

## The University Ombudsperson's Ethical Principles

The Office of the University Ombudsperson practices in accordance with the Code of Ethics and Standards of Practice of the International Ombudsman Association. Four ethical principles guide the Ombudsperson's work:

**Independence.** The University Ombudsperson reports to the President of Michigan State University and is not aligned with any administrative or academic unit.

**Impartiality.** The University Ombudsperson provides objective assessments of any concern brought to the office. As a neutral third-party, the University Ombudsperson is an advocate for fair process and equitable outcomes, but does not take sides on behalf of any individual or cause.

**Confidentiality.** Confidentiality is essential to the Ombudsperson function. The University Ombudsperson will not disclose the identity of visitors or the substance of concerns raised unless given permission by the visitor to do so. The only exception is when the University Ombudsperson believes there is an imminent risk of serious harm. The promise of confidentiality helps create a safe place to voice your concerns, evaluate your situation, organize your thoughts and identify your options.

**Informality.** Any conversation you have with the University Ombudsperson is off the record. Talking to the University Ombudsperson about a problem does not provide the University with legal "notice" that the problem exists. If you would like to make a formal complaint, the University Ombudsperson will help you identify your options for doing so. The University Ombudsperson will not willingly participate in any formal adjudicative or administrative processes.

## We want to hear from you

We will arrange a confidential meeting at a time and place convenient for you. It is helpful if you make an appointment, but you may drop by our office without an appointment and an ombudsperson will see you as soon as possible. We believe we can be most effective if we meet with you in person, but if you prefer, we will work with you over the telephone or via Skype or Zoom. You may also ask questions via e-mail, however we discourage you from sending any confidential information through e-mail. Retaliation for visiting the University Ombudsperson is prohibited.

We also welcome invitations to staff/faculty meetings, training sessions, classes, student organization meetings, and conferences in order to explain what we do and answer questions about the University Ombudsperson's roles and practices at MSU, academic integrity, and other university policies and procedures.

Our office is located in room 129 North Kedzie Hall. For persons with disabilities, parking and accessible entry is available off of Farm Lane on the east side of North Kedzie Hall.

### Office Hours

Monday—Friday

8 a.m. — 12 noon, 1 p.m. — 5 p.m.

or by appointment.

Skype and Zoom meetings also available.

### Office of the University Ombudsperson

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MSU is an affirmative-action, equal-opportunity employer.

*Helping students  
resolve conflicts  
on campus.*

**confidential**  
*informal*  
**impartial**  
*independent*

OFFICE OF THE  
**UNIVERSITY  
OMBUDSPERSON**

*Serving the MSU Community  
Since 1967*

**MICHIGAN STATE  
UNIVERSITY**

# Should I Consult The Ombudsperson?



## What Is An Ombudsperson?

**Pronunciation:** äm -búdz, ðm ´büdz

“Ombuds” is a Swedish term dating back to 1809 when the Swedish government assigned an agent or deputy to investigate citizen complaints and suggest solutions. The idea soon spread through government agencies, and today Ombuds offices also exist in universities, corporations, municipalities, and institutions such as hospitals.

### History of the Office

MSU created the Office of the University Ombudsperson in 1967. The University Ombudsperson functions as a designated neutral party or intermediary and has access to relevant university decision-makers.

The University Ombudsperson is a senior faculty member appointed by the President to assist students in resolving conflicts or disputes within the university. The University Ombudsperson also helps staff members, instructors, and administrators sort through university rules and regulations that might apply to specific student issues and concerns. In addition to helping members of the MSU community resolve disputes, the University Ombudsperson also is charged with identifying MSU policies that might need revision and referring them to the appropriate academic governance committee.



## How Can The Ombudsperson Help?

- Listen and provide a neutral resource
- Know and explain MSU policies and procedures
- Clarify issues and provide referrals when appropriate
- Analyze the issue and provide options for resolving complaints
- Prevent an issue from escalating into a major problem
- Recommend a change in policy when appropriate
- Assist the university in the development, implementation, and application of policies and procedures

## What An Ombudsperson Does Not Do

- Determine the “guilt” or “innocence” of those accused of wrongdoing
- Establish, change, or set aside policies or administrative decisions
- Offer legal advice or psychological counseling
- Participate in grievances or other formal processes
- Serve as an agent of notice for MSU
- Serve as an advocate for any individual

## Topics You May Want To Discuss

Violations of university policy  
Discrimination  
Harassment  
Communication problems  
Academic policies or disputes  
Health and safety issues  
Red tape in university procedures  
Disciplinary actions  
Misunderstanding  
Appropriate ways to frame and discuss issues  
Ways to make or seek an apology  
Untangling a complicated situation  
Threats or retaliation  
Academic Freedom/Academic Integrity  
Ethical behavior  
Accessing other university resources  
Formal processes for resolving issues  
Student rights and responsibilities  
Other campus concerns

