
Systems and processes

12a: So you Zoomed the Ombud.. What changed?- Revisiting Ombud services outcomes

Franco Parrella (Australia)

Particularly during our current Covid times, where more and more (Australian) universities move towards 'flexible learning' methods, it is time to review how students find us, how we describe our role and how we report back on our value. The presentation includes a synopsis of my approach to reviewing how the Ombud's work is defined and measured, and why outcomes measures are important in describing our value proposition. The aim is to share some of my experiences, challenge our thinking about how we measure outcomes, and assist colleagues in similar roles to either validate their own approaches and reporting systems or indeed stimulate discussion and change.

Presenter(s):

Franco Parrella: As the Student Ombud, my role is to act independently and impartially to firstly examine whether all avenues available to investigate and/or resolve student(s) concerns have been explored, and to act as an 'Advocate for Fairness', not the University, nor an individual, per se. I cannot override a decision of the University. I can, however, make recommendations regarding improvements to the University's practices, policy or procedures if I believe they may be negatively impacting on students. I can also ask the University to reconsider its position in some circumstances and/or make suggestions to try to conciliate/resolve matters. I also report back on trends and ongoing challenges and systemic issues that may negatively impact on students.

12b: Navigating hierarchy in Higher Education Institutions – the Ombuds perspective

Ursula Meiser (Germany), Ryan Smith (United States of America)

The nature of the academic environment leads to a prevalence of hierarchical structures. Academic hierarchy has been documented within the higher education and organizational literature (Lang, 1984; Kotkin, 2019; Vanstone & Grierson, 2021). This academic hierarchy reflects stratification within the organizations, which may reflect and further perpetuate social stratification externally (Acker, 1990). The role of the academic ombuds is to assist members of an academic community in navigating grievance, conflict, and complaints. By their nature, these issues are often rooted in issues of hierarchy. While this looks different at the undergraduate and graduate levels, hierarchy can play a significant role in student success and persistence at the university level. We want to present our findings about hierarchy within universities in both Germany and the United States, as well as the role that Ombuds play as they work with students who seek to navigate hierarchy and bureaucracy within increasingly large and complex organizations.

Presenter(s):

Ursula Meiser: Ombuds for Teaching and Doctoral Degree Studies at the University of Stuttgart, Germany. She is a trained mediator, member of ENOHE and a member of the speakers' team of BeVeOm, the German Ombuds Network in Higher Education. She holds an MA in Political Science and Italian Studies and a doctorate in Social Sciences from the University of Stuttgart. Her recent research is on hierarchy and the abuse of power as well as discrimination and diversity issues in the higher education context.

Ryan Smith: Assistant University Ombudsperson at Michigan State University in East Lansing Michigan, in the United States. He holds an MA in international development and a doctorate in higher education, both from the University of Denver. His research interests include historical and comparative analyses of ombuds, conflict resolution, and educational systems.