Confidentiality is one of the cornerstones of Ombuds practice. At the UMass Ombuds Office, we consider a mutual commitment to confidentiality essential to our work. Yet we, like other professionals, can’t offer absolute confidentiality. There are several laws that can require professionals to disclose information, and there is always a duty to report an imminent risk of serious harm. Ombuds confidentiality is subject to these exceptions.

We also want you to be aware of an important specific exception to our confidentiality. The University has designated the Ombuds Office as a ‘Responsible Employee’ for the purposes of cases involving sexual assault, sexual misconduct and sexual harassment (Title IX). This means that we are required to report such behavior that we learn about in our work; this requirement conflicts with our professional obligation to maintain confidentiality. We have therefore developed the following protocol for these cases so that we can provide you with the service you want. If you want to have a confidential discussion of any matter involving sexual assault, sexual misconduct, or sexual harassment, you have two options:

1. You can utilize the option to talk with us anonymously, which is available to all Ombuds Office visitors. We will then report only the non-identifying statistical data you choose to share, which is the same data reporting we do for all other visitors.

2. You can choose instead to consult with a different office that has specific, legally protected confidentiality for discussions about sexual assault, sexual misconduct or sexual harassment. The Ombuds office can help you to identify and connect with resources on or off campus that will best meet your confidentiality needs.

A third option is available if you want to report your matter formally. In that case, before discussing specific information about a Title IX issue, you can give the Ombuds permission to report any information you share with us. This option means that we will have your permission report all information, even information that identifies you and the circumstances you report, to either the Dean of Students Office (students) or the Equal Opportunity & Diversity Office (faculty, staff, and contractors). In your appointment, we’ll discuss what happens to the information from there.

Please ask any questions you have about Ombuds confidentiality or the Title IX reporting process. Our goal is to ensure you are aware of your options for obtaining the degree of privacy you may be looking for.