

Louisiana State University New Orleans – School of Medicine
Ombudsman Policies and Procedures
Developed: July 2017

Throughout your academic journey, there may come a time when you encounter an unresolved dispute or an unsettling discussion and feel uncertain as to how to reach a resolution. During these times, students need someone to whom they can turn. That is why the Office of Students Affairs in the School of Medicine is excited to announce the new student ombudsman role. The person in this role, also commonly known as the *ombudsperson* or *ombuds*, is guided by an unyielding code of ethics. The fundamental responsibility of an ombudsman is to offer a safe, confidential, and neutral environment to discuss individual, group, and systemic problems and to evaluate options for resolution without fear of retribution.

As an alternate and informal pathway to conflict resolution, the ombudsman is committed to adhering to the International Ombudsman Association Standards of Practice:

- **Confidentiality:** The Ombudsman 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 serious harm to self or others.
- **Informality:** The Ombudsman, as an informal resource, does not participate in any formal adjudicative or administrative procedure related to concerns brought to his/her attention but can advise students on the process of lodging a formal complaint.
- **Neutrality and Impartiality:** The Ombudsman, as a designated neutral, remains unaligned and impartial. The Ombudsman does not engage in any situation, which could create a conflict of interest. Existing outside of formal channels, the Ombudsman does not advocate for a particular office or for any specific individual, rather the ombudsman advocates for a fair process and a fair outcome.
- **Independence:** The Ombudsman is independent in structure, function, and appearance to the highest degree. The Ombudsman holds no other position within the organization, which might compromise independence. The Ombudsman has no influence over the student's academic endeavors, including but not limited to writing official LSUHSC recommendation letters, formal academic evaluations, and grades.

What is the Role of the Ombudsman?

- Listen to concerns
- Gather information
- Informally mediate and investigate complaints
- Analyze, identify, and evaluate options
- Explain campus policies and procedures
- Assist students in navigating formal reporting channels
- Advocate for fairness
- Recommend policy changes to alleviate chronic problem areas

Due to the delicate nature of the ombudsman's role, a few activities and functions are prohibited from its scope of duties. The ombudsman will not make binding decisions, provide legal advice, compel any

person or department to implement recommendations, participate in a formal investigation or a formal resolution process, maintain official files on behalf the organization, and take action without express permission from the student.

Concerns Commonly Discussed with the Ombudsman

- Conflicts with or grievances about faculty, staff, or other students
- Factors affecting enrollment or academic success
- Physical/Mental Health issues
- Academic policy
- Grade appeals
- Academic integrity topics
- Financial concerns

What is the Process of Working with an Ombudsman?

1. Contact the Ombudsman

The Ombudsman's Office maintains an open-door policy for students at all times to aid in responding to complaints, questions, and concerns. Students are welcome to arrange an appointment by phone or e-mail, but scheduled consultations are not necessary. The office also encourages students to gather relevant documents that may support the details of their complaint.

2. Assessing and Investigating the Complaint

During the initial consultation, the ombudsman will identify the underlying complaint and make appropriate recommendations for mediation or further actions based on the facts and context of the complaint. Transparency during the planning process is critical because the ombudsman's primary concern is to ensure that students feel at ease and protected throughout the proposed action plan set forth.

Given that the central purpose of this role is to ensure that students feel safe and comfortable discussing private matters, confidentiality is key. At no point during the initial consultation, investigative process, or even after a resolution has been reached will the Ombudsman reveal the identity of any student in contact with the Ombudsman Office to faculty, staff, students, or outside parties without express permission from the student, unless required to do so by law. However, during the problem-solving phase, the ombudsman may disclose described events so long as the student's identity is not compromised. The only instance where the ombudsman is required to violate confidentiality is under Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972. Should the Office receive allegations involving sexual harassment, discrimination, and/or sexual assault, the office must submit a report to the LSUHSC New Orleans Title IX Coordinator. In such cases, the Ombudsman will explain to the student the required procedures for reporting and responding to a complaint alleging a violation of Title IX.

It is also significant to note that while the ombudsman serves in an informal and an off-the-record basis for listening, developing options, interventions, and mediation, the ombudsman does not replace any formal procedures required by the school nor does the ombudsman accept official notice on behalf of the school.

3. Summary Report

For the purposes of retaining statistical data regarding general demographics and categories of concerns that students discuss, a summary report will be created. At the close of an informal investigation, students will be invited to meet with the ombudsman to discuss the outcomes noted

in the report. This report will contain details of the principal complaint, the process of the mediation or investigation performed relevant facts, outcomes, and recommendations, which will not include any personal identifiers. Due to the sensitive nature of the report, student will not be allowed to make copies of the document but are free to review this document with the ombudsman.

4. Ensuring Follow Through

The ombudsman's role is not only to treat complaints as they surface but also to take proactive measures to safeguard the quality of the learning environment throughout the school. The ombudsman will monitor all proposed solutions on their effect at both individual case levels and throughout the organizational level.

The ombudsman is available at any stage for advice or assistance in resolving academic complaints. Should you need help, please do not hesitate to contact the student ombudsman for the School of Medicine.

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