MEMORANDUM

To: USC Community

From: Michael W. Quick
Provost and Senior Vice President for Academic Affairs

Varun Soni
Vice Provost for Campus Wellness and Crisis Intervention

Date: January 29, 2019

Subject: USC Office of the Ombuds

We are pleased to announce that we have launched the new USC Office of the Ombuds to provide independent, confidential, and impartial support for our university community.

The USC Office of the Ombuds will provide a safe place on both campuses for faculty, students, and staff to navigate policies, issues, concerns, and conflicts without fear of reprisal or judgement. In doing so, the Office will promote and embody an ethical, empathetic, and engaged university culture committed to problem-solving, dispute resolution, and workplace wellness.

Having concluded a national search, we are excited to announce our key hires for the Office of the Ombuds: Katherine Greenwood will be the University Ombuds at the University Park Campus, and Thomas Kosakowski will be the University Ombuds at the Health Sciences Campus.

Katherine Greenwood, JD/PhD, previously served as the Director of the Office of the Ombuds at the University of California, Davis, overseeing ombuds offices at both the UC Davis campus and the UC Davis Health campus in Sacramento. Prior to that role, she served as an ombuds at the University of Colorado’s Anschutz Medical Campus in Denver. Before stepping into an ombuds role, Katherine was an international maritime attorney working with firms in New York, San Francisco, and London. She also served as an adjunct faculty member at Loyola University in Chicago. In addition to her ombuds duties, Katherine conducts numerous trainings in conflict management, leadership development, and communication strategies.

Thomas Kosakowski, JD, served as the Ombudsperson for the Health System at the University of California, Los Angeles over the last 12 years. He also established the Ombuds Office at Claremont Graduate University and served as the Interim Director of the Ombuds Office at the University of California, Riverside. Additionally, he started and manages The Ombuds Blog, a national resource for the ombuds profession. Before becoming an ombuds, he worked as an attorney and served as a court-appointed mediator of the Los Angeles Superior Court. Thomas has also served on the Board of Directors of the International Ombudsman Association and the Board of Trustees of Occidental College. Their offices are now open and operational, and their contact information is:

- University Park Campus Ombuds: (213) 821-9556 / upcombuds@usc.edu
- Health Sciences Campus Ombuds: (323) 442-0341 / hscombuds@usc.edu
On behalf of USC, we welcome both Kathie and Tom to our university community, and we thank them for their willingness to serve in these vital positions. We are also very grateful to the Task Force on Workplace Standards and Employee Wellness for suggesting and supporting the creation of the USC Office of the Ombuds, and for their extraordinary work in moving our university forward in significant and meaningful ways.

Please find included a Q and A to help you better acquaint yourself with the role and services of the USC Office of the Ombuds.

Cc: Wanda Austin
    Academic Senate
    President’s Cabinet
    Provost's Cabinet
    Academic Deans
USC Office of the Ombuds
Q and A with Katherine Greenwood and Thomas Kosakowski

Q: What is an ombuds?

A: An ombuds, or ombudsperson, is an individual who serves as a confidential, impartial, informal, and independent problem-solving resource. Fundamentally, ombuds are dispute resolution professionals who assist individuals and groups in navigating through conflict. We strive to create a safe place for people who come to the office to discuss and examine concerns. We do this by listening to issues and concerns that are raised, clarifying goals and objectives, brainstorming options, weighing the pros and cons of particular courses of action, making appropriate inquiries, and providing referrals to other resources. We serve as conflict and communication coaches to help faculty, students, and staff increase their comfort and skill in addressing conflict as it arises, and we also offer mediation services and other alternative dispute resolution resources. Ultimately, we strive to promote a culture of “conflict competency” by sharing conflict management models, tools, and strategies across the institution.

Q: What are examples of the issues one might bring to the Office of the Ombuds?

A: The ombuds office is equipped to address a wide variety of issues and concerns, which can fall into several broad topic areas, including organizational climate, change management, interpersonal issues, ethical concerns, issues of perceived unfairness or incivility, behavioral or stylistic differences in the workplace or classroom, or inquiries related to university procedures and policy.

As an example, faculty might bring issues relating to departmental governance, interpersonal issues with colleagues, or concerns about students. Alternatively, staff might raise issues relating to workplace climate or the managerial style of their supervisors, or perceptions of unfairness in workload distributions. Managers or administrators might seek the ombuds in exploring various communication strategies to ease strained relationships with employees in their reporting line. Undergraduate students might raise academic concerns relating to grading or university departments, roommate concerns, and issues of fairness arising from group projects. They also may pose questions regarding difficult conversations that they want to hold with their parents, peers, and professors. Graduate students might bring concerns relating to the power dynamics with their advisors, peers, or projects or authorship issues. In addition, at the Health Science Campus, medical personnel may raise concerns about the allocation of shift assignments, interpersonal exchanges in high stress situations, or ethical issues.

Q: How does someone know when to bring a concern to an ombuds versus reporting it through another campus office?

A: The ombuds office does not replace other campus resources but instead is an informal place where members of the campus community might start exploring a concern, policy, or issue, and that is why ombuds are better utilized as an “office of first resort” as opposed to an “office of last
For people considering whether to report an issue to a formal campus resource, they may want to talk to an ombuds first to weigh various options. Sharing information with the ombuds office does not “let the university know” about an issue or concern, but if individuals wish to put the university on notice, the ombuds office will direct them to the appropriate campus reporting unit.

Q: What resolution, if any, could one expect from an ombuds?

A: Ombuds do not directly resolve issues. Instead, we help to empower community members to analyze, strategize, and choose what to do. Since ombuds act outside of formal channels, we do not have authority to direct any specific outcomes. Furthermore, we are not factfinders; nor do we adjudicate issues, make determinations, conduct investigations, accept notice on behalf of the university, give legal advice, or provide psychological counseling.

Q: Why is USC creating these positions?

A: In the wake of a number of institutional issues, USC recognized the critical importance in establishing an ombuds office as a neutral and independent safe place for university constituents to confidentially share their concerns, issues, and challenges. In addition to assisting members of our community, another value that an ombuds office will provide to USC is that of upward feedback. As we identify patterns, trends, or systemic concerns, we share this upward feedback with the university through anonymized and depersonalized data and information. Accordingly, we can serve as a potential early warning system that alerts the university to possible concerns while also maintaining strict confidentiality.

Q: Who do the ombuds report to?

A: The Office of the Ombuds is independent and confidential by design and structure, and therefore occupies a unique space in the university’s organizational chart. At USC, the ombuds ultimately report, by a dotted line, to the Provost’s Office. For administrative, budgetary, and logistical matters, the ombuds report to Vice Provost Varun Soni, who oversees the Office of Campus Wellness and Crisis Intervention. The ombuds are expected to have regular contact with administrators at all levels within the university.

Q: How does someone access the Office of the Ombuds?

A: The services provided by the Office of the Ombuds are free, voluntary, and confidential. The best way to access the ombuds is to schedule an appointment via telephone or email. The Health Sciences Campus ombuds office contact information is (323) 442-0341 / hscombuds@usc.edu and the University Park Campus ombuds contact information is (213) 821-9556 / upcombuds@usc.edu.