



Office of the Ombudsperson

Service Overview: Discussions – Ombuds Facilitated Conversation and Dialogue

As a facilitator, you can expect me to be:

- Welcoming, compassionate, nonjudgmental, and impartial
- Focused on guiding a fair and fruitful discussion which may include redirecting individuals to their discussion agreement
- Curious (I will periodically ask questions)

Visitors are most successful when they are able to:

- Speak from their personal experience (use “I” statements)
- Seek to understand others’ experiences and perceptions
- Refrain from speaking for others
- Follow the guidance and/or groundrules they have co-created

Together, we will honor the process, each other, and our time by:

- Withholding judgment
- Listening actively, intentionally, and respectfully
- Asking genuine questions to learn
- Sitting in a shared space of collaboration, not one of competition

Individuals experiencing interpersonal conflict may feel stymied in their resolution efforts or ill-equipped to understand another’s perspective or behaviors.

Discussions, often called facilitated conversation or facilitated dialogue are informal, voluntary processes providing a forum for listening, learning, and sometimes resolving differences with the help of an objective third-party such as the Ombuds, to facilitate the process.

A facilitated conversation may be appropriate when two people, or a small group, are directly involved in a dispute.

A facilitated dialogue can be useful for a group matter, for example, a department or other work unit, a residence hall floor, or a classroom wherein the climate has been adversely affected by conflict, dispute, or inappropriate behavior.

Facilitated conversation or dialogue with the Ombuds is not appropriate when individuals are feeling pressured to participate rather than freely choosing to do so; or when a formal process has already been initiated as a means of handling the matter; or if the dispute involves terms of or service falling under a Collective Bargaining Agreement.

Facilitated discussions will require preparatory discussion. The initial meetings will be conducted one-to-one with the Ombuds so that they can determine whether the service is suitable for the circumstances and to help each individual clarify their concerns, hoped for outcomes, and any particular ground-rules they may wish to have in place as they generate a discussion agreement.

Discussions can be wonderful opportunities to discover interests that often underlie our own and others’ positions. Distinct from formal processes, there is no determination or judgment made by another person, but rather a mutually achieved understanding between parties that may result in remedy for individual relationships or for specific harms that occurred, and in restoration or repair to affected campus living, learning, and work environments.