

ABSTRACT: 2013 ELAM Institutional Action Project Poster Symposium

Project Title: The establishment of an ombuds office in a new health sciences center

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Collaborators: Ombuds taskforce consisting of faculty, students and staff from the TTUHSC Paul L. Foster School of Medicine, TTUHSC Gayle Greve Hunt School of Nursing and TTUHSC Graduate School of Biomedical Sciences

Background:

In keeping with the AAMC Compact between Teacher and Learner, Texas Tech University Health Sciences Center-El Paso promotes the professional values of integrity, mutual respect, honesty, compassion, fidelity, and dependability. A recent survey of medical students on the campus revealed a greater than expected incidence of mistreatment as compared to other medical schools. Other institutes of higher learning have found that an Ombuds Office can help address concerns of misunderstanding, inequities, and mistreatment. Development of an Ombuds Office at our institution could help reduce concerns of unprofessional behavior as our student body and faculty expands in the coming years.

Purpose/Objective: Evaluate the feasibility of developing an Ombuds Office at the TTUHSC- El Paso campus

Method/Approach: An ombudsman at our institution would offer a venue for students, staff, residents and faculty who feel they have been subjected to a breach of professional behavior. The ombudsman would function as a neutral party to listen, offer guidance, and potentially mediate concerns. This office would also help identify worrisome trends and help recommend solutions to reduce unprofessional behavior on our campus.

A taskforce that includes individuals from all three schools at TTUHSC-El Paso has been formed to explore the feasibility of developing an Ombuds Office on our campus. The expertise offered by these individuals will provide a solid foundation on which to build our recommendation. After thoughtful collaboration within the taskforce, input will be sought from the Employee and Faculty Councils, and the human resources department regarding the value of such an office. Once input from these groups has been carefully considered, the taskforce will present its findings to the administration.

Outcomes/Evaluation of Effectiveness: The effectiveness of the Ombuds Office on our campus will be evaluated using four separate but interrelated measures. These will include: 1) the extent to which the office is utilized, 2) a survey of those that use the facility to determine their level of satisfaction, 3) a focus group of students selected at random to determine their perception of the office and its effectiveness, and 4) an indirect measure based on exit surveys of graduating students and their level of perceived mistreatment. The first medical and nursing school classes graduating in 2012 and 2013 will not have benefited from such an Ombuds Office. This group will serve as a control. The results from future graduating classes will be compared to the control and to each other as an indirect measure of the successfulness of the office. The office will be considered effective if there is appropriate usage of the office, perceived benefit and effectiveness of the office, and significant decrease in the incidence of mistreatment.

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Grievances cannot be redressed unless they are known, and they cannot be known but through complaints... If these are deemed affronts and the messengers punished as offenders, who will henceforth send petitions?... Where complaining is a crime, hope becomes despair. Ben Franklin

Challenge:

LCME Student survey - unexpected level of mistreatment
 Students suspicious of neutrality of administrators
 Faculty grievance policy lacks process for mediation between faculty members
 Limited number and availability of trained mediators on campus among HSC employees

Opportunities:

Transitioning to free-standing Health Sciences Center
 Need for full complement of accessible, local services
 Need for student, faculty, staff and resident venue to voice concerns and complaints

Process:

Identified "found pilots"
 • TTU campus
 • Other schools
 Buy in from all three deans
 • Paul L. Foster SOM
 • Gayle Greve Hunt SON
 • TTUHSC Graduate School El Paso



Taskforce recommendations:

Develop project description and mission statement
 Conduct focus groups with each stakeholder constituency to assess needs and build support
 Examine experiences of other schools as they established an Ombuds Office

Next steps:

Educating constituencies & building support
 Developing a business plan with funding specifications
 Planning the employee hiring and staffing processes

Outcome Measurements:

Educational seminars provided
 User Satisfaction
 Data from focus groups regarding effectiveness
 Alumni Questionnaires and Program exit surveys demonstrate decreased rate of mistreatment in each school

Taskforce

- TTUHSC Paul L. Foster School of Medicine
 - Faculty member – Herb Janssen, PhD, Professor Medical Education
 - Administrator – Kathryn Horn, M.D. Associate Dean for Student Affairs
 - Staff – Alex Garcia, MA, Director of Student Affairs
 - Student – Lisa Montgomery, MSIV
- TTUHSC Gayle Greve Hunt School of Nursing
 - Faculty/administrator – Wrennah Gabbert, PhD, RN, CPNP, FNP-BC, Senior Associate Dean and Professor
 - Staff – Gretchen Ruiz, Lead Specialist, Office of Student Affairs
 - Students - Laura Darilek – 2nd Degree BSN Program; Albert Hernandez – Traditional Undergraduate BSN
- TTUHSC Graduate School of Biomedical Sciences
 - Faculty – Anjali Joshi, PhD, Assistant Professor,
 - Staff - Myriam Casillas Senior Director, Office of the Associate Dean for Research
 - Coordinator – Geisha Soto
 - Student - Jacqueline Parada, first year Master’s degree program
- TTUHSC El Paso
 - Rebecca Salcido – Director of Human Resources

Resources

Newhart, Mary. "Ombudsmen in Higher Education: Similarities, Divergences, and the Rise of Alternative Dispute Resolution" A Thesis Presented to the Faculty of the Graduate School of Cornell University. 2007.
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