



Rhodes College

— 1848 —

OFFICE OF THE PRESIDENT

I. Introduction

The Rhodes College Office of the Ombudsperson was established in January 2024 to provide dispute resolution and prevention services at the College with the overarching goals of protecting fairness and promoting respect for all employees. In furtherance of these goals and principles, this Charter Agreement defines the responsibilities and privileges of the Rhodes College Office of the Ombudsperson.

II. Mandate

The Office of the Ombudsperson serves as a confidential and independent resource available to all members of the College's faculty and staff. The Office offers dispute resolution and prevention services, and additionally the Office serves to identify systemic concerns and provide feedback to the institution through direct reporting to the Office of the President. Through these services, the Office promotes positive organizational change as well as fairness and respect in the workplace.

III. Scope of Services

The Office of the Ombudsperson is available for use by all faculty and staff at Rhodes College. Use of the Office and participation in services is voluntary. The Office receives complaints, concerns, and inquiries regarding policies, formal and informal procedures, alleged acts or omissions, improprieties, and/or any alleged broader employment-related concerns. The Office does not participate in complaints involving grade appeals or academic decisions. The Office serves to listen, review matters, offer options and ideas for handling concerns, make referrals, make informal inquiries when authorized to do so by the visitor, and facilitate resolution through mediation and other alternative dispute resolution methods. The Office also serves to identify broader systemic issues and provide feedback directly to the Office of the President as well as make informal recommendations for change without compromising the confidentiality requirement of the office. The Ombudsperson may offer training to members of the faculty and staff on conflict resolution, productive conversation techniques, and respect in the workplace. The Office of the Ombudsperson serves as a supplement to, but does not replace, formal grievance processes, investigative systems, and appeals processes made available by the College.

IV. Reporting Requirements

The Ombudsperson is not a mandatory reporter as contemplated by the Rhodes College Handbook and complaints to the Office of the Ombudsperson do not constitute notice to the College for purposes of legal claims, formal complaints or other grievances.

V. **Standards of Practice**

The Office shall adhere to the International Ombuds Association (IOA) Code of Ethics and Standards of Practice. These standards require that the Office operate independently of the College, maintain confidentiality, serve impartially without bias, and limit services to informal means of dispute resolution.

Confidentiality

The Office of the Ombudsperson is a confidential and "off-the-record" resource to the extent allowable by law. The Office of the Ombudsperson shall not keep any records on behalf of the College or accept notice for the College. All reporting shall be done in a manner that protects confidentiality. The Ombudsperson shall not testify or provide records to be used in any other dispute resolution process, grievance process, or investigation, even if requested to do so by the visitor to the Office. The Ombudsperson shall take reasonable steps to ensure confidentiality of the visitor's identity and communications, and will only make disclosures (i) as permitted by the visitor; (ii) if the Ombudsperson believes that there is an imminent risk of serious harm, or (iii) when disclosure is otherwise required by law. All emails, voicemails, and/or informal notes used for Ombudsperson business will be permanently deleted and/or destroyed upon resolution or closure of a matter. If a litigation hold is placed on items relevant to the Office of the Ombudsperson before such items are destroyed in the regular course of business, such items will be maintained subject to legal requirements.

Impartiality

The Ombudsperson shall at all times be neutral, impartial, and unbiased. He/she shall not take sides in any dispute or conflict. The Ombudsperson shall never serve as an advocate for a party but may advocate for fairness of process.

Informality

The Office of the Ombudsperson shall operate as a neutral third party to provide informal dispute resolution guidance. The Ombudsperson shall not make binding decisions, issue any formal findings, or participate in any formal investigation or adjudication process. The Office shall make only informal recommendations. The Ombudsperson does not provide legal advice. The Office shall not make, change, or overrule College policy or administrative decisions.

Independence

The Ombudsperson reports to the Office of the President and operates independently of ordinary College structures. The Ombudsperson also operates independently in respect to case handling. The Ombudsperson may decline involvement if the Ombudsperson believes involvement would be improper for any reason, including matters not brought in good faith, conflicts of interest, or misuse of the Office's function. In accordance with the IOA's Best Practices, the Office of the Ombudsperson shall have access to independent legal counsel when necessary in order to fulfill the functions of the position.

VI. Term and Service of the Ombudsperson


The Ombudsperson shall be appointed directly by the President of the College and will serve a set and renewable term of three (3) years unless removed from that position by the President.

VII. References

1. "Standards of Practice." The International Ombudsman Association.
2. "Code of Ethics." The International Ombudsman Association.
3. "Best Practices." The International Ombudsman Association.

Accepted and Adopted by:


Jennifer Collins, President


Lisa Krupicka, General Counsel