counted in these totals. \*Specifically, of the 142 individuals consultations, 56, or about one third of the total consultations entailed several follow-up consultations to assist in reaching a final resolution.

### Employee work groups that used OCR's Services

50%: P&A

25%: Faculty

22%: Civil Service

3%: Student workers

## Formal Assistance

Petitions are formal complaints that allege a violation of a University rule, regulation, policy, or practice. The OCR had four petitions carry over from FY19 and received eight new petitions in FY20, for a total of 12 active petitions, a significant increase from FY19. Petitioners appealed both of these dismissals on jurisdictional grounds, to the Executive Vice President and Provost, and the Provost affirmed the dismissals. The final two settled at an OCR facilitated mediation before the scheduled hearings in FY20.

Of the eight newly filed petitions in FY20: two settled at an OCR facilitated mediation prior to a hearing. Two were dismissed for failing to satisfy jurisdictional requirements. One of these dismissals was appealed and was subsequently affirmed by the Executive Vice-President and Provost. Five of the eight FY20 filed petitions carried over into FY21. No cases proceeded to the Minnesota Court of Appeals or binding Arbitration.

### In FY20, OCR received 8 new petitions. Of these:

- 1 was heard by a peer panel decision, which ruled for the employee.
- 2 petitions were dismissed following jurisdictional challenges. One dismissal was appealed to the Provost, who upheld the jurisdictional decision.
- 5 petitions are in process and carried over into FY21.

### In FY20 some themes emerged in delivering both the informal and formal assistance to University employees.

1. Managers and supervisors failing to address claims of misconduct or conflict. Ignoring or failing to address claims of misconduct or conflict diminishes productivity and morale, and competent employees leave for more professional work environments. We worked with employees and managers across the University community to strategize ways to address misconduct or conflict and to communicate clearly both expectations and consequences.
2. In FY20, COVID-19 pandemic mandated remote work, the police killing of George Floyd, and the subsequent community social unrest, exacerbated pre-existing conflict, feelings of disparate treatment of employees of marginalized identities, and exposed a greater need for mental health resources. The remote work environment was very challenging for many employees who were also required to teach school-age children, provide care-giving to family members impacted by the pandemic, and also complete their University work tasks. We provided informal assistance to employees at all levels to strategize methods of support to complete the work, address issues of disparate treatment and referral to resources for mental health support.
3. Managers and supervisors failing to address and enforce existing University or unit policies regarding unprofessional or discriminatory behavior and inappropriately delegating employee accountability solely to HR professionals. Department and unit leadership are responsible for setting expectations of a professional work environment and for addressing with clear consequences, behavior that fails to meet those expectations. We provided informal assistance to employees, at all levels to identify applicable University policies and ways to address the behavior.

## Educational Programming

### OCR offers two programs:

- **Success Signals**<sup>®</sup> focuses on understanding the intersection between conflict and communication. It is a highly interactive workshop that helps participants become more aware of their own style, identify the styles of others, and communicate better with others.
- **Conflict Competency** emphasizes that conflict between people is inevitable. Participants are given practical assistance in raising concerns in a constructive manner and managing difficult situations more effectively.

FY20:

6

CONFLICT COMPETENCY  
WORKSHOPS DELIVERED

8

SUCCESS SIGNALS  
WORKSHOPS DELIVERED

## FY20 Conflict Resolution Advisory Committee

- **Catherine French** (Chair), Professor, College of Science & Engineering
- **Jill DeBoer**, Director, Office of Emergency Response, Academic Health Center
- **Mary Belisle**, HR Consultant, School of Public Health
- **Michael LuBrant**, Program Director/Assist. Professor Program of Mortuary Science
- **Kate Stuckert**, Senior Assistant to the President
- **Etty DeVeaux**, Chief of Staff, The Graduate School
- **Marlowe Thomas**, Undergraduate Student (FY19 & FY 20)
- **Warren Cormack**, Student in Law School (FY20)

## Visitor Feedback

FY20:

89% satisfied with OCR's service and found them to be helpful

97% OCR staff were respectful and listened to my concerns

97% agreed their concerns were given prompt attention & options clearly explained

## UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA

### Office for Conflict Resolution

669 Heller Hall

271 19th Ave. S

Minneapolis, MN 55455

(612) 624-1030

[ocr@umn.edu](mailto:ocr@umn.edu)