

# CONFLICT MANAGEMENT IN HIGHER EDUCATION REPORT

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## A Composite Campus Ombuds Profile

by Misa Kelly

The Ombuds Office at the University of California Santa Barbara has begun building an online Ombuds Reading and Resources Room. It is my hope that this work will provide a valuable educational resource for new ombudsmen, for ombudsmen seeking to cultivate their practice through acquisition of knowledge, for ombudsman scholars conducting research, and for individuals unfamiliar with the profession interested in learning more about ombudsmanship.

Key aspects of the new information initiative include:

- The Ombuds Oral History Project
- The Ombuds Case Study Project
- The Annual Report Project
- The Ombuds Profile Project

The portrait of a hypothetical campus ombuds presented below represents a snapshot in time. It was written using information received from the Ombuds Profile Project survey. In the spring of 2002 questionnaires were sent out with a call for case studies to 103 campus ombuds in the United States, Canada, and Australia (65 women, 32 men, 6 to "ombuds offices" without ombuds listed). This profile blends eleven responses to the questionnaire (6 women, 5 men) that were received in time for the 2002 profile. In answer to the question "Ombuds, Who Are They?" we present the following composite.

### 2002 Campus Ombuds Composite Portrait

The campus ombuds is more likely to be female than male. Prior to working as an ombuds she/he had been working in a field that had little to do with alternative dispute resolution. She/he worked on the campus prior to becoming an ombuds and learned of the position via "word of mouth" through an extended invitation to apply by someone within the campus community, a recommendation to the position, or being informed by a peer of the job opening. Another avenue she/he might have entered the field was through working as an "Assistant to the Ombuds" and being promoted from that position. Whatever the case, the campus ombuds has worked in the capacity of ombuds for five years or less.

She/he is well educated holding a masters degree in one or two areas. The breadth of her/his education is staggering. Fields of study include: alternative dispute resolution, anthropology, business economics, choreography, college student personnel administration, communication, dance, english, health care management, history, law, philosophy, police sciences, and sociology.

The community that the campus ombuds serves is over 20,000. She/he serves the staff, students, and faculty of the campus. The ombuds office itself was most likely established in the 1970's although there is a good chance that the office may have been established in the 1990's. The office itself came into existence in a variety of ways. It may have been established by the Provost, the Academic Senate, the Student Union/Association, the Board of Governors, the State Board of Regents, the Chancellor, or the Associate Dean. Who the ombuds answers to is equally diverse and may include: the Executive Vice Chancellor, The Office of the Provost, The President of the University, the Coordinating Committee on Operational Matters, the Dean of Undergraduate Studies, The Vice President for Student Affairs, to "no one", and to the Associate Dean.

Education, events, and readings that have helped to shape the ombuds practice are broad in scope. The campus ombuds benefits from the following: remaining current with issues, trends, and legal aspects of higher education, mediation training, mentoring and interaction with experienced ombuds. She/he also benefits from attending the California Caucus of College and University Ombuds Association's (CCCUOA) Asilomar conferences, University College Ombuds Association (UCOA) conferences. Research in communication in conflict, alternative dispute resolution, listening skills, and restorative justice training has also proved helpful.

Some of the readings that have helped shape the practice include: Fisher and Ury's *Getting to Yes*, Chris Moore's *The Mediation Process*, Dan Millan's *The Way of the Peaceful Warrior*, H. Arnold and D. Feldman's *Organizational Behavior*, Kenneth Cloke's *Mediating Dangerously*, *The International Ombudsman Anthology*, the collection of 5 articles in the *Negotiation Journal* devoted to ombudsing, *The International Handbook of the Ombudsman* edited by Gerald E. Caiden, *The Center Magazine's* article "Ombudsman on the Campus: A discussion with Geoffrey Wallace", and UCOA's *The Ombuds Handbook*.

Life experiences that have helped shape the ombuds practice include: dedication to life-long learning, learning to work with people from different cultures under intense stress, living a life passionate about peace, and seeking to live a life of integrity.

As her/his greatest accomplishment the campus ombuds might cite one of many different achievements. Accomplishments include: work on individual files, assisting students in managing roadblocks hampering matriculation, recipient of a 1988 Nobel Prize for Peace as a UN peacekeeper, helping to start the first Restorative Justice program at a major university in the U.S., using many years of service to the university to help faculty, putting work as an anthropologist to useful work in a context outside of that profession, helping to alter the way residents are treated, and/or transcending the odds, rising above the circumstances, and having the courage to choose the path of most growth.

The campus ombuds finds the work rewarding. The work is never dull, and people cease to amaze the ombuds. She/he enjoys working in a learning environment and appreciates the "learning, endless learning; growing endless growing". The campus ombuds enjoys helping those in need to heal relationships, solve problems, and resolve conflicts. She/he is rewarded each time she/he sees someone leaving the office smiling and full of hope that had entered crying and despondent. The campus ombuds is grateful that their practice contributes to the process of peace and to the betterment of humanity.

Ombudsing presents many challenges. It is tough at times to not favor one side or another and remain neutral/impartial. The campus ombuds finds it difficult at times to leave work at work and not take things home. It can be frustrating cutting through red tape, dealing with close-minded and difficult clients, and encountering individuals committed to "winning" or "being right". Additionally, the work may leave one feeling isolated, and emotionally drained.

Important tools found in the ombuds toolkit include: listening, patience, persistence, balancing creative and analytical problem solving skills, and debriefing with colleagues.

The campus ombuds is also a visionary. On the horizon she/he sees an ombuds office in every university and college. Ombudsing has gained legitimacy in higher education as a useful and important alternative for managing and resolving conflicts and promoting justice within institutions. A continuum of experience exists in the office. One year terms have been extended, and the appropriate staffing provided in order to optimize the campus benefits from ombudsing. The office is respected, well known, and is a "first thought" for the campus community when seeking assistance in resolving a problem.

The ombuds knowledge base has increased, and more specialization among the skill sets has occurred. Ombuds have effectively met the challenges of increased enrollment, budget cuts, and an increase in the complexity of issues, both legal and moral. The ombuds concept has evolved, is readily understood by the public, and very few individuals have difficulty pronouncing the word. Clear boundaries are defined between the different categories of ombuds, types of ombuds, their primary function, and roles.

Many research and special interest projects have been finished and new projects have begun. State wide shield laws legally guaranteeing ombuds confidentiality have been created. The areas of disagreement between ombuds working in different categories (classical/executive/organizational/quasi/specialty/advocate) have been resolved and a common "language" has been created that enables ombuds scholars to make legitimate comparisons of ombudsmanship in different institutions. The Ombuds Profile Project, The Case Study Project, and The Ombuds Oral History project have expanded as research resources to include the work of all categories and types of ombudsing.

The California Caucus of College and University Ombuds continues to meet at Asilomar. The conferences are well document and select transcripts are available online as learning resources. The Caucus Journal has published an anthology which is found in the library of every major university. It has also been made available online. Alternative Dispute Resolution has become a field of study within Political Science Departments and an emphasis in ombudsing is offered. Peer ombuds groups join the efforts of peer mediators in high schools. An international ombuds is appointed and joins a team of international alternative dispute resolution practitioners to problem solve for acts of injustice and unfair processes. Progress is made toward problem solving for world peace...

This is what a campus ombuds looks like in 2002.

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