

INTRODUCTION

This report on the Office of Professional Conduct (“OPC”) will focus on six areas: (I) staff composition; (II) attorney misconduct case process and procedure; (III) statistics for fiscal year 2005-2006; (IV) progress and goals on cases; (V) the Consumer Assistance Program; and (VI) goals for fiscal year 2006-2007.

I. STAFF COMPOSITION

The staff currently consists of ten full-time employees and one part-time file clerk. These ten full-time employees include Senior Counsel, Deputy Counsel, four Assistant Counsel, two Paralegals, one Legal Secretary/Assistant to Counsel, and one Intake Clerk.

II. ATTORNEY MISCONDUCT CASE PROCESS AND PROCEDURE

A) Rules

The Rules of Lawyer Discipline and Disability (“RLDD”) are in Chapter 14 of the Utah Supreme Court Rules of Professional Practice. The RLDD are the authority for the attorney misconduct process and procedure. Rule 4 of the RLDD is the overall authority for the OPC and Senior Counsel as head of the OPC.

B) Ethics and Discipline Committee

Pursuant to Rule 3 of the RLDD, twenty-six (26) volunteer attorneys and eight (8) volunteer non-attorneys are appointed by the Utah Supreme Court to serve on an administrative body called the Ethics and Discipline Committee (“Committee”). The Committee’s function is to consider attorney discipline cases that are appropriately referred to it under the RLDD.

The Utah Supreme Court appoints a Committee Chair and a Committee Vice-Chair from the 26 attorneys. The Committee Chair is responsible for the oversight of the Committee and the Committee Vice-Chair assists the Committee Chair in this task. The remaining twenty-four (24) attorneys and eight (8) non-attorneys do their main work in subcommittees called Screening Panels. The Utah Supreme Court appoints a Chair and the Committee appoints a Vice-Chair to each Screening Panel.

The majority of Screening Panel work is done by conducting hearings. The Screening Panel work must be presided over by either the Screening Panel Chair or the Screening Panel Vice-Chair, and must have a quorum consisting of two attorneys and one non-attorney.

The OPC has the duty to be the secretary of the Committee and handle the Committee's administrative affairs. These OPC duties include the scheduling of the hearings of the Committee and sending notices to the participants of these hearings.

C) How the OPC Addresses Information That Comes to Its Attention

Specifically addressing the processing of cases, the pertinent provisions of Rule 4(b) of the RLDD state that Senior Counsel and the OPC have the power and duty to:

- (1) Screen all information coming to the attention of the Office to determine whether it is within the jurisdiction of the Office in that it relates to misconduct by a lawyer or to the incapacity of a lawyer;
- (2) Investigate all information coming to the attention of the Office which, if true, would be grounds for discipline or transfer to disability status and investigate all facts pertaining to petitions for reinstatement or readmission;
- (3) For each matter not covered in Rule 10 [of the RLDD] brought to the attention of the Office:

- (A) dismiss;

(B) decline to prosecute;

(C) refer non-frivolous and substantial informal complaints to the Committee for hearing; or

(D) petition for transfer to disability status;

(4) Prosecute before the screening panels, the district courts and the Supreme Court all disciplinary cases and proceedings for transfer to or from disability status;

Information comes to the OPC's attention in the form of notarized/verified and non-notarized complaints. Notarized/verified complaints are official informal complaints ("informal complaints") within the meaning of Rule 10(a)(2) and, therefore, are processed pursuant to Rule 4 and Rule 10 of the RLDD. By contrast, non-notarized complaints are not official informal complaints, and are usually submitted to the OPC in the form of a Request for Assistance. They are processed pursuant to Rule 4 of the RLDD. For purposes of this report, all non-notarized complaints will hereinafter be referred to as Requests for Assistance. The OPC reviews Requests for Assistance in coordination with the Utah State Bar's Consumer Assistance Program ("CAP").

Additionally, pursuant to Rule 4(b)(2) and Rule 10(a)(1) of the RLDD, the OPC can start an attorney misconduct investigation or complaint on its own initiative, based upon information that comes to its attention. In these cases, the OPC usually sends the attorney a notice of the OPC complaint with the notarized signature of Senior Counsel. Under Rule 10(a)(2), the OPC complaint is not required to be verified and attested to.

1) Central Intake System

The OPC's Central Intake System attorneys are assigned to review all initial information received (Requests for Assistance and informal complaints) to determine whether the matter is appropriately closed by a declination to prosecute or a dismissal,

or whether the matter should be processed further for referral to a Screening Panel. These decisions are made jointly by the intake attorneys and the other staff attorneys at weekly case status meetings.

As part of this system, the OPC reviews all Requests for Assistance made to the CAP. The OPC determines whether the Request for Assistance is appropriate to be handled through the CAP (i.e., minor attorney concerns that most likely do not rise to the level of Rule of Professional Conduct violations). The OPC also determines whether the Request for Assistance should be resubmitted as an informal complaint (i.e., serious attorney concerns or matters involving attorneys who are already under investigation by the OPC on the basis of other informal complaints alleging similar concerns). Within those parameters, when appropriate, Requests for Assistance are sent to the CAP and there is OPC case closure. The OPC may also close the case by a determination of declination to prosecute. When appropriate the OPC notifies the Complainant to resubmit their Request for Assistance with notarization and verification.

2) Investigations

All reviews of all informal complaints and the decisions associated with these reviews are made jointly by the OPC attorneys at weekly staff meetings. The informal complaint is reviewed for jurisdiction, merit and timeliness. Looking at the “four corners” of the informal complaint, if the OPC determines it does not have jurisdiction, if the informal complaint fails to state a claim, if the informal complaint is beyond the statute of limitations, or if the case lacks merit in that the alleged conduct even if true is not an ethical violation, the case is dismissed. In these type of dismissal cases, there is no need to contact the attorney for information. For administrative purposes, the OPC

refers to these dismissals as summary dismissals. Both the Complainant and the attorney receive a dismissal letter, and a copy of the informal complaint is sent to the attorney.

Assuming that the OPC does not dismiss an informal complaint based on jurisdiction, merit or timeliness as described above, the OPC conducts a preliminary investigation. The preliminary investigation is to ascertain whether the informal complaint is sufficiently clear as to the allegations. If it is not, the OPC will seek additional facts from the Complainant.

After the preliminary investigation, if the OPC determines that a response is needed from the attorney to reach an appropriate resolution of the informal complaint in accordance with the RLDD, including the possibility of a Screening Panel hearing, the OPC will serve on the attorney a Notice of Informal Complaint (“NOIC”). The NOIC will have attached a true copy of the signed informal complaint and any additional information that the OPC has received from the Complainant. The NOIC will also identify with particularity the possible violations of the Rules of Professional Conduct raised by the informal complaint as preliminarily determined by the OPC. The attorney has 20 days after service of the NOIC to file with the OPC a written and signed answer setting forth in full an explanation of the facts surrounding the informal complaint, together with all defenses and responses to the claims of possible misconduct.

The OPC sends the Complainant a copy of the attorney’s response to the NOIC and, in most cases, continues its investigation by obtaining a response from the Complainant to the attorney’s response. Further, where necessary and appropriate to ascertain the facts necessary to assess the charges, the OPC will seek additional

responses and/or contact witnesses. The OPC always examines all documents submitted by all participants. At any point during the investigation, the OPC is willing to conduct settlement discussions with the attorney. Upon completion of the investigation as outlined above, the OPC determines whether the informal complaint sets forth facts which by their very nature should be brought before a Screening Panel or if good cause otherwise exists to bring the matter before a Screening Panel. These are “non-frivolous” and “substantial” informal complaints within the meaning of RLDD 4(b)(3) and are required to be presented to Screening Panels consistent with RLDD 10(a)(4).

If upon completion of this investigation the OPC determines that the case is not substantial or non-frivolous (i.e., the factual allegations made by the Complainant that can be proven do not constitute a violation of the Rules of Professional Conduct or the evidence is insufficient to establish probable cause that the attorney violated the Rules of Professional Conduct), the OPC dismisses the informal complaint consistent with RLDD 10(a)(6). For administrative purposes, the OPC refers to these dismissals as standard dismissals. Additionally, as part of its dismissal authority, consistent with the language in Rule 10(a)(6) of the RLDD, the OPC can determine that an informal complaint is barred by the statute of limitations, or is more adequately addressed in another forum, or the OPC can decline to prosecute an informal complaint.

The OPC does not arbitrarily decide to decline to prosecute a case. Occasionally, due to the nature of a case (i.e., the remedy sought by a Complainant; ongoing proceedings and the possible disruption of those proceedings that a Bar disciplinary case could have; the OPC resources needed to process a case compared to the OPC resources needed if the matters are first addressed elsewhere), it is in

everyone's best interests to resolve the disciplinary matter by declining to prosecute the case. Generally, the OPC standards for declining to prosecute cases are as follows:

- The OPC may decline to prosecute cases where there is a question as to the nexus between the allegations and the attorney's practice.
- The OPC may decline to prosecute cases where the attorney has already been disciplined for similar misconduct committed during the same period. In these cases, it is unlikely the misconduct will result in discipline greater than what has already been imposed.
- The OPC may decline to prosecute cases where the attorney has taken immediate action to remedy the alleged misconduct.

It should be noted that if the OPC declines to prosecute a case and a court subsequently makes findings that could be the basis for a finding of misconduct under the Rules of Professional Conduct, the OPC can re-open the case and address the findings.

Further, pursuant to the language in Rule 10 of the RLDD regarding the OPC authority to resolve cases "in the interests of the public, the respondent, and the Complainant," if the attorney consents to a Diversion Agreement, the OPC may also decline to prosecute cases involving minor Rules of Professional Conduct violations. The specific types of cases that are appropriate for diversion are outlined in the OPC Alternative to Discipline Policy. Generally, pursuant to the OPC Alternative to Discipline Policy, the Diversion Program is available for minor rule violations where an attorney does not have a history of disciplinary complaints or problems. Further, the Diversion Program must be appropriate to address the rule violation(s).

3) Informal Appeals

Pursuant to Rule 10(a)(6) of the RLDD, a Complainant can appeal within fifteen days to the Committee Chair the OPC's dismissal including declinations to prosecute of any informal complaint. When the OPC dismisses an informal complaint after investigation or declines to prosecute an informal complaint, it gives notice to the Complainant of the language in Rule 10(a)(6) of the RLDD and allows the Complainant the opportunity to appeal the decision. If the Complainant files an appeal, the Committee Chair conducts a de novo review of the OPC file and either affirms the dismissal or directs the OPC to prepare the informal complaint for Screening Panel hearing.

4) Screening Panel

If after investigation, the OPC determines that the allegations of the informal complaint are non-frivolous and substantial, or if the Chair or Vice-Chair of the Committee remands a case after an appeal, the OPC refers the informal complaint to a Screening Panel. The NOIC described in section 2 above is the official notice that is required for the OPC to bring the case before a Screening Panel.

A Screening Panel reviews all the facts developed by the informal complaint, the Respondent's answer, the OPC's investigation and the Screening Panel hearing. After this review, the Screening Panel may make the following determinations:

- Dismissal for lack of merit
- Dismissal with a letter of caution
- Dismissal upon condition of a specific performance by the attorney (i.e. CLE, restitution, Ethics School, etc.)

- Recommendation that the attorney be (privately) admonished or publicly reprimanded (if the Screening Panel recommends an admonition or public reprimand, the attorney has ten days to file an exception to the recommendation with the Chair of the Committee.)
- A finding of probable cause that a formal Complaint be filed with the District Court.

If the Screening Panel determines that the informal complaint should be filed as a formal Complaint, Rule 11 of the RLDD requires the OPC to prepare the formal Complaint for the signature of the Chair of the Committee. Often the attorney has more than one informal complaint pending against him/her. If there is more than one informal complaint involved, an informal complaint may be temporarily held in a Screening Panel voted-formal-not-yet-filed category until the other informal complaints pass through the Screening Panel process and can be combined into a single formal Complaint.

5) **Formal Complaints**

A formal Complaint can be filed in the county where the alleged misconduct occurred, or in the county where the attorney resides or practices law or last practiced law. Once a formal Complaint is filed with the District Court, if no settlement can be reached, the case is prepared for a bench trial. The bench trial is bifurcated, the first portion of which involves the adjudication of misconduct. If the judge does not dismiss the case and finds misconduct, the second stage of the trial is a sanctions hearing. At the end of the sanctions hearing, the judge can order sanctions and remedies that may include, but are not limited to, the following dispositions:

- | | |
|------------------------|--------------|
| ➤ Admonition | ➤ Probation |
| ➤ CLE or Ethics School | ➤ Suspension |
| ➤ Public Reprimand | ➤ Disbarment |
| ➤ Restitution | |

6) Formal Appeals

All appeals from District Court orders are directed to the Utah Supreme Court. Only the Respondent attorney or the OPC can appeal from the District Court order.

7) Monitored Cases

Monitored cases include probation cases, disability cases and trusteeship cases. Probation cases require someone to docket reminder dates, and follow-up to ensure that the attorney meets the probation requirements. Disability cases generally require someone to investigate the extent of the disability, to process the case through District Court, and to monitor the continuing status of the attorney. Trusteeship cases generally require that someone inventory the attorney's files, notify the attorney's clients of the trusteeship, and assist with distribution of client files to the clients. Additionally, trusteeship cases require someone to inventory unclaimed files, prepare a notice for publication of potential destruction of the files, prepare a request to the District Court to approve destruction of unclaimed files, and ultimately to destroy the files.

When the OPC has to undertake a trusteeship, it takes a significant amount of resources and time. It is preferable to the OPC that an attorney or firm outside of the OPC be appointed to manage trusteeships. However, since in most trusteeship cases there is little or no money for the recoupment of costs and fees, there are not always attorneys or firms that are willing and able to oversee a trusteeship.

8) Interim Suspension

Pursuant to Rules 18, 19, and 23 of the RLDD, if an attorney poses a substantial threat of irreparable harm to the public and has either committed a violation of the Rules of Professional Conduct or has been convicted of a crime which reflects adversely on

the attorney's honesty, trustworthiness, or fitness as an attorney, or is under a disability as defined in the RLDD, the OPC may file a petition for interim suspension and/or a request for trusteeship. This is an immediate filing in the District Court, and need not go through the Screening Panel process outlined above.

9) Final Dispositions

Until a case reaches a "final" disposition, the OPC considers it an active case. Final dispositions are cases where the result has been determined to be dismissal, dismissal with caution, dismissal on condition, admonition, public reprimand, disbarment, time-specified suspension, probation, resignation pending discipline, and cases in which no appeal is pending.

III. STATISTICS – Fiscal Year 2005-2006 (July 1, 2005 to June 30, 2006)

For purposes of compiling statistics, the OPC counts as one case each Request for Assistance received, informal complaint received, or attorney misconduct investigation started on the OPC's initiative. Formal Complaints filed with the District Court or Supreme Court often encompass a number of underlying informal complaints. The underlying informal complaints are not closed and considered final dispositions until an order is entered and no formal appeal is pending.

A) Case Activity

Active cases as of 7/1/05	742*
1) <u>Cases opened</u>	
Informal Complaints	229
Requests for Assistance	788
Readmission/Reinstatement/Contempt	4

* Based upon an audit performed by the OPC during the fiscal year, as well as information taken from raw data, the number of active cases reported in the previous annual report as of 7/1/05 has been adjusted from 786 to 742.

Trusteeship.....5
 Total 1026
Total cases processed during period:..... 1768

2) Informal Complaints Closed

By Declination to Prosecute85
 By Dismissal After Investigation 121
 By Dismissal After Screening Panel..... 12
 By Summary Dismissal 48
 Total 266

3) Requests for Assistance Closed

By Sending to CAP55
 By Return for Notarization147
 By Declination to Prosecute 712
 By Summary..... 19
 Total933

4) Cases Closed With Orders of:

of attys

Admonition	27	(24)
Resignation With Discipline Pending.....	20	(3)
Suspension	16	(7)
Public Reprimand.....	36	(27)
Disbarment.....	7	(5)
Miscellaneous Orders	13	(5)
Total	119	(71)

Total case closures during period:..... 1318

Active cases as of 7/1/06 450

(Open cases minus closures for fiscal year 2005-2006)

5) During the Fiscal Year 2005-2006, the OPC had open case activity as follows:

Diversions3

Informal Abeyances4

Informal Appeals55

(3 remands by Committee Chair and to date 2 have been heard by Screening Panels. The results of the remands have been 1 Screening Panel voted admonition and 1 dismissal on condition.)

Interim Suspension	5
(Representing 22 underlying informal complaints)	
Disability.....	1
(Representing 4 underlying informal complaints)	
Probation.....	2
(Representing 3 underlying informal complaints)	
Contempt.....	4
(Representing 32 underlying informal complaints)	
Trusteeship	5
(Representing 7 underlying informal complaints)	
Formal cases filed with the District Court	17
(Representing 23 underlying informal complaints)	
Formal Appeals.....	2

6) <u>Screening Panel outcomes were as follows:</u>		<u>(# of attys)</u>
Cases voted formal	25	(13)
Cases voted public reprimand.....	23	(17)
Cases voted admonition.....	17	(16)
Cases dismissed	3	(3)
Cases dismissed on condition.....	0	(0)
Cases dismissed with a caution	9	(8)
Total Screening Panel Case Outcomes.....	77	(57)

7) Stipulations

Admonitions	7	(5)
Suspensions.....	13	(7)
Public Reprimand.....	3	(3)
Resignation with Discipline Pending	20	(3)
Disbarment.....	1	(1)
Probation.....	1	(1)

8) Notice of Insufficient Funds

As part of the OPC case activity, Rule 1.15(a) of the Rules of Professional Conduct requires that attorneys maintain their trust accounts in financial institutions that agree to report to the OPC “in the event any instrument in properly payable form is

presented against an attorney trust account containing insufficient funds (NSF), irrespective of whether or not the instrument is honored.” Pursuant to this rule the OPC opened 51 NSF cases in fiscal year 2005-2006, and dismissed 38 of them. The usual reasons for dismissals of NSF cases are accounting errors, bank errors, depositing errors, or drawing on the account before a deposit clears.

9) Summary

Of the 1768 cases the OPC processed in fiscal year 2005-2006, 1199 or 67.8% were resolved by dismissals, declinations to prosecute, referral to CAP or return for notarization. Of these 1768 cases, 119 or 14.8% of the cases resulted in Orders, including Orders of Discipline. Approximately 37.8% of the Orders were by stipulation. Finally, 4.3% of the OPC’s processed cases for the year were heard by Screening Panels.

10) Beginning Fiscal Year 2006-2007

The 450 active cases with which the OPC begins Fiscal Year 2006-2007 are against 366 attorneys. The breakdown of the various stages of the 450 cases is as follows:

Requests for Assistance	138
Informal Complaints	74
Informal Abeyances	12
Informal Abeyance Removed	1
NOIC Opened	90
Diversions	14
Informal Appeals	7

Informal Appeal Remanded.....	2
Screening Panel Voted Formal (not yet filed).....	35
Screening Panel Voted Public Reprimand	3
Screening Panel Voted Admonition.....	1

(underlying informal
complaints)

Formals	37
Disability.....	2
Probation.....	4
Reinstatement.....	2
Trusteeships.....	17
Interim Suspensions.....	6
Formal Appeals.....	2
Contempt.....	3

B) Miscellaneous

1) Rule 4(b)(13) of the RLDD requires that the OPC provide informal guidance to promote ethical conduct by Bar members. In compliance with this rule, the OPC has an Ethics Hotline where the OPC attorneys give Bar members informal guidance by telephone. During fiscal year 2005-2006, the OPC rendered 575 informal ethics opinions by telephone.

Additionally, the OPC attorneys make Continuing Legal Education (“CLE”) ethics presentations. During fiscal year 2005-2006, the OPC’s CLE presentations totaled 41.5 hours. Two of the CLE presentations were the Ethics School conducted by the OPC. The OPC titles the Ethics School “What You Didn’t Learn in Law School.” Some

attorneys are required to be there as a condition of a disciplinary case, but the OPC usually opens it to the entire Bar. At the school, the OPC covers a number of topics, including the lawyer discipline process, engaging and terminating the attorney-client relationship, conflicts of interests, lawyer trust fund accounting and hot topics of ethical issues. The OPC also usually tries to have at least one judge as a guest speaker to talk about civility and professionalism. The Ethics School was held in July and January of the 2005-2006 fiscal year for 6 CLE hours each time.

Finally, with respect to ethical guidance, the OPC has provided written guidance to attorneys through publication of Utah Bar Journal articles on common ethics topics, and in brochures available to Bar members and the public. In the last fiscal year, OPC attorneys contributed four articles on the following subjects: “Avoiding Fee Disputes and the Bar Complaints That Sometimes Accompany Them” and “Ethical Considerations for Office Sharing.” The OPC anticipates continuing to publish articles on ethics topics.

2) The OPC participates in committees with respect to attorney conduct. Senior Counsel of the OPC sits as a voting member of the Utah Supreme Court’s Advisory Committee on the Rules of Professional Practice. OPC counsel sits as a non-voting member on the Utah State Bar’s Ethics Advisory Opinion Committee. And, Senior Counsel of the OPC is a voting member of the Utah Supreme Court’s Advisory Committee on Professionalism.

3) The OPC has collected and categorized other data regarding its cases. Specifically, the data collected provide statistics on the rule violations.

(A) For example, for informal complaints reviewed in fiscal year 2005-2006, in approximate percentages, the cases resulted in violations of the following rules:

<u>Percentage</u>	<u>Rule</u>
72.2%	1.4 (Communication)
48.6%	1.3 (Diligence)
34.7%	8.1 (Bar Admission and Disciplinary Matters)
31.9%	1.5 (Fees)
31.9%	1.16 (Declining or Terminating Representation)
30.6%	1.15 (Safekeeping Property)
29.2%	1.1 (Competence)
18.1%	8.4(c) (Misconduct – Deceit, Fraud, Misrepresentation)
18.0%	1.7 and 1.8 (Conflicts of Interest)
15.3%	1.2 (Scope of Representation)
13.9%	8.4(d) (Misconduct Prejudicial to the Administration of Justice)
12.5%	5.3 (Responsibilities Regarding Nonlawyer Assistants)
6.94%	3.3 (Candor Toward the Tribunal)
6.94%	8.4(b) (Misconduct – Criminal Act)
4.17%	1.6 (Confidentiality of Information)
4.17%	3.4 (Fairness to Opposing Party and Counsel)
4.17%	7.5 (Firm Names and Letterhead)
2.78%	3.2 (Expediting Litigation)
2.78%	4.3 (Dealing with Unrepresented Person)
2.78%	5.5 (Unauthorized Practice of Law)
2.78%	7.1 (Communications Concerning a Lawyer's Services)
1.39%	7.3 (Direct Contact with Prospective Clients)
1.39%	1.9 (Duties to Former Clients)
1.39%	1.14 (Client with Diminished Capacity)
1.39%	3.1 (Meritorious Claims and Contentions)
1.39%	3.5 (Impartiality and Decorum of the Tribunal)
1.39%	4.4 (Respect for Rights of Third Persons)
1.39%	5.1 (Responsibilities of Partners, Managers, and Supervisory Lawyers)
1.39%	8.2 (Judicial Officials)

The OPC's impression is that violations of Rule 1.1 (Competence) commonly derive from attorneys missing court appearances; that violations of Rule 1.5 (Fees) commonly arise from attorneys collecting fees without performing meaningful work; that violations of Rule 1.15 (Safekeeping Property) often arise from attorneys failing to

promptly provide an accounting of how fees were used; that violations of Rule 1.16 (Declining or Terminating Representation) commonly result from attorneys withholding the client file upon termination of the representation; and violations of Rule 8.1(b) (Bar Admission and Disciplinary Matters) usually are based upon attorneys failing to respond to the OPC's lawful requests for information in the course of disciplinary investigations. Accordingly, the OPC's CLE presentations often focus on helping practitioners avoid these particular problems.

(B) Looking at the source for information received in fiscal year 2005-2006, in approximate percentages the sources were as follows:

<u>Percentage</u>	<u>Source</u>
34.7%	Former Client
17.3%	Current Client
16.4%	Opposing Party
7.1%	Family Member of Client or Former Client
6.5%	OPC
4.9%	Non-Lawyer
4.1%	Lawyer – Not Opposing Counsel
3.6%	Financial Institution
1.6%	Opposing Counsel
1.2%	Law Enforcement/Government Agency
1.1%	Employee
0.5%	Witness
0.5%	Judiciary
0.4%	Reciprocal Discipline
0.2%	Other Outside Disciplinary Source

Total: 100.00%

IV. PROGRESS AND GOALS ON CASES

The OPC, like every other state bar disciplinary authority, has and will continue to have unfinished work. Furthermore, the OPC, like every other state bar disciplinary authority, has and will continue to have a percentage of its unfinished work accumulate at the informal stage. The reason for this is the nature of the work. In this regard, the

OPC processes disciplinary cases against attorneys who are often determined to use every means at their disposal to protect their “privilege” to practice law. This sometimes makes investigating and processing cases analogous to a criminal proceeding. In these cases, it tends to lengthen the processing at both the informal and post-informal stages. Notwithstanding the nature or the work, it should be noted that the OPC’s overriding mission is to perform its responsibility in a professional and civil manner.

The OPC case progress goal is to have a system in place that keeps cases moving so the unfinished work at the informal stage is in percentage numbers as small as possible. This goal must be accomplished while simultaneously, and as expeditiously as possible, moving the larger percentage of cases that are at the post-informal stage (i.e., cases before Screening Panels or the District Court; cases on appeal; cases holding for resolution of a companion formal case; or cases held in abeyance pending related litigation).

As progress points of comparison of this fiscal year with last fiscal year:

- (1) Cases received this fiscal year were down approximately 4% (1026 vs. 1066);
- (2) Dismissals this fiscal year increased by approximately 32% (1199 vs. 816);
- (3) Orders this fiscal year increased by approximately 12% (119 vs. 105);
and
- (4) Active case number at the end of the last fiscal year was reduced by approximately 39% (742 vs. 450).

The OPC has a goal to reduce its active case number each fiscal year by closing more cases in a fiscal year than the office receives in that year. This year, the OPC did accomplish this goal because it closed 1318 cases and received 1026 and reduced its active case number by about 39%.

The OPC has also established a goal of attempting to have 25% or less of its cases be in the informal stage for a period of more than six months. Of its current caseload of 450, 171 or 38% of these cases have been in the informal stage for over six months. However, 31 of the 171 cases are either diversions, abeyances, informal appeals or special prosecutor cases (special prosecutor cases are cases filed against either OPC staff, Bar Commissioners or Ethics and Discipline Committee lawyer members – which pursuant to Rule 17(f) of the RLDD, have to be prosecuted outside of the OPC). Not counting these 31 cases, about 31% of the 450 cases have been at the informal stage for a period of greater than six months. This 31% number is still outside of the OPC's goal and the OPC will strive in the upcoming fiscal year to reduce this percentage.

Finally, the OPC has the goal of bringing the majority of all its cases to final resolution in a current fiscal year. In this fiscal year, the OPC brought 74.5% of the cases it processed in the last fiscal year to a final disposition; this included bringing informal and post-informal stage cases to final dispositions. Based upon this fact, the OPC accomplished this goal. It should also be noted that while accomplishing this goal, the OPC also filed a significant number of new formal cases. In this respect, in addition to handling 4 new cases of readmission/reinstatement/contempt, the OPC filed 20 new

formal cases with the District Court (the 20 formal cases represent 37 underlying informal complaints).

The OPC does not simply concentrate its efforts on older cases: it attempts to provide expedited and efficient work on all cases, new and old. This work method is intended to keep cases progressing.

The Central Intake System has greatly aided case processing goals. Central Intake enables the OPC to address all information coming to its attention (both notarized and non-notarized) to quickly and efficiently determine the appropriate track for the information. Under this system, it is the OPC policy that summary dismissals, closures, and preliminary investigations on average are to be made within 5-10 working days. This leaves more resources to address cases raising more serious ethical allegations, resulting in quicker case processing for all cases. It should also be noted that the OPC's Alternatives to Discipline Policy has allowed the OPC to more quickly resolve cases. Furthermore, this policy has alleviated the need to spend extra OPC resources on cases involving minor ethical violations.

V. CONSUMER ASSISTANCE PROGRAM

The CAP is not part of the OPC, but the OPC works in coordination with it, and reviews information sent to the Utah State Bar as a non-notarized Request for Assistance. This review ensures that allegations of serious misconduct are not processed as Requests for Assistance. Of the 788 Requests for Assistance the OPC received in fiscal year 2005-2006, 55 were sent to CAP, and 9 ultimately came back to the OPC as informal complaints. Thus, 46 cases were resolved by CAP in fiscal year

2005-2006.* The OPC uses the resources normally needed for reviewing and resolving the cases that are handled by the CAP to process cases where there are serious ethical violations.

VI. GOALS FOR FISCAL YEAR 2006-2007

The OPC will continue to work toward the goals outlined in this report. Specifically, the OPC has a responsibility to resolve disciplinary complaints in a uniform; expeditious; professional; civil and systematic way to protect the public, clients, and the legal profession from the professional misconduct of attorneys. The overriding goal is to continue to develop the OPC case processing system to ensure that the majority of resources are utilized to more quickly prosecute those cases where it is appropriate to file formal complaints with the District Court.

CONCLUSION

The OPC staff is excellent and continues its hard work. The OPC will continue its efforts towards efficiency in the expedition of cases. The OPC looks forward to another productive year.

Billy L. Walker
Senior Counsel
Office of Professional Conduct
Utah State Bar

* Since CAP is not part of the OPC, the OPC does not have complete statistics on cases resolved by CAP in a fiscal year. In this regard, the OPC does not have statistics on information that is sent directly to CAP.