

Office Charter

SHSU Faculty/Staff Ombuds Office

The SHSU Faculty and Staff Campus Ombuds Office was established upon recommendation of the SHSU Impact Planning Committee, and the Office of the Provost, with endorsement by the Office of the President.

The Ombuds Office seeks to resolve conflicts, concerns, misunderstandings, or questions raised by faculty and staff members of the campus community to create an environment of mutual respect, accountability, and civility.

Purpose

The University Ombuds Office will help in creating an environment of mutual respect, equity, integrity, ethical conduct, and accountability on campus in accordance with TSUS Rules and Regulations, University policies, and SHSU values. The Ombuds Office is a place where SHSU faculty and staff members can reach out to raise questions, and address conflicts, or concerns in a neutral and confidential environment. The office promotes accountability and fair treatment of all members of the University community with the goal of creating a safe and equitable campus environment. The Ombuds Office operates independently and supplements existing University resources for conflict resolution and fair treatment (e.g., Human Resources, Office of Equity & Title IX, Office of Compliance and Insurance, etc.). The Ombuds Office is a confidential, informal, impartial, and independent alternative to formal channels of conflict resolution. The Ombuds Office will gather data and generate broadly aggregated reports for university leadership, without breaching confidentiality, about general trends and patterns of

issues raised to help identify any themes of concern and prevent issues from recurring or escalating.

Scope of Services

The mission of the Ombuds Office is to help foster and create a respectful, equitable, and ethical campus environment. The Ombuds Office will accomplish this mission by serving as a confidential, independent, informal, and neutral resource for conflict resolution and fair treatment.

The Ombuds Office will provide following services to the faculty and staff community:

- Be an avenue for constructive problem solving and conflict resolution
- Provide a neutral and confidential channel of communication
- Explain or clarify University policies and procedures
- Listen to and assist faculty and staff with underlying concerns
- Provide information and explore options to address concerns and constructively resolve conflicts
- Identify existing resources and refer faculty and staff to appropriate resources/processes
- Provide information about the appropriate SHSU office for formal reporting and official channels for grievance procedures
- Facilitate conversations, upon agreement, between members of the University community to resolve issues
- Collect anonymized data on emerging trends and patterns while maintaining confidentiality

The Ombuds Office is authorized to provide informal assistance only. The Ombuds however, is not authorized to participate in any “informal resolution process” after the filing of a formal Title IX complaint. The Ombuds is also not authorized to receive or accept notice of any claims against the University. The Ombuds Office is also not authorized to change any University policy or rule, or override decisions made by any University administrator.

Principles of Practice

The Ombuds Office at SHSU operates as per the [Standards of Practice](#) (SOP) and [Code of Ethics](#) (COE) of the [International Ombuds Association](#) (IOA). The following four principles guide the operations of the Ombuds Office.

- **CONFIDENTIALITY**

- All communication with the Ombuds Office is strictly confidential and off-the record.
- The Ombuds Office does not maintain records with individually identifiable information.
- The Ombuds Office will not reveal the identity of faculty and staff that utilize its services, will not disclose the contents of conversations with them, nor will it discuss a faculty or staff’s concern in a manner that will identify them.
- The only exception to confidentiality is if an imminent risk of harm to self or to others is identified, a faculty/staff member gives express permission to the Ombuds to disclose their identity or contents of their conversation during confidential communication, or disclosure is required under TSUS Rules and Regulations (e.g., reporting of wrongful or fraudulent conduct) or local, state, or federal law. If during a confidential communication

any allegations of Title IX violations are reported, the Ombuds Office is required by law to notify the SHSU Office of Equity and Title IX.

- The Ombuds Office does not maintain any records of communication with faculty and staff and will not disclose documents or participate or testify in any official proceedings, internal or external.
- The Ombuds does not provide legal advice nor is a substitute for representation or medical or mental health counseling.
- In line with the International Ombuds Association [Standards of Practice](#) (SOP) and [Code of Ethics](#) (COE), communication with the Ombuds does not constitute notice to the University.
- A goal of the Ombuds Office is to bring to light recurring concerns that point to a pattern or a trend which would benefit from investigation by appropriate administrators to prevent escalation, while protecting individual confidentiality.

- **INDEPENDENCE**

- The SHSU Ombuds Office operates independently, free from interference and any undue influence from the University or its administrators.
- The Ombuds Office reports directly to the Office of the Provost.
- The Ombuds Office is not authorized to override any decisions of university administrators.
- The Ombuds Office is not authorized to establish or change any University rule or policy.
- The Ombuds Office may not compel any university administrator or office to take specific actions.
- The Ombuds Office may not launch an official investigation or take disciplinary action.

- **IMPARTIALITY and NEUTRALITY**

- The Ombuds Office is a neutral and an impartial office and will not advocate for or on behalf of or against any individual, office, position, or cause.
- The Ombuds Office promotes fair and equitable process for all faculty and staff members of the University community.

- **INFORMALITY**

- The Ombuds Office is an informal resource for conflict management and resolution and hence, provides informal assistance. However, the Ombuds is not authorized to participate in any “informal resolution process” after the filing of a formal Title IX complaint.
- The Ombuds Office will not participate in or initiate any formal process or investigation.
- The Ombuds Office may not authorize or conduct disciplinary action.
- The Ombuds Office may not adjudicate cases.
- The Ombuds Office may not advocate or act as a witness in any case inside or outside the University.
- The following actions lie outside the purview of the Ombuds Office - maintaining a record for the University of faculty and staff who contact the Ombuds Office, determining innocence or otherwise, authorizing or approving sanctions, developing or revising any policy, protocol, or rule, or overriding administrative decisions.
- The Ombuds Office only maintains anonymous, aggregate data. No formal records are created by the office.

- Use of the Ombuds Office is voluntary and not a required step in any grievance process, University policy, or any other situation.
- The Ombuds Office may provide information about existing formal channels for filing grievance, complaint redressal, and conflict resolution to those who contact the office to help them make informed choices and decide on the process that works best for them.
- The Ombuds Office is not authorized to accept legal notice of any claims against the University.

Authority of the University Ombuds

The Ombuds is authorized to contact all members of the University, including senior administrators, to gather information, make informal inquiries, seek solutions, and draw the attention of administrators to concerns or questions raised by faculty and staff. The Ombuds may request information pertaining to faculty or staff's concerns. The Ombuds is authorized to discuss various options available for faculty and staff to address their concerns, including all available informal and formal channels of grievance procedures.

The Ombuds has no authority to take action to redress complaints of discrimination, harassment, or alleged misconduct. The Ombuds has no authority to initiate or establish corrective measures on behalf of the University under Title IX and its regulations. The Ombuds will serve as a Campus Security Authority (CSA) under the Clery Act and its regulations. The Ombuds may share information and guidance for filing formal complaints by providing information on relevant policies and procedures. The Ombuds is not authorized to conduct any formal investigations, change University policy or procedures, nor participate in any internal or external proceedings on behalf of faculty, staff, or the University.

The Ombuds has the responsibility, while respecting the confidentiality of faculty and staff who contact the Ombuds Office, to provide feedback to the Office of the Provost about trends and to make recommendations for constructive change.

All faculty and staff members of the University community have the right to consult with the University Ombuds without fear of retaliation.