

CSBS Ombudsperson Job Description

Adapted from the International Ombudsman Association webpage below:

<http://www.ombudsassociation.org/resources/academic-pd>

Position Summary

The academic ombudsperson is a designated neutral or impartial dispute resolution practitioner whose major function is to provide confidential and informal assistance to constituents of the College of Social and Behavioral Sciences (CSBS) community, which includes students, staff, faculty, and/or administrators. Serving as a designated neutral 3rd party, the ombudsperson is neither an advocate for any individual nor the organization, but rather is an advocate for fairness, who acts as a source of information and referral, and aids in answering individual's questions, and assists in the resolution of concerns and critical situations. In considering any given instance or concern, the point of view of all parties that might be involved are taken into account. This office supplements, but does not replace, the University's existing resources for formal conflict resolution.

Reporting

The ombudsperson function is independent of existing administrative structures and reports directly to the CSBS Climate Committee. The ombudsperson does not accept notice on behalf of the university. While maintaining confidentiality of communications with inquirers, the ombudsperson may prepare a periodic report to the CSBS community. Based on anonymous aggregate data, this report discusses trends in the reporting of issues or concerns, identifies patterns or problem areas in existing policies and practices, may recommend revisions and improvements, and may assess the climate of CSBS.

Critical Skills and Characteristics

- **Communication and Problem-Solving Skills.** An ombudsperson must have outstanding communication skills and be able to communicate effectively with individuals at all levels of the organization, as well as, with people of all cultures. It is imperative that the ombudsperson has excellent problem-solving skills and be able to gather information, analyze it and, as necessary, help the inquirer develop appropriate options and actions.
- **Decision-Making/Strategic Thinking Skills.** An ombudsperson must be aware of how all decisions might impact the inquirer, as well as other stakeholders and the university/college. An ombudsperson must know how to proceed with issues, and help the inquirer assess who should be involved and at what stage.
- **Conflict Resolution Skills.** An essential element of the ombudsperson's role is that of facilitating the resolution of conflict between parties. It is important that the ombudsperson have a thorough understanding of what leads to conflict, the nature of conflict, and methods of resolution. The skills used to assist inquirers to resolve their conflicts include:
 - helping people learn how to deal with the matter directly if they wish to do so
 - serving as a facilitator between the parties via shuttle diplomacy

- informally bringing the parties together and serving as a facilitator or mediator approaching the conflict issue generically within the larger environment (especially when the inquirer is afraid of retaliation)
- influencing systems change which could obviate the individual problem

The ombudsperson may also have the ability to help the inquirer determine which conflict resolution method would be appropriate for the specific situation.

- **Organizational Knowledge and Networking Skills.** An ombudsperson must be knowledgeable about the college and university, its structure, culture, policies, and practices. The ombudsperson must have excellent networking skills, understand and participate in collaboration with others, and be able to establish and maintain broad contacts throughout the organization.
- **Sensitivity to Diversity Issues.** The ombudsperson must be sensitive to dealing with individuals from a wide variety of backgrounds and cultures. The ombudsperson must be open, objective, and must seek to understand issues from multiple perspectives. The ombudsperson should be innovative in developing options that are responsive to differing needs.
- **Composure and Presentation Skills.** An ombudsperson should maintain a professional demeanor, should have strong presentation skills, and should be able to organize and communicate information to groups of varying size and hierarchical levels in the organization.
- **Integrity.** An ombudsperson should have a reputation for integrity and for dealing fairly, effectively and in a timely fashion with all constituents.

An ombudsperson's office is based on the assurance of confidentiality to the extent to which the law allows. Therefore the ombudsperson must keep information confidential in accordance with the Code of Ethics and Standards of Practice of the International Ombudsperson Association.

An ombudsperson should not be risk-averse and should understand that this position may, on occasion, challenge even the highest levels of the administration in an effort to foster fair and just practices.

Accountabilities

Dispute Resolution, Consultation, and Referral

- Provide impartial and confidential conflict resolution services to members of the CSBS community who are aggrieved or concerned about an issue.
- Remain independent, neutral and impartial, and exercise good judgment.
- Assist inquirers in obtaining and providing relevant information regarding university policies and procedures.
- Assist inquirers in clarifying issues and generating options for resolution.
- Facilitate the inquirer's assessment of the pros and cons of possible options.

- If direct action by the ombudsperson is an appropriate option, obtain the inquirer's agreement and permission before proceeding.
- If necessary, and while maintaining confidentiality, engage in informal information gathering in order to better understand an issue from all perspectives.
- Consult with department managers and appropriate individuals to develop cooperative strategies for resolving concerns and complaints.
- With the inquirer's permission, consult with all parties to clarify and analyze problems, focus discussions, and develop a mutually-satisfactory process for resolution.
- When appropriate, facilitate group meetings, use shuttle diplomacy, or negotiation skills to facilitate communication among parties in conflict.
- Encourage flexible administrative practices to maximize the institution's ability to meet the needs of all members of the campus community equitably.
- Whenever possible and appropriate, provide inquirer with referrals to other resources, such as Human Resources, Faculty Affairs, the Employee Assistance Program, University Counseling Services, Campus Health Center, Campus Safety, and the like.
- Follow up with inquirers as appropriate to determine outcome and further need of assistance.

Policy Analysis and Feedback

- Serve as a college resource for administrators in formulating or modifying policy and procedures, raising issues that might surface as a result of a gap between the stated goals of the college and actual practice.
- Act as a liaison between individuals or groups and the college administrative structure, serving as a communicator or informal facilitator, as appropriate, and providing upward feedback.
- Function as a sensor within the college community to identify problems or trends that affect the entire college or significant parts of the college; if appropriate, recommend creative ways to address these concerns.
- Provide early warning of new areas of organizational concern, upward feedback, critical analysis of systemic needs for improvement, and make systems change recommendations.

College Community Outreach and Education

- The ombudsperson is responsible for ongoing education and communication about the office's role to all potential inquirers as well as to college leadership.
- Design and conduct training programs for the college community in dispute/conflict resolution, negotiation skills and theory, civility, and related topics.

Education and Work Experience

The academic ombudsperson should have an advanced degree combined with relevant dispute resolution training or ombudsperson experience is preferred. Experience working with people of diverse backgrounds and cultures is also desired.