

Charter: University of Wyoming Ombuds Office

Introduction—

The Office of the Ombuds at the University of Wyoming strives to operate through the best practices laid out by the International Ombuds Organization. That means that we adhere to the principles of independence, informality, impartiality, and confidentiality. As a new office, established in the spring of 2023, to serve staff and students, we hope to provide a safe space for visitors to explore ideas and options, to help with communication tools, to create workshops in conflict resolution, and much more. We welcome input and suggestions.

Mission—

It is the goal of the Ombuds Office at the University of Wyoming to provide the university community an informal setting in which to share dilemmas, ideas, questions, without fear of exposure, retaliation, or recrimination. The office is committed to serving with the International Ombuds Association best practice principles: informal, confidential, impartial, independent. It is our mandate to give voice to the university community, and to protect those voices. We will engage and support people and divisions to improve communications and policies. Our mandate includes resolving conflict, shedding light on serious concerns, mediating, facilitating difficult conversations, giving the community tools to disagree productively, educating, and coaching. The Ombuds Office, in every instance, will advocate for fairness and equity.

Responsibilities—

What we do: As a first resort, the Office of the Ombuds provides the following services:

- Facilitation and mediation
- Conflict management tools and resources
- An alternative to formal channels
- Information and help understanding regarding policies and procedures
- Strategy development and formation

- Brainstorming
- Communication tools and guidance for difficult conversations
- Coaching
- Shuttle diplomacy—we can take your issue to a division head without revealing your identity
- Provide a safe space to speak without judgement

What we don't do:

- We do not report visits or keep records that might identify an individual.
- We are not mandatory reporters. That means that if you come to us with a problem—even if that problem could be legally adjudicated, like sexual harassment, or sexual violence—and you don't want to take the situation to another office, we will respect that and we will not report it.
- Unless there is threat of imminent harm, we keep everything you say confidential.
- We do not investigate, nor do we take part in investigations
- We do not take part in legal proceedings.

Standards of Practice—

At the University of Wyoming, we adhere to the International Ombuds Association principles of practice: independent, impartial, informal, confidential.

Independent: We are officially housed with the Office of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion; however, we are independent of them. Unlike DEI, Title IX, Human Resources, or other mandatory reporters, we are not an office of advocacy, and because we are not mandatory reporters, we can safeguard your identity and your information. We are advocates of fairness, and to that end, we work throughout the campus, with people and divisions, to improve and enhance policies and procedures to make them fairer for everyone.

Impartial: We are on the side of fairness, not on the side of any party or person. We will help you through develop ideas, strategies, help you understand policies and procedures, and many other things, but we do not advocate for any person or office.

Informal: Not only is our office an informal meeting place, but we are also informal in the sense that we do not engage in investigations or legal proceedings. We practice alternative dispute resolution, mediation, and we work to enhance communication throughout campus.

Confidential: We will not reveal anything you tell us, nor even that you came to see us unless we believe that there is a danger of imminent harm to your or others.

Operating Procedures—

The Office of the Ombudsperson is committed to working with other campus offices, but not for them. The ombudsperson does not advocate for any person, department, or office. Rather, the ombudsperson is an advocate for fairness. We do not keep records. We are not mandatory reporters. We do not make policy, but we can help you understand it, and we can work with policy makers to create clearer, fairer policy. In every encounter, we will protect your identity. As the office gets underway, we will collect anonymous feedback to improve our systems and to create annual reports. In no case will a name be attached to any feedback that is provided to us.

Our Jurisdiction and Limitations—

The Office of the Ombudsperson can (jurisdiction):

- Initiate informal inquiries → The Office is entitled to inquire informally about any issue that concerns the University or any member of its community (fact and information gathering/research).
- Access relevant organizational information → The Office may request information regarding visitor's concerns from offices of the University, and those offices are expected to cooperate as much as possible.

- Recuse oneself from actual or potential conflict of interest → If the Office believes involvement in any matter would be inappropriate, the Office may withdraw or decline to look into a matter.
- Access legal counsel → On rare occasions, the Office may require legal advice or representation, and the University may provide legal counsel separate and independent from the University.

The Office of the Ombudsperson cannot (limitations):

- Change or make policy.
- Participate in formal processes—we do investigate with any formal channels, nor will we reveal any identifying information in the formal processes of other divisions.
- Receive notice for the organization → The Office may receive information that may constitute violations, such as sexual harassment, as one example, but is not required to report them. Further, only if the visitor discloses to the Office an interest or desire to make a formal report, will the Office refer the visitor to the appropriate office to make a formal complaint.
- Provide notice to the organization → The Office does not conduct formal investigations and does not participate in investigations, or in any formal dispute processes.
- Give legal advice.
- Also, we are not therapists and cannot provide therapy.
- Advocate or adjudicate for parties → The Office is an advocate of fairness and equity.
- The Office does not inquire or participate in collective bargaining agreements.
- The Office does not keep records for the University.

Retaliation—

The University agrees that it will not retaliate against individuals for consulting with the Office.