

What is an Ombuds?

An ombuds is a person trained to assist members of a community or organization. We are a confidential, impartial, informal, and independent resource for everyone at Carolina. We also identify trends and challenges and make recommendations for change in University policies or practices when appropriate. However, we are not decision makers. We do not have the power to establish, change, or set aside University rules, policies, or management decisions.

Always Open

We want to hear from you

We will arrange a confidential meeting at a time and place convenient for you. It is helpful if you make an appointment, but you may drop by our office without an appointment and an ombuds will see you as soon as possible. We believe we can be most effective if we meet with you, but if you prefer, we will work with you over the telephone. We do not do our work through email and discourage you from sending any confidential information through email.

We also welcome invitations to come explain what we do and answer questions about the University Ombuds Office.

Our office is located at 137 E. Franklin Street, Suite 22, on the second floor of the CVS Plaza.

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the university **OMBUDS OFFICE**



THE UNIVERSITY
of NORTH CAROLINA
at CHAPEL HILL

About the Office

The University Ombuds Office is a safe place where all Carolina staff, faculty, students, and administrators are welcome to come and talk in confidence about any campus issue, concern, problem, or dispute. Our office supplements, but does not replace, the University's formal channels.

Contact us as a first step, or as a last resort, or anywhere along the way. Come and share your concerns, evaluate your situation, and plan your next step — if you want to take a next step. We also welcome suggestions about how to improve Carolina, and we invite you to share good news with us.

Our Door Is

confidential
informal
impartial
independent

Topics You May Want to Discuss

- Interpersonal difficulties
- Student life
- Violations of University policy
- Discrimination
- Harassment
- Managing long-term and high-stakes conflict
- Communication problems
- Preparing for difficult conversations
- Academic policies or disputes
- Health and safety issues
- Red tape in University procedures
- Departmental conflict
- Disciplinary actions
- Misunderstandings
- Advocating for yourself
- Promotions or evaluations
- Appropriate ways to frame and discuss issues
- How to make or seek an apology
- Untangling a complicated situation
- Protecting your reputation
- Threats or retaliation
- Academic freedom
- Ethical behavior
- Accessing other University resources
- Formal processes for resolving issues
- Other campus concerns

Why Come to the Ombuds Office?

People come to our office for many reasons. Sometimes visitors just want to talk. Some are reluctant to go through formal channels. Some just don't know where else to go. And some have tried other ways to get help but have not found what they need. If you are not sure whether the Ombuds Office can help, please contact us no matter how big or small your issue is. If it's important to you, it's important. We also invite you to drop in just to get acquainted.

All conversations with an ombuds are voluntary and free. Retaliation for visiting an ombuds is prohibited.

Our Principles

Confidentiality, impartiality, informality, and independence are the principles under which we operate.

- We are confidential. We will not identify you or discuss your concerns with anyone without your permission. The only exceptions are when we believe that disclosure is necessary to address an imminent risk of serious harm, when we suspect abuse or neglect of a child or disabled adult, or if required by law. We do not keep permanent records of confidential communications. We refuse to testify in any formal proceeding even if a visitor asks us to.

- We are impartial. We do not take sides; we consider the rights and interests of all parties. We do not judge, discipline, or reward anyone. We are advocates for fairness. We have no personal stake in the outcome of any situation.

- We are informal. Use of the Ombuds Office is not a substitute for formal procedures, such as filing a grievance. Any communication with us is "off the record" and does not put the University on formal notice of a problem.

- We are independent. We report directly to the Chancellor and are not part of any other department or group on campus. We work hard to merit the trust others place in us.

What We Do

Our responses are tailored to the individual's situation and informed consent, so we

- Listen, which may be all you want
- Discuss your concerns and help clarify the most important issues
- Help identify and evaluate your options
- Gather information, explain policies, and offer referrals to other resources
- Serve as a neutral party to solve problems and resolve conflicts and work to achieve fair outcomes for all parties using mediation and other conflict resolution strategies
- Offer coaching, for example to help you prepare for a difficult conversation

- Review drafts of employment-related documents
- Consult with groups on development of policies and procedures
- Facilitate conversations
- Consult with University officials about broad issues and trends
- Make recommendations for institutional change when appropriate
- Use our experience, knowledge, and judgment to assist all visitors and improve Carolina
- Provide referrals to other resources
- Operate under the code of ethics and standards of practice of the International Ombudsman Association

What We Don't Do

- Make decisions for anyone
- Offer legal advice
- Offer psychological counseling
- Participate in the University's grievance process or any other formal process
- Testify in any judicial or administrative proceeding, unless required by law after reasonable efforts have been made to protect confidentially
- Serve as a place to put the University on notice of claims
- Serve as an advocate for any individual or entity
- Address issues involving persons not at Carolina

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