

**UConn Ombuds Office Year 2 Annual Report
June 1, 2014 – May 31, 2015**

Included in this report are data and commentary from the second year's operation of the UConn Ombuds Office. Issues or concerns raised by visitors are tabulated according to the International Ombudsman Association (IOA) uniform reporting categories. In some places, data are further subdivided according to graduate student, staff, or faculty employee status. In places where this occurs, the intention is to present information in the most meaningful way for offices concerned with personnel matters for faculty, staff, and graduate students.

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.

The Commentary section of the report is an opportunity to share observations with the campus community. Generally, these observations are stimulated by the work performed with visitors to the office and how that work intersects with ongoing dialogue on campus about civility. The Ombuds Office functions independent of formal administrative offices on campus and therefore ideas presented in this section have no authority or force of policy. Rather, these observations are offered solely for the readers' consideration from the perspective of a conflict management practitioner.

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 second year of the UConn Ombuds Office was 3.7%. The graduate student usage rate was 0.5%. Overall, there was an approximately 5% rise in the number of visitors contacts to the Ombuds Office compared to last year (225 visitors vs. 214 visitors).

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 and were similar to the issues raised last year.

The 225 visitors raised a total of 1160 issues (5.2 issues per visitor). As was the case last year, the largest IOA category of concern raised by visitors was in the area of *Evaluative Relationships*, (51% of all issues). Issues arising amidst supervisor-supervisee relationships are consistently the most common category identified in the reports from most employee focused university ombuds offices. In tables 3 and 5 some data has been highlighted to reflect notable increases (red) or decreases (green) in the percentage of visitors raising a specific category of concern or the actions taken by the Ombuds Office in response to visitors' requests. Importantly, any of these changes most likely reflect the progress in the way the Ombuds Office can serve the campus community rather than denoting any "spike" in problem areas. For example, this year more visitors were amenable to using the Ombuds Office to facilitate conversations with other parties (27% versus 18%) and graduate students raised a greater breadth of concerns in the second year of the office. Rolling 3 or 4 year averages seem the best method to assess deviations in the types of concerns being brought forward and will be employed in the next several years.

Pre-dispute versus Post-dispute

The Ombuds Office is designed as an informal mechanism, when appropriate, to address workplace or other campus concerns. Thus, attention was given to whether a visitor's concern was raised in the Ombuds Office prior to taking a formal action (pre-dispute) or after a formal action (post-dispute). Of visitors where this distinction was evident, 88% were addressing a pre-dispute issue and 12% made contact with the Ombuds Office following engagement in a formal dispute resolution process or after formally addressing their concern with a campus regulatory or compliance office or via union intervention.

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. 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

August 15, 2015

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 UConn Health. 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: ~ 4816

Classification	Number	% total	% male	% female
Faculty *	~1550	~32%	~61%	~39%
Staff	~3266	~68%	~42%	~58%

* tenure track and non tenure track

Table 1a. Total Estimated Employees by Union Membership

Classification	Number	% total employees
AAUP	~1804	~37.5%
UCPEA	~1874	~38.9%
NP-2 (CEUI)	~461	~9.6%
NP-3 (AFSCME)	~200	~4.2%
NP-5 (CPFU)	~116	~2.4%
Total	~4455	~92%

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

Total UConn	Number	% total	% male	% female
8146	~7026	~86%	~48%	~52%

Table 2. Ombuds Office Visitor Demographics & Employee Classification
(Total visitors = 214)

Classification	Number	% visitors	% total pop	% male	% female
Faculty *	52	23%	3.6 %	43%	57%
Non-faculty	126	56%	3.9%	24%	76%
AAUP	49	22%	-	-	-
UCPEA	78	35%	-	-	-
NP-2 (CEUI)	3	1%	-	-	-
NP-3 (AFSCME)	8	4%	-	-	-
NP-5 (CPFU)	6	3%	-	-	-
MNGMT Confidential	27	12%	-	-	-
Unk/Unrep	6	3%	-	-	-
Total Employee visitors	178	79%	3.7%	29%	71%
Grad Students	38	17%	0.5%	49%	51%
Other	9	4%	-	22%	78%
Total Visitors	225	100%	-	33%	67%

* 79% (41/52) of faculty visitors were tenured

Table 3. Ombuds Actions in Response to 225 visitors (multiple actions may be taken with any given visitor).

Action	Number of visitors	Percentage of visitors
Individual consultation / problem solving	153	68%
Referral to policy or campus agency/office	40	18%
Facilitation with third parties*	65	29%
Notify campus office on behalf of visitor	0	0%
Inquiry to campus office on behalf of visitor	21	9%
Look into situation	11	5%
Provide upward feedback to administrators / leaders	5	2%

* In the Year 1 report, ~18% of visitors requested facilitation with third parties. Percentages of other actions were similar to Year 1.

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 ombudsperson's 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 re 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 turn the issue over to the appropriate office of responsibility.

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

Table 4. Total Issues Raised by Visitors – IOA Categories
 N= 1160 issues raised by 2225 visitors (mean = 5.2 issues per visitor)

IOA Issues Category	% of total concerns
<u>Compensation & Benefits:</u> Questions, concerns, issues or inquiries about the equity, appropriateness and competitiveness of employee compensation, benefits and other benefit programs.	1%
<u>Evaluative Relationships:</u> Questions, concerns, issues or inquiries arising between people in evaluative relationships (i.e. supervisor-employee, faculty-student.)	51%
<u>Peer & Colleague Relationships:</u> Questions, concerns, issues or inquiries involving peers or colleagues who do not have a supervisory– employee or student–professor relationship (e.g., two staff members within the same department or conflict involving members of a student organization.)	10%
<u>Career Profession and Development:</u> Questions, concerns, issues or inquiries about administrative processes and decisions regarding entering and leaving a job, what it entails, (i.e., recruitment, nature and place of assignment, job security, and separation.)	8%
<u>Legal, Regulatory, Financial, and Compliance:</u> Questions, concerns, issues or inquiries that may create a legal risk (financial, sanction etc.) for the organization or its members if not addressed, including issues related to waste, fraud or abuse.	5%
<u>Safety, Health, and Physical Environment:</u> Questions, concerns, issues or inquiries about Safety, Health and Infrastructure-related issues.	1%
<u>Services/Administration Issues:</u> Questions, concerns, issues or inquiries about services or administrative offices including from external parties.	6%
<u>Organizational, Strategic, and Mission Related:</u> Questions, concerns, issues or inquiries that relate to the whole or some part of an organization.	15%
<u>Values, Ethics, and Standards:</u> Questions, concerns, issues or inquiries about the fairness of organizational values, ethics, and/or standards, the application of related policies and/or procedures, or the need for creation or revision of policies, and/or standards.	3%
Total (N=1160)	100%

Table 5. Issues Raised by Number of Visitors (% of total visitors: n= 225) and subcategorized as percentage of faculty, non-faculty, graduate student, and other visitors raising concern. Percentages highlighted in **red** denote a notable increase from Year 1. **Green** highlight denotes a notable decrease from Year 1.

Selected Concerns Raised by Visitors	Total (n=225)	Faculty (n=52)	Non-faculty (n=126)	Graduate Student (n=38)	Other (n=9)
1. Compensation & Benefits					
1a rate of pay, job classification, benefits, retirement, pension	2.7% (6)				
2. Evaluative Relationships (supervisory)					
2a priorities, values, beliefs	12.0% (27)	11.5%	11.1%	18.4%	
2b disrespect, ruse, crude, disregard of people	27.6% (62)	21.2%	34.9%	18.4%	
2c trust/integrity suspicions	18.7% (42)	19.2%	17.5%	26.3%	
2d reputation, rumors, gossip	28.0% (63)	33.1%	30.2%	34.2%	
2e communication, poor quality or quantity	30.7% (69)	26.9%	31.7%	39.5%	
2f bullying, abusive, coercive behavior	8.4% (19)	7.7%	11.1%		
2g insensitivity to diversity	3.6% (8)	3.8%	3.2%	5.3%	
2h punitive behaviors, retaliation	7.6% (17)	5.8%	9.5%	5.3%	
2j fairness of assignments, schedules	32.4% (73)	25.0%	34.1%	44.7%	
2k manner of feedback given or received	21.8% (49)	11.5%	24.6%	31.6%	
2l supervisor consultation	13.8% (31)	28.8%	12.7%		
2m performance appraisal	5.8% (13)	3.8%	7.9%		
2n unit/departmental climate, norms	12.0% (27)	11.5%	15.1%	5.3	
2o supervisor failure to address work issues	26.7% (60)	21.2%	34.1%	15.8%	
2q manner of disciplinary actions	7.1% (16)	5.8%	8.7%		
2r inequity of treatment, favoritism	8.9% (20)	13.5%	7.9%	7.9%	
3. Peer and Colleague Relationships					
3a priorities, values, beliefs	6.7% (15)	5.8%	5.6%	13.2%	
3b disrespect, ruse, crude, disregard of people	14.2% (32)	15.4%	15.9%	10.5%	
3c trust/integrity suspicions	5.8% (13)	5.8%	7.9%		
3d reputation, rumors, gossip	8.9% (20)	9.6%	8.7%	10.5%	
3e communication, poor quality or quantity	12.0% (27)	13.5%	13.5%	7.9%	
3f bullying, abusive, coercive behavior	4.0% (9)		4.8%		

4. Career Progression and Development						
4a	job application selection recruitment	1.8% (4)		3.2%		
4b	job description after new position	5.3% (12)		7.1%	5.3%	
4c	involuntary transfer/change of assignment	2.2% (5)		3.2%		
4d	tenure/position security/ambiguity	6.2% (14)		4.8%	18.4%	
4e	ability to achieve promotion, tenure	12.0% (27)		10.3%	36.8%	
4f	rotation/duration of assignment	2.2% (5)			10.5%	
4g	resignation	6.7% (15)	9.6%	4.0%	13.2%	
4h	disputed termination, nonrenewal	2.7% (6)		2.4%	7.9%	
4j	Position elimination	1.3% (3)				
5. Legal, Regulatory, Compliance						
5b	business, financial practices	5.3% (12)	5.8%	4.8%	5.3%	11.1%
5c	harassment	2.7% (6)	5.8%		5.3%	
5d	discrimination, different treatment	5.3% (12)	3.8%	4.0%	10.5%	11.1%
5e	disability, accommodation	3.1% (7)	5.8%		5.3%	
5h	Privacy, security of information	6.2% (14)	5.8%	4.8%	10.5%	11.1%
6. Safety, Health, Physical Environment						
6a	meeting safety requirements	3.1% (7)		5.6%		
7. Services & Administrative Actions (including external)						
7a	quality of service, accuracy, thoroughness	4.9% (11)	3.8%	4.0%		44%
7b	responsiveness, timeliness	5.3% (12)	5.8%	3.2%	5.3%	33%
7c	decisions, application of rules (non-disciplinary)	18.2% (41)	23.1%	15.1%	21.7%	22.2%
7d	behavior of service provider(s)	4.4% (10)	5.8%		5.3%	44.4%
8. Organizational, Strategic, Mission Issues						
8a	technical management of mission	9.8% (22)	5.8%	15.1%		
8b	leadership, management decisions	11.6% (26)	7.7%	16.7%		
8c	use/abuse or positional power/authority	6.7% (15)	11.5%	5.6%	5.3%	
8d	communication re strategy, mission	7.6% (17)	3.8%	11.9%		
8e	restructuring and relocation	5.8% (13)		6.3%		
8f	climate, morale, capacity to function	8.4% (19)	7.7%	11.1%		
8g	adaptability of unit to changes	6.2% (14)		10.3%		
8i	Data methodology interpretation of results	2.7% (6)	3.8%	3.2%		

8h	priority setting and funding	4.9% (11)	5.8%	6.3%		
8j	inter-organizational work territory	12.0% (27)	11.5%	16.7%		
9. Values, Ethics & Standards						
9a	applicability or lack of conduct codes	2.2% (5)				11.1%
9b	values, culture of the organization	4.4% (10)	1.9%	4.8%	5.3%	11.1%

Ombuds Commentary:

In the two years since opening the Ombuds Office, there has been much discussion on campus regarding civility and how people would like to be treated in the workplace. We've seen new policies that focus *specifically* on harassment, discrimination, and inappropriate romantic relationships on campus. To a *limited* extent, the Code of Conduct, General Rules of Conduct, and Policy on Violence in the Workplace Prevention describe expectations for professional behavior on campus. For those employees that are members of bargaining units, collective bargaining agreements specify *some* parameters on treatment at work. Yet, these policies and collective bargaining agreements can't, nor is it reasonable to expect them to, encompass the breadth of interactions that occur on campus.

Many of the concerns raised this year focus on the ideas of respect, civility, and professional conduct and how various campus policies can (or can't) be applied to improve the work climate. To be sure though, more of the visitors seeking assistance are focused on how individuals themselves can participate in holding one another accountable for maintaining a collegial work environment. Indeed, with the exception of the more egregious episodes of disrespectful or uncivil conduct and cases of severe bullying, most problems with disrespect and incivility can be successfully addressed informally. When individuals are developing strategies to change the culture, the level of discourse, or behaviors in the workplace, some of the challenges they face involve workload stresses due to budget constraints and the academic cycle and the boundaries related to values of academic freedom, freedom of expression, and the institutional commitment to diversity and inclusiveness. But even after navigating those environmental challenges, summoning the action steps to individually address incivility can still be daunting.

This year's commentary shares some of the approaches that visitors have found helpful in responding to unwelcome behavior by engaging with people directly. These ideas come from several sources appended below but also from feedback from many visitors' direct experiences.

Preparing

Before deciding how to proceed, it's important to separate out the feelings or emotions you may have from the actual observations of what happened. This can be difficult at first but an effective way to begin is to either talk to someone not connected with the situation or to write your account in a private journal. The Ombuds, the Employee Assistance Program, a union representative, or colleague or friend you trust to listen and respect your privacy can be helpful people to talk to. Whether you are writing for yourself only or talking with someone else, it's most helpful to make a goal of organizing your thoughts into categories. This will not only help in understanding your experience but will prepare you to respond whether formally or informally.

The first category is the observation of what happened. Describe the behavior as precisely and factual as you can without the emotions or opinions you may be feeling. Staying focused on the chronology of what happened is helpful in organizing your thoughts this way.

The second category *is* about your opinions and feelings. What was the impact or consequences of the behavior on you? What are the natural consequences for you if the behavior continues?

Next, organize your thoughts on *expectations*. Be precise here as well. What behavior would you expect in the situation that occurred instead of the behavior you observed. Then, also, what are your expectations for what should happen now – now that the behavior has occurred?

Finally, organize your thoughts around whether the unwelcome behavior was an episode or a pattern. Is the person who is exhibiting the behaviors someone with whom you will be having an ongoing relationship? Are you confronted with the behavior all the time? Does the problem occur under predictable circumstances? Or was this “out of the blue”?

After sorting through the observations, emotions, expectations, and patterns to the behavior people usually have some clarity on what next steps are most suitable. Those steps might range from not doing anything at all right now to registering a formal complaint with a supervisor, someone further up the supervisory chain, a compliance office on campus, or a union official. Or it may feel right to choose a more informal approach.

Informal Options

One informal option is anonymous reporting to the Ombuds Office. Anonymous reporting will not result in an investigation and will not directly hold the person accountable for their behavior but it does help the university learn about unwelcome behavior on campus. The Ombuds Office maintains statistical information without names attached that are published in this annual report that's made available online to the

campus community. The information is used by the UConn administration to develop training, review policies, and evaluate complaint-handling processes on campus. The Ombuds may also have learned of other behavioral problems related to your concern that form a trend that needs to be addressed. And, if you wish, the Ombuds can assist you in organizing your thoughts about the situation.

An alternative approach to anonymous reporting is the *direct approach*; engaging with the individual who exhibited the behaviors to try to resolve the problem. This is best done privately either with just you and the individual or with a third-party facilitator.

You can approach the person in writing or in person. Either way, you'll want to organize your message in the way outlined previously – describing what you observed, describing what you expected, and relaying how you were impacted by the behavior. Ultimately, the goal of this approach is to agree to different expectations for behavior in the future. Acknowledging any stressors you're aware of that might have contributed to the behavior at the time can be really helpful in bridging this part of the interaction.

Another way of engaging with the individual is through a third party facilitator. This can be the Ombuds or another trusted intermediary who can carry the message and response back and forth or bring you and the other person together to solve the problem. The third party should be someone with facilitation training or someone who has experience with helping people reach agreements. The goal of engaging with the individual informally is to obtain agreement about what should happen next. Changes in behavior are usually more durable when the people involved agree to changes during a private respectful conversation.

* * *

What if we are approached about our behavior? Holding each other accountable for a respectful and civil behavior means that each of us are approachable for an informal conversation about our own behavior that might have troubled some one else. At the same time, there are conditions one should be able to count on if approached for such a conversation. From conversations in the Ombuds Office, some definite themes emerge on how people want to be approached if their behavior is has been offensive to someone else:

- The conversation should be **private**, both when invited to have a conversation and during the exchange itself. Conversations about behavior shouldn't be *on demand* but should accommodate people's schedules and allow each person to prepare or get in the proper frame of mind for the conversation. No one wants to feel ambushed, for example, by having an important conversation like this sandwiched in between housekeeping items at a weekly business meeting without prior notice.
- The conversation should be **respectful** and one should expect to hear complaints about their behaviors in a precise and objective manner, free of sarcasm, moral judgments or accusations. It should be clear how the behavior differed from the

other person's expectations and hear, with some specificity, alternative examples that would be preferable. It should also be clear whether the behaviors are episodic or a pattern from the person's point of view.

- The conversation should be **informal**, and not serve as a record to be used as evidence later – this is certainly true when the Ombuds serves as an intermediary or third party. And one can expect that if an understanding or agreement is reached that it is acknowledged and means that the formal process will be avoided.
- The conversation should respect people's **autonomy**. Agreeing to have the discussion does not obligate one to accepting requests about future expectations. One retains their autonomy whether or not to accept any proposed solutions.

* * *

When appropriate, good faith efforts at engaging others about unwelcome behaviors can be the quickest and most enduring way of holding people accountable for their behavior. It's an alternative to ignoring the problem – which can in effect give permission to such behavior - and it's an alternative to the uncertainty and *organizational chill* of a lengthy formal investigation. Being mindful of some of the ideas presented here, both when confronting others' behavior and when being approached about your own conduct, can make a seemingly uncomfortable discussion much more natural. It preserves peoples' reputations, acknowledges that people have the best chance to excel when working in a civil environment, and is almost always the way people prefer to resolve interpersonal problems.

Suggested Resources

Patterson, Kerry, Joseph Grenny, Ron McMillan, Al Switzler and David Maxwell. *Crucial Accountability: Tools for resolving violated expectations, broken commitments, and bad behavior*. 2nd edition. Boston: McGraw-Hill, 2013. Print.

Rowe, Mary. "Drafting—and perhaps sending—a private letter to a person who has harassed or offended you." MIT Ombuds Office. 10-213 Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 2011 web. July 30, 2015.

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Weingart, LE, Behfar KJ, Bendersky C, Todorova G, Jehn KA. The Directness and Oppositional Intensity of Conflict Expression. *Academy of Management Review* 40.2 (2015): 235-262. Print.

Flahert, Colleen. U. Wisconsin-Madison faculty approves an anti-bullying policy. *Inside Higher Ed.com*, December 2, 2014. Web. July 30, 2015.
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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.
