

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

****By appointment only***

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