

The Student and Housestaff Ombudsperson Program at



What is a student/housestaff Ombudsperson?

Each RBHS Dean has appointed an ombudsperson as a designated, confidential resource for students and housestaff (“visitors”) seeking information or solutions to problems. The unique nature of the ombudsperson is one of neutrality, impartiality and independence from the Schools’ and University’s established administrative structures. Thus, the ombudsperson is not a student/house officer advocate and does not represent the student’s or house officer’s interests. The ombudsperson is also not an agent of the institution, is not responsible for academic or disciplinary decisions concerning students or housestaff, and is independent of all administrators who have notice, compliance, regulatory, enforcement, adjudicatory and disciplinary functions such as deans or program directors. Instead, the ombudsperson aims for fairness, and impartially considers the interests of all parties. The ombudsperson does not make decisions, render judgments or administer sanctions. Instead, she or he identifies options, provides information, refers visitors to other resources if appropriate, facilitates communication between people, may mediate disputes or negotiate resolutions between parties, and recommends changes in policy or procedure to School/University administrators.

The assistance of an ombudsperson is informal and non-adversarial, separate from existing formal grievance and complaint procedures. Bringing complaints or problems to the ombudsperson does not constitute placing the University on formal notice. Individuals can always invoke the formal procedures. Sometimes the ombudsperson herself or himself may recommend this course of action and refer the individual to the appropriate office. In any case, the ombudsperson will not participate in a formal process.

Each RBHS School has also identified another individual as a research ombudsperson whose focus is on research disputes and problems. This person is available to assist faculty and staff as well as students and housestaff on issues related to research.

Relationship with the Dean, School/University administrators, faculty, other students/housestaff:

The ombudsperson maintains a great degree of independence within the School and University hierarchy. The ombudsperson is answerable only to the Dean, annually summarizing for the Dean the office’s activities without revealing any personal or confidential information about cases. The ombudsperson also makes recommendations to the Dean for specific and systemic changes and improvements in School policy, procedure, environment, etc., based upon the pattern of problems and complaints brought forward by visitors. The ombudsperson has the full support of the RBHS Office of Academic Affairs, Office Workplace Diversity and Office of the General Counsel. The ombudsperson, in addition, is authorized to approach any individual — administrator, faculty member, other student or house officer — in pursuit of information, resolutions to problems or complaints, or to make recommendations.



Confidentiality

The ombudsperson strives to maintain confidentiality and respect privacy to the maximum extent permitted by law. The ombudsperson will not keep records with any personally identifiable information, and usually will not share any information received from visitors without the visitors' permission. However there are legal and ethical standards which may require the ombudsperson to disclose certain kinds of information, such as statutory violations, imminent threats of serious harm to an individual (the visitor or others), or to the University and its property, or about serious misconduct, harassment or the commission of a crime. The ombudsperson must also comply with court orders and valid subpoenas.

RBHS Student/Housestaff Ombudspersons

Paul Copeland, PhD
SGS-Biomedical Sciences, Piscataway
RWJMS, Biochemistry and Molecular
Biology
RWJMS Research Tower Room 738
732-235-4670
paul.copeland@rutgers.edu

NJMS - TBD

Latoya Rawlins, DNP, RN-BC, CNE
SN - Division of Entry to Baccalaureate
Practice
SSB Rm. 1117, Newark
973-972-2470
ralinln@sn.rutgers.edu

Christine Rohowsky-Kochan, PhD
SGS-Biomedical Sciences, Newark
NJMS, Pharmacology, Physiology &
Neuroscience
MSB H596, Newark
(973) 972-7394
rohowscm@njms.rutgers.edu

Lynn Clemow, PhD
RWJMS - Dept. of Family Med. &
Community Health
MEB 278, New Brunswick
609-851-5038
lynn.clemow@rutgers.edu

R. Thurman Barnes, JD, MDiv
SPH – Department of Urban Global Public
Health
683 Hoes Ln W, Piscataway Rm/Ofc 333
(732) 235-9566
rtbarnes@sph.rutgers.edu

Ival G. McDermott, DDS
RSDM - Restorative Dentistry
DS D853, Newark
973-972-3851
ivalg@sdm.rutgers.edu

Irina Benenson, DNP, FNP-C, CEN
SN - Division of Advanced Nursing Practice
SSB Rm. 1115, Newark
973-972-3222
benensir@sn.rutgers.edu

Brittany L. Stone, MS, LAC, CRC, NCC
SHP – Dept. of Psych. Rehab. & Counseling
Jefferson Hall, Rm 211
Blackwood Campus
O: 856.566.6440
C: 908.461.5559
brittany.stone@rutgers.edu

Abhinav Wadkar, BDS, MDS, DMD
RSDM – Restorative Dentistry
DS D-839, Newark
973-972-0322
wadkarap@sdm.rutgers.edu

Amy Sweeney, Ed.D., MSN, RN
SN - Instructor & Clinical Learning
Coordinator
Jefferson Hall, Rm. 215
Blackwood Campus
856-566-6922
as2296@sn.rutgers.edu



Rutgers – The State University of New Jersey
Rutgers Biomedical and Health Sciences

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