

# OMBUDS PROGRAM

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402-559-2491 (Call for a confidential appointment)  
<https://www.unmc.edu/academicaffairs/institutional/ombuds.html>  
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## Purpose of the Ombuds Program

The word “ombudsman” originated in Sweden and means “representative of the people.” UNMC has established an Ombuds Program to help students, residents, faculty and staff resolve problems and to promote fair and equitable treatment for all members of the UNMC community. Drs. David Carver and Susan Swindells serve as the UNMC Ombudspersons. More specifically, Ombuds services are:

1. **Confidential** – No written records are kept, and any information shared in an individual contact with the ombuds remains private except in cases of direct threats of physical harm to self or others.
2. **Informal** – The ombudsperson is a voluntary “behind the scenes” sounding board or consultant; but is not an UNMC “officer of notice” for filing or adjudicating formal complaints, grievances, appeals or disciplinary processes.
3. **Independent** – The ombudsperson program is not part of the formal UNMC administrative chain of command and reports only general problem trends and other summary data (without identifying individuals) to the Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs and the Chancellor.
4. **Impartial** – The ombudsperson remains objective and unaligned when responding to individual complaints. The ombudsperson advocates for fair processes but does not serve as a designated advocate or spokesperson for an individual in a dispute or complaint.

## Functions of the Ombudsperson

**Information and Referral Source** – The ombudsperson is an information source on policies, procedures and regulations that apply to students, staff or faculty. In a complex organization like UNMC, it is often difficult to figure out where to go with an issue or concern. The ombudsperson can answer the question “Where do I start?” by making a voluntary referral to the appropriate person or office. The ombudsperson can also help to locate and interpret relevant policies.

**Identification of Options** – The ombudsperson listens carefully and non-judgmentally to an individual’s concern and then assists them in identifying various options for solving a particular problem. This confidential conversation may help someone to decide on a specific course of action after weighing the potential rewards and risks of various options.

**Facilitating Conversations** – The ombuds may provide communication coaching prior to anticipated difficult conversations. With the permission of the individual seeking help, the ombudsperson may act as an informal, neutral facilitator between parties in a dispute. This can be done by bringing the parties together for a face-to-face conversation with the ombudsperson present, or it can be accomplished through “shuttle diplomacy” where the

ombudsperson talks with each party separately. The dispute may be with a student, faculty member, or office staff. The ombudsperson may also provide information about formal “due process” grievance procedures, but the ombudsperson will not participate directly or actively in these formal processes.

**Policy Recommendations and Standards of Practice** – Ombudspersons gather facts and data on recurring problems experienced by students, faculty or staff. Ombuds may recommend changes in policies, procedures, and organizational structures that promote increased fairness and social justice. The UNMC Ombuds Program follows the Code of Ethics and Standards of Practice of the International Ombuds Association, including a commitment to enhanced diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging.

## Consult an Ombudsperson

- If you are unsure about which UNMC policies, procedures or regulations apply in your situation.
- If you have a specific problem or complaint that you have not been able to resolve through regular UNMC channels (or if you are unclear about where to start or what to do next).
- If you need help in deciding how to respond to an evaluation, a grade, or an administrative decision.
- If you feel that you have been treated improperly or unfairly and would like to identify your options.
- If you have a problem that requires assistance in facilitating communication and understanding between you and another party.
- If you need help in deciding whether to file a formal complaint or grievance.

Students, faculty and staff can get more information about the UNMC Ombuds Program by calling the Ombuds Office confidential phone line at 402-559-2491 or emailing Ombuds Program Director David Carver, PhD at [dcarver@unmc.edu](mailto:dcarver@unmc.edu) ([dcarver@unmc.edu](mailto:dcarver@unmc.edu)).