

Ombudsperson Position Description

The Ombudsperson program for medical students and graduate students has been in place at the PSU College of Medicine since 1991. Two faculty members serve as ombudspersons for students. Confidentiality is maintained in all cases. Brief notes and copies of materials students provide are placed in a secure file. Details of cases are not shared between the two ombudspersons or with any other person without the express permission of the student(s) bringing the issue to the ombudsperson.

The Penn State University College of Medicine student ombudsperson serves as a neutral, independent and confidential resource for medical and graduate students within the College of Medicine community.

- **Neutral** - The College of Medicine ombudsperson serves as a neutral, independent and confidential resource for medical and graduate students within the College of Medicine community.
- **Independent** - The ombudsperson is independent of existing administrative or academic structures and is responsible only to the Dean of the College of Medicine or his designees. The ombudsperson supplements the existing resources available to faculty, staff and students.
- **Confidential** - The ombudsperson will treat all matters confidentially within the bounds of the law. Your privacy will be respected. Should the pursuit of an inquiry require the disclosure of details that identify you, you will be contacted and no further action will be taken without your permission. When there is a potential threat to safety or a legal proceeding with subpoena, it may have to be shared.

The ombudsperson is an impartial complaint-handler who strives to see that people are treated fairly and equitably at PSUCOM.

What will the student ombudsperson do?

- Provide a comfortable, confidential environment for students to air concerns
- Listen to complaints or grievances
- Work with people to develop options for resolving their concerns or complaints
- Open channels of communication
- Suggest approaches for addressing and managing conflicts
- Research and provide answers to questions regarding a policy or procedure
- Serve as a neutral third party in conflict resolution
- Seek fair and equitable solutions to problems

What authority does the ombudsperson have?

- Brings issues to the attention of those with authority to address concerns
- Persuades in decision-making
- Reports systemic issues to the Dean and other leaders with recommendations for resolution

Types of Concerns Reported to the College of Medicine Ombudsperson

The ombudsperson will provide you with a safe forum to voice concerns, organize thoughts, assess feelings, evaluate a situation and decide on what is important and relevant to your dilemma.

- CAREER AND ACADEMIC ISSUES- academic concerns dealing with performance, grading, compensation, promotion, work planning and scheduling, work environment, work overload, work styles, communication breakdown, job future, impact of reorganizations, mentoring
- ABUSE - harassing unkind behavior, unprofessional demeanor, sexual harassment, retaliation, insensitivity, personality conflicts, hostile workplace, oppressive management practices
- DISCRIMINATION - different treatment due to race, gender, mental and physical disabilities, sexual orientation, religion, age
- INTELLECTUAL PROPERTY - research opportunity, proprietorship or authorship of work, conflicts of interest, professional misconduct, misrepresentation of data, protocol error
- MISCELLANEOUS - fear of retaliation, safety, stress and ethical dilemmas

Working with the ombudsperson, you can explore options ranging from simply talking about your problem to pursuing a formal grievance proceeding. You select the options you prefer. If all attempts at resolving the situation informally have failed, you may choose a more formal grievance process. College of Medicine policies and procedures, as well as those of the Penn State University, provide many options for formal grievance. For many people, contacting the ombudsperson will be a safe first step. If you are in need of specific expertise, referral information will be provided on other issues, policies or resources.

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