

**CHARTER FOR
SONORAN UNIVERSITY OF HEALTH SCIENCES
OMBUDS OFFICE
Established April 2023**

The OMBUDS Office serves as a neutral temporary staff person that operates under the guidelines set forth by the International OMBUDS Association (IOA) <https://www.ombudsassociation.org/standards-of-practice-code-of-ethics>. The University Ombuds Charter outlines the role of the Ombuds Office and how the Ombuds office will function within the overall operations of the university.

The University Ombuds reports directly to the President/CEO, and serves to support faculty, staff, employees, students, and the community with a focus on impartiality and equality. The Office provides a confidential, neutral and impartial forum to help promote accountability and fair treatment.

SECTION 1: PURPOSE AND SCOPE OF THE OMBUDS OFFICE

Purpose:

This document sets forth the terms, conditions, and principles on which Sonoran University Ombuds Office operates and defines and clarifies the highest standards and best practices in the Ombuds profession, as they apply within the context of Sonoran University and its Ombuds Office.

The intent of this document is to: (1) educate the University community about the role of the Ombuds Office; (2) proactively assist the Ombuds Office to operate in a manner consistent with IOA professional standards, code of ethics, and best practices; and (3) discourage activities and action which do not comply with best practices within the profession.

Mission and Scope:

The primary mission of Sonoran University of Health Sciences Ombuds Office is to provide confidential, unbiased, and objective assistance that allows individuals to manage their own conflicts early, informally, and at the lowest levels possible without the necessity to pursue a more formal grievance processes such as mediation, arbitration, or litigation. Sonoran University of Health Sciences Ombuds Office serves as a place where all members of Sonoran University community can seek informal, independent, confidential, and impartial assistance in addressing conflicts, disputes, or complaints. The establishment of the Ombuds Office is to assist and provide a more open environment conducive to broader communication among and between constituents while serving the needs of faculty, staff, students, employees, patients, and the communities served.

Additionally, the Office will help to foster and support a respectful, ethical, and equitable working, learning and operational environment for the diverse constituents served (i.e., faculty, staff, employees, patients, students, and community).

Sonoran University is committed to fostering a diverse and inclusive community that values the range of human experiences where students, staff, faculty, and patients feel respected, included, supported, and valued.

The Ombuds Office will aid and support all members of the Sonoran University community to receive fair and equitable treatment. The Ombuds Office seeks to expedite the duties of the office using mainly two strategies: (1) utilizing keen listening skills and assessing possible options to resolve differences and disagreements among individuals and groups on a confidential, informal, and human-centered basis; and 2) to serve in the capacity of a supporter and advocate for fair process, procedures, practices, and policies. One purpose of the Ombuds Office is to act as “an ear to the people” to help every voice at Sonoran University to be heard and receive impartial attention without fear of retaliation and/or loss of privacy. In doing so, the Ombuds Office serves as an independent, confidential, impartial, and informal resource to the entire university community.

Responsibilities of the Ombuds Office

Sonoran University ombudsman is a neutral external person that will:

- Listen and provide guidance to and for underlying concerns.
- Provide clarity, to and for misunderstandings, conflicts, customer service, issues and/or complaints.
- Outline options for internal constituents on the proper process to address grievances or seek resolution.
- Make appropriate inquiries to help address a concern.
- Help individuals navigate the university website for appropriate resources.
- Work with the community in the coordination of outreach efforts
- Identify resources internally and externally to the university surrounding resolution of conflicts that may surface.
- Provide training where appropriate on conflict management.
- Gather data to provide recommendations for possible systemic and organizational change.
- Provide a respectful, confidential place for individuals to discuss problems off the record, including helping to explain relevant university policies and practices.
- Provide referrals where appropriate to other offices throughout the university and/or services.
- Provide information to university leadership on general trends and patterns of complaints without breaching confidentiality.

Please note that The Ombuds may take several steps towards addressing concerns raised, however the Office can provide informal assistance ONLY, and is not authorized to accept notice of any claims against the University. The Ombuds further, can not establish, change or set aside any policy or override the decisions of the Governing Board or any university administrator.

Standards of Practice:

The Ombuds Office services in an Organizational Ombuds capacity and adheres to and has adopted the IOA Standards of Practice and Ethical Principles, and this Charter adopts and incorporates by reference the [IOA Standards of Practice and Code of Ethics](#). The Ombuds Office will operate under four guiding principles of (a) Independence, (b) impartiality, (c) confidentiality, and (d) informality, and limit the scope of its services to informal means of dispute resolution and problem-solving support. The Ombuds will be a member of IOA and will attend regular relevant training and the annual IOA conferences whenever possible. Policies, practices and procedures of the operation of The Ombuds Office will be posted on the My Sonoran website.

A. Independence: The Ombuds Office will be, and will take action to appear to be, free from interference in the performance of their duties. Sonoran University will not attempt to direct or exert undue influence on the substantive work of the Ombuds, including with whom the Ombuds meet and how they manage any given concern. Sonoran University will also not attempt to interfere with or control the substance of any recommendations for Sonoran University change that the Ombuds might offer. The independence of the Ombuds is affected through Sonoran University recognition of it, a reporting structure in which the Ombuds reports to the President of Sonoran University, freedom from direction or interference in the substance of its work, and by being distinct from all other organizational entities. The Ombuds Office' professional staff has discretion over how or whether to address visitors' concerns.

B. Impartiality: The Ombuds will strive for impartiality and fairness in consideration of all visitors and the issues they raise. The Ombuds will operate with the aim of supporting all visitors and parties in the most effective way possible and will facilitate communication and problem-solving in a way that is impartial and that does not take sides or favor a particular outcome.

The Ombuds will refrain from any involvement in any matter in which their private interests, real or perceived, may conflict with their ability to be impartial and independent in their role. To avoid such conflicts in the first place, the Ombuds will not serve as a voting member on Sonoran University Board of Directors or any committees, will not participate in adjudication processes, and will not serve in a formal policy making capacity, except regarding Ombuds policies. If a potential conflict of interest nonetheless exists, the Ombuds will take all steps necessary to disclose the potential conflict and/or remove the conflict. If it is not possible to sufficiently address a conflict of interest in each case, the Ombuds will recuse themselves from involvement in it.

C. Confidentiality: The Ombuds will hold all communications in strict confidence and will not reveal - and must not be required to reveal - the identity of visitors to the Ombuds. The Ombuds will not reveal any information disclosed to them in confidence except in accordance with the IOA Standards of Practice, including not disclosing such information without a visitor's express permission, and then only at the discretion of the Ombuds. The Ombuds may, disclose otherwise confidential information if such information is determined to be **an imminent risk of serious physical harm or as permitted by the IOA Standards of Practice**. Because the Ombuds is a purely voluntary resource that no one is required to use, those who do so will be understood to have agreed to the terms, conditions, and principles upon which the Ombuds Office was created and it operates and not disclose or call on the Ombuds to testify or produce documents relating to confidential communications in any legal, administrative, or other proceedings. Sonoran University of Health Sciences has also agreed to respect the terms, conditions, and principles on which the Ombuds was created and not call on the Ombuds to testify or produce documents relating to visitors' identities and confidential communications in any legal, administrative, or other proceedings.

The Ombuds will resist any attempts by visitors or third parties to compel disclosure by the Ombuds of visitors' identities and confidential communications or documents by invoking the terms and conditions of this Charter and by asserting a claim of confidentiality under any applicable rule or statute under which confidential communications may be protected, including where applicable, rules or statutes dealing with mediation and other methods of alternative dispute resolution. The confidentiality of visitors' identities and communications is held by the Ombuds and cannot be waived by others, including the University administration, unless an appropriate judicial or regulatory authority determines that disclosure is necessary to prevent a manifest injustice or that disclosure is required because the interests served by disclosure clearly outweigh the interests served by ombuds confidentiality.

The Ombuds will not keep any permanent written records or notes with identifying information for the Ombuds Office and on behalf of the organization. The Ombuds will maintain all visit, visitor, and/or case-related information (e.g., notes, phone messages, appointment calendars) in a secure location and manner, reasonably protected from inspection by others (including management) and will have a consistent and standard practice for the regular destruction of such information. The Ombuds case handling and tracking process is ideally independent of the organization's technology system, with access allowed only to Ombuds Office personnel. In cases where this is or is not possible, the Sonoran University administration, Sonoran University IT, and Ombuds will collaborate to develop and maintain appropriate process and practices for preservation of confidentiality. The Ombuds will be responsible for preparing any data or reports to be shared with the University or otherwise made public in ways that protect visitor confidentiality.

D. Informality: The Ombuds serves as a resource for informal dispute resolution and problem-solving services. The Ombuds will not participate in formal investigative or adjudicative procedures, whether internal or external. The Ombuds will, however, endeavor to provide visitors with information about relevant formal grievance or complaint processes to help educate them about their options. Use of the Ombuds will be voluntary and will not be a required step in any grievance process or Sonoran University policy.

Limitations on the Authority of the Office

The Ombuds Office may help a visitor address a problem or concern effectively. However, the Ombuds Office has no authority or obligation to take action to seek to protect the legal rights of the visitor.

The university ombudsman can help in many ways, however, ombudsman cannot:

- Receive or accept Notice of any claims against the University including but not limited to allegations of a crime, research misconduct, sexual misconduct, discrimination, or harassment.
- Give legal advice or guidance.
- Does not serve as the reporter under title IX nor as a Campus Security Authority under the Clergy Act, nor is the office an agent of the university with the authority to institute corrective measures on behalf of the university and does not have significant responsibility for student and campus activities.
- The Ombuds Office can not extend any timelines relating to any legal proceedings or deadlines with respect to filing a complaint or grievance, whether internal or external
- Can not participate in formal processes and investigations.
- Make the final determination as to the resolution of a matter, or overturn decisions already made by the appropriate authority through the proper execution of established processes and procedures.
- Resolve student complaints regarding grades.
- The Ombuds Office has no authority to keep records and will not create or maintain permanent records regarding individual matters. Temporary notes and other pertinent information will be maintained in a secure location and manner that will be destroyed in accordance with document destruction process and procedures. Any reports made will always protect the identity of the visitor and any confidential communications.

Amendment/Revocation of Charter

This charter may be amended only at the agreement of the President/CEO and Executive Leadership. The charter remains in effect unless revoked by the President/CEO after providing notification and communication.

CONTACT:

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