

CHARTER *of the*

BOWDOIN COLLEGE OMBUDS OFFICE

MISSION

As part of Bowdoin's goal to promote a culture of universal respect and support, the efforts of the Ombuds Office—beginning initially with work with employees—are geared toward an overall goal of improving campus life by managing conflict and building fairness, dignity, equity, and belonging into the experience of all members of the community.

NEED FOR A PROFESSIONAL OMBUDS

In 2021, members of the faculty, along with the Workplace Advisors, presented President Clayton Rose with a request to establish a professional ombuds office at Bowdoin. Both constituencies felt the need for a formally trained individual to act as an independent, neutral, and confidential party, outside of the standard supervisory structures of the College. It was believed that a professional ombuds would have more access and latitude than the volunteer advisors and could achieve a higher level of visibility on campus. A professional could also perform the additional function of conducting training on ways to improve interpersonal dynamics in the workplace.

ESTABLISHMENT OF THE OMBUDS OFFICE

The Bowdoin College Ombuds Office was established September 1, 2023, with Jackie Reese serving as the inaugural college ombuds. It replaced the Workplace Advisors Program, a team of staff volunteers who served the College for several decades.

PURPOSE OF THE OMBUDS OFFICE

An ombuds has two major functions:

- To meet privately with individuals (“visitors”) to help them address their workplace concerns, and
- To provide education and training to the college community to improve interpersonal function in the workplace.

The ombuds provides a safe place for visitors to discuss issues, weigh and develop options, better understand policies and procedures, and examine available resources and process recommendations to enable employees to resolve issues.

The ombuds is neither an employee advocate nor a member of management but is a representative for a fair process.

The ombuds may address workplace issues, interpersonal conflict, professional concerns, policy questions, and many other problems, whether as a first step, last resort, or at any point along the way.

APPOINTMENT

When there is a vacancy in the Ombuds Office, a hiring committee will be created to screen and interview candidates. The committee will then work with the president to select the candidate who is the best fit for the College and the position of ombuds.

The college ombuds serves at the discretion of the president and reports only to the president.

JURISDICTION

The Ombuds Office is available to all people who have a professional relationship with the College, including but not limited to full-time, part-time, and casual employees, faculty, and volunteers. The office does not serve students, even in their role as student employees. Requests for a meeting with the ombuds will be considered up to six months after a person’s relationship with the College has concluded. The college ombuds is independent from all other college offices.

Anyone with a professional relationship with the College has a right to consult the ombuds.

Retaliation for communicating with the ombuds is prohibited, and any such retaliation may be grounds for disciplinary action.

GUIDING PRINCIPLES

The Ombuds Office abides by the current Standards of Practice and Code of Ethics of the International Ombuds Association: <https://www.ombudsassociation.org/standards-of-practice-code-of-ethics> and follows its guiding principles of independence, impartiality, informality, and confidentiality.

LEGAL LIMITATIONS

The college ombuds does not participate in any formal investigations or make binding decisions for the College or its employees. They do not receive legal notice for the College, nor can they put the College on legal notice.

When a formal investigation is requested, the ombuds refers visitors to the appropriate office or individual.

The ombuds does not provide legal advice, is not authorized to speak on behalf of the College, and does not serve as a witness in formal grievance processes internally or externally.

The ombuds must act within the legal parameters required of the College and may, if deemed necessary following consultation with the president and/or college counsel, retain legal advice, counsel, and representation separately and independently from the College.

OMBUDS ROLE DEFINED

The ombuds does not have the authority to establish, enforce, change, or set aside any college policy, nor can they replace established legislative or judicial procedures. Ombuds services are informal, and they supplement but do not replace formal processes available to the college community.

The ombuds may request information from offices or individuals at the College. To the extent permissible by law, any personnel contacted by the ombuds for information are expected to cooperate and provide materials as requested with reasonable promptness.

The ombuds may decline to work with a visitor if they believe there is a conflict of interest, either with the ombuds or involving another visitor with whom they are already working or have worked. The ombuds is authorized to decide whether and how to work with any visitor and to discontinue discussions if they conclude that further involvement in the matter would be inappropriate or futile.

The ombuds may provide confidential support to visitors, impartial facilitation between parties with the consent of both, or engage in shuttle diplomacy but does not serve as an advocate for an individual or as a mediator between individuals.

RECORD KEEPING AND REPORTING

For purposes of the reporting to the president and the larger community, the ombuds may keep nonidentifiable data, such as the number of yearly visitors and the broad problem areas for which ombuds services are sought.

The college ombuds does not retain records of visits or notes about visitors. Any written or electronic records related to visitors are destroyed at regular intervals. The ombuds discourages visitors from communicating sensitive information electronically.

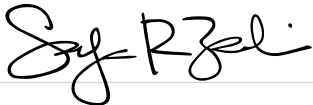
At least annually, the ombuds will report generalized, aggregate statistics to the president and may share these materials with others with the goal of correcting systemic problems.

AMENDMENT TO THE CHARTER

The president has the sole authority to amend or dissolve this charter.

RATIFICATION

This charter remains in effect until amended or revoked by the president of the College.



Safa R. Zaki
President, Bowdoin College

Date: October 24, 2024