

Distinguishing the Services of the Employee Assistance Office and the Ombuds Office

The University of Wisconsin-Madison provides the Employee Assistance Office and the Ombuds Office as complementary resources to support employees in managing challenges and conflicts in the workplace.

Employee Assistance is a team of internal, licensed professional counselors whose mission is to give timely assistance to all employees with personal or work-related concerns in order to contribute to the overall performance and well-being of the employee.

Ombuds provide a safe opportunity to be heard, explore concerns, and consider resources, options, and strategies for next steps to address workplace concerns. Ombuds are impartial and non-aligned, promoting fairness in the workplace, rather than representing any side in a dispute.

Early consultations – when the employee begins to experience a concern – will offer greater flexibility for achieving success. Employees can start with either office to explore potential campus resources.

Both offices:	
	• Are familiar with campus policies and procedures.
	• Provide services at no cost to the employee.
	• May help to facilitate communication between and among employees and others.
	• Provide confidentiality to all visitors and do not retain formal records of visitor contacts.
	• Are not authorized to accept notice of claims against the University.
	• Campus allows employees to use work time for appointments.
	• Offer an informal process to address conflict/communication.

Differences between the offices:		
	Ombuds	Employee Assistance Office
Staffing	Ombuds are retired faculty, academic and university staff with extensive on-campus experience to provide a collective team perspective.	EAO Consultants are licensed counselors with background and training that includes organizational development/leadership.
Audience and issues addressed	Any campus employee, including student employees and post docs, may initiate contact to consult about workplace dilemmas.	Any campus employee, including student employees and post docs may make appointments to discuss workplace concerns or personal issues. Additionally, family members or significant others are eligible for counseling.
Case initiation	The employee is <i>always</i> the one to initiate contact with the Ombuds Office.	Employees may initiate contact with the EAO. Supervisors can refer but not mandate employees to contact EAO.
Scheduling meetings	Assistance may be provided by telephone or meetings may be scheduled at a time and location convenient to the employee and the Ombuds.	Counseling appointments can be made by phone or email. Counseling sessions occur at the Lowell Center. Consultation can occur across campus at the division or college making the requests.

Unique Features

Ombuds

- Is independent in structure, function, and appearance to the highest degree possible within the organization.
- Strives for impartiality, fairness and objectivity in the treatment of people and the consideration of issues. The Ombuds advocate for fair and equitably administered processes and does not advocate on behalf of any individual within the organization.
- Is an alternative, informal resource and does not participate in any formal adjudicative or administrative procedure related to concerns brought to its attention.

EAO

- Offers group facilitation to resolve conflict, and improve communication and teamwork.
- Responds to crises and traumatic events with affected employees.
- EAO director is a member of the campus Threat Assessment Team to proactively address concerns before they become disruptive to the workplace.
- Provides coaching for supervisory staff on difficult conversations.
- Offers consultation to unit human resource staff on concerns for employees, supervisors, and groups.
- Offers educational presentations on many interpersonal workplace dynamic topics such as communication, respect, and dealing with conflict.
- Offers educational presentations on a variety of wellness related topics such as personal self-awareness and stress management.
- Data is collected through follow up surveys
- Is duty bound to maintain confidentiality unless permission is given in writing.