

University Faculty Ombudsperson

Faculty Ombudsperson

Role:

The University of Memphis Faculty Ombudsperson is an independent, confidential and impartial resource available to the faculty to facilitate cooperation and consensus through education and mediation. The Ombudsperson is a designated neutral or impartial dispute resolution practitioner whose major function is to provide confidential and informal assistance to faculty of the institution. Serving as a designated neutral, the Ombudsperson is neither an advocate for any individual nor the organization, but rather, serves as an advocate for fairness who acts as a source of information and referral, aids in answering questions, and assists in the resolution of concerns and critical situations.

More specifically, the Ombudsperson engenders awareness and skill development in the areas of conflict resolution, communication, team building and civility.

Ombudsperson's activities assist all tenured, tenure-track, clinical, research, one-year instructors to resolve complaints with the goal of promoting alternatives to adversarial processes. The office supplements, but does not replace, the University's existing resources for conflict resolution. Staff and student conflicts should be directed to the Department of Human Resources and the Division of Student Affairs respectively.

Responsibilities:

Dispute Resolution/Consultation and Referral

- Provide impartial and confidential consultation to members of the college/university faculty community who are aggrieved or concerned about an issue
- Remain independent, neutral and impartial, and exercise good judgment
- Assist inquirers in interpreting college/university policies and procedures, seeking input from appropriate offices when needed
- Provide assistance to inquirers by clarifying issues and generating options for resolution
- Facilitate the inquirer's assessment of the pros and cons of possible options
- If direct action by the ombudsperson may be an appropriate option, obtain the inquirer's agreement and permission before proceeding
- If necessary, and while maintaining confidentiality, conduct appropriate informal fact-finding in order to better understand an issue from all perspectives
- Consult with faculty to develop cooperative strategies for complaint resolution
- With the inquirer's permission, consult with all parties to clarify and analyze problems, focus discussions, and develop a mutually-satisfactory process for resolution
- When appropriate, facilitate group meetings, use shuttle diplomacy, or negotiation skills to facilitate communication among parties in conflict

- When legal and/or disciplinary issues arise, the Ombudsperson refers the case to the appropriate unit of the University.

Policy Analysis and Feedback

- Serve as a campus resource for officials in formulating or modifying policy and procedures, raising issues that may surface as a result of a gap between the stated goals of the institution and actual practice
- Based on anonymous aggregate data, prepare an annual report *to the Faculty Senate* that discusses trends in the reporting of grievances and concerns, identifies patterns or problem areas in university/college policies and practices, and recommend revisions and improvements, where appropriate.
- Act as a liaison between individuals or groups and the campus administrative structure, serving as a communicator or informal facilitator, as appropriate
- Function as a sensor within the campus community to identify problems or trends that affect the faculty.
- Provide early warning of new areas of organizational concern, upward feedback, critical analysis of systemic need for improvement, and recommendations of systemic changes

Community Outreach and Education

- The ombudsperson is responsible for on-going education and communication about the office's role to all potential inquirers as well as to university leadership

Reporting:

The Ombudsperson reports to the Provost except in cases involving the provost, when the Ombudsperson will report to the university president. Any case not satisfactorily resolved by the Office of the Provost will be sent to the university president for resolution. The Ombudsperson maintains collaborative relationships with other University offices (e.g., Academic Affairs, Human Resources, Affirmative Action, Student Affairs) in the conduct of her/his functions.

Term of Office:

The Ombudsperson will serve a two year term of office.

Selection:

Nominations for Ombudsperson will be solicited 90 days before the end of the current Ombudspersons term. A Committee of six persons will review nominations for Ombudsperson. Three members of the selection committee will be appointed by the Faculty Senate and three members will be appointed by the President. The Faculty Senate will make the selection of the Ombudsperson, subject to the-President's approval.