

Academic Administrators and Legal Problems.

A recent national survey of college and university academic administrators regarding legal issues they are facing has underscored some common problem areas and resource needs. A majority of those surveyed identified personnel issues, particularly promotion/tenure and termination, as the most troublesome area, with harassment being next on the list. This contrasts slightly with their experience regarding problems that lead to the filing of a lawsuit, where discrimination was named as the most common cause. A surprisingly high percentage (over 40%) of the administrators surveyed indicated that they had been involved in a lawsuit. When asked what legal issues were viewed as “most urgent,” faculty evaluations/recommendations and sexual harassment garnered the highest response rate, followed by affirmative action, intellectual property, governance, student records and confidentiality, students with special needs, academic freedom, student discipline, and international student issues.

Regarding the matter of information sources, the administrators reported that the campus lawyer was the most frequently used resource. The respondents also indicated that they frequently consulted the *Chronicle of Higher Education*. In response to a question about the most useful format for receiving legal information, the three highest rated answers were a periodic written update on current cases and legislation, an annual workshop with university attorneys and administrators, and pertinent websites.

Among the authors’ concluding recommendations were that administrators be surveyed periodically to determine what they perceive to be their most pressing legal issues. Also mentioned were “legal literacy” workshops for administrators, insuring that administrators have direct access to campus counsel, and the development and use of a legal website to which administrators may refer.

Most of the recommended practices are in place at UAH. *LegalWatch*, published bi-monthly, is intended to provide current information to campus administrators about pertinent legal developments. Campus-wide workshops and college briefing sessions, dealing with specific legal topics of interest, are held each year by the Office of Counsel as an “educational” effort. The Office of Counsel also maintains a website (<http://www.uah.edu/legal/>) where workshop materials, *LegalWatch* articles, University policies, forms and checklists, and other information are readily accessible to the University community. The Office of Counsel would welcome additional suggestions about other methods it may use to assist University administrators and officials in carrying out their duties.