MEMORANDUM

TO: Mr. Tom Jones, Chair, Faculty Senate

FROM: Donald R. Zacharias, President

SUBJECT: Faculty Ombudsman

April 7, 1980

The proposal from the Faculty Senate recommending the establishment of a faculty ombudsman has received careful review by the deans, the vice presidents, and by this office. Although I intend to place it on the April 26, 1980, meeting of the Board of Regents, I am recommending that it not be adopted at this time.

My decision to defer adoption of the proposal should in no way be interpreted as a criticism of the Faculty Senate committee. I realize that the committee was deeply interested in providing the best possible relationship between faculty and administrators. In addition to my own familiarity with the operation of ombudsmen on two other campuses, I have had good discussions with Dr. Albert Petersen regarding the committee's intentions. At some future time it may be advisable to establish an office that has some similarity to the one described by the Faculty Senate committee.

Let me outline some of the difficulties that appeared when the current proposal was given careful scrutiny. It is my objective to build an administrative system that is accountable and responsive to the mission of the University in the needs of all campus personnel and students. As I approach the end of the academic calendar, I believe that we have made considerable progress in improving the administrative process. Through the use of informal discussions with randomly selected employees and faculty, I have gained considerable insights about the needs of the campus. In addition, we have a study nearing completion on ways to improve communication with classified personnel. The use of administrative interns and the Presidential Advisory Committee should further strengthen our efforts to strengthen the quality of administrative performance and organizational communication. I am concerned that until I have an opportunity to find compelling need for an ombudsman that we might establish a system that permitted preemptive short-circuiting of supervisory channels and ignore or de-emphasize the importance that is placed upon each administrator's need to be thorough and open-minded in investigating every complaint made about operations over which that administrator has responsibility. It remains an elementary principle of public administration that an official has the responsibility for reconsidering any action taken if someone immediately affected by that action feels that an error in judgment has been made. Certainly one important aspect of administration is the ability to resolve conflicts. If an
Administrator lacks the ability to receive complaints and resolve them, I seriously doubt that the situation calls for an ombudsman. If an administrator is repeatedly unable to handle disagreements and frequently causes misunderstandings, then I would see the need to discuss the performance of the administrator at the next level of supervision.

I noted that the recommendation as forwarded from the Senate calls for a university ombudsman but the duties and responsibilities cover only the investigation of a grievance that a faculty member might have. As you well know, students and classified employees also feel the need from time to time to express complaints. If it should become advisable to establish an ombudsman at some future time, I would be inclined to consider the needs of the entire university community and not restrict the office to faculty grievances.

I appreciate the work of the committee and the time that was spent in studying the work of an ombudsman. However, because of the views that I have outlined above, I prefer to make every effort to improve the functioning of our present administrative system with some modifications rather than adding another administrative office in the form of a university ombudsman.

DWZ:mcb