



# UCSF OFFICE OF THE OMBUDS

## Mediation Services

### **What is mediation?**

A process in which two or more individuals who are part of the UCSF community voluntarily come together with third-party neutrals to facilitate the resolution of a conflict or dispute, or to reach an understanding or agreement.

### **Why use mediation?**

Generally, no one enjoys conflict – although it is a fact of life. The challenge for all of us is to find solutions to conflict and thus maintain a productive and satisfying workplace environment. Mediation helps address this challenge by providing a structured process that enables participants to work together to overcome obstacles and change negative patterns of communication.

The assistance of impartial co-mediators also serves to relieve the burden and stress of conflict for those involved, which in turn is a first step in making it possible for the participants to develop their own resolution.

### **When should you consider mediation?**

As early in the development of conflict as possible, regardless of whether those involved have made any attempt to address the current (or any pre-existing) conflict. When conflict can be resolved at the lowest level it benefits everyone. Most conflicts or disputes involving troubled communication, working relationships or interpersonal issues are mediable. A few issues may be inappropriate for mediation because of an existing policy.

### **How does mediation work?**

The co-mediators are skilled in facilitating a structured process that promotes communication and deflects negative judgments that impede resolution. No one can be bound to an outcome to which he or she does not agree. Pursuant to mediation confidentiality provisions in the California Evidence Code, statements made in the course of mediation are not admissible, subject to certain limited exceptions, in civil actions or administrative proceedings.

The mediation process helps people to hear and acknowledge each other, and find alternatives to the conflict or dispute in which they are immersed. Mediation invites people to assess their options realistically, and also to understand opposing perspectives. It provides an opportunity for productive communication that offers participants an excellent chance of reaching a satisfying resolution.

***“I resolved most of the issues I was faced with... this is an extremely valuable service offered by UCSF.”***  
***(Faculty member)***

### **What is the Office of the Ombuds?**

Mediation services are provided under the auspices of the Office of the Ombuds. As a unit, the Office of the Ombuds is a separate entity from other existing administrative units; thus it is an alternative dispute resolution provider.

### **Who has used mediation at UCSF and why?**

Faculty, staff, students and administrators have used mediation with satisfying results, often changing a negative dynamic in one or two mediation sessions. Communication (or lack thereof) was a critical factor for most of those requesting mediation; perceived deficiencies in respect and/or civility were the next most cited concerns. Other issues tracked for statistical purposes were performance, trust and ethics.

***“It was more comfortable talking about these uncomfortable issues with others present, rather than one-on-one with my supervisor again... it was a relief to make a little headway.”*** (Staff member)

***“The safety, rules and protection of mediation led to extremely useful disclosures that totally changed the misunderstanding that led to the need for mediation.”***  
***(Staff member)***

### **How do you start mediation?**

Parties may seek mediation on their own or might be referred. Anyone can propose that the possibility of mediation be explored, including a colleague or supervisor. The first step is to contact the Office of the Ombuds at 502-9600. Communications are confidential.

Mediation can be arranged to take place in a private setting convenient to the participant, preferably not at their work site. Since mediation is voluntary, the actual time spent and number of meetings reflects the needs and desires of those involved.

The University of California, San Francisco is committed to providing individuals with a safe, neutral process for the resolution of conflict. The Office of the Ombuds offers mediation and other services for conflict prevention and resolution.

For more information, contact the main line for the Office of the Ombuds at 415.502.9600  
or Maureen Brodie, Mediation Officer at 415.502.3272 or maureen.brodie@ucsf.edu.