



OFFICE OF THE PRESIDENT

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Faculty Ombud Charter

I. Mandate

The Faculty Ombud position was created on July 1, 2024, by the Office of the President upon the recommendation of the Faculty Senate to provide a means of informal dispute resolution for faculty at The University of Southern Mississippi. The Faculty Ombud provides confidential, independent, impartial, and informal assistance to all faculty and advises administrators and administrative bodies about systematic issues of concern with the purpose of promoting the University's values as articulated in the [Code of Ethical Conduct](#) and the University's [vision, mission, and values](#) statements.

The Faculty Ombud is a confidential resource for faculty that they can turn to explore options for informal resolution of problems and to better understand University policy and procedures. The ombud listens, can suggest a range of options for handling concerns, and makes referrals, internal and external. When authorized by the visitor, the ombud may make informal inquiries; when agreed to by all parties, the ombud may be asked to serve as an impartial facilitator for difficult conversations. In addition, while maintaining confidentiality, the Faculty Ombud may remind various parties of the obligations imposed by university policy and may also serve as a catalyst for institutional improvement.

The Faculty Ombud supplements, but does not replace, formal grievance processes, investigative systems, and appeals processes. Use of the office's services does not delay filing requirements for any grievance or complaint procedure.

II. Code of Ethics

The Faculty Ombud adheres to the [ethical standards](#) and [standards of practice](#) established by the International Ombuds Association. These standards require that the ombud operates independent of the university, maintains confidentiality, serves impartially without bias, and limits services to informal means of dispute resolution.

Independence

The Faculty Ombud shall be free of interference in the performance of duties. The Faculty Ombud will remain neutral in all disputes and has a responsibility to report only systemic issues and only in a manner that ensures visitors' confidentiality and the ombud's independence. The University and its employees have an obligation to respect the independence of the Faculty Ombud.

The Faculty Ombud will have access to independent legal counsel at the expense of the University in rare instances when necessary to fulfill the functions of the position. Said counsel must be approved in accordance with the guidelines and policies of the Mississippi Institutions of Higher Learning.

Confidentiality

The Faculty Ombud will not disclose information provided in confidence without the consent of the visitor and a determination by the ombud that disclosure is appropriate unless there is a threat to safety.

The Faculty Ombud asserts that there is privilege of confidentiality with respect to the identity of visitors and their concerns. The Faculty Ombud shall not identify any visitor without their consent and cannot be compelled to participate as a witness with respect to any confidential communications, nor participate in any formal process inside or outside the University except under court order.

The University of Southern Mississippi shall not tolerate retaliation against individuals for use of the Faculty Ombud. Similarly, the ombud shall be protected from retaliation as a result of performing the duties articulated in this charter.

Impartiality

The Faculty Ombud does not advocate for any side, either the faculty or the administration, and instead maintains impartiality in all concerns. The purpose of the Faculty Ombud is to facilitate communication, ensure that policies are followed, and encourage all parties to implement the university's policies and practices fairly.

The ombud shall not serve in any additional role within the University that would compromise his/her impartiality. The ombud may decline involvement if the ombud believes it would be improper for any reason, including matters not brought in good faith or conflicts of interest.

Informality

The Faculty Ombud engages in informal dispute resolution and shall not make binding decisions, issue any formal findings about individual cases, or participate in any formal investigation or adjudication process. To the extent allowable by federal and state law and the Mississippi Institutions of Higher Learning, communication with the Faculty Ombud shall not constitute notice to the University with regard to violations of laws, regulations, or policies, including sexual harassment. The Faculty Ombud does not maintain records about individual inquiries.

III. Scope of Services

The Faculty Ombud is available for use by all faculty at any campus of The University of Southern Mississippi (including online faculty), full-time and part-time, tenured or not, including administrative faculty.

The ombud is entitled to make enquiries, even without a specific complaint, into issues related to faculty welfare and sustaining an ethical environment at the University.

If a visitor to the Faculty Ombud wishes to file a formal grievance or report misconduct, the ombud will provide that visitor the information they require to officially notify the university.

IV. Institutional Status and Responsibilities

The ombud is independent of The University of Southern Mississippi's administrative structure, although the ombud serves at the will of the University President and receives budgetary support from the Office of the Provost. The Faculty Ombud will be allocated a budget and space sufficient to meet the needs of the campus community and shall be granted access to institutional information necessary to perform the role of Faculty Ombud.

The Faculty Ombud will provide the Office of the President with an annual report that describes systemic issues and trends that may compromise the University's mission. Reports include only aggregated information and will maintain the confidentiality of visitors to the Faculty Ombud.

Approved by:



Joseph S. Paul, Ph.D.
President

8/23/24

Date