



Standard Administrative Policy and Procedure

Subject: University Ombuds

Number:

I. PURPOSE

The Office of the Ombuds at the University of Wyoming provides the faculty, staff, and students at the University of Wyoming an informal setting in which to share dilemmas, concerns, ideas, and questions, without fear of exposure or retaliation.

II. DEFINITIONS

International Ombudsman Association: Many organizational Ombuds, including the University of Wyoming Office of the Ombuds, practice according to the International Ombudsman Association Code of Ethics and Standards of Practice.

Ombudsperson or “Ombuds”: At the University of Wyoming, the term Ombuds refers to the professional staff in the Office of the Ombuds who serve the University. Most Ombuds who work in US-based academic settings are “Organizational Ombuds” and work to address concerns and problems of their constituencies using informal means.

III. POLICY

The Ombuds Office assists individuals in resolving conflict, facilitating communication, and assisting the University by surfacing issues and providing feedback on emerging or systemic concerns. It will operate in a way that supports the University's values of integrity and inclusion. The Ombuds is neither an advocate for its visitors (the people who see the Ombuds) nor a representative of University administration. Rather, the Ombuds is impartial, advocating for respectful dialogue, fair practices, and mutual understanding.

IV. OMBUDS ROLE AND PRINCIPLES

A. The Office of the Ombuds provides the following services:

1. Facilitation and mediation
2. Conflict management tools and resources
3. An informal option rather than an investigating body
4. Information on and help in understanding policies and procedures

5. Strategy development and formation
6. A safe space to speak without judgment

B. The Office of the Ombuds does not:

1. Provide legal advice
2. Provide mental health assistance
3. Investigate claims
4. Act as a personal advocate
5. Act as an office of notice

C. Standards of Practice

At the University of Wyoming, the Office of the Ombuds adheres to the International Ombuds Association principles of practice: independence, impartiality, informality, and confidentiality.

1. **Independent:** The Ombuds is independent and not a mandatory reporter as delineated in the Equal Opportunity, Harassment, and Nondiscrimination SAP (https://www.uwyo.edu/regs-policies/_files/docs/policies/eo-harassment-nondiscrim-sap-approved-8-14-20.pdf). The office advances the principles of fairness and equity while working throughout the campus to improve and enhance the fairness of policies and procedures for everyone.
2. **Impartial:** The Ombuds is independent, neutral, and unbiased. The office will help visitors develop ideas and strategies, understand policies and procedures, and provide interpersonal tools and resources.
3. **Informal:** The Office of the Ombuds is an informal meeting place—a safe space to talk about issues and concerns. It is informal in that the Ombuds does not engage in investigations or legal proceedings. The Ombuds is an alternative dispute resolution resource, meaning the office engages in mediation, facilitation, and conflict resolution training in an effort to enhance communication and collaboration throughout campus.
4. **Confidential:** The Ombuds will not reveal anything a visitor relays while in the execution of official duties nor that a particular person was a visitor of the office. However, in the case of imminent harm to yourself or others, the Ombuds is obligated to report these concerns. Confidentiality does not apply to matters relating to threats to public safety, child abuse, if there is imminent risk of serious harm, or if compelled by a court of law.

D. Authorized Duties

Ombuds Officers have the authority to contact senior officers and all other members of the University community, to gather information in the course of looking into a problem, to mediate disputes, to bring concerns to the attention of those in authority, and attempt to expedite and resolve administrative processes.

1. **Initiating Informal Inquiries:** The Ombuds shall be entitled to inquire, informally, about any issue concerning the University and affecting any member of the University community but will not divulge the identity of the visitor without the visitor's consent. The Ombuds may initiate informal inquiries into matters without a specific complaint from an affected member of the University community. Participation of others on campus is entirely voluntary.
2. **Access to Information:** During an inquiry, the Ombuds may request access to information from files and offices of the University and shall respect the confidentiality of that information. If other departments voluntarily choose to respond to Ombuds' requests for information, such responses should be handled with reasonable promptness.
3. **Discussions with Visitors and Others:** The Ombuds has the authority to discuss a range of options available to their visitors, including both informal and formal processes. The Ombuds may make any recommendations to resolving problems or improving policies, rules, or procedures. However, the Ombuds does not have authority to impose remedies or sanctions, nor require certain processes that enforce or change any policy, rule, or procedure.

E. Record Keeping

The Office of the Ombuds does not keep or retain records except as is required by law. Any emails between the Office of the Ombuds and any other person may be subject to public record requests.

The Office of the Ombuds does collect anonymous feedback and de-identified statistics to improve its internal processes and systems and to create annual reports.

F. Conflict of Interest

The Ombuds will recuse themselves from actual or potential conflict of interest if the Office believes involvement in a matter would be inappropriate. The Office of the Ombuds may withdraw or decline to look into a matter based on scope, jurisdiction, limitation, and conflict of interest.

V. LIMITATIONS AND NOTICE

The Office of the Ombuds will refer matters relating to denial of faculty tenure or promotion, formal academic personnel dispute resolution processes with the faculty conciliator or the hearing committee, termination of an employee during the probationary period, student conduct and academic integrity, and issues that have been formally noticed for University compliance investigators. If a visitor of the office has a concern relating to one of these issues, the Ombuds will refer the visitor to other resources.

The Office of the Ombuds serves as a resource for current faculty, students, staff, post-doctoral fellows, and administrators.

A. Receiving Notice for the University

Communication with the Ombuds shall not constitute notice to the University. This includes allegations regarding violations of laws, regulations or policies, including but not limited to sexual harassment, discrimination, issues covered by whistleblower policies or laws, or incidents subject to reporting under the Clery Act. Although the Ombuds may receive such allegations, they are not a “campus security authority” as defined in the Clery Act, nor are they required to report these allegations to the University. In addition, if the visitor discloses such allegations and expresses a desire to make a formal report, the Ombuds shall refer the visitor to the appropriate University office(s) for investigation, response, remediation, support, or grievance processes.

B. Putting the University on Notice

If a visitor would like to put the University on notice regarding a specific situation or wishes for information to be provided to the University, the Ombuds shall provide the visitor with information to do it themselves. In certain situations, including but not limited to situations that involve public safety, harm to self or others, or child abuse, an Ombuds may have an ethical obligation to put the University on notice to protect the safety of members of the University community. If the Ombuds decides to put the University on notice, they shall, to the extent practicable, do so in writing.

C. Formal Processes and Investigations

The Ombuds shall not conduct formal investigations. The Ombuds shall also not participate in the substance of any formal dispute processes, outside agency complaints or lawsuits, either on behalf of a visitor to the Ombuds or on behalf of the University unless compelled to do so by court order or applicable law.

D. Adjudication of Issues

The Ombuds shall not have authority to adjudicate, impose remedies or sanctions, or to enforce or change University policies or rules.

VI. PROHIBITION ON INQUIRY OR RETALIATION

The University supports efforts to manage and resolve concerns informally, so as to preserve collegial and effective working relationships, maintain a vibrant University community, and avoid the time and expense required in formal processes.

Because the Ombuds Program is intended to be a confidential resource, it is not appropriate to inquire about an individual's use of the program or any communication that may have taken place there. Furthermore, discouraging or preventing anyone who is eligible from using the program is prohibited. An individual's use of the program or participation in the process will always be completely voluntarily. It is acceptable to remind individuals and groups that the program is available as an option or a resource.

VII. ANNUAL REPORT

Annually, the Ombuds will prepare a report of the work of the Office of the Ombuds consisting of aggregate statistics relating to office usage, types of cases handled, analysis of salient topics and trends, and recommendations for adjustments or additional implications for university conflict resolution approaches. This report will be provided to the President of the University and to the campus community. A comprehensive review of both the program and the role of the Ombuds will be conducted at no longer than three-year intervals.

Responsible Division/Unit: Office of the President

Sources: [International Ombudsman Association and Standards of Practice](#) and [International Ombudsman Association Standards of Practice](#).

Links: <http://www.uwyo.edu/regs-policies>

Associated Regulations, Policies, and Forms: None

Approved: 2/29/2024