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# university & college ombuds association

The University & College Ombuds Association is an international organization of persons who perform the ombuds function in universities and colleges and individuals who are interested in the ombuds practice.

## **UCOA's mission is to:**

- enhance and advance the practice of ombudsing in higher education;
- assist existing university and college ombuds professionals and organizations in improving their ombuds services;
- promote, consult on, and assist with the establishment of ombuds offices in institutions of higher education;
- foster cooperation and exchange with other ombuds organizations and dispute resolution professionals in the public and private sectors.

## **This is achieved through:**

An annual meeting, professional development workshops and seminars, newsletters, a mentoring program, a consultation/resource service, and participation in UCOANET—a listserv providing resource materials and membership information, as well as an immediate communications network for members.

## **The Ombuds Office in a university or college is an independent, confidential, impartial resource, designated:**

- to help individuals function effectively within the university/college system;
- to help the university/college recognize problems, issues and trends, deal proactively with them, and evolve more effective policies and procedures.

## **Role of a university or college Ombuds Office:**

Ombuds Offices provide confidential and impartial complaint-handling services for students, staff, faculty, and administrators. Ombuds Offices operate independently, as a supplement to existing administrative or formal grievance procedures, and have no formal decision-making authority. They do not act as advocates for either side in a dispute. To achieve maximum independence, most University and College Ombuds Offices report administratively to the CEO of the institution.

## **An ombudsperson is...**

a designated neutral or impartial dispute resolution practitioner who provides confidential and informal assistance to her/his constituents.

## **An effective ombuds professional must have:**

- skills in listening carefully and communicating effectively;
- conviction that the university system works best when honoring the rights and responsibilities of each member of the campus community;
- the ability to work with all segments of that community;
- knowledge of the policies, procedures and ways in which the institution functions;
- the ability to be creative in developing resolutions that are fundamentally fair to all.

## **Membership**

**Voting membership** is open to individuals who are full or part-time practicing ombuds professionals affiliated with an institution of higher education who practice according to the UCOA Standards of Practice and who:

- have no notice, compliance, regulatory, enforcement, adjudicatory, or disciplinary functions, and are not part of an administrative unit which has any of such functions and responsibilities, including, but not limited to, sexual harassment; and
- have no other responsibilities that compromise or limit real or perceived confidentiality, independence, and impartiality, or create real or perceived conflicts of interest, while serving as ombuds; and
- if faculty members, refrain from participating in departmental, college/school, and institutional activities and committees that compromise or limit confidentiality, independence, and impartiality, or create conflicts of interest, while serving as the ombuds.

**Associate membership** is open to individuals who endorse and support the UCOA Standards of Practice and who are:

- full or part-time practicing ombuds professionals affiliated with institutions of higher education who do not qualify for or wish to be considered for Voting Membership; or
- affiliated with entities other than institutions of higher education; or
- interested in the ombuds profession.

Associate members have limited voting rights, but may participate in every other way in UCOA activities. Honorary or emeritus memberships may also be granted to individuals.

## **Benefits of UCOA Membership**

Belonging to UCOA provides opportunities to:

- work with and learn from an experienced ombuds mentor during the first year of membership;
- receive UCOA publications (e.g. Handbook, Newletters, etc.) and materials such as a listing of resource consultants;
- subscribe to UCOANET;
- attend the annual University and College Ombuds Association Conference at reduced rates;
- contribute to the effectiveness of UCOA by taking an active role in its growth, development, and governance;
- participate in projects and activities that are pertinent to the needs and interests of higher education ombudspersons;
- enhance your ability to serve your university/college.



**For more information about UCOA and for information on how to join, access our website at:**

<http://www.colorado.edu/Ombuds/UCOA/>