

1. OBJECTIVE:

The Ombuds Officer provides resources for confidential complaint handling and neutral, informal conflict resolution to all Alfred University faculty, students, and employees. The Ombuds Officer aims to facilitate communication and collaborative dispute resolution, either by offering options for self-help or by mediating to resolve grievances. The Ombuds Officer shall, where appropriate, have access to confidential personnel records and may collect and forward to administrators anonymous aggregate data as well as other information when patterns of concern indicate problem areas or trends. While maintaining impartiality, the Ombuds Officer may serve as an organizational resource to recommend improvements in policy and procedures. The position of Ombuds Officer is a part-time post, reporting to the President or the Provost.

2. DUTIES & RESPONSIBILITIES

An Ombuds Office exists to provide an informal process for dispute resolution. The office is not designed to replace formal grievance procedures or formal procedures regarding tenure, promotion, reappointment and termination. The Ombuds Officer:

- a. Provides impartial and private consultation to members of the university community who are aggrieved about an issue.
- b. Remains independent and neutral. Exercises good judgment.
- c. Confidentiality: The Ombuds Officer will not voluntarily disclose to anyone outside the Ombuds Office, including the President or the Provost, the identity of those seeking the services of the Ombuds Officer, or information provided by those seeking aid, except in cases where confidentiality regarding such identities or such information may contribute to imminent risk or serious harm, or where the individual(s) seeking the aid of the Ombuds Officer expresses a willingness to forego confidentiality, or where a court of competent jurisdiction may require information from a Ombuds Officer.
- d. Provides information and assists in interpreting University policies and procedures. Provides referrals and assists in facilitating access to other resources as appropriate, including information about filing formal grievances.
- e. Shall try not to make judgments and will not make decisions regarding matters brought to the Ombuds Officer.
- f. Shall not provide legal advice or psychological counseling.
- g. Conducts appropriate informal inquiry to better understand all perspectives regarding matters brought to the office.
- h. With the inquirer's permission, shall consult with appropriate parties to clarify and analyze problems, focus discussions, and develop a mutually-satisfactory process for resolution.

3. THE OMBUDS OFFICER DOES NOT...

- a. Take sides, arbitrate or adjudicate.
- b. Intervene if the person initiating the grievance or others involved in the grievance have already contacted an attorney or, in some cases, the Office of Human Resources, regardless of whether the attorney has initiated formal legal action.

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- c. Become involved in a case involving a formal grievance, or disciplinary or termination procedures as formalized in university governing documents.
- d. Become involved in a personnel dispute if a hearing before a University grievance panel has been scheduled or has already occurred, if a proposed decision has been sustained by the hearing board, or if a grievant is represented by counsel.
- e. Conduct formal investigations or offer legal advice.
- f. Determine "guilt" or "innocence" of those accused of wrong-doing.
- g. Make administrative decisions for administrators, make policy, or change policy.
- h. Take action without permission from either the grievant or from university administrators.
- i. Act as a witness or later testify in a formal grievance or legal proceeding unless compelled by law.
- j. Keep identifying records or assume a custodial role for formal documentation.
- k. Provide information without permission that may breach the confidentiality of a grievant or an individual/office initiating contact with the Ombuds Office.

Note: Due to the confidential, independent, informal, and neutral functions of the Ombuds Office, communication with the Ombuds Officer DOES NOT constitute legal or formal notice to the University

4. QUALIFICATIONS

- a. The Ombuds Officer is normally a faculty member of the university, but the President or Provost may appoint an individual to the post who is not an employee of the University. If not an employee, the Ombuds Officer shall be considered an outside consultant.
- b. Should be able to communicate effectively with individuals at all levels of the University, and shall be appreciative of and sensitive to dealing with people from a wide variety of backgrounds.
- c. Should be able to gather and analyze information impartially, be professional in demeanor, demonstrate integrity, honor confidentiality, and deal fairly, respectfully, and effectively in a timely fashion with all members of the University community.
- d. Should adhere to Code of Ethics and Standards of the Practice of the International Ombudsman Association.
- e. Possesses an understanding of the nature of conflict, negotiation skills, and strategies for dispute resolution and system change.

5. THE OMBUDS OFFICER SHALL MAINTAIN THE OMBUDS OFFICE:

By ensuring that the integrity of the office is upheld through independence, fair process, neutrality, impartiality, confidentiality, and timely attention to the resolution of issues while treating all people with dignity and respect.

This page completed with the help of material drawn from the International Ombudsman Association and from the ombuds office at Elon University and St. Bonaventure University, with permission.