

**UConn Ombuds Office Annual Report
June 1, 2015 – June 30, 2017**

Included in this report are data and commentary from the third and fourth years' operation of the UConn Ombuds Office. Issues or concerns raised by visitors are tabulated according to the International Ombudsman Association (IOA) uniform reporting categories (a copy of the IOA categories is appended to this report). In some places, data are further subdivided according to graduate student, non-faculty, or faculty employee status. Cumulative data and 3 year averages are also presented.

When reviewing the data, it is important to interpret the information in the context of how an ombuds comes in contact with visitors and how issues are tabulated. Visitors voluntarily contact the office; no one is compelled to interact with the UConn Ombuds. The ombuds serves as a neutral party and does not attempt to investigate the veracity of any statements by visitors or determine the facts of what is being described. The issues raised are based on what visitors report and then translated into the IOA categories. Thus, there are no verbatim quotes from visitors nor is there information that might reveal the source of a reported issue.

Visitors

The visitor data presented can only be interpreted as *the number (or percentage) of employees or graduate students experiencing a campus concern who have chosen to contact the Ombuds Office as a neutral and confidential means to explore options towards resolving an issue*. The data presented **do not** represent the percentage of all employees or graduate students experiencing conflict nor the extent to which employees and graduate students seek other informal methods of resolving conflict.

Approximate employee usage rates of ombuds offices at colleges and universities range from 1% to 5% of the constituency population. The employee usage rate during the first four years of the UConn Ombuds Office fluctuates between 3 and 4%. The graduate student usage rate approaches 1%. Over the four-year period, faculty, professional staff, and nonprofessional staff visitor numbers have been relatively stable. The number of graduate student and non-unionized management visitors has progressively increased. Overall, in year 3, there was a 20% increase in visitors over the previous year. In year 4 (13 month period), there was a 14% increase in visitors compared to year 3.

Issues or concerns raised by visitors to the Ombuds Office

Issues raised range across several categories for any given visitor. Often, a visitor will have in mind one or a few main concern(s) but several other issues will be revealed during the course of an interaction. The Ombuds makes no attempt to assess what a visitor's *major concern* or *most important concern* may be when recording issues. Despite this limitation, the data may be helpful to readers in discerning the types and frequencies of issues on the minds of people choosing to explore informal resolutions or other approaches to problems affecting their work. As is the case with usage rate, the types of issues raised are very much in line with reports from ombuds offices at other universities.

The largest IOA category of concern raised by visitors was in the area of *Evaluative Relationships*, issues arising amidst supervisor-supervisee relationships (45% of all issues). This observation is a consistent finding in the reports of most ombuds reports available for review. During the third and fourth year, many of these visits focus on the criteria used in evaluation and the interpersonal dynamics between supervisors and supervisees during the exercise of authority. The commentary section of this two-year report focuses on these types of interactions.

Mirroring the response of institutions in academia, private industry, and government, the University of Connecticut established the Ombuds Office in 2013 to assist employees and graduate students pursuing informal resolution of campus concerns or problems. The Ombuds Office is located on the 2nd level of the Homer Babbidge Library and maintains a campus webpage at www.ombuds.uconn.edu. The UConn Ombuds is intended to serve as an *organizational ombudsperson*. There are a variety of Ombuds models all emphasizing that the incumbent has no command authority in the organization, functions independently of normal reporting channels, does not serve in other roles that could jeopardize neutrality, and is committed to confidentiality of communications to the extent allowed by law.^a The distinction of an *organizational ombudsperson* is the absence of the intention or ability to conduct formal investigations, be a finder of facts, publish findings, or render judgments on grievances whereas *statutory* or *classical ombuds* are vested with some or all of these powers. The UConn Ombuds Office Charter describing the office and the Standards of Practice and Code of Ethics of the IOA are appended to this report.

Respectfully submitted,



Jim Wohl, DVM, MPA
UConn Ombuds

Estimated Ombuds Office Service Population: The Ombuds Office service population includes faculty and non-faculty employees and graduate students at the Storrs and regional campuses but does not include the UConn Health Center. These estimated numbers and percentages of employee and graduate student populations are unofficial numbers tabulated solely for the purpose of interpreting the visitor data for the University Ombuds Office.

Table 1. Total Estimated Employees: ~ 4918

Classification	Number	% total
Faculty *	~1857	~38%
Non-faculty / Non-GA	~3061	~62%

* tenure track and non tenure track

Table 1a. Total Estimated Employees by Union Membership

Classification	Number	% total employees
AAUP	~1813	~36.0%
UCPEA	~1889	~38.2%
NP-2 (CEUI)	~460	~9.8%
NP-3 (AFSCME)	~144	~4.6%
NP-5 (CPFU)	~136	~2.3%
Total	~ 4345	(91%)

Table 1c. Total Graduate/Professional Students and Post Docs in Ombuds Office Service Population

Total Graduate & Professional Students	~ 6434
Total Post Docs	~137

UConn Ombuds Office Visitor Data: Each visit represents a single voluntary contact to the office by an individual. Each visit could represent a single interaction with the individual initiating the contact or a more involved series of meetings including meetings with other individuals or groups.

Table 2. Ombuds Office Visitor Demographics & Employee Classification 2013-2017
{Total visitors = 271 (year 3), 310 (year 4)}

Classification	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4	3yr Average
Total	214	225	271	310	269
Faculty	53 (25%)	52 (23%)	52 (19%)	49 (16%)	51
Staff	116 (54%)	126 (56%)	148 (55%)	126 (41%)	133
AAUP	49	49	52	49	50
UCPEA	69	78	77	67	74
NP-2	6	3	9	5	6
AFSCME	8	8	7	3	6
NP-5	4	6	3	2	4
Administration	27 (13%)	27 (12%)	35 (13%)	65 (21%)	42
Grad	35 (16%)	38 (17%)	58 (21%)	89 (29%)	62
Other	10 (5%)	9 (4%)	13 (5%)	10 (3%)	11

Table 3. Ombuds Actions in Response to visitors 2013-2107 (multiple actions may be taken with any given visitor).

Action	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4	3 yr Average
Individual consultation / problem solving	157 (73%)	153 (68%)	196 (72%)	220 (71%)	71%
Referral to policy or campus agency/office	40 (19%)	40 (18%)	38 (14%)	65 (21%)	18%
Facilitation with third parties	39 (18%)	65 (29%)	62 (23%)	77 (25%)	25%
Notify campus office on behalf of visitor	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	2 (<1%)	4 (1%)	<1%
Inquiry to campus office on behalf of visitor	25 (12%)	21 (9%)	32 (12%)	38 (12%)	11%
Look into situation	22 (10%)	11 (5%)	14 (5%)	13 (4%)	5%
Provide upward feedback to administrators / leaders	16 (7.5%)	5 (2%)	9 (3%)	15 (5%)	4%

Individual consultation / problem solving: Listening, providing and receiving information, reframing issues, discussing options for addressing a visitor's concern rather than choosing for a visitor how to respond. Many visitors to an ombuds office are seeking an impartial listener to assist them in verbally expressing a concern. No further action may be desired or needed.

Referral to policy or campus agency/office: Ombuds are in a position to respond to confidential inquiries for referral to appropriate offices or services that are available on campus. The ombuds must be well versed in university complaint and notification procedures and have a working knowledge of the appropriate offices responsible for regulatory and compliance functions of the university. This information resource function compliments the ombuds practice of remaining up to date and knowledgeable of current university policies.

Facilitation with third parties: A visitor may seek the ombuds assistance in finding an intermediary in speaking with another party privately in resolving a conflict – sometimes shuttling between disputants and other times through a facilitated discussion similar to mediation. The intermediary may be the ombuds or another appropriate person. The ombuds may serve as a facilitator with groups when requested and appropriate or refer multiparty conflicts to facilitation services elsewhere on or off campus. The ombuds only serves in this role with the permission of the involved parties.

Notify campus office on behalf of visitor: Under certain circumstances, the ombuds may notify a campus office of information on behalf of a visitor in order to surface allegations while protecting the observer's identity or safety.

Inquiry to campus office on behalf of visitor: A visitor may wish to confidentially seek clarification regarding the meaning of a specific university policy or procedure.

Look into situation: The ombuds does not perform formal fact finding investigations. On rare occasions, the informal practice of looking into or following up on an issue at the request of a visitor wishing to remain anonymous may be undertaken with the understanding that the information may be used in advancing an informal resolution. When looking into a situation uncovers that a more formal investigation is warranted, the ombuds will inform the visitor of the appropriate office of responsibility.

Provide upward feedback to administrators / leaders: Throughout the year, the ombuds may report observations or serial related concerns that are tied to systemic conditions, ambiguities, or absence of policy. Such feedback is made while preserving visitor confidentiality.

Table 4. Total Issues Raised by Visitors – IOA Categories
% of total concerns raised/% of visitors expressing concern

Issue Category	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4	3 yr % visitors
Compensation & Benefits	2%/8%	1%/3%	2%/4%	2%/4%	4%
Evaluative Relationships	45%/63%	51%/68%	29%/57%	42%/66%	64%
Peer & Colleague Relationships	9%/21%	10%/20%	11%/22%	8%/20%	21%
Career Profession and Development	11%/33%	8%/28%	17%/34%	15%/37%	33%
Legal, Regulatory, Financial, and Compliance	5%/22%	5%/16%	11%/23%	5%/17%	19%
Safety, Health, and Physical Environment	2%/8%	1%/3%	3%/5%	2%/4%	4%
Services/Administration Issues	8%/30%	6%/22%	12%/24%	15%/28%	25%
Organizational, Strategic, and Mission Related	16%/27%	15%/25%	12%/24%	9%/27%	25%
Values, Ethics, and Standards	2%/8%	3%/11%	3%/7%	2%/9%	9%

Ombuds Commentary

Problems arising between people whose campus relationship features an authority, hierarchy, or power difference to one another represents the most common type of concern brought to the Ombuds Office. This feature is true of nearly every U.S. campus ombuds office of which I'm aware. Few are surprised to learn this reality of ombuds practice; intuitively, when one is permitted to direct and evaluate another's activities, conflicts can be expected.

We tend to describe such problems in terms of idiosyncratic management styles conflicting with an illusive consensus on appropriate workplace culture and professional decorum. In a more granular way, however, troubled professional relationships and workplace cultures evolve by a series of *oppositional moments* occurring between people. Opposition and disagreement arise every day over ideas, behaviors, approaches to assigned tasks, and the assessment of one's work activities. Indeed, a major justification for a hierarchy of positional authority in organizations is to manage the inherent opposition arising out of, simply, doing work.

When asymmetry of power exists between people, the expression of opposition takes on implications for individuals and the office environment. Dr. Laurie Weingart of Carnegie Mellon University and her colleagues reviewed what transpires during oppositional interactions in workplace settings. Interested in which types of interactions are most

associated with healthy work environments, the researchers looked at the *intensity* of the communication while expressing opposition as well as the *directness* (or *indirectness*) of the communication. Their conclusions resonate with narratives heard in the Ombuds Office: **direct and low intensity expression of opposition comports with healthier workplace environments.** In contrast, high intensity and indirect communication was more likely to be associated with conflict spiraling: the cyclical escalation and de-escalation of interpersonal conflict (and the energy that's spent maintaining the spiral!). Importantly, high intensity communication does not only refer to yelling or other forms of overt aggressiveness but specifically relates to how entrenched or subversive another one acts. Sarcasm, teasing, eye rolls, undermining to third parties, backstabbing, and triangulation can constitute high intensity expression in the absence of shouting. The directness of expression refers to how clear and unambiguous the opposition is communicated.

In hierarchies, those with authority also have the legitimate responsibility to direct the activities of others and thereby influence the behavior of the individuals in their reporting structure. But authority to influence another's behavior is not boundless; it is easy to see there are limitations to one's ability to influence the behavior of another with less power in the hierarchy. Many of the conversations in the Ombuds Office center on the perceptions of these limits of influence, the personal, societal, and organizational sources they derive from, who maintains the limits, and how people are held accountable to the ethical boundaries that exist in the exercise of positional power.

Moral principles identified by philosophers Beauchamp and Childress have been applied to medical ethics, social science research, and public service and seem equally applicable to organizational life. These principles, or pillars, of ethical behavior towards others include

- 1) **Autonomy:** respecting an other's right to self-determination, their right to make choices, hold views, and take actions based on personal values and beliefs
- 2) **Nonmaleficence:** refraining from inflicting harm on another
- 3) **Beneficence:** obligating oneself to promoting the well being of an other
- 4) **Justice:** treating others equitably and distributing benefits and burdens fairly.

Social ethicist Herbert Kelman, applied these moral principles specifically to hierarchal relationships in organizations – relationships where one person with positional authority attempts to influence the behavior of one in a less powerful position. For Kelman, the simple possession of power over another activates these moral obligations during those moments of influence, including moments of opposition, between supervisors and supervisees or between advisors and graduate students.

Often, attempting to influence another's behavior requires balancing these principles. What prompts many visits to the Ombuds Office are the *means* by which influence is exerted during moments of opposition when asymmetrical power exists between individuals. Kelman (Kelman and Warwick, 1977) defines the tactics available to the person with power as falling on a continuum ranging from *coercion* to *manipulation* to *persuasion* to *facilitation*. These methods track from the least respectful of the other's autonomy to the most accommodating.

Asymmetrical power complicates the interpretation of the tactics employed. For example, from a graduate student's point of view, an advisor's persuasion may look and feel more like manipulation or coercion. Similarly, a policy or a supervisor's directive that seemingly presents options from which an employee is free to choose (facilitation), may be construed to direct employees towards a preferred choice (manipulation). All the ambiguities in communicating influence can't likely be eliminated. But a thoughtful approach to the ethical implications of the power in our relationships and the methods we use to exercise influence can help.

But beyond the *way* we communicate influence over another, what ethical constraints on our influence do exist and from where do the limits of the legitimate influence one has over another derive? First, attention to the ethical principles advanced by Beauchamp and Childress provide guidance to people with authority wishing to act ethically. As Kelman states, the principle of beneficence refers to "a positive duty to promote the welfare of those with whom we interact, and particularly on whom we seek to exert influence, applies to the hierarchical relationships within organizations as much as it does to other human relationships."

Certainly there are societal norms that establish acceptable behavior. Most obviously federal and state laws establish boundaries on the acceptable exercise of authority. But even when coercive or manipulation tactics are legitimately employed, for example, when administering discipline for documented poor performance or discontinuing a graduate student's program, society has expectations that methods are used in a fair, considerate, and nondiscriminatory way that protects peoples' rights.

Within an organization, Kelman describes three necessary boundaries that limit the influence on people with less positional power. First are documents that establish the domain where influence is permissible. Human resource policies, the Graduate Handbook, and union contracts are examples of policies that limit influence to the domain of the working relationship (rather than behavior outside of one's job or behavior in one's personal life). A second set of boundaries is organizational norms specifying the appropriateness of influence tactics and which of those a superior is entitled to use with subordinates. These norms are animated through management training, codes of conduct, campus efforts towards creating a respectful workplace, and pronouncements from UConn leadership. Even when coercive or manipulative approaches are employed, norms can dictate that influence is conducted transparently and with awareness of the power differential that exist in the relationships. The third necessary boundary includes

readily available mechanisms of recourse and accountability within the organization to limit abuse of power-based influence. Access to one's union, UConn compliance offices, and the Ombuds Office are mechanisms by which abuses of influence can be redressed as a means of correcting boundaries, restoring individuals' autonomy, and reinforcing organizational norms.

In the Ombuds Office, most conflicts between supervisors and supervisees center on whether or not a set of behaviors - the way one has been treated - is acceptable. Put simply, is this treatment I'm expected to tolerate or should I *not* be expected to experience this behavior? Rarely do these questions fall on whether one possesses the authority but rather whether the exercise of that power crosses ethical or moral boundaries. When our policies, contractual agreements, and norms are silent or ambiguous, reliance on respecting individual autonomy and exercising beneficence, nonmaleficence, and justice can guide us to the ethical exercise of power in our campus environment.

- 1 Weingart L.R., Behfar K.J., Bendersky C., Todorova G., Jehn, K.A. (2015). The Directness and Oppositional Intensity of Conflict Expression. *Academy of Management Review*, 40(2), 235-262.
- 2 Beauchamp, T. & Childress J. (2013). *Principles of Biomedical Ethics, 7th Edition*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- 3 Beauchamp, T.L., Faden, R.R., Wallace, R.J. & Walters, L. (Eds.) (1982). *Ethical issues in social science research*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press.
- 4 Kelman, H.C. & Warwick, D.P. (1977). The ethics of social intervention. Goals, means, and consequences. In G. Bermant, H.C. Kelman, & D. P. Warwick (Eds.), *The ethics of social intervention* (pp. 3-33). Washington, DC: Hemisphere.
- 5 Kelman HC. *Ethical limits on the use of influence in hierarchical relationships*. In: In J.M. Darley, D. Messick, & T.R. Tyler (Eds.), *Social influences on ethical behavior in organizations*. Mahwah, NJ, and London: Lawrence Erlbaum ; 2001. pp. 11-20.



INTERNATIONAL
OMBUDSMAN
ASSOCIATION

IOA CODE OF ETHICS

PREAMBLE

The IOA is dedicated to excellence in the practice of Ombudsman work. The IOA Code of Ethics provides a common set of professional ethical principles to which members adhere in their organizational Ombudsman practice.

Based on the traditions and values of Ombudsman practice, the Code of Ethics reflects a commitment to promote ethical conduct in the performance of the Ombudsman role and to maintain the integrity of the Ombudsman profession.

The Ombudsman shall be truthful and act with integrity, shall foster respect for all members of the organization he or she serves, and shall promote procedural fairness in the content and administration of those organizations' practices, processes, and policies.

ETHICAL PRINCIPLES

INDEPENDENCE

The Ombudsman is independent in structure, function, and appearance to the highest degree possible within the organization.

NEUTRALITY AND IMPARTIALITY

The Ombudsman, as a designated neutral, remains unaligned and impartial. The Ombudsman does not engage in any situation which could create a conflict of interest.

CONFIDENTIALITY

The Ombudsman holds all communications with those seeking assistance in strict confidence, and does not disclose confidential communications unless given permission to do so. The only exception to this privilege of confidentiality is where there appears to be imminent risk of serious harm.

INFORMALITY

The Ombudsman, as an informal resource, does not participate in any formal adjudicative or administrative procedure related to concerns brought to his/her attention.

University of Connecticut (UConn) Ombuds Office: Office Charter: ¹

I. Introduction

The UConn Ombuds Office provides resources and assistance to individuals seeking the informal resolution of workplace problems in a confidential, informal, and independent manner. The Ombuds Office is designed to be a confidential, neutral resource where staff, faculty, administrators, and graduate students can go for assistance in identifying available options, facilitating productive communication, and surfacing responsible concerns regarding university policies and practices. The role and authority of the Ombuds² are established by the Office of the President, but the services of the Ombuds Office are neither directed nor controlled by the President. Further, other than as explained below, communications made to the Ombudsman are not shared with UConn or any of its officials. This Charter defines the role, privileges, and responsibilities of the UConn Ombuds Office.

II. Purpose and Scope of Services

The Ombuds provides informal dispute resolution services to UConn faculty, administrators, graduate students, and professional and staff employees.¹ The Ombuds Office is a place where these constituents can seek guidance regarding workplace problems or concerns at no cost and without fear of retaliation. Consultation with the Ombuds is entirely voluntary and may not be compelled by the University or an employee.

To the extent permitted by law, the Ombuds Office receives questions and concerns about individual situations or broader systemic issues and keeps them confidential. The response of the Ombudsman is tailored to the dynamics of the situation and the nature of the concerns. The Ombudsman will listen, make informal inquiries or otherwise review matters received, offer resolution options, make referrals, and informally mediate disputes independently and impartially. The Ombudsman will assist individuals in reaching resolutions that are consistent with the stated ideals, objectives and policies of UConn.

Services offered by the Ombuds Office supplement, but do not replace, other more formal processes available to university employees and graduate students. The Ombudsman serves as an information and communication resource. The Ombuds also is a catalyst for institutional change for the University through reporting of trends and identifying opportunities to enhance policies and procedures. The Ombudsman has no authority to impose remedies or sanctions. Nor does the Ombuds have the authority to enforce, make exceptions to, or change any UConn policy, rule, or procedure.

¹ Undergraduate students may use services provided by the Division of Student Affairs, such as the Office of Student Services and Advocacy.

² The terms "ombudsman" and "ombuds" are considered synonymous and are used interchangeably throughout this document.

Services of the Ombuds Office include but are not limited to:

Providing individual problem assistance services

- Listening impartially to concerns and providing a confidential place to collaboratively explore problems
- Developing options for informal approaches to resolving concerns
- Pointing employees and graduate students toward available services and resources and obtaining applicable information, including university policies, procedures, and materials
- Exploring early problem solving approaches as a means of avoiding escalation of conflicts and empowering individuals to find their own solutions to problems when appropriate
- Coaching and training and/or referral to resources on communication and interpersonal relationship skills in the workplace

Providing conflict resolution services

- Facilitating communication between parties during conflict
- Serving as facilitator for group problem solving and consensus development
- Assisting groups in the design and implementation of collaborative decision making processes
- Mediating and advising mediation as an informal conflict resolution process
- Alerting individuals or groups to available formal channels for conflict resolution

Serving the UConn campus community

- Identifying observed trends or problems areas
- Providing feedback relating to changes in policies or procedures
- Educating and informing the campus community about conflict resolution through presentations and office literature
- Modeling fairness, equity, inclusion, and civility in carrying out duties

The Ombuds Office will publish an annual report that will describe the activities of the office and aggregate data on the concerns raised at the office in a manner that protects the identity of visitors.

Receiving Notice for the University

The Ombuds Office does not receive or record complaints on behalf of the University of Connecticut and the Ombuds is not designated by the University as an individual authorized to receive reports of any violations of university policy or the law.

THEREFORE, COMMUNICATIONS TO THE OMBUDS OFFICE REGARDING POSSIBLE VIOLATIONS OF UNIVERSITY POLICIES OR UNLAWFUL PRACTICES DO NOT CONSTITUTE NOTICE TO UNIVERSITY OF CONNECTICUT. Any such information shared with the Ombuds Office is not shared with the University. This allows the Ombuds to preserve the confidential and impartial nature of the office. If an individual discloses information that might evidence a violation of University policy or unlawful activity, the Ombuds will provide information necessary to permit the individual to make an official report to the University and, if requested, will assist the individual in making such report.

III. Standards of Practice

The Ombuds aspires to the Code of Ethics and Standards of Practice of the International Ombudsman Association (IOA) as a neutral party to promote fair practices and foster integrity and timeliness in the administration of University policies and practices that may affect faculty, staff and graduate students. The IOA's tenets require that ombuds function independently of their organization, be confidential and neutral, and limit the scope of their services to informal means of dispute resolution. The IOA Standards are minimum standards, and the Ombudsman will strive to operate to "best practices" and in a way that serves the interests of the University community in a manner consistent with the law.

Independence

The Ombuds Office is designed to be free from direct University oversight or control. This independence is achieved primarily through reporting structure, neutrality and organizational recognition. The Ombudsman reports to the Office of the President but the President neither directs nor controls the day-to-day activities of the Ombuds Office, and the Ombuds does not share with the President or any other University official communications made in confidence to the Ombuds Office. The University's Ombuds provides programmatic leadership and direction for the office and is responsible for designing, implementing, operating and coordinating all aspects of the office. The Ombuds will exercise sole discretion over whether and how to act regarding individual matters or systemic concerns.

Confidentiality

The Ombuds holds all communications with those seeking assistance in strict confidence to the extent permitted by law. Typically, the Ombuds will not confirm communicating with any individual who has sought the services of the Ombuds Office or disclose any confidential information shared with the Ombuds Office without that individual's express permission. The Ombudsman may, however, disclose confidential information without consent when such disclosure is required by law or, in the judgment of the Ombudsman, there is an imminent risk of serious harm. The Ombudsman does not participate in any formal process, whether internal or external to the University, even if given permission by the individual who consulted with the Ombuds, unless otherwise required by law.

Neutrality

The Ombuds is neutral in his activities and does not act as an advocate for any participant to a dispute or visitor to the office. The Ombudsman impartially considers the interests and concerns of all persons involved in a situation with the aim of facilitating communication and assisting others in reaching mutually acceptable agreements that are fair and equitable, and consistent with the mission and policies of the University.

The Ombuds will not be assigned other roles, including assignment to university committees, that would compromise neutrality. The Ombuds will take all necessary steps to avoid involvement in matters where there may be a real or perceived conflict

of interest. A conflict of interest occurs when the Ombuds' personal or private interests, real or perceived, are at odds with his duties and obligations to the University, including his role as a neutral and independent ombudsman. The Ombuds may withdraw services or decline to look into a matter if he believes involvement would be inappropriate for any reason, including, but not limited to, requests for misuse of ombuds services, matters not brought in good faith, a conflict of interest, matters specified in existing union contracts, or when insufficient information is provided.

Informality

The Ombuds Office is a resource for informal dispute resolution only. The Ombuds does not formally investigate, arbitrate, adjudicate or in any other way participate in any formal adjudicative or administrative process or procedure, unless required to do so by law. Use of Ombuds Office services is completely voluntary; it is not a required step in any grievance process or any University or external complaint process.

To the extent permitted by law, the Ombuds does not create or maintain documents or records for the University about individual matters.

IV. Authority and Limits of the Ombuds

The Ombuds has the authority to discuss a range of options available to visitors, including both informal and formal procedures, and may make any recommendations he deems appropriate with regard to resolving problems or improving policies, rules, or procedures.

Further, while the Ombuds has no authority to direct or control the activities of any University official, employee, or graduate student, members of the University's administration are encouraged to make themselves accessible to the Ombuds.

The Ombuds refrains from significant involvement in issues that are specifically covered by contract between the University of Connecticut and any bargaining unit. However, the Ombuds is available to serve as an informal resource for union leadership or union employees for issues that are not governed by current contracts.

The Ombuds has no authority to bargain or negotiate with the University of Connecticut on behalf of any employee or with any employee or bargaining unit on behalf of the University. No interaction between the Ombuds Office and any University employee or graduate student constitutes "negotiating" or "bargaining". Rather, all communications with the Ombuds Office are for the sole purpose of discussing and working toward informal resolution of workplace concerns.

V. Retaliation for Using the Ombuds Office

UConn faculty, administrators, professional and staff employees, and graduate students have the right to consult the Ombuds Office without retaliation. Similarly, because consultation with the Ombuds is wholly voluntary and not a required step in

any process, formal or informal, internal or external, individuals will not be retaliated against for choosing to not consult the Ombuds.

Employees may access the Ombuds Office during their normal working hours but may be required to notify the applicable supervisor and receive approval to leave their assigned work area. Employees wishing to access the Ombuds Office without notifying a supervisor may use approved leave time, scheduled break time, or visit outside normal work hours. The Ombuds Office will be available to arrange flexible hours to meet with employees.