



FSA Ombudsman News

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"It's not about who's right...it's about doing the right thing!"

Did you know?

The Office of Personnel Management (OPM) has authorized federal agencies to increase student loan repayments annually from \$6,000 to \$10,000 and cumulatively from \$40,000 to \$60,000 for certain federal employees. For FY 2003, 24 federal agencies provided more than \$9.1 million in student loan repayment benefits to 2,077 federal employees.

Student loan repayment information from: OPM, Federal Student Loan Repayment Program, Fiscal Year 2003, Report to Congress. <http://www.opm.gov>

Ombuds Training

This month's FSA Ombudsman staff training in Pearson's Coralville, Iowa location included a course on effective correspondence. The main refresher point was to "bottom line" your letters. Answer the question asked in the first part of the letter. We followed that with a presentation from Joe Aiello in FSA Communications about "reader-centered writing" (see tips in next column).

The Office of the Ombudsman is pleased to announce the addition of three new staff members.

Danaé Oldenburg is a contractor, analyzing current and historical case data. **Joy Dingle**, a newly certified attorney in the State of New Jersey, will be assisting on casework.

Julie Sanchez, a recent high school graduate, will assist with records management and other administrative duties.

Practice Tip:

Communication is Key!

The crux behind many Ombudsman cases is miscommunication. The following tips for reader-centered writing can reduce the communication gap.

- **Sense of Audience**
Put yourself in the reader's place. Anticipate their needs: Why am I reading this? What is it about? What am I supposed to do? What's in it for me? Answer their concerns and then provide the necessary facts and sequence of events.
- **Appropriate Tone**
Use a professional tone. Sound like one human speaking to another. Simplify your language and avoid industry jargon.
- **Sense of Movement**
Organize your writing so that it goes somewhere, and in an orderly fashion. Make clear connections between the sections.
- **Brevity**
Keep your writing simple and concise. Ensure every word counts.
- **Good Format**
Utilize (but don't overuse) headings and bullets to guide the reader. Acronyms need to be spelled out. Make sure the page is easy to scan and looks digestible.

From: *Managing Other People's Writing*, by Marcie Potter (Paraphrased by John Laughner)

The Six C's of Effective Writing

1. Is it clear?
2. Is it concise?
3. Is it contextual?
4. Is it complete?
5. Is it correct?
6. Is it considerate?

From: *Managing Other People's Writing*, by Marcie Potter (Paraphrased by Melissa Lewis)

Quotable Quote

"How would people I respect in this profession handle this situation?"

Remarks from Dr. Craig McEwen, Dean for Academic Affairs, Bowdoin College

In "*Valuing Professionalism: Challenges to the Ombuds*"

The Ombudsman Association and The University and College Ombuds Association, Joint Conference, Tucson, Ariz., April 18-21, 2004

Ombudsman Kudos to:

Jeannie Rowe of NELA, who asked:

We have a borrower who was active military in Iraq when he was killed. Since no official state issued death certificate exists, can we accept the official letter of notification from the military?

And to George Harris in the Office of Postsecondary Education (OPE) for his prompt reply:

Yes. The authority for this is found in the second sentence of 34 CFR 682.402(b)(2):

(2) Under exceptional circumstances and on a case-by-case basis, the chief executive officer of the guaranty agency may approve a discharge based upon other reliable documentation supporting the discharge request.

OmbudSpeak:

Option Identification: Brainstorming as many creative approaches to a conflict as possible. This sets the conflict resolution process apart from the reporting process. www.crinfo.org (Paraphrased by Melissa Lewis)

COMING EVENTS July 12-15: The Ombudsman Association (TOA) courses, e.g., Ombuds 101, 101 Plus, Individual and Group Dynamics in Conflict, The Advanced Series-Conflict Theory, Toronto, Canada **July 18-21:** NASFAA Conference, Minneapolis, Minn.