

WHITE & STRADLEY, PLLC

ATTORNEYS AT LAW

Reply to:

Leto Copeley

letoc@whiteandstradley.com

April 13, 2020

To: AEA Executive Committee
From: Leto Copeley, ombudsperson
Re: Summary of reports to the Committee
Period covered: May 21, 2019 through April 13, 2020

Introduction:

The ombuds program was announced by then-President Ben Bernanke on May 20, 2019 and the first complaint was received the next day.

Reporting was slow but regular until the ASSA meeting in January 2020, when there was more in-person contact, several presentations were made, and there were ombudsperson office hours. Then and in the weeks following, the pace of reporting picked up until the coronavirus pandemic hit and disrupted most people's schedules.

Complaints are initiated through phone calls, a web form linked from the AEA website, email, and direct messages through social media.

Clarification of role:

All complainants/callers are advised at the outset that the ombudsperson does not represent them or the AEA, and a complaint made with the ombudsperson is not a formal complaint to the AEA.

3105 CHARLES B. ROOT WYND • RALEIGH, NORTH CAROLINA 27612

Telephone: (919) 844-0400. Facsimile: (919) 845-9745

The ombudsperson is here to help improve the climate of the economics profession so it may become more inclusive and welcoming to all. Toward that end, the ombudsperson's job is to listen to all persons who call and to give brief advice and constructive feedback if requested. All communications from all stakeholders are welcome. The ombudsperson's services are impartial. All complaints are confidential, unless a victim of discrimination or harassment consents to a written record of the complaint being made and the victim's name being shared with any others who may call in the future to complain about the conduct of the same person.

The ombudsperson is empowered to engage in limited fact-finding, in order to answer a complainant's questions or to attempt informal dispute resolution. However the ombudsperson does not investigate alleged perpetrators of harassment or discrimination. For questions about the ombudsperson's role, please see [FAQs here](#).

Number of complaints:

Through April 13, 2020, 65 complaints were received. Most of the complainants have spoken directly to the ombudsperson. Several communications have been electronic only. Most people who speak prefer to speak by phone rather than videoconference, which has been offered to all. All complainants are first identified as either AEA members or calling about an AEA member or persons calling about an AEA-sponsored activity.

Types of conduct complained of:

Complaints have included allegations of sexual harassment, and discrimination based on sex, race, national origin, age, marital status, and religion. A significant minority of complainants have been bystanders. They have included both men and women who report they have witnessed discrimination by their colleagues (nearly all white men, but some white women) against women and persons of color.

The largest number of complaints involved allegations of sex discrimination, with the vast majority of those involving sexual harassment. Of the complaints of sex discrimination that do *not* involve sexual harassment, most involve allegations of bullying based on sex and retaliation for complaining about sex discrimination.

The vast majority of, but not all, sexual harassment complaints have involved male on female conduct.

Reported bullying based on sex includes yelling, screaming, throwing objects at a victim, breaking objects in front of the victim, and making a threatening move to cause a victim to feel she was about to be punched. Also reported is less physically threatening conduct such as pressuring a complainant to party more, to party less, not to work with students, to allow students to get all the credit for their work, to be more friendly, less friendly, less threatening, or less attractive.

Sexual harassment allegations include rape, attempted rape, unwanted touching, unwanted grabbing (to the point of leaving bruises), inappropriate suggestions of sexual encounters, and gaining entry into a complainant's secure workplace through personal connections, in order to visit the victim without permission.

Inappropriate touching or suggestions of sexual encounters have mostly taken place in the context of discussions about publications, or other activity where the person engaging in the inappropriate conduct holds power over the other person getting published, getting hired, etc.

There have been approximately a dozen complaints about national origin discrimination, heavily directed at people of Asian descent. People of Asian descent are referred to randomly as Chinese, when they may have no connection whatsoever to China. The terms Asian and Asian-American are used by economists interchangeably, whether they apply or not. Asian-associated tropes are incorporated into discussions about economics when they have no bearing to the subject matter.

Complaints about race discrimination involve the work of persons of color being given harsher scrutiny than that of white people, especially white males. Black women have been spoken of publicly as getting their jobs handed to them rather than having obtained them through doing the work. More than one person of color has reported retaliation after making efforts to improve the diversity of their department. In some departments it appears to some economists as if white males are taking active steps to reserve faculty hiring slots for people who look like them. One job applicant was questioned about her racial identity.

Multiple persons complained they have been encouraged by senior faculty to just put up with racist and sexist comments from fellow faculty and from students.

There were several complaints about white males in academia making statements that slots in their departments were being reserved for the hiring of a woman, a person of color, etc.

We received one complaint that married women economists face burdens not faced by married male economists, even when both spouses are economists. This report was accompanied by substantiating documentation.

We received two complaints about elitism. Elitism might seem to be outside the core mission of the AEA ombuds program to focus on complaints of harassment and discrimination. However, it was pointed out by the complainants that elitism in the profession enables people at the top of the profession to exert control over those who have less power, and that the people at the top are overwhelmingly white males. Therefore their views carry the day.

There have been multiple complaints about econjobrumors.com. Comments complained about included, among others, the stereotyping of Asian women as primarily sexual beings and a suggestion that a woman professor should be killed.

Settings of conduct:

Almost all complaints have been about conduct occurring in the academic setting or an AEA-sponsored activity. Some of these complaints involved the hiring and/or recruiting process. There have been multiple complaints about the lack of leadership in academic departments when it comes to handling overtly sexist and/or racist behavior.

The vast majority of complaints have come from within the United States. Two have come from AEA members at academic institutions in other countries.

Several complaints involved sexual harassment at privately sponsored conferences or events at the homes of professors. These settings present potential for pressure on graduate students particularly.

Actions taken:

The ombudsperson took action in a number of situations to explore further the subjects of the complaints, to engage in fact-finding, and to answer questions or address the complaints. Several matters were resolved informally. This report will not detail the actions taken so as to preserve confidentiality.

Other actions taken:

The ombudsperson provides other services to the AEA, such as advising leaders of AEA affinity groups or publications editors about standards of conduct, publicizing the ombuds program, and working with AEA leadership and counsel on various standards, FAQs, etc.

Several people have called seeking guidance regarding the AEA standards and procedures for handling official complaints and have been given limited advice and feedback.

Goals for improvement:

Gaining visibility for the ombuds program is a constant challenge, made more difficult by pandemic conditions which prevents in-person contact at conferences or meetings. Many AEA members have been helpful in this regard and work on gaining more visibility for the program. will continue. We welcome feedback.

