

# Wichita State University Faculty Ombuds Program Charter

## I. INTRODUCTION

The Wichita State University Faculty Ombuds program (“Ombuds Program”) was established to help foster an environment of respect, honesty, fairness, and integrity, to bolster a supportive working and learning climate at Wichita State University (“University”) for faculty and instructional staff. In keeping with national industry norms, members of faculty and instructional staff who utilize the services of the Ombuds Program will be referred to as “visitors” throughout this Charter. When a visitor seeks support, Ombuds members can listen, serve as a strategic thought partner, help plan or develop options for difficult conversations or surface an issue, provide resources and information about university policies and systems, and assist with informal conflict resolution and problem solving. In every case, the Ombuds Program provides support that is independent, confidential, impartial, and informal. This Charter document defines the terms, conditions, and principles on which the Ombuds Program has been established and describes the standards, responsibilities and authority of the Ombuds members and the Ombuds Program.

## II. PURPOSE, MISSION AND SCOPE OF SERVICES

The purpose and mission of the Ombuds Program is to assist the University campus in seeking the highest standard of university governance while furthering the University’s commitment to the principles of equal opportunity. In addition, the Ombuds Program strives to promote an ethical, supportive, and responsive culture for members of the University by providing confidential, impartial, and informal conflict resolution services and problem solving support that is independent in its ombuds role. The Ombuds Program holds autonomy to determine when and how ombuds perform all ombuds services including, and not limited to, consultations, raising concerns, asking questions, making inquiries, coaching, informal conflict resolution, etc.

While Ombuds do not advocate for visitors or the institution, the Ombuds Program may identify and elevate systemic trends or concerns to the attention of University leadership ~~to~~ <sup>to</sup> improve the fairness of those programs. Day to day, the Ombuds fulfill this purpose and receive inquiries, concerns, or questions from visitors and tailor response based on the specific

needs of each situation. As appropriate, the Ombuds will: listen, clarify issues, serve as a strategic thought partner and conflict coach, make informal inquiries, gather additional information, provide referrals, offer information on available resources, identify available pathways and options to address or raise concerns, assist with difficult conversations or engage in conflicts resolution, and provide feedback to the University about campus trends and concerns.

### III. STANDARDS OF PRACTICE

The Ombuds Program adheres to and has adopted the International Ombuds Association (IOA) [Standards of Practice and Ethical Principles](#), and this Charter adopts and incorporates by reference the IOA Standards of Practice and Code of Ethics. The Ombuds will function independently of interference or direction from University administration in its ombuds services. The Ombuds Program will operate confidentially and impartially and limit the scope of its services to informal means of dispute resolution and problem solving support. Ombuds will be members of IOA and will attend regular relevant trainings and conferences whenever possible. The Ombuds will establish and follow consistent policies for the Ombuds Program, which will be posted on the Ombuds Program website. The Ombuds will also publicize the key principles on which the Ombuds Program is based, including the confidential, independent, impartial, and informal nature of the Ombuds Program's services and will clearly explain each of these Standards of Practice to each visitor.

#### A. Independence

The Ombuds Program will be, and will take care to ensure that it is perceived to be, free from interference in the performance of its ombuds services. The University will not attempt to direct or influence the substantive work of the Ombuds Program as it provides ombuds services to visitors, including determining with whom the Ombuds meet and directing how Ombuds manage any given concern. Although the University is not obligated to accept any of the options offered by the Ombuds, the University will also not attempt to interfere with or control the substance of any options the Ombuds might offer visitors. In the provision of its services, however, the Ombuds Program remains subject to generally applicable University policies, including those prohibiting discrimination, harassment, retaliation, fiscal misconduct, and other standards of conduct. Working within the University's budgeting protocols in coordination with the Provost's Office, the Ombuds Program will have a specific allocated budget to fulfill its role and pursue continuing professional development. The Ombuds will have the authority to manage the budget and operations of the Ombuds Program and will report to the Provost, or their designee, for administrative and budgetary matters only.

The Ombuds Program is largely independent of existing administrative structures, although the Program and the Ombuds must otherwise adhere to University policy. The Ombuds should be able to carry out their services independent from control, limitation, or interference by University leadership (President, Vice President, Deans, and Chairs). The Ombuds should be protected from retaliation (such as elimination of the office or the Ombudsperson, or reduction of the Ombuds budget or other resources) by any person who may be the subject of a complaint or inquiry.

#### B. Impartiality

The Ombuds will strive for impartiality and fairness in consideration of all visitors and the issues they raise. The Ombuds will operate with the aim of supporting all visitors and parties in the most effective way possible and will facilitate communication and problem solving in a manner that

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## D. Informality

The Ombuds will be a resource for informal dispute resolution and problem solving services only. Unless required by law, the Ombuds will not willingly participate in formal investigative or adjudicative procedures, whether internal or external. The Ombuds will, however, endeavor to provide visitors with information about relevant formal grievance or complaint processes to help educate them about their options. Use of the Ombuds Program will be voluntary and will not be a required step in any grievance process or University policy.

## IV. AUTHORITY AND LIMITS OF THE OMBUDS ROLE

### A. Ombuds Authority

The authority of the Ombuds derives from the establishment of the Ombuds Program by the University administration and the enactment of this Charter. The University recognizes that the Ombuds has the independent authority to engage in the following actions as an integral part of their role:

1. Have Discussions with Visitors and Others. The Ombuds has the authority to discuss with visitors their concerns, available informal and formal pathways for resolution, options for next steps, relevant information, resources, and so forth. The Ombuds also have the authority to invite parties to engage in voluntary facilitated conversations as appropriate.
2. Initiate Informal Inquiries. The Ombuds are entitled to inquire informally about any issue concerning visitors served by the **AUT aboutdn**

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6. Legal Counsel. The Office of General Counsel may provide the Ombuds Program with access to the Office of the General Counsel in situations or on issues that do not implicate the Ombuds' independence or confidentiality. If the need arises, the Ombuds may require

will be independent of the organization's technology system, with access allowed only to Ombuds Program personnel. Non confiden

## VIII. RETALIATION FOR USING THE OMBUDS PROGRAM

Visitors have the right to visit the Ombuds without reprisal. Employees may utilize reasonable time away, consistent with workplace expectations and