



Office of the Ombudsperson

End of Year Report

2024-2025

The mission of the Ombuds Office is to serve the university community by providing an informal setting in which to share concerns, ideas, and questions, without fear of exposure, retaliation, or recrimination. The Ombuds process is informal, confidential, impartial, and independent. The Ombuds Office advocates fairness and equity in all interactions and seeks to facilitate outcomes that are both just and enduring.

The work of the Ombuds Office aligns with the University of Wyoming's established policies and procedures and its Strategic Plan (2023). The role and work of the Ombuds reflect the values in the Strategic Plan, by providing for:

- A welcoming and supportive learning community fostered by integrity, inclusivity, freedom of expression, and respect.
- The growth, health, and leadership capacity of all members of the university community.

Additionally, the work and mission of the Ombuds also dovetails with the University's Ongoing Objectives, specifically the following:

1. Enhance Student Success
2. Pursue Institutional Excellence, and,
3. Provide a Supportive Community

Office Activity (by the numbers)

Unique visitors: 60*

Total visits: 183**

- ❖ Outreach activity: 14 (including organizations & departments),
- ❖ Consults: 9 (including organizations & departments).
- ❖ Coaching & role playing: 4.
- ❖ Mediation/Conciliation: 8 (2-9 parties per conflict) / Total Rounds of Mediation: 33.
- ❖ Presentations: 6 (4 different organizations).

* Faculty: 11; Staff: 30; Students: 19 (including 5 Graduate students)

**This does not include phone calls, drop-in visits, “follow-ups,” and other types of non-scheduled interactions.

Key Deliverables

- Converted 8 existing conflicts into interpersonal or interorganizational mediations using the Joint Analytical Problem-Solving format.
- Developed and administered the first satisfaction survey to provide meaningful and anonymous feedback for the office.
- Provided regular consultations and/or check-ins with parties who did not follow up and/or who escalated during the process.
- Advised multiple parties on policy and procedures, as well as clarification of language contained in contracts, using subject matter experts (as needed) to confirm accuracy of representation.
- Provided support, made referrals, and shared suitable reporting mechanisms.
- Consulted with multiple colleagues/peers on best practices within the field to formulate the best possible approach to challenging policy, practice, or procedural issues.

Workshops & Outreach

- Intentionally engaged in outreach to all key constituencies where conflict can occur and would be more likely/prevalent.
 - New outreach included multiple student clubs and organizations, along with the Resident Assistants (Residence Life), the ASUW (student government), International Student Services, the Reserve Officer Training Corps, local religious affiliates, and University of Wyoming Athletics.
 - There was less emphasis this past year on outreach to faculty and staff (especially the former) since the faculty also have the services of the Faculty Conciliator. Please also see below: “Plans and Priorities for 2025-2026.”.
 - The upcoming year will see a greater emphasis on engaging with athletes and Greek Letter Organizations (i.e., fraternity and sorority life), and the faculty.
- Presented to all Senates.
- Provided training on Conflict Management for the Resident Assistant Team.
- Provided training on Communication for the cadets in the Air Force ROTC.
- Provided training to the Office of the President on de-escalation techniques.
- Engaged in regular check-ins and multiple presentations (3) to Associated Students of the University of Wyoming (ASUW) on multiple topics related to conflict, communication, and leadership.

Perceived Systemic Flaws
(as reported by respective unit members)

*Faculty**

Most of the concerns were with the “administration” or their direct supervisor, and included:

- Concerns for retaliation: Several faculty members expressed fear that if they raised issues about or with someone in their supervisory chain, it could lead to retaliation.
- Concerns about job security: More than half of the faculty members (from different schools) expressed concern about conflict leading to retaliation and job loss. Some further noted two additional dynamics that dovetail with this specific concern – that there was a high degree of turnover when conflict occurred, and that the university might have a budget cut or deficit soon, and would actively seek some “culling” of the total number of current employees (as one faculty put it).
- Lack of transparency: Several faculty members noted a lack of transparency and honesty from their supervisors and/or colleagues; one also asserted a pervasive culture of dissimulation.
- Inability of supervisors to understand and/or properly administer accommodations: Some faculty members claimed that they had received accommodations, but that their supervisor did not implement the accommodations properly or chose to do so selectively.
- Concern that engaging in conflict would damage a person’s professional reputation.
- Two reporting lines, or a funding source (with quasi-supervisory capabilities), separate from the immediate supervisor.

*Caution is needed in extrapolating from this data, since relatively few faculty members were reporting; there are, however, clear parallels with the prior End-of-Year report (submitted by the Ombudsperson in the summer of 2023).

Staff/Administration

Most of the concerns were with their supervisors or leadership in their area, and included:

- Concerns/conflicts with a colleague and/or supervisor.
- Lack of transparency.
- Concerns about potential retaliation.
- Concerns about job security.
- Micromanagement.
- Challenges with understanding/navigating policies.
- Concerns about work-life balance.

Students

Most of the Concerns/conflicts were with their instructor, and included:

- Unfair and/or discriminatory grading practices.
- Challenges understanding/navigating policies, procedures, or processes.
- Applying ADA accommodations unfairly/inappropriately.
- Unfair/inappropriate application of applicable policies and procedures.
- Concerns re: potential retaliation.
- Lack of transparency.

Summary Analysis on Concerns or Recurrent Narratives

There was a significant level of overlap between faculty and staff/administration about their perceived concerns. A sizeable number of these concerns echoed what the prior Ombuds report noted; the new concerns invite further scrutiny to determine whether they are outliers or potential trends.

There was noticeable concern for job security. One client noted, “All of higher ed(ucation) is being cut. Soon it will be our turn....” In a similar vein, there was angst about job security tied to the frequency of involuntary turnover with one client wryly singing the chorus from the Cole Porter song, “Anything goes.”

There was consistent concern about how both faculty and supervisors implement required accommodation(s) for people with disabilities.

There is also, seemingly, a lack of resources available to students when charged with violations of the student code of conduct and/or academic violations. The observation holds true for students who are challenging their grade(s). At other institutions, the Office of the Dean of Students would provide this service.

The Office received at least six referrals that were inconsistent with the charge of this office. These referrals originated from sources that were knowledgeable about the role of the Ombuds. There will be a concerted effort to provide greater outreach in both presentations and discussions to avoid this challenge in the future, since it sets up the “client” for unrealistic and unmet expectations of this service.

Recommendations/Suggestions for Improvement

One of the roles of an ombuds is to alert organizations and individuals to potential systemic issues. Within the profession, ombuds understand we surface concerns within the organization; in that capacity, we function as a “fire alarm, not a fire extinguisher.”

Based on both the nature and number of reported concerns (and the emerging themes), this office makes the following recommendations for consideration:

- Make training in the ADA a required part of ongoing professional development. This training would focus on the responsibilities of a supervisor and/or faculty member; it would review applicable principles and provide “practice” using real-life scenarios.
Rationale: The ADA is a federal law and has teeth, and its applicability is something that challenges every organization, including this one. Faculty and/or supervisors may not be fully aware of the limits of their authority when their responsibilities intersect with the ADA; training that addresses when to consult with human resources and/or disability support services (as applicable) might be beneficial.
- Develop a common template for academic adjudicative processes (e.g., grade appeals, alleged violations of professional standards) along with training on their execution (see below).
Rationale: There seems to be a high (and unnecessary) degree of variation in how academic units discharge this responsibility. This allows for inconsistencies that can adversely affect both students and the respective academic units.

- Require key academic affairs personnel to undergo training on understanding and administering said policies (noted above).

Rationale: Faculty are “content experts” within their respective areas of expertise and may benefit from training in areas that touch upon where academic processes intersect with due process.

- Reduce or minimize the administrative reporting lines. Remove, reduce, or otherwise mitigate differentiation in reporting lines and/or grant funding when possible and practical. If it is impractical or impossible to remove dual reporting lines, it would be useful to require the development of a plan detailing how the supervisee/grant recipient will function in the face of this ambiguity.

Rationale: The Ombuds' position is that dual reporting lines rarely add value, support, or efficacy; when they do, they typically come with higher costs, especially in relation to conflict. Indeed, from the perspective of conflict management, dual reporting lines often add ambiguity, confusion, and frustration, and can be problematic and/or wasteful. While situations may exist that require dual reporting lines (or an administrative reporting line and a PI “reporting line” for grants), such needs do not obviate the necessity for planning and coordinated execution on the part of the supervisors. Ideally, the supervisee should not be in an untenable position due to a lack of planning.

Plans and Priorities for AY 2025-2026

The Ombuds will need to continue to learn about the institution’s culture and applicable policies and procedures. A deeper grounding in both the culture and underlying policies will equip the Ombuds to be more effective in providing advice and identifying all viable options.

Similarly, considerable time will be needed to meet with individuals and units within the university, while continuing to develop existing relationships.

Part of that outreach will include engaging in regular presentations. Aside from still providing presentations on specific topics as requested, the Office of the Ombuds will proactively provide presentations with broad appeal. The Office will offer a regular, opt-in, speaker series that includes “brown-bag lunch and learn,” along with evening opportunities to ensure accessibility of content to the campus community.

Outreach efforts will focus on increasing the content for the new website to include:

- Clarifying the role and responsibilities of the Ombuds.
- Providing greater clarity about the limitations of the role.
- Developing sections for a Glossary of Terms and Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ).
- Providing the campus community with added resources that are readily accessible via the website.

For questions, concerns, or additional information, please contact:

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