

Academic Ombud

Responsible Unit: Academics, Vice President's Office

Date Approved: December 2005

Date Revised: January 2011

The Academic Ombud helps resolve academic disputes between students and faculty or administration. When a student is unable to resolve a grievance or complaint through usual means, the Ombud may be able to expedite the process or advise the student about the proper procedures to follow. Problems include, but are not limited to, violation of students' academic rights, unfair teaching and grading practices, cheating and plagiarism, and discrimination and harassment.

The Ombud will:

- Be an advocate for fairness
- Listen and discuss questions, issues, and concerns
- Maintain student confidentiality, with the exception of times when, with the student's permission, it becomes appropriate to mediate between the student and involved parties.
 - Advise individuals about steps to resolve problems informally
 - Advise individuals about formal and administrative options to resolve problems
 - Explain College policies and procedures
 - Point out patterns of problems/complaints to administrators

The Ombud will not:

- Make decisions for the student
- Make decisions for College faculty/administrators
- Direct any College office to change a decision
- Determine "guilt" or "innocence" of those accused of wrong-doing
- Assign sanctions to students
- Have a stake in outcomes
- Receive official "notice" for the College about issues
- Give legal advice

Decision to Accept a Case

When an issue to be resolved is brought to the Academic Ombud, the Ombud shall first determine if the issue falls within his or her jurisdiction, as defined above. If it does not, the Ombud shall refer the person presenting the issue to the proper authority to deal with it. If the

issue does fall within his or her jurisdiction, the Ombud shall determine if efforts have been made to adjudicate the issue through normal channels and procedures. Where such channels and procedures exist and have not been utilized, the Ombud shall recommend their use, unless there is compelling evidence that they will not effectively resolve the issue.

The Academic Ombud shall investigate each issue falling within his or her jurisdiction to determine:

- a) whether it is deserving of extended attention; and
- b) the priority of attention which it should be accorded by the Ombud's office.

Procedures

When the Academic Ombud determines that an issue merits his or her attention, the Ombud shall contact the parties involved to determine the background of the issue and areas of disagreement. With this information in hand, the Ombud shall seek to determine alternative means of achieving an equitable resolution and propose to the conflicting parties those solutions which appear to offer the greatest promise of mutual satisfaction. The investigatory and mediation activities shall be conducted informally and need not involve confrontation of the conflicting parties.

Liaison

The Academic Ombud shall maintain close liaison with the appropriate Academic Dean. However, the Ombud shall not violate the rights of students or other parties involved in cases brought to the Ombud through the disclosure of any information communicated in confidence.

Records and Reports

The Academic Ombud shall retain a record of all accepted cases. The Ombud shall review all files at the end of the term of office and should destroy any files of resolved cases five years old or older. If not destroyed, then all names should be removed. The decision not to destroy a file ought to be based on criteria such as a resolution possibly serving as a precedent for similar cases in the future. All unresolved cases more than one year old and never forwarded to the Appeals Board shall be destroyed. The Ombud shall present annually a report of activities to the Vice President of Academics and may offer recommendations for changes in rules, practices, or procedures to achieve more harmonious and effective governance of student academic issues.

Qualifications of the Academic Ombuds

Ombuds must be veteran members of the faculty. The qualifications should be those permitting the faculty member to perform the functions of the office with fairness, discretion, and efficiency. It is important that the person be regarded by students as one who is genuinely interested in their welfare and sympathetic to their problems. It is equally important that the person be temperate in judgment, judicious in action, and persistent in seeking to achieve prompt and equitable solutions to the problems brought to him or her. Frequently, the success of the Ombud depends upon his or her ability to utilize informal channels of communication and action; therefore, that person should be one able to develop and maintain cordial personal relations with a wide variety of students, faculty, and members of the administrative staff. Above all, the person must be one of unquestionable integrity and resolute commitment to justice.

Selection Procedure

The Vice President of Academics, with the advice of the Academics Leadership Team, shall appoint Academic Ombuds based upon analysis of submitted application materials.

Should the office of Academic Ombud be vacated prior to the expiration of the normal term of office, a new appointment shall be made to fill the unexpired term using the same procedures as described above.

Conditions of Assignment

The term of assignment for each Academic Ombud is three academic years, and the amount of reassignment (typically 0-6 hours) is determined annually. The assignment will continue for the specified duration and with the specified reassigned hours unless there is communication with the Ombud during the term about the possibility of changes to this term and/or these hours.

The Ombud shall be eligible for reappointment.