



TO: SUNY University Faculty Senate
FROM: Governance Committee
RE: Resolution requesting the creation of a SUNY Office of Ombuds Services
DATE: 181st Plenary, January 17-19, 2018
LOCATION: SUNY Cobleskill
RESOLUTION #: 181-02-02 RESOLUTION FAILED
VOTE TALLY: FOR: 11; AGAINST: 29; ABSTAIN: 3

RATIONALE:

WHEREAS Ombuds programs provide neutral, independent, informal and confidential assistance in conflict resolution, problem-solving, upward feedback, and trend-tracking to universities, private industry, and government; act as informal and independent mechanisms to facilitate confidential inquiry and provide additional expert advice on working to achieve fair solutions to a wide range of issues and concerns; and provide prospective training in the avoidance of conflict; and

WHEREAS Ombuds programs have operated at U.S. institutions of higher learning since the 1960s and, recognizing the benefits to their campus communities, over 300 universities across the country including Binghamton, and Stony Brook, have established Ombuds programs;^{1,2,3} and

WHEREAS several SUNY campuses have encountered issues and concerns that may have been resolved through the use of an Ombuds office such as conflict between groups of professional staff and campus administration, conflicts with shared governance bodies and administration, or between individuals; and

WHEREAS many SUNY campuses are financially unable to sustain such an office on their own; and

WHEREAS the role of an Ombuds is to listen, provide information, make recommendations, offer suggestions and generally operate outside of normal organizational structure; and

WHEREAS this informal assistance can empower individuals and groups to define problems, identify goals and talk through solutions, often solving problems before they escalate and require more formal and more costly mechanisms:

RESOLUTION:

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that the University Faculty Senate (UFS) requests that the SUNY Chancellor create a SUNY Office of Ombuds Services to assist in the resolution of disagreements and disputes in all matters pertaining to the academic mission, but excluding matters relating to terms and conditions of employment; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the UFS recommends to the SUNY Chancellor that the Office of Ombuds Services should include certified individual(s) who shall work with persons and groups in SUNY to explore and assist them in peace-building efforts, determining options to help resolve conflicts, problematic issues, or concerns, and to bring systemic concerns to the attention of SUNY for resolution, as described by the International Ombudsman Association⁴.

BACKGROUND:

1. Examples of Campuses with Office of Ombuds:

Binghamton University (<https://www.binghamton.edu/ombudsman/>)
Stony Brook (<https://www.stonybrook.edu/ombuds/>)
University of Kentucky (<https://www.uky.edu/ombud/>)
Harvard University (<https://ombudsman.harvard.edu/>)
University of California (<http://ombuds.ucsf.edu/>, <https://ombuds.ucdavis.edu/>,
<http://www.ombuds.ucla.edu/>, <https://ombuds.ucsb.edu/>)
University of Michigan (<http://facultyombuds.umich.edu/>)
Brown University (<https://www.brown.edu/about/administration/ombudsperson/>)
University of Florida (<https://www.ombuds.ufl.edu/>)
U Mass (<http://www.umass.edu/ombuds/>)
Syracuse University (<https://www.syracuse.edu/about/ombuds/>)

2. The need for an academic ombudsman, *Times Higher Education*, 1998.

<https://www.timeshighereducation.com/news/the-need-for-an-academic-ombudsman/108884.article>

3. The Stony Brook University Ombudsman Office handled approximately 300 individual cases last year, and ran numerous workshops and training sessions on topics such as conflict resolution, enhancing communication, and navigating change and transitions.

4. International Ombudsman Association <http://www.ombudsassociation.org/Resources/Frequently-Asked-Questions/What-is-an-Organizational-Ombudsman.aspx>

Existing Processes - http://www.buffalo.edu/facultysenate/Governance/standingorders.html#title_2001366599