



IOWA STATE UNIVERSITY

Graduate & Professional Student Senate

SENATE RESOLUTION SU20-05 SENATE MEETING JULY 27, 2020

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6 **TITLE:** Condemnation of Changes to the Iowa State University Ombuds Office

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8 **WHEREAS:** The Iowa State University Ombuds Officer has existed in a permanent capacity
9 since 2008, providing confidential, neutral, and informal guidance to graduate
10 students, professional students, postdocs, P&S staff, merit staff, and faculty, and
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12 **WHEREAS:** The Ombuds Office provides essential services to the graduate and professional
13 student community through its assistance with mediation, diplomacy, and
14 problem-solving. The Ombuds Office is therefore a critical service for improving
15 graduate and professional student wellness. Now,
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17 **WHEREAS:** The Ombuds Office has a duty to expose systematic issues at all levels within the
18 university, including ongoing concerns of “lack of respect” from supervisors and
19 academic advisors toward their students and/or employees, as noted in annual
20 reports from the Ombuds Office, and
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22 **WHEREAS:** The Charter forming the Ombuds Office explicitly emphasizes the need for
23 neutrality, impartiality, and independence, and these features of the Office are
24 essential for an effective Ombuds Office, and
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26 **WHEREAS:** The Ombuds Office has reported to the Office of the President since its creation in
27 2008. The Office of the President maintaining jurisdiction over the Ombuds
28 Office mitigated concerns that the Ombuds Office would be subject to politics of
29 existing under an office that directly administrates a group served by the Ombuds
30 Office—a perceived conflict of interest. Now,
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32 **WHEREAS:** On July 20, 2020 Ombuds Office was moved from the Office of the President to
33 the Office of the Senior Vice President and Provost (OSVPP), with the Ombuds
34 officers reporting to the Dawn Bratsch-Prince, the Associate Provost for Faculty,
35 and
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37 **WHEREAS:** The OSVPP oversees all aspects of Iowa State faculty, from promotions and
38 tenure to disciplinary actions, the movement of the Ombuds Offices to the
39 OSVPP presents new and significant potential conflicts of interest. Now,



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WHEREAS: The Ombuds Office, under the supervision of the OSVPP, alters the perception that the office may implicitly favor faculty over graduate and professional students and postdocs, increasing the chance that students and postdocs may not receive the neutral and impartial advice that they ought to be permitted to access. Furthermore,

WHEREAS: Restructuring the Ombuds Office to exist under the OSVPP reduces the independence of the Office. The decision also results in a chilling effect on the ability of graduate and professional students and postdocs to seek the services that the Ombuds Office is intended to provide, particularly as we prepare to enter an unprecedented academic year in which many graduate and professional students will be asked to place themselves on the front lines against the novel coronavirus, teaching thousands of students across campus, any one of which may be a source of a potentially fatal infection. Moreover,

WHEREAS: The Graduate and Professional Student Senate (GPSS) is a significant stakeholder in the independence of the Ombuds Office, and

WHEREAS: The GPSS was not notified nor consulted on any of the effects that restructuring the Ombuds Office may have on the graduate and professional student body, and instead learned of the changes to the Ombuds Office through edits quietly and surreptitiously made to the Ombuds Office website, and

WHEREAS: Decisions potentially resulting in significant changes to university resources should occur openly and candidly, be it therefore

RESOLVED: That the GPSS finds that the restructuring of the Ombuds Office and movement of the Office to the OSVPP presents a conflict of interest as the OSVPP manages faculty appointments, promotions, tenure decisions, and professional development programs, and also oversees faculty disciplinary action, and be it further

RESOLVED: That the GPSS finds that the Ombuds Office existing under the direction of the OSVPP reduces neutrality and independence of the Office by potentially favoring faculty over graduate students and postdocs while also producing a chilling effect that may reduce the willingness of students and postdocs to seek advice about their concerns, and be it further



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80 RESOLVED: That the Graduate and Professional Student Senate formally censures Iowa State
81 University President Wendy Wintersteen and Senior Vice President and Provost
82 Jonathon Wickert for failure to discuss the effects of the structural changes to the
83 Ombuds Office with key university stakeholders, including the GPSS.

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85 Sponsors:

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James Klimavicz, Vice President

Eleanor Field, President