## Ombudsman appeals student grades

By Sandi Witkowicz Staff Reporter

When students disagree with university staff members, the UNL ombudsman might be able to help.

The office protects the rights of people who are relatively powerless, said stream. This usually generates com-Robert Filbeck, ombudsman for City and East campuses.

often than faculty, but students use it most often, he said.

Disagreements between students and instructors concerning grades and course-work expectations often are handled by the office, Filbeck said.

Conflicts also arise over housing, financial aid and class registration, he said. In all situations, Filbeck said, students should try to resolve conflicts themselves first.

Students should remember, he said, that instructors and administrators are accessible and approachable without fact, one way the ombudsman can help better for themselves, Filbeck said.

If a department has an effective LEGAL from Page 11 grade appeal process, the ombudsman will help students prepare their cases. However, if no effective appeal process exists, Filbeck said, the ombudsman will contact the department chairman. In some cases Filbeck has contacted the individual instructors to work out a compromise, he said.

Students who are unable to get into classes they need for graduation present tough problems because classrooms and laboratories cannot be stretched, Filbeck said. Frankly, he said, the office often is stymied.

For students who need a closed class for graduation, the ombudsman tries to help students find substitute classes or work out acceptable programs to postpone the closed class until another available to them. semester. The office looks for any reasonable alternative, he said.

Filbeck said 500 to 600 people came to the office for help last year. This is about 100 fewer than in previous years,

Filbeck attributes part of this decrease to the faculty and administration's increasing awareness of students' rights and taking steps to protect those

Filbeck cited a recent case where a student came to his office after being refused admission to a particular program. The program administrators had informed the student of his right to take the matter to the ombudsman.

Another reason for the decline in cases, Filbeck said, is that more instructors are spelling out what is expected of their students and becoming more adept at following their course outlines. If instructors clearly outline

what's expected of students, the grad- lem to the chancellor, he said ing criteria, their grading process and alternative ways students can achieve grades, there is little room for problems to arise, Filbeck said.

An instructor occasionally will outline everything and then change midplaints, he said.

The concept of the ombudsman office Staff members use the office more started in Sweden, Filbeck said. A king realized that the government had grown so that citizens with legitimate concerns could not get government action.

The king gave the ombudsman the authority to go around the bureaucracy at any level, even if it meant taking a problem directly to the king, Filbeck works much the same way, he said.

The UNL ombudsman has the authority to go directly to the level in the versity conflict, Filbeck said. The bureaucracy where decisions are made. ombudsman can help students, staff

But problems seldom go to the chancellor, Filbeck said, adding that most deans and directors are responsive.

"There are days when I'm downright proud" of the way they solve problems, Filbeck said.

If the ombudsman suspects that an instructor or professor has not acted in a professional manner, the ombudsman might take the matter to the Professional Conduct Committee. The committee holds hearings and recommends censure or suggests that the university take other action, said Filbeck, who has been ombudsman for one year and four months.

Taking a matter to the committee, said. The university ombudsman office however, is an extreme measure and Filbeck said he has not used it.

Avenues exist to approach any uni-That sometimes means taking a prob- and faculty find these avenues.

## accessible and approachable without help from the ombudsman's office. In Attorney expects large increase is by preparing students to negotiate in student-related court cases

Occasionally, Stall refers cases to other lawyers. Civil litigation cases are referred to other attorneys becaue they are "fee generating," she said. A student sues for some amount of money and a lawyer works for a percentage of dle the workload. She said the office

The service's second function concentrates on legal education for the university community. The handbook is just one way to do this, Stall said.

She answered students' questions in a column last year in the Daily Nebraskan. Stall said she wrote the column "to give students basic information on legal problems, let them know Student Legal Services is there and help is

But Stall said she expects a big the program last year."

increase in student contacts and cases.

'We had a definite increase and I think we should have," she said. "I think we were more visible last year. We had an extra attorney working part

Stall said she and Bancroft can hancould offer more services if more attorney hours were available.

"I think, based on the budget we have to work with, we offer a lot of services," Stall said.

Because Stall and Bancroft work to capacity, they have no new plans for this school year.

"I think we started so much in the last couple of years that we're just going to try to smooth it out," she said. "I learned a lot from running through

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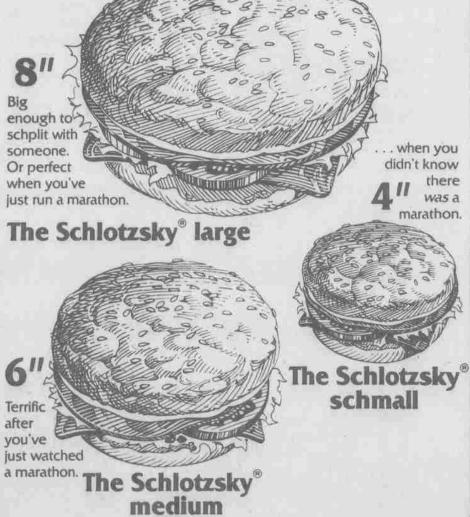
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