Candidate Name

Michelle Horvath Other, JD (Juris Doctor)

Candidate Title

University Ombudsperson

Organization

University of Alabama--Birmingham

Candidate Statement

I am interested in serving on the IOA Board of Directors because I have already gained so much from the organization as a member, think that I have meaningfully contributed thus far, but have the ability to contribute to its mission and membership more impactfully in this leadership capacity. While I may not have the longest tenure as an ombuds (although I have always worked in ADR and RJ-adjacent roles), I think that is an important quality that I would bring because I see the work of the field through both the perspective of someone within in, but not so long external from it to know how others see it.

Moreover, I think that I would bring a concreteness and grounding the work—offering practical and transparent leadership that is ethically-based, open to other perspectives, and supportive of the work of IOA members.

Pathway to the Profession

I think that one the most important aspects facing the profession over the next five years is being able to continually defend and preserve the nebulous nature of our work. We as practitioners understand why the work is not concrete and does not follow a set process—each visitor presents an opportunity to work within the Standards of Practice based on their unique needs and the experience and knowledge we have as ombuds. However, I think that there is going to be a focus on all entities whose work cannot be easily explained or is complex, does not have set outcomes, and is subject to privacy laws or confidentiality protections to be critiqued or looked at with concern, and we must be prepared to preserve the important and unique nature of our field.

Thus, as someone who has spent the majority of her career in such roles, I have not only honed the ability to proactively educate about the work, but have created standard operating procedures, transparency documents, and other such procedurals that can be shared when the work is questions or inquired into. In my current role, such documents have already been helpful in the instance of a litigation hold and request (as well as to visitors) because they work to protect the standards of the profession while instilling trust in the work.

Therefore, as a Board member, I would advocate for engaging in proactive education campaigns—especially in professional organizations and entities of senior leaders and policy makers—as well as creating concrete documents that can be shared and modified by members based on how they conduct their work.

Additionally, I think that AI and alternative digital resources will be a key factor for the board to address in the next five years. While this is an area where I have some concrete solutions, this is a place where I would look towards collaboration.

IOA Values

One of the most exciting (and immediately evident) aspects of IOA is its membership variety—practitioners from around the globe, within a myriad of sectors, with different personal and professional backgrounds, and who are at different stages of their ombuds journey. As a result, there can be a tendency to either create too generic offerings and guidance or to create highly specialized offerings and guidance.

Thus, to me, the best way to engage this broad membership and to create meaningful opportunities is to purposely identify elements of the professional that are foundational, ones which are situationally unique, and one which provide transferable knowledge. We can honor the individuality of the practitioner and their location, yet still offer baseline information (with caveat notations), provide uniquely tailored offerings that may be of use to only some members, and strive to provide cross-cultural and cross-environmental offerings that aim to build the knowledge of all IOA members.

However, in order to provide such offerings, there requires the participation and collaboration with all members of the Association, and as a Board member, one of the things that I would like to propose is purposely reaching out to members to not only inquire about what skills or talents they could share, but proactively and contemporaneously identifying issues that could impact the profession and its practitioners and seeking internal and external presenters—with no previous ties to IOA— to help address the topic.

Finally, as someone who has and continues to gain much from the Mentorship Program as a mentee, I think working to expand and add a cross-cultural component to this program as almost a cohort model would be a way for members to feel more connected to and valued by IOA.

Volunteer or Leadership Experience

I joined IOA in 2023, and since then I:

- Have served as an annual conference program reviewer (2024, 2025, 2026);
- Was part of the most recent Standards of Practice and Code of Ethics short-term Limited Task Force Review and the drafting of the Compendium (2025);
- Presented “Title IX and Ombuds” as a webinar for the Association (April 2024);
- Was awarded an IOA Scholarship to attend the Foundations Couse (December 2023);
- Served as a member of the Professional Development Committee (April 2023-September 2024)
- Engaged as a mentee in the Mentorship Program (April 2023); and,
- Have participated in a various programmatic offerings and attended an annual conference.

Within other professional organizations that I have been a part of, I have a long history of serving as a presenter, panelist, specialty-track faculty member, and overall collaborator.

Professional Expertise

The skill and experience in the above list that is most natural to me, and which I would immediately bring to the Board is my ability to develop and cultivate partnerships. Given that I have had the opportunity to work in positions that require partnerships across the entity, as well as with external stakeholders such as local communities, inter/national organizations (such as athletic governing bodies, federal regulators, and affiliated charter-groups), invested parties (such as alumni, parents, corporations, sponsors), building short and long-term coalitions and collaborators is an area where I excel and would look forward to contributing to needs of IOA and members.

Additionally, as a researcher, I am thorough, comprehensive, comparative, and able to synthesize and present findings clearly.

Finally, while fundraising and marketing are not areas where I would identify as having expertise, I am willing to learn and collaborate with others who may more readily have those skills.

Candidate Bio

I currently serve as the University Ombuds at the University of Alabama at Birmingham—a public research institution, part of a larger system structure, in the United States; I have served in that role since January 2023.

Prior to my current role, I served as the:

- Assistant Dean of Students—Director of Student Conduct and Academic Integrity and Deputy Title IX Coordinator at Florida International University, the largest Hispanic Serving higher education Institution in the United States (March 2020-January 2023);
- Judicial Administrator and Deputy Title IX Coordinator at Cornell University an Ivy League Institution in the United States (June 2016-March 2020);
- Director of the Office of Citizenship and Community Standards at Truman State University, a public liberal arts university in the United States (August 2014-June 2016).

Additionally, I:

- Established a consulting company in 2024 to provide contracted consulting, investigation, and training services, with a specialization in conflict resolution, policy review, and hazing matters; and,
- practiced law as a solo-practitioner from July 2011-November 2016 and remain a part of the Michigan Bar Association (a state within the United States).