

MCW Ombuds Office 2023 Activity Report

The Ombuds Office
414-266-8776 (Confidential line)
mcw.edu/Ombuds



A Note from the Ombuds

We are pleased to provide this 12th annual summary of the activities of the MCW Ombuds Office. The data and themes presented here demonstrate the authenticity, challenge, and investment expressed through hundreds of conversations with the ombuds in 2023. We are grateful to all who have placed their confidence in our services and to the individuals throughout MCW who model humility and curiosity by engaging with the issues brought to their attention.

This report is intended to provide information about the types of concerns that staff, faculty, and postdoctoral students have raised with us in the past year and to inform institutional learning. We appreciate comments and suggestions for improving the report and for ensuring that the services of the Ombuds Office meet the needs of MCW staff, faculty, and postdoctoral fellows. Please share feedback by contacting us directly or by completing the anonymous [*Ombuds Office Experience Survey*](#).

It is an honor and a privilege to serve as the MCW Ombuds.

Natalie C. Fleury, JD Michelle Shasha, PhD



"I needed someone to listen to me."



Ombuds Standards of Practice



Confidential

We will not identify you or discuss your concerns with anyone without your permission. The rare exceptions to this pledge of confidentiality occur if we determine that there is an imminent threat of significant harm or if we are legally compelled to disclose information about our services.



Impartial

We do not take sides. We consider the rights and interests of all parties. We are advocates for good communication and fair process. We facilitate dialogue and collaborative problem solving by identifying a range of reasonable options to surface or resolve concerns.



Informal

Any communication with us is “off the record.” We do not formally investigate, arbitrate, arbitrate, adjudicate or participate in any internal or external formal process or actions. The Ombuds Office is not authorized to receive official notice for MCW, and speaking with the Ombuds Office does not satisfy or trigger any deadlines used for more formal complaint mechanisms.



Independent

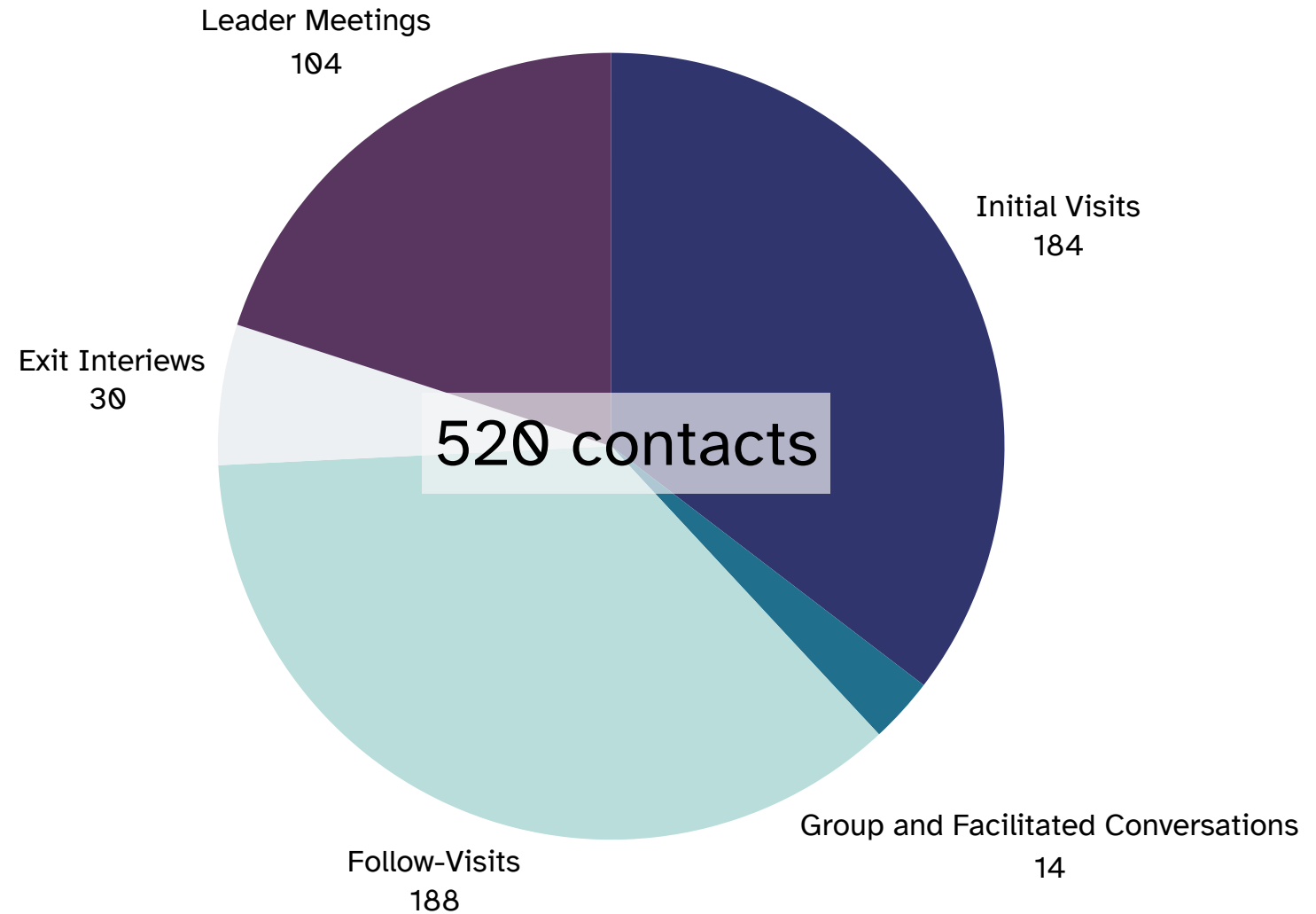
The Ombuds Office is independent in appearance, purpose, practice, and decision-making. The office is also independent of central administration and is not aligned with any campus department or group.

The Activity Report in Context

As an informal, confidential, and impartial resource, the ombuds may become aware of concerns that would not otherwise surface elsewhere. The issues presented are usually many-sided.

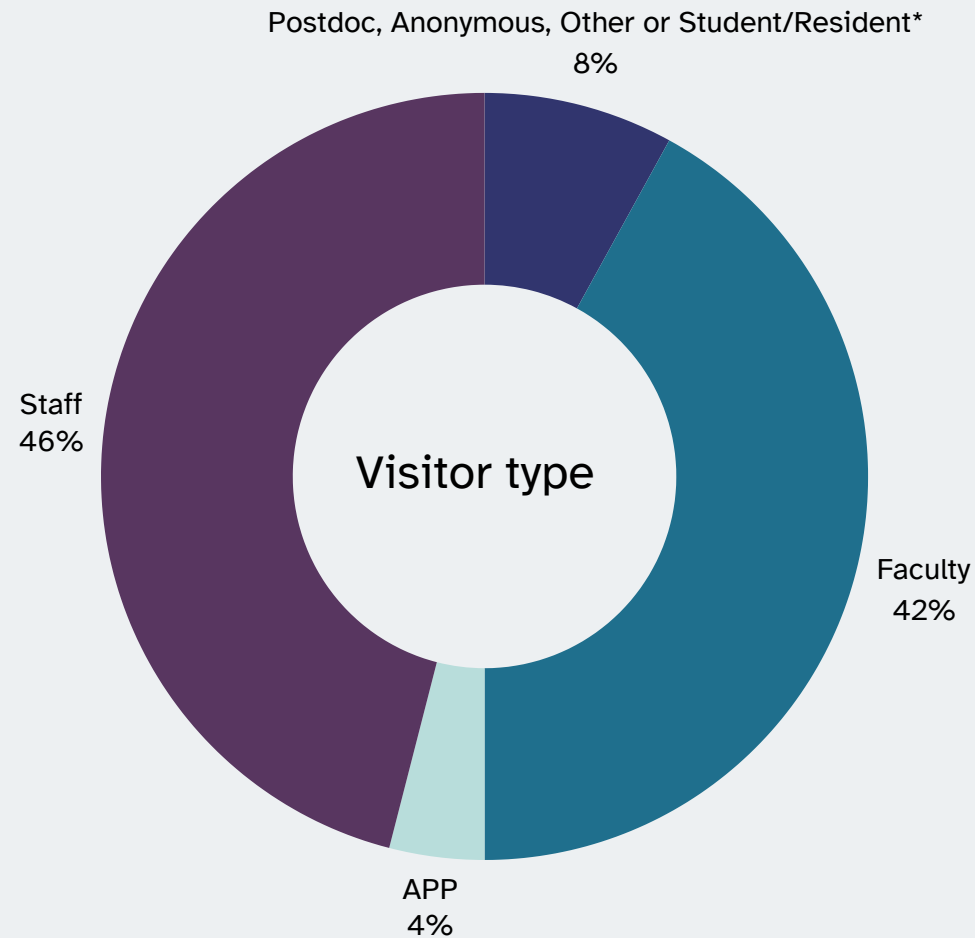
Themes identified in the report are not intended to represent whole truths about complex issues or to criticize or assign fault.

This report is intended to inform the MCW community, as concerns raised through the Ombuds Office may provide additional points of view for institutional review, learning, and action.

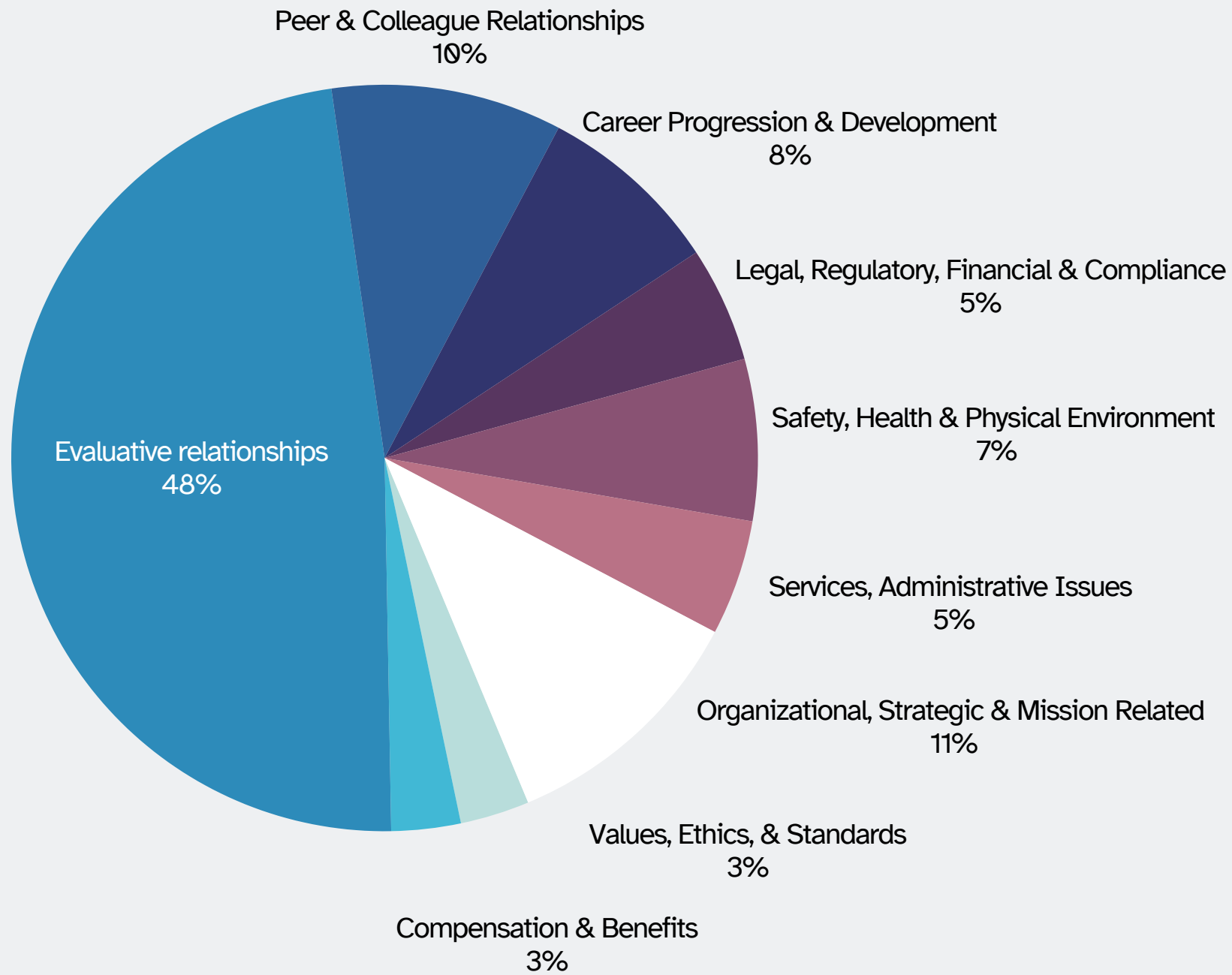


Visit Information

Visitors to the Ombuds Office are consistently committed to MCW, to its missions, and to improving its organizational culture. Although often under significant work-related stress, visitors typically approach concerns with an interest in both their professional development and the organization's improvement.

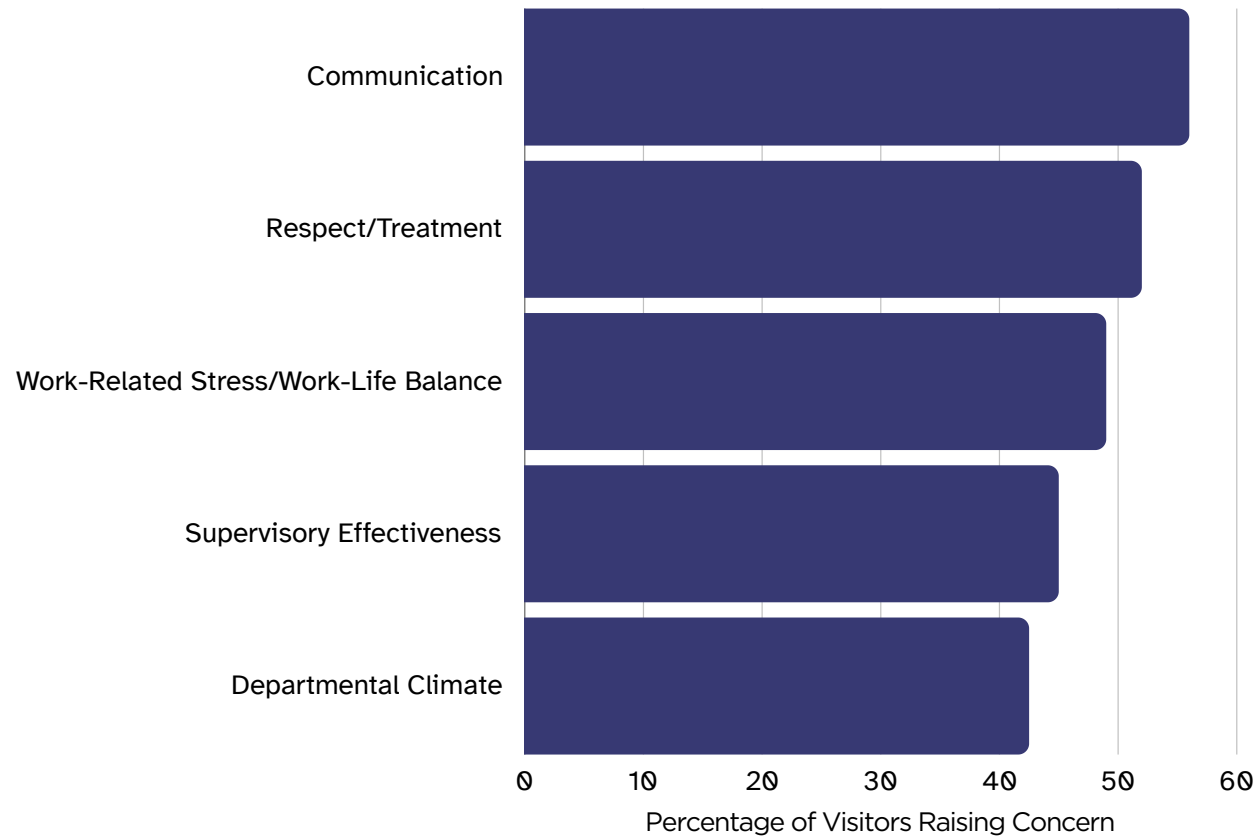


*Students and Residents are referred to other institutional resources.



Categories of Concern as Percentage of Total Concerns

Top Five Subcategories of Concern



Four of the top 5 subcategories fall under the heading of Evaluative Relationships, the top category of concern raised by visitors.

Organizational improvement may be compromised if local and central leaders minimize or reflexively dismiss the viewpoints and concerns of their employees.



Culture

Some leaders are perceived to experience feedback as bothersome complaints, insubordination, or blame and, by extension, may resist ideas that challenge their viewpoints and experiences. These responses may inhibit the expression of diverse perspectives and may be particularly pronounced when there are significant differences in status between leaders and those seeking to provide feedback.

MCW maintains multiple sources of guidance for behavioral expectations of employees, including the Code of Conduct, Professionalism Code, Professionalism Policy, and institutional values. Some express concern that these standards are inconsistently upheld; this concern is amplified when institutional status, gender, race, and/or age are perceived to influence accountability.

Some underrepresented faculty and staff, including people of color, those who identify as LGBTQIA+, and those from non-Christian religions, perceive that their colleagues have limited or no experience working with those from different backgrounds. This unfamiliarity may contribute to disrespect regarding native language, accents, mannerisms, and religious differences. Some perceive that implicit bias impacts hiring decisions, disciplinary actions, and career progress.

One in five visitors reported concerns about respect and communication involving their peers.

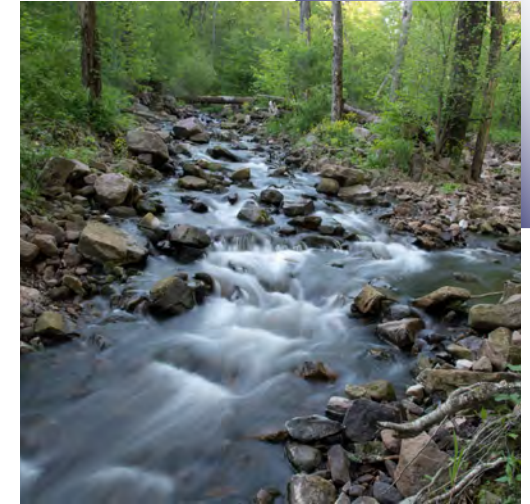
Operations

Safeguarding academic time and maintaining a culture that operationally values education, research, and community engagement is a persistent concern among visitors, particularly those who view compensation for academic duties as a primary indicator of those values. This concern is more pronounced during periods of sustained financial pressures and significant clinical demands.

Financial pressures may influence some departmental leaders and supervisors to assume a more authoritarian management style, increasing micromanagement, use of corrective action, and/or terse communications.

For some postdoctoral fellows, there is a persistent fear of retaliation for surfacing even confidential or anonymous concerns. This is not unique to MCW; the distinctive power differentials and highly specialized work of postdocs, their supervisors, and their shared professional networks may limit open communication and exacerbate conflict, most especially for foreign national postdocs.

Some individuals question whether formal investigations of faculty and staff are thorough and unbiased and whether multiple viewpoints are collected and considered. Concerns about potential repercussions for making formal complaints may impact willingness to share identifying details related to investigations, limiting the process and employee's perception of support from leader(s) or Human Resources.



"I'm worried that academic medicine will be gone."

Compensation and Career Progression

Some staff express concern about the lack of transparency about pay ranges within pay grades, both when applying for positions and when negotiating within a current role or for a promotion.

Some faculty express confusion and, at times, mistrust about the application of their Personnel Activity Reports (PARs), about institutional commitment to their protected time, and about the equity of productivity expectations.

Faculty and staff promotions to mid-level leadership positions are not consistently accompanied by ongoing training, coaching, and support. This may lead to conflict, morale, and retention problems. There are several emerging training and support opportunities available to faculty and staff, including the [Leadership Roundtable](#), [Leadership Academy](#), and the [Women's Learning and Leadership Collaborative \(WLLC\)](#).

Some faculty and staff have raised questions as to whether performance standards are uniformly applied across roles. Some believe that performance improvement plans and corrective actions are being used to retaliate or to prevent staff from changing departments.

Department-level standards that screen faculty for promotion differ from institutional standards, contributing to confusion and frustration in the promotion process. The Office of Faculty Affairs is formally reviewing these and other promotion and tenure-related concerns.

Some staff experience longer than expected hiring times with limited communication during the process. Some employees applying for internal positions receive little or no feedback when not offered a position, limiting professional development and, in some situations, affecting retention.



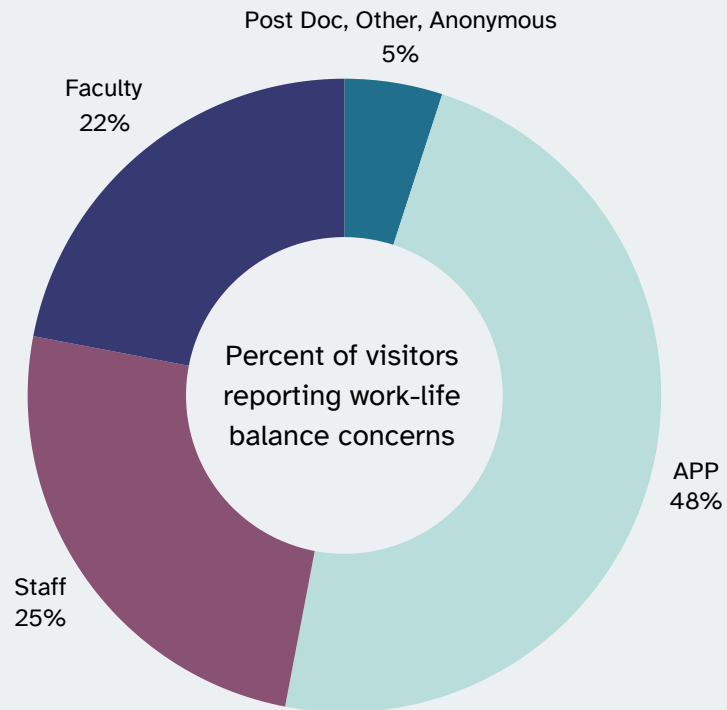


Interorganizational Issues

MCW employees who experience conflicts within partner institutions are uncertain about the pathways for best addressing workplace concerns. These conflicts impact human resources, risk management, and patient care matters and are complicated by different or duplicative oversight mechanisms across institutions.

Work-Life Balance

There is recognition of organizational attention on wellness, particularly through the appointment of a Chief Wellness Officer, through appointed wellness leaders in some departments, and through wellness newsletters. Still, skepticism persists about the effectiveness of initiatives to address burnout, particularly amid tightened budgets and enduring tensions between academic and clinical priorities.



Forty-nine percent of all visitors reported work-life balance concerns in 2023.

Select Presentations

Ombuds Office:

An Introduction & Overview

Ten-Year Report Overview

Professionalism Week Presentations:

Dignity and Equity in a Hierarchy

Cultivating a Culture of Collaboration

Insight: Using Self-Awareness to Adapt & Evolve

Magnanimity as Greatness of Spirit

Conflict Resolution:

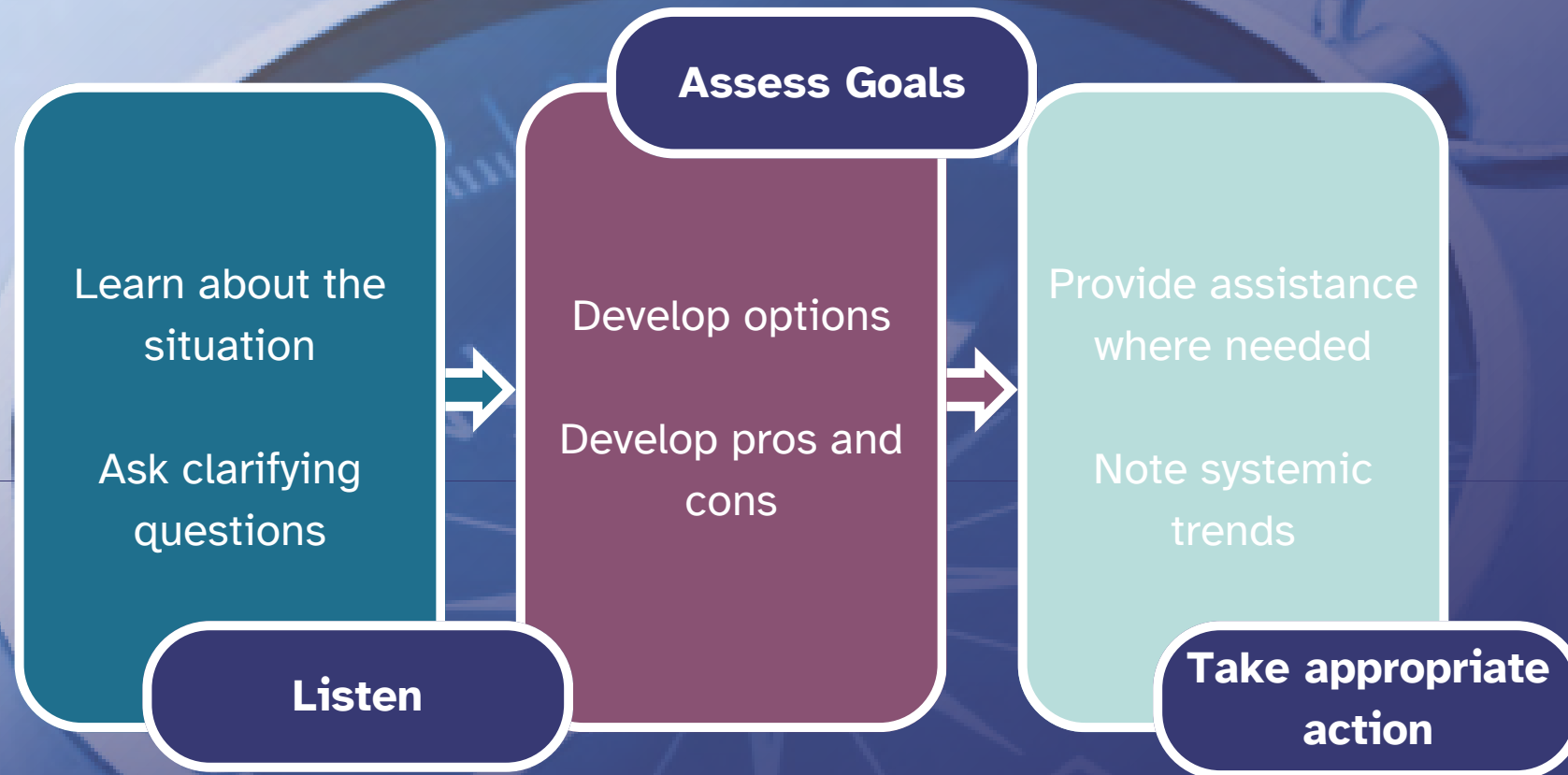
Conflict 101: The Basics of Navigating Conflict

Basic Conflict Navigation: A Primer for Leaders

Dignity & Teamwork in a Hierarchy



Visit with Ombuds



The ombuds are available for in person, phone, or Zoom consultations.

Contact us at 414-266-8776 to set up an appointment. You may also email us at ombuds@mcw.edu.

The **Ombuds** Office

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MCW Ombuds
Office Website



MCW Ombuds
Office Visitor Survey



Ombuds2512
Blog

Appendix
INTERNATIONAL OMBUDSMAN ASSOCIATION
Reporting Categories

MCW Ombuds Office Annual Report: January 1, 2023 - December 31, 2023
Issues, Questions, Concerns, or Inquiries Addressed with Ombuds

Category	Number	% Total
1 Compensation & Benefits Questions, concerns, issues or inquiries about the equity, appropriateness and competitiveness of employee compensation, benefits and other benefit programs.	58	3.2%
Sub-total	58	% category 3.2%
1.a Compensation (rate of pay, salary amount, job salary classification/level)	31	53%
1.b Payroll (administration of pay, check wrong or delayed)	1	2%
1.c Benefits (decisions related to medical, dental, life, vacation/sick leave, education, worker's compensation insurance, etc.)	20	34%
1.d Retirement, Pension (eligibility, calculation of amount, retirement pension benefits)	0	0%
1.e Other	6	10%
2 Evaluative Relationships Questions, concerns, issues or inquiries arising between people in evaluative relationships (i.e. supervisor-employee, faculty-student.)	883	48.6%
Sub-total	883	% category 48.6%
2.a Priorities, Values, Beliefs (differences about what should be considered important - or most important –often rooted in ethical or moral beliefs)	25	3%
2.b Respect, Treatment (demonstrations of inappropriate behavior, disregard for people, rudeness, crudeness, etc.)	115	13%
2.c Trust, Integrity (suspicion that others are not being honest, whether or to what extent one wishes to be honest, etc.)	62	7%
2.d Reputation (possible impact of rumors and/or gossip about professional or personal matters)	39	4%
2.e Communication (quality and/or quantity of communication)	124	14%
2.f Bullying, Mobbing (abusive, threatening, and/or coercive behaviors)	16	2%
2.g Diversity-Related (comments or behaviors perceived to be insensitive, offensive, or intolerant on the basis of an identity-related difference such as race, gender, nationality, sexual orientation)	29	3%
2.h Retaliation (punitive behaviors for previous actions or comments, whistleblower)	42	5%
2.i Physical Violence (actual or threats of bodily harm to another)	2	0%
2.j Assignments, Schedules (appropriateness or fairness of tasks, expected volume of work)	73	8%
2.k Feedback (feedback or recognition given, or responses to feedback received)	35	4%
2.l Consultation (requests for help in dealing with issues between two or more individuals they supervise/teach or with other unusual situations in evaluative relationships)	2	0%
2.m Performance Appraisal/Grading (job/academic performance in formal or informal evaluation)	31	4%

2.n	Departmental Climate (prevailing behaviors, norms, or attitudes within a department for which supervisors or faculty have responsibility)	96	11%
2.o	Supervisory Effectiveness (management of department or classroom, failure to address issues)	100	11%
2.p	Insubordination (refusal to do what is asked)	1	0%
2.q	Discipline (appropriateness, timeliness, requirements, alternatives, or options for responding)	19	2%
2.r	Equity of Treatment (favoritism, one or more individuals receive preferential treatment)	68	8%
2.s	Other (any other evaluative relationship not described by the above categories)	4	0%

3 Peer and Colleague Relationships Questions, concerns, issues or inquiries involving peers or colleagues who do not have a supervisory-employee or student-professor relationship (e.g., two staff members within the same department or conflict involving members of a student organization).

		Sub-total	175	% category	9.6%
3.a	Priorities, Values, Beliefs (differences about what should be considered important - or most important –often rooted in ethical or moral beliefs)		8	5%	
3.b	Respect, Treatment (demonstrations of inappropriate regard for people, not listening, rudeness, crudeness, etc.)		52	30%	
3.c	Trust, Integrity (suspicion that others are not being honest, whether or to what extent one wishes to be honest, etc.)		26	15%	
3.d	Reputation (possible impact of rumors and/or gossip about professional or personal matters)		15	9%	
3.e	Communication (quality and/or quantity of communication)		46	26%	
3.f	Bullying, Mobbing (abusive, threatening, and/or coercive behaviors)		11	6%	
3.g	Diversity-Related (comments or behaviors perceived to be insensitive, offensive, or intolerant on the basis of an identity-related difference such as race, gender, nationality, sexual orientation)		6	3%	
3.h	Retaliation (punitive behaviors for previous actions or comments, whistleblower)		8	5%	
3.i	Physical Violence (actual or threats of bodily harm to another)		0	0%	
3.j	Other (any peer or colleague relationship not described by the above categories)		3	2%	

4 Career Progression and Development Questions, concerns, issues or inquiries about administrative processes and decisions regarding entering and leaving a job, what it entails, (i.e., recruitment, nature and place of assignment, job security, and separation.)

		Sub-total	144	% category	7.9%
4.a	Job Application, Selection and Recruitment Processes (recruitment and selection processes, facilitation of job applications, short-listing and criteria for selection, disputed decisions linked to recruitment and selection)		16	11%	
4.b	Job Classification and Description (changes or disagreements over requirements of assignment, appropriate tasks)		13	9%	

4.c	Involuntary Transfer, Change of Assignment (notice, selection and special dislocation rights/benefits, removal from prior duties, unrequested change of work tasks)	11	8%
4.d	Tenure-Position Security, Ambiguity (security of position or contract, provision of secure contractual categories), Career Progression (Promotion, Reappointment, or Tenure)	17	12%
4.e	Career Progression (promotion, reappointment, or tenure)	47	33%
4.f	Rotation and Duration of Assignment (non-completion or over-extension of assignments in specific settings/countries, lack of access or involuntary transfer to specific roles/assignments, requests for transfer to other places/duties/roles)	2	1%
4.g	Resignation (concerns about whether or how to voluntarily terminate employment or how such a decision might be communicated appropriately)	7	5%
4.h	Termination/Non-Renewal (end of contract, non-renewal of contract, disputed permanent separation from organization)	1	1%
4.i	Re-employment of Former or Retired Staff (loss of competitive advantages associated with re-hiring retired staff, favoritism)	0	0%
4.j	Position Elimination (elimination or abolition of an individual's position)	0	0%
4.k	Career Development/Coaching/Mentoring (classroom, on-the-job, and varied assignments as training and developmental opportunities)	27	19%
4.l	Other (any other issues linked to recruitment, assignment, job security or separation not described by the above categories)	3	2%

5 Legal, Regulatory, Financial and Compliance Questions, concerns, issues or inquiries that may create a legal risk (financial, sanction etc.) for the organization or its members if not addressed, including issues related to waste, fraud or abuse.

		Sub-total	95	% category	5.2%
5.a	Criminal Activity (threats or crimes planned, observed, or experienced, fraud)		2	2%	
5.b	Business and Financial Practices (inappropriate actions that abuse or waste organizational finances, facilities or equipment)		11	12%	
5.c	Harassment (unwelcome physical, verbal, written, e-mail, audio, video, psychological or sexual conduct that creates a hostile or intimidating environment) (10 Race, 6 Gender, 1 OPC, 1 Other)		18	19%	
5.d	Discrimination (different treatment compared with others or exclusion from some benefit on the basis of an Equal Employment Opportunity protected category. (14 Race, 14 Gender, 5 OPC, 1 Other)		34	36%	
5.e	Disability, Temporary or Permanent, Reasonable Accommodation (extra time on exams, provision of assistive technology, interpreters, or Braille materials including questions on policies, etc. for people with disabilities)		14	15%	
5.f	Accessibility (removal of physical barriers, providing ramps, elevators, etc.)		0	0%	
5.g	Intellectual Property Rights (e.g., copyright and patent infringement)		2	2%	
5.h	Privacy and Security of Information (release or access to individual or organizational private or confidential information)		3	3%	
5.i	5.i. Property Damage (personal property damage, liabilities)		0		

5.j	Other (any other legal, financial and compliance issue not described by the above categories)	11	12%	
6 Safety, Health, and Physical Environment Questions, concerns, issues or inquiries about Safety, Health and Infrastructure-related issues.		Sub-total	120	6.6%
6.a	Safety (physical safety, injury, medical evacuation, meeting federal and state requirements for safety training and equipment)	9	8%	
6.b	Physical Working/Living Conditions (temperature, odors, noise, available space, lighting, etc)	3	3%	
6.c	Ergonomics (proper set-up of workstation affecting physical functioning)	1	1%	
6.d	Cleanliness (sanitary conditions and facilities to prevent the spread of disease)	0	0%	
6.e	Security (adequate lighting in parking lots, metal detectors, guards, limited access to building by outsiders, anti-terrorists measures (not for classifying "compromise of classified or top secret" information)	0	0%	
6.f	Telework, Flexplace (ability to work from home or other location because of business or personal need, e.g., in case of man-made or natural emergency)	13	11%	
6.g	Safety Equipment (access to/use of safety equipment as well as access to or use of safety equipment, e.g., fire extinguisher)	0	0%	
6.h	Environmental Policies (policies not being followed, being unfair ineffective, cumbersome)	0	0%	
6.i	Work Related Stress and Work-Life Balance (Post-Traumatic Stress, Critical Incident Response, internal/external stress, e.g. divorce, shooting, caring for sick, injured)	87	73%	
6.j	Other (any safety, health, or physical environment issue not described by the above categories)	7	6%	
7 Services/Administrative Issues Questions, concerns, issues or inquiries about services or administrative offices including from external parties.		Sub-total	87	4.8%
7.a	Quality of Services (how well services were provided, accuracy or thoroughness of information, competence, etc.)	7	8%	
7.b	Responsiveness, Timeliness (time involved in getting a response or return call or about the time for a complete response to be provided)	19	22%	
7.c	Administrative Decisions and Interpretation, Application of Rules (decisions about requests for academic or administrative services, e.g., exceptions to policy deadlines or limits, refund requests, appeals of library or parking fines, application for financial aid, etc.)	49	56%	
7.d	Behavior of Service Provider(s) (how an administrator or staff member spoke to or dealt with a constituent, customer, or client, eg., rude, inattentive, or impatient)	8	9%	
7.e	Other (any services or administrative issue not described by the above categories)	4	5%	
8 Organizational, Strategic, and Mission Related Questions, concerns, issues or inquiries that relate to the whole or some part of an organization.		Sub-total	193	10.6%

8.a	Strategic and Mission-Related, Strategic and Technical Management (principles, decisions and actions related to where and how the organization is moving)	8	4%
8.b	Leadership and Management (quality/capacity of management and/or management/leadership decisions, suggested training, reassignments and reorganizations)	22	11%
8.c	Use of Positional Power, Authority (lack or abuse of power provided by individual's position)	16	8%
8.d	Communication (content, style, timing, effects and amount of organizational and leader's communication, quality of communication about strategic issues)	12	6%
8.e	Restructuring and Relocation (issues related to broad scope planned or actual restructuring and/or relocation affecting the whole or major divisions of an organization, eg. downsizing, offshoring, outsourcing)	1	1%
8.f	Organizational Climate (issues related to organizational morale and/or capacity for functioning)	23	12%
8.g	Change Management (making, responding or adapting to organizational changes, quality of leadership in facilitating organizational change)	6	3%
8.h	Priority Setting and/or Funding (disputes about setting organizational/departmental priorities and/or allocation of funding within programs)	20	10%
8.i	Data, Methodology, Interpretation of Results (scientific disputes about the conduct, outcomes and interpretation of studies and resulting data for policy)	4	2%
8.j	Interdepartment, Interorganization Work, Territory (disputes about which department/organization should be doing what/taking the lead)	78	40%
8.k	Other (any organizational issue not described by the above categories)	3	2%

9 Values, Ethics, and Standards Questions, concerns, issues or inquiries about the fairness of organizational values, ethics, and/or standards, the application of related policies and/or procedures, or the need for creation or revision of policies, and/or standards.

	Sub-total	62	% category	3.4%
9.a	Standards of Conduct (fairness, applicability or lack of behavioral guidelines and/or Codes of Conduct, e.g., Academic Honesty, plagiarism, Code of Conduct, conflict of interest)	15	24%	
9.b	Values and Culture (questions, concerns or issues about the values or culture of the organization)	25	40%	
9.c	Scientific Conduct, Integrity (scientific or research misconduct or misdemeanors, e.g., authorship; falsification of results)	12	19%	
9.d	Policies and Procedures NOT Covered in Broad Categories 1 thru 8 (fairness or lack of policy or the application of the policy, policy not followed, or needs revision, eg., appropriate dress, use of internet or cell phones)	5		
9.e	Other (Other policy, procedure, ethics or standards issues not described in the above categories)	5	8%	

TOTAL 1817