

### Compliance Chats Podcast

<b>Podcast Title:</b>	Getting to Know the Ombuds Office	<b>Podcast Date:</b>	9/25/2017
<b>Host:</b>	Laurie Neal	<b>Guest Speaker(s):</b>	Jim Wohl
<b>Purpose</b>	The purpose of this podcast is to gain an understanding of the role of the University Ombudsman and how he is able to assist faculty and staff and influence positive changes at the University.		
<b>About Guest Speaker</b>	Jim Wohl has served as University Ombuds since June 2013. He was the University Ombuds at Auburn University between 2008-2013 and served as Interim Ombuds at Louisiana State University in 2007. Jim is a Certified Organizational Ombudsman Practitioner, an active member of the International Ombudsman Association, and a member of the Steering Committee of the European Network of Ombudsman in Higher Education. Prior to his career in conflict resolution, he was a Professor of Medicine in the Department of Clinical Sciences at the College of Veterinary Medicine at Auburn University.		

### SAMPLE TRANSCRIPT OF INTERVIEW

#### QUICK INTRO:

**LAURIE/OMAR:** Hello everyone and welcome to Compliance Chats- a new podcast series intended to keep Faculty and Staff up to date on various compliance matters. My name is Laurie Neal and in today's episode I am sitting down with UConn's Ombudsman Jim Wohl. Thanks for joining me today Jim.

Jim: Glad to be here.

#### INTERVIEW QUESTIONS:

**LAURIE/OMAR:** When I think of a classical Ombudsman, I think of someone who investigates a complaint, issues findings and recommends action, but I understand that is not quite the case here.

**JIM:** That description is more of the European model of government type ombudsman. As a campus ombudsman at UConn, my function and sphere of responsibilities is quite a bit different. My primary goals and responsibilities are to provide assistance for faculty and staff in exploring options for addressing really any kind of problem that's affecting their work. So that's a pretty broad definition and that's how I look at it. The idea when a university sets up an Ombuds Office is to support the idea of people working out problems informally or on their own or through dialogue in the early going. Sort of providing resources on that end of things

and saving the more formal processes like investigations, formal complaints, and grievances as a latter resort. My website has a lot of information on the ombuds role on campus.

**LAURIE/OMAR:** So you're not really a compliance officer at all then despite our series being called "Compliance Chats"?

**Jim:** No, but I'm really glad to be part of the series because my office is truly part of the problem solving system for UConn. I differ in that I don't have authority to make anyone on campus overturn a decision or power over anyone in an organizational sense. I don't participate in investigations or create or maintain records for the university. Also, the use of my office is voluntary – that's an important tenet of my work. That people who visit with me stay in control of the next steps of addressing a problem. If I bring up options to someone, it will be up to them to decide the next steps.

**LAURIE/OMAR:** So the key here really is voluntary. What sort of issues do people bring to you?

**JIM:** The majority of issues people bring up involve an issue with another person and most of the time it involves a supervisory relationship or a problem between people with different levels of authority. While most of those visits are initiated by, let's say, the supervisee, several of my visits are with supervisors looking for options of improving a relationship with someone they supervise.

Whether these types of interpersonal issues involve supervision or not, a lot of the concerns involve civility and respect, perceptions of bullying, fairness, and difficulties arising from the way people are communicating with one another.

**LAURIE/OMAR:** After doing this for some time, what sort of discussions do you have with people bring forward these types of conflicts in the workplace?

**JIM:** When I meet with people I'm interested in what steps they've already taken, if any, and what responses they've gotten and what are their goals or what would they like to see change. It's important that one's strategy for change lines up with one's goals. For some of the issues about treatment, for example, a conversation with their counterpart in a problem is what we spend some time talking about. We'll spend time preparing for that conversation, both the logistics and the language of the conversation. Sometimes I'll participate in those conversations with their counterpart in a problem. We'll also discuss options of the more formal kind, filing a complaint with a compliance office or contacting someone higher up on the organizational chart but also talk about whether those approaches meet one's goals in the situation.

One thing I've been talking more and more with people is focusing on the idea of opposition rather than conflict. In our work life, we face opposition all the time, to our ideas, to our behaviors, the work we produce and we feel opposed to the same things from others. I'm not ignoring that conflicts arise, but most of the time, conflicts result from a series of oppositional

interactions. It's what happens during those moments of opposition that lead to conflicts. And changing the way people are treated and treat others can start with a more intentional way we communicate when we're expressing opposition.

**LAURIE/OMAR:** It's really valuable to be aware of the difference between opposition and conflicts and it sounds like that when individuals come to you, they are really in the driver's seat and they can make decisions based on the options that are available to them and you're there to help them as a resource. In addition to directly assisting individuals, what are some things you do that people may not realize?

**JIM:** As a confidential resource for employees, I can receive information to bring forward to appropriate offices when people are uncomfortable bring issues forward themselves. I can also ask questions of the University on behalf of people without revealing the source of the question. When I first arrived in 2013, I worked with the UConn administration to develop an Office Charter that describes the confidential nature of the office. Also, because the Ombuds Office does not report to another unit on campus, people feel comfortable passing on information or learning what other units on campus can be helpful to them. Safety issues, how to suggest a new idea to decision makers, and amending policies are some examples I've been involved with.

**LAURIE/OMAR:** It sounds like it is really vital that your office is independent and because of that you can do some unique things to impact change at the University. How does that change actually happen and what role do you play?

**JIM:** There's a couple ways of looking at that question. A lot of the people I visit with are looking for change in a situation that's affecting them but not others around campus. A lot of the time change can happen by finding the right person or office with the responsibility to make changes, thinking about what are the interests of that person or office, and asking the right question and in the right way. That's sometimes the focus my meetings and taking that approach can, at least, remove the uncertainty about whether change can happen if not instigate the change itself simply by asking the question. Broader change, like cultural change, is a very different type of challenge. I read somewhere that if you want to understand a culture, watch what bystanders do. I'm really encouraged by the emphasis the university is putting on bystander awareness and training. Having a campus dialogue, like the one we've been having about civility is another way to initiate culture change. Really, culture of an organization is about norms and what people tolerate as acceptable or unacceptable. On a college campus, those norms can change faster than in other parts of society. So it makes it hard to keep up with on the one hand, but also makes the culture more pliable and ready to change.

**LAURIE/OMAR:** Where is your office located and how can faculty and staff find you if they'd like to talk about their situation?

**JIM:** I'm located in a quiet area of Babbidge Library. But for privacy's sake, I ask that people contact me to set an appointment rather than just stopping by. My number is 860-486-5143 or I can make appointments via email at Jim dot Wohl at UConn dot Edu. There's an adage in the Ombuds field that if you're not sure where to go or are feeling stuck, the Ombuds office is a good place to start. There's a ton of information and some resources at my website, too.

**RESOURCES MENTIONED BY TODAY'S SPEAKER:**

**OMBUDS WEBSITE:** [WWW.OMBUDS.UCONN.EDU](http://WWW.OMBUDS.UCONN.EDU)

**OMBUDS OFFICE CHARTER:** [HTTP://OMBUDS.UCONN.EDU/UCONN-OMBUDS-OFFICE-CHARTER/](http://OMBUDS.UCONN.EDU/UCONN-OMBUDS-OFFICE-CHARTER/)

**MUSIC CREDITS:**

On the Ground. Kevin MacLeod. Royalty Free 2014. Retrieved from: <http://incompetech.com/music/royalty-free/index.html?genre=Jazz>

Rollin at 5. Kevin MacLeod. Royalty Free 2014. Retrieved from: <http://incompetech.com/music/royalty-free/index.html?genre=Jazz>