



Office of the University Ombuds Charter with the University of Texas at Austin

I. Purpose

This charter defines the role and responsibilities of the Office of the University Ombuds ("Office") and helps promote understanding and confidence in the Office. The Office was established to provide a neutral, impartial, and confidential environment for students, staff, and faculty to voice concerns related to life at The University of Texas at Austin ("University"). The Office functions independently and informally to help students, staff, and faculty explore effective problem-solving and conflict-resolution options. The Office also identifies and provides recommendations to the University regarding systemic issues.

The Office's credibility rests on its reputation for independence, impartiality, fairness, objectivity, tact, and respectful concern for all community members' welfare and the University's well-being. The Office advocates for fair processes and does not side with individuals or the University. The Office helps the University uphold its mission, core purpose, core values, student honor code, and University code of conduct.

II. Scope and Duties

- A. The scope of the Office's duties extends to all aspects of University life affecting students, staff and faculty. The Ombuds:
 1. Provides information, referrals, and assistance with appropriate policies and processes for addressing University-related concerns.
 2. Helps community members receive expeditious, fair, and impartial treatment.
 3. Provides voluntary conflict management for disputes and concerns at the University, whether academic, nonacademic, or employment. This may include identifying options, policy clarification, conflict coaching, mediation, training, and other appropriate conflict resolution or consultative services.
- B. The Office follows the Code of Ethics and Standards of Practice developed by the International Ombuds Association (IOA). To the extent permitted by law, the Rules and Regulations of the Board of Regents of The University of Texas System, and University policy, the Office will function according to these best practices and ethical principles of confidentiality, impartiality, informality, and independence. These principles govern how the Office receives complaints, works to resolve issues, and makes recommendations for the general improvement of the University.
 1. *Confidentiality*. The Office maintains privacy and confidentiality to the extent permitted by law, rule, and policy to create a safe place to voice concerns, evaluate issues, and generate options.

2. *Impartiality.* The Office provides impartial and objective assessments of the concern presented. As a neutral party, the Office does not take sides for any individual or cause.
 3. *Informality.* The Office will be a resource for informal and off-the-record dispute resolution. The Ombuds assists community members in accessing formal procedures, including making referrals to proper avenues to request that the University takes formal action. Use of the Office is strictly voluntary, and disciplinary action or retaliation for using, or not using, Office services is prohibited. However, as a general matter, the Ombuds will not participate in formal processes even if given permission by community members. Formal investigations and grievances are the purview of other offices. One exception is the Faculty and Teaching Assistant/Assistant Instructor grievance process, in which one of the two faculty Ombuds will be available to participate in the initial review of grievances.
 4. *Independence.* The Ombuds exercises autonomy regarding responsibilities and is authorized to act independently. The Office is independent and is situated outside the University's normal administrative structure to uphold impartiality. The Ombuds neither compels other offices to take specific action nor receives compulsory orders from other offices about approaching a particular issue. Although the Ombuds has no authority to establish, change, or set aside any University rule or policy or override the decisions of University officials, the Ombuds has access to University officials and records as appropriate to carry out the functions of the Office. University administrators shall cooperate with the Ombuds in good faith. The Ombuds takes all steps to avoid real or perceived conflicts of interest. The Ombuds shall report directly to an appropriate upper-level University administrator to ensure independence in the fulfillment of duties.
- C. The Office does not maintain identifying records and asserts privilege, where permitted, about the identity of visitors and their concerns.
- D. The Ombuds makes periodic reports regarding the Office's operation and may report any concerns about systemic issues, policies or procedures to the University officers and make appropriate recommendations.
- E. Service exclusions:
1. The Office does not offer legal advice or therapy services, make binding decisions, or override the authority of other University officials.
 2. The Office does not testify, participate, or replace any formal complaint, grievance or appeals process, except as noted above B3. The Ombuds may, however, assist a community member in accessing and understanding formal grievance or appeal procedures.
 3. The Ombuds may decline to deal with any case considered inappropriate for the Office.

III. Selection and Appointment

- A. When a vacancy occurs in the Faculty Ombuds office, an advisory committee will be created jointly by the Faculty Council and Provost's office. The search committee is encouraged to consult other University Ombuds during selection. When a vacancy occurs in the Staff/Student Ombuds office, hiring managers are encouraged to form a selection committee to assist in aspects of the hire process such as screening applications, participating in interviews, and making recommendations on selection.
- B. The Ombuds should not have another role at the University that could compromise independence, impartiality, confidentiality, and informality.
- C. The Ombuds shall hold an administrative and professional appointment, subject to the conditions of such an appointment. The Student and Staff Ombuds will report to the appropriate senior university administrator within the President's Office. The Faculty Ombuds' annual performance evaluation will be conducted by the Vice Provost for Advocacy and Dispute Resolution.

IV. Structure and Organization

- A. To ensure independence in the fulfillment of the Ombuds' duties, the Ombuds shall report to an appropriate University-level administrator. The Student and Staff Ombuds will report to the appropriate senior university administrator within the President's Office. The Faculty Ombuds will report to the Vice Provost for Advocacy and Dispute Resolution.
- B. The Office shall have a budget for operating expenses, staff, professional development and training, and other necessary expenses.
- C. The Ombuds may employ staff, student employees, and interns to fulfill the mission of the Office.
- D. The University shall provide appropriate space for the Office to conduct business.