

UNIVERSITY OF WYOMING OMBUDS OFFICE

ANNUAL REPORT 2023

Mission

The Ombuds Office at the University of Wyoming offers facilitated conversations, mediation, problem solving tools and conflict resolution strategies to students, faculty, and staff in a safe, confidential, informal, independent, and neutral space.

Summary of Accomplishments

- 105 visits¹
- 65 visitors
- Established new office, including creating a marketing plan and content for advertising
- Standard Administrative Procedures in development with General Council and Office of the President
- Education and outreach included meetings with multiple stakeholders, including the three Senates
- Relocated the office to ensure greater confidentiality, lowered barriers for visitors
- Created new website to that includes helpful videos and cheat sheet <https://www.uwyo.edu/ombuds/index.html>

Summary of Staff and Faculty Concerns

- Leadership and supervisory issues
- Research obstacles
- Communication problems
- Sexism/Old Boy's Network
- Lack of supervisory knowledge regarding federal guidelines for ADA and FMLA
- Retaliation

Summary of Student Concerns

- Unfair, arbitrary, or biased grading practices
- Difficulty with advisors
- Discrimination
- Tensions in lab with either other students or faculty advisors

¹ Breakdown of visitors: 32 staff, 14 faculty, 14 undergraduates, 5 graduate students

Overview of Concerns

In some cases, problems arose between co-workers and those in smaller departments felt the repercussions throughout. In those cases, multiple meetings were held between the various constituents. Many female staff and faculty relayed frustration about sex-based discrimination, and throughout both groups and all genders, the feeling that there was a very strong “old boys’ network” was pervasive. Both faculty and staff expressed that policies weren’t always clear, especially for ADA and FMLA accommodations. Notably, supervisors and chairs seemed unaware of basic principles of these federal guidelines.

For undergraduates, concerns revolved around unfair, arbitrary, or biased grading practices, discrimination, difficulty with advisors, and a need for help navigating appeals.

Graduate students came to the Ombuds Office to discuss inappropriate demands made by advisors, discrimination, and tensions with other students in their cohort.

Plans and Priorities for 2024

Requests for conflict resolution workshops have been heard and these are in development with the intention to begin offering them no later than April 2024. “Embracing Conflict: How to Have a Difficult Conversation” includes the tried and tested aspects of the “cheat sheet” available on the [website](#), however here we will put those principals into practice with role playing exercises. “Getting Along” is based on Amy Gallo’s book, *How to Work with Anyone (Even Difficult People)*. This workshop might be especially useful for supervisors.

The Ombuds Office is offering a department-wide workshop, “Rules of Engagement” to improve office communications. Initial steps include asking each member of the department to list 5 to 8 things that would make their department more effective and collegial. The Ombuds would then consolidate those suggestions into 5 rules and the department would meet to discuss them and find agreement. These “rules of engagement” would be discussed at each staff meeting and posted so that employees could refer to them. The Ombuds would then check in with the group after one month, three months, and six months, and then on an as-needed basis.

In answer to requests for greater communication and conflict resolution resources, the Ombuds Office is opening a lending library for students, staff, and faculty.

The ideal is to stem conflict before it erupts. In that vein, the Ombuds has convened the campus-wide Conflict Management Group, which has 21 members. In this group we will streamline complaint processes, alert each other to potential problems, and act as a support for those on the front lines of conflict at the university. We have all heard the story of the person who gets routed from office to office with increasing frustration and the aim of this group is to minimize, if not eliminate this kind of frustration and effectively address individuals' concerns.

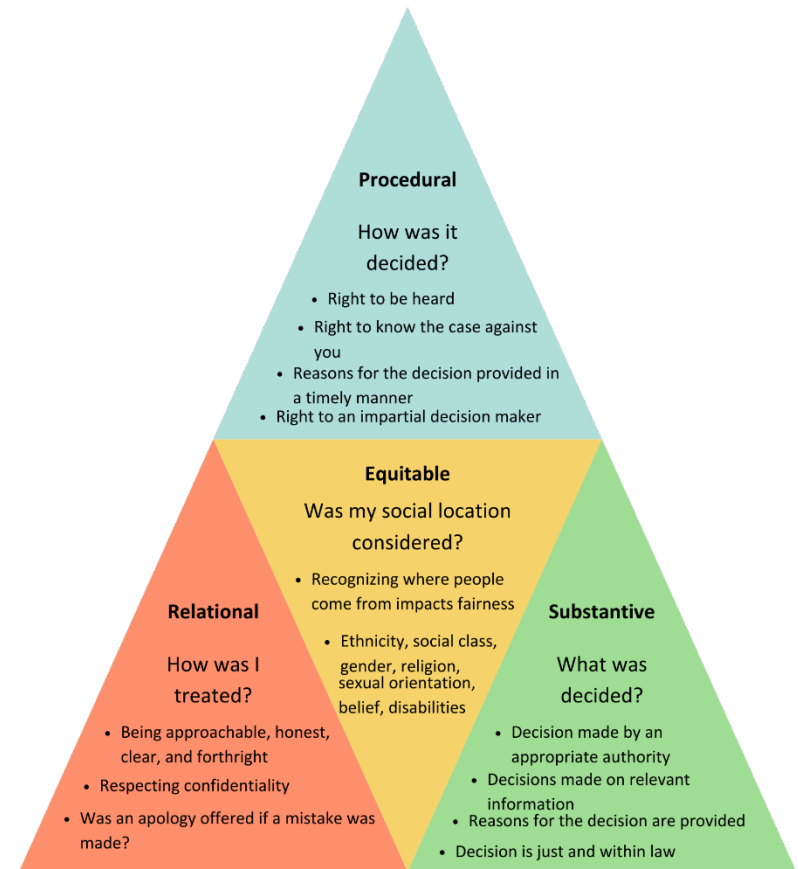
Professional Development Plans

As a member of the International Ombuds Association (IOA), the Ombuds takes advantage of the IOA's webinars. This year, the Ombuds is participating in the National Equity Project Workshop Series for Ombuds, a two-part virtual workshop. As well, the Ombuds will sit for the IOA CO-OP® certification exam and undertake national mediation certification.

Concluding Remarks

The Ombuds Office supports the university's strategic plan by providing conflict resolution tools to enhance student success and provide a supportive community in the pursuit of academic and institutional excellence. In that vein, the Ombuds provides confidential, neutral, informal, and independent, support to those employed or educated by the university. One priority of the office is to increase campus awareness of the Ombuds Office. Outreach includes the regular attendance at Staff Senate, Faculty Senate, and the ASUW Town Hall, and to reach those without regular access to the internet, the Ombuds Office has partnered with AVP Michael Samp. In accordance with the International Ombuds Association practicing principles, the Ombuds Office is committed to providing conflict resolution and communication tools to create a more collegial environment at the University of Wyoming.

The Fairness Triangle



University of Alberta

This graphic represents the Ombuds' process and best practices.