

The Ombuds: Your Resource for Addressing Work- Related Challenges

When challenges or disputes arise at work, it's natural to feel hesitant about addressing them. You might worry about making a big deal out of something or fear that speaking up could lead to more stress. However, avoiding conflicts can take a toll, impacting your well-being or work, and the overall atmosphere of the university. That's why it's important to know that there's a unique resource here to help you navigate these situations and improve your experience.

The UC Berkeley Ombuds Team is a dedicated resource to support you in navigating workplace challenges. Whether it's a misunderstanding with a fellow staff member, navigating a difficult conversation with a supervisor, or figuring out how to voice concerns constructively, we can help with any work-related concern no matter how big or small it may seem.

What Does an Ombuds Do, and How Is It Relevant to You?

First, let's address a common question: How do you pronounce "ombuds"? It's pronounced "ahm-buds," and it comes from a Swedish term meaning "a person who has an ear to the people." That's exactly what we do —listen and provide guidance.

Our role is to work with individuals and groups at UC Berkeley to provide a safe space to talk about issues or concerns, explore options for resolving conflicts, and bring systemic concerns to the attention of the university for resolution. We are impartial, independent, informal, and confidential.

Why Should You Care About Ombuds Programs?

You spend a significant amount of time at work, so it's only natural that issues will come up from time to time. Whether it's feeling left out of important decisions within your department, or simply needing to vent about a frustrating situation, we are here to help.

Our role is also to help foster a positive workplace culture. When staff feel heard and supported, they're more likely to be engaged, productive, and committed to their roles. It's a win-win situation—happy and supported constituents lead to a successful and thriving university.

How an Ombuds Team Member Can Help You

Imagine this: You're struggling with a fellow staff member over a project deadline, and it's creating tension with your supervisor. You've tried talking it out, but it's not getting better. Or perhaps you've been feeling overwhelmed by communication breakdowns in your department and need a safe space to explore your options. This is where an ombuds comes in.

For example, Mark, a staff member, was feeling sidelined in departmental decisions and didn't know how to bring it up without sounding like he was complaining. The ombuds provided a safe space for him to express his concerns and guided him on how to approach his supervisor in a positive, solution-focused way.

What to Expect When You Reach Out to an Ombuds

When you reach out to the ombuds, you can expect confidentiality, empathy, and a non-judgmental approach. We offer a confidential space to discuss your concerns and help you determine the best way to address them. The goal is to empower you to navigate challenges in a way that feels right for you.

The process is simple: You reach out, share your concerns, and we listen. We might ask questions to help clarify the situation, suggest different approaches, help you role-play a difficult conversation, raise concerns anonymously to leadership, or simply provide a space for you to think through your next steps.

Addressing Systemic Issues Through Aggregated Data

Beyond helping individuals, we try to improve the institution. By gathering and analyzing aggregated data from the concerns and issues raised—without revealing anyone's identity— we try and identify patterns and systemic issues that may be affecting the university. This data can then be shared with leadership without revealing who shared the information, enabling the institution to address broader challenges and make meaningful changes.

For instance, if multiple people raise concerns about communication breakdowns in a specific department, we can highlight this trend, prompting leadership to take proactive steps to improve communication strategies across the university. This not only helps resolve current issues but also prevents future ones, creating a healthier and more productive university environment for everyone.

How to Get in Touch

So, if you ever find yourself thinking, "I wish I had someone to talk to about this," we're a call or email away. Don't wait for things to pile up—reach out sooner rather than later.

It's not just about resolving conflicts; it's about creating an institution where you feel valued, respected, and empowered. We do this by referring to all staff/employees as "visitors" which suggests a more collaborative and active term for how the ombuds sessions are conducted.

Got questions? Want to know more? Reach out to a member of the ombuds team today by calling our office at (510)-642-7823 to have those questions answered or if you need directions to a specific resource. You can also visit us at <https://www.mwi.org/ucb-ombuds/>.