Tell me about the “ombuds” - what the office does and how it can benefit me?

stonybrook.edu/ombuds
OMBUDS OFFICE

Donna L. Buehler
University Ombudsman*

An Ombuds

• Listens with an open mind &
• Helps resolve problems fairly.

* An Ombudsman is gender-neutral in origin and is a Swedish term.

stonybrook.edu/ombuds  -  (631) 632-9200
Learn about the Ombuds Office’s role at Stony Brook

Understand how the Ombuds Office differs from other offices such as HR, OEA, Unions, Employee/Labor Relations, EAP/CAPS, Healthier U/Student Health & Wellness, Employee Health, etc.

Determine how you could benefit from a consultation with the Ombuds Office
What is an Ombuds?
A person who serves as a designated neutral within a specific organization and provides conflict resolution and problem-solving services to members of the organization.

Where does an Ombuds work?
In corporations, colleges and universities, hospitals, government and non-governmental agencies, nonprofits and media, etc. (e.g. NIH, UN, WHO, NPR, etc.)
STANDARDS OF PRACTICE

CONFIDENTIALITY  NEUTRALITY

INTERNATIONAL OMBUDS ASSOCIATION

INDEPENDENCE  INFORMALITY

STONY BROOK UNIVERSITY

SUNY
Confidentiality
The Ombuds holds the identity and all communications with those seeking assistance in strict confidence and does *not* disclose confidential communications unless given permission to do so. The only exceptions are when there is imminent risk of serious harm, or where required by Title IX and other state and federal laws.

Informality
The Ombuds assists in resolving conflicts or complaints at an informal level. The Ombuds does *not* participate in any formal, internal or external investigative or adjudicative procedures or make or overturn administrative decisions. As an informal resource, the Ombuds is *not* authorized to accept notice (formal complaints) for the university, except in Title IX cases, but will refer to the appropriate office. Use of the Ombuds is voluntary.
**Independence**
The Ombuds Office operates independent from other organizational entities. The Ombuds reports to the University Administration for budgetary and administrative purposes and conveys perceived issues and trends. The Ombuds makes recommendations to improve the academic and work environment. The Ombuds provides anonymous aggregate statistical data and does *not* keep formal records.

**Neutrality**
The Ombuds is neutral, impartial, and unaligned in the handling of concerns and complaints. In considering the rights and interests of all parties, the Ombuds assists parties in reaching mutually acceptable agreements that are fair, equitable and consistent with the mission and policies of the University. The Ombuds will *not* serve as an advocate for the university or an individual.
WHO OMBUDS SERVES

Individuals & groups
• Students
• Faculty & Staff
• Visitors
• Parents
• Alumni
• Supervisors, Directors
• Department Heads

Senior management
• VPs, AVPs, Deans, Chairs

WHAT AN OMBUDS DOES

• Conflict resolution
• Informal mediation/shuttle diplomacy
• Consultation and coaching
• Information/referral
• Prevention

Outreach – tabling/fairs
Ombuds Orientations
Training
Skill development
• Academic Issues/Integrity
• Conflicts of Interest
• Change & Transition
• Communication
• Discrimination
• Equity of Treatment
• Ethical Dilemmas
• Harassment
• Health & Safety Issues

• Incivility/Rudeness
• Interpersonal Conflicts
• Organizational climate
• Performance (evaluations, grades, promotion/tenure)
• Policy & Procedural Issues
• Supervision/Management
• Intellectual Property/Authorship Concerns
When should I contact the “ombuds?”

- Anytime, but preferably the earlier the better
- No problem is too big or too small
- There is never a wrong reason to call

The “ombuds” can always point you in the right direction.
Ombuds services: PREVENTION

➢ Outreach - tabling/fairs
➢ Ombuds orientations
➢ Quick Tips
➢ Library
➢ Training & workshops for the SB community and per request of departments and student groups
➢ Skill development - role playing
➢ Meet/Greet
Ombuds services: EARLY INTERVENTION

➢ Conflict resolution
➢ Shuttle diplomacy
➢ Informal mediation
➢ Consultation & coaching
➢ Information & referral
Ombuds services: SYSTEMIC ISSUES

➢ Identifies trends in the workplace
➢ Works collaboratively with other offices to resolve problems while maintaining neutrality
➢ Makes recommendations to administration
   ❖ To revise policies or consider creating a policy
   ❖ To advise on various training opportunities
   ❖ To improve the work environment
How is the “ombuds” different from:

- [Human Resource Services](#)
- [Employee/Labor Relations – Student Conduct and Community Standards](#)
- [Unions](#)
- [Office of Equity & Access](#)
- [EAP - CAPS/CPO/LGBTQ*Services](#)
- [Healthier U/Student Health & Wellness](#)
• **Not** an office of record – does not keep any identifying information about individuals or groups who consult with the Ombuds Office. No paper or electronic records or names in an online calendar or aggregate database. May keep notes with an individual’s permission only while working with the person and then shreds the information once the case is closed.

• **Not** an office of psychological counseling, but will refer to the EAP for faculty/staff or to CAPs for students, if appropriate.

• **Not** an office that does formal investigations. With permission, may informally investigate a complaint and help an individual navigate the system or look into a situation.

• **Not** an advocate of an individual, group or department or of Stony Brook as an institution. Instead, is *impartial or neutral*, helping people understand all sides of an issue to gain perspective.

• **Not** an office that gives legal advice.

• **Not** an office of compliance, except for being mandated to report Title IX issues.
• Offers a **safe, confidential** and neutral place to hear concerns

• **Empowers** individuals to work through challenges & **explore options**

• **Facilitates** communication and conflict resolution

• Functions as a **central** information and referral resource

• **Promotes a civil, inclusive and respectful** climate where there is **fair and equitable** treatment

• Acts **independently** in structure, function and appearance

• **Provides systemic feedback** about trends to administration and makes recommendations for resolution

*Except where required by Title IX and other state and federal laws*
A handy guide to promote positive and respectful interactions with others

Actively Listening    Making an Apology
Becoming Resilient    Preparing for a Difficult Conversation
Developing Leadership Responding to Change & Transition
Enhancing Communication Supporting Teams
Giving & Receiving Feedback Understanding Civility/Incivility
Handling Conflict Using Email Etiquette
Handling Grade Dispute Writing a Rebuttal
Keeping an Informal Record

QUICK TIPS
Sometimes all you need is someone to point you in the right direction

**WHAT AN OMBUDS DOES**
- The Ombuds listens with an open mind.
- The Ombuds helps to resolve problems fairly.
- The Ombuds provides a safe place to voice your concerns and explore options for productive conflict management and resolution.
- The Ombuds supports a safe, productive and civil community.

**WHEN TO USE SERVICES**
- When you need information or assistance in resolving your concern.
- When you are unsure of how to proceed or what options are available.
- When you feel your concerns have not been adequately addressed through formal channels.
- When you don’t know where else to go.

**RESOURCES**
Consult the Resources links for additional information. Resources are available for students, faculty, staff, and administrators. REGISTER below for workshops.
- Referrals
- Workshops
- Quick Tips
- Library
- Websites

stonybrook.edu/ombuds
OFFICE LOCATIONS:
Please call for an appointment.
(631) 632-9200

• **West Campus**
  Rm. 137
  Psychology B Building

• **Health Sciences Center**
  By appointment