

2023

## Competencies of Ombuds in Higher Education

Alicia Booker

Follow this and additional works at: [https://nsuworks.nova.edu/shss\\_dcar\\_etd](https://nsuworks.nova.edu/shss_dcar_etd)

 Part of the [Dispute Resolution and Arbitration Commons](#), [Educational Administration and Supervision Commons](#), [Higher Education Commons](#), and the [Social and Behavioral Sciences Commons](#)

## Share Feedback About This Item

---

This Dissertation is brought to you by the HCAS Student Theses and Dissertations at NSUWorks. It has been accepted for inclusion in Department of Conflict Resolution Studies Theses and Dissertations by an authorized administrator of NSUWorks. For more information, please contact [nsuworks@nova.edu](mailto:nsuworks@nova.edu).

Competencies of Ombuds in Higher Education

by

Alicia J. Booker

A Dissertation Presented to the  
Halmos College of Arts and Sciences of Nova Southeastern University  
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy

Nova Southeastern University  
2023

Copyright © by

Alicia J. Booker  
March 2023

**Nova Southeastern University  
Halmos College of Arts and Sciences**

This dissertation was submitted by Alicia J. Booker under the direction of the chair of the dissertation committee listed below. It was submitted to the Halmos College of Arts and Sciences and approved in partial fulfillment for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Conflict Analysis and Resolution at Nova Southeastern University.

**Approved:**

March 9, 2023  
Date of Defense

*Robin Cooper*

\_\_\_\_\_  
Robin Cooper, Ph.D.  
Chair

*Urszula Strawinska-Zanko*

\_\_\_\_\_  
Urszula Strawinska-Zanko, Ph.D.

*Angela Dash*

\_\_\_\_\_  
Angela Dash, Ph.D.

March 29, 2023  
Date of Final Approval

*Robin Cooper*

\_\_\_\_\_  
Robin Cooper, Ph.D.  
Chair

## Dedication

I dedicate this dissertation to the memory and legacy of my grandparents, Joe Smith, Bertha Spikes, O'Neal "Paw-paw" Booker, and Maddie "Big Momma" Booker.

## Acknowledgments

I want to acknowledge everyone who played a role in my academic and professional goals. Your continued support throughout this process has helped me stay focused and keep my commitment to complete this academic goal. I truly could not have made it this far without you. To my parents: thank you for modeling good work ethic and determination which has carried me to this wonderful completion of my dissertation project. Mr. Joe Booker, Daddy: thank you for being the wind beneath my wings. I soar high because I know you will catch me if I fall. You are my superhero for life. Ms. Joyce Booker, Mom: thank you for teaching me how to pray and call on God when I felt weary about completing this goal. You taught me how to push through the tough days and to do it with style and elegance. To my deceased grandparents, I hope to continue honoring your legacy of greatness as the first of many to have reached this level of education and success. To my deceased godparents Aaron and Junita Taylor, thank you for being wonderful friends to my parents. Momma Junita, thank you for the prayers and for speaking this degree into existence before you went home to paradise. I will do my part to represent your legacy of greatness in your family as well. To my siblings: Andrea: thank you for being the best sissy and cheerleader for my many adventures while pursuing this degree. Darron: thank you for your sarcasm and being my lifelong, gentle, giant big brother. Donovan: thank you for showing me that we may have setbacks but to stay hopeful in an amazing future. To my favorite Aunt Joe Ann: thank you for always being there when I need advice and serving as our family's ombuds. To my uncles, aunts, cousins, thank you for always cheering me on. To my host of nieces (Shakelia, Precious, Brizza, Rachele, O'Shelly, Madison) and nephews (Kadon and Julian), thank you for

keeping me humble, serving as my *why for you ALL shall be my legacy*. A huge thank you to my close friends, Mr. & Mrs. Views & Vibes (aka Lala and CV) Villeneuve, Fredricka Johnson, Sonia LeCompte, Chloe Graham, Schemain Duncan, Kelley Johnson, Ariel Wilson, Kimberly Alexander, Ursula Langford Esquire, and Christian Smith. Ya'll have seen me in the darkest hours of growing, healing, transitioning, researching, and writing. Special shout out to my childhood friends: Tiffany Gates- Wheeler, Natalie Norman Garrett, Geya Williams Prudhomme Esq. , Chanelle Morris Godfrey, Erline Maingot, and Felicia McKnight. You all are my tribe of cheerleaders, and I am blessed to call each of you friends. I am grateful for every call in and call out.

To my PhD partner, Amanda Lipscomb, who planted the seed in me to aim high and pursue this degree. This is for us, soul sister. Adoration and appreciation to my past silent partners who have provided me emotional, spiritual, and financial support during this journey. Your generosity of support and love will forever live in my heart. A huge shout out to my special silent partner who helped me get over the finish line. I want to thank you; "you helped strengthen my weakness to a point where I don't even know what my weakness is." I sincerely adore the peace and the space you gave me to be my complete self during this process of my evolution.

I would like to also thank my accountability partners who have walked this PhD path before me and helped me finish this marathon, Dr. Keresa Britton and Dr. Maurice Williams Jr.

A very special thank you to my countless ombuddies and alternative dispute practitioner community. Thank you to Dr. Betty Gilmore, my first ADR supervisor who lit the fire in me to pursue this career goal and exposed me to leaders in the ADR field.

Thank you to my SMU professor Carrie Creado for keeping me encouraged since undergrad. Thank you to Dr. Mary Rowe, Dr. Timothy Hedeem, Dr. Angela Dash, Mr. Chuck Howard, Esq., Mr. Wayne Blaire, Esq., Mr. Sean Banks, Esq., Susan Casino, Shannon Burton, PhD, Kimberly Fulbright, MA, and my ombuds besties: Brett Harris, JD and Jai Callaway, MA, JD for supporting my ombuds career and research aspirations over the years. I am forever indebted to each of you for the wisdom and grace you have extended to me on my ombuds journey. Thank you to Melanie Jagneaux, JD for giving me the opportunity to do what I love in the city where I started. This role makes me feel like the stars have aligned in my favor. To my host of colleagues who serve as university ombuds around the world. My network of those who hold space for students, faculty, staff, and sometimes their families; keep shining bright using your voice. You often represent the last hope for fairness and kindness. Know we are shooting stars for dignity and our efforts can have a rippling effect of peace or resolution.

To my dissertation committee, members: Dr. Angela Dash thank you for being the prototype for Ombuds education and practice. Dr. Ursula Strawinska-Zanko, thank you for your support for my data analysis. Last by far NOT least, my chair Dr. Robin Cooper, thank you so much for supporting, encouraging, and helping me make my dream a reality. Dr. Cooper, you have witnessed my full evolution from a student taking my first course with you for my qualitative certificate to today, as you chaired my dissertation committee. I know I could not have made it without you. I can't thank you enough for the graciousness of "Dissertation Detention" workshop time.



## Table of Contents

List of Tables .....	iv
List of Figures .....	viii
Abstract .....	ix
Chapter 1: Introduction .....	1
Context/Background .....	4
Why There is Division .....	6
Research Problem .....	7
Purpose Statement/Research Questions .....	9
Theoretical Background .....	11
Ombuds Systematic Theory .....	12
Systems Theory for Competency Model .....	13
The Design .....	14
The Inspiration .....	15
Definition of Terms .....	17
Context of the Researcher .....	20
Organization of Dissertation .....	21
Chapter 2: Literature Review and Theoretical Framing .....	22
History of the Ombuds Profession .....	22
Sweden Expansion .....	23
Global Expansion .....	23
Historical Background of Ombuds in Higher Education .....	243
What Ombuds Do .....	26

Essential Ombuds Characteristics.....	29
Types of Cases Received by Ombuds.....	31
Ombuds' Necessary Skills.....	32
Why Ombuds Should be Considered a Profession .....	33
Suggested Competencies Model.....	35
Chapter 3: Methodology .....	39
Research Project Methodology .....	39
Qualitative Research Approach .....	39
Case Study .....	40
Sampling and Recruitment.....	41
Data Collection .....	42
Qualitative Interviews.....	44
Data Analysis.....	49
Data Analysis Notes.....	49
Q1 Code Example.....	50
Ethical Considerations .....	51
Chapter 4: Results .....	53
Theme 1: Behavioral Competencies Most Important .....	53
Listening .....	55
Knowledge of ADR Intervention Methods Essential .....	55
Theme 2: Competencies Learned Via Self-Seeking & On-the-job Training.....	57
Acquiring Competencies.....	58

Theme 3: Effectiveness Determined by Formal Assessments,	
Usage, and Surveys .....	60
Performance Evaluation.....	61
Office Effectiveness.....	62
Results of Ranking Questions.....	63
Chapter 5: Discussion .....	67
Comparison to the Literature .....	68
Theoretical Analysis .....	72
Limitations.....	73
Recommendations.....	73
Areas for Future Research .....	75
Contributions to the Field of Conflict Resolution.....	76
Conclusions.....	77
References.....	79
Appendix A: Competency Terms and Definitions.....	86
Appendix B: Competency Ranking Table .....	91
Appendix C: Behavioral and Technical Competencies; Functional Requirements.....	92
Appendix D: Qualitative Analysis Tables .....	93
Appendix E: Quantitative Analysis Tables.....	94
Appendix F: Participant Invitation Letter .....	107
Appendix G: General Informed Consent Form .....	108

## List of Tables

Table 1. Competencies Coded From the 2008/2016 Job Analyses .....	15
Table 2. Competencies by Category .....	36
Table 3. Participant Demographics.....	42
Table 4. Higher Education Ombuds’ Technical, Behavioral, Functional Skills.....	44
Table 5. Alignment of Research Questions to Interview Questions .....	48
Table 6. ADR Intervention Methods with Frequency from Pattern Coding Analysis .....	56
Table 7. Experiences That Prepared Ombuds for Their Role Pattern Coding.....	58
Table 8. Ways Competencies Were Acquired .....	59
Table 9. Types and Frequency of Evaluation from Pattern Coding .....	61
Table 10. Types and Frequency of Self-Assessment from Pattern Coding .....	62
Table 11. Technical Competencies with Rankings and Frequencies.....	64
Table 12. Behavior Competencies with Rankings and Frequencies.....	65
Table 13. ADR Intervention Methods from Pattern Coding of Participants’ Transcripts .....	94
Table 14. Methods of Acquiring Technical Competencies: Budget Requirements/Management .....	94
Table 15. Methods of Acquiring Technical Competencies: Change Management .....	95
Table 16. Methods of Acquiring Technical Competencies: Coaching .....	95
Table 17. Methods of Acquiring Technical Competencies: Conflict Management .....	96
Table 18. Methods of Acquiring Behavioral Competencies: Awareness of Personal Bias.....	97

Table 19. Methods of Acquiring Behavioral Competencies:	
Effective Communication .....	97
Table 20. Methods of Acquiring Behavioral Competencies:	
Emotional Intelligence .....	97
Table 21. Methods of Acquiring Behavioral Competencies: Ethical Agent .....	97
Table 22. Methods of Acquiring Behavioral Competencies: Global and Cultural Effectiveness .....	98
Table 23. Methods of Acquiring Behavioral Competencies: Networking .....	98
Table 24. Methods of Acquiring Behavioral Competencies: Ombuds Integrity .....	98
Table 25. Methods of Acquiring Behavioral Competencies:	
Relationship Management .....	99
Table 26. Methods of Acquiring Behavioral Competencies: Stress Management .....	99
Table 27. Methods of Assessment for Technical Competencies: Budget Requirements/Management .....	100
Table 28. Methods of Assessment for Technical Competencies:	
Change Management .....	100
Table 29. Methods of Assessment for Technical Competencies: Coaching.....	100
Table 30. Methods of Assessment for Technical Competencies:	
Conflict Management.....	100
Table 31. Methods of Assessment for Technical Competencies:	
Crisis Management .....	101
Table 32. Methods of Assessment for Technical Competencies:	
Data Analysis.....	101

Table 33. Methods of Assessment for Technical Competencies:	
Dispute Systems.....	101
Table 34. Methods of Assessment for Technical Competencies: Facilitation.....	101
Table 35. Methods of Assessment for Technical Competencies:	
Informal Investigation.....	102
Table 36. Methods of Assessment for Technical Competencies: Marketing .....	102
Table 37. Methods of Assessment for Technical Competencies: Mediation.....	102
Table 38. Methods of Assessment for Technical Competencies: Negotiation .....	102
Table 39. Methods of Assessment for Technical Competencies:	
Public Relations .....	103
Table 40. Methods of Assessment for Technical Competencies: Training .....	103
Table 41. Methods of Assessment for Behavioral Competencies:	
Awareness of Personal Bias.....	104
Table 42. Methods of Assessment for Behavioral Competencies:	
Effective Communication .....	104
Table 43. Methods of Assessment for Behavioral Competencies: Emotional	
Intelligence/Self-Awareness .....	104
Table 44. Methods of Assessment for Behavioral Competencies: Ethical Agent .....	105
Table 45. Methods of Assessment for Behavioral Competencies:	
Global and Cultural Effectiveness (DEIB) .....	105
Table 46. Methods of Assessment for Behavioral Competencies: Networking .....	105
Table 47. Methods of Assessment for Behavioral Competencies:	
Ombuds Integrity .....	106

Table 48. Methods of Assessment for Behavioral Competencies:

Relationship Management ..... 106

Table 49. Methods of Assessment for Behavioral Competencies:

Stress Management ..... 106

## List of Figures

Figure 1. SHRM Competency Model .....	17
Figure 2. Organizational Ombuds Functions .....	27
Figure 3. CO-OP Domains.....	35
Figure 4. Example of Structured and Unstructured Questions Used in This Study .....	47
Figure 5. Behavioral Competencies Identified in Patterns Coding Analysis.....	54
Figure 6. Technical Competencies.....	64
Figure 7. IOA Behavioral Competencies.....	65



## Abstract

This study aimed to deepen the understanding of ombuds (i.e., ombudsman, ombudsperson) who practice in higher education settings by exploring what ombuds consider the critical competencies to fulfill a variety of professional functions, how ombuds acquired those competencies, and how ombuds are assessed and self-assess. The purpose of this qualitative case study was to make an empirically researched recommendation for an ombuds in higher education competency model. The researcher gathered data from 23 ombuds in the United States working in institutions of higher education. The researcher analyzed the data gathered from semi-structured interviews using descriptive coding in the first coding cycle and pattern coding in the second coding cycle. The three major themes developed through data analysis were: (a) ombuds place the most value on behavioral competencies, (b) ombuds value knowledge of ADR intervention methods, and (c) ombuds rely on feedback to assess their competencies. The study expanded previous research findings about the characteristics, competencies, functions, and effectiveness of the ombuds position. The study findings will support the ombuds profession by identifying and confirming key competencies and how they are assessed. The recommendations will be shared with the International Ombuds Association (IOA).

## Chapter 1: Introduction

Today there are many options for persons who wish to engage in a career of alternative dispute resolution, conflict management, conflict reduction, and conflict analysis. The plethora of choices includes ombuds, a role that has been elevated as a practical application of conflict resolution theory, knowledge, and skills. In the 1980s, ombudsmen arguably provided the largest number of jobs for neutrals in North America (Rowe, 1988). Three decades later, the profession and role of ombuds are more vital than ever before, especially in the higher education environment. According to Katz et al. (2018), "By 2016, nearly 400 colleges and universities ombuds were listed as members of the International Ombuds Association (IOA), with the majority of these institutions providing services to the full population of the university" (p. 3). Mary Rowe is considered the godmother of ombudsing, an adjunct negotiation and conflict management professor, and retired ombuds at the Management in Technology (MIT) Sloan School of Management (Rowe, 2022). Rowe conducted pioneering research on ombudsing, studying topics such as the functions, standards of practice, and professional values of organizational ombuds; the effectiveness and value of organizational ombuds; as well as case studies, self-help resources, and examples for better ombuds communication (Rowe, 2022). Building on past research into the higher education ombuds role, this qualitative study was conducted to create a consensus on the critical competencies ombuds working in higher education should possess.

The ombuds community has recently experienced a rupture that triggered a cascade of individual reflective and systematic inquiries for individual programs and the ombuds profession across sectors. These processes have occurred both in private and

public spaces. Publicly, a significant increase in research on ombuds in higher education is occurring, and privately, the ombuds community at large has wrestled with incidents of poor professional conduct by ombuds colleagues (Peterson, 2022; Pittman, 2021). Both topics have caused a rippling effect of curiosity about the performance quality, skillset, and conduct deemed essential in the role of ombuds. For example, in 2021, the University of Mississippi Ombuds was put on leave regarding confidentiality and whistleblower concerns (Pittman, 2021). Most recently, the Kansas University vice provost and former ombuds resigned after allegations of plagiarism (Peterson, 2022). As an attempt to address some of these concerns within the professional association of ombuds, The IOA established a code for behavior norms within the association (IOA, 2022), hired an ombud to address concerns among members (IOA, n.d.-b), and established a diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging (DEIB) committee to design a framework to address systemic issues within the association (IOA, n.d.-a). This scholarly project is an extension of those efforts to support transparency, diversity, equity, and opportunity within the profession.

In 1995, Dr. Mary P. Rowe stated, "Ombudspeople need certain knowledge and need to learn a variety of skills to pursue their basic functions" (p. 106). Rowe (1995) identified and discussed the following options, functions, and skills pertinent to the ombuds' role: (a) listening, (b) providing and receiving information, (c) reframing issues and developing options, (d) referral, (e) helping people help themselves in a direct approach, (f) informal third-party intervention, (g) shuttle diplomacy, (h) looking into the problem (investigation), (i) class mediation, (j) generic approaches (anonymous inquiry or hypothetical inquiry), (k) systems change, (l) following through, (m) a custom

approach, and (n) investigation and adjudication and formal appeals (pp. 106–111). Rowe (1995) further delineated additional skills critical to the role, including "maintaining confidentiality and neutrality, maintaining statistical records and using them appropriately, and using data—in a fashion consonant with confidentiality—to inform management of new problems" (p. 111). While subsequent researchers (Hedeem et al., 2018; Rowe & Hicks, 2004) continued to illuminate the definition of an ombuds' function, little progress has occurred toward a more specific set of competencies by which ombuds are known since Rowe's (1995) assessment of the essential characteristics for ombuds nearly 30 years ago.

Building on Rowe's (1995) skill set definitions, Rowe and Hicks (2004) offered insight into the functions associated with ombuds practice. According to Rowe and Hicks, ombuds should show respect for all people, be accessible in all academic spaces, collect and disseminate information that leads to change, encourage individuals to be problem solvers, and support all types of dispute resolution. Hedeem et al. (2018) further clarified the ombuds' role in the 2017 IOA Practice Survey findings. Ombuds practitioners who participated in the survey indicated they act as trainers, mediators, facilitators, liaisons, negotiators, and coordinators for legal counsel. While these functions describe ombuds' activities, there remains space for a formalized expectation of essential competencies for persons desiring to hold an ombuds position. There is also the potential for expanding an aspirational and enforceable licensing model. Therefore, the first step toward developing a set of recognized competencies was to delineate what ombuds do as a regular part of their occupation. In this scholarly project, I sought to take a deeper look at the problem from a competency and functional standpoint. I scoped out

essential ombuds functions by categorizing ombuds competencies under technical skills and behavioral skills.

### **Context/Background**

The organizational ombuds profession began in the United States in the mid-to late-20th century and soon spread worldwide (Rowe & Williams, 2014).

The university ombuds were among the first private sector ombuds positions. The profession flourished in universities, which in the 1960s was widely considered a hotbed of radicalism and unrest (Ziegenfuss & O'Rourke, 2011). Today, the ombuds community faces a similar period of social instability; ombuds were forced to pivot during the COVID-19 global pandemic to a virtual setting where they could offer services.

Additionally, there is a call for social justice reform efforts in response to the racial unrest triggered by the murders of George Floyd and Ahmaud Arbery. These tragedies caused a rippling effect in organizations, which increased the need for facilitated dialogues, dispute systems design and assessment, conflict analysis, and many other intervention methods used by ombuds in the profession. Ombuds often heard cases that sought their support and were enlisted to encourage systemic changes for equality, transparency, and equity. Concerns for equality and diversity extended to the ombuds profession itself.

Ombuds began to feel division in the ombuds community regarding qualifications, what constitutes ombuds' experience, ombuds' education, professionalism, and reverse ageism. There are biases among ombuds throughout the community related to the importance of DEIB as it relates to the ombuds' role. These varied perspectives of how ombuds should view their roles have entered the public opinion spaces for open discussion.

At the 2019 Conference of the IOA, a young ombuds stood in the middle of the conference room and proclaimed that older ombuds were not allowing aspiring ombuds to learn or grow in the field. Additionally, many participants strongly reacted to the keynote speaker's topic of *White fragility*. As I observed conference participants' actions, I became reflective on the profession's future and its impact on my colleagues. I aimed to design a skills, knowledge, and behavior competency model with assessment recommendations to help address the profession's diversity, equity, and inclusion perceptions and guide future recommendations for role enhancement and appropriate behaviors that align with our standards of practice (IOA, 2022).

Similar associations, such as the Society for Human Resource Management (SHRM), National Association of Workforce Professionals, Certified Financial Planners Board of Standards, College Student Educators International, and Student Affairs Administrators in Higher Education designed rubrics for competency models that outline different levels or outcomes for a long-term career in the designated profession. One of my desires for this doctoral project was to create a collaboration between alternative dispute resolution (ADR) programs and the multiple associations/groups of organizational ombuds to agree on curriculum, competencies, assessments, and continuing education units of measurement to support the evolution of the ombuds field. My ultimate goal was to create an ombuds licensing model whereby opportunities for promotion and developmental plans rooted in ADR continuing education are acquired. My secondary goal was that all ombuds practitioners can self-reflect on their areas of opportunity for professional development with the hope that consistency in the ombuds

approaches to practicing can provide organizations a way to assess ombuds that is appropriate and meaningful.

### **Why There is a Division**

Exploring what ombuds consider the critical competencies for the profession may help explain the conflict between career path competencies and promotional opportunities for university ombuds. This research could also help the IOA Professional Development Committee create a curriculum for and change the requirements of the Certificate of Organizational Ombuds Practitioners. The findings may help explain professional growth issues from a historical perspective. They may elicit an understanding of how the increase of ombuds who have acquired competencies from ADR courses or graduates from degree programs apply their technical competencies to their role as ombuds. This increased awareness of ombuds as a profession can strengthen the importance, value, and knowledge of what ombuds bring to the university environment.

Heightened awareness may also strengthen the job market for ombuds positions in higher education. Tompkins Byer (2017) conducted a mixed-methods survey with 111 ombuds in higher education and found discrepancies in the interpretation of standard operating procedures for ombuds, the way ombuds practice, practitioner experiences, working conditions, and how ombuds cultivate campus relationships within the academic ombuds profession. The lack of community and connection within the profession contributes to the inconsistency of practice (Newhart, 2007; Tompkins Byer, 2017). The challenge for ombuds is to measure and demonstrate the value they add to the organizations they serve (Levine-Finley & Carter, 2011; Witzler, 2014).

## Research Problem

Although there are standards of practice for ombuds (IOA, 2022), there remains variance in ombudsing approaches because of what is considered vital competencies, specific developmental paths to acquire critical competencies, and consistency in assessment for ombuds are lacking. Gadlin (2000) stated, "The ombuds' role is arguably the least well understood" profession in dispute resolution. (p. 37). A wide variety of experiences, education, and expertise among professional ombuds have fostered an environment where the more profound discussion of needed competencies is avoided (Tompkins Byer, 2017). Hedeem et al. (2018) outlined that ombuds blend ADR processes by serving as conflict coaches, conciliators, mediators, and fact finders. Hedeem et al. listed four main functions within the ombuds role:

1. Build a reputation for being safe, fair, accessible, and credible.
  - a. delivering respect
  - b. listening actively
  - c. providing and explaining information
  - d. receiving vital information
  - e. helping individuals and groups to make sense of their experiences
  - f. reframing issues
  - g. helping individuals and groups develop options
  - h. monitoring
2. Helping people help themselves.
  - a. offering referrals
  - b. helping people to use a direct approach



- c. helping people to find responsible affinity groups, mentors, and networks
3. Offer informal intervention.
    - a. conducting 'shuttle diplomacy'
    - b. offering informal mediation inside the organization
    - c. offering referrals for formal mediation by others inside or outside the organization
    - d. "looking into" a problem informally
    - e. reviewing organizational data
    - f. facilitating a generic approach
    - g. assisting informally with process issues in the case of an appeal
    - h. working with leaders so they may be seen as approachable
    - i. following up
  4. Supporting the mission of the organization and conflict management systems.
    - a. getting out into the organization
    - b. keeping non-identifiable notes and statistics
    - c. providing early warning of an issue that is new
    - d. identifying and communicating about a pattern of issues
    - e. working for systemic change
    - f. following up on systems change options and informal recommendations
    - g. helping informally and often invisibly to connect and coordinate

While there is literature to support the functions and practices of ombuds and how they measure their effectiveness and success within their practice, there is still difficulty in evaluating and defining ombuds' success (Harrison, 2004). Without a clear definition

and description of the competencies needed in the profession, the field of ombudsing is vulnerable to continued criticism. The lack of formal structure affects the validity of the profession. Tompkins Byer (2017) underscored the need for further clarification of the ombuds role by calling for transparency within the profession. Tompkins Byer stated, "Ombudspeople challenge their visitors to have difficult conversations and should be willing to undertake the same processes themselves" (p. 8). There is scant literature on the ombuds profession; scholars (Gadlin, 2000; Harrison, 2004; Newhart, 2007; Tompkins Byer, 2017; Witzler, 2014) agree more research is needed to clarify the competencies needed to meet the demands of the practice. The problem addressed in this study was a lack of consistency and consensus in what are deemed key competencies, how to acquire these competencies, and valid assessments to endorse the professional ombuds' needed competencies.

### **Purpose Statement/Research Questions**

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to describe the competencies ombuds in higher education identify as key competencies, how they acquire these competencies, their awareness of their developmental opportunities for optimal performance and promotion, how their institution assesses their performance, and how they self-assess. In this study, the competencies for ombuds in higher education were generally defined as behavioral skills and technical skills adapted and applied in the context of conflict resolution functional business acumen status quo previously used by ombuds practitioners. To fulfill the purpose of the study, the following research questions were explored:

**RQ1:** What do ombuds in higher education consider key competencies?

**RQ2:** How do ombuds in higher education acquire key competencies?

**RQ3:** How do ombuds in higher education assess required competencies?

Preliminary research on ombuds in higher education provides an overview of the need for a deeper inquiry into the competencies needed for success in the ombuds profession. Newhart (2007) conducted a correlational study on the rise of ADR and the role of ombuds in higher education and found a discrepancy between those participants who used ADR techniques, such as transformative mediation, and those participants whose offices did not employ such techniques. In Newhart's study, 63% of participants agreed or strongly agreed that their offices practiced ADR techniques, while 19% were undecided, and 18% disagreed or strongly disagreed. Newhart concluded, "Ombuds in institutions of higher education in the United States has been influenced by the ADR movement and have adopted ADR techniques into their practice" (p. 62). Interestingly, ADR is a field of study that is consistently highlighted as a key component of the ombuds role, yet less than half of Newhart's participants held advanced degrees in areas where ADR practices would be taught. There is no consistency in the literature related to how ombuds value, attain, assess, or practically apply critical knowledge and skills for appropriate ADR in the higher education setting. Witzler (2014) acknowledged the issues of speaking freely about different ways ombuds practice. This lack of transparency and psychological safety may be affecting the culture of the ombuds community, which Greenwood (1957) cited as an important component of any profession. While there is consistency related to the parameters in which the ombuds operate and the functions of the ombuds role, there is no uniformity around the professional or self-assessments used as valid or governing methods to evaluate or certify these competencies. This

inconsistency allowed for deeper exploration to better understand the competency model phenomenon as a whole.

### **Theoretical Background**

I started my theoretical background by applying Earnest Greenwood's (1957) attributes of a profession as a lens to explore the theories applicable to the role of an ombud in higher education. Greenwood discussed distinguishable attributes that vary for professionals and non-professionals. The attributes include technical specialization and professional activity. Greenwood theorized a profession's validity specifically possesses the superior skill, mastery of a body of theory, and preparation for the profession. Ombuds are perceived to "possess superior skill" of conflict management, yet there is not currently an assessment of ombuds competencies nor a clear career path in the ombuds profession for preparation or promotion beyond retiring from the role (Greenwood, 1957). Thus, there is no formal competency-building plan for most aspiring ombuds other than volunteering, researching, taking the IOA's foundations course, or studying the field of ADR or conflict resolution. Specifically, in higher education, where theory is considered the foundation of many paths of study, the blending of education and experience is critical in the preparation of qualifying for the role of ombuds.

My personal experience as an ombud in higher education informed my decision to initially propose an eclectic framework of theories for this research.

Ombuds borrow from many theoretical backgrounds. The practice of ombuds consists of blending systematic theory, conflict management practice, theory of change, negotiation theory, mediation theory, counseling theory, decision theory, psychology theory, organizational development theory, and structural theory. I selected systems

theory for this research project. Systems theory may best explain the need for clarity about a multifaceted and complex set of skills needed in the profession of ombudsing since the ombuds role is part of an organization's dispute systems design. The systems approach supported the analysis of the complexity of the role and provided rigor to the development of a competency assessment model for ombuds practice using a systematic approach. As a background to the discussion of systems theory as the appropriate framework for this project, I begin with a presentation of ombuds systematic theory to provide context.

### **Ombuds Systematic Theory**

Although ombuds borrow theoretical approaches from many professions, the primary theories that align with the principles of the ombuds practices are rooted in conflict resolution, mediation, negotiation, and dispute systems. Every profession embraces certain theories that operate as key elements of the profession (Witzler, 2014). Ombuds serve as conflict resolution practitioners. Practicing ombuds have a variety of backgrounds and often are selected because of their characteristics, comparable professional backgrounds, history, and understanding of the organizational culture (Escalante, 2018; Gadlin, 2000; Shelton, 2000). Newhart (2007) underscored that ombuds practice differently in dispute systems designs, reporting structure, and approaches, which raises a question about whether the reason for different practices is due to the variation of ADR educational training in dispute systems design or other conflict reduction intervention methodology.

Rowe (1995) underscored the conflict related to systems design. Rowe stated ombuds spend one-third of their time on systems design. Burton (1993) noted theory of

conflict emerges when needs are not met and when exploring options, perceptions, motives, and risks are associated with the desired outcome. Other researchers (e.g., Escalante, 2018; Howard, 2011) summarized the many different unknown conflict resolution approaches and referenced ombuds as decision recommenders that fit into organizational systems.

Many ombuds researchers agree with the decision recommender description for ombuds, stating that ombuds act as a function of a dispute systems design to support other resources of an organization for conflict resolution (Howard, 2011; Rowe, 1995; Witzler, 2014). Dispute systems design is a concept suggested by Ury et al. (1989), who noted that ombuds fit many of the functions identified in a dispute systems design; however, ombuds do not make decisions, arbitrate, or conduct formal investigations.

### **Systems Theory for Competency Model**

Based on the individual industry, competency models will contain different elements. A competency model is a description of the requirements needed to perform a job at its best (Rothwell & Lindholm, 1999). Competency models help employees understand how they can be top-performing employees in their roles, within their organizations, and throughout their field of practice. Competency models are used by organizations to distinguish between good and great practitioners (Rothwell & Lindholm, 1999).

Systems theory can be a basis for case studies that build toward designing a competency model. Systems theory provides a foundation whereby the data gathered in a case study can be received as rigorous and valid. Systems theory fit the purpose of this research project because the project was conducted to explore the “attitudes, feelings, and

motivation level of exemplar performers” (Rothwell & Lindholm, 1999, p. 93). Rothwell and Lindholm (1999) discussed the borrowed-and-tailored approach to creating competency models as the most rigorous. In this project, I used a borrow-and-tailored approach from a systems perspective to explore the competencies ombuds believe are needed to be successful in the profession.

### **The Design**

One aim of this research project was for ombuds to shift from using function and task language to using ADR technical language and specific behavioral competencies. Comparable to the Delphi method that focuses on attempting to refine or augment competency models by gaining the consensus of subject matter experts in the field. I looked at the functions that have been previously researched and confirmed from other data sets.

In 2008 (IOA, 2008) and again in 2016 (Schroeder Measurement Technologies, Inc., 2016), the IOA, in collaboration with Schroeder Measurements Technologies, Inc. (SMT), conducted scientific research and job analysis for organizational ombuds, identifying performance activities (task) and knowledge, skills, and abilities (KSAs) from 200 survey respondents. To aid in my desire to build on the previous model, I designed a chart by reversing the definitions of functions and tasks into the specific ADR intervention methods or behavioral competencies. Table 1 presents the results of the 2008 and 2016 surveys.

**Table 1***Competencies Coded From the 2008/2016 Job Analyses*

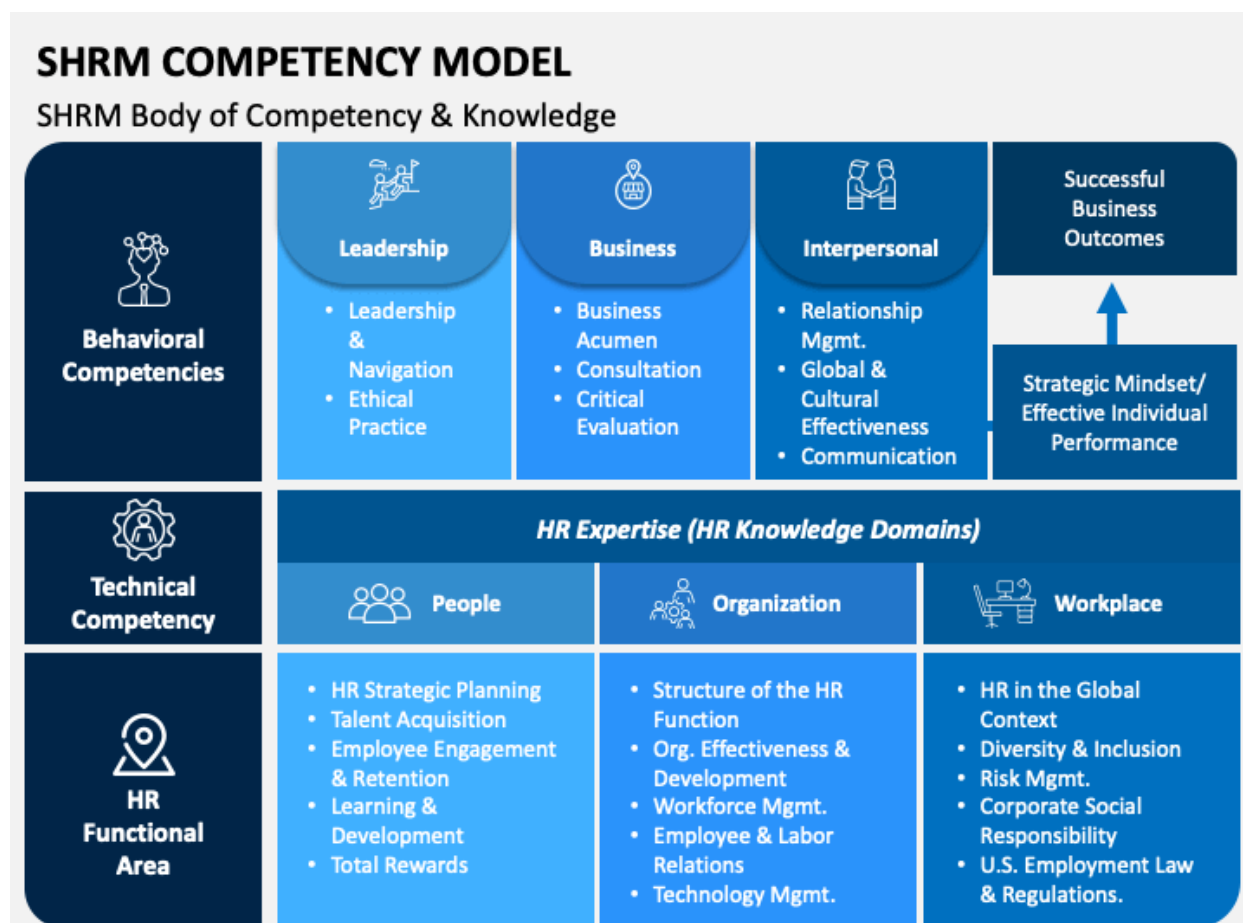
Technical	Code(s)	Behavioral	Code(s)	Functional	Code(s)
Conflict Management	C1, 1C1	Ombuds Integrity	1A1-2, 2A1	IOA Standard of Practice	1A1-2
Resolution Styles	1C1	Professional Integrity	1B4, 1B11	IOA Ethical Principles	1A1-2
Change Management	3A2	Recognizes Personal Bias	1B3, 1B10	Sexual Misconduct Policies	3A1
Crisis Management	1A1 iv	Ethical Agent	3C5, 3C7	Legislation and Legal	3A1
Mediation	1C3, 2B7, 2A1-7	Relationship Management	1B11-12		
Facilitation	1B7-8, 2B7	Stress Management	1B5		
Negotiation	1C2	High Emotional and Social Intelligence	1B3-6		
Coaching	2B4				
Dispute Systems Assessment & Design	1C4, 3A1-4, 3C1-7				
Teaching	CB1-2, 1B7				
Training	3B1-2, 1B7				
Data Analysis	1D2, 3C3-4, 2A3				
Marketing	1B12				
Public Relations	1B12				
Budget Management	1D1-2				
Informal Inquiry	2B5				

**The Inspiration**

Ombuds often spend a large amount of time explaining what they do to human resources personnel, general councils, and senior leaders to express the value ombuds add to an organization. Many HR professionals are unclear on the role of the ombuds, which has led to a large population of ombuds with legal training or law background.



To support the aim for a better understanding of the essential ombudsing skills, I looked at the comparable competencies of human resources practitioners by borrowing from SHRM. In 2011, SHRM began a program of research involving thousands of HR professionals to identify the critical competencies needed for success as an HR professional (SHRM, 2022). This research led to the development of the initial SHRM Competency Model, which defined eight key behavioral competencies (Leadership & Navigation; Ethical Practice; Relationship Management; Communication; Global & Cultural Effectiveness; Business Acumen; Consultation; and Critical Evaluation) and one technical competency (HR Expertise). The SHRM Competency Model represented an important advance for the field of HR by focusing on the types of behaviors that are integral for success in HR (SHRM, 2022). Figure 1 highlights the SHRM Competency Model. The SHRM Competency Model was the inspiration for the desire to draw analysis and consistencies in defining the role of the ombuds. These competencies were identified after analysis by the 2021 and 2022 IOA Professional Development Committee Chairs, Alicia Booker and Susan Casino. The proposed Competency Model was accepted by the IOA as an updated representation of organizational ombuds competencies.

**Figure 1***SHRM Competency Model*

Source: *Society for Human Resources*

The SHRM Body of Competency and Knowledge Model has comparable behavioral and technical competency skills that are essential to the Ombuds role as well. Leadership skills, business skills, and interpersonal skills all play a part in the many functions outlined in the IOA Job Analysis.

### Definition of Terms

The following terms were frequently used within this research project. The definitions provided are offered to help the reader better understand how the terms are

applied throughout this study. Additional definitions for the competencies can be found in Appendix A.

### **Competencies**

Many professions identify key competencies or bodies of knowledge needed to perform the roles associated with the profession. This knowledge can be acquired through “experience, academic courses, reading, self-reflection, workshops at professional conferences or discussions” with others (Rowe, 1995, p. 8).

### **Conflict**

Conflict is "a competitive or opposing action of incompatibilities" (Merriam-Webster, n.d.-a). The term conflict is used in two descriptive ways in this study (i.e., x and y) with the same definition.

### **Conflict Resolution**

Conflict specialists often use the terms conflict resolution, dispute resolution, and conflict management interchangeably (Witzler, 2014). In this study, I use the term *conflict resolution* to describe the act of helping individuals or organizations resolve their differences and come to greater understanding and cooperation.

### **Functions**

Functions describe how skills specific to the professional role are applied. For this research, the anticipated outcome is to develop a comprehensive list of functions for the ombuds role. Some ombuds in higher education services in different functional roles for the team or organization. Jagneaux et al. (2017) described a team approach to ombuds and discussed an "information specialist" (p. 7), whose role consists of data analysis or database management. Some ombuds in higher education serve in a collateral role.

Tompkins Byer (2017) defined collateral ombuds as "ombuds who hold other positions, including faculty, staff, or administration positions" (p. 217). The primary ombuds functions also might include people managing in their role as director of an ombuds program, thus requiring budgeting and marketing skills applicable to increasing awareness of the office.

### **Intervention Method**

Intervention methods may consist of the identified technical skills the ombuds might use for conflict resolution and reduction. Intervention methods include but are not limited to active listening, mediation, facilitated dialogue, conflict coaching, executive coaching, dispute systems design and assessments, skip-level interventions, referrals to other resources, shuttling diplomacy, informal investigations, or simply providing or sharing information (Rowe, 1995).

### **Ombuds**

Ombuds, ombudsman, and ombudsperson are terms used interchangeably to describe a person whose job is to "investigate, report on, and help settle complaints" (Merriam-Webster, n.d.-b). There are a variety of ombuds that operate under similar standards of practices and processes in advocating for fair treatment around the world (Howard, 2011; Levine-Finley & Carter, 2011; Witzler, 2014).

### **Organizational Conflict**

Organizational conflict is deeply embedded in organizational culture. Organizational conflicts can emerge from individual or collective experiences, unmet expectations, interactions, unwritten rules, beliefs, customs, values, or anything that

disrupts a person's ability to fulfill their role within the organization (Raines & Harrison, 2020).

### **Visitor**

A visitor is a term used to refer to any member of a population who seeks consultation with the ombuds. A visitor is the term most widely used in the ombuds community and is recognized by the IOA. Alternative terms for the person seeking help include inquirer and caller (IOA, 2009).

### **Context of the Researcher**

I participated in a research project, the Administrative Conference of the United States (ACUS) survey, as a graduate assistant. During the project, I began to consider what higher education ombuds do. Following my participation in the ACUS survey, every paper I wrote touched on the topic of ombuds in higher education. I was also a research assistant as a student in the Nova Southeastern University course, Conflict Intervention (CARD 6639), taught by Professor Neil Katz, where I contributed to a group project on ombudsmen. During that project, I was able to explore ombuds' perceptions about their perceived values and personal characteristics through themes and findings. In my research for the project, I learned many ombuds believed their awareness of university culture improved their ability to provide conflict resolution services. My interest in developing competencies for ombuds grew as I worked on the course project. Additionally, I desired to build on Kovack's (2021) dissertation, which examined the similarities and differences between ombuds in various environments. Kovack's findings confirmed that ombuds felt their organizational historical knowledge of "professionalism" within the organization and "prior experiences," in addition to the IOA

foundations course; the IOA Certification of Organizational Ombuds Practitioners® (CO-OP®) certification; and knowledge, skills, and attitudes (KSAs) contributed to the success of their role as ombuds. Kovack recommended deeper exploration needed for essential ombuds competencies, such as behavioral competencies, such as interpersonal skill sets, emotional intelligence, deep personal caring, selflessness, critical thinking, data gathering, and other soft skills. Therefore, I designed my dissertation project to hone in on these specific types of competencies.

### **Organization of Dissertation**

In Chapter 1, I offered an overview of what ombuds do, why there is division, the research problem statement, the purpose of the research, the research questions, the theoretical background, and the definition of key terms. Chapter 2 will consist of a discussion of the history of the ombuds profession and the historical background of ombuds in higher education. I will also explore what ombuds do more extensively through a review of the relevant literature. In Chapter 3, I will explain the methodology of the research project. In Chapter 4, I will present the results of the research study, and in Chapter 5, I will discuss the findings and the implications of the findings and present recommendations for future research and practice, which will contribute to the field of conflict resolution.

## Chapter 2: Literature Review and Theoretical Framing

The purpose of this qualitative descriptive study was to describe the competencies ombuds in higher education identify as key competencies, how they acquire these competencies, their awareness of their developmental opportunities for optimal performance, how their institution assesses their performance, and how they self-assess. The literature review was conducted to reveal what is known about the knowledge and key competencies associated with the role of ombuds in higher education. The literature review is composed of five sections. The first section addresses the historical context of the ombuds position. The second section outlines the essential functions and characteristics of the ombuds. The third section brings focus to the types of cases ombuds receive. The skills ombuds should possess to be effective in their role within the higher education system are described in the fourth section. Finally, the literature on the reasons ombuds should be considered a profession with full competencies and expectations is explored in the fifth section.

### **History of the Ombuds Profession**

The role of the ombuds has a rich history rooted in serving. Governmental complaint-handling systems date back to ancient Egypt when leaders such as Moses and the Pharaohs had people in their leadership circles who handled grievances (Howard, 2011). Most scholars give credit to King Charles XII of Sweden for terming the position of ombuds; King Charles XII appointed the first ombuds because he wanted to ensure Swedish officials followed the law and fulfilled their obligations (Howard, 2011). The American Bar Association (Howard, 2011) provided a timeline of significant events in the ombuds profession:

### Sweden Expansion

- 1713. Chancellor of Justice
- 1809: Swedish constitution provided for a "Justitieombudsman."
- 1914–1918: World War I, ombuds was created to supervise Swedish military authorities

### Global Expansion

- 1919: Finland created an ombuds role
- 1952: Norway created military ombuds
- 1955: Denmark created an ombuds role
- 1957: the Federal Republic of Germany created military ombuds
- 1962: New Zealand created national ombuds
- 1960s and 1970s: global expansion continued
- 1961: Professor Kenneth Culp Davis's *University of Pennsylvania, Law Review* article introduces the ombuds concept in the United States, predicting evolution to "have considerable potentiality" (p. 1058)
- 1967: Professor Walter Gellhorn introduces a model bill to create a public ombuds office
- 1968: Offices consolidated; global expansion
- 1969: ABA Resolution
- Mid-to-late-1960s: expansion of the nonclassical model
- The early 1970s: Nursing Home Ombuds Program Demonstration Project developed in seven states
- 1975, 1978: Older Americans Act



## **Historical Background of Ombuds in Higher Education**

Ombuds' evolution into the higher education sector is comparable to how many roles arrive in response to a need. This section will shed light on the need for an Ombuds evolved and rapidly spread across universities. The Vietnam War spanned from November 1, 1955 – April 30, 1975.

In the 1960s, no industry was immune to ripples from the civil rights movement. Ombuds was established in higher education to address conflicts of systemic proportion. The need for universal changes, especially in universities, spurred the adaptation of the ombuds concept to the educational setting. The ombuds role was quickly implemented at Eastern Montana College in 1966, and the first ombuds program began at Michigan State University in 1967. In Hayden's (1997) survey of 178 higher education institutions, participants were asked to share "the year the position was established, the supervising authority, what population they served, case number, and resolution times." Hayden garnered 109 respondents that, included 54 institutions with ombuds and seven persons without a title but similar duties. The global unrest of the Vietnam War, the draft, and civil turmoil, especially the National Guard shooting of a Kent State University student in 1970, provided ample evidence of the need for ombudsmen in the educational setting (Howard, 2011). Scholarly articles on the emergence of the ombuds' role as a wonderful alternative to violence birthed from the climate of social justice and civil unrest also began to appear toward the end of the 1960s (Newhart, 2007). Historically, and in some instances currently, the ombuds function goes by another name with similar responsibilities. Some titles are "Special Assistant to the President or Chancellor," "troubleshooter," "Assistant to the Chairman," "Dean of University Relations,"

"alternative communications channel," and a recent title of "Senior Advisor to the President" at Emory University (Howard, 2011, p. 14). Ombuds in higher education hold a unique privileged position as they have a responsibility for strategizing with leaders about concerns and different approaches to conflict resolution, reduction, and/or management (Hayden, 1997).

In 1970, President Nixon appointed the Commission on Campus Unrest, which gave special attention to grievance procedures and described the ombuds' role as a method to manage conflicts and respond informally to grievances (Howard, 2011). The Carnegie Corporation's Commission on Higher Education also encouraged the role of the ombuds as an "individual or agency to inform members of the campus of the appropriate agency to hear their complaints and suggestions, and to assist them in being heard" (Howard, 2011, p. 13). Steady growth in the profession occurred in that by 1971, 69 colleges or universities had appointed an ombud; the highest number of universities with an ombud occurred in the 1970s with 190 offices. By 1982, there were 100 sustaining offices (Howard, 2011).

The IOA membership more than doubled from approximately 150 in 2000 to 2007, rising from over 500 (Newhart, 2007) to 1,037 today. The explosion of the ombuds' role mirrors the current social climate in the United States, thus highlighting the need to explore competencies deemed critical for ombuds to advocate for justice and systemic changes. In 2018, the IOA had approximately 400 higher education institutions listed as members (Katz et al., 2018). I conducted a member search for ombuds in higher education on August 7, 2021, finding 474 Ombuds member institutions and 482 Ombuds

institutions when collateral duty ombuds were included as search criteria. This timeline shows a brief history of the ombuds in higher education progression.

- 1965: Simon Fraser University, British Columbia created the first nongovernmental adaptation.
- 1966: Eastern Montana College.
- 1967: Michigan State University; University of California, Berkeley
- 1970: Commission on Campus Unrest approvingly noted the role of campus ombuds following the Kent State uprising.
- 1971: Carnegie Corporation's Commission on Higher Education 69 colleges or universities had Ombuds (Howard, 2011)
- The 1970s: As many as 190 university and college ombuds offices
- 1973: California Caucus of College and University Ombuds established
- 1985: University and College Ombuds Association (UCOA) organized
- 2005: The IOA was established with the merger of UCOA and The Ombuds Association (TOA)
- 2022: 464 Higher education ombuds members in IOA

### **What Ombuds Do**

For the ombuds community, the desire to explain the word ombuds is just as complex as explaining what ombuds do, how ombuds add value to the organization, and what qualifies ombuds to serve in this role where confidentiality is the key to success. Although the role of ombuds has existed for years, much of the literature conducted around the role in the 1960s is not accessible in electronic forms or databases. Rowe and Hicks (2004) conducted the most recent research and contained a discussion of the

functions of the organizational ombuds. Hedeem et al. (2018) expanded on earlier definitions and identified a list of functions for organizational ombudsmen (see Figure 2).

**Figure 2**

*Organizational Ombuds Functions*

<p><b>Building the perception of being fair, safe accessible and credible</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Delivering respect</li> <li>▪ Listening actively</li> <li>▪ Providing and explain information</li> <li>▪ Receiving vital information</li> <li>▪ Helping individuals and groups to make sense of their experiences</li> <li>▪ Reframing issues</li> <li>▪ Helping to develop options</li> </ul>	<p><b>Helping people help themselves</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Offering the option of referrals</li> <li>▪ Helping people help themselves to use a direct approach</li> <li>▪ Helping people find responsible affinity groups, mentors, and networks</li> <li>▪ “Looking into” a problem informally</li> <li>▪ Reviewing organizational data</li> <li>▪ Facilitating a generic approach</li> </ul>
<p><b>Offering informal intervention</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Offering shuttle diplomacy</li> <li>▪ Offering informal mediation inside the organization</li> <li>▪ Offering referrals for formal mediation by resources outside</li> <li>▪ “Looking into” a problem informally</li> <li>▪ Reviewing organizational data</li> <li>▪ Facilitating a generic approach</li> </ul>	<p><b>Supporting the mission of the organization and its conflict management system</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Getting out into the organization</li> <li>▪ Providing early warning of an issue that is “new”</li> <li>▪ Identifying and communication about pattern issues</li> <li>▪ Working for system change</li> <li>▪ Following up on system change options and informal recommendations</li> <li>▪ Helping informally and often invisibly, to connect and coordinate</li> <li>▪ Helping managers do professional development planning</li> </ul>

Adapted from: Rowe, Hedeem and Schneider 2020

Other attempts have been made to explore the characteristics and functions of ombuds in higher education (Katz et al., 2018; Tompkins Byer, 2017; Witzler, 2014).

Witzler (2014) noted the foundational training opportunity IOA provides is general training on standards of practice and the role of the ombuds, which supports the scarcity of consistency in definitive competencies for the profession. Tompkins Byer (2017)

explored the discrepancies and the lack of consistency surrounding the perception of ombuds in higher education. Tompkins Byer concluded,

While organizational ombudspeople who belong to the IOA unite under the IOA's standards of practice in theory, in practice they diverge in several areas, including the nature of their positions, hiring practices, the level of informality in their practice, their degree of isolation or integration within their institutions, how they cultivate relationships on campus, and how essential they consider ombuds offices to be for the effective functioning of the university. (p. 213)

The "2017 IOA Practice Survey for the Academic Sector" (Hedeen et al., 2018) provided a glimpse into the conflict surrounding the ombuds career path and the need for a detailed competency model with the following data. Of the 80 respondents to the survey, 32 respondents (40%) had master's degrees, 25 respondents (31.3%) had law degrees, and 18 respondents (22.5%) had doctoral degrees. Yet, 61 respondents (77.2%) stated they did not hold a CO-OP® endorsement. In addition, the survey revealed that 43/80 respondents (53.8%) were solo practitioners, while 65/80 respondents (84.4%) responded there were no promotional opportunities in their role. In support of this data, Katz et al. (2018) discovered in their sample size of 11, the ombuds and directors held the following credentials: (2) PhDs in conflict resolution, (1) Ph.D. in organizational communication, (1) renowned scholar and practitioner in dispute resolution, (4) certified mediators, (2) CO-OP® practitioners, (1) certificate in dispute resolution, (1) professional in human resources (SPHR®), (5) Juris Doctorates with some specialization in labor, arbitration, or related focus and (1) who had a renowned career focused on ethics and labor practices (p. 8).

## **Essential Ombuds Characteristics**

There is a limited but rapidly expanding amount of literature accessible about the different tasks of ombuds in higher education in comparison to ombuds who serve other populations. Newhart (2007) reported the ombuds to operate as a "highly visible" (p. 19) conflict resolution service provider to a large-scale population, assisting with the interpretation of regulations, procedures, referrals, informational consultations, and mediations. The characteristics of the role are identified as conflict resolution practitioners who serve to mediate between groups, attempt to anticipate conflict, attempt to prevent conflict, take a proactive role in identifying areas of conflict, raise awareness to appropriate administrators, serve group and individual conflict from all members of the university community (Howard, 2011, p. 15).

Higher education institutions are complex organizations that blend business principles to create a distinctive governance culture (Katz et al., 2018). Universities operate under one of two styles of governance: bureaucratic corporation or faculty-led shared governance (p. 2). Preliminary research conducted by Hayden (1997) highlighted that "although the ombuds role is structured differently based on institutions, there is consistency in providing responsible, trustworthy, confidential, and various exploratory approaches to conflict resolution or reduction in a responsible manner to their clients" (p. 12).

Witzler (2014) provided the most recent researched data on ombuds practicing in higher education, noting characteristics that focus on the practice versus the characteristics of the practitioner. In these complex environments, ombuds serve as a channel to raise awareness among leaders about the pressing social issues facing the

educational community. Katz et al. (2018) found that ombuds in higher education spend a large portion of their time performing three key functions: addressing top employee issues, education outreach, and systemic review. Hedeem et al. (2018) described ombuds as providing accessible, responsive, independent, and confidential services via respectful listening, access to relevant information, tips for navigating other offices, coaching to support visitors to self-advocate, or mediation. According to Tompkins Byer (2017), the ombuds offer a space for visitors to voice their grievances without fear of retaliation because of the standards of confidentiality. Raines and Harrison (2020) highlighted that the ombuds might provide conflict coaching to visitors, offer feedback to organizational leaders, offer training, conduct assessments, and engage in activities designed for conflict reduction or resolution.

In summary, ombuds are effective in addressing conflict concerns by reporting organizational matters to the highest levels of an organization (Escalante, 2018; Howard, 2011). Specifically, the need for ombuds in higher education is understandable, considering the evolution of the ombuds role. As a more educated workforce emerges, employees and students can identify their own needs; constituents want ways to impact the structure of the system and experiences of their specific environment (Ziegenfuss & O'Rourke, 2011). Ombuds are a part of that structure in the sense that they serve as skip-level intervention awareness raisers. Newhart (2007) stated that ombuds operate confidentially, offer options for resolution, and informally investigate concerns independently and impartially.

### **Types of Cases Received by Ombuds**

In the introduction to the *Ombuds Handbook*, Ziegenfuss and O'Rourke (2011) underscored the types of cases ombuds receive, which focus on "people problems" (p. 5) between management and employees, individual interest versus organizational interest and equity of treatment. The types of cases an ombud can receive are varied. Escalante (2018) highlighted how ombuds might be called upon to address concerns of incivility ranging from "rudeness, disrespect, microaggressions, passive aggression, workplace harassment, emotional tyranny, and other abrasive behaviors" (p. 37). Ziegenfuss and O'Rourke shed light on data showing that the more educated a population is, the more they "voice their concerns, want fair treatment, and can see through organizational propaganda to smooth over issues versus making changes" (p. 65).

Ombuds can also receive cases related to demographic conflicts. Cross-cultural problems emerge in cases of diversity in cultural behaviors, physical accommodations, favoritism, privilege, and generational differences (Ziegenfuss & O'Rourke, 2011). Most ombuds keep track of the types of cases they receive and use their tracking to communicate with leaders about their perceived effectiveness by writing and sharing annual reports, although this is not a consistent practice for all ombuds.

Ombuds serve as conflict resolution options explorers and receive a variety of cases regarding workplace concerns. The primary role of the ombuds is to provide a safe space for visitors to share their perspectives with the ombuds in an informal setting. There is still confusion on exactly what the ombuds do to help bring about a resolution to issues brought to their attention.



### **Ombuds' Necessary Skills**

Ombuds in higher education serve a large population and report trends of conflict to the highest levels of an organization (Escalante, 2018; Howard, 2011). Ombuds offices assist visitors with any type of university-related conflict. Hollis (2015) highlighted metaphorically that ombuds serve as "canaries in the mine" by raising awareness of workplace bullying and toxic work concern (p. 23). As previously highlighted, the IOA 2008 and 2016 job analyses identified several domains of functions and tasks. Figure 3 has been the basis for most research conducted on organizational ombuds. In 2008, the IOA, in collaboration with Schroeder Measurements Technologies, Inc. (SMT), conducted scientific research job analysis for organizational ombuds and identified performance activities (tasks) and KSAs from the survey's 200 respondents (IOA, 2009). Findings yielded six domains with subtask categories for entry-level organizational

The most significant area of opportunity in the current certification model is that the CO-OP certification is a nonsanctioned authority and only assesses the knowledge.

According to Katz et al. (2018), there is a consistency of services provided in conflict intervention approaches, yet variances in reflective listening and active listening as special skills are held by different ombuds. Many scholars and practitioners agree on the functions of the ombuds, but there remains disagreement about the skills needed to perform those functions effectively. Ziegenfuss and O'Rourke (2011) described an ombuds who embodies all the identified competencies as having an "expert power" knowledge base and "personal power" individual traits (p. 94).

In support of this description of competencies, Katz et al. (2018) stated that most ombuds in higher education have a "specialization in conflict resolution ... [and a] sense

of commitment and purpose" (p. 8) to the role they play in the institution. The implication of these behavioral skills, such as patience, listening, and empathy, are described at a surface level with little in-depth research on the topic. Ziegenfuss and O'Rourke (2011) addressed the behavioral competencies of ombuds, referencing that ombuds should be able to take "technical and social-psychological approaches" (pp. 180–181) to conflicts since ombuds receive cases that overlap on the social and technical aspects of the organization. In 2014, Witzler conducted a dissertation project to explore the characteristics of higher education organizational ombuds practices. Witzler's research on practicing ombuds with three or more years of experience found comparable educational data with all seven participants. Every participant in the study held advanced degrees. The awareness and reality-checking ombuds provide visitors are rooted in the context of the organization's values and historical knowledge of organizational processes for accountability. Ombuds' ability to leverage conflict resolution, conflict reduction, or conflict management intervention methods that blend well into organizational dispute systems is a competency not effectively evaluated.

### **Why Ombuds Should be Considered a Profession**

Although a fairly young vocation, ombuds in higher education as a practice have many of the elements to be considered a profession. Greenwood (1957) identified key areas for a profession: (a) highlight the element, (b) extensive education, (c) augment the profession to have professional authority, and (d) have advanced knowledge of the potential client. The systematic body of theory for ombuds is primarily rooted in conflict intervention methods in dispute resolution. In the 1990s, there was an explosion in the application of ADR for corporations to address disputes internally (Lipsky et al., 2003;

Newhart, 2007). According to U.S. News & World Report (n.d.), there were 98 dispute resolution master's programs in the United States as of 2021. The opportunity to attend extensive training in skills to be an ombuds is evident with the current offerings in the study of ADR.

Greenwood (1957) discussed the importance of the community sanctioning and regulating a code of ethics. Many practitioners in the field made attempts to organize and legitimize the role with the formation of the California Caucus of College and University Ombuds in 1973 and the University and College Ombuds Association in 1985 (Howard, 2011). The growth spurt of ombuds and the collaborative efforts to be recognized as a profession continue. The Corporate Ombuds Association changed its name to The Ombuds Association and defined essential characteristics and functions of the ombuds. The Ombuds Association developed a code of ethics, followed by defining ethical principles ombuds should follow in accordance with the University and College Ombuds Association (Howard, 2011). The most significant area of opportunity for the role of the ombuds is professional authority and sanction of the community by providing a formal approval process and oversight for practitioners (Greenwood, 1957). I am aware that although the role of ombuds is still evolving. However, the evolution is ripe for deeper analysis into solidifying our professional standards by expanding our governing associations' authority. The criteria to fulfill Greenwood's (1957) identified attributes of professional authority and sanctions of the community is a lofty goal. This research project will serve as one piece to support the professional association's efforts to preserve and continue the growth of the role of ombuds in higher education.

## Suggested Competencies Model

The minimal competencies required for entry-level ombuds are displayed in Figure 3 as designed by the IOA. This skill review applied the term competencies to maintain consistency and parallel to other models. In addition, IOA conducted a 2016 job analysis focus group that was used to develop the IOA CO-OP exam (Schroeder Measurement Technologies, 2016). As a result, competency is defined as knowledge, skills, and abilities (KSAs). The report listed these competencies as *Domains/Tasks*.

**Figure 3**

### CO-OP Domains

CO-OP® Domains (Based on 2016 Job Analysis)						
DOMAIN #1 – RECOGNIZE ETHICAL PRINCIPLES (EPS) & FOUNDATIONAL THEORIES (FTs)	#1A – IOA Code of Ethics and Standards of Practice	#1B – Interpersonal and Organizational Communication	#1C – Conflict Theory	#1D – Program Operations		
	1. Recognize Ethical Principles a. Independence i. Define independence ii. Identify what promotes/fosters independence iii. Identify what prevents/hinders independence b. Neutrality and Impartiality i. Define neutrality and impartiality ii. Identify what promotes/fosters neutrality and impartiality iii. Identify what prevents/hinders neutrality and impartiality 2. Recognize limits of ombudsman practice	c. Confidentiality i. Define confidentiality ii. Identify what promotes/fosters confidentiality iii. Identify what prevents/hinders confidentiality iv. Identify exceptions to confidentiality d. Informality i. Define informality ii. Identify what promotes/fosters informality iii. Identify what prevents/hinders informality 2. Recognize limits of ombudsman practice	1. Identify active listening techniques 2. Recognize skillful questioning 3. Recognize aspects of inclusion and diversity 4. Recognize techniques for communicating with influence 5. Identify concepts of emotional intelligence 6. Interpret nonverbal cues 7. Select effective presentation techniques 8. Recognize elements of group facilitation	9. Identify effective written communication 10. Identify appropriate use of written and verbal reporting 11. Define methods for fostering trust and building rapport 12. Identify effective marketing and program promotion 13. Identify strategies for relationship-building 14. Recognize potential for risk	1. Identify conflict styles 2. Identify features of interest-based negotiation 3. Identify conflict resolution techniques 4. Identify sources and elements of conflict 5. Identify power dynamics in conflict	1. Identify elements of an effective ombudsman work-setting (e.g., physical space, technology) 2. Define metrics for program evaluation
DOMAIN #2 – APPLY EPS & FTS WHILE WORKING WITH INDIVIDUALS	#2A – Case Management	#2B – Ombudsman Actions				
	1. Determine elements for an opening statement 2. Determine strategies to elicit individual narratives 3. Analyze sources of conflict 4. Detect the issues and interests	5. Determine and evaluate options (i.e., pros and cons) 6. Determine strategies for pursuing options 7. Determine follow-up strategies	1. Identify when and how to gather information 2. Identify when and how to raise a concern 3. Apply shuttle diplomacy 4. Apply coaching strategies	5. Apply use of informal inquiries 6. Apply use of referrals (internal or external) 7. Apply mediation or facilitation techniques		
DOMAIN #3 – APPLY EPS & FTS WHILE WORKING WITH ORGANIZATIONS	#3A – Know the Organization	#3B – Build Organizational Effectiveness	#3C – Influence Leadership			
	1. Locate common sources of policies, procedures, and resources (i.e., stated and unstated) 2. Recognize impact of organizational structure and decision-making processes 3. Identify culture, values, and norms 4. Identify vision, mission, and goals	1. Design and deliver education 2. Develop methods for disseminating relevant information	1. Advocate for proper ombudsman program administration and office design 2. Determine strategies to build stakeholder relationships 3. Use data effectively 4. Identify and share trends and patterns 5. Detect and deliver early warnings 6. Identify systemic issues 7. Recommend improvement options			

Source: IOA CO-OP exam (Schroeder Measurement Technologies, 2016).

In the designing phases of this project, the researcher, in collaboration with the chair of the IOA, focused on defining these functions into alternative dispute resolution intervention methods. In this qualitative case study, I sought to explore what methods ombuds in higher education use to acquire critical competencies for the role by asking participants to discuss technical and behavioral competencies. Functional competencies also outlined in Table 2 were not explored in this research project due to the complexity of state laws the varying charters have, which govern the role of ombuds in each state. The three categories of competencies are based on inferences about the phenomenon from the literature review and my personal perspective. Table 2 highlights how the domains were changed into the recommended organizational ombuds competency model.

**Table 2**

*Competencies by Category*

Technical	Behavioral	Functional
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Conflict Management</li> <li>    Conflict Resolution Styles</li> <li>● Change Management</li> <li>● Crisis Management</li> <li>● Mediation</li> <li>● Facilitation</li> <li>● Negotiation</li> <li>● Coaching</li> <li>● Dispute Systems</li> <li>    Assessment &amp; Design</li> <li>● Teaching</li> <li>● Training</li> <li>● Data Analysis</li> <li>● Marketing</li> <li>● Public Relations</li> <li>● Budget Management</li> <li>● Formal/Informal Inquiry</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Ombuds Integrity</li> <li>● Professional Integrity</li> <li>● Recognizes personal Bias, Ethical Agent</li> <li>● Relationship Management</li> <li>● Stress Management</li> <li>● High Emotional and Social Intelligence</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● IOA Standard of Practice</li> <li>● IOA Ethical Principles</li> <li>● Sexual Misconduct Policies</li> <li>● Legislation and Legal</li> </ul>

The recommended organizational ombuds competency model borrows from two other models: the International Coaching Federation (ICF, n.d.) and SHRM (2022). The four core competencies of the ICF closely parallel the ombuds profession and provide a structure for categorizing the role of the ombuds in higher education. The four competencies are: (a) setting the foundation, (b) cocreating the relationship, (c) communicating effectively, and (d) facilitating learning and results (ICF, n.d.) Setting the foundation involves sharing expectations, clearly communicating the agreement, and assessing if there is compatibility between the ombuds and visitor. Cocreating the relationship occurs when the ombuds build trust and show respect to the visitor's styles and preferences. Communicating effectively happens through active listening, interviewing, and exploring options with the visitor. Finally, facilitating learning and results is rooted in awareness, accountability, and evaluating decisions (ICF, n.d.). Ombuds should explore how they implement the qualities that describe each competency. The SHRM (2022) Competency Model takes the deepest dive into technical, behavioral, and functional competencies by defining each skill in detail and then expanding on the level of proficiency in the SHRM certification levels. In this project, I aim to align IOA domains and functions to conflict resolution and management terms they define, hoping to take a step toward the level and structure that ICF and SHRM have attained.

The first part of this project was to streamline and define the functional domains broken down into tasks aligned to conflict management and resolution terminology. The second step was to show the alignment in table format for readers to understand the aim of this research project. Lastly, I showed the aim for a structural frame of competencies comparable to other professions.

Chapter 3 provides an explanation of the methodology used for this research project. The chapter contains discussions of qualitative research methodology, why a case study approach was chosen, the sampling and recruitment process, data collection, the qualitative interview process, and the alignment of interview questions to the research questions. The chapter concludes with an overview of the data analysis procedures.

## Chapter 3: Methodology

### **Research Project Methodology**

The specific competencies surrounding the role of the ombuds in higher education have received scant scholarly attention. Mary Newhart (2007) explored the rise of alternative dispute resolution to influence the services offered by ombuds in higher education. Lisa Witzler (2014) explored "characteristics of the practice" by ombuds in higher education. Tessa Tompkins Byer (2017) touched on the topic of ombuds in higher education evaluation criteria and discovered that 63% of her research project participants evaluated themselves based on the number of cases handled (p. 231). Although much data exists on the ombuds' practice, skills, and knowledge, there needs to be more research on how those skills were acquired or how skills and knowledge are evaluated. Furthermore, there needs to be more consistency in the agreement of what ombuds consider essential skills to practice in higher education settings.

This research project aimed to learn what ombuds in higher education consider vital competencies in critical knowledge, skills, and behaviors. Another goal was to determine how those skills are acquired and evaluated. The research questions guiding this qualitative case study were:

**RQ1:** What do ombuds in higher education consider vital competencies?

**RQ2:** How do ombuds in higher education acquire vital competencies?

**RQ3:** How do ombuds in higher education assess required competencies?

### **Qualitative Research Approach**

A qualitative approach is best suited to meet my research objectives. According to Marshall and Rossman (2011), qualitative inquiry is designed to explore the lived



experiences of research participants to provide in-depth knowledge about a particular phenomenon. Sullivan-Bolyai and Bova (2021) described the qualitative inquiry as a naturalistic inquiry paradigm or constructivist perspective that allows an insider's view of the research phenomenon and aligns with the researcher's study goals. I selected a qualitative research approach to explore ombuds' narrative responses to look for consistencies in their lived experiences (Marshall & Rossman, 2011). The qualitative approach gave me a deeper insight into how ombuds perceive and define their skills beyond what had been previously shared in the literature. I selected the case study approach to uncover what trends could be identified with a specific set of ombuds. According to Ragin and Becker (1992), "[a case study] investigation might lead to an identification of an important subset of instances with many common characteristics, which might be conceived, in turn, as cases of the same thing" (p. 10).

### **Case Study**

A case study approach allows researchers to select a set of cases that can be bounded by specific parameters to be compared accurately (Creswell & Poth, 2017). The place bounded this case study since all research participants were ombuds working in higher education in the United States; it was also bounded by time since all interviews were completed over two weeks in 2021. A descriptive case study approach also supported meeting the criteria of a qualitative research design for validity. This research project embodied Yin's (2009) suggestions that a case study instrument should gather a single data point. The criteria met the protocol, thus increasing the reliability of the case study, and were used to guide the researcher during data collection in each case (Yin,

2009). Case study methodology helped clarify and refine the competencies already identified as critical to the ombuds' role.

### **Sampling and Recruitment**

The inclusion criterion for this study was based on the case parameters and many research objectives. In order to be eligible to participate in the study, participants had to be ombuds working in higher education in the United States. This criterion was established to build on recent research on ombuds in higher education and because higher education ombuds are one of the largest groups of organizational ombuds. Once the criterion and research proposal was accepted, I submitted my proposal and received approval from the Nova Southeastern University Institutional Review Board (IRB) to start my research participant recruitment. First, I invited interested ombuds to contact me using my LinkedIn network of 1,700 connections. Next, I drafted a simple survey in SurveyMonkey to determine eligibility and schedule interviews. The survey link collected the following information from interested individuals: an (a) name, (b) university, (c) phone number, and (d) email address. Table 3 shows the demographic breakdown of the participants.

**Table 3***Participant Demographics*

Demographic	Number of Participants ( <i>N</i> = 23)
Gender	
Female	17
Male	6
Educational Background	
B.A.	1
MA	6
J.D.	11
PhD	5
Years of Experience	
1–5 years	10
6–10 years	8
11+ years	5

**Data Collection**

In keeping with qualitative case study methodology, I used multiple methods to collect data: document analysis, surveys, and in-depth interviews. As a result of the document analysis, I decided to extend Kovack's (2021) research on higher education ombuds and answer three research questions about the competencies required to be an ombuds in higher education.

I have been an active member of the ombuds community for almost 10 years. During this time, I transitioned from a graduate student in both master's and Ph.D. programs to staff, adjunct faculty, and finally, associate ombuds in higher education. These multiple roles afforded me a multifaceted perspective as a participatory observer of the need for a competency model, a clear career path, and assessments for the role of the ombuds in higher education. According to Kumar (2011), "The main advantage of participant observation is that the researcher spends sufficient time with the group or in

the situation ... [thus allowing] richer and more accurate information, but the main disadvantage [is the researcher may develop or] introduce their own bias" (p. 392). I mitigated bias by asking open-ended questions during the semi-structured interviews.

I conducted a document analysis for suggestions related to the technical competencies assessment portion of the model. In addition, I investigated ADR certification and surveyed bachelor's, master's, and Ph.D. curricula and syllabi in academic programs. I studied suggested textbooks to determine trends and consistencies in defining the role of the ombuds. I also gathered "information from document analysis and in-depth interviews [to] enhance the richness of the information collected by participant observation" (Kumar, 2011, p. 141). Finally, to bind my case, I focused on the technical, behavioral, and functional skills needed by organizational ombuds in higher education settings in the United States (see Table 4 in Chapter 2).

I consulted with the IOA Professional Development Committee Co-Chair, Susan Casino, for expert opinion and review of questions about the competencies, assessment tools, and career paths identified by the IOA. This strategy was used to support clarity in the expectations of organizational ombuds and to continue the evolution of the role. The alignment of interview questions to the study's research questions can be found in Appendix D. With Susan Casino, I designed the technical, behavioral, and functional skills table shown in Chapter 2. The IOA Professional Development Committee is the primary organizational ombuds professional development and training source. To support the mission of the IOA in providing quality training and alignment to the role of organizational ombud, Susan Casino and I aligned the domains from previous IOA job analysis research projects to the skills described in the dispute resolution and conflict

management field of study. We looked at the domains identified in the 2008 (IOA, 2008) and 2016 (Schroeder Measurement Technologies, Inc., 2016) IOA Job Analysis reports and assigned the technical names to the definitions provided by the analysis. In my evaluation, I recognized the researchers of the job analysis report used a case study survey design to define the domains of the tasks ombuds use in their roles, which increased the validity of their findings, as recommended by Yin (2009). Table 4 lists the technical, behavioral, and functional skills identified for higher education ombuds.

**Table 4**

*Higher Education Ombuds' Technical, Behavioral, and Functional Skills*

Technical	Behavioral	Functional
Budget Management	Ombuds Integrity	IOA Ethical Principles
Change Management	Awareness of Personal Bias	IOA Standard of Practice
Coaching	Ethical Agent	Legislation and Legal Sexual Misconduct Policies
Conflict Management	Relationship Management	
Conflict Resolution Styles	Networking	
Crisis Management	Effective Communication	
Data Analysis	Global and Cultural Effectiveness	
Dispute Systems Assessment & Design	Stress Management	
Facilitation	Emotional and Social Intelligence/Self-Awareness	
Informal Inquiry		
Marketing		
Mediation		
Negotiation		
Public Relations		
Teaching		
Training		

### Qualitative Interviews

I developed my data collection instrument based on the document analysis of domains and functions to competencies. First, I sent a request for participants using my LinkedIn network by sharing my participant criteria. Next, I shared a survey monkey link to confirm each participant met the criteria and asked for their contact information to

send the research participant consent form. Once I received participant informed consent, I conducted semi-structured interviews with 23 practicing ombuds in higher education via Zoom for two weeks.

After the first round of interviews, as I reflected on the process, I discovered I was leading the participants by giving examples of acquiring the competency, defining the competency, and potential processes for accessing knowledge. Therefore, before the second round of interviews, I modified my questionnaire to include examples of alternative dispute resolution intervention methods and definitions of competencies. For instance, I shared the processes and definitions of the technical competencies that align with the functions defined by IOA.

In my reflection, I also noted I needed to include ombuds who had been in their role for under ten years. In addition, I was curious to see if my theory of experience, behavioral skills, and technical skills would emerge from additional data. I, therefore, invited three other participants to the research project.

In this final round of interviews, I discovered I could share fewer examples of methods and assessments with the second group described by participants in previous interviews. Many ombuds who had completed alternative dispute resolution training could identify specific coursework that had informed their knowledge and added to their ability to assess during visitor encounters. I did observe a consistent value in coaching as an essential competency for ombuds. This trend will yield itself well to help ombuds customize and craft their specific styles. Ombuds' specific style of collaborative visitor conversations could blend conflict coaching models from Patricia Porter (i.e., Cindy Noble or Patricia Jones), executive coaching, or another type of coaching that has yet to

emerge from the data. I found that many research participants placed a priority and considerable value on behavior as a critical competency. This value was placed prior to sharing Table 4. Interestingly, many participants placed behavior as a value prior to those technical skills. Another premature yet identifiable competency is institutional knowledge, i.e., understanding of higher education systems bureaucracies and some specific to the historical trends that are conflict-related for specific institutions.

The primary purpose of the open-ended questions was to learn participants' perspectives about the critical competencies needed to perform the ombuds role, what methods they used to acquire the knowledge needed to be effective in their role, and how they assess these skills.

The interview questions were designed to generate data that would answer the three primary research questions. I used a variety of questions to ensure the participants' perspectives could be gathered. Some of the open-ended questions were:

1. What previous life and professional experiences prepared you for this role?
2. What do you believe the key competencies are for university ombuds?
3. How did you acquire the competencies required for the role you did not initially have?
4. How does your university evaluate your performance as the ombuds?
5. Do you know what your strengths are regarding ombuds competencies?  
(Yes/No)
  - a. How do you know these are your strengths?
6. Do you know what your weaknesses are regarding ombuds competencies?  
(Yes/No)

- a. How have you become aware of these?
7. How have you worked to strengthen the areas of weakness?
8. If you are part of an ombuds team, does the team meet regularly to debrief and analyze cases and to provide constructive feedback to each other?
9. What, if any, degree or certifications do you believe are most important for university ombuds?

In addition to open-ended questions, I asked structured questions based on the competencies rendered in the document analysis and the table designed from the job analysis reports. During these questions, I shared my screen via Zoom and entered participants' responses as they answered.

Using a blend of structured and unstructured questions in a case study interview protocol is common. (Yin, 2009). In this study, interview questions 10–14 were blended between structured and unstructured questions (see example in Figure 4).

#### Figure 4

##### *Example of Structured and Unstructured Questions Used in This Study*

10. → How do you assess your office effectiveness?¶			
a. → Number of cases¶			
b. → Number of resolved conflicts¶			
c. → Amount of time the office saved the university in formal grievances¶			
d. → Amount of money the office saved the university in legal fees¶			
e. → Other (please explain)¶			
11. Please rate these 14 technical ombuds competencies in order of importance to the ombuds role from your perspective. ¶			
Conflict Management□	□	Dispute Systems Assessment & Design□	□
Change Management□	□	Training□	□
Crisis Management□	□	Data Analysis□	□
Mediation□	□	Informal Investigations□	□
Facilitation□	□	Public Relations□	□
Negotiation□	□	Budget Requirement/Management□	□
Coaching□	□	Marketing□	□



Table 5 shows the alignment of the interview questions to the primary research questions.

**Table 5**

*Alignment of Research Questions to Interview Questions*

---

**RQ1. What do ombuds in higher education consider key competencies?**

2. What do you believe are the critical competencies for university ombuds?
10. What, if any, degree or certifications do you believe are most important for university ombuds?
11. Please rate the 14 technical ombuds competencies, in order of importance to the ombuds role from your perspective.
13. Please rate the nine behavioral ombuds competencies in order of importance to the ombuds role from your perspective.

**RQ2. How do ombuds in higher education acquire key competencies?**

1. What previous life and professional experiences prepared you for this role?
3. How did you acquire the competencies required for the role you did not initially have?
8. How have you worked to strengthen the areas of weakness?
12.
  - a. What was the method used to acquire the necessary knowledge for each technical competency? (e.g., degree coursework/certifications, on-the-job training, previous role, trial and error, reading, training)
  - b. If coursework was involved, what was the duration of the course?
  - c. How do you assess your personal competency in 14 key areas?
14.
  - a. What method was used to acquire the necessary knowledge for each behavioral competency?
  - b. If coursework was involved, what was the duration of the course?
  - c. How do you assess your competency for each?

**RQ3. How do ombuds in higher education assess required competencies?**

4. How does your university evaluate your performance as the ombuds?
  5. How do you assess your office's effectiveness?
    - a. Number of cases
    - b. Number of resolved conflicts
    - c. Amount of time the office saved the university in formal grievances
    - d. Amount of money the office saved the university in legal fees
    - e. Other (please explain)
  6. Do you know what your strengths are regarding ombuds competencies? (Yes/No)
    - a. How do you know these are your strengths?
  7. Do you know what your weaknesses are regarding ombuds competencies? (Yes/No)
    - a. How have you become aware of these?
  9. If you are part of an ombuds team, does the team meet regularly to debrief and analyze cases and to provide constructive feedback to each other?
    - a. What method was used to acquire the necessary knowledge for each technical competency? (such as degree coursework/ certifications, on-the-job training, previous role, trial and error, reading, and training)
    - b. If coursework was involved, what was the duration of the course?
    - c. How do you assess your competency for each?
  14.
    - a. What method was used to acquire the necessary knowledge for each behavioral competency?
    - b. If coursework was involved, what was the duration of the course?
    - c. How do you assess your personal competency for each?
- 

I designed a form to serve as a guide for the semi-structured interviews. I shared this form using the screen share feature in Zoom. The form allowed the research

participant the opportunity to see the questions so I could capture their ranking and answers in the table format. This process also supported organizing the data during the data analysis portion of this project. I used Otter.ai to transcribe the audio recordings of the interviews generated by Zoom because the technology can transcribe every word spoken. Using Otter.ai enabled me to replay the audio and follow the transcription, which proved a reliable transcription source.

### **Data Analysis**

Tables of the thematic analysis of the descriptive and pattern codes created from the interviews of the research participants and the qualitative analysis of the ranking of competencies can be found in Appendix E, Tables 13 - 49. All participants were given a pseudonym. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 23 practicing ombuds in a higher education organization. The interview form consisted of 14 questions.

In the first round of data analysis, I used a descriptive coding approach described by Saldaña (2008), a case study methodologist. Methodologists defined this methodology as "topic coding," usually using a noun to identify the code (Saldaña, 2008). During the second cycle of coding, I used a pattern coding method. Saldaña (2008) stated, "Use the pattern code as a stimulus to develop a statement to describe a major theme, a pattern of action, a network of interrelationships, or a theoretical construct from the data" (p. 238). I used pattern coding to identify, analyze, and report patterns of themes to interpret the data from the research (Boyatzis, 1998; Braun & Clarke, 2006).

### **Data Analysis Notes**

Many of the research participants were reflective and leaned heavily on the skills they had in their toolboxes. Because there is liberty in performing the role of ombuds,

each practitioner could assess how effective they were in their roles by applying their ADR skills. I codified the competencies gleaned from the document analysis in the initial qualitative data analysis. Saldaña (2008) stated that “to codify is to arrange things in a systematic order, to make something part of a system or classification to categorize” (p. 8). I used a categorical model following the SHRM (2022) model of technical, behavioral, and functional competencies. To analyze the data from the interviews, I used descriptive coding to “summarize in a word or short phrase the basic topic of a passage of qualitative data” (Saldaña, 2008, p. 70).

### **Q1 Code Example**

The code for J.D. was used for those participants who shared that they acquired competencies from a law school education and ADR for those who shared that they acquired the competencies from a master's program in alternative dispute resolution or conflict management. I continued this process for each interview question. The tables throughout this project highlight the frequencies of the coded themes.

Interview Question 1 asked, “What previous life and or professional experiences prepared you for this role?”

- Participant Alexandra Benson shared, “I am an attorney by education” J.D.
- Participant Bethany Wilson shared, “ I studied dispute resolution in law school.” ADR/JD
- Participant Benson Johnson shared, “I ultimately decided to go to law school in order to deepen my skill set in conflict resolution and mediation.” JD/ADR
- Participant Jackie Oman shared, "In law school, one of the alternative courses is alternative dispute resolution." JD/ADR

During the second coding cycle, I found many descriptive codes were the same as the theme codes. I suspect that this trend emerged due to many of my participants speaking the same technical language. Therefore, I add the frequency of themes tables to share how there are similarities and some consistencies in values. This is also important since many ombuds arrive in this profession and are solo practitioners; sharing the frequency of the coding allows the reader to also see where there are vast differences in some perspectives.

### **Ethical Considerations**

I was intentional in the ethical considerations related to interview questions 1–3. I made a narrative inquiry by asking open-ended questions about participants' perceptions and experiences that align with the competencies identified in the literature. Since ombudsing is often a mid-career job for many practitioners, I wanted to provide research participants space to share how they arrived at the role. This method allowed participants to share their reality by narrating their stories and experiences (Marshall & Rossman, 2011). The interview questions required a great deal of openness, trust, and mutual understanding of the primary concerns within the ombuds community. The data collection method served its purpose well since the researcher is active in IOA and supported the sincere collaboration of the participants for the research project goals (Marshall & Rossman, 2011).

### ***Trustworthiness—Potential Researcher Bias***

My role as an organizational ombud practicing in higher education allowed me to have insight into my research population's experiences but also made me want to be intentional in my methodology. I am the co-chair of the IOA Professional Development

Committee and know that my role, experiences, and education can stimulate the research project process in a way that may be perceived as biased. My personal biases that may emerge are rooted in my lived experience with two advanced degrees in the field of alternative dispute resolution and conflict management. Another potential bias is that I am currently practicing ombuds in a higher education organization and serve as an adjunct faculty member who teaches the Ombuds 101 course that covers the importance of the competencies identified. I managed my bias in this study by asking open-ended questions that allowed participants to share their perspectives without my influence or ideologies. The participants could have answered using their knowledge of the researcher's role; therefore, social desirability bias cannot be ruled out and should be considered. Newhart (2007) proposed, "ombuds function has been labeled and accepted as a method of dispute resolution" (p. 72); the data analysis of this project supports this position. The data analysis and coding technique in my results emphasizes the validity of my model and ethical considerations.

## Chapter 4: Results

I designed this research project to discover what ombuds in higher education consider to be critical competencies. I conducted semi-structured interviews with 23 participants, using an interview protocol that included open-ended and structured questions to gather data. Questions 1–10, which were open-ended, gathered the participants' experiences and perceptions. After this series of questions, I shared specific competencies identified in the 2008/2016 Focused Group Job Analysis used to design the IOA certification of Organizational Ombuds. These latter competencies guided the structured interview questions 11–14. In this chapter, I present the results of my analysis of this data based on the data analysis methods described in Chapter 3.

RQ1 asked, "What do Ombuds in higher education consider key competencies?"

This research question uncovered a theme of listening and a sub-theme of ADR intervention methods. This question was explored in interview questions 2,10,11, and 13.

### **Theme 1: Behavioral Competencies Most Important**

A majority of the participants felt behavioral competencies were the most critical for ombuds, with listening and communication as the leading competencies for ombuds. Twenty of the 23 participants in this study named a variety of behavioral competencies that were a blend of psychological and sociological themes. This theme is significant because it emerged from the open-ended interview question posed to participants. In addition, some of these competencies directly aligned with the nine IOA behavioral competencies shared in the ranking portion of the participants' interviews. Figure 5 shows the 21 competencies mentioned by 20 of 23 participants based on the themes I gathered from the research participants. It was clear from the analysis of their responses that all of

them agreed that the behavior of the ombuds is a critical factor for the ombuds role.

Figure 5 highlights the variety of themes that emerged from the data analysis.

**Figure 5**

*Behavioral Competencies Identified in Patterns Coding Analysis*

<b>Behavioral Competencies</b>	
Approachable Communication Compassionate Discernment Empathy Entrepreneurial Fair Flexible Attitude Good Rapport Helpful Humility	Humor Influence Integrity Maintaining/Building Relationships Open-minded Patient Listener Self-awareness Sympathetic Trustworthy Withholding Judgment

Participants indicated that patterns of behavior and mannerisms could impact how a visitor engages with the ombuds and how the ombuds operate regarding intervention methods. Figure 5 highlights the intricacy and fluidity participants feel they are essential. Ombuds must have the essence of being emotionally intelligent to connect with visitors and serve the organization well. The following behavior patterns were identified as critical competencies of ombuds within the parameters of the standards of practice and code of ethics.

## **Listening**

Participants' statements reflected the importance they placed on listening.

- Alexandra stated, "Being able to openly listen, take off the hat of judgment, and just listen."
- Carmela stated, "The ability to listen, reframe, and ask open-ended questions."
- Donald stated, "A person who is a good listener, who asks good questions, or probing questions."
- Elaine stated, "Listening, I would definitely say is a key competency."

From the pattern coding analysis, three participants shared knowledge of IOA, while eight participants specifically stated all or parts of the IOA Standards of Practice (SOP). Confidentiality, independence, impartiality, and neutrality are the standards that were emphasized as necessary for the behavior of the ombuds. The SOP serves as a filter for ombuds when engaged with a visitor.

### **Subtheme 1- Knowledge of ADR Intervention Methods Essential**

Most of the 23 participants noted a variety of alternative dispute resolution (ADR) intervention methods as a critical competency. This theme is significant because it emerged from data analysis of open-ended interview questions that asked participants "what they perceive as key competencies" and "what experiences prepared them for the role ." Remarkably, this result interpretation underscores the need for consistency in technical language to support consistency in practice.

Five ADR intervention methods were named directly. Table 6 displays the ADR intervention methods and the number of participants mentioned in each method.



**Table 6***ADR Intervention Methods with Frequency from Pattern Coding Analysis*

ADR Intervention Method	Frequency
Mediation	8
Coaching	6
Facilitation	2
Negotiation	1
Dispute Systems Assessment and Design (includes an understanding of higher ed structure, knowledge, experience, or institutional knowledge)	11

Some of the statements made by participants about ADR competencies included:

- Creston stated, "First, the ability to do research or conduct research and second, ADR (alternative dispute resolution) skill set; different concerns are going to require you to pull from different things. The third is being able to come up with strategies proposing solutions that are sometimes out of the box."
- Damien stated, "I think being knowledgeable about the processes at your university is very important... You need to know that institution's bylaws and codes, and if it is part of a state institution, you need to know the state's institutional framework."
- Jackie stated, "Understanding dispute resolution, conflict resolution methodology, and core concepts of mediation."
- Kip expanded on this framing by stating, "I think in terms of organization, universities... understand what shared governance and academic freedom..."

understanding why faculty have these privileges and how the staff is different; student roles and hierarchy."

- Rachel stated, "Helping people solve problems (listening, interest and issue identification, option generation); understanding academia; systems thinking; creating relationships."

In summary, 20 of the 23 participants emphasized behavioral competencies, while 17 of the 23 participants cited technical competencies as critical to the ombuds' role.

### **Theme 2: Competencies Learned Via Self-Seeking & On-the-job Training**

RQ2 asked, "How do ombuds in higher education acquire the required competencies?" This question was explored in Questions 1, 3, 8, and partially in Questions 12 and 14.

Ombuds in higher education are learning competencies for the role via self-seeking professional development and on the job. Reflecting on what had prepared them for being an ombud in higher education, participants recalled what lived experiences yielded the opportunity to practically apply competencies applicable to the Ombuds role. The pattern coding analysis of participants' responses identified four primary areas of experiences that the ombuds felt prepared them for the role: ADR education and conflict resolution career, law degree education and or legal career, higher education roles as a faculty member or staff, and family experience. Comparable to subtheme 1, many participants who had ADR had to seek it out and primarily focused on ADR experiences. The correlation between these themes is noteworthy because although there is no direct path for the ombuds role, many seek ADR knowledge.

Table 7 displays the top four areas named by participants as experiences that prepared them for their role, along with the frequency of responses.

**Table 7**

*Experiences That Prepared Ombuds for Their Role Pattern Coding*

Experience	Ranking	Number of Respondents ( <i>N</i> = 23)
ADR/Conflict Resolution	1	19
Higher Education Roles (faculty, staff, student)	2	11
Legal Education/Career	3	10
Family Dynamics/Values	4	7

- Bethany stated, "I studied dispute resolution in law school. Therefore, I had the alternative dispute resolution training during law school and after mediation, training, and (work) experience."
- Benson shared, "I ultimately decided to go to law school in order to deepen my skill set in conflict resolution and mediation."
- Jackie stated, "One of those (experiences) was law school... and masters of dispute resolution."
- Jameson stated, "I got my master's in conflict management."
- Kip stated, "I started as an attorney."

### **Acquiring Competencies**

Interview Question 3 asked, "How did you acquire the competencies for the role you did not initially have?" Respondents listed a variety of opportunities in which they acquired the competencies they needed and did not initially have when beginning in the role. Based upon pattern coding of the data, the results indicated that the top four

methods for acquiring competencies were on-the-job training/collaboration with other ombuds, self-seeking/professional development, IOA, and graduate school. Table 8 displays the top four ways participants acquired the competencies needed to perform their roles and the frequency of responses.

**Table 8**

*Ways Competencies Were Acquired*

Competency Acquired Via	Ranking	Number of Respondents ( <i>N</i> = 23)
Self-Seeking/Professional Development	1	18
On-the-job Training/Collaboration	2	17
IOA	3	10
Graduate School	4	6

Some of the statements made by participants about how they acquired competencies included,

- Alma stated, “Graduate school, then I would say (IOA) foundations.”
- Bethany shared, “I read many books on conflict coaching, Title IX ... listened to TED talks on leadership coaching because I found that to be a big part of the role. Then through courses by IOA and USOA or other closely connected fields, i.e., human resources and DEIB.”
- Creston recalled, "It was a combination of a graduate degree, professional work experience in ADR, and life experiences."
- Carmela shared, "I shadowed other ombuds, I took the IOA courses, I had a mentor from IOA whom I consulted with. A lot of on-the-job learning ... made and learned from some mistakes."

Many participants indicated strengthening their ombuds competencies by self-seeking knowledge and stretching themselves. This included seeking out courses, seeking knowledge from other ombuds through feedback or collaborations, or augmenting their skills via reading books or journals. In addition, participants cited on-the-job training as a method to acquire knowledge in technical competencies, coursework, and degree programs of note; a few participants did not believe Budget Requirement/Management, Facilitation, Negotiation, and Dispute Systems Assessment & Design were not applicable to them.

### **Theme 3: Effectiveness Determined by Formal Assessments, Usage, and Surveys**

RQ3 stated, "How do ombuds in higher education assess required competencies?" This question was explored in Interview Questions 4, 5, 6, 7, 9, 12, and 14. Higher education Ombuds assess their effectiveness through a formal program of study assessments, office usage, and anonymous surveys. The researcher used a combination of responses from the seven questions to determine how the participants assessed higher education ombuds' technical and behavioral competencies. The most striking data discovered is consistency in approaches participants value to assess their competencies. However, the analysis did not explore the specifics of the survey questions asked for an assessment. This theme is significant because many ombuds are solo practitioners, so there is the liberty to design surveys to individual interests. The qualitative analysis is provided below, and the quantitative data can be found in Appendix E.

## Performance Evaluation

Interview Question 4 asked, "How does your university evaluate your performance?" Table 9 displays the types of evaluations mentioned and the frequency of responses for each type that emerged from pattern coding analysis.

**Table 9**

*Types and Frequency of Evaluation from Pattern Coding*

Type of Evaluation	Frequency ( <i>N</i> = 23)
Traditional Performance Review	13
Feedback	12
Supervisor feedback	9
Survey	11
I do not know/am not sure	9
360 Review – assessment tool	3

Some participants shared the following responses:

- Damien shared, "So I can honestly say, I do not know. I have put together a feedback survey that I give to everybody who visits the office. I also have an advisory panel with representatives of each constituency."
- Elaine shared, "We have an H.R. process and performance plans. In addition, we have core competencies that the university requires for all staff."
- Karlie shared, "They would send out a campus-wide survey about the Ombuds office (covering) four main qualities: confidentiality, neutrality, informality, and independence and make sure people felt that I was living up to those standards and then asked for general feedback."
- Cicely shared, "Quite truthfully, my interactions with the provost and president are probably it. Furthermore, that is how it has always been, at least for 20–30 years."

- Timothy shared, "I have no clue. Probably my assessment that I write before theirs and also word of mouth."

### **Office Effectiveness**

Interview Question 5 asked, "How do you assess your office's effectiveness?"

Participants were given six methods of evaluation: (a) the number of cases, (b) the number of resolved conflicts, (c) the amount of time the office saved the university in formal grievances, (d) the amount of money the office save the university in legal fees, (e) other [please explain].

**Table 10**

*Types and Frequency of Self-Assessment from Pattern Coding*

Type of Assessment	Frequency ( <i>N</i> = 23)
Number of cases	22
Feedback/ Surveys / Testimonials	14
Annual Reports	9
Outreach engagement	7
Time spent on a case	5
Leadership invitations to conflict	4

Some participants shared the following responses:

- Bethany shared, "I use comparative analysis with other programs to see about the work we are doing: our utilization rate and resolution rates, things like that."
- Carmela stated, "All the above, to some extent, with our anonymous surveys for trainings and visitor evaluations."
- Donald stated, "One way is when are not going so well, whose called to the table and amongst a part of the team that's called to the table when leadership is grappling with issues."

- Robert described, "I keep a lot of data. I measure impact in post-contact surveys."
- Terra shared, "We track our time and include the number of hours we work with groups and compare those to the cost of a consultant."

In conclusion, this section showcased the research project findings that Ombuds in higher education consider behavioral competencies the most critical competencies. Further, they emphasize the importance of knowledge of ADR intervention methods, and most ombuds acquired essential competencies from conflict resolution courses or programs.

### **Results of Ranking Questions**

In addition to open-ended questions, participants responded to several structured questions asking them to rate or rank for specific information. This approach is common in case study methodology, which often utilizes a combination of forms of data. For example, to provide triangulated data for RQ1, I asked participants to rank the technical competencies: "Please rate these 14 technical ombuds competencies in order of importance to the ombuds role from your perspective." The 14 technical competencies are shown in Figure 6.



**Figure 6***Technical Competencies*

<b>Technical Competencies</b>	
Budget Requirement/Management Change Management Coaching Conflict Management Crisis Management Data Analysis Dispute Systems Assessment & Design	Facilitation Informal Investigations Marketing Mediation Negotiation Public Relations Training

Table 11 displays the top four technical ombuds competencies ranked by participants and the number of respondents who selected the competency for each ranking.

**Table 11***Technical Competencies with Rankings and Frequencies*

Technical Competency	Ranking	Number of Respondents ( <i>N</i> = 23)
Conflict Management	1	15
Coaching	2	10
Mediation	3	6
Facilitation	4	7

Notably, most participants selected conflict management and coaching as the critical competencies for ombuds in Higher Education, suggesting that the ombuds profession is rooted in conflict management practices. Figure 6 and Table 11 illuminate that practicing Ombuds perceive alternative dispute resolution and reduction intervention methods as critical competencies to the role. This data is significant because speaking the same technical language is essential to create consistency in practice. This data set

confirms my initial assumptions that the Ombuds functions defined coordinate well with the purposed competency model.

Interview Question 13 asked, "Please rate these nine behavioral ombuds competencies in order of importance to the ombuds role from your perspective." Figure 6 displays the nine behavioral competencies.

**Figure 7**

*IOA Behavioral Competencies*

<b>IOA Behavioral Competencies</b>	
Awareness of Personal Bias Effective Communication Emotional and Social Intelligence/Self-Awareness Ethical Agent Global and Cultural Effectiveness	Networking Ombuds Integrity Relationship Management Stress Management

Table 12 displays the top four behavioral ombuds competencies and the number of respondents who selected the competency for each ranking.

**Table 12**

*Behavior Competencies with Rankings and Frequencies*

Behavioral Competency	Ranking	Number of Respondents (N = 23)
Ombuds Integrity	1	15
Emotional and Social Intelligence/Self-Awareness	2	9
Effective Communication	3	7
Global and Cultural Effectiveness	4	7

It is significant to note from this data set that those ombuds in higher education place most of the weight on integrity and emotional intelligence or self-awareness. Figure 7 and Table 11 have further strengthened my confidence that behavioral competencies are critical to the role of Ombuds. Surprisingly, my initial interpretation of Ombuds Integrity being the most prominent trend caused me to consider what actions inform integrity from the participants' perspective. This apparent lack of consistency in technical language amongst Ombuds lends itself well to further research.

The data demonstrate, however, how participants perceive these behavioral competencies as essential to perform well in the role of Ombuds. These results widen our knowledge of the perceptions Ombuds in higher education share regarding competencies.

In the following chapter, I will discuss these findings, offer my recommendations, and suggest future research.

## Chapter 5: Discussion

My goal in this research was to uncover the skills and competencies ombuds in higher education feel are essential to the role and to identify conflict resolution/ADR intervention methods that ombuds value. The research questions were:

**RQ1:** What do ombuds in higher education consider vital competencies?

Theme 1 addressed this research question. Most participants felt behavioral competencies were the most critical, with listening and communication as the leading competencies for ombuds.

**RQ2:** How do ombuds in higher education acquire vital competencies?

Theme 2 addressed this research question. Data analysis uncovered that ombuds in higher education are learning competencies for the role via conflict resolution courses or programs through self-seeking professional development and on-the-job.

**RQ3:** How do ombuds in higher education assess required competencies?

Theme 3 revealed that ombuds in higher education assess their effectiveness through a formal program of study assessments, office usage, and anonymous surveys.

This research project uncovered that ombuds find behavioral competencies the most critical skills, yet there needs to be more consistency in evaluation or assessment. Listening and communication skills were emphasized as the most critical competencies for ombuds. Of the behavioral competencies mentioned as key competencies, 10 of 23 participants specifically named listening, while six of 23 participants stated communication skills. Some of the statements made by participants about behavioral competencies include:

- Jackie summarized many of these behavioral competencies as leadership when they stated, "Leadership is important. At a university, the ombuds are leaders and do not necessarily have decision-making power. Influencing others is a huge part. We may be neutral, but we certainly have perspective when we step into situations we need to be trusted and believed."
- Kip expanded on empathy by stating, "Understanding conflict helps us be more empathetic. I think empathy is an important competency. It is not enough to be able to sympathize because it does not feel good to the visitor. You must really know how to communicate in a way that helps the visitor feel seen and heard."
- Robert shared his perspective on behavioral competencies, stating, "I think we should be very calm and patient disposition-wise. I am not rushing to how we solve the problem; I am just really holding the space initially with them."
- Rachel shared, "I think someone compassionate can see the world in shades of gray and keep an open mind."
- Cicely expanded on these behaviors by sharing, "I really believe trust plays a big role. Knowing that there is some way to relate to them is important. Even our first Ombuds 50 years ago said the primary role of the ombuds is to listen. Nevertheless, ultimately, I think it comes down to building relationships."

### **Comparison to the Literature**

This study substantiates previous findings in the literature and confirms competency concerns that are showing up within the ombuds-practicing population. Behavioral competencies emerged as the most critical competencies from this research

project and answered RQ1. This data set summarizes what Rowe (1995) offered in her skill set definitions and expands on what Rowe and Hicks (2004) described: ombuds should show respect for all people. Hedeem et al. (2018) described this competency as a function to “build a reputation for being safe, fair, accessible, and credible” (p. 2).

This project's findings on listening and ADR as critical competencies for ombuds agree with the most recent literature and research findings. Katz et al. (2018) found variances in reflective listening and active listening as special skills are held by different ombuds which this project did not expand on the differences between the two types but confirmed listening as a critical competency. Newhart (2007) stated, "Some ombuds resist the labeling of their profession" as ADR "because they were not trained as dispute resolution professionals but instead were drawn to the job because they possessed institutional knowledge, a desire to help the community and a belief that social justice and democracy belonged in the workplace" (p. 73). Sixteen years later, this project's findings underscore ADR skills as critical technical competencies for organizational ombuds in higher education settings.

According to Katz et al. (2018), services are consistently provided in conflict intervention approaches. Witzler (2014) explored "how ombuds in higher education learn the ombuds role" and discovered that 80% of her participants received formal ombuds training from IOA or an equivalent. These project findings are comparable with participants in both projects naming competencies acquired and assessed via IOA standards because IOA is the primary source for organizational ombuds education and professional development. Witzler also explored "non-SOP influences of practice," where she found similar categories in her data set of "learned on the job," "previous knowledge

of the organization," "influence by non-OO literature," and "attend a conference," which I assume refers to the IOA annual conference (p. 167).

The findings for RQ2 are similar and expand on how ombuds in higher education acquire required competencies. Most recently, Tompkins Byer (2017) discovered the following datasets for ombuds in academic and professional backgrounds:

- 29/111 Academia
- 24/111 Conflict Resolution
- 24/111 Univ. Administration/ Human Resources
- 13/111 Counseling/Social Work
- 9/111 Law; and
- 8/111 Other. (p. 218)

These demographic snapshots are similar to the research findings of the *2017 IOA Practice Survey for the Academic Sector* (Hedeen et al., 2018). The IOA practice survey highlighted that of the 80 respondents to the survey, 32 respondents (40%) had master's degrees, 25 respondents (31.3%) had law degrees, and 18 respondents (22.5%) had doctoral degrees. However, 61 respondents (77.2%) did not hold a CO-OP® endorsement. In addition, the survey revealed that 43/80 respondents (53.8%) were solo practitioners, while 65/80 respondents (84.4%) responded that there were no promotional opportunities in their role (Hedeen et al., 2018). In support of the IOA Practice Survey data, Katz et al. (2018) discovered in their sample size of 11, the ombuds and directors held the following credentials: two PhDs in conflict resolution, one Ph.D. in organizational communication, one renowned scholar and practitioner in dispute resolution, four certified mediators, two CO-OP® practitioners, one certificate in dispute

resolution, one professional in human resources (SPHR®), five Juris doctorates with some specialization in labor, arbitration, or related focus and one who had an outstanding career focused on ethics and labor practices (p. 8).

This project's findings are comparable. In answer to Interview Question 1, ADR had the highest ranking; human resources were second, and legal ranked third. The findings from Interview Question 1 offer insight into RQ2 on how ombuds in higher education acquire the required competencies for practice.

Newhart (2007) highlighted the rise of the ADR movement regarding how Ombuds practice in Higher Education. Newhart (2007) found that many ombuds offices evaluate success based on "institution, word of mouth, and satisfied client letters" (p. 24). As described above, the findings of this project RQ3 are similar and expand on how ombuds evaluate their effectiveness. Newhart (2007) underscored that there is a variance in the opinion of ombuds practitioners on the topic of dispute resolution education, ombuds experience, and developing ombuds practice models. Ten years later, Tompkins Byer (2017) echoed a similar sentiment that "a full exploration of discrepancies ... represents an opportunity for rich collaboration among colleagues, but only if ombudspeople are willing to learn about each other's experiences and openly discuss disagreements ... despite competing interest (p. 237). This research project design initially considered these internal ombuds community conflicts by asking open-ended questions. This project's findings took a deeper dive into the findings offered by previous literature.



### **Theoretical Analysis**

The most rigorous approach to creating competencies models is the borrowed-and-tailored approach (Rothwell & Lindholm, 1999). The borrowed-and-tailored approach fits this research project because this project was concerned with exploring "the attitudes, feelings, and motivation level of exemplary performers" (Rothwell & Lindholm, 1999, p. 97). In addition, other professions have successfully identified competencies essential to various jobs.

Rothwell and Lindholm stated, "The tailored approach to competency modeling requires the greatest research rigor and is essential when organization decision makers plan to use competency models as a basis for making such important employment decisions as selecting, terminating, and promoting" (p. 97). The organizational ombuds is a profession that borrows methodology and conflict intervention techniques from similar career designations and then tailors them to the IOA Standards of Practice; therefore, the borrowed-and-tailored approach applied to this project.

I also utilized systems theory, as discussed earlier in this dissertation. Looking at the results following a systematic approach allowed me to understand how other professions have been able to apply similar rigorous approaches to validate competencies for their professional assessments. Rothwell and Lindholm's systematic theory of competency identification, modeling, and assessment served this project well in supporting the building of a bridge that "move[d] from past-oriented to future-oriented competency models" (p. 104).

### **Limitations**

This research project's limitations were that some participants needed to become more familiar with all the alternative dispute resolution technical terms and methods. Although the role functions describe the methods and theories, I had to verbally explain the processes and definitions associated with the task affiliated with the intervention method. My role as an active volunteer in the IOA may have influenced participants not to be vulnerable about the experiences that shaped their ombuds career. The use of Zoom may have inhibited my ability to explore more deeply with my participants in the narrative-sharing portion of the semistructured Interview.

### **Recommendations**

This project summarizes years of research into how I can qualify to serve in a role that feeds my passion for serving others. In seeking opportunities in the role, I found it competitive and a crap shoot for many landing the role. Then once in the role, many retired out. Some retirees take the skills and knowledge they acquired while in the role, leaving aspiring Ombuds or replacements in the dark about institutional knowledge or best practices with that dispute systems model. Earnest Greenwood (1957) defined the attributes of a profession as having three characteristics: a body of theory, professional authority, community sanctions, a code of ethics, and a professional culture (p. 45). This research project confirmed that ombuds in higher education had identified the theory or theories in which we root our practices. Although we may arrive at the role from other professions, the findings from this research project confirm perceptions of ADR as a critical competency for the role, a common path into the role, and valid assessments from the educational path. Many ombuds in higher education are members of IOA and adhere

to the code of ethics and the standards of practice that provide a sense of professional culture. The conflict at the IOA conference illuminated the differing levels of behavioral competencies of Ombuds. The findings and recommendations of This project for a competency model can aid in the design of assessments to improve the quality of services ombuds provide. My findings expanded on previous research of the function and skills ombuds possess; these findings can support IOA to reevaluate what we define as the professional authority by defining what the highest professional standards are for an ombuds and exploring what community sanctions would look like in the assessment of these competencies we identify as essential.

These findings support my recommendation to IOA to define what ombuds do according to competencies and how these competencies should be evaluated according to best practices. My findings revealed that ombuds most value behavioral competencies, so I recommend what many professional accreditations have clearly defined: to determine what accountability looks like when these expectations are violated. The clarity in what is defined as egregious and what is a call for additional professional development.

Greenwood (1957) defined accreditation as a "sanctioning organization by conferring upon the profession a series of powers and privileges both formal and informal" (p. 48).

IOA has been the primary source for ombuds to acquire skills and knowledge unique to our profession. From the findings of this project, I recommend additional research that explores the expectations of knowledge, skills, and abilities according to the different roles of ombuds in higher education and years of experience. Such research will help create equity in the profession and consistency in visitor or organizational ombuds' expectation of services. Expanding the current certification model to include more

expectations on abilities could also shed light on financial expectations for the role of Ombuds. I also recommend job descriptions clearly stating the competencies ombuds find essential to the role. In addition, clearly defining these competencies and levels will help emerging ombuds and aspiring ombuds feel that the profession has equitable processes and practices.

### **Areas for Future Research**

If I had to design another research project, I would provide participants in my study an overview of the definitions of the intervention methods and the task associated with the ADR methods and the behavioral competencies. I would also explore perspectives on specific behavioral assessment instruments. In addition, I would explore competency level and job descriptions of ombuds in higher education to identify themes in interventions and applied or most used in each role. This research could be conducted using a quantitative methodology approach. An additional research project is how we assess an ombuds' integrity or fiscal responsibility. If the assessment of the ombuds' role needs to be clarified or well defined in the charter, or the ombuds can be terminated at will and without cause. Adding competency and credit checks comparable to other roles requiring background checks will augment the ombuds' capacity to engage in difficult conversations. I have heard it said that an ombuds should not need their role for financial gain, for it may prevent them from speaking truth to power. Financial obligations may prevent some ombuds from having hard conversations with leadership without some financial literacy or resource insurance in place to support terminated ombuds or ombuds on administrative leave. I would also explore what other conflict intervention methods,

approaches, or tools ombuds borrow from other professions and theories that align with our standards of practice and code of ethics.

### **Contributions to the Field of Conflict Resolution**

This research is essential to the field of ombudsing to help higher educational institutions to design better and set up their ombuds programs according to the services they wish to provide and to better recruit ombuds with the skills needed to fulfill the desired task. This research supports consistency in services provided by ombuds practicing in higher education. My findings can be used to spawn additional research and help serve as foundational data for designing a professional standard of competencies for the ombuds' role beyond the higher education sector.

This research shows the importance of ADR and conflict resolution in the field of ombudsing. When ombuds speak the same technical language, there will be increased consistency in effectiveness evaluation and assessment. In addition, the data from this research project can help the IOA Professional Development Committee and the IOA explore educational options and support practicing ombuds to identify their area of opportunity highlighted in this research study.

The IOA can expand the certification model and professional development course curriculum. The study is relevant since there is an excellent uptake in the number of ombuds offices, and new ombuds are constantly coming into the role. Many universities are adding ombuds and expanding the role of ombuds to executive levels. In addition, the IOA and the CO-OP are collaborating to explore certification models that will take a deeper dive into the competencies of an organizational ombud. There is also currently a large population of aspiring ombuds. Until we as a profession take a deeper exploration

into an assessment of each competency, I invite my ombuds colleagues to explore professional development opportunities within the IOA.

### **Conclusions**

I discovered the role of ombuds in 2010 when I was looking for a role for those students earning a master's in dispute resolution who could qualify for using their ADR skills. I quickly found that the role of the ombuds was the one role that offered practical application of the whole curriculum. However, after years of practice, I recognize that the human factors and ADR tools dramatically change the effectiveness of ADR intervention methods for conflict resolution, conflict management, and conflict reduction. At my first IOA conference in Houston, I asked many practitioners about their educational backgrounds and set my sights on becoming an ombuds. My journey took me from exploring how to become an ombuds to becoming an ombuds. I have been given the opportunity to study conflict resolution theory and the practical application of that theory with many ADR intervention methods. I have made a complete in-depth analysis of the ombuds role by studying, shadowing others, researching, and working as an ombuds in higher education and in the non-profit sector. My journey was intentional and long, leading me to a life beyond my wildest dreams as a leader in my field. This project helped me confirm my ideas and highlight a course of action for ombuds operating without many guidelines while sharing what other colleagues are doing in their practices. This project was partially designed to highlight the sophistication of the ombuds' role and help the ombuds community unite on naming and defining our technical competencies. The study also shed light on the need to assess our behavioral and technical competencies. Even more, I recognized the importance for those in the role and leaders

whom Ombuds work with to have clarity in expectations. I fear the lack of consistency can have a crippling effect on the legacy of the Ombuds role and the experiences of our visitors. Since most offices serve thousands of people, ombuds must show up as our best selves and offer comparable services and approaches to conflict intervention, management, reduction, and resolution.

I invite my ombuddies to reflect and shed light on the conflicts we observe in our organizations. Reflect on how we process conflict within our egos and how that manifests when resolving concerns within our ombuds community. I genuinely believe ombuds are professional peacekeepers. We cannot give peace if we have none of our own. We can only move this profession forward if we agree on what sets us apart as subject matter experts on the topic of conflict resolution. We start the process by agreeing on labels and definitions of these methodologies and the ones that align with our standards of practice and code of ethics.

In order to maintain a level of excellence, we must continue to be on a path of naming what we do, conducting proper assessments of what we do, and creating a path for those who aspire to do what we do. We will only solve some of the ombuds problems. However, I propose changing the narratives of assumed standards that have created inequity and inequality to leave the proper tools for defined interventions as our living legacy for organizational ombuds practicing in higher education.

## References

- Boyatzis, R. (1998). *Transforming qualitative information: Thematic analysis and code development*. Sage Publications
- Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 3(2), 77–101.  
<https://doi.org/10.1191/1478088706qp063oa>
- Burton, J. W. (1993). *Conflict resolution as a political system* (Working Paper No. 1). George Mason University, Institute for Conflict Analysis and Resolution.  
[https://activity.scar.gmu.edu/sites/default/files/wp\\_1\\_burton\\_0\\_0.pdf](https://activity.scar.gmu.edu/sites/default/files/wp_1_burton_0_0.pdf)
- Creswell, J. W., & Poth, C. N. (2017). *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five approaches* (4th ed.). SAGE Publishing.
- Escalante, H. (2018). *Incivility and abrasive conduct in institutions of higher learning and the ombuds role* [Unpublished dissertation proposal] University of the Pacific.
- Gadlin, H. (2000). The ombudsman: What's in a name? *Negotiation Journal*, 16(1), 37–48. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1571-9979.2000.tb00201.x>
- Greenwood, E. (1957). Attributes of a profession. *Social Work*, 2(3), 45–55.  
<https://doi.org/10.1093/sw/2.3.45>
- Harrison, T. R. (2004). What is success in ombuds processes? Evaluation of a university ombudsman. *Conflict Resolution Quarterly*, 21(3), 313–335.  
<https://doi.org/10.1002/crq.65>
- Hayden, S. (1997). *The ombuds office in higher education* [Report]. University of Florida.



- Hedeen, T., Rowe, M., & Schneider, J. (2018, Spring). *International Ombuds Association 2017 Practice Survey: Academic Sector* [Report]. International Ombuds Association. <https://www.ombudsassociation.org/>
- Hollis, L. P. (2015). Canary in the mine: Ombuds as first alerts for workplace bullying on campus. *Journal of the International Ombuds Association*, 9(1), 23–31.  
<http://www.ombudsassociation.org/>
- Howard, C. L. (2011). *The organizational ombudsman: Origins, roles, and operations. A legal guide*. American Bar Association.
- International Coaching Federation. (n.d.). *ICF core competencies*.  
<https://coachingfederation.org/credentials-and-standards/core-competencies>
- International Ombuds Association. (n.d.-a). *Announcing the DEIB framework*.  
[https://www.ombudsassociation.org/index.php?option=com\\_dailyplanetblog&view=entry&year=2022&month=08&day=02&id=205:announcing-the-deib-framework](https://www.ombudsassociation.org/index.php?option=com_dailyplanetblog&view=entry&year=2022&month=08&day=02&id=205:announcing-the-deib-framework)
- International Ombuds Association. (n.d.-b). *IOA's ombuds program*.  
<https://www.ombudsassociation.org/ioa-ombuds-program>
- International Ombuds Association. (2008). *Job analysis report 2008*.  
[https://www.ombudsassociation.org/assets/CO-OP/2008\\_Job\\_Analysis\\_and\\_Knowledge\\_Domains.pdf](https://www.ombudsassociation.org/assets/CO-OP/2008_Job_Analysis_and_Knowledge_Domains.pdf)
- International Ombuds Association. (2009, February 2). *Corporate PD: Generic corporate ombudsman position description*.  
[https://www.ombudsassociation.org/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=129:Corporate-PD&catid=20:site-content](https://www.ombudsassociation.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=129:Corporate-PD&catid=20:site-content)

International Ombuds Association. (2022, March 17). *Standards of practice*.

[https://ioa.memberclicks.net/assets/docs/SOP-COE/IOA\\_Standards\\_of\\_Practice\\_English.pdf](https://ioa.memberclicks.net/assets/docs/SOP-COE/IOA_Standards_of_Practice_English.pdf)

Jagneaux, M., Bonnivier, B., Stiles, J., & Mayer, M. (2017). Reflections on a team approach to ombuds office. *Journal of the International Ombuds Association*, *10*(1), 1–23.

[https://www.ombudsassociation.org/assets/docs/JIOA\\_2017\\_1\\_ReflectionsOnATeamApproachtoanOmbudsOffice.pdf](https://www.ombudsassociation.org/assets/docs/JIOA_2017_1_ReflectionsOnATeamApproachtoanOmbudsOffice.pdf)

Katz, N. H., Sosa, K. J., & Kovack, L. N. (2018). Ombuds and conflict resolution specialists: Navigating workplace challenges in higher education. *Journal of the International Ombuds Association*, *16*, 1–41. <http://www.ombudsassociation.org/>

Kovack, L. (2021). *Navigating the human side of workplace conflict: A comparative study of organizational ombuds' similarities and differences* [Doctoral dissertation, Nova Southeastern University]. NSU Works.

[https://nsuworks.nova.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1179&context=shss\\_dcar\\_etd](https://nsuworks.nova.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1179&context=shss_dcar_etd)

Kumar, R. (2011). *Research methodology: A Step-by-step guide for beginners*. Sage Publications.

Levine-Finley, S., & Carter, J. (2011). Then and now: Interviews with expert U.S. organizational ombudsmen. *Conflict Resolution Quarterly*, *28*(2), 111–139.

<https://doi.org/10.1002/crq.20016>

Lipsky, D. B., Seeber, R. L., & Fincher, R. D. (2003). *Emerging systems for managing workplace conflict: Lessons from American corporations for managers and dispute resolution professionals*. John Wiley & Sons.

Marshall, C., & Rossman, G. (2011). *Designing qualitative research*. Sage Publishing

Merriam-Webster. (n.d.-a). Conflict. In *Merriam-Webster.com dictionary*. Retrieved

April 7, 2021, from <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/conflict>

Merriam-Webster. (n.d.-b). Ombudsman. In *Merriam-Webster.com dictionary*. Retrieved

April 7, 2021, from <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/ombudsman>

Newhart, M. J. (2007). *Ombudsmen in higher education: Similarities, divergences, and the rise of alternative dispute resolution* [Unpublished master's thesis]. Cornell University.

Peterson, L. (2022, January 20). *KU's vice provost for diversity, equity resigns after plagiarizing MLK message*. The Kansas City Star.

<https://www.kansascity.com/news/local/education/article257517329.html>

Pittman, A. (2021, January 5). *UM accuses ombudsman of 'raising false alarms' over whistleblower investigation*. Mississippi Free Press.

<https://www.mississippifreepress.org/7992/um-accuses-ombudsman-of-raising-false-alarms-over-whistleblower-investigation>

Ragin, C., & Becker, H. (Eds.). (1992). *What is a case? Exploring the foundations of social inquiry*. Cambridge University Press.

- Raines, S., & Harrison, T. (2020). Overcoming Groundhog Day: Changing organizational culture while institutionalizing the ombudsman role. *Journal of the International Ombuds Association*.  
[https://www.ombudsassociation.org/assets/docs/JIOA\\_Articles/2020\\_JIOA-G.pdf](https://www.ombudsassociation.org/assets/docs/JIOA_Articles/2020_JIOA-G.pdf)
- Rothwell, W. J., & Lindholm, J. E. (1999). Competency identification, modelling and assessment in the USA. *International Journal of Training and Development*, 3(2), 90–105. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1468-2419.00069>
- Rowe, M. P. (1988). Ombuds jobs are proliferating, and characterized by diversity. *Practice and Perspective*, 2, 198–199.  
<https://mitsloan.mit.edu/shared/ods/documents/?PublicationDocumentID=4006>
- Rowe, M. P. (1995). Options, functions, and skills: What an organizational ombudsperson might want to know. *Negotiation Journal*, 11(2), 103–114.  
<https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1571-9979.1995.tb00051.x>
- Rowe, M. P. (2022). *Becoming an ombuds at MIT*. International Ombuds Association.  
[https://www.ombudsassociation.org/index.php?option=com\\_dailyplanetblog&view=entry&year=2023&month=02&day=06&id=227:becoming-an-ombuds-at-mit](https://www.ombudsassociation.org/index.php?option=com_dailyplanetblog&view=entry&year=2023&month=02&day=06&id=227:becoming-an-ombuds-at-mit)
- Rowe, M. P., & Hicks, W. (2004). The organizational ombuds. In J. W. Waks (Ed.), *Resource book for managing employment disputes*. PR Institute for Dispute Resolution, Inc.
- Rowe, M. P., & Williams, R. (2014). *Cutting edge advances in resolving workplace disputes*. International Institute for Conflict Prevention and Resolution.
- Saldaña, J. (2008). *The coding manual for qualitative researchers* (3rd ed.). Sage Publications.

- Schroeder Measurement Technologies, Inc. (2016, May 4–5). *The International Ombudsman Association Certified Organizational Ombudsman Practitioner (CO-OP®) Examination: Focus group job analysis report*.  
[https://www.ombudsassociation.org/assets/CO-OP/2016\\_SMT\\_CO-OP\\_Job\\_Analysis\\_Report.pdf](https://www.ombudsassociation.org/assets/CO-OP/2016_SMT_CO-OP_Job_Analysis_Report.pdf)
- Shelton, R. L. (2000). The institutional ombudsman: A university case study. *The Negotiation Journal*, 16, 81–98. <https://doi.org/10.1023/A:1007550505481>
- Society for Human Resource Management (SHRM). (2022). *SHRM body of applied skills and knowledge*. <https://www.shrm.org/certification/decide/pages/body-of-applied-skills-and-knowledge.aspx>
- Sullivan-Bolyai, S. L., & Bova, C. A. (2021, February). *Qualitative description: A “how-to” guide*. eScholarship@UMassChan.  
<https://repository.escholarship.umassmed.edu/handle/20.500.14038/46447>
- Tompkins Byer, T. (2017). Yea, nay, and everything in between: Disparities within the academic ombuds field. *Negotiation Journal*, 33(3), 213–238.  
<https://doi.org/10.1111/nej.12183>
- Ury, W. L., Brett, J. M., & Goldberg, S. B. (1989). Dispute systems design: An introduction. *Negotiation Journal*, 5(4), 357–358. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1571-9979.1989.tb00536.x>
- U.S. News & World Report. (n.d.). *Best dispute resolution programs*.  
<https://www.usnews.com/best-graduate-schools/top-law-schools/dispute-resolution-rankings>

- Witzler, L. C. (2014). *An exploration of the characteristics of organizational ombudsman practice within higher education in the United States* [Unpublished doctoral dissertation]. Nova Southeastern University.
- Yin, R. (2009). *Case study research design and methods*. Sage.
- Ziegenfuss, J. T., & O'Rourke, P. (2011). *The ombudsman handbook: Designing, managing an effective problem-solving program* (2nd ed.). McFarland & Company.

## **Appendix A**

### **Competency Terms and Definitions**

#### **Assessment & Design**

ADR professionals blend two intervention methods of conflict analysis and dispute systems design for conflict that are process related. Assessments can initially involve stakeholders, policies, and procedures. Then move into phases of creating, implementing, testing and modification of the model. (Kluwer, 2013)

#### **Budget Management**

Identify elements of an effective ombuds work setting (physical space, technology or staff needs) (Schroeder Measurement Technologies, Inc., 2016)

#### **Change Management**

Principles and practices for managing a change initiative so it is more likely to be accepted and to receive the resources necessary (such as financial, human, physical, etc.) to reshape the organization and its people. (SHRM,2018)

#### **Competencies**

Clusters of highly interrelated attributes, including knowledge, skills, abilities and other characteristics (KSAOs), that give rise to the behaviors needed to perform a given job effectively. (SHRM,2018)

#### **Conflict Management**

Alternative dispute resolution: an umbrella term for the various approaches and techniques (other than litigation) that can be used to resolve a dispute, such as arbitration, conciliation and mediation.

**Consultation/ Informal Inquiry**

Consultation is defined as the KSOAs needed to work with organizational stakeholders (visitors) in evaluating business challenges and identifying opportunities for the design, implantation, and evaluation of change initiatives, and to build ongoing support for HR solutions that meet the changing needs of customers and the business. (SHRM, 2018). Informal inquiry is defined as a task for ombuds.

**Coaching**

Focused, interactive communication and guidance intended to develop and enhance on-the-job performance, knowledge or behavior. (SHRM,2018)

**Communication**

“Communication is defined as the KSAOLs needed to effectively craft and deliver concise and informative communications. To listen and address the concerns of others, and to transfer and translate information from one level or unit of the organization to another” (SHRM, 2018)

**Diversity**

The differences between individuals on any attribute that may lead to the perception that another person is different from the self. (SHRM,2018)

**Equity**

A relative form of equality that takes into consideration the needs and characteristics of the individuals, the context of the situation, and circumstances that result in disparate outcomes. (SHRM,2018)



**Crisis Management-**

During the intake of a case an Ombuds is assessing imminent risk for harm or danger.

This can be defined by the “identifying the complaint” or first steps most Ombuds take in visitor intake processes (Ziegenfuss & O’Rourke, p. 25).

**Data Analysis—Analytical Aptitude**

Data analysis is defined as the KSAOs needed to collect and analyze qualitative and quantitative data, and to interpret and promote finds that evaluate HR initiatives and inform business decisions and recommendations. This includes data gathering and analysis.

**Dispute Systems**

“a system for learning from, preventing, and responding to recurring disputes” (Kluwer, 2013)

**Ethical Agent**

“Cultivates the organization’s ethical environment and ensures that policies and practices reflect ethical values.” (SHRM,2018)

**Facilitation**

A facilitation is a conflict intervention process which for the purpose of this research is used for large group conflict. Schuman (2005) defines it as a process to increase the quality of decisions and support improving working relationships and organizational learning fostering more collaboration in solving problems.

**Inclusion**

Extent to which each person in an organization is and feels welcomed, respected, supported and valued as a team member. (SHRM,2018)

**KPI**

Key performance indicator: a quantifiable measure of performance that gauges an organization's progress toward strategic objectives or other agreed-upon performance standards.

**Marketing**

Based on the IOA domains and functions, marketing is defined by the ability to promote the ombuds program. (Schroeder Measurement Technologies, Inc.)

**Mediation**

Method of nonbinding alternative dispute resolution (ADR) by which a neutral third party tries to help disputing parties reach a mutually agreeable decision, such as reconciliation (SHRM, 2018).

**Negotiation**

Process by which two or more parties work together to reach agreement on a matter (SHRM, 2018).

**Ombuds Integrity**

Adherence to a set of ethical standards that reflect strong moral principles, honesty and consistency in behavior (SHRM, 2018).

**Public Relations**

Effectively builds a network of professional contacts both within and outside the organizations (SHRM, 2018).

**Recognizes Personal Bias**

A partiality or an inclination or predisposition for or against something (SHRM, 2018).

**Relationship Management**

“Effectively builds and maintains relationships both within and outside of the organization. ... To be aware of, control and express one’s emotions and handle interpersonal relationships judiciously and empathetically” (SHRM,2018).

**Systems**

Process for understanding how seemingly independent units within a larger entity interact with and influence one another (SHRM, 2018).

**Teaching & Training**

Process by which employees are provided with knowledge, skills, abilities, and other characteristics (KSAOs) specific to a task or job (SHRM, 2018). Understanding how to determine data utility, identifiers, and data trends by subclassifying comparisons to inform organizational decisions (SHRM, 2018).

## Appendix B

### Competency Ranking Table

ROLE: _____		
<i>Rank each competency from most important to least important for each category</i>		
TECHNICAL	BEHAVIORAL	FUNCTIONAL
<input type="checkbox"/> Imminent Risk Assessment	<input type="checkbox"/> Relationship Building and Sustainability	<input type="checkbox"/> Advocacy Groups/Allies
<input type="checkbox"/> Mediation	<input type="checkbox"/> Bias Assessment	<input type="checkbox"/> Organizational Structure (Public/private/community college/religious institution)
<input type="checkbox"/> Facilitation	<input type="checkbox"/> Servant Leadership	<input type="checkbox"/> Ombudsman Standard of Practice
<input type="checkbox"/> Conflict	<input type="checkbox"/> Emotional Intelligence	<input type="checkbox"/> Sexual Misconduct Policies
<input type="checkbox"/> Coaching/Executive Coaching	<input type="checkbox"/> Cultural Competencies	<input type="checkbox"/> Public Relations
<input type="checkbox"/> Systems Design	<input type="checkbox"/> Crisis Management	<input type="checkbox"/> Legislation
<input type="checkbox"/> Negotiation	<input type="checkbox"/> Active Listening	<input type="checkbox"/> Legal
<input type="checkbox"/> Teaching and Training Design	<input type="checkbox"/> Appropriate Intervention Selection	<input type="checkbox"/> Ethics
<input type="checkbox"/> Conflict Assessment	<input type="checkbox"/> Building Trust/Building Rapport	<input type="checkbox"/> Budget Management
<input type="checkbox"/> Upward Feedback		<input type="checkbox"/> Outreach & Marketing
<input type="checkbox"/> Data Analysis of Annual or Thematic Reports (Qualitative and Quantitative)		<input type="checkbox"/> <u>Ombuds</u> Services
<input type="checkbox"/> Shuttlng Diplomacy		
<input type="checkbox"/> Informal Investigations		
<input type="checkbox"/> Confidential Consultations		
<input type="checkbox"/> Appropriate Referrals		

## Appendix C

### Behavioral and Technical Competencies: Functional Requirements

The following items were identified by the primary investigator Alicia Booker and secondary investigator as the minimal competencies required for an \*entry level ombuds. (p 5) The term 'competencies' has been applied in this skill review to maintain consistency with the 2016 Focus Group Job Analysis that was used to develop the IOA CO-OP exam. Competency is defined as knowledge, skills, and abilities (KSAs). The report listed these competencies as *Domains/Tasks/Sub-tasks* (Appendix D, pp. 20–29)

Additional Resources: SHRM 2020 Competency and Body of Knowledge

Technical	Behavioral	Functional
Conflict Management	Personal Integrity	IOA Standard of Practice
Conflict Resolution Styles	Professional Integrity	IOA Ethical Principles
Change Management	Recognizes personal bias	Sexual Misconduct Policies
Crisis Management	Ethical Agent	Legislation and Legal
Mediation	Relationship Management	
Facilitation	Stress Management	
Negotiation	High Emotional and Social	
Coaching	Intelligence	
Dispute Systems Assessment & Design		
Teaching		
Training		
Data Analysis		
Marketing		
Public Relations		
Budget Management		
Formal/Informal Inquiry		

## Appendix D

### Qualitative Analysis Tables

#### *Alignment of Research Questions to Interview Questions*

**RQ1. What do ombuds in higher education consider key competencies?**

2. What do you believe are the key competencies for a university ombuds?
11. Please rate the 14 technical ombuds competencies, in order of importance to the ombuds role from your perspective.
13. Please rate the nine behavioral ombuds competencies, in order of importance to the ombuds role from your perspective.

**RQ2. How do ombuds in higher education acquire key competencies?**

1. What previous life and/or professional experiences prepared you for this role?
3. How did you acquire the competencies required for the role that you did not have initially?
8. How have you worked to strengthen the areas of weakness?
12.
  - a. What was the method used to acquire the necessary knowledge for each technical competency? (e.g., degree coursework/certifications, on-the-job training, previous role, trial and error, reading, trainings)
  - b. If coursework was involved, what was the duration of the course?
  - c. How do you assess your personal competency in 14 key areas?
14.
  - a. What was the method used to acquire the necessary knowledge for each behavioral competency?
  - b. If coursework was involved, what was the duration of the course?
  - c. How do you assess your personal competency for each?

**RQ3. How do ombuds in higher education assess required competencies?**

4. How does your university evaluate your performance as the ombuds?
5. How do you assess your office effectiveness?
  - f. Number of cases
  - g. Number of resolved conflicts
  - h. Amount of time the office saved the university in formal grievances
  - i. Amount of money the office saved the university in legal fees
  - j. Other (please explain)
9. If you are part of an ombuds team, does the team meet regularly to debrief and analyze cases and to provide constructive feedback to each other?
12.
  - a. What was the method used to acquire the necessary knowledge for each technical competency? (such as: degree course work/ certifications, on the job training, previous role, trial and error, reading, trainings)
  - b. If coursework was involved, what was the duration of the course?
  - c. How do you assess your personal competency for each?
14.
  - a. What was the method used to acquire the necessary knowledge for each behavioral competency?
  - b. If coursework was involved, what was the duration of the course?
  - c. How do you assess your personal competency for each?

**Outstanding Questions**

6. Do you know what your strengths are regarding ombuds competencies? (Yes/No)
  - a. How do you know these are your strengths?
7. Do you know what your weaknesses are regarding ombuds competencies? (Yes/No)
  - a. How have you become aware of these?
10. What, if any, degree or certifications do you believe are most important for a university ombuds?

## Appendix E

### Quantitative Analysis Tables from Interview Questions

Tables 13–24 display the top sources of knowledge mentioned by respondents for each of the technical competencies. Competencies are listed in alphabetical order for ease of reference.

**Table 13**

*ADR Intervention Methods From Pattern Coding of Participants' Transcripts*

ADR Intervention Method	Number of Times Mentioned
Mediation	8
DEIB	6
Facilitation	2
Negotiation	1
Dispute Systems Assessment and Design (includes understanding of higher ed structure, knowledge, experience, or institutional knowledge)	11

**Table 14**

*Methods of Acquiring Technical Competencies: Budget Requirements/Management*

Competency	Frequency
Budget Requirements/Management	
On-the-job	16
Organizational managers' course	3
Not applicable	3

Most participants shared they acquired the competency on the job from various roles. Three participants shared their organization and provided a leadership or managers course to ensure understanding of budget management systems or processes.

**Table 15***Methods of Acquiring Technical Competencies: Change Management*

Competency	Frequency
Change Management	
On-the-job	8
Reading	7
Coursework	7

No significant method emerged when participants shared how they acquired the competency of change management. Eight participants recalled they learned this competency on the job albeit their current or former roles.

**Table 16***Methods of Acquiring Technical Competencies: Coaching*

Competency	Frequency
Coaching	
Advanced degree	10
On-the-job	6
JD	5
Books/Self-Study	4
Certifications	3

Many of the participants shared they acquired the competency coaching during courses in their advanced degree matriculation process. Of the 23 participants, five specifically recalled coaching being a part of their juris doctorate course work. Six participants shared they acquired coaching competencies on the job.



**Table 17***Methods of Acquiring Technical Competencies: Conflict Management*

Competency	Frequency
Conflict Management	
Advanced Education	12
Workshops	10
On-the-job	8
Reading	7
IOA	4

Many of the participants shared they acquired the competency conflict management through their advanced education degree. Ten participants shared they attended a conflict management workshop.

**Interview Question 14.** Interview Question 14 was a three-part question that asked, (a) “What was the method used to acquire the necessary knowledge for each behavioral competency?” (b) “If coursework was involved, what was the duration of the course?” and (c) “How do you assess your personal competency for each?” Participants cited degree programs, coursework, professional development, and other training for each of the nine behavioral competencies. On-the-job training and lived experiences also accounted for methods of acquiring knowledge in behavioral competencies. Tables 22–30 display the top sources of knowledge mentioned by respondents for each of the behavioral competencies. Competencies are listed in alphabetical order for ease of reference.

**Table 18***Methods of Acquiring Behavioral Competencies: Awareness of Personal Bias*

Competency	Frequency
Awareness of Personal Bias	
Harvard Implicit Bias Assessment	11
DEIB training	7
Books/Self-Study	7
Peer conversations	5

**Table 19***Methods of Acquiring Behavioral Competencies: Effective Communication*

Competency	Frequency
Effective Communication	
Advanced degree	17
On-the-job	14
Professional development	4
BA degree	3

**Table 20***Methods of Acquiring Behavioral Competencies: Emotional Intelligence*

Competency	Frequency
Emotional Intelligence	
EQ Assessment	10
Reading	7
Lived Experiences	5
Advanced degree course	4
Training	3

**Table 21***Methods of Acquiring Behavioral Competencies: Ethical Agent*

Competency	Frequency
Ethical Agent	
Advanced education course	8
On-the-job	8
Internal awareness or values	6
Invitation to participate on	

**Table 22***Methods of Acquiring Behavioral Competencies: Global and Cultural Effectiveness*

Competency	Frequency
Global and Cultural Effectiveness (DEIB)	
Training	15
Lived Experiences	10
Reading/Self-Taught	9
Advanced Education Course	8
Peer reflection/On-the-job	8

**Table 23***Methods of Acquiring Behavioral Competencies: Networking*

Competency	Frequency
Networking	
On-the-job	12
Extracurricular/Volunteer	3
Professional Development	3
Organizational Collaboration	3

**Table 24***Methods of Acquiring Behavioral Competencies: Ombuds Integrity*

Competency	Frequency
Ombuds Integrity	
IOA Foundations Course	9
Personal/Spiritual Values	9
IOA Trainings	7
Advanced Degree Courses	5

**Table 25***Methods of Acquiring Behavioral Competencies: Relationship Management*

Competency	Frequency
Relationship Management	
On-the-job	16
Institutional Knowledge	3
Not Applicable	3
Professional Development	2
Advanced Education Course	2

**Table 26***Methods of Acquiring Behavioral Competencies: Stress Management*

Competency	Frequency
Stress Management	
Self-Reflection/Mindfulness	14
Therapy	6
HE Experiences/Courses	5
On-the-job	4

**Interview Question 12.** Interview Question 12 was a three-part question that asked, (a) “What was the method used to acquire the necessary knowledge for each technical competency?” (b) “If coursework was involved, what was the duration of the course?” and (c) “How do you assess your personal competency for each?” In answer to RQ3, the third part of this question (c) was used to glean participants’ responses. The most mentioned source of conflict management knowledge or experience was on-the job (8), reading (7), coursework (6), and training (5). Additionally, it is interesting to note that 11 participants could not specifically name how they are assessed on crisis management as a technical competency. Tables 25–38 display the top methods of assessment for each technical competency.

**Table 27***Methods of Assessment for Technical Competencies: Budget Requirements/Management*

Competency	Frequency
Budget Requirements/Management	
Not Applicable/Not Sure	19
Practical Application	2
Informal Feedback	1
Certificate	1

**Table 28***Methods of Assessment for Technical Competencies: Change Management*

Competency	Frequency
Change Management	
Degree Conferred	11
Surveys/Evaluations	6
Visitor Feedback	5
Practical Application/Observation	5

**Table 29***Methods of Assessment for Technical Competencies: Coaching*

Competency	Frequency
Coaching	
Role Play/Observation	9
Feedback	9
Degree Conferred	5
Certifications	3

**Table 30***Methods of Assessment for Technical Competencies: Conflict Management*

Competency	Frequency
Conflict Management	
Degree Conferred	8
Feedback	6
Practical Application	4

**Table 31***Methods of Assessment for Technical Competencies: Crisis Management*

Competency	Frequency
Crisis Management	
Unsure	11
Certificate of Completion	5
Degree Conferred	4

**Table 32***Methods of Assessment for Technical Competencies: Data Analysis*

Competency	Frequency
Data Analysis	
Degree Conferred	19
Annual Reports	6
Practical Applications	2

**Table 33***Methods of Assessment for Technical Competencies: Dispute Systems*

Competency	Frequency
Dispute Systems	
Degree Conferred	9
Acceptance of Recommendations	4

**Table 34***Methods of Assessment for Technical Competencies: Facilitation*

Competency	Frequency
Facilitation	
Practical Application/Observation	13
Certifications	6
Not Applicable	6
Degree Conferred	3

**Table 35***Methods of Assessment for Technical Competencies: Informal Investigation*

Competency	Frequency
Informal Investigation	
Degree Conferred	11
Feedback: 360 review/survey	3

**Table 36***Methods of Assessment for Technical Competencies: Marketing*

Competency	Frequency
Marketing	
Not Applicable/Not Sure	9
Office Usage	8
Intake Process	3
Tracking Website/Social Media	2

**Table 37***Methods of Assessment for Technical Competencies: Mediation*

Competency	Frequency
Mediation	
Observation	17
Time Commitment (40 hrs.)	15
Certificate of Completion	14
Degree Conferred	10
Role Play	7

**Table 38***Methods of Assessment for Technical Competencies: Negotiation*

Competency	Frequency
Negotiation	
Degree Conferred	19
Role Play/Observation	6

**Table 39***Methods of Assessment for Technical Competencies: Public Relations*

Competency	Frequency
Public Relations	
Not Applicable/Not Sure	12
Annual Reports	3
Degree Conferred	2

**Table 40***Methods of Assessment for Technical Competencies: Training*

Competency	Frequency
Training	
Feedback/Surveys	15
Observations/Practical	8
Application	
Degree Conferred	4

**Interview Question 14.** Interview Question 14 was a three-part question that asked, (a) “What was the method used to acquire the necessary knowledge for each behavioral competency?” (b) “If coursework was involved, what was the duration of the course?” and (c) “How do you assess your personal competency for each?” For Effective Communication, three respondents specifically stated they created a presentation of their competency in this area. In terms of competency in Global and Cultural Effectiveness, participants use the demographic makeup of the visitors or cases they work with, their willingness to have hard conversations with visitors, and courses and certifications received as the benchmarks. Finally, one participant discussed the onboarding process in place at their university that makes the ombuds visible and connection to the population, which enhances the Networking competency. Tables 39–47 display the quantitative



analysis of top mentioned self-assessments used by participants for behavioral competencies.

**Table 41**

*Methods of Assessment for Behavioral Competencies: Awareness of Personal Bias*

Competency	Frequency
Awareness of Personal Bias	
Harvard Assessment	11
Reflective Practitioner/Self-Reflection	7
Peer Reflection	6
Office Demographics	3
Certification	2
Behavioral Interview Questioning	2

**Table 42**

*Methods of Assessment for Behavioral Competencies: Effective Communication*

Competency	Frequency
Effective Communication	
Feedback/Evaluation	8
Degree Conferred	6
Behavioral Interview Process	5
Presentation	3
Office Demographics	3

**Table 43**

*Methods of Assessment for Behavioral Competencies: Emotional Intelligence/Self-*

*Awareness*

Competency	Frequency
Emotional Intelligence/Self-Awareness	
Certificate of Completion	11
Practical	8
Application/Observation/Referrals	
Self-Reflection	7
Feedback	5

**Table 44***Methods of Assessment for Behavioral Competencies: Ethical Agent*

Competency	Frequency
Ethical Agent	
Campus Survey/Visitor Feedback	7
Degree Conferred	5
Background Check	4
Word of Mouth/Letters of Recommendation	4
Collaboration	3

**Table 45***Methods of Assessment for Behavioral Competencies: Global and Cultural Effectiveness**(DEIB)*

Competency	Frequency
Global and Cultural Effectiveness (DEIB)	
Demographic Makeup of Visitors/Cases	8
Reputation and Relationship	5
Course/Degree Program	4
Certification in DEIB	4

**Table 46***Methods of Assessment for Behavioral Competencies: Networking*

Competency	Frequency
Networking	
Visitor Usage	5
Collaboration Request	3
Social Media Tracking	3
Onboarding/Intentional Intros	1

**Table 47***Methods of Assessment for Behavioral Competencies: Ombuds Integrity*

Competency	Frequency
Ombuds Integrity	
Word of Mouth/References	12
IOA Certification	7
Feedback	6
Repeat Visitors	5

**Table 48***Methods of Assessment for Behavioral Competencies: Relationship Management*

Competency	Frequency
Relationship Management	
Letters of Recommendation/Word of Mouth	7
Repeat Visitors	6
Evaluations/Feedback/360	5

**Table 49***Methods of Assessment for Behavioral Competencies: Stress Management*

Competency	Frequency
Stress Management	
Self-Regulation/Self-Management	18
Peer/Supervisor Reflection	6

**Appendix F**  
**Participant Invitation Letter**

Dear Ombuddy,

Thank you for kindly agreeing to be a part of my doctoral research study to make an empirically researched recommendation for an ombudsperson in higher education competency model based on the lived experiences and perceptions of current ombuds.

Thank you for your valuable support with this study and your continued interest in participating in the study.

This one-on-one interview will be conducted via Zoom. Each interview will last 30–60 minutes and will involve answering in-depth questions about your ombuds experience. Your responses to the questions will be kept confidential. Each participant will be assigned a pseudonym to help ensure their personal identifiers are not revealed during the analysis and write-up of findings. There is no compensation for participating in this study. However, your participation will help clarify and confirm competencies to advance the knowledge considered essential to perform the ombuds role well.

**Please read, sign, and send back the attached informed consent form.**

If you are still willing to participate in this study, please send me your first and second preferences for date and time given the available dates below. If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to ask.

Date	Morning	Afternoon	Evening
1.			
2.			

Hopes for health and peace,

Alicia

**Appendix G:****General Informed Consent Form****NSU Consent to be in a Research Study Entitled**

Competencies of Ombuds in Higher Education

**Who is doing this research study?**

College: Halmos College of Arts and Sciences at Nova Southeastern University,  
Department of Conflict Resolution Studies

Principal Investigator: Alicia Booker (BA Journalism, MA Dispute Resolution)

Faculty Advisor/Dissertation Chair: Dr. Robin Cooper

Co-Investigator(s): NA

Site Information: Virtual

Funding: Unfunded

**What is this study about?**

This study aims to deepen the understanding of ombuds (i.e., ombuds, ombudsperson) practice in public higher education by exploring what ombudsmen consider the critical competencies to fulfill a variety of professional functions, how ombudsmen acquire those competencies, and how ombudsmen self-assess or apply the competencies they develop. The purpose of this qualitative study is to make an empirically researched recommendation for an ombuds in higher education competency models based on the lived experiences and perceptions of the current ombuds.

**Why are you asking me to be in this research study?**

You are being asked to be in this research study because you have unique insight to the research problem. As a practicing ombuds in the higher education sector you have knowledge about the competencies' required for effective conflict intervention, reduction, management and resolution. Your lived experiences are valuable contributions to improving the ombuds profession, making you a perfect candidate for this study.

**What will I be doing if I agree to be in this research study?**

As a part of this study, you will participate in one 30–60 minute semi-structured interview with me to explore open-ended questions about the competencies of the ombuds profession.

**Are there possible risks and discomforts to me?**

This research study involves minimal risk to you. To the best of our knowledge, the things you will be doing have no more risk of harm than you would have in everyday life.

**What happens if I do not want to be in this research study?**

You have the right to leave this research study at any time or not be in it. If you do decide to leave or decide not to be in the study anymore, you will not receive any penalty or lose any services you have a right to get. If you choose to stop being in the study, any information collected about you **before** the date you leave the study will be kept in the research records for 36 months from the end of the study but you may request that it not be used.

**What if there is new information learned during the study that may affect my decision to remain in the study?**

If significant new information relating to the study becomes available, which may relate to whether you want to remain in this study, this information will be given to you by the investigators. You may be asked to sign a new Informed Consent Form, if the information is given to you after you have joined the study.

**Are there any benefits for taking part in this research study?**

The possible benefit of your being in this research study is understanding how you view the ombuds role, and if there are any ways in which you might be better able to improve the profession through topics for potential training needs for Ombuds in higher education. There is no guarantee or promise that you will receive any benefit from this study. We hope the information learned from this research study will benefit other ombuds and organizations in similar positions in the future.

**Will I be paid or be given compensation for being in the study?**

You will not be given any payments or compensation for being in this research study.

**Will it cost me anything?**

There are no costs to you for being in this research study.

**How will you keep my information private?**

Information we learn about you in this research study will be handled in a confidential manner, within the limits of the law, and will be limited to people who have a need to review this information. Within the study I will not use your real name, and any or all names and specific locations within the transcripts of the interview will be redacted. This data will be available to the researcher, the Institutional Review Board and other representatives of this institution, and any regulatory and granting agencies (if applicable). If we publish the results of the study in a scientific journal or book, we will

not identify you. All confidential data will be kept securely. The written notes and transcript, as well as the audio recording will be stored on my personal hard drive. This hard drive will not be connected to the internet, nor will the data itself be placed on any cloud or internet-based site. The hard drive remains within my home office and does not leave my house. All data will be kept for 36 months from the end of the study and destroyed after that time by deleting the typed transcript as well as the voice recording from my personal hard drive.

**Will there be any Audio or Video Recording?**

This research study involves audio and/or video recording. This recording will be available to the researcher, the Institutional Review Board, and other representatives of this institution. The recording will be kept, stored, and destroyed as stated in the section above. Because what is in the recording could be used to find out that it is you, it is not possible to be sure that the recording will always be kept confidential. The researcher will try to keep anyone not working on the research from listening to or viewing the recording.

**Whom can I contact if I have questions, concerns, comments, or complaints?**

If you have questions now, feel free to ask us. If you have more questions about the research, your research rights, or have a research-related injury, please contact:

Primary contact:

Dr. Robin Cooper can be reached at (954) 262-3048, [robicoop@nova.edu](mailto:robicoop@nova.edu)

If primary is not available, contact:

Dr. Ursula Zanko (954) 262-3041, [uzanko@nova.edu](mailto:uzanko@nova.edu)

**Research Participants Rights**

For questions/concerns regarding your research rights, please contact:

Institutional Review Board  
Nova Southeastern University  
(954) 262-5369 / Toll Free: 1-866-499-0790



IRB@nova.edu

You may also visit the NSU IRB website at [www.nova.edu/irb/information-for-research-participants](http://www.nova.edu/irb/information-for-research-participants) for further information regarding your rights as a research participant.

### **Research Consent & Authorization Signature Section**

Voluntary Participation: You are not required to participate in this study. In the event you do participate, you may leave this research study at any time. If you leave this research study before it is completed, there will be no penalty to you, and you will not lose any benefits to which you are entitled.

If you agree to participate in this research study, sign this section. You will be given a signed copy of this form to keep. You do not waive any of your legal rights by signing this form.

### **SIGN THIS FORM ONLY IF THE STATEMENTS LISTED BELOW ARE TRUE:**

- You have read the above information.  
Your questions have been answered to your satisfaction about the research

### **Adult Signature Section**

I have voluntarily decided to take part in this research study

Printed Name of Participant	Signature of Participant	Date
Printed Name of Person Obtaining Consent and Authorization	Signature of Person Obtaining Consent and Authorization	Date