Academic Ombud Services, Syllabi and Student/Instructor Issue Resolution
TA Orientation, January 2018
Joe McGillis, Ph.D., Academic Ombud
http://www.uky.edu/ombud/

Topics
1. Academic Ombud Services
2. University Senate/Senate Rules
3. The Syllabus
4. Academic Integrity and Academic Rights
5. Procedures for Academic Violations

What is Academic Ombud Services?
- a Resource for Students and Faculty established by the University Senate

From Senate Rules Section 6.2:
6.2.0 THE ACADEMIC OMBUD

“The Academic Ombud is the officer of the university charged with consideration of student grievances in connection with academic affairs.”

some functions from 6.2.1.1:
“provide a mechanism for handling issues for which no established procedure exists”

“for which established procedures have not yielded a satisfactory solution”

“students who wish to appeal a finding of an academic offense (see section 6.3), a penalty for an academic offense, a grade in a course, or an action in any other academic matter must confer with the Academic Ombud before they can appeal to the University Appeals Board (UAB)”
UK Academic Ombud Services Standards of Practice
(established by the International Ombudsman Association)

Confidential: “Ombud shall not violate the rights of students or other parties involved in cases brought to the Ombud through the disclosure of any information communicated in confidence.” SR6.2.1.6

Impartial: Advocates for fair processes & their equitable application.

Informal: Provides a safe, neutral setting to ask questions, discuss problems and seek assistance with academic-related conflicts and disputes.

Independent: The Ombud is appointed by and reports directly to the University Provost. The Academic Ombud Office functions independently of all colleges and instructional programs and works across traditional lines of authority and responsibility to facilitate resolution of the most complex problems.

* Certain limits exist, we must report issues such as Title IX violations (sexual harassment), criminal activity, concern for harm to self or others.

What kinds of student grievances and complaints does AOS deal with?

- Grade disputes
- Admission/registration problems
- Academic issues related to disciplinary matters
- Perceived favoritism
- Fear of retaliation
- Charges of & sanctions for academic offenses
- Disability accommodation issues
- Cross-cultural misunderstandings & personality conflicts
- Others
What Can AOS actually do to resolve issues?

The Ombud Office can:

• Open new lines of communication.
• Conduct a thorough investigation.
• Recommend cases to the University Appeals Board.
• Discuss the merits of a case with appropriate officials.
• Encourage and facilitate use of different perspectives.

The Ombud Office cannot:

• Change a grade or waive a requirement.
• Change policies or rules.
• Release a financial obligation. (can refer you to the financial Ombud)
• Testify at hearings.

The Ombud Office is not an Office of Report:

• We do make appropriate referrals.

So what is the University Senate and what are these Rules?

University Senate

• determines broad academic policies of the university
• comprised of 94 elected faculty representatives and 17 student representatives
• promulgates the University Senate Rules
• https://www.uky.edu/universitysenate/

Senate Rules

• govern all academic aspects of the University, undergraduate, graduate and professional programs
• note: faculty often choose to include in their course syllabi the explicit language in the SRs regarding plagiarism and academic offenses
• link to Senate Rules
Most Relevant SR Sections for Instructors

5.0 Section V: Rules Relating to Attending the University
• grading
• academic standards
• attendance and absences
• probation and suspension

6.0 Section VI: Student Academic Affairs
• academic rights of students
• Academic Ombud, functions, jurisdiction and procedures
• academic offenses and procedures
• University Appeal Board

7.0 Section VII: Code of Faculty Responsibilities

Why is a Syllabus Important

• At its most basic level, the syllabus is a contract between the student and the instructor. It explicitly describes all procedures, expectations and responsibilities for both the student and the instructor.

• A well thought out and prepared syllabus is the single most important factor that will prevent many of the misunderstandings that end up in the Ombuds Office.
The Course Syllabus: General Features

Four Core Components:
• General Course Information
• Instructor Contact Information
• Course Description
• Course Policies

Features of well prepared syllabus:
• Establishes expectations for students and instructors
• Explicit and complete
• Avoids vague, ambiguous statements

Additional notes:
• Must be provided free of charge at the first or second class meeting
• May not be changed during the semester, except in certain circumstances. Please consult with the Ombud Office before making any changes

The Course Syllabus

Course Information:
• Course Name & ID (prefix, course number, section number )
• Location(s) and meeting time(s) including exams

Instructor(s) Contact Information:
• Office location, office phone number, email address
• Office Hours and Location, instructors should be available for consultation outside of class, policies regarding appointments

Course Description:
• Provide a detailed overview of the course that matches the UK Bulletin
• Provide a schedule with dates for lectures, projects, etc., that includes due dates for assignments
• Identify components of the final grade and their relative weight; clarify expectations for assignments; the relationship of scores to letter grade
• Provide the time, date, and nature of the final exam
Policies: Grading

- Final Letter Grades – How are they related to the grading scale?
- Rounding Grades – Will the final grade be rounded?
- Curving Grades – If there is a curve, how is the curve established?
- Attendance requirements for grading purposes
- Midterm Evaluation – What assignments are included?
- What are penalties for late homework and assignments.

Other Useful Course Policies

- Process for assignment and homework submission (Format, deadlines, etc.)
- Excused absence policy; refer to University Senate Rule 5.2.4.2
  - Documentation requirements
  - Requirements for make-ups
- Academic integrity reminders; cheating, plagiarism
- Group work and collaboration guidelines
- Attendance, including late arrivals and early departures
- Expectations of classroom decorum and behavior
  - Penalties for improper decorum and behavior
- Specify penalties for violations of course policies
- Disability resources
- Inclement weather policies
Final Policy Notes: Dead Week*  
(SR 5.2.4.6)

- **Intent is to avoid undue hardship on students** before final exams.

- For courses **with a final exam**:
  - No quizzes, exams, laboratory practicals, projects, or student presentations may be scheduled during dead week.
  - Make-up exams may be scheduled.
  - Attendance and participation may be graded and regularly scheduled homework identified in the syllabus is allowed.

- For courses **with no final exam**:
  - Quizzes, exams, laboratory practicals, projects, and student presentations may be scheduled in the syllabus during dead week.
  - If these items are not identified in the syllabus provided during one of the first two class periods, they may not be scheduled during dead week.

* Referred to in some quarters as “week of the living dead”

---

Academic Integrity and Academic Rights of Students

- Essential to the University and to Society
- Share your perspective with your students
- Student rights, including most importantly the right to a fair and just evaluation
- Expect academic integrity from students and instructors.

Academic Rights and Integrity Issues are Defined in University Senate Rule 6.1

- 6.1.1 Information about Course Content
- 6.1.2 Contrary Opinion
- 6.1.3 Academic Evaluation
- 6.1.4 Academic Records
- 6.1.5 Evaluation of Student Character and Ability
- 6.1.6 Student Participation in Academic Affairs
- 6.1.7 Attendance and Participation During Appeal
Core Academic Rights of Students

Substantive Rights
• Fair and just evaluation of student’s performance based on standards defined in the course syllabus.
• Notice of midterm performance for undergraduate students
• Rules for excused absences
• Limits on dead week activities

Procedural Rights
• Notice and hearing rights in case of an academic offense
• Right of appeal regarding grades and academic offenses

Academic Integrity:
Procedures for Academic Violations
(detailed procedures described in SR section 6)

1. Discretely collect evidence.
2. Consult with course director or department chair.
3. Meet with the student and the department chair.
4. Hear the student’s perspective.
5. Determine if an offense occurred, and if so, the penalty to be imposed.
6. Notify the student in writing within seven days of meeting with the student of the penalty imposed. (form letters available from AOS)
   a) Notify the student of their right of appeal.
   b) Notify the student that Ombud assistance is available.
7. Notify Academic Ombud Services of the penalty imposed, if any.
   a) Student has 10 days to file an appeal through the Ombud Office

Note: Feel free to consult with AOS at any time in the process, we are also a resource for instructors
Useful Online Resources:

University Senate Webpage Links on Syllabi:

- Required Components of Course Syllabi
- Helpful Components of a Course Syllabus

A link to download a template syllabus can be found at:

https://dib.uky.edu/ombud/syllabus-information-faculty

Academic Ombud Services Homepage:

www.uky.edu/ombud/

Contains more extensive information on:

- Academic Integrity
- Academic Policies
- Grade/Appeal Policies
- Rights and Responsibilities
- The University Appeals Board

---

Final Advice

We are all impressionable – actions and behavior speak louder than words!

We all make mistakes – try to make student’s misteps learning experiences!

Have a great Semester!
Who Are These Helpful Ombud People and Where Do I Find Them?

Laura Anschel, MS
Coordinator, Academic Ombud Services

Joe McGillis, PhD
Academic Ombud

Rm 109 Bradley Hall
859 257 3737
Confidential fax: 859 257 5346
ombud@uky.edu
website: http://www.uky.edu/ombud/

Bradley Hall, 545 Rose Street