

Job Description

Job Title:	Student Ombudsperson
Department:	Secretariat
Reports To:	University Secretary
Jobs Reporting:	Case Manager, Student Ombuds Office
Salary Grade:	USG 12
Effective Date:	September 2023

Primary Purpose

The Student Ombuds office is an independent unit but will be supported by the University Secretary to whom the Student Ombudsperson will report. The Student Ombuds Office shall provide an accessible, independent, impartial, and confidential office through which students receive guidance and advice about their university-related concerns and complaints regarding university policies, procedures and particularly those governed by Policies 33, 42, 70, 71 and 72 as well as non-academic processes over which the university has jurisdiction (e.g., housing, parking services). This office supplements but does not replace the University's existing resources for formal conflict resolution.

The Ombudsperson may receive any University-related inquire or concern from any University of Waterloo student. Concerns may also be received, at the discretion of the Ombudsperson, from University applicants whether accepted or not at the time of the initial contact as well as former students where the issue crystallized during their former student status.

The Ombudsperson may conduct an inquiry of concerns and complaints notifying those in authority and providing recommendations with a view to remedying an individual situation, and/or identify any policies, rules or procedures that appear unclear, inequitable, or unfair. Committed to equity, diversity and inclusion principles, the Ombudsperson assists students explore and evaluate options, and determine an appropriate course of action with an aim to resolving disputes before they escalate. The successful resolution of complaints contributes to the development of a supportive and inclusive environment for all students across the university.

The Students Ombuds Office must comply with the professional standards of the Association of Canadian College and University Ombuds (check agreement)

Key Accountabilities

Leadership and Strategic Direction

- Provides overall leadership, management, and administration for the Ombuds Office
- Responsible for the development of short-and long-term goals
- Oversees the financial, human resources, and other management duties within the Office
- Establishes consistent policies and practices for the Office and ensures the Office upholds the necessary confidentiality practices
- Keeps abreast of relevant laws and regulations to ensure compliance with government guidelines and university requirements, policies, and procedures
- Demonstrates transparency and congruency in beliefs and actions; holds high ethical standards, integrity and credibility

- Monitors on an ongoing basis, the effectiveness of the investigation process and, improves efficiencies where deficiencies are noted
- Safeguards and keeps confidential all information received in the Ombuds Office; responsible for data management in the Ombuds Office, ensuring compliance with university requirements, policies, and procedures
- Maintains and secures information systems and determines how and to whom confidential data can be released
- Compiles the annual Ombuds Office Report

Student-focused Dispute Resolution, Consultation, and Referral

- Acts as a source of information and referral, aids in answering individuals' questions, and assists in the resolution of concerns
- Identifies and explains relevant university processes and policies to students
- Assists students involved in academic and non-academic misconduct matters and proceedings within the University including participating at hearings if requested by any individual student
- Advises students of their rights and responsibilities and of the procedures to follow to resolve complaints proceedings
- Facilitates discussion and uses informal channels to build consensus and seek resolution
- Works with students to plan strategies and to explore or evaluate options on how best to proceed with the aim to resolve disputes before they escalate
- Empowers students to deal directly and effectively with their concerns
- Listens and provides an objective perspective
- Through impartial advice and administration, ensures and sustains the credibility and integrity of each process
- Ensures that procedures and criteria used in making decisions are well defined, and clearly communicated to those affected
- Mediates complaints according to university policies or procedures or upon request of the parties to a dispute. Through impartial advice and administration, ensures and sustains the credibility and integrity of each process.
- Conducts thorough and objective investigations regarding both individual and systemic issues with a focus on fact-finding, fairness, timeliness, and attention to detail
- Guide and assist students experiencing conflict situations in the preparation of their cases
- Advises students of their rights and responsibilities, offer general guidance on the appropriate channel of redress for any concern or complaint, and make referrals to appropriate bodies whether within or outside the university community

Policy Compliance Review

- At the request of students, reviews the University's compliance with its policy-mandated processes
- Regularly reviews the University's processes relative to policy to instill confidence that the University regularly complies with its own policies
- Works to improve systems and develops best practices, and procedures
- Reviews data and trends related to policy-related outcomes and identifies areas of concern to university leaders
- Provides recommendations with a view to remedy an individual situation, identify any policy, procedure or practice that appears unclear, inequitable, or unfair
- Works in collaboration with the University policymakers, to ensure that the rights and responsibilities of students are adequately defined in the University policies and procedures and published, and that awareness of such rights and responsibilities is created and maintained

Job Description



- Reviews, investigates and advises regarding any gaps or inadequacies in relevant policies and procedures, which may affect the ability of students to function as members of the university community or which may compromise their human rights or the rules of natural justice; ensure these are brought to the attention of the proper administrative authority

Investigations

- Develops an investigation plan to guide the initial steps of the process. In doing so, determines what allegations or relevant facts are in dispute and identifies potential sources of evidence
- Collects evidence from all appropriate sources including witness interviews and hard evidence (e.g., digital evidence, documentation)
- Consistently considers and adheres to university policy, principle of natural justice and fair process when collecting, assessing, and weighing evidence in support of findings
- Adheres to established timelines and is accountable for any procedural delays
- Provides regular updates to internal clients, complainant(s), respondent(s) and their support personnel
- Prepares a final report for presentation to the client setting out the allegations, evidence, relevant procedural matters, findings (facts, credibility, and policy analysis).
- Ensures that they remain well informed of all relevant legislation, policies, and enhancements to investigatory practices

General Duties

- Maintains suitable records of inquiries and cases in accordance with the University of Waterloo's information retention policy
- Maintains strict confidentiality of all personal information of students, and does not undertake any course of action on a student's behalf without the express consent of the student except to the extent required by law
- Presents the annual Ombuds Office report(s) and compiles other reports for key stakeholders as required
- Performs educational outreach on topics relevant to the university community
- Reviews draft policies and procedures that govern the lives of University of Waterloo students or Affiliated & Federated University College students
- Works with faculties on general student related issues and concerns
- Consults regularly with the Waterloo Undergraduate Student Association and the Graduate students Association to ensure the needs of students are being met with respect to the mandate of the Ombuds Office
- Close liaison with faculties, student residence and other student service offices on student related issues

**All employees of the University are expected to follow University and departmental health and safety policy, procedures and work practices at all times. Employees are also responsible for the completion of all health and safety training, as assigned. Employees with staff supervision and/or management responsibilities will ensure that assigned staff abide by the above, and actively identify, assess and correct health and safety hazards, as required.*

Required Qualifications

Education

- University degree in a discipline that covers mediation, conflict resolution, social work, law, ethics

Job Description



- Formal mediation training from a recognized post-secondary institution (e.g., Certificate in mediation) is an asset

Experience

- 5-8 years of experience conducting mediations and facilitated conversations
- 5-8 years of experience conducting initial intakes, discussing concerns and options
- Experience within a post-secondary education setting is an asset
- Ombudsperson experience is preferred
- Experience conducting investigations and reporting writing
- Experience working with people of diverse backgrounds and cultures is also desired
- Experience and knowledge applying relevant provisions of legislation e.g., Ontario Human Rights Code and Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act
- Experience in the development and/or review of policies and procedures/guidelines preferably in an academic setting (committee process, collegial decision-making, student government, residence systems)
- Knowledge of administrative law, tribunals, and procedural fairness. Ability to mediate grievances

Knowledge/Skills/Abilities

- Understanding of the business requirements of an academic institution, the ability to identify and respond to the needs of university departments, and the ability to interpret and revise academic appeals procedures
- Strong mediation and negotiation skills including the ability to listen, synthesize relevant information and diffuse tension
- Exceptional interpersonal and communication skills with a proven strength in building relationships in a diverse environment
- Demonstrated leadership related to strategy development and implementation designed to support equity-deserving groups/student population
- High degree of understanding in procedural fairness, exceptional decision-making abilities to guide fair process and accurate evidence assessment
- Excellent planning, organizational and time management skills
- Maintain a clear Policy Vulnerable Sector Check
- Knowledge of the provincial Ombudsman Office and its jurisdiction

Nature and Scope

- **Contacts:** Internally, this position interacts with their direct report, the University Secretary. The position also interacts with the Office of Equity, Diversity, Inclusion & Anti-racism, Human Resources, Special Constable Services, Associate Deans, Faculty or Faculty representatives, when appropriate. In addition, this position will interact with the student governing bodies, the Graduate Student Association, and the Waterloo Undergraduate Student Association. Externally, this position interacts with ombuds offices at other universities and colleges and relevant associations
- **Level of Responsibility:** This office does not directly or indirectly report to university leadership, but day-to-day operations in the Ombuds office are coordinated between the Ombudsperson and the University Secretary.
- **Decision-Making Authority:** This position has decision-making authority of all items outlined above

Job Description



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- **Physical and Sensory Demands:** Responding to emotional and aggressive behaviour given clients can be experiencing a range of negative emotions
 - **Working Environment:** Exposed to stress and pressure associated with front-facing support positions when meeting with individuals who are in distress. Involves moderate psychological risk resulting from ongoing interactions with individuals who have a specific concern or conflict with one or more individuals