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Characteristics of good ombudsman

How to find, choose and appoint the correct person?

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UNI WERSYTET

- 
- *What person you would like to contact if you had an academic problem?*

Ombudsman wanted!

Writing a position description

- Summary of the position.
- Responsibilities and essential duties.
- Required/preferred qualifications.

Summary of the position

Neutral and impartial person within academic structure, whose major function is to provide confidential and informal assistance to constituents of the university's community, which includes students, staff, faculty and/or administrators.

Source: Generic Academic Ombudsman Position Description IOA

Responsibilities and essential duties

The ombudsman is neither an advocate for any individual nor the organization, but rather is an advocate for fairness, who acts as a source of information and referral and aids in answering individual/s questions and assists in the resolution of concerns and critical situations.

Source: Generic Academic Ombudsman Position Description IOA



„You are the tool of your work...”

- The weakness in the model is simply that it relies so heavily upon the qualities of the particular individual(s) chosen to occupy the ombuds office.



Characteristics of good ombudsman

How to choose the correct person?

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Ombudsman qualifications

- Professional background,
- Knowledge & skills,
- Personality traits,
- Attitude & moral character.

Background

- There is no specific disciplinary background need.
- The college and graduate school majors are diverse:
 - Law;
 - Social studies: psychology, sociology, pedagogic, social work;
 - Communication, journalism;
 - Administrative HR;
 - Engineering;
 - Economics, management, etc.
- Ombudsman should have a bachelor's degree; however an advanced degree combined with relevant **dispute resolution training** or **ombudsman experience** is preferred.

„Ombuds practitioners appear to vary a good deal as to how they spend their time. Some observers believe that the prior career of the ombudsman may influence ombuds practice.”

Mary P. Rowe, *The Corporate Ombudsman*, *Negotiation Journal*, April 1987

Knowledge and understanding

- How the organization works: company goals, policies and customs;
- The spirit and intent of basic employment and administrative law principles;
- Communication & PR;
- Theory and practice of ADR and conflict resolution;
- Psychology, common personality types.

Skills

- Communication skills – good listener;
- Presentation skills - able to speak well;
- Problem-solving and conflict resolution skills;
- Decision making and strategic thinking skills;
- Networking skills – able to establish and maintain broad contacts throughout the organization;
- Ability to be fairly self-reflective and critical;
- Easily separate people from the problem;
- Can deal peacefully with high emotions.

Personality traits



- Empathy
- Patience
- Honesty
- Persuasiveness and credibility
- Sense of tact and diplomacy
- Energy, vigor and creativity, being a person of action
- Openness
- Sense of humor 😊

Attitude/moral character

Ombudsmen have to be someone who can see through power and stand up to it, not be intimidated, not need to be liked for everything that s/he does.

- Strong sense of moral and legal obligations
- Strong sense of justice
- Independent in thought with courage of convictions
- Low need for power and public accolade
- Must have an integrated value system that helps identify ethical issues early wherever possible.
- Responsive to people's interests and caring about them.
- Able to understand issues from multiple perspective, tolerant, sensitive to diversity issue.



Where to find a good ombudsman?

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U N I W E R S Y T E T

„Natural Mediators“

- „Finding a person to whom colleagues naturally turn“
- Have reputation for dealing fairly and comfortably with both employees and managers, with people of different races, religions, income and gender.
- Reputation for integrity and for dealing fairly, effectively with all constituents.

Who becomes an ombudsman?

Survey of about 50 U.S. ombuds practitioners reveals wide diversity of backgrounds. At least 90 % of ombudsmen were „picked from within“ the company structure:

- Employee Assistance office,
- Equal Opportunity office,
- Internal counsels,
- Human Resources/Employee Relations,
- Line managers,
- Senior line managers.

Finding, choosing and appointing the correct person



- Choosing an ombudsman requires insight, concern and the courage to select someone who from time to time may challenge the assumptions and practices of those who govern and those who would govern.

Source: Gregory J. Levine, Characteristic of an Ombudsman, 2005

The background of the slide features the coat of arms of the University of Warsaw, which is a golden eagle with its wings spread, perched on a decorative base. The eagle is surrounded by golden stars and laurel branches. Below the eagle is a decorative wrought-iron fence with the word 'UNIWERSYTET' inscribed in large, golden letters.

Legal basis of ombudsman position

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Ombudsman paradox

- An Ombudsman, who bases his/her work on independence, self-reliance, impartiality and confidentiality, is at the same time a regular university employee, dependent on the administrative structure and university budget.
- Regulation, according to which establishing of this position [ombudsman post] and appointing particular person for the post depends only on the will of the Rector, may strongly diminish ombudsman's independence and impartiality .

Available legal ways to establish the post of the ombudsman

- Ordinance of the Rector
- Resolution adopted by the Senate
- Statute of the University

- Act of state law

Based on the research data collected by Tomasz Brzezicki and Bartłomiej Chludziński from the University of Mikołaj Kopernik in Toruń with the cooperation of Anna Cybulko from the University of Warsaw.

Different methods to appoint Ombudsman – pros and cons

- Decision made by:
 - Rector
 - Senate
 - other collegial body of the University
 - Students Unions
- Mixed methods:
 - combined decisions of two or more organs (motion + acceptance/decision),
 - obligatory consultations of binding or non-binding character.
 - Acceptance post factum/vote of confidence

Based on the research data collected by Tomasz Brzezicki and Bartłomiej Chludziński from the University of Mikołaj Kopernik in Toruń with the cooperation of Anna Cybulko from the University of Warsaw.



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