

# MONTGOMERY COLLEGE

Office of the President

November 9, 2017

## MEMORANDUM

To: Montgomery College Colleagues  
From: Dr. DeRionne P. Pollard, President  
Subject: 2017 Ombuds Recommendations

On Conflict Resolution Day last month, the College's Office of the Ombuds issued its Fiscal Year 2017 report, which contained important information about issues brought to the ombuds' attention as well as a series of recommendations. In this memorandum, I reflect on the report and comment on those recommendations.

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

One hundred and twenty-six employee visitors accessed the services of the ombuds in FY17. The annual report on this activity also contained four new recommendations—and updates on recommendations that I adopted in previous years. In the attachment below, please find this year's recommendations and my reasons for adopting them.

I want to thank Ombuds Julie Weber for her diligent efforts this year. In only her first full year as ombuds, she has been a leader in creating fair, accessible, and confidential services at the College. Her ambitious approach to communication has resulted in greater knowledge about ombuds services and enhanced awareness collegewide of the benefits of an ombuds to equity, employee relationships, and general morale. I am so convinced of the value of the ombuds' work that I am exploring the possibility—budget permitting —of a retiree/cadre of “ombuds associates,” who could assist the ombuds with her duties. I also believe that broadening the Ombuds Advisory Committee will enhance the office's work, and will be discussing that with the ombuds in the near future.

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

## ATTACHMENT

### PRESIDENT'S ADOPTION OF RECOMMENDATIONS IN FY17 OMBUDS REPORT November 2017

#### **RECOMMENDATION 1. Commit to providing employees protected access to the Office of the Ombuds services, without the fear of retaliation.**

**Adopted.** Increasing awareness by supervisors of the important role that the ombuds plays at our institution is a priority. In the FY17 report, the Ombuds found that a sizeable number of visitors expressed concern about retaliation should their supervisor learn of their visit and, in some cases, were actively discouraged by their supervisor from contacting the ombuds. I consider such attitudes and actions by supervisors to be unacceptable and in direct contradiction to the professional climate of the College. I accept the recommendation that explicit language be inserted in a policy and/or procedure to protect employees from retaliation. I am charging Ombuds Julie Weber to work with Dr. Kevin Long to assure that a prohibition on retaliation for visiting the ombuds is brought for consideration by the end of FY18. With the proper expectations in place, any supervisor who attempts to dissuade an employee from visiting the ombuds would face disciplinary action.

#### **RECOMMENDATION 2. Integrate the core values of civility and respectful communication into the standards for employee performance for all employees.**

**Adopted.** The practice of civility toward one's colleagues, students, and visitors to the College should be a fundamental professional competency that the College should underscore by incorporating it into expectations for employee behavior. In order to implement this recommendation, I am directing the Office of Human Resources and Strategic Talent Management to develop a plan to integrate civility and respectful communication into the standards of employee performance evaluations in time for the performance reviews scheduled for summer 2019. Ultimately, such standards are essential for productive professional collaboration in service to student success, at the core of our mission.

#### **RECOMMENDATION 3. Provide greater transparency and clear guidelines regarding internal promotion opportunities.**

**Adopted.** Engaging in more active professional stewardship of College personnel is another priority. I am accepting the ombuds' recommendation that the College provide greater transparency and clearer guidelines regarding internal promotion opportunities. In order to ensure equity in professional opportunities, the College should define professional pathways more clearly and build awareness of evolving opportunities. While the classification and compensation redesign is already making progress toward the goals of this recommendation, I am formally accepting them as part of the ombuds report in order to emphasize the importance of these efforts. Infusing the promotion and hiring processes with a greater sense of fairness should help qualified individuals at the College to grow professionally with more consistent results. This work is also being pursued by the Chief Equity and Inclusion Officer and by the Office of Compliance, Risk, and Ethics. All of these efforts are vital to the success of the College as they will produce employees who better serve the needs of students. Therefore, I am charging the Office of Human Resources and Strategic Talent Management with developing a plan that can be implemented by summer 2019. I am also charging the Chief Compliance, Risk, and Ethics Officer to meet quarterly with representatives from the Offices of Equity and Inclusion, HRSTM, and Ombuds to look closely at a data trends connected to the employee experience. I am requesting their input on improvements to the communication of internal promotional opportunities and the clarification of guidelines around them. The Director of Employee/Labor Relations has also been tasked with leading a committee to look at the internal promotions process and develop recommendations to improve it both moving up grades and possible promotions within grade.

#### **RECOMMENDATION 4. Ensure greater and more consistent support for employee career growth.**

**Adopted.** The fourth recommendation is closely related to the third, but focuses on the role of supervisors in career guidance. Actively supporting employee professional growth by discussing career planning during employee annual performance review meetings will be a requirement for supervisors. Consistently encouraging the progress of qualified employees at the College is an important responsibility that supervisors should prioritize. Not only will it increase the value of employees to the College, but it will build trust and enhance workplace relationships. Conversations with employees about available tools and mentoring opportunities will enable them to maximize their professional growth and their value to the College. Supporting employees in this way enhances equity and professional satisfaction, both of which drive student success. Now that HRSTM has implemented the 360-degree feedback survey for supervisors, their direct reports will also have a tool for evaluating whether this process of professional guidance is being implemented successfully. To fully implement this recommendation, I am charging the Office of Human Resources and Strategic Talent Management with developing a partial day training for all supervisors to provide them with strategies to support their direct reports' career growth. This could, for instance, be a part of the annual Administrators Leadership Conference in June.