

FAS Senate

AN ELECTED BODY OF THE FACULTY OF ARTS AND SCIENCES
YALE UNIVERSITY

**Recommendation to the President and Provost by the FAS Senate
Peer Advisory Committee:
Creation of a University Ombuds Office at Yale
April 30, 2019**

Committee Members:

Arielle Baskin-Sommers, Assistant Professor of Psychology and Psychiatry, Co-Chair
Jill Campbell, Professor of English, Co-Chair
Sybil Alexandrov, Senior Lector II, Spanish and Portuguese
Howard Bloch, Sterling Professor of French
Theresa Schenker, Senior Lector II, Germanic Languages and Literatures
Mark Solomon, Professor of Molecular Biophysics and Biochemistry

After a year of study by the 2018-19 Peer Advisory Committee, the FAS Senate recommends to the President and Provost that they create a University Ombuds Office for Yale, to serve University faculty, students, and staff (other than the Medical School). Yale alone among Ivy League Universities lacks such an office; the overwhelming majority of other universities also provide an Ombuds Office, many of them long-standing. In their independence from institutional structures and their flexibility, Ombudspersons perform a unique function in organizations. They have been shown to provide significant benefits to universities.¹

Definition. The essential features of a University Ombuds Office are independence, impartiality, informality, and confidentiality. The work of an Ombudsperson entails communications and outreach; issue resolution; and identification of areas for systemic change and issue prevention. The Ombuds' role includes: listening; providing information about relevant resources, offices, and procedures; developing a range of responsible options; and (with permission) engaging in third-party intervention. The Ombuds also serves to advise University leadership of trends, issues, and concerns in the University community, including potential future issues and concerns, without breaching confidentiality or anonymity.²

¹ For data and discussion of these benefits, see Charles Howard, *The Organizational Ombudsman: Origins, Roles, and Operations – a Legal Guide* (Chicago, IL: American Bar Association, 2010), xviii, 177-87, and Appendix 14.

² Adapted from Howard, 75, and the International Ombudsman Association Standards of Practice (Howard 65-66).

Benefits. An Ombudsperson supplements, but does not replace, existing formal channels. Yale has developed several robust offices and official bodies for addressing important areas of concern for members of the University community, including discrimination and harassment (the University-Wide Committee on Sexual Misconduct, Office for Equal Opportunity Programs, Dean of Diversity and Faculty Development, and Dean’s Designees). These groups and individuals provide avenues of recourse for concerns that fall in several key areas; but they do not cover the great variety of kinds of conflict or difficulty that may arise for faculty, students, and staff. Furthermore, many conflicts, irregularities, or difficulties are best resolved through the informal means that an Ombuds may provide. Some individuals will seek guidance only with the assurance of confidentiality. The Ombuds’ independence from institutional structures also prevents concerns about consultation affecting academic relationships or evaluation. Finally, Ombudspersons can benefit the University as a whole by reporting to University leadership about patterns they observe, so that systemic issues can be addressed.

The Committee’s process of inquiry. The Committee undertook interviews with several individuals with special knowledge about the function of Ombuds offices or about Yale’s existing means of recourse for members of the community experiencing conflict or difficulty in the University setting. It also reviewed the structure and presentation of Ombuds offices at numerous universities, including peer institutions (see examples below). For a more general understanding of the functions of the “organizational ombudsman” it consulted published literature; and it reviewed several studies of the effects on organizations of Ombuds offices.

Ivy plus schools with an Ombuds office	Ivy plus schools without an Ombuds office
Brown University Columbia University (establ. 1991) Cornell University (establ. 1969) Dartmouth College Harvard University MIT Princeton University Stanford University University of Chicago University of Pennsylvania	Yale University