

UO Senate Award for Shared Governance, Transparency, and Trust

Nominee: Brett Harris, university ombuds

Department: Ombuds Program

Work Phone: 541-346-6400

Supervisor: President Schill

Nominator's Name: Sara Ash, assistant ombuds

Department: Ombuds Program

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During my time at the University of Oregon I have had the pleasure of working closely with my supervisor, Brett Harris. Brett serves as the university ombuds which serves faculty, staff, students, and community members with business with the university. The core tenets of our office are confidentiality, impartiality, independence, and informality. We work with visitors to hear their concerns and help them resolve them in a way that feels comfortable to the visitor. This individual work with visitors is what most people think of when they think of the ombuds program, and while it is crucial work on campus it is not all that we do.

Brett leads the charge in hosting mediations and conducting facilitations. These services are voluntary, and visitors will often reach out to Brett because of a good previous interaction they have had with Brett, having seen her conduct something similar in a different setting, or by speaking with colleagues who refer them to her. These types of larger meetings require a significant amount of work from Brett, from meeting with individuals ahead of time, conducting any necessary research or outreach, doing the meeting preparation, conducting the facilitations, and then conducting any follow up efforts.

These types of larger processes can take weeks if not months to prepare for and execute. The outcome though, that we often hear, is how thankful the groups or individuals are for having the space to voice concerns or talk through a challenging situation that they are going through. These meetings provide space to hold the conversation, and is done so in a way that invites all voices to be heard. They help departments or individuals meet their goal of tackling difficult discussions, and hopefully coming away with some action items.

Brett also conducts upward feedback when appropriate. She does this in a way that raises the concern but also lets the person know that she can be available to them as well to talk through possible solutions. Brett is adept at delicate work like this – balancing validating the emotions of the visitor while also doing a reality check about the situation. I can think, therefore, of no more deserving person of this award, as this work does so much to help build shared governance with departments and gives a space for all those who wish to share and who may not have. While maintaining visitor confidentiality her work is naturally transparent as issues are raised, and it helps create trust for visitors, within units, and across campus as she works to help with these challenging topics. Brett's passion and compassion make her the ideal ombuds and someone that I am incredibly lucky to be working with.