

## Faculty Ombuds Officer

The Faculty Ombuds Officer will serve as an independent, neutral and impartial, confidential, and informal resource for faculty at Texas A&M University. The ombuds officer will strive to adhere to the professional ethical principles and best practices as defined by the International Ombudsman Association:

### *ETHICAL PRINCIPLES*

**INDEPENDENCE:** The Faculty Ombuds Officer is independent in structure, function, and appearance to the highest degree possible within the organization.

**NEUTRALITY AND IMPARTIALITY:** The Faculty Ombuds Officer, as a designated neutral, remains unaligned and impartial. The Faculty Ombuds Officer does not engage in any situation which could create a conflict of interest.

**CONFIDENTIALITY:** The Faculty Ombuds Officer holds all communications with those seeking assistance in strict confidence, and does not disclose confidential communications unless given permission to do so. The only exception to this privilege of confidentiality is where there appears to be imminent risk of harm.

**INFORMALITY:** The Faculty Ombuds Officer, as an informal resource, does not participate in any formal adjudicative or administrative procedure related to concerns brought to his/her attention.

### *Purpose*

The Faculty Ombuds Officer will function as a confidential, neutral resource for faculty to raise and clarify issues and concerns, identify options, and request assistance to informally resolve workplace conflicts, including mediation services. When informal resolution of conflicts fail, or when informal resolution is not advisable, the Ombuds Officer will counsel faculty regarding their options for formal action and direct them to the appropriate university rules, resources, and offices.

The Faculty Ombuds Officer will inform the Vice Provost and the Executive Committee of the Faculty Senate of the type, volume, and severity of the conflicts and issues he or she observes. This information will be useful in guiding policy decision-making for the continual improvement of fairness, equity, and respect at Texas A&M University.

### *Services*

Faculty will be able to seek guidance regarding concerns at any time, without fear of reprisal. The Faculty Ombuds Officer will hear individual or broader systemic faculty concerns confidentially. Whereas the response of the ombuds officer will be tailored to the dynamics of the situation and the nature of the concerns, generally the ombuds officer's role will be to assist parties in reaching informal resolutions that are consistent with the rules and policies of the university. The ombuds officer may supplement, but not replace or interfere with, formal processes available to the university community. The ombuds officer does not serve notice to the University, cannot impose remedies or sanctions, or enforce or change any policy, rule, or procedure.

The ombuds officer may serve as a communication resource and catalyst for institutional change for the university by reporting trends and identifying opportunities to enhance policies and procedures. Aligned with institutional change, the ombuds officer will work with faculty networks, colleges and departments to build and enhance faculty mentoring opportunities at all levels.

**More specifically, the Faculty Ombuds Officer will:**

- Provide faculty with individual assistance with university-related conflicts or concerns
  - Listen impartially and give unbiased feedback
  - Provide a confidential place to collaboratively explore complaints, clarify issues, and consider options
  - Point faculty toward available services and resources
- Assist with early problem-solving, to minimize the escalation of conflict
  - Encourage and empower employees to find their own solutions to problems
  - Provide support for addressing work place problems
  - Facilitate communication when conflict arises
  - Serve as facilitator in group problem-solving
  - With the visitor's consent, consult with university units and departments to obtain more information about the issue and explore options for conflict resolution
  - Provide and recommend mediation services as needed
  - Suggest the redirection of matters to formal channels when appropriate
- Identify and report about campus trends and problem areas
  - Make recommendations regarding changes in policy and procedure
  - Promote equality, inclusion and access for all persons
  - Advocate for and model fairness, equity, and a healthy work environment
  - Enhance faculty development and mentoring opportunities across campus

**Limitations:**

- The ombuds officer does not have any formal decision-making capability, or the ability to determine "Guilt" or "Innocence" in any matter.
- The ombuds officer does not offer legal advice and does not act as an advocate or representative of any individual or entity.
- The ombuds officer does not offer psychological counseling.
- The ombuds officer steps aside when a grievance is filed.
- The ombuds officer does not arbitrate or adjudicate grievances or disputes.

**Appointment process and qualifications of the Faculty Ombuds Officer:**

- The Faculty Ombuds Officer is a part-time position appointed (evaluated and reappointed) by the Vice Provost in consultation with the Executive Committee of the Faculty Senate.

- Important qualifications for Faculty Ombuds Officer include:
  - Tenured faculty member at the rank of Professor
  - Knowledge of university policies and resources
  - Extensive cross campus experience
  - Strong communication skills
  - Ability to be objective and neutral
  - Strong conflict resolution skills
  - Commitment to promote ethical conduct in the performance of the Faculty Ombuds Officer role
  - Understanding of cross-cultural values and commitment to diversity