**Ombudsperson Job Description[[1]](#footnote-1)**

**POSITION SUMMARY**

The university ombudsperson is responsible for neutral and impartial dispute resolution, providing confidential and informal assistance to constituents of the university community, including students, staff, faculty and administrators.

The ombudsperson role has a long and honorable tradition as a means of protecting against abuse, bias and other improper treatment or unfairness. Serving as a designated neutral, the ombudsperson is not an advocate for any individual or for the university as a whole but, rather, for fairness. He or she acts as a source of information and referral, aids in answering individual’s questions, and assists in the resolution of concerns and disputes. In considering any given instance, the rights of all parties that might be involved are taken into account. This office supplements, but does not replace, the university’s existing resources for conflict resolution, including the Equal Opportunity and Affirmative Action Office, the Senate Grievance Committee, etc.

**REPORTING**

The ombudsperson is independent of existing administrative structures and reports directly to the president. While maintaining confidentiality of communications, the ombudsperson prepares an annual report to the university community. Based on anonymous aggregate data, this report discusses trends in the reporting of grievances and concerns, identifies patterns or problem areas in university policies and practices, and may recommend revisions and improvements.

The ombudsperson does not accept legal notice on behalf of the university.

**CRITICAL SKILLS AND CHARACTERISTICS**

*Communication and Problem-Solving Skills*

The ombudsperson must have outstanding communication skills and be able to communicate effectively with individuals at all levels of the university as well as with people of all cultures.

It is imperative that the ombudsperson have excellent problem-solving skills and be able to gather information, analyze it and as necessary, help the inquirer or complainant develop appropriate options and actions.

The ombudsperson should maintain a professional demeanor, should have strong presentation skills, and should be able to organize and communicate information to a variety of groups of people.

The ombudsperson must be knowledgeable about the university - its structure, culture, policies and practices. The ombudsperson must have excellent networking skills and be able to establish and maintain broad contacts throughout the university.

*Conflict Resolution Skills*

An essential element of the ombudsperson’s role is that of facilitating the resolution of conflict between parties. It is important that the ombudsperson have a thorough understanding of what leads to conflict, the nature of conflict, and methods for resolution. The skills used to assist inquirers or complainants resolve their conflicts include: helping people learn how to deal with the matter directly if they wish to do this, serving as a communication conduit between the parties, informally bringing the parties together, bringing them together through an informal mediation process, approaching the conflict generically (especially when a complainant is afraid of retaliation), and influencing systems change which could obviate the individual problem. The ombudsperson must also have the ability to help complainants determine which conflict resolution method would be appropriate for their specific situation.

*Sensitivity to Diversity Issues*

The university’s expectation is to create an environment that values human differences. The ombudsperson must be sensitive to dealing with individuals from a wide variety of backgrounds and cultures. The ombudsperson must be open, objective, and must seek to understand issues from different perspectives. The ombudsperson should be innovative in developing options that are responsive to differing needs.

*Integrity*

The ombudsperson should have a reputation for integrity and for dealing fairly, effectively and in a timely fashion with all constituents. An ombuds office is based on confidentiality. Therefore, the ombudsperson must keep information confidential and must use good judgment about when and how such information can be shared, while being mindful of maintaining professional standards that are consistent with the Code of Ethics and Standards of Practice of The Ombudsman Association, and the Ethical Principles of the University and College Ombuds Association.

An ombudsman should not be risk-averse and should understand that this position may, on occasion, challenge even the highest levels of the administration in an effort to foster fair and just practices.

**ACCOUNTABILITIES**

*Dispute Resolution/Consultation and Referral*

Provide impartial and confidential consultation to members of the AUC community who are aggrieved or concerned about an issue

Assist inquirers in interpreting University policies and procedures

Provide assistance to inquirers by clarifying issues and generating options for resolution

Facilitate the inquirer’s assessment of the pros and cons of possible options

If direct action by the ombudsperson may be an appropriate option, obtain the inquirer’s agreement and permission before proceeding

If necessary, and while maintaining confidentiality, conduct appropriate informal fact-finding in order to better understand an issue from all perspectives

Consult with managers/faculty to develop cooperative strategies for complaint resolution

When appropriate, facilitate group meetings, use shuttle diplomacy, or negotiation skills to facilitate communication among parties in conflict

Encourage flexible administrative practices to maximize the institution’s ability to meet the needs of all members of the campus community equitably

Whenever possible and appropriate, provide referrals to other resources

*Policy Analysis and Feedback*

Serve as a campus resource for senior administration in formulating or modifying policy and procedures, raising issues that may surface as a result of discrepancies between the stated goals of the institution and actual practice

Review periodically the patterns of grievances and make appropriate recommendations for policies or practices to reduce or eliminate recurring grievances

Provide early warning of new areas of organizational concern, upward feedback, critical analysis of systemic need for improvement, and make systems change recommendations

*Community Outreach and Education*

Provide on-going education and communication about the office’s role to all potential inquirers as well as to AUC’s leadership

Design and conduct training programs for the campus community in dispute resolution, negotiation skills and theory, civility, and related topics

*Establish/Manage the Office of the Ombudsperson*

Supervise office staff, as necessary. Formulate, manage and monitor the overall goals, direction, programs, and budget of the office

Ensure that the integrity of the office is maintained by all ombuds office staff through independence, fair process, neutrality, impartiality, confidentiality and timely attention to the resolution of issues while treating people with dignity and respect

**EDUCATION/WORK EXPERIENCE**

The ombudsperson should have a Bachelor’s Degree. An advanced degree and/or relevant is desired. An understanding of diverse cultures and backgrounds is essential; the AUC Ombudsperson should be able to work comfortably in both English and Arabic. The incumbent must either be, or be willing to be, an active member of professional associations, in particular, The Ombudsman Association, the University and College Ombuds Association, the Society of Professionals in Dispute Resolution, etc., in order to stay on the leading edge of critical ombud's issues such as confidentiality.

1. Adapted from <http://www.jefferson.edu/jmc/faculty/pdf/toaombudsjobcollege.pdf>

 [↑](#footnote-ref-1)