

# University Ombuds Office Biennial Report

July 1, 2011 –  
June 30, 2013

University of Kansas, Lawrence

Kellie Harmon, University Ombuds, CO-OP  
Prof. Maria Orive, Faculty Ombuds  
Prof. Stephen Grabow, Alternate Faculty Ombuds

University of Kansas



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**HISTORY OF THE UNIVERSITY OMBUDS OFFICE**

The University Ombuds Office celebrated its 35<sup>th</sup> anniversary at the University of Kansas in November, 2012. The office was established in 1977 as a response to internal concerns that reached their peak during the conflict and protests of the mid-1960s through the early-1970s. These concerns primarily related to the civil rights movement for racial and economic equality, the anti-war movement, and the womens' rights movement. Other factors that contributed to the development of the University Ombudsman Office at this time included an increase in student and faculty involvement in University Governance, as well as a movement away from *in loco parentis* to more individual student responsibility.

As a result of these and other cultural factors, the administration and University Senate agreed that establishing an Ombudsman Office would assist in a more open environment conducive to better communication between constituents and in serving the needs and interests of the campus community. Professor William Balfour, former faculty member and the first Vice Chancellor of Student Affairs, was appointed the first ombudsman in 1977. In 1985, the second ombudsman, Professor Robert Shelton, served in this capacity for eighteen years until 2003, followed by Professor Doug Whitman who served a three year term until 2006.

In August, 2006, Kellie Harmon, formerly Assistant Ombudsman, was appointed Interim University Ombuds. She became the first non-faculty, full-time professional Ombuds. She started working in the Ombuds Office in 1993 and was appointed University Ombuds in 2007.

Maria Orive, Associate Professor of Ecology and Evolutionary Biology, was appointed as Faculty Ombuds and began her position in January, 2007. During fall 2007 and spring 2008 semesters, Professor Orive was on sabbatical leave, and Stephen Grabow, Professor in the School of Architecture, assisted as Faculty Ombuds part-time. Professors Orive and Grabow attended Ombuds training sponsored by the International Ombudsman Association in 2007.

In 2007, Ombuds Harmon changed the name of the office from "Ombudsman" to "Ombuds" to reflect a gender-neutral title more consistent with other university Ombuds offices in the United States (although not every university uses the term "Ombuds," the term is used by the majority of such offices).

In accordance with the International Ombudsman Association (IOA) Statement of Best Practices, the University of Kansas Ombuds Office adopted its first Statement of Best Practices document in 2008 that was supported by the offices of the Chancellor, Provost, and University Governance. Please take time to read the Statement of Best Practices on the Ombuds Office website at <http://ombuds.ku.edu/statement-best-practices-ku>.

In May, 2010, Ombuds Harmon was among the first group of eighty organizational ombuds internationally to become certified as an Organizational Ombuds Practitioner. Currently, certification status is voluntary for members of the International Ombudsman Association. Ombuds Harmon has to renew her certification every four years.

Currently, the Ombuds Office staff consists of one full-time Ombuds professional, Kellie Harmon, and two part-time Faculty Ombuds' professionals, Professor Maria Orive and Professor Stephen Grabow. The current K.U. Ombuds adhere to the International Ombudsman Association Standards of Practice and Code of Ethics. Refer to the following website for more information:

[http://www.ombudsassociation.org/IOA\\_Main/media/SiteFiles/IOA\\_Standards\\_of\\_Practice\\_Oct09.pdf](http://www.ombudsassociation.org/IOA_Main/media/SiteFiles/IOA_Standards_of_Practice_Oct09.pdf)

For more information on the history of the University of Kansas Ombuds Office, see Appendix A.

### **MOST COMMON ISSUES FOR SEEKING OMBUDS OFFICE ASSISTANCE**

The list below describes issues that were brought to the Ombuds Office by students, faculty, and staff ***in order of frequency with the largest number of issues brought to this office listed first:***

#### **Unclassified Professional Staff Issues:**

- Conflict with supervisor or colleague
- Alleged bullying, civility and work environment concerns
- Conflict/complaint about a university unit or specific staff person
- Health and disability concerns
- Consult regarding a student issue
- Non-reappointment

#### **Undergraduate Student Issues**

- Grade(s)
- Course management (how assignments are graded, exam issues, participation points, attendance, lack of feedback from instructor, other conflicts with instructor, etc.)
- Academic misconduct
- Enrollment, residency, tuition
- Exams
- "Clickers"
- Graduation requirements and/or advising
- Fees and fines
- Conflict with a particular unit or staff person in a unit

#### **Graduate Student Issues:**

- Conflict with advisor
- Grade(s)
- Conflict with instructor or faculty member
- Thesis/dissertation
- Conflict with department
- Funding
- Academic misconduct

**Faculty Issues:**

- Conflict with colleague(s), chair, dean
- Promotion and tenure
- Teaching load or other work-related concerns
- University policy consultation
- Consultation regarding a student matter
- Faculty rights consultation

**University Support Staff Issues:**

- Performance evaluation and/or disciplinary concerns
- Conflict with supervisor
- Civility, work environment, alleged bullying
- Health and disability concerns
- Confidentiality concerns

**STATISTICAL INFORMATION AND DISCUSSION**

Since the Ombuds role is neutral, we prefer not to use the term “client,” as that term commonly implies advocacy. Instead, we use the term “visitor.” Although not a perfect term because sometimes we assist people over the telephone, it more appropriately describes the nature of our contacts given our neutral role.

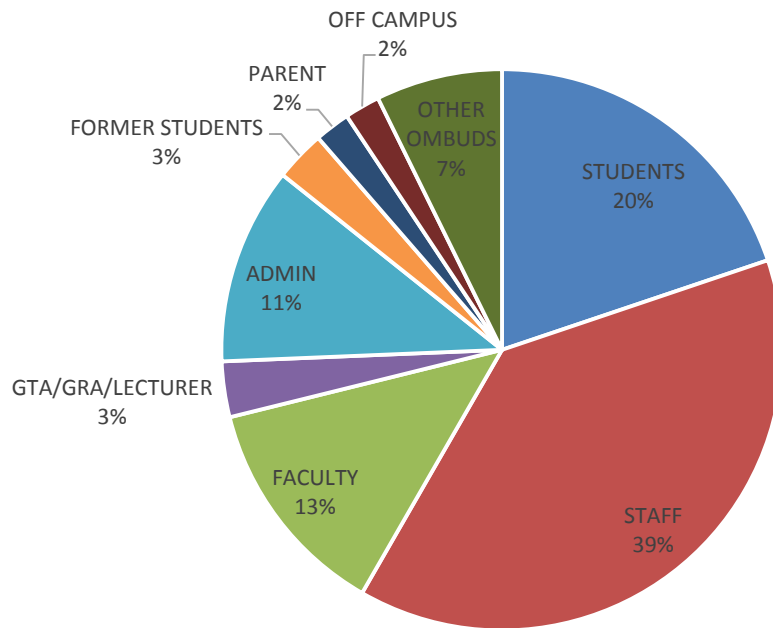
These numbers represent visitors who contacted the Ombuds Office either by telephone, email, or in-person. The contact is only counted once, so if we consult with a visitor more than one time on the same issue, the contact is not counted again. The time and response to visitors varies from a brief consultation to a large amount of time involving other individuals and campus units. The more complex the issue, the more time and additional follow-up is needed.

Although the Ombuds Office does not store records or any type of identifiable information, the Office tracks trends and patterns so we can assist in positive systemic change. One role of the Ombuds Office is to provide upward feedback to promote responsible systems change based on input we hear throughout the year while maintaining visitor confidentiality. The annual report is one of several ways the Ombuds Office provides feedback to the university community.

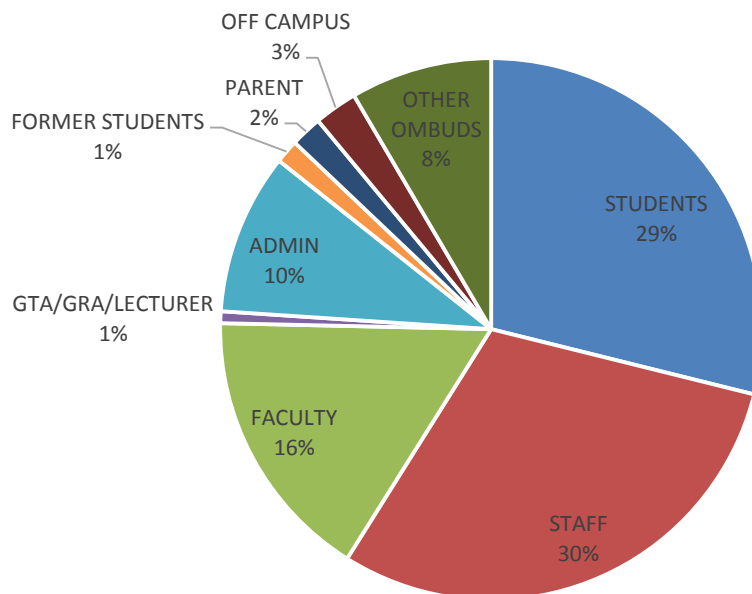
The breakdown of contacts are shown in the table and graphs below:

<b>Ombuds Office Contacts</b>	<b>2011-2012</b>	<b>2012-2013</b>
<b>Total Contacts</b>	<b>343</b>	<b>426</b>
Staff	132	128
Students	68	123
Faculty	44	70
Admin	39	41
GTA/GRA	11	3
Former Stu	10	6
Parent	7	8
Off-Campus	7	11
Other Ombuds	25	36

Visitors 2011-2012, percentage of total 343 cases



Visitors 2012-2013, percentage of total 426 cases



During the 2012-2013 academic year, we saw an increase of visitors from 343 cases in 2011-2012 to 426 cases. Staff members comprise the majority of cases, with students (both undergraduate and graduate) encompassing the second largest group. The Ombuds Office continues to see a rise in staff member visits (see “Observations and Commentary,” #1, below).

## **OBSERVATIONS AND COMMENTARY**

### **1. Faculty and staff response to reorganization and other changes within the University**

There were many organizational changes within the last couple of years. Changes in leadership, the re-organization of some units, budget cuts and other changes while trying to do “more with less”, can cause stress even if the changes are an improvement and more efficient in the long-run. Unsurprisingly, this results in more campus members contacting the Office with concerns. Some visitors find it helpful to “brainstorm” and have a productive, confidential, conversation with the University or Faculty Ombuds to analyze their situation, weigh the pros and cons, as well as to help organize their thoughts before they decide if they want to pursue taking an action to a formal level.

### **2. Whistleblowing and fear of retaliation**

This issue was touched upon in the last biennial report; however, it appears to be an ongoing concern. There were a few cases of visitors reporting alleged misconduct or violation of University policy to an official of the University and upon reporting the concern to the appropriate official, the visitors perceived they were being retaliated against. Some visitors believed they were doing what was right by coming forward and thus, were upset and disappointed when not only were their concerns not addressed, but they also perceived retaliation for coming forward. Confidentiality does not permit more specifics on this issue, and although retaliation can be difficult to prove, nevertheless, it seems this is a growing concern among some of the visitors that met with an Ombuds.

If someone feels retaliated against, more than likely, they will not be comfortable speaking about any future concerns. In addition, when other colleagues hear about what happened to those who came forward with a concern, it can discourage or prevent them from reporting misconduct or concerns to the appropriate official.

For more information, see the “Whistleblower Policy” in the Policy Library: <http://policy.ku.edu/internal-audit/whistleblower-policy>. In addition to the Ombuds Office, the Human Resources and Internal Audit offices are available if there are questions or concerns about reporting misconduct and/or if there is a perception of being retaliated against.

### **3. Graduate student supervision**

The majority of graduate student cases involve conflicts with their advisor. Often, this is a result of one party not meeting the expectations of the other party. Clearly, communication is a key issue in these situations and conflict arises when there is a communication breakdown or there is a disconnect between the graduate students’ expectations and the faculty advisors’ expectations. Although flexibility is usually necessary, communication preferences (i.e., phone, in-person, e-mail), time-lines,

other expectations (such as expectations regarding publication authorship), etc., ought to be established at the beginning of the student's degree program and consistently followed up through the duration of the student's program to keep track of progress or lack thereof. Also, feedback from the professor regarding the student's thesis or dissertation should be provided to the graduate student in a timely manner to keep the graduate student on track to graduate on time. Establishing guidelines from the very beginning results in fewer conflicts down the road.

## **WHAT WE DO AND WHAT WE DO NOT DO**

Many people ask how the Ombuds Office at K.U. differs from other resources on campus. The "Principles of an Ombuds" document listed in Appendix B describes the Ombuds function and demonstrates in more detail how the Office differs from "formal" resources that operate within administrative processes. The Ombuds role consists of four main principles: 1) Confidentiality; 2) Informality; 3) Neutrality; and 4) Independence. These principles are consistent with the International Ombudsman Association's Standards of Practice and Code of Ethics.

### What the University Ombuds Does

- Serves as a confidential resource (unless there is an imminent risk of serious harm)
- Listens and discusses concerns, complaints, or grievances
- Helps identify, clarify, and evaluate options
- Serves as a neutral facilitator between parties
- Gathers information, answers questions, and provides referrals
- Consults regarding university policies and procedures
- Advises individuals about formal and administrative options
- Offers coaching (i.e., how to prepare for a difficult conversation)
- Consults with University officials about broad issues and trends
- Provides recommendations for institutional change when appropriate
- Operates according to the International Ombudsman Association Standards of Practice and Code of Ethics

### What the University Ombuds Office Does **Not** Do

- Advocate for specific outcomes
- Make judgments (i.e., determine "guilt" or "innocence" or determine who is "right" and who is "wrong")
- Make binding or administrative decisions
- Participate or provide testimony in formal grievance procedures
- Maintain official records on behalf of the University
- Provide legal advice
- Offer psychological counseling
- Receive official "notice" for the University about complaints
- Assign sanctions to individuals
- Require individuals to come to our office



## **WHAT CAN A VISITOR EXPECT WHEN CONTACTING THE OMBUDS OFFICE?**

Although each case differs widely depending on the situation, the process of visiting the University Ombuds Office is as follows: a student, staff, or faculty member contacts the Ombuds Office by phone or e-mail. The University Ombuds Office encourages setting scheduled appointments because we are not usually able to accommodate walk-ins. While the Ombuds Office does not consult over e-mail, we will set up appointments via e-mail. Either a phone or in-person meeting is scheduled and either the University Ombuds or a Faculty Ombuds meets with the visitor.

At the meeting, visitors are explained the Principles of an Ombuds (see Appendix B) and the visitor explains the reason for the visit and discusses his/her concerns. Often, pros and cons of different options are discussed, policy information is explained, issues are clarified, and other possibilities are evaluated and considered. An Ombuds can also coach the visitor to prepare for a difficult conversation and/or facilitate conversations when necessary. An Ombuds does not tell a visitor specifically what to do because that impedes impartiality. Decisions are always up to visitors and they choose what they want to do based on advice from an Ombuds.

The Ombuds Office empowers people to help themselves. However, if additional intervention is necessary by the University or Faculty Ombuds, the visitor must first give permission, and then attempts to resolve or manage the issue is initiated. This typically involves various resources around the university such as a professor or GTA, a staff person, or conversations with an administrator, dean, or chair. It is important to remember that the University and Faculty Ombuds are a confidential, impartial, informal, and independent resource for the other participants that are contacted via the permission of the original visitor.

The University and Faculty Ombuds also provide policy consultation, referrals, coaching, and generally serves as a sounding board for the university community. The Office does not keep track of individual information, but does keep track of trends and patterns that arise within the University system. The Ombuds Office provides “upward feedback” based on these trends to administration or others to help create positive systems change.

## **OTHER OMBUDS ACTIVITIES**

### Increased Outreach

During 2011-2013, the University and Faculty Ombuds made a concerted effort to meet with new Deans, administrators, and other faculty and staff to increase awareness of the Ombuds Office. If any department or unit wants to request a visit from the University and Faculty Ombuds, please do not hesitate to contact the office. We are more than happy to meet, talk, and answer questions about the Ombuds role at K.U.

### Campus Dispute Assistance Services

If any person or group on campus would like to request mediation services, Campus Dispute Assistance Services (CDAS) is available for this purpose. The Ombuds Office keeps a list of trained faculty mediators who are available for mediation services. Although the Ombuds Office maintains the list and helps recruit mediation volunteers, the office itself is not directly involved in the mediation process. The list of mediators is not made public, but it is important to be aware that mediators are available and volunteer a considerable amount of their time and energy for this very important service.

## Threat Assessment Team

The University Ombuds is a member of the Threat Assessment Team. This team of various staff members meets on occasion to review situations that potentially may be a threat of violence, but does not involve an immediate threat. For more information about this team, please visit the Human Resources and Equal Opportunity web page at <http://policy.ku.edu/human-resources/workplace-violence-policy>

## **Professional Development and Activities from July 1, 2011-June 30, 2012**

During the 2011-2012 academic year, members of the University Ombuds Office performed the following additional activities and professional development:

### **University Ombuds, Kellie Harmon**

Ombuds Harmon participated in the IOA Professional Development workshops in Baltimore, MD, in October 2011 and completed three courses: 1) *Intermediate Course: A Step by Step Approach to Working with Visitors and Respondents*; 2) *“Mediation and Ombudsing: Complementary Processes”*; and 3) *A Primer on Employment Law*.

Ms. Harmon also participated in four, two-hour IOA sponsored webinar series focused on “bullying”: *Bullying for the Organizational Ombudsman* (November, 2011); *Using Mediation and Other Facilitated Processes to Deal with Workplace Bullying and Harassment* (December, 2011); *Bullying: You Know What the Problem Is, Now What Do You Do About It?* (February, 2012); *What Does the Research Tell Us about Workplace Bullying?* (March, 2012).

She also attended *Workshop on Organizational Change* in February 2012, and ½ day at the *2<sup>nd</sup> Annual Spring Symposium on the Scholarship of Diversity*, March, 2011, both on the KU campus.

Ombuds Harmon attended the annual IOA conference in Houston, TX, April 2012, and took a pre-conference workshop titled, *“Managing Up: Helping Visitors Improve Relationships with their Supervisors.”*

In addition, she is an IOA volunteer serving as a mentor to new ombuds all over the country. This usually involves many phone consultations to new ombuds, discussing the ombuds role to people who are interested in becoming an Ombuds, how to establish an Ombuds Office, and other related matters.

Ombuds Harmon and Orive gave several presentations across campus about the Ombuds role as well as meetings with some Deans, Associate Vice Provosts, and Directors. The University and Faculty Ombuds (including Prof. Grabow) also gave a presentation to University Senate in the fall 2011 semester.

### **Faculty Ombuds Orive**

The faculty ombuds, Professor Maria Orive, met with visitors and contacted other participants as needed throughout the 2011-2012 academic year. Ombuds Orive also provided office coverage whenever needed, such as during training and conference travel by Ombuds Harmon, or to cover vacation and sick leave. At the 2012 CTE Teaching Summit (8/18/11), Ombuds Orive and Harmon presented two break-out sessions on the topic “What Being An Ombuds Has Taught Me About Teaching”. The sessions used materials prepared by Ombuds

Orive, including three case studies (modified to preserve the anonymity of our visitors) that explored some of the main instructional conflict themes seen by the office (classroom expectations and communication, academic misconduct, and graduate student/advisor interactions). Feedback from the Summit was very positive, and we later had faculty members contact us asking for copies of the presentation (available on the CTE website or directly from the Ombuds Office). Additionally, Ombuds Orive continues to be involved with other aspects of campus outreach for the University Ombuds Office such as presentations on Responsible Research Ethics to graduate student courses.

### **Faculty Ombuds Grabow**

Professor Grabow handled eight individual cases (each with multiple contacts, meetings, and research), seven separate days of phone duty (including follow-ups), three intra-staff meetings, three annual meetings with KU administrators, one meeting with governance and one presentation to University Senate, and weekly intra-staff communications and consultations.

### **Professional Development and Activities from July 1, 2012-June 30, 2013**

During the 2012-2013 academic year, members of the University Ombuds Office performed the following additional activities and professional development:

### **University Ombuds, Kellie Harmon**

Ombuds Harmon attended the annual IOA conference in Houston, TX, April 2012, and took a pre-conference workshop titled, "*Managing Up: Helping Visitors Improve Relationships with their Supervisors.*" She is also attending the upcoming IOA Conference in Miami April 21st – 24<sup>th</sup>. Other professional development included attending the 10<sup>th</sup> Annual Summer Meeting of Midwest Academic Ombudspersons, July 22<sup>nd</sup>-23<sup>rd</sup>, 2012, at the University of Wisconsin, Madison.

In addition, Ombuds Harmon is on the IOA Mentoring Committee and also serves as a mentor to new ombuds all over the country. The IOA Mentoring Committee meets once a month via conference call for an hour and a half. The IOA Mentoring Committee also involves matching new Ombuds to a mentor and this can consist of several phone calls and e-mails to find the best match possible. Mentoring a specific new Ombuds consists of many phone consultations and discussions as questions arise during their first year of Ombuds service. In addition, it involves discussing the ombuds role to those who are interested in becoming an Ombuds, how to break into the Ombuds field, and how to establish an Ombuds Office, and other related topics.

Ombuds Harmon gave several presentations and held meetings along with Professors Orive and Grabow to explain the Ombuds role to university units, Deans, Directors, and classrooms. She also gave a few solo presentations to groups and graduate students.

Ombuds Harmon, along with Professors Orive, Grabow, and Shelton, planned the Ombuds Office 35<sup>th</sup> Anniversary celebration held in November, 2012. Ombuds Harmon also spent several hours in Spencer Research Library researching the history of the Ombuds Office at KU and collected all the annual reports since the office first opened in 1976. From the annual

reports she compiled a report that included yearly totals of how many faculty, students, and staff were met by the Ombuds Office and compared the data from year to year.

Finally, Ombuds Harmon is currently serving on the Carruth O’Leary Building Advisory Board that discusses emergency preparedness plans. She also participated in compliance candidate interviews as a member of the stakeholder group.

#### **Faculty Ombuds Orive:**

The Faculty Ombuds, Professor Maria Orive, met with visitors and contacted other participants as needed throughout the 2012-2013 academic year. Prof. Orive also provided office coverage whenever needed, such as during training and conference travel by Ms. Harmon, or to cover vacation and sick leave. Additionally, Prof. Orive assisted in planning the Ombuds Office Anniversary Celebration (11/2/12) and spoke briefly at the celebration. She also attended compliance candidate interviews as a member of the stakeholder group. Prof. Orive continues to be involved with other aspects of campus outreach for the University Ombuds Office. Some examples include Ombuds Office meetings with governance leaders, members of the KU administration, and deans of professional schools; preparing and leading a Civility Workshop; and presentations on Responsible Research and Ethics. Finally, Prof. Orive attended the International Ombudsman Association Conference with Ms. Harmon (4/21/14 – 4/24/13).

#### **Faculty Ombuds Grabow:**

Professor Grabow handled eight individual cases (each with multiple contacts, meetings, and research), four separate days of phone duty (including follow-ups), three intra-staff meetings, annual meetings with KU administrators and governance, weekly intra-staff communications and consultations, and gave a presentation to graduate students with Ms. Harmon. In addition, he also assisted with the planning of the 35th Anniversary of the Ombuds Office. Finally, Prof. Grabow attended the 10<sup>th</sup> Annual Midwest Summer Meeting of Academic Ombudspersons, July 21-22, 2012 at the University of Wisconsin, Madison with Ms. Harmon.

### **EVALUATION OF THE OMBUDS OFFICE**

Similarly to previous years, there was a low survey response rate, but almost all of the individuals who responded indicated a high level of satisfaction with the Ombuds Office. The Ombuds Office also wants to know from visitors how the Ombuds Office was valuable to them and the institution. Some of the responses to the question, “What would you have done without the Ombuds Office?” include:

- not talked about the issue
- left the University
- decrease in work productivity
- brought the issue outside the university (i.e., hired an attorney)
- would have had nowhere else to go
- would have brought the issue to the chancellor
- would have filed a formal grievance
- would have taken a lot more time and stress to deal with my issue
- might have left the program
- would have not known what to do

## **WHO AND WHERE WE ARE**

The University Ombuds Office is located in room 34 Carruth O'Leary Hall, 1246 West Campus Road, Lawrence, KS 66045. Our telephone number is (785) 864-7261. Our email is [ombuds@ku.edu](mailto:ombuds@ku.edu).

Kellie Harmon, the University Ombuds and full-time staff, is located in room 34, Carruth O'Leary Hall.

The Faculty Ombuds, Maria Orive (professor in Ecology and Evolutionary Biology) and Stephen Grabow (professor in the School of Architecture) can be contacted through the Ombuds Office for an appointment.

## **APPENDIX A**

### **HISTORY OF THE UNIVERSITY OF KANSAS OMBUDS OFFICE**

- October 24, 1974      University Council discussion began regarding grievance procedures and the need for a University Ombudsman.
- November 13, 1975    University Council created an Advisory Committee on Campus Grievances and an office of Ombudsman.
- April 15, 1976        Executive Vice Chancellor Shankel requested an opinion poll be completed by University Council members to determine the support for the creation of an ombudsman office.
- August 17, 1977      Dr. William Balfour, (former faculty member and Vice Chancellor of Student Affairs, 1968-1976) officially began his half-time appointment serving as the first University Ombudsman serving students, staff, and faculty.
- May, 1985             Professor Robert Shelton is appointed half-time as University Ombudsman.
- August, 1993         The University Ombudsman, Professor Robert Shelton, hires the office's first administrative assistant, Kellie Harmon. In July 1, 1996 the position becomes full-time. In 2000, the administrative assistant position becomes unclassified.
- February, 2000        Dr. William Balfour passed away at age 85.
- June, 2003            Professor Robert Shelton resigns as University Ombudsman after eighteen years of service.
- June, 2003            Kellie Harmon is appointed as the full-time Assistant University Ombudsman
- July 1, 2003          Professor Douglas Whitman begins his half-time appointment as University Ombudsman.
- July, 2006            Kellie Harmon is appointed Interim University Ombuds and becomes the first full-time staff ombudsperson. There is no longer an assistant ombudsperson or administrative assistant.
- January 1, 2007        Professor Maria Orive is appointed as Faculty Ombuds at .20 time. Prof. Stephen Grabow is also appointed at this time and serves as an alternate Faculty Ombuds with no specific time appointment, but fills in when

needed. Both Professor Orive and Professor Grabow attend Ombuds training offered by the International Ombudsman Association.

May, 2007

Kellie Harmon is appointed University Ombuds.

2007-2008

Professor Orive goes on sabbatical leave during the academic year. Professor Grabow replaces Professor Orive as Faculty Ombuds.

March, 2008

Statement of Best Practices (charter) written by the University Ombuds, Kellie Harmon, and approved by General Counsel with the support of the Chancellor, Provost, and University Governance.

Fall, 2008

Professor Maria Orive returns to her post as Faculty Ombuds. Professor Stephen Grabow stays on as additional faculty ombuds help as needed.

April, 2010

Kellie Harmon, University Ombuds, passes the necessary requirements to become a Certified Organizational Ombudsman Practitioner (CO-OP) designated by the International Ombudsman Association.

## APPENDIX B

### University Ombuds Office University of Kansas Principles of an Ombuds Office

The University Ombuds Office is a safe place where members of the University of Kansas community can seek impartial, confidential assistance in addressing conflicts, disputes, or complaints on an informal basis without fear of retaliation or judgment. The University Ombuds Office adheres to the International Ombudsman Association (IOA) *Standards of Practice* and *Code of Ethics*. These standards were developed in accordance with commonly understood principles within the organizational ombuds profession: “informal, independent, confidential, and impartial.”

**Informal:** The University Ombuds office is “informal” and “off-the-record”. An ombudsperson facilitates communication when conflict arises and provides an opportunity for informal dispute resolution. The Ombuds Office is a supplement, not a replacement for formal channels, and formal complaints are not filed here. The use of the Ombuds Office is voluntary and no one can be mandated to visit the office nor can someone be mandated not to visit the office. In fact, telling someone they are not allowed to visit the Ombuds Office may be perceived as a form of retaliation. **An ombudsperson does not make judgments, request or enforce disciplinary action, or participate in any internal or external formal proceedings, nor shall an ombudsperson participate as witnesses with respect to confidential communication.**

The University Ombuds Office must also cease assistance if the visitor is involved in a formal grievance process or an attorney becomes involved in the dispute. *As an informal, independent, confidential, “off-the-record” resource, conversations with the Ombuds Office do not serve as “notice” to the University.*

**Independent:** To ensure objectivity, the University Ombuds Office operates independently of other campus resources, offices, and units. The University Ombuds Office is not part of the formal “chain-of-command” and visiting with an ombudsperson does not mean someone is skipping over positions in the hierarchal chain. In addition, *the University Ombuds Office must be free from interference in the legitimate performance of its duties.* Due to our independence, and because we are not part of University administration, our only agenda is to encourage communication, to create an environment where issues are safely brought forward, and to promote the management of conflict, fairness and cooperation throughout the University.

**Confidential:** The University Ombuds Office is confidential. *An ombudsperson will not talk with anyone or do anything about an issue without the visitor’s permission.* An exception to upholding confidentiality is if there is a reasonable concern about serious risk of imminent harm. The University Ombuds Office is an impartial, confidential resource for every person involved in the dispute and anyone can contact the Ombuds Office at any time as long as they are not involved in a formal process. *The University Ombuds Office does not keep records on behalf of the university. The Ombuds Office will not receive documents from visitors nor keep “on file” any information given to the office.*

**Impartial:** *An ombudsperson is not an advocate for individuals but is an advocate for fair process.* An ombudsperson will not side with the visitor who originally brought the issue to his or her attention, nor does he or she side with others involved in the dispute. *Due to our impartiality, the University Ombuds Office does not have a stake in the outcome of a situation brought to our attention.* The Ombuds Office does not impose solutions because that would impede impartiality, but suggests options and offers advice so that visitors can address concerns more effectively.

Kellie Harmon, University Ombuds, CO-OP (Certified Organizational-Ombudsman Practitioner)

Prof. Maria Orive, Faculty Ombuds

Prof. Stephen Grabow, Faculty Ombuds

Room 36 Carruth O’Leary; (785) 864-7261\*

[www.ombuds.ku.edu](http://www.ombuds.ku.edu)