

32.01.01W1.2 Faculty Ombuds Officer
March 5, 2012
Supplements System Policy 32.01.01

This procedure establishes a Faculty Ombuds Officer at West Texas A&M University and provides guidelines for the administration of this position.

PURPOSE

The Faculty Ombuds Officer will function as a confidential, neutral resource for faculty and professional librarians to raise and clarify issues and concerns, identify options, and request assistance to informally resolve workplace conflicts. When informal resolution of conflicts fail, or where 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. Faculty will be able to seek guidance regarding concerns at any time, without fear of reprisal. An employee's complaint alleging discrimination, sexual harassment, and/or related retaliation must be filed in accordance with System Regulation 08.01.01. If a claim of illegal discrimination/retaliation is raised to the Ombuds Officer, the officer should immediately forward the issue to the appropriate person under WTAMU Procedure 08.01.01W1.1.

1. ROLE OF OMBUDS OFFICER

- 1.1 The Faculty Ombuds Officer will provide a confidential place for faculty to collaboratively explore complaints, clarify issues, and consider options. As appropriate, the Faculty Ombuds Officer will direct faculty toward available services and resources. Conversations may be confidential, but any written documentation maintained or provided to or by the Ombuds Officer will be subject to the Public Information Act, Ch. 552, Government Code.
- 1.2 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 procedures of the University.
- 1.3 The Ombuds Officer may supplement, but not replace or interfere with, formal processes available to the University community.
- 1.4 The Ombuds Officer does not serve notice to the University, cannot impose remedies or sanctions, or enforce or change any rule or procedure.
- 1.5 The Ombuds Officer will assist with early problem-solving, to minimize the escalation of conflict. She/he will encourage and

empower employees to find their own solutions to problems; provide support for addressing work place problems; facilitate communication when conflict arises; and serve as facilitator in group problem-solving. With the interested party's consent, consult with university units and departments to obtain more information about the issue and explore options for conflict resolution, and suggest the redirection of matters to formal channels when appropriate.

- 1.6 Quarterly, the Faculty Ombuds Officer will inform the President and the Executive Committee of the Faculty Senate of the type, volume, and severity of conflicts and issues he or she observes. Reports will be written so as to maintain the confidentiality of individuals accessing the services of the Faculty Ombuds Officer. This information will be useful in guiding policy decision-making for the continual improvement of fairness, equity, and respect at West Texas A&M University.
- 1.7 It should be clearly understood by all parties that the Ombuds Officer;
 - 1.7.1 does not have any formal decision-making authority, or the ability to determine "Guilt" or "Innocence" in any matter;
 - 1.7.2 does not offer legal advice and does not act as an advocate or representative of any individual or entity;
 - 1.7.3 does not offer psychological counseling;
 - 1.7.4 steps aside when a grievance is filed; and
 - 1.7.5 does not arbitrate or adjudicate grievances or disputes.
- 1.8 Faculty grievances must be filed within 60 working days of the most recent incident, as prescribed by The Faculty Handbook, Faculty Grievances. Faculty should be aware that seeking assistance from the Ombuds Officer does not alter this requirement.

2. GUIDING PRINCIPLES FOR OMBUDS OFFICER

- 2.1 The Faculty Ombuds Officer will serve as an independent, neutral and impartial, confidential, and informal resource for faculty and professional librarians at West Texas A&M University, and in compliance with U.S. and Texas laws and The Texas A&M University System policies and procedures. The Ombuds Officer will strive to adhere to the professional ethical principles and best practices as defined by the International Ombudsman Association, as modified and summarized below.
 - 2.1.1 INDEPENDENCE: The Faculty Ombuds Officer is independent in structure, function, and appearance to the highest degree possible within the University.
 - 2.1.2 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.

2.1.3 CONFIDENTIALITY: The Faculty Ombuds Officer holds all communications with those seeking assistance in strict confidence, and does not disclose confidential communications unless given written permission to do so. The only exception to this privilege of confidentiality is where there are allegations of discrimination, sexual harassment, related retaliation sexual violence, fraud and/or imminent risk of serious harm

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

3. APPOINTMENT OF FACULTY OMBUDS OFFICER

3.1 The Faculty Ombuds Officer is appointed by the President in consultation with the Faculty Senate.

3.2 The Faculty Senate shall provide to the President the names of at least three nominees from whom the President will appoint the Faculty Ombuds Officer.

3.3 Characteristics of nominees shall include:

3.3.1 Tenured faculty member

3.3.2 Knowledge of university rules, procedures, and resources

3.3.3 Extensive cross campus experience

3.3.4 Strong communication skills

3.3.5 Ability to be objective and neutral

3.3.6 Strong conflict resolution skills

3.3.7 Commitment to promote ethical conduct in the performance of the Faculty Ombuds Officer role

3.3.8 Understanding of cross-cultural values and commitment to diversity

3.4 The President and Executive Committee of the Faculty Senate will jointly conduct an annual evaluation of the performance of the Faculty Ombuds Officer.

3.5 Appointment as Faculty Ombuds Officer is for a two year term. An individual may be reappointed for a second two year term following the procedures outlined in 3.2.

3.6 The University Faculty Ombuds Officer will be provided a section of administrative release each semester, funded out of the President's Office.

CONTACT FOR INTERPRETATION: President/CEO

APPROVAL 

President/CEO

March 5, 2012
Date