

MONTGOMERY COLLEGE
Office of the President

December 6, 2018

MEMORANDUM

To: Montgomery College Colleagues

From: Dr. Stephen D. Cain, Acting President

Subject: 2018 Ombuds Recommendations

On Conflict Resolution Day in October, the College's Office of the Ombuds issued its Fiscal Year 2018 report, which contained important information about issues brought to the ombuds' attention as well as a series of recommendations. In this memorandum, I reflect on the report and comment on those recommendations.

Let me first reiterate the importance of the ombuds' role. As you likely know, the Office of the Ombuds provides confidential assistance to staff, faculty, and administrators in mitigating and resolving workplace issues and concerns. It was created in 2013 as a result of recommendations from both the Employee Engagement Advisory Group and a workgroup of union and governance leaders. The ombuds operates in accordance with the Code of Ethics and Standards of Practice as established by the International Ombudsman Association; specifically, the ombuds is informal, impartial, and independent, and maintains the confidentiality of visitors. In addition to providing a safe forum for individual employees to discuss concerns, the Office of the Ombuds contributes to organizational wellness by identifying and sharing trends with senior leadership, sharing data in an annual report, and making recommendations for change. By seeking to improve employee experiences at Montgomery College, these recommendations help to contribute to the overall organizational health and effectiveness of Montgomery College.

Two hundred and three individuals sought the services of the ombuds in FY18. The annual report on this activity also contained three new recommendations—and updates on recommendations that Dr. Pollard adopted in previous years. In the attachment, please find this year's recommendations and my reasons for adopting them.

I want to thank Ombuds Julie Weber for her diligent efforts this year. In her second year as ombuds, she has been a leader in creating fair, accessible, and confidential services at the College. Her ambitious approach to communication has resulted in greater knowledge about ombuds services and enhanced awareness collegewide of the benefits of an ombuds to equity, employee relationships, and general morale. I am so convinced of the value of the ombuds' work that I am exploring the possibility—budget permitting—of an associate ombuds who could primarily serve students, but also assist in the ombuds' work with employees.

Thank you for all you do to make Montgomery College a welcoming and inclusive place to work.

ATTACHMENT

PRESIDENT'S ADOPTION OF RECOMMENDATIONS IN FY18 OMBUDS REPORT December 2018

RECOMMENDATION 1. *Commit to identifying and operationalizing concrete ways to achieve the purpose of the Code of Ethics and Employee Conduct to ensure that all employees uphold the ethical standards within the Code by convening a group of stakeholders to brainstorm and make decisions on this matter.*

Adopted with modification. With the memorialization of our Code of Ethics and Employee Conduct—an effort that originated in employee recommendation through our governance system—we have a clearly articulated set of expectations regarding accountability, civility and collegiality, compliance, fairness, honesty, respect, and stewardship. The ethics training occurring this year is generating robust conversation about these issues as employees grapple with realistic scenarios to apply these principles.

Our work in this arena does not stop with the code or with the training. In fact, it will be ongoing as it becomes a deeper part of our cultural matrix.

To that end, I will establish a working group of six supervisors (who are not administrators) and six employees to be convened by co-chairs Chief Equity and Inclusion Officer Sharon Bland and Chief Compliance, Risk, and Ethics Officer Vicki Duggan to fulfill this recommendation and provide recommendations to the president by June 30, 2019. The group's charge is to refine the ethical standards as articulated in the relevant policy and procedure, make them measurable, reviewing existing policies, procedures, and practices that hold employees accountable for one or more of the stated ethical standards, and find additional ways to embed the ethical standards within the Montgomery College culture. These steps should enhance both evaluative relationships as well as confidence in leadership and management by transparently setting ethical and professional expectations for all employees.

RECOMMENDATION 2. *Commit to providing employees with the opportunity for regular access to their supervisors to strengthen communication from the top-down and the bottom-up by mandating that routine communication occur via one or more of the following vehicles: regular staff meetings, one-on-one meetings, and timely email communications.*

Adopted. Regular staff meetings, one-on-one meetings, and timely email communications enhance communication in the workplace and build trust among colleagues and in evaluative relationships. While different groups will have multiple factors to consider in determining their ideal methods of regular communication, supervisors and direct reports should communicate directly, at least twice per month, and more frequently, where possible. Providing employees with regular opportunities and access to their supervisors strengthens working relationships. Routine communication ensures that at least the minimum intentional communication is occurring. The frequency of such communication may vary among departments, but this baseline is appropriate and achievable.

Supervisors can receive information and coaching on how best to accomplish effective communication by consulting with their line administrator, the Office of Employee and Labor Relations, or the Office of the Ombuds.

RECOMMENDATION 3. *Commit to continue to provide the Montgomery College community with access to the Office of the Ombuds by allocating sufficient resources to maintain the quality of the service, including allocating positions and recruiting for an associate ombuds and administrative aide, finding additional discrete spaces in which an associate ombuds and administrative aide would work, and identifying discrete office space on each of the three campuses that can be used regularly on a part-time basis.*

Adopted in part, with resource dependencies. The services of the ombuds are proving themselves time and again as an effective vehicle for helping employees understand, address, and, hopefully, resolve conflict. The ombuds serves as an informal, impartial, independent, and confidential individual who can provide guidance. To have conflict is part of the human experience. Working to resolve it is what brings out the best in all of us.

This recommendation speaks to three elements: space, administrative support, and an associate ombuds. I am re-affirming the College's commitment to an associate ombuds, whose primary role would be to serve an ombuds function for students. This is also a suggestion in the College's 2018 Middle States Self-Study. We will address this through reallocation of a position when one becomes available.

Administrative support will be continue to be provided through existing resources. I am charging the Interim Senior Vice President for Administrative and Fiscal Services Donna Schena, the campus vice president and provosts, and the ombuds to design a model for space use that meets the needs of ombuds services and provide recommendations to the president by June 30, 2019.