

Attachment I

University of Florida: April 2013

University Faculty Senate Welfare Council Recommendation: Ombuds

The University Faculty Senate Faculty Welfare Council recommends the establishment of a University Faculty Ombuds Position and Office at the University of Florida.

Purpose of the position

The ombuds would provide informal, impartial, and confidential dispute resolution services for the faculty. This office would be a place where faculty members can seek information and guidance regarding concerns or conflicts – at no cost and with confidentiality to the extent permitted by law. The ombuds would not advocate for the individual or institution, but rather attempt to mediate disputes. The ombuds would be a source of information and provide assistance in answering questions and in the search for resolution of concerns and critical situations. The ombuds would not, however, replace the institution's existing resources or processes for formal conflict resolution.

Required Qualifications

The ombuds is expected to have faculty experience (either as a current tenured faculty member, a newly hired employee with faculty credentials, or an emeritus faculty member). The ombuds must have six years of professional level experience in dealing with administrative, human resource or related issues. The candidate must have proven ability to exercise independent judgment in analyzing complex and diverse workplace disputes and conflicts, as well as, demonstrated initiative and expertise in developing procedures and methodologies related to conflict resolution. The candidate must indicate a willingness to participate in a qualified ombuds training course leading to formal certification, unless that certification was previously acquired. Excellent interpersonal communication skills and professional demeanor are also required. Experience working with people of diverse backgrounds and cultures is essential.

Preferred Qualifications

The preferred qualifications include at least three years experience working as a faculty member in higher education. It is preferred the candidate have experience in developing and giving effective presentations to faculty and academic administrators. Experience in the field of employee relations or in providing mediation/facilitation services is desirable. Knowledge of state and federal employment laws, and university regulations and procedures would be helpful.

Sample Roles and Responsibilities for the Office

The Ombuds would:

- Provide a confidential environment to listen to questions and concerns
- Help identify alternative options and appropriate resources
- Offer an impartial perspective
- Facilitate difficult conversations as an impartial third-party
- Assist with early problem-solving to minimize the potential escalation of conflict
- Identify patterns of emerging issues and, as needed, recommend university policy review based on these patterns

- Promote equality, inclusion and access for all persons to reduce conflicts through informal resolution

The Ombuds would not:

- Provide legal advice
- Offer psychological counseling
- Make decisions or render judgments on issues
- Conduct investigations
- Participate in formal processes, such as grievances

Appointment

The appointment to the position of ombuds would be for one year with the option to renew annually by the mutual agreement of both parties and the availability of funding.

Sample Peer Institutions with Ombuds Offices

- 1) Ohio State University – separate faculty ombudsman (retired emeritus faculty member). They have a separate office for students and HR handles staff issues. <http://ombudsman.osu.edu/>
- 2) University of Michigan - Ann Arbor – separate office for faculty with college liaisons (retired emeritus professor) <http://www.umich.edu/~facombud/>
- 3) University of Texas at Austin – separate faculty office <http://www.utexas.edu/ombuds/>
- 4) University of North Carolina – three individuals who provide service for faculty, staff, and students <http://www.ombuds.unc.edu/index.html>
- 5) University of California - Berkeley – a committee of faculty members available for Academic Senate members. There is a separate Staff Ombudsperson office. <http://academic-senate.berkeley.edu/committees/omb/faculty-ombudsperson>
- 6) Penn State University - separate faculty ombudsperson (emeritus associate professor) with college and campus liaisons <http://senate.psu.edu/ombuds/ombuds.asp>
- 7) University of Wisconsin – ombuds office for faculty and staff; four part-time emeritus faculty and staff <http://www.ombuds.wisc.edu/>
- 8) University of Washington – one office for faculty, staff, and students. <http://www.washington.edu/about/ombudsman/>