

The University of Tennessee, Knoxville

# **Office of Ombuds Services Fiscal Year 2019 Annual Report**

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*Submitted to the University of Tennessee, Knoxville  
Interim Chancellor on June 28, 2019*



**Lisa Yamagata-Lynch**  
**Professor and Ombudsperson**  
2423 Dunford Hall  
915 Volunteer Blvd.  
Knoxville, TN 37996

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## Executive Summary

This report was prepared following the University of Tennessee, Knoxville, Office of Ombuds Services charter, which requires a report every fiscal year to the University of Tennessee, Knoxville, chancellor. This report is also provided to the Faculty Senate following university policies listed in the Faculty Handbook. Additionally, the report meets the reporting guidelines of the International Ombudsman Association and is made available to the public at [ombuds.utk.edu](http://ombuds.utk.edu).

The Office of Ombuds Services was established on May 1, 2019, and Lisa Yamagata-Lynch was internally hired as the full-time University of Tennessee, Knoxville, ombudsperson to serve both the Knoxville campus and the University of Tennessee Institute of Agriculture (UTIA). Activities since May have focused on Yamagata-Lynch's job role transition, establishing a physical office space, charter development, ombudsperson professional development, and internal outreach. Visitors began to request phone appointments as well as in-person visits starting in April. By the end of June there were a total of 22 visitors and 11 distinct cases. Visitors included department heads, faculty, staff, and graduate students. Some of these cases involved one-time consultations or referral services, and others involved the ombudsperson becoming an ongoing informal consultant to help visitors identify the best method to navigate their situations. The ombudsperson received additional consultation requests from individuals outside of UT. These requests were referred to appropriate internal and external offices.



The number of visitors and cases were limited in this two months of operations, but there were enough cases where common patterns were observed and prominent themes emerged. Each of the case themes was coded following the IOA Uniform Reporting Categories (Dale, Ganci, Miller & Sebok, 2008). The most prominent themes were in the evaluative relationship category. Tensions observed in these relationships were between graduate students and department heads, faculty and department heads, and staff and supervisors. The most common themes observed in this category included respectful treatment, communication, department climate, supervisory effectiveness, and equity of treatment.

The recommendations from fiscal year 2019 will be focused on further establishing the Office of Ombuds Services:

- To continue Office of Ombuds Services operations during the University of Tennessee, Knoxville, chancellor transition
- For the ombudsperson to engage in professional development to become an IOA-certified organizational ombudsman practitioner
- For the ombudsperson to engage in further internal outreach with other offices on campus in an effort to support employees and graduate students at UT Knoxville and UTIA

When looking forward to the upcoming fiscal year 2020, it is likely for the Office of Ombuds Services to see an increase in visitor consultation requests with the faculty periodic post-tenure performance review going into full implementation.

## **Office of Ombuds Services Overview**

The UT Knoxville Office of Ombuds Services was established on May 1, 2019, to serve as an independent, impartial, informal, and confidential resource for the Knoxville campus and the UT Institute of Agriculture. The office serves all employees, both faculty and staff, as well as graduate students. The office was established by Interim Chancellor Wayne Davis to provide the university community an alternative to official channels of conflict resolution. The office is staffed by an ombudsperson who practices in accordance with International Ombudsman Association professional standards and will work with visitors as a trusted consultant.

### ***Mission Statement***

The mission for the Office of Ombuds Services is to serve as a no-barrier first stop when seeking information and insight from a trusted consultant who is independent, impartial, confidential, and informal. The ombudsperson will help visitors make empowered decisions related to organizational disputes, conflicts, and barriers that stand in the way of reaching their full potential. Visitors, as well as stakeholders when appropriate, will engage in constructive problem solving with the ombudsperson that instills respect and civility. The ombudsperson will help visitors identify, examine, and reflect on their experiences relative to university policies and procedures, including as requested generating options for navigating the specific situation. When appropriate, the ombudsperson will provide training, educational activities, and coaching to individuals and organizational units that are facing challenges. The ombudsperson also serves as a catalyst for constructive organizational change by identifying and reporting emerging trends and issues and providing upward feedback to university officials.

### ***Standards of Practice***

The Office of Ombuds Services will operate consistent with the International Ombudsman Association (IOA) code of ethics and standards of practice. The IOA is dedicated to excellence in the practice of ombuds work, and their code of ethics provides a common set of professional ethical principles to which members adhere. The IOA code of ethics reflects a commitment to promoting ethical conduct in the performance of the ombudsperson role and to maintaining the integrity of the ombuds profession. An ombudsperson shall be truthful and act with integrity, shall foster respect for all members of the organization she or he serves, and promote procedural fairness in the content and administration of the organization's practices, processes, and policies.

### ***Professional Affiliation***

Lisa Yamagata-Lynch, the university ombudsperson, is a member of the IOA.

## **Fiscal Year 2019 Activities**

Fiscal year 2019 activities were limited to May and June. In that duration, office activities have included the following staffing and administration activities:

- Staffing
- Securing a physical space for the office
- Establishing an online presence
- Developing a charter
- Engaging in ombudsperson professional development
- Engaging in internal outreach
- Consulting visitors

### ***Staffing***

Starting May 1, 2019, Lisa Yamagata-Lynch was internally hired to serve as the full-time university ombudsperson.

### ***Securing a Physical Space for the Office***

The Office of Ombuds Services is located in Dunford Hall 2423. Currently the room is being remodeled to fit the need of the office operations. Once remodeling is complete, the ombudsperson will move into the office and hold meetings with visitors. Based on the current interior design plans, Dunford 2423 will accommodate up to three visitors to fit comfortably in a meeting. When visiting the ombudsperson, it is important that visitors gain a sense of physical and psychological safety, and when that is better achieved in a conference room setting there will be conference rooms accessible in Dunford Hall. Facilities Services has provided guidance on how the ombudsperson can independently and confidentially have access to conference rooms to meet with visitors.

### ***Establishing an Online Presence***

The Office of Ombuds Services website is under development. Initial update of the website at [ombuds.utk.edu](http://ombuds.utk.edu) launched on May 1, 2019. During the next fiscal year, the ombudsperson will work with Creative Communications for further updates. In the initial design plan the following information was identified to be made available to the public:

- Visitor welcome page
- Office services
- When to talk to an ombudsperson
- Charter with link to IOA Code of Conduct and Professional Standards
- Annual reports
- Internal resources

### ***Developing a Charter***

The office charter was developed and approved by the University of Tennessee General Counsel. The charter reflects how the office will operate within UT consistent with the IOA code of ethics and standards of practice as well as university policies and the law. Future amendments to the charter will be discussed with the University of Tennessee, Knoxville, chancellor as well as other appropriate individuals.

***Engaging in Ombudsperson Professional Development***

Since her appointment, the ombudsperson has attended the following IOA webinar trainings:

- Listening: An Ombuds Superpower
- Preparing the Visitor for the Facilitated Conversation

Additionally, she is scheduled to attend the IOA foundation and core courses in July 2019.



Within the UT Human Resources training opportunities, the ombudsperson has taken part in the following professional development activities:

**UT Human Resources Employee and Organizational Development Training**

- Enrolled in the Customer Relations and Communication Certificate; completed two courses in active listening and communication styles
- Attended the Conference for Women in Leadership

**UT Knoxville Human Resources**

- Intercultural Development Inventory (IDI) Qualifying Seminar

**Compliance Training**

- Title VI
- 2018–2019 Title IX Mandatory Reporter Training
- Code of Conduct
- UTK IT Security Awareness Training–201
- Effort Certification Training
- UTK FERPA Basics
- Clery Reporter Training

***Engaging in Internal Outreach***

For the Office of Ombuds Services to best serve faculty, staff, and graduate students requires that the ombudsperson build relationships with existing campus units, while maintaining the office role to serve as an independent, neutral, confidential, and informal resource for visitors. During the current fiscal year, the ombudsperson initiated meetings with several units across

<b>FIGURE 1: INTERNAL OUTREACH</b>		
	May	June
General Counsel	✓	
Human Resources	✓	
Facilities Services	✓	
Faculty Senate	✓	
Office of Equity and Diversity	✓	
Title IX	✓	
Graduate School		✓
Provost's Office		✓
VC for Diversity and Engagement		✓
Pride Center		✓
Creative Communications		✓

campus. Figure 1 shows a list of units that met with the ombudsperson. In these meetings, the ombudsperson and unit representatives discussed how to jointly serve faculty, staff, and graduate students in the best manner possible. These meetings often helped identify strategies for how to maintain the independence of the office as well as work with other units when appropriate and maintain visitor confidentiality.



### ***Faculty, Staff, and Graduate Students Served***

Visitors began to request appointments with the ombudsperson on the phone as well as in person starting in April, and by the end of June there were a total of 22 visitors and 11 distinct cases. Visitors included department heads, faculty, staff, graduate students, and individuals outside of UT. Some of these cases involved one-time consultations or referral services, and others involved the ombudsperson becoming an ongoing informal consultant for visitors to find the best method to navigate difficult UT-related situations. There were two referral requests involving individuals outside of UT. The first request was concerned about research conduct, which the ombudsperson referred to the

responsible conduct and research integrity officer, and the second request involved consultation about how to start an ombuds office.

There is much debate on how to accurately count visitors among ombuds professionals. In this report the following rules were applied to count visitors:

- Visitors were defined as individuals who visit the office in any given month. If an individual visited more than one month, they were counted as a visitor in the following month (e.g., if a staff member visited the office in April, the staff member was counted as a visitor in April, and if they visited in May, they were counted as a visitor in May as well).
- All visitors were categorized by their primary role at UT into one of the following three roles: faculty, staff, and graduate student.
- New cases were defined as cases introduced to the office for the first time whether it involved one visitor or multiple visitors (e.g., if there were three faculty who came to visit together or separately about one case, the case was counted as one case, but visitors were counted as three).
- Ongoing cases were defined as cases that required a visitor to consult the ombudsperson through multiple months.

Anticipating a low number of total visitors for the current reporting period, the office purposefully did not collect visitor demographic data to ensure that visitor identities would not be compromised.

<b>FIGURE 2: VISITOR INTAKE BY NUMBER</b>				
	April	May	June	FY 19 Total
Graduate Students	0	1	0	1
Staff	2	1	4	7
Faculty	0	6	3	9
Department Heads	1	1	1	3
Individuals Outside UT	0	1	1	2
Total Visitors	3	10	9	22
Total New Cases	2	6	3	11
Ongoing Case Visitors	0	0	2	2

### Case Themes

While it was anticipated that the number of visitors and cases would be low in this first two months of operations of the Office of Ombuds Services, there were enough cases for common patterns to be observed, and prominent themes emerged. The ombudsperson treated each case as a unique narrative and treated narratives as a form of publicly engaging in interpretations and negotiations of public meanings (Bruner, 1990). From this perspective, the ombudsperson approached case narrative sharing as a social interaction between her and the visitor that brings shape and form to ideas for the visitor to engage in ongoing dialogue about their ideas as part of our shared reality (Bruner, 2002). From each case narrative, emerging themes were coded following the IOA uniform reporting categories (Dale, Ganci, Miller & Sebok, 2008), and multiple themes were coded in each case as they emerged. The main IOA uniform reporting categories include:

1. Compensation and benefits
2. Evaluative relationships
3. Peer and college relationships
4. Career progression and development
5. Legal, regulatory, financial and compliance
6. Safety, health, and physical environment
7. Services/administrative issues
8. Organizational, strategic, and mission related
9. Values, ethics, and standards

<b>FIGURE 3: CASE CATEGORIES AND THEMES</b>					
	Graduate Student	Staff	Faculty	Heads	External
<b>Compensation and Benefits</b>					
Retirement, Pension			✓		
<b>Evaluative Relationship</b>					
Respect/Treatment	✓	✓	✓		
Communication	✓	✓	✓		
Diversity Related			✓		
Assignment/Schedule		✓			
Consultations				✓	
Department Climate	✓	✓	✓		
Supervisory Effectiveness		✓	✓		
Equity of Treatment	✓	✓	✓		
<b>Peer and Colleague Relationships</b>					
Trust/Integrity			✓		
Reputation			✓		
<b>Career Progression and Development</b>					
Tenure/Position Security/Ambiguity			✓		
<b>Services/Administrative Issues</b>					
Adm Decisions and Interpret/App of Rules				✓	
<b>Values, Ethics, and Standards</b>					
Policies and Procures		✓	✓	✓	
Scientific Conduct/Integrity					✓*



Figure 3 shows case analysis results and observed themes. The broad categories for which themes emerged following the IOA Uniform Reporting Categories were compensation and benefits; evaluative relationships; peer colleague relationships; career progression and development; services/administrative issues; and values, ethics, and standards. The most prominent themes were observed in the evaluative relationships category that involved relationships between graduate student and department head, faculty and department head, and staff and supervisor. The prominent themes in this category included respectful treatment, communication, department climate, supervisory effectiveness, and equity of treatment.

\*The scientific conduct/integrity case was referred to the responsible conduct of research and research integrity officer.

### ***Services Provided to Visitors***

The services that the Office of Ombuds Services provided to visitors during fiscal year 2019 were focused on two critical roles that an organizational ombudsperson can take in a large institution such as UT. The first role was to act as a listener to provide a safe space for visitors to hear their own voice by sharing their ideas to a neutral party. These listening consultations took place on the phone or in person and involved one-on-one meetings as well as meetings with groups of visitors. In some cases, this listening consultation was all that visitors needed to come to their own decision making about their situation.

The second role that the ombudsperson took was to act as a consultant who assisted visitors in gaining information about UT policies and existing resources. Assisting visitors in gaining new information can help visitors better navigate the organization and make empowered decisions while weighing options for how to approach their situation. In these cases, the ombudsperson helped visitors interpret existing policies and how they would apply to the specific visitor's situation. When there was not a clear way to apply existing policies to a visitor's situation, the ombudsperson helped the visitor identify a list of questions to ask the appropriate formal offices to obtain further clarification about policies and resources. When visitors were uncomfortable asking their questions to representatives from official offices, the ombudsperson asked the questions in their place anonymously about a hypothetical case, or by being open about the specific situation, based on how the visitor wanted the ombudsperson to approach the situation.

Finally, the ombudsperson received requests to attend meetings between visitors and representatives from official offices. In these meetings, the ombudsperson attended the meeting as an advocate of fair process and clear communication and did not represent the visitor or the representative from the official office. These requests came from both visitors and representatives of official offices when visitors discussed with them that they were working informally with the ombudsperson. The ombudsperson already has requests for this type of meeting scheduled in the next fiscal year as well.

## **Ombudsperson Reflections**

While examining ombuds office annual reports from other institutions, it is quite common that prominent themes in visitor cases are related to evaluative relationships between graduate students, faculty, or staff and their supervisor/department head. From this perspective, the difficult situations observed during this reporting period at UT were in alignment with other institutions. Many of the cases at UT were about supervisor communication style that made it difficult for graduate students, faculty, and staff to see that they were being treated with respect by their supervisor/department head. Additionally, there were instances where the supervisor/head communication was not clear for faculty, staff, and graduate students to know their job expectations. Therefore, when they received a low performance review, they felt unclear whether they were treated fairly or not because the expectations were not clearly communicated.

### ***Recommendations***

The recommendations from fiscal year 2019 will be focused on further establishing the Office of Ombuds Services:

- To continue Office of Ombuds Services operations during the University of Tennessee, Knoxville, chancellor transition
- For the ombudsperson to engage in professional development to become an IOA certified organizational ombudsman practitioner
- For the ombudsperson to engage in further internal outreach with other offices on campus in an effort to support employees and graduate students at UT Knoxville and UTIA

## **Goals for Fiscal Year 2020**

The goals for the next fiscal year are aligned to the recommendations in this report and are related to the Office of Ombuds Services solidifying its operations. The office has five goals:

- Supervisory transition to Chancellor-Elect Plowman
- Continued consultation services for visitors
- Ongoing professional development
- Marketing
- Future reporting

### ***Supervisory Transition to Chancellor-Elect Plowman***

The ombudsperson will work closely with Chancellor-Elect Donde Plowman for an efficient supervisory transition from Interim Chancellor Wayne Davis. Throughout the transition, the Office of Ombuds Services will continue to provide UT and UTIA faculty, staff, and graduate students an alternative to official channels of conflict resolution for them to obtain access to fair, impartial, and honest resolution of problems. The office will continue to be supported through the Office of the Chancellor.

### ***Continued Consultation Services for Visitors***

The ombudsperson will continue to provide consultation services to visitors focusing in listening, problem solving, and when appropriate unit training related to communication and conflict resolution. When looking forward to the upcoming fiscal year, it is likely that the office will see an increase in visitor consultation requests with the faculty periodic post-tenure perfor-

mance review going into full implementation. Additionally, based on past data provided by the former part-time ombudsman, it is anticipated that visitor traffic will increase during annual performance review (fall semester for faculty and spring semester for staff), faculty tenure and promotion review in the fall semester, and lecturer evaluation in the spring semester.

### ***Ongoing Professional Development***

The ombudsperson will continue to enroll in IOA monthly webinar training, and start the IOA certified organizational ombudsman practitioner (CO-OP) certification requirement procedures, which require that the ombudsperson:

- Pass a certification exam
- Have at least one year of full-time experience (2,000 hours) working as an organizational ombudsperson adhering to the IOA standards of practice and code of ethics
- Complete an application, submit associated fees, and sign a certification agreement
- Successfully complete an interview with a member of the Eligibility Committee

The ombudsperson will continue the UT Customer Relations and Communication Certificate training as well.



### ***Marketing and Internal Outreach***

The Office of Ombuds Services will work with Creative Communications to identify strategies for UT and UTIA faculty, staff, and graduate students to become aware that the office is available as a resource to them. Initial suggestions from other UT offices have included print media campaigns such as postcard distribution through campus mail as well as during various new employee and student orientations. For a non-print media marketing strategy, the ombudsperson plans to prepare a short video introduction about services that can be presented during new employee orientations, which take place more than 20 times during

the calendar year. In addition to marketing, the ombudsperson will continue to work with various official units at UT to identify how to best serve faculty, staff, and graduate students.

### ***Future Reporting***

With a full 12 months of office operations in the next fiscal year, it is anticipated that there will be more visitor data to report. Therefore, in future reports the following visitor demographic information may be included:

- Visitors by schools or colleges
- Visitors by gender
- Visitors by race

However, the ombudsperson will assess whether that much reporting is feasible or not without compromising visitor identities.

### **Fiscal Year 2019 Final Remarks**

In the next fiscal year, the Office of Ombuds Services will have a full year of operation to serve the UT and UTIA community. There will be significant efforts put into further internal outreach and marketing of the office. The ombudsperson is always available for faculty, staff, and graduate students and can be reached at 865-974-6273 or by email at [LisaYL@utk.edu](mailto:LisaYL@utk.edu).

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