

**Report of the Ombudsperson Committee
University Faculty Senate
March 11, 2018**

Faculty: Dr. Nancy Getchell
Dr. Christopher Williams
Dr. Elizabeth Orsega-Smith
Dr. Amy Nagorski Johnson

Staff: Jeannie Taylor, Accountant
Jodi Drake, Administrative Assistant IV
Megan Gaffney, Associate Librarian

Students: Rebecca Glinn, Senior Honors
Stijn Koshari, Graduate student, engineering
John Stout, Graduate student, psychology

This membership gives a broad view of those persons representing faculty, staff, and student views to offer perspective and suggestions on the proposed new Office of the Ombudsperson. The Faculty Senate recommended the establishment of the Office of the Ombudsperson to provide private, confidential services that include but are not limited to (1) informal dispute resolution services to the University community including faculty, staff, and students, (2) hearing of problems and concerns, (3) providing options for problem-solving, and (4) providing an Office that is easily accessible to all those it serves.

The group began by reviewing the Senate resolution noting that it describes the purpose of the office and speaks to the charge for this committee. Each member looked at what already exists for faculty, staff, and students that may interface with this office as well as noting the areas that need improvement. From this review, the need for the Office of the Ombudsperson with rationale was the focus of the committee discussion.

Discussion of Need:

From the faculty perspective, the Faculty Senate Welfare and Privileges committee as well as the AAUP union with the Collective Bargaining Agreement (CBA) serves faculty by protecting rights, offering guidance, and mediates issues in most cases, however there are instances that the proposed ombudsperson would benefit faculty. Tenure track faculty was discussed as perhaps the most vulnerable group, along with faculty with any administrative appointment. Although there may be overlap in mechanisms to support people working through issues, that overlap was thought to be inconsequential by this group.

Of interest, faculty explored the current University of Delaware website to identify and locate help with conflict resolution. There was no easy answer to access this information, particularly on the main sites faculty find useful. The website search took the user to the Office of Equity and Inclusion and spoke to matters of discrimination. Other recommended sites included the Dean of Students, the VP of Faculty Affairs, the Title IX office, and Human Resources which stop at workplace misconduct. At no point was the information accessible or clear, which supports the premise that there is a need for the Office of the Ombudsperson.

The salaried and professional staff view their group as unprotected with a culture where confidentiality of complaints and concerns may not be upheld. Because retaliation without protection is perceived as a major problem, many are afraid to speak up; thereby keeping issues to themselves. This may be a bigger problem for diverse groups as they can be “targets to rules.” This culture does not align with the University statement of respect and responsibility found on the website under its Mission.

Undergraduate students can find support in working through many personal issues that speak to positive relationships and inclusion with the staff of Residence Life. Furthermore, the Office of the Dean of Students advocates for the wellbeing of all students. What appears to be lacking is support for undergraduate student workers or researchers when conflicts arise. Graduate students identify a different set of problems that include advisor conflicts, the need to talk through problems, and information on leaves of absence. Although the Office of Graduate and Professional Education offers some support for students, many rely on speaking to Dr. Mary Martin for resolution. More importantly, the graduate students report “not hearing” information on the infrastructure of the new Graduate College to offer the necessary support.

Recommendations:

This committee supports the development of the proposed new Office of the Ombudsperson with the following important recommendations:

1. This office must be promoted as a place for everyone. It does not offer services for only one group such as women, as it is meant as a common connection of help for everyone that is a part of our University.
2. The office must be located in an area of our campus that is non-threatening. The STAR campus is strongly suggested by this committee. Bus transportation, free parking, and a location that offers some privacy are important considerations to access for our University community.
3. The office must be visible with easy website navigation, multimedia advertisement across campus that offers clear information, and easy, intuitive navigation on the STAR campus to locate the services.
4. The physical office must offer private spaces for waiting for appointments and services. Waiting rooms do not support privacy.

5. Power differentials between various groups on campus must be considered in developing an office that advocates for the entire campus community. Staff must be trained to understand this core of ethical awareness if they are to be effective.
6. A trauma-informed approach must be taken when providing assistance to members of the community and managing conflict-resolution.
7. A private email hotline is suggested with a support staff responding timely to the inquiries.
8. Because this email hotline may help staff get a sense of the issues on our campus, programs and interventions campus-wide can be implemented proactively.
9. In consideration of the limitations of staff, a psychologist on staff as well as staff with legal background may be considered.

Please move this report forward in the Faculty Senate so that the proposed new Office of the Ombudsperson can move forward at the University of Delaware. Thank you for the opportunity to discuss this Senate Resolution.