

Charter Agreement for the Office of the University Ombudsman

I. INTRODUCTION

The Binghamton University Office of the Ombudsman (the “Office”) has a rich history of service to the University, dating back to 1969. The inaugural office, like many established during this era of social and political unrest, served only students and acted as a liaison between disgruntled students and the University’s administration. In 1997, Lois B. DeFleur formally established the Office as a confidential, neutral, independent and informal dispute resolution resource for all members of the University community. The spirit of the organizational ombudsman function is consistent with the core values of both the State University of New York system generally and of Binghamton University specifically. Over the past decade, the University’s strategic plans have each affirmed the University’s dedication to fostering a campus culture of respect and inclusion, and encouraging collaborative problem-solving among all members of the University community. The Office is committed to helping the University further these and other strategic objectives within a culture that is ethical, respectful, inclusive and insistent upon fair process. This Charter Agreement defines the Office’s standards of practice, privileges, responsibilities, authority and limitations on authority.

II. PURPOSE AND SCOPE OF SERVICES

The Office provides informal dispute resolution services to the University community, including students, faculty and staff, and serves as a place where all members of the University community can confidentially voice concerns, seek guidance, develop options and generally problem-solve at any stage in the resolution process. The Office is responsible for providing the University community, at regular intervals, with information about the role of the University Ombudsman (the “Ombudsman”) and for making the services of the Office easily accessible to those it serves.

The Ombudsman confidentially receives complaints, concerns or questions about alleged acts, omissions, improprieties and/or broader systemic problems. The Ombudsman’s response is tailored to the dynamics of the situation and the visitor’s concerns. The Ombudsman listens to the visitor and may make informal inquiries or otherwise review matters received, offer resolution options, make referrals to other offices, explain University policies and procedures, coach visitors on how to help themselves, engage in shuttle diplomacy and/or otherwise

facilitate the resolution of disputes independently and impartially. The Ombudsman assists those involved in a particular matter in reaching resolutions that are consistent with the articulated values, ideals and objectives of the University. The Ombudsman is empowered to provide informal assistance only and his/her services supplement, but do not replace, other more formal processes available to the University community.

In addition, the Ombudsman serves as a source of informal feedback and recommendations for institutional improvement and change. The Ombudsman may serve as an early warning system and provide feedback to the University when trends, patterns, policies or procedures generate concerns or conflicts. The Ombudsman will identify such trends and patterns without breaching confidentiality and anonymity and may provide recommendations to the University for responsibly addressing the identified issues.

III. STANDARDS OF PRACTICE AND CODE OF ETHICS

The Ombudsman practices according to the International Ombudsman Association (“IOA”) Standards of Practice and Code of Ethics. All staff¹ of the Office are required to adhere to these standards, available at <http://www.ombudsassociation.org>. The Ombudsman is a member of IOA and attends regular trainings and the annual IOA conference. The Ombudsman publicizes the confidential, independent, neutral and informal nature of his/her services and explains these ethical standards to each visitor.

A. Independence

The Ombudsman will be, and appear to be, free from interference in the performance of his/her duties. This independence is effected primarily through organizational recognition, reporting structure, and neutrality. The Ombudsman operates independent of ordinary line and staff structures and exercises sole discretion over whether and how to act regarding individual matters or systemic concerns. The Ombudsman is entitled to make informal inquiry about any issue concerning the University and affecting any member of the University community. The Ombudsman may request access to information related to visitors’ concerns, from files and offices of the University, and will respect the confidentiality of that information. Requests by the Ombudsman for information should be handled with reasonable promptness by University departments.

To fulfill his/her functions, the Ombudsman has a specific allocated budget, adequate space, and sufficient resources to meet operating needs and pursue continuing professional development. The Ombudsman has the sole authority to manage the budget and operations of the Office. The Ombudsman reports to the Office of the President for administrative and budgetary matters and trends affecting the University climate.

¹ “All Staff” refers to both paid and volunteer staff of the Office of the University Ombudsman.

