

Attachment 3

2023-2024 Ombudsperson Report

August 14, 2024

To: Faculty Senate

From: University Ombudspersons (*Dr. Alfred Cochran, Tara Coleman, Jared Meitler*)

Re: 2023-2024 Annual Reports

This report represents the activities of the K-State Ombudspersons from mid-August 2023 to late July 2024. The information provided comes from three ombudspersons. Our activities have been combined to provide an aggregate view of our work, to protect confidentiality, and to maintain the anonymity of those with whom we work. All conversations, actions, and outcomes are privileged information. No specific information about any individual(s) or their status is provided.

University Ombuds continue to be an essential resource for employees as they seek out information, raise concerns, and work toward mutually satisfactory solutions in the workplace. The consultee numbers and hours expended by the ombuds have increased significantly over the last year. Once seen as the last resort, an Ombuds consultation is often considered the first step for many individuals looking to address workplace issues, interpersonal conflict, policy questions, and various other concerns.

There were 98 consultees who visited an ombudsperson within the 2023-2024 timeframe (+40 over '22/'23). Ombuds spent 128 hours (+71 over '22/'23) providing consultative services. A summary of consultees who sought assistance is provided below. Consultees tended to be self-referrals or found us via suggestions from other colleagues or Human Resources.

Ombudspersons	# of Consultees	Consultation Hours*
All	12/71/16	56/33/39

*does not include time spent conducting research and communicating with consultees via email, Teams, etc.

Nature of Consultee Concerns

**For some consultees, multiple complaints were discussed.*

***Full definitions may be found at the end of this report.*

Consultee Concern <small>*For some consultees, multiple complaints were discussed</small>	Number	Consultee Concern <small>*For some consultees, multiple complaints were discussed</small>	Number
ADA	1	HCS-Organizational Development	
Appeal		HCS-Payroll	
Attendance	1	HCS-Talent Acquisition	
Change		Interpersonal Conflict	8
COVID-19		Nonrenewal	4
Discipline	1	Performance	2

Discrimination/Harassment	1	Policy	
Evaluation	12	PRC	
Furlough		Promotion and Tenure	4
Hearing and/or Grievance		Unfair Treatment	3
HCS-Benefits	3	Work Environment	39
HCS-Compensation	2	Workload	4

Ombuds empathetically listen to concerns, clarify, and identify pertinent policies and resources, and offer communication strategies to individuals to resolve issues that might otherwise escalate into adversarial and timeconsuming formal processes. This “insider” knowledge allows the Ombuds to make recommendations for systemic change to promote transparency, clarity, and equity across the University.

Below are the recommendations for the 2023-2024 reporting year:

1. Enhanced training for Dept./Unit Heads regarding University handbook compliance, interpretation, and effective leadership/organizational management practices.
 - a. Renewed focus on the University’s Principles of Community, as unprofessional actions and speech continue to contribute to interpersonal conflict.
 - b. Training about microaggressions and bullying – and how to respond to such behavior.
 - c. More training on the performance evaluation process.
 - i. *Continued delay in fully and holistically addressing the recommendations may prolong concerns that can often be addressed at the personal, interpersonal, or unit level.
2. Review of Tenure and Promotion documents across each department/unit to ensure consistency and understanding at the individual, departmental, and Provost levels, per Provost Office requirement up to date within the five-year review cycle.
3. Standing annual meetings with Ombudspersons and University Provost to communicate themes, needs, etc.
4. Ongoing support by HR for contribution to a manual that future Ombudspersons can consult as needed. Content creation has begun by current ombudspersons.
5. Continued support for ongoing training for Ombudspersons, perhaps including some external resources from relevant professional organizations for Ombudspersons.
6. Create a full-time, professional Ombudsperson position and/or office on campus.
7. Continue meeting monthly as faculty/staff and student ombudspersons during the year.

8. More and frequent communication with members of the University Community about what an Ombudsperson is and how to work with one. (This should be a component of new faculty and staff orientation, for example, and it could be an annual feature in *_K-State Today_*, among other strategies.)
9. Clear communication to support staff on how to get help through university systems and resources.
10. Additional informational outreach regarding mental health resources, economic assistance.

Concern Definitions

ADA – individuals seeking information about an accommodation

Appeal – USS employees requesting a hearing through one of the hearing bodies

Attendance – concerns about employees not attending work as expected (tardiness, excessive absences)

Change – concerns about changes to work hours, job duties, structure

Discipline – concerns about disciplinary actions and either imposing or receiving an action

Discrimination/Harassment – concerns about being treated differently based on PPM 3010 (referred to OIE)

Evaluation – concerns about how to conduct an evaluation or from an individual who has questions about an evaluation they have received.

Hearing and/or Grievance: Unclassified employees requesting information about an administrative appeal and/or grievance hearing.

HCS – Benefits – concerns about different kinds of leave, tuition assistance or other benefits

HCS – Compensation – concerns about pay

HCS – Organizational Development – concerns about changes in organizational structure, working out of one's classification

HCS – Payroll – concerns about paychecks and/or deductions from paychecks

HCS – Talent Acquisition – concerns about recruitments or applications

Interpersonal Conflict – concerns about getting along with another person or group

Nonrenewal – concerns about a notice of nonrenewal

Performance – concerns about performance coaching and feedback and consequences of poor performance

Policy – questions about policies i.e. is there a policy, where is it located, what is the appropriate interpretation and application

PRC – USS employees appeal disciplinary actions to this body

Promotion & Tenure – concerns about the tenure clock, denial of promotion and/or tenure

Unfair Treatment – concerns about being treated differently or unfairly based on something not covered in PPM 3010

Work Environment – concerns about the work environment being uncomfortable either physically or emotionally

Workload – concerns about level of workload based on contract