

Organizational Ombuds: A Resource for Individuals and Institutions

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Health Research Alliance

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PAUL
SMITH

*"O.K., let's slowly lower in the grant
money."*

Todd Bearson
Arlington, Mass.

Presentation Objectives

- Introduce and describe the role of organizational ombuds in higher education settings
- Describe how ombuds fit within the ecosystem of campus resources
- Provide an overview of problem navigation frameworks
- Foster conversation and discussion about how to incentivize healthy relational dynamics in working and learning environments



Duke Office of the Ombuds Mission Statement

The purpose and mission of the Office of the Ombuds is to enhance an ethical, supportive, and responsive culture for members of the University community by providing confidential, impartial, informal, and independent conflict resolution services and problem-solving support. The Office also elevates systemic trends or concerns to the attention of University leadership to effect high-level improvement.





The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill Ombuds Office is available to assist all members of the university community in navigating any Carolina-related question, challenge, or concern.

We are committed to ethical ombuds practice and to fostering an environment in which individuals can feel seen and heard, discuss anything that is important to them, and strategize their next steps.

Through consultation, education, and facilitation, we support thoughtful decision-making, fair processes, constructive approaches to conflict, and a campus climate that is both healthy and humane.

Organizational Ombuds Practice Pursuant to International Ombuds Association Professional Standards

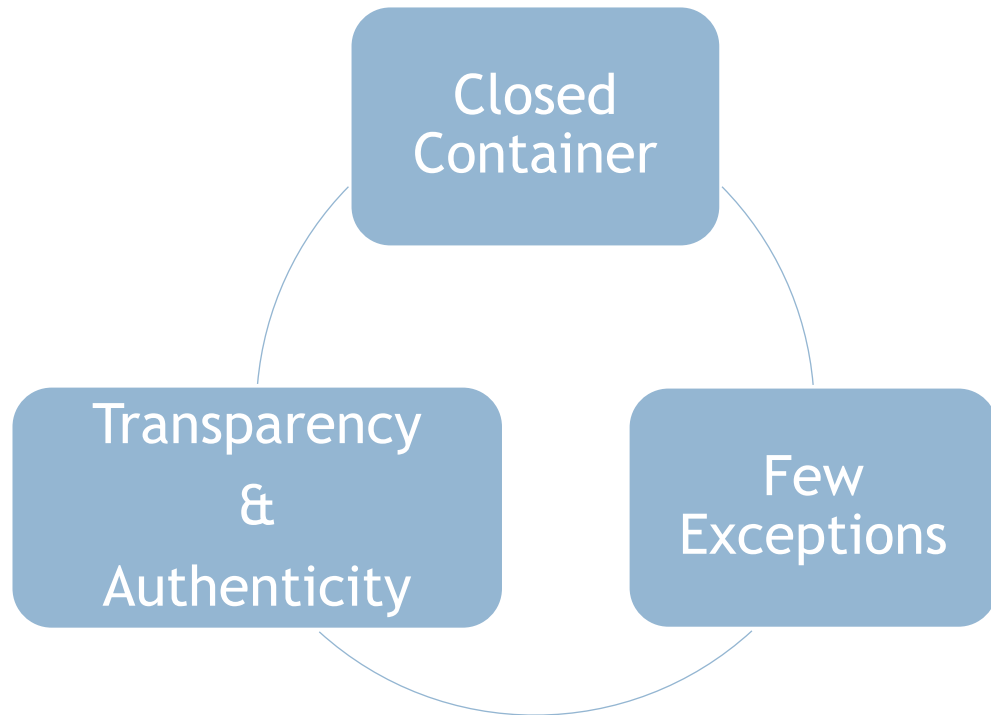


Key Principles Include:

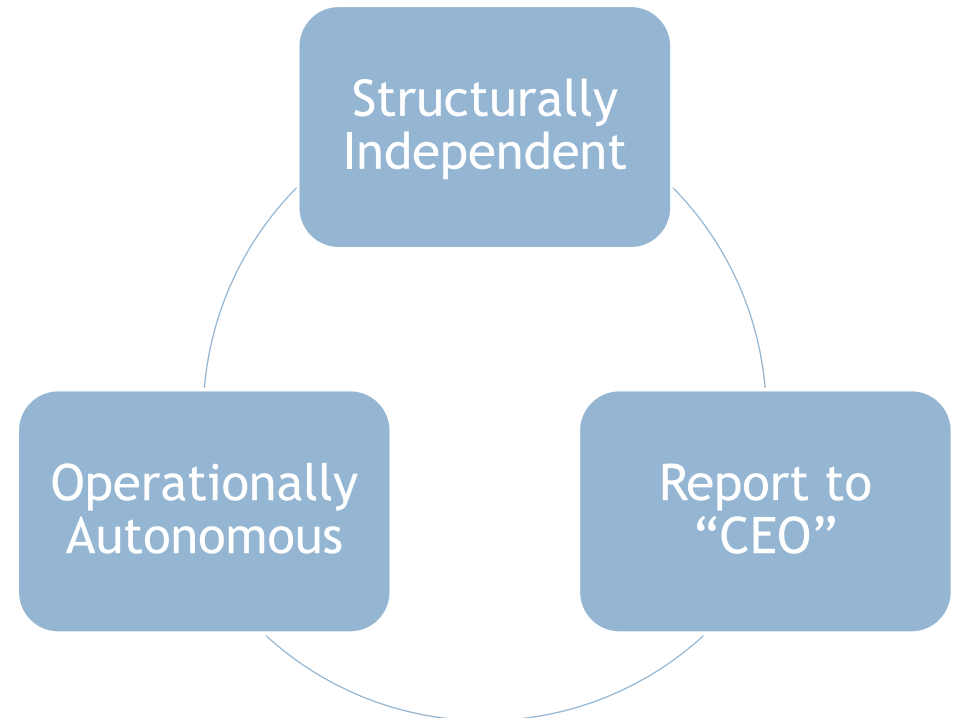
- Confidential
- Independent
- Impartial
- Informal



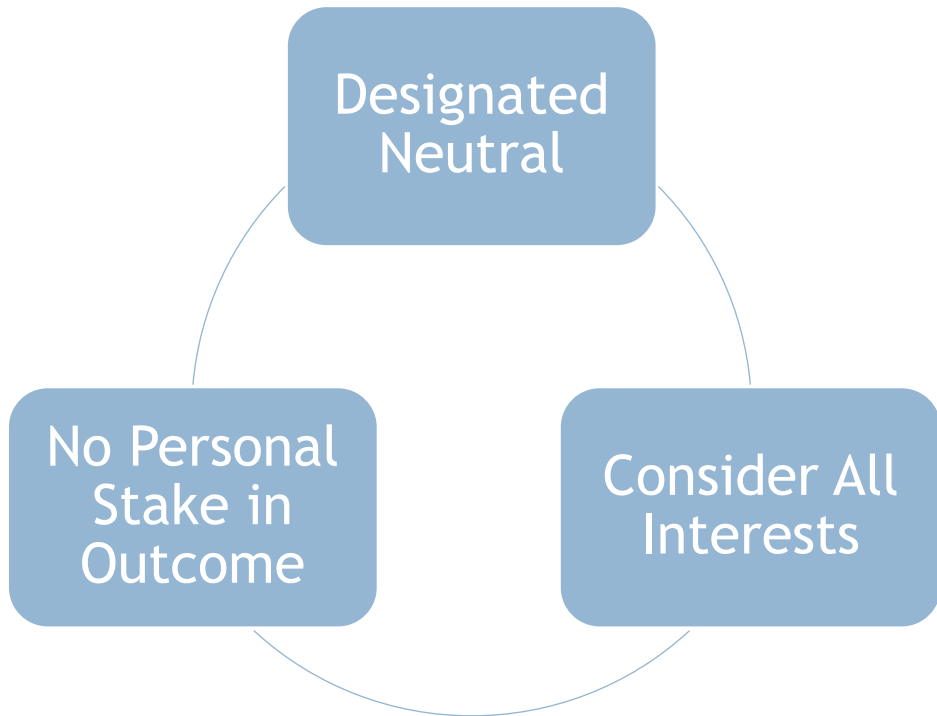
Confidential



Independent



Impartial



Informal



What Ombuds Do

- Listening and Coaching/Thought Partnership
- Providing Information/Objective Perspective
- Identifying and Developing Options
- Clarifying Priorities and Evaluating Options
- Facilitate Effective Communication
- Identifying Relevant Resources
- Feedback to the Organization
- Celebrate Good News



What Ombuds Don't Do

- Make decisions for individuals/the institution
- Accept notice/formal complaints
- Conduct formal investigations
- Provide legal advice or psychological counseling
- Decide who is right and who is wrong
- Act as an advocate for individuals



Types of Concerns Brought to an Ombuds

Communication issues

Team dynamics

Concerns related to harassment or discrimination

When you just need an impartial perspective

Untangling complicated situations

Inter-personal conflict/
Facilitation

Ethical dilemmas

Health and safety concerns

Preparing for a challenging conversation

Policy questions

Navigating formal processes

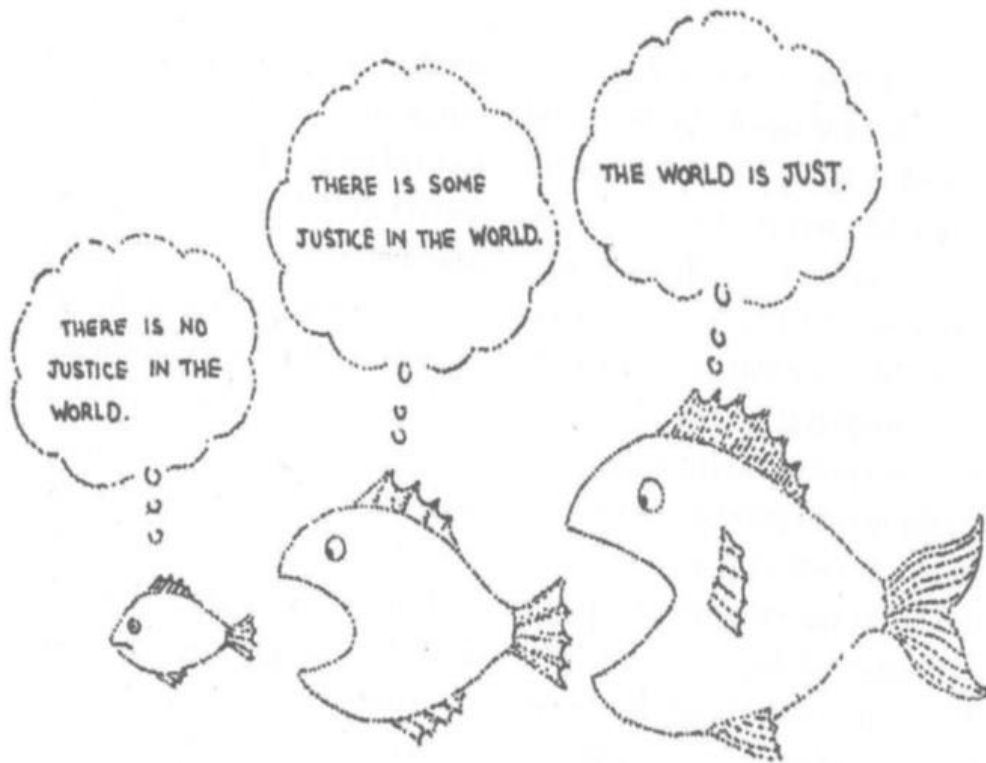
Request for thought partnership





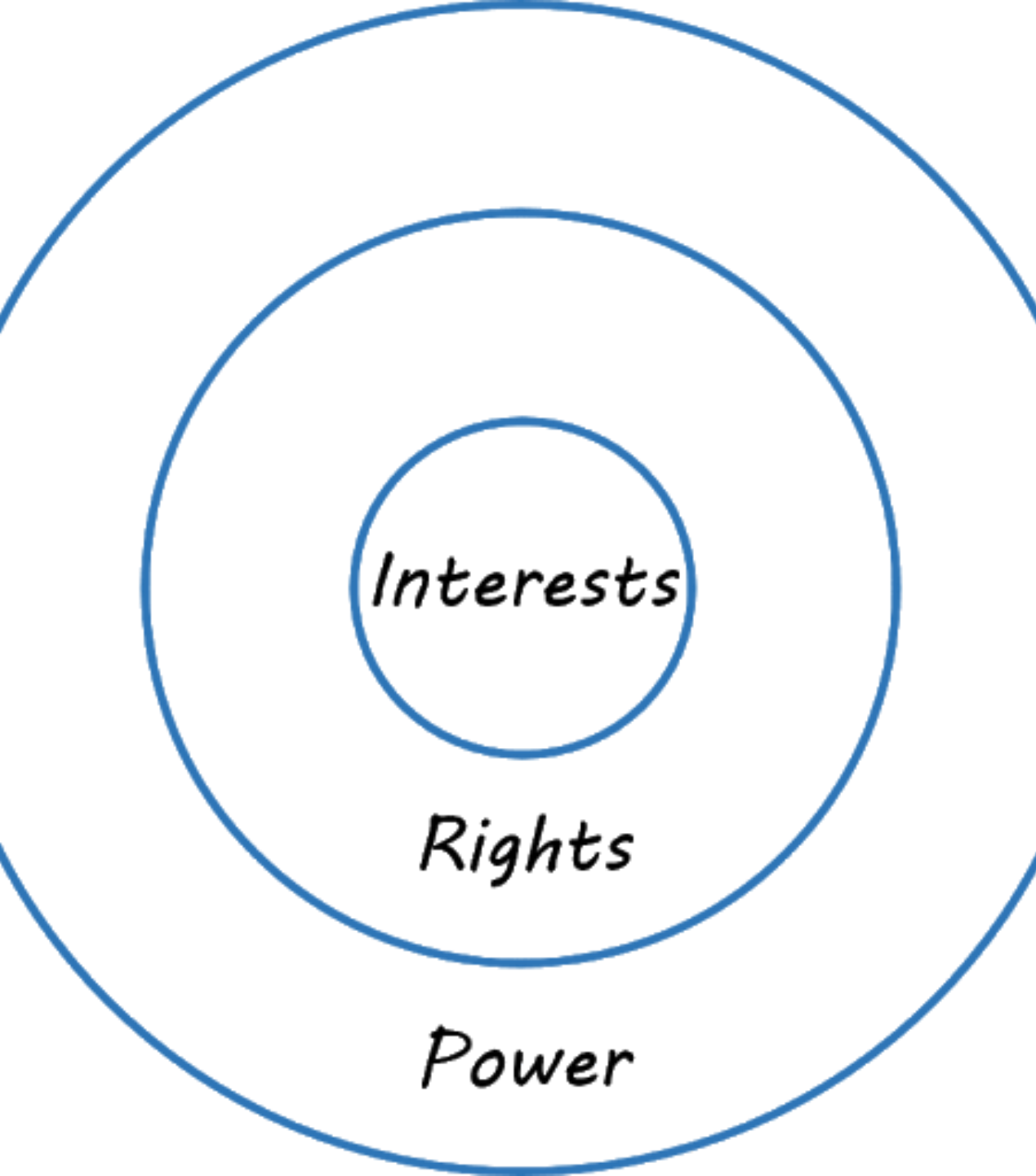
Frameworks for Navigating Concerns





MANKOFF





Interests, rights & power

- Interests: Needs, desires, concerns, fears - the things one cares about or wants. Interests should drive our approach to problem solving.
- Rights: An independent standard with perceived legitimacy or fairness that determines who is entitled to prevail.
- Power: The ability to coerce someone to do something they would not otherwise do.

Source: Fisher, R., Ury, W. & Patton, B. (2011). *Getting to Yes : Negotiating Agreement without Giving In* (Rev. ed.). Boston: Houghton Mifflin.



Ombuds Help with Navigating a Range of Options

Self-Management	Self-Advocacy	Intervention	Adjudication
Making adjustments to one's own approach, style, communication, and/or behavior in an effort to unilaterally deescalate or address a conflict.	Asserting and giving voice to your interests and needs in an effort to negotiate a desired outcome. Activism, a unilateral approach to forcing a desired outcome, is escalated self-advocacy.	Seeking assistance from someone who is not a party to the conflict in an effort to improve communication, encourage application of rules, and/or facilitate or impose an outcome.	Pursuing an internal or external process designed to make a judgment about who is right. Typically involves investigation, reviewing evidence, and fact-finding.



**SELF-ADVOCACY
OR
INTERVENTION?**

Is this conflict, misconduct, or abuse?

Is this something I can resolve myself or does someone else need to know about it?

What are the power dynamics?

Is it possible, and appropriate, to take a graduated/step-wise approach?

Is there a need to document my steps or will an informal approach be sufficient?

What is the role of boundary setting in this instance?

Is preserving a relationship one of my considerations?



Common Campus Resources

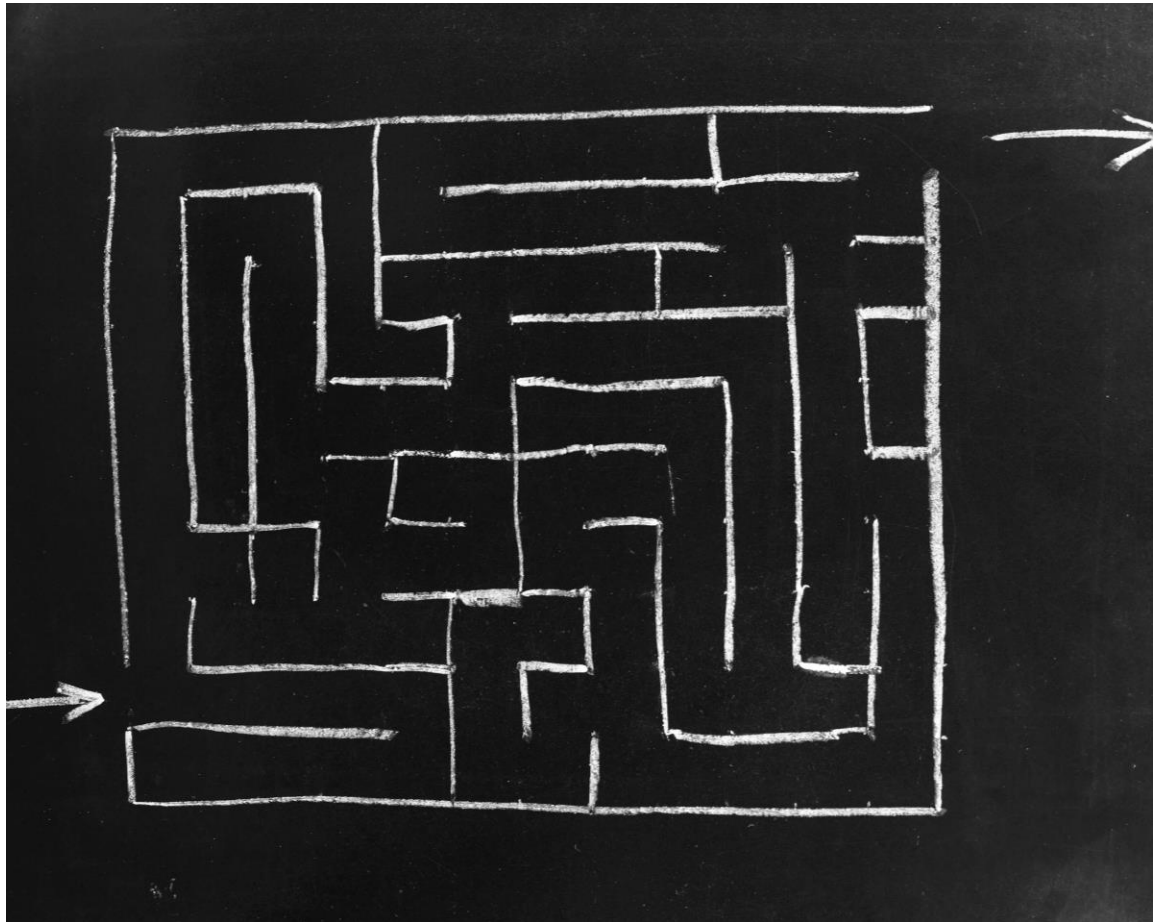
- Employee Assistance Program (EAP)
- Human Resources (HR)
- Primary Investigator/Line of Authority
- Departmental resources (Director of Grad Studies, Chair, etc..)
- Dean of Students/Graduate School
- Postdoctoral Affairs
- EEO/Title IX
- Ethics Line
- Environmental Health and Safety
- ADA Accommodations Offices
- Representative groups - unions, staff assembly, student government
- Gender Violence Services
- Mentorship programs



Case Example

- Dr. Z is a tenured professor and PI on several grants. Dr. Z runs a large lab with graduate students, post-docs and staff.
- A post-doc asks to meet with the ombuds to convey that many lab members are complaining about Dr. Z's behavior.
- While the behavior has been a concern for some time, it seems to be escalating. The post-doc feels that it is creating a toxic climate. The post-doc describes behaviors like yelling when upset, name calling, and stating that they have no future in science.
- The post-doc and others fear retaliation if Dr. Z found out that they had complained. The post-doc and others wish to be anonymous. If not, career options could be sabotaged without Dr. Z's full support.





“The Ombuds office provides wonderful resources that address the question of how to be human-centered within an organization - how to provide for your own self-care in the midst of conflict, how to assess the ecosystem and culture around you and utilize this assessment in your decision-making, and how to process important life choices from a point of consideration and reflection.”

-- UNC student describing Ombuds Office services



QUESTIONS AND CONVERSATION





INTERNATIONAL
OMBUDS
ASSOCIATION

For Resources and Reading

<https://www.ombudsassociation.org/value-effectiveness-of-organizational-ombuds>

