Report of the Ombudsperson
Concerning Discrimination and Sexual Harassment

Laurie Shrage, September 2018

This is the first year of my second three-year term as APA Ombudsperson. On July 1, 2017, I took over from Ruth Chang, with whom I have consulted regarding several cases this year.

Summary of activity

I was contacted by 19 people with requests for assistance. Six were requests for help from members of other professional organizations in regard to devising sexual harassment/discrimination policies for their organizations. Four involved questions from members about the APA's non-discrimination policies. Eight people sought advice about whether to proceed with a formal complaint, either at their institution or through the APA. One student from a South American country inquired about whether the APA offered scholarships for underrepresented students who wish to study philosophy in the US.

The six requests for help about devising sexual harassment/discrimination policies included two professional organizations in fields outside philosophy, three philosophical societies, and one request for guidance about conducting a climate survey for philosophy graduate students.

Professional societies are especially seeking advice about how to address sexual harassment or discriminatory behavior at professional meetings, and the kinds of sanctions that organizations may apply to their members. The APA's policies and procedures appear to be serving as a model for other organizations.

The four queries from members about the APA's policies pertained to whether the APA's discrimination complaint procedure covers institutions such as philosophy journals, whether two job advertisements conformed to the APA's policy on nondiscrimination, and which famous people should be mentioned on the APA's promotional webpage "who studies philosophy?"

The eight requests for advice about filing formal complaints came from three untenured philosophy professors and five graduate students. One case involved alleged discrimination on the basis of pregnancy and parental status. Four cases involved alleged discrimination on the basis of disability. Three cases involved alleged sexual harassment and gender discrimination. I referred one case involving a serious personal conflict between two faculty to the APA's Committee for the Defense of the Professional Rights of Philosophers.

I will provide expanded descriptions of these cases and how they were handled (with all identifying information removed) in a confidential document for the National Office records.