University Ombuds Services

Mary Steinhardt
University Faculty Ombudsperson

Brittany Linton
University Student Ombudsperson

Jen Sims
University Staff Ombudsperson
UNIVERSITY OMBUDS SERVICES

Faculty Ombuds: Mary Steinhardt
Student Ombuds: Brittany Linton
Staff Ombuds: Jen G. Sims

CAMPUS OMBUDS OPERATING PRINCIPLES

CONFIDENTIALITY:
- Ombuds do not identify visitors or discuss their concerns without permission
- Exceptions may be made as required by law or University policy
- This includes a perceived imminent risk of serious harm

NEUTRALITY:
- Ombuds provide impartial and objective assessments of any concern
- Ombuds operate as neutral third-parties and do not take sides
- Ombuds are advocates for equity, fair process, and fair administration

INFORMALITY:
- Conversations with Ombuds are considered informal and off-the-record
- Ombuds do not maintain records (other than statistical data)
- Ombuds do not participate in formal grievances or complaints
- Use of any of the offices is strictly voluntary

INDEPENDENCE:
- Ombuds Offices are independent and out of the University’s normal administrative structure to aid impartiality
- Ombuds do not give or receive compulsory orders in working with other University divisions
- Ombuds exercise autonomy and report to the highest levels at the University

**Offices’ operations are based upon the Code of Ethics and Standards of Practice of the International Ombudsman Association.**
The Ombuds can:

- Listen in a nonjudgmental and objective way
- Answer questions or refer visitors to someone who can
- Explain how University policies or procedures work
- Help identify options in resolving a problem
- Help evaluate options and possible next steps
- Assist in informally resolving a dispute or conflict by facilitating communication, coaching on conflict resolution, or mediating between willing parties
- Refer individuals to the appropriate office should they wish to file a formal complaint
- Look into perceived procedural irregularities in grievance proceedings
- Recommend changes to policies/procedures that appear problematic
- Inform University officials about significant trends, patterns of complaints, or problems that appear to be systemic

How Can the Campus Ombuds Help You?

- Identify issues and options
- Clarify desired outcomes
- Strategize – to whom and how can you best raise this issue or concern
- Think through difficult situations (personally and/or professionally) in a confidential, neutral setting – with someone familiar with UT culture
- Facilitate understanding and resolution
- Pursue organizational development through systemic feedback

Campus Ombuds Process

Examples of Concerns Commonly Brought to Campus Ombuds

- Questions or complaints about a University office, service, or decision
- Need for mediation help or facilitating communication
- Perceived inequities in work or pay; unfair treatment
- Belief that a University policy or practice is unfair or confusing
- Perceived unethical or inappropriate behavior
- Interpersonal conflicts and problems with workplace climate
- Concerns about career advancement & job satisfaction or security
- Advice on having a difficult conversation
- Problems of institutional non-responsiveness and red-tape
- Need for an impartial and confidential sounding board
- Unsure where else to turn for help or next steps
OFFICE OF THE STUDENT OMBUDS

PURPOSE:
The Office of the Student Ombuds was created in 1968 to hear student concerns, facilitate information gathering, and aid in generating options.

VISITORS:
The Student Ombuds is available to all students of the University. The Ombuds also routinely answers questions from administrators.

MOST COMMON ISSUES REPORTED TO STUDENT OMBUDS

- Grade disputes
- Communication of class expectations or department policies
- Scholastic dishonesty
- Unclear grading criteria or standards for curves
- Academic expenses
- Degree requirements
- Final exams
- Current semester and retroactive withdrawals
- Probation & dismissal
- Dissertation committees
- Student employment
- Registration concerns
- Managing relationship dynamics

STUDENT OMBUDS CONSULTATIONS DURING JUNE 2013- MAY 2014

- Over 1300 student contacts
- Total of 286 visitors from 89 academic departments/divisions within University:
  - 195 Undergraduate (89 in senior standing), 75 Graduate (43 in PhD programs), and 16 various (administrators, parents, incoming students, etc.)
- Three largest concerns were grade disputes (~74 cases), academic integrity (~69), and faculty interactions (~68)
- Students had concerns with professors in the majority of cases, followed by academic advisors and decisions/policies of departments
- Registration, internal transfers, and probation/dismissal concerns were also growing trends this year
- Busiest times are following mid-terms and end of semesters
- Ombuds intervention most used: coaching, communication skill building, explaining policy, and referring out
**Talking with Students: Helpful Tips**

- Indicate your preferred form of communication (e.g., email, phone, in person, etc.)
- Inform them of deadlines and time frames for meetings or decisions
- Clarify the context of the concern:
  - Why is this issue important?
  - What additional factors should be taken into account?
- Establish the specific requests and/or a proposed satisfactory resolution
- Attempt empathy – you don’t have to be in agreement
- Explain your rationale for a decision (i.e. the policy)
- Clarify any future expectations

**How the Student Ombuds Can Work With You**

- Contact you regarding general questions or particular case concerns
- Provide referrals
- Trend reporting related to your division
- Provide consultation on division academic policies/procedures (per request)
- Suggest best practices for conflict resolution
- Opportunities for discussions related to improving graduate advising and mentoring or difficult conversations

**Student Ombuds Office**

Brittany Linton, M.A.
Student Ombuds

Phone: 512-232-8010  
Website: [http://www.utexas.edu/students/ombuds](http://www.utexas.edu/students/ombuds)

**Student Ombuds Office Location:**  
SSB G1.404  
Ground floor of the Student Services Building

Visitors are encouraged to call to set up an appointment. We also are happy to try to accommodate walk-ins.
OFFICE OF THE UNIVERSITY FACULTY OMBUDSPERSON
ESTABLISHED SEPT. 2004

Purpose:
The Faculty Ombuds is intended to provide “visitors” with a prompt and professional way to resolve concerns, conflicts, and complaints beyond turning to their supervisors.

Visitors:
The Faculty Ombuds is available to all members of the University with faculty and post-doctoral appointments.

CONSULTATIONS – INCREASED TREND
FROM 2004 THROUGH 2014

Visitors To Faculty Ombuds

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Visitors</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2008-2009</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2009-2010</td>
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<td>2010-2011</td>
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<tr>
<td>2012-2013</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2013-2014</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

average 2004-2008

CONSULTATIONS DURING
2013-14 ACADEMIC YEAR

- Total of 124 visitors
- From 13 colleges/schools; 45 departments/divisions
  - 5 Post-docs; 11 Lecturers/Specialists; 17 Assist Prof; 25 Assoc Prof; 41 Prof; 16 Dept Chairs/Directors; 9 Deans/Assoc Deans
  - 61 Female; 63 Male
- 9 requests for information only
- Faculty Ombuds works approximately 10-15 hrs/wk
- Most cases resolved without initiating grievance process
- Extraordinary cooperation from Deans, Senior Vice Provost, Provost, Legal Affairs, Office of Institutional Equity, and other Administrative Officials
GENERALIZATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Choose actions that best demonstrate fairness and respect, and, where appropriate, advocacy for rewards.

…nonetheless, conflicts will arise (well-meaning bright people sometimes disagree), and most can be resolved amicably.

Under the University Code of Conduct, all members of the University community are responsible for treating other members of the community, as well as visitors to campus, fairly, honestly, and respectfully as each of us conducts his or her function at the University.

Mary Steinhardt, EdD, LPC
Faculty Ombuds
Professor, College of Education

Phone: 512-471-5866 (UT)
E-mail: facombud@uts.cc.utexas.edu
Faculty Ombuds Office Location: WMB 2.102
Web: www.utexas.edu/faculty/council/ombuds

Note: An initial phone contact results in rapid arrangement of a mutually convenient time for a longer meeting or phone conversation.
Visitors from divisions within University:
Professional, Support, Service/Craft/Technical

Great cooperation from all affected parties

Most common issues are Career Progression and Development, Interpersonal, Organizational Issues, and Civility

Ombuds Intervention most used: Coaching, Referring, Research

Please see website for more detailed reports

The University of Texas at Austin
Staff Ombuds Office is a place where all staff members are welcome to come in and talk in confidence about any concerns.

Phone: 512-232-8010
Website: http://www.utexas.edu/staff/ombuds

Staff Ombuds Office Location:
Walter Webb Hall, Room 401
At the corner of 25th & Guadalupe Streets

Thank You!