

MCW Ombuds Office 2024 Activity Report

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



A Note from the Ombuds

We are pleased to provide this 13th annual summary of the activities of the MCW Ombuds Office. The data and themes presented here demonstrate the authenticity, challenge and dedication expressed through hundreds of conversations with the ombuds in 2024.

Ombuds help organizations and stakeholders by identifying patterns and trends so that institutions can address and manage systemic concerns. The Ombuds Office Activity Report is intended to synthesize the concerns shared with the Ombuds Office and may also serve as a reference for leaders at all levels of the organization regarding operational, cultural and role-specific themes connected to the processes and decisions that fall within their authority.

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



"You acknowledged me and made me feel heard."



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.

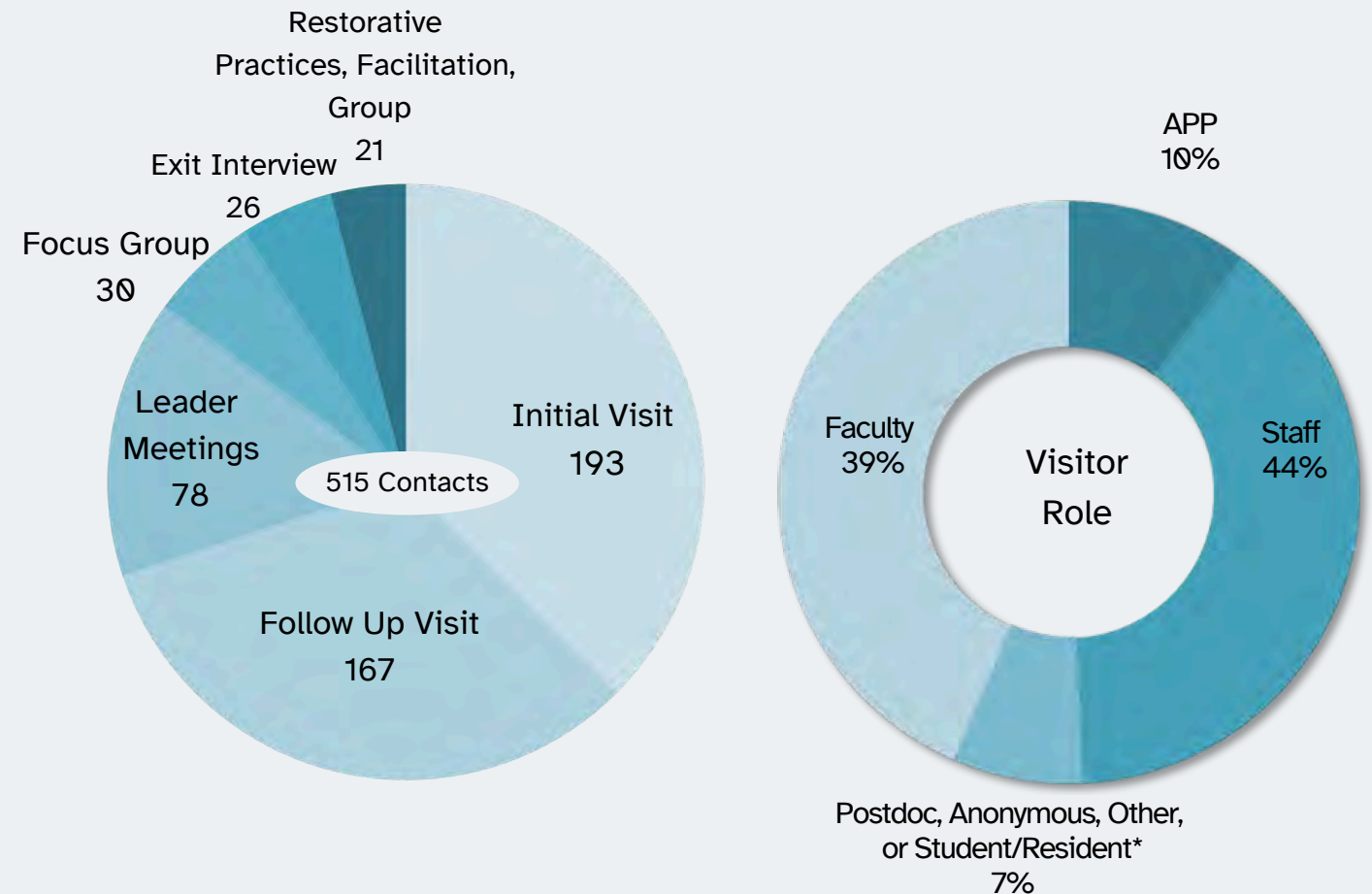
Employee Voices

The Activity Report is an invitation to the MCW community to reflect on the collective voices of employees who engaged with the Ombuds Office.

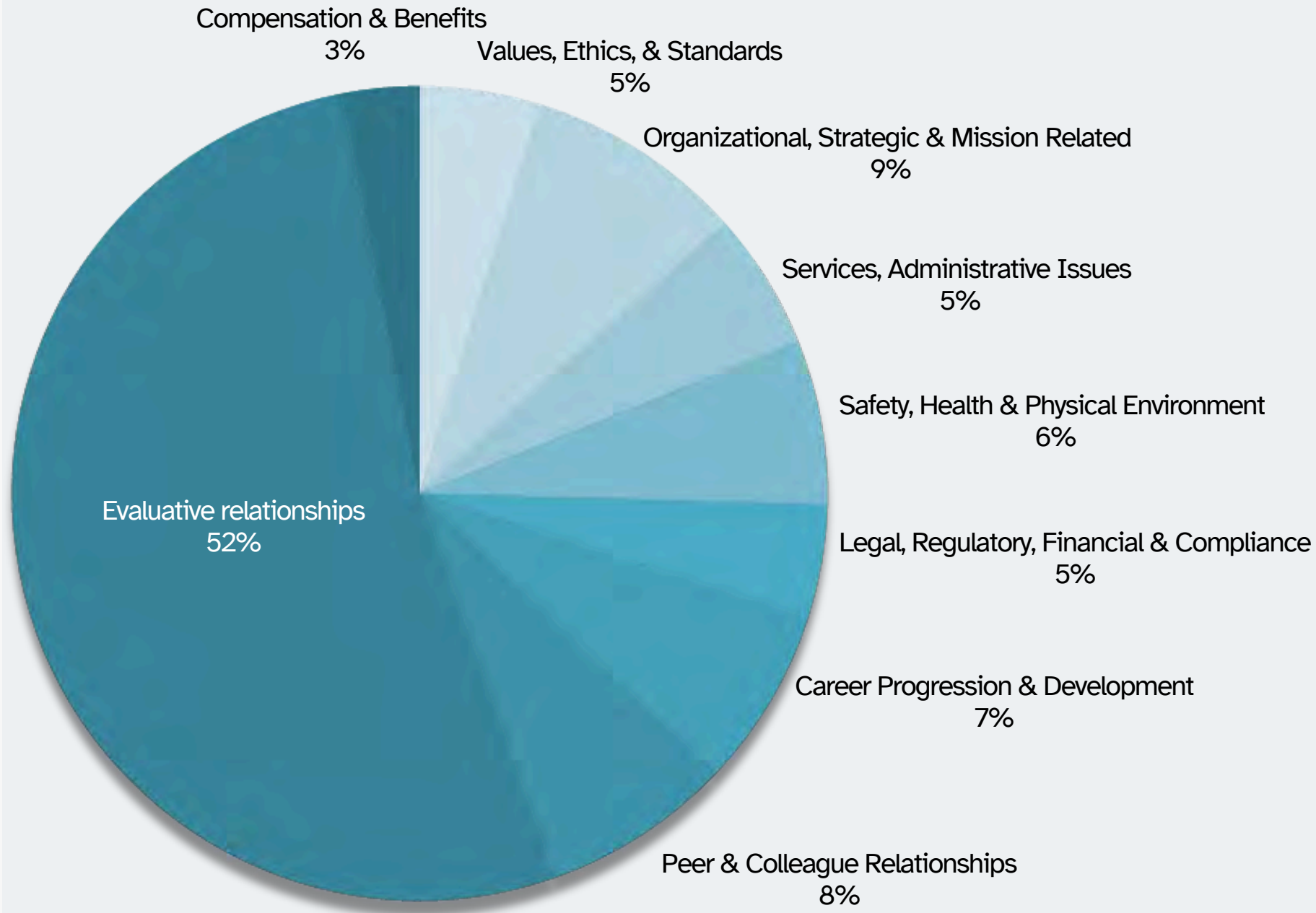
As an informal, confidential and impartial resource, the ombuds may become aware of concerns that would not otherwise surface. The issues presented are usually complex and many-sided.

Openness to and thoughtful consideration of this information honors the courage and commitment of those who shared their perspective with the Ombuds over the past year. Integrating these perspectives with feedback from other sources, particularly by those in positions of authority, signals that voices at all levels of the organization are valued.

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, individuals typically approach concerns with an interest in both professional development and the organization's improvement.

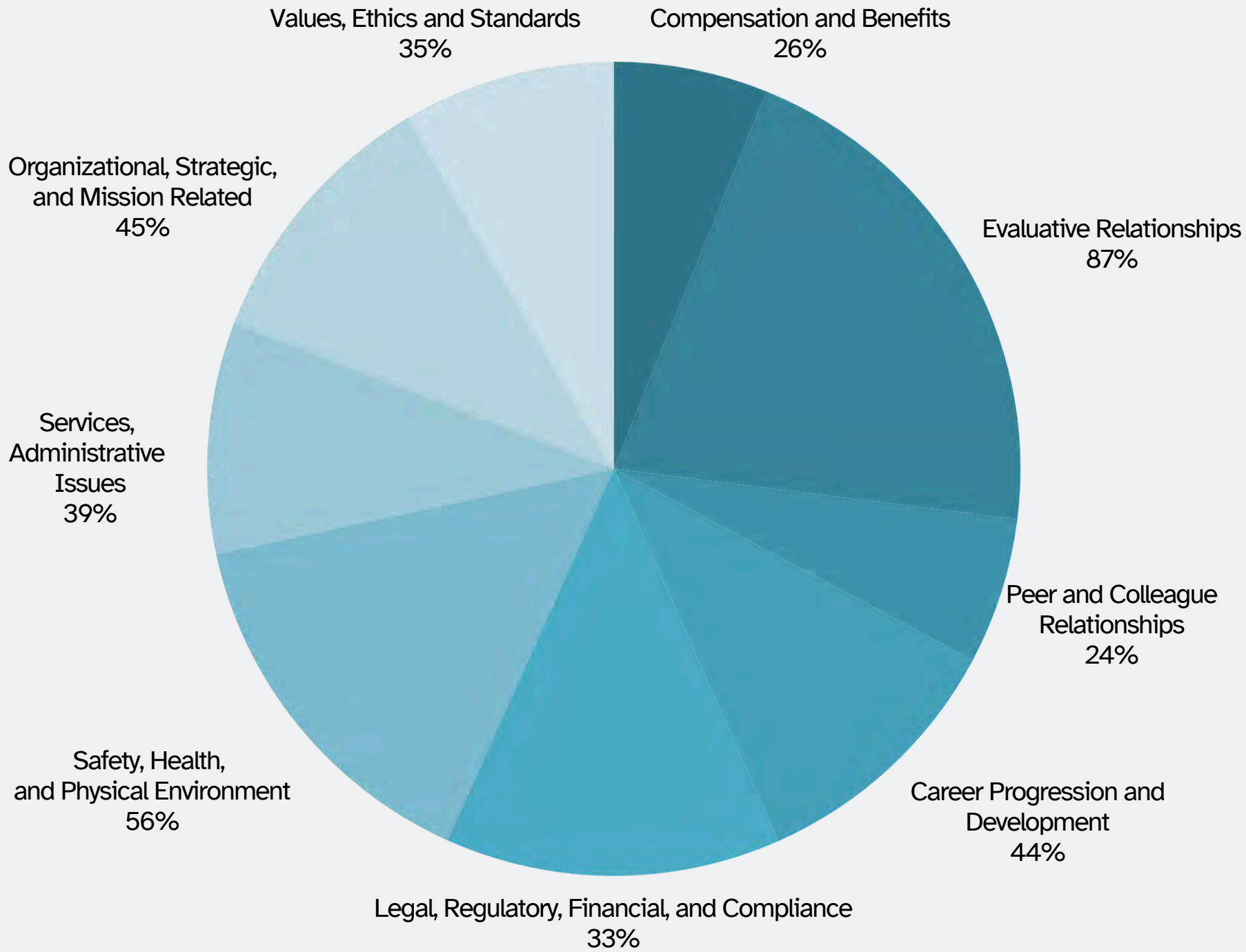


*Students and residents are referred to other institutional resources



Categories of Concern as Percentage of Total Concerns

Detailed statistics are provided in the Appendix



Categories of Concern by Percentage of Visitors Reporting

Detailed statistics are provided in the Appendix



Three out of four visitors reported concerns about respect and treatment by their supervisors or peers.

Culture

Individuals are attuned to whether their leaders demonstrate **MCW's values**. Communication styles, behavior, and decisions that appear to be inconsistent with these values may diminish trust and morale. Upholding the visibility of the values can be particularly challenging for leaders when performance concerns arise and when financial circumstances impact operations.

Some individuals note that MCW's **growth impacts organizational culture** by distancing and fragmenting information from those at the front line of patient care and by shifting some decision-making to those in administrative roles. This pattern may impact engagement and loyalty.

Diversity issues (concerns related to insensitive, offensive, or intolerant comments or behaviors related to identity differences) were raised by 18.5% of visitors, a higher percentage than in previous years. **Discrimination concerns** (issues that are specifically focused on different treatment or exclusion) were raised by 12.8% of visitors, a lower percentage than in the previous 3 years. These concerns were not limited to members of minority groups.

Some **departmental inclusivity initiatives** prompted concerns and potential conflicts between institutional or departmental expectations and individual preferences. Because individuals may be wary of potential misunderstanding, conflict, or possible reprimand, these sensitivities may stifle open communication and dialogue. The newly established MCW Freedom of Expression Principles may provide a shared framework for open communication.

Some experience MCW's conflict norm to be one of **avoidance**, noting that those who communicate more directly or advocate on their own behalf tend to be labeled as difficult, insubordinate, or unprofessional. Some are reluctant to raise issues because their concerns have been discounted or countered by hearsay rather than verifiable information.

Operations

Feedback persists about what is perceived to be a **lack of or slowed responsiveness** to issues involving professionalism, respect, and performance concerns of some leaders. Employees who observe this pattern commonly raise questions about organizational standards, expectations, and processes; high turnover is frequently perceived to be an indicator of unaddressed concerns.

Information disseminated in higher-level administrative meetings among chairs, administrators, and/or department representatives is not consistently shared with faculty and staff; similarly, upward feedback from constituents that might inform process improvements is not reliably transmitted to those with influence and/or decision-making authority.

Some raised concern about MCW's **organizational structure**, with authority perceived to be excessively localized in Chairs and executive leadership. This structure may support cronyism and limit institutional flexibility, growth, and responsiveness.

Apprehension about **retaliation** remains high; 32% of visitors to the Ombuds Office expressed worry about repercussions from leaders or peers should they report concerns.



"I appreciated the confidence you gave me and the strategies for talking with my colleagues."

Human Resources

Some employees are reluctant to engage with Human Resources due to concerns regarding **confidentiality** and **retaliation**.

Some individuals who are the subject of complaints, corrective action, and/or investigations question the **objectivity** and **comprehensiveness** of these processes.

Compensation concerns were raised more frequently than in previous years, with 17.3% of visitors raising this issue. These concerns included frustration with limited compensation transparency and with comparatively lower earnings between academic and community or private institutions.

There is inconsistent understanding among employees and leaders related to **non-maternity based family medical leaves (FMLA)**, with frequent concerns and questions related to eligibility, protections, reporting, and requirements for intermittent versus full leaves of absence.



Equity of treatment concerns were raised by nearly one-third of visitors; perceived bias, conflicts of interest, & favoritism were common themes.

Staff

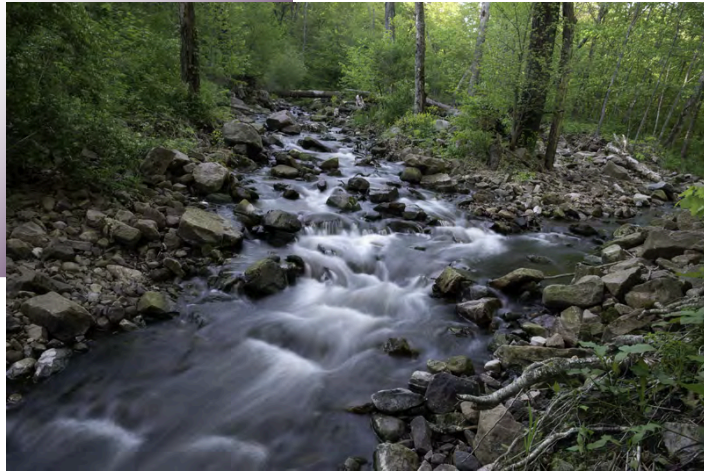
- Some staff perceive that **corrective action** is applied prematurely in situations that might otherwise be addressed with enhanced training. This is experienced most acutely during a trial period, with tensions heightened by a shortened timeline to address problems.
- Some staff express concerns that administrative **job descriptions, duties, expectations and compensation** are not consistent among similar roles across departments.
- Some employees are not familiar with the **career development resources** available to them on Infoscope and through Human Resources. Additionally, faculty who manage staff may benefit from increased awareness of resources for staff development and career progression.

Faculty

- Some faculty experience their employment **restrictive covenant** (no-compete clause) to be unnecessarily limiting and demoralizing.
- Absent a pathway for submitting a formal grievance for concerns that do not involve disparate treatment (e.g., protracted conflict with a colleague or leader(s) or concerns regarding performance feedback), some faculty raise questions regarding **institutional fairness and due process**
- Departing faculty have mentioned concerns with **succession planning and recruitment**, noting that recruitment efforts are often delayed for months, occasionally resulting in the loss of qualified candidates, despite advance notice of a faculty member's upcoming departure.

Advance Practice Providers

- While **centralization and standardization of APP expectation-setting** is a recognized need, some experience centralized decision-making to be disconnected from specialty-specific workflows, clinical demands and infrastructure needs, which may impact trust, morale and retention.
- There are concerns that APP **leadership opportunities** are limited and do not always allow for an open application process.
- There are tensions related to **expanding services and coverage** issues, particularly related to APP scheduling. Some worry that supervisors who are setting schedules don't have enough familiarity with workflows.

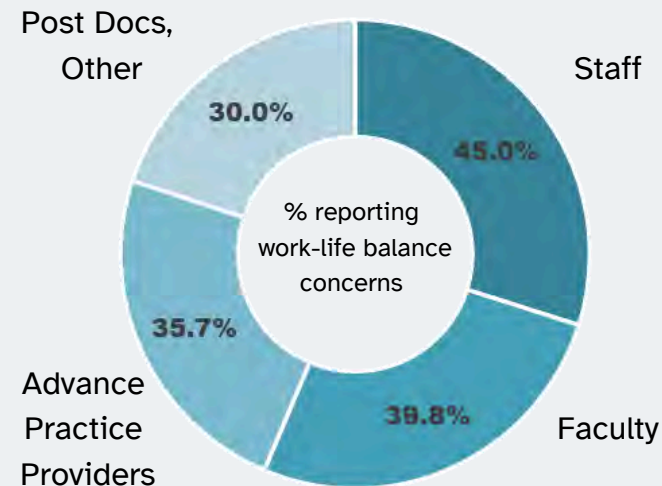


Interorganizational Issues

Some are impacted by **competing tensions with partner organizations** related to the balance of MCW's missions of education, research, and community engagement with clinical demands; some fear that closer partnerships with Froedtert and Children's Wisconsin may compromise academic missions and impede MCW's agility.

Work-Life Balance

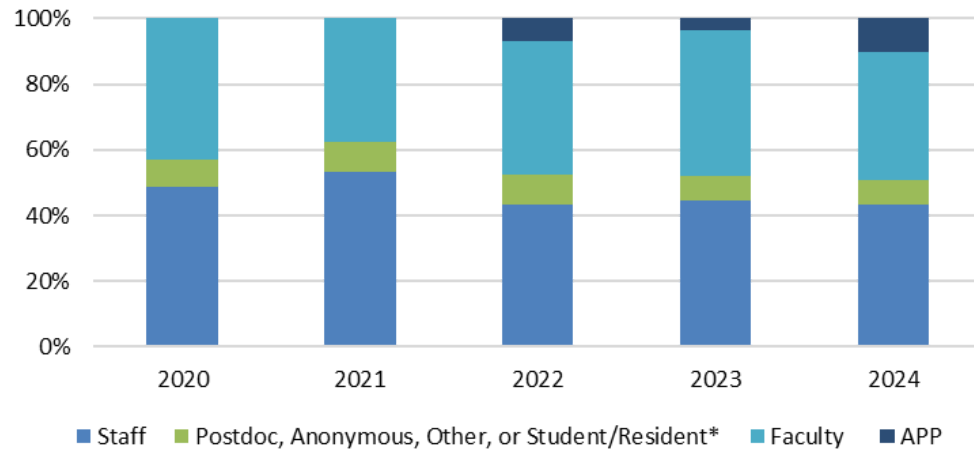
- Staff-related concerns about work-life balance are largely driven by **workload** and by **tensions** with immediate leader(s).
- Some clinicians describe their work environment as a **machine climate** in which productivity and financial pressures compete with quality, safety and well-being concerns.
- Some faculty and staff express **reluctance to use FMLA** because of concern that it will lead to resentment and/or repercussions from their leader(s) and colleagues.



50% of all visitors reported work-life balance concerns in 2024

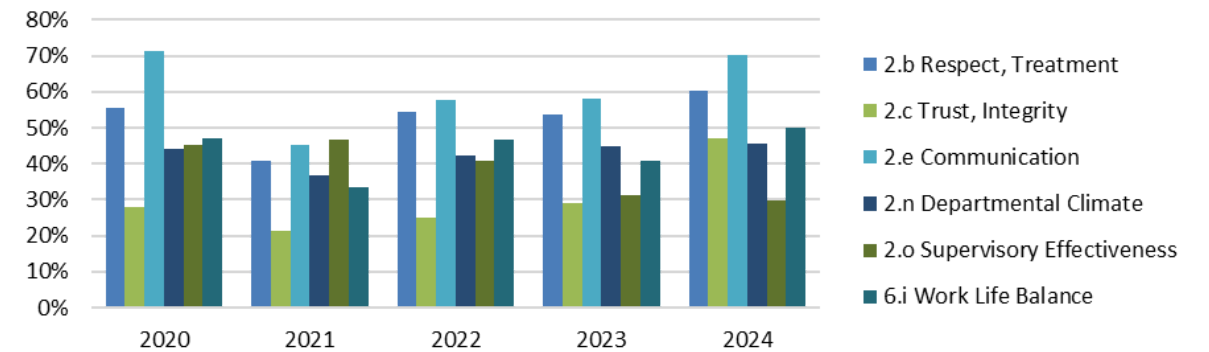
5-Year Retrospective: Select Trends 2020-2024

Visitor Type by Percentage*
2020-2024

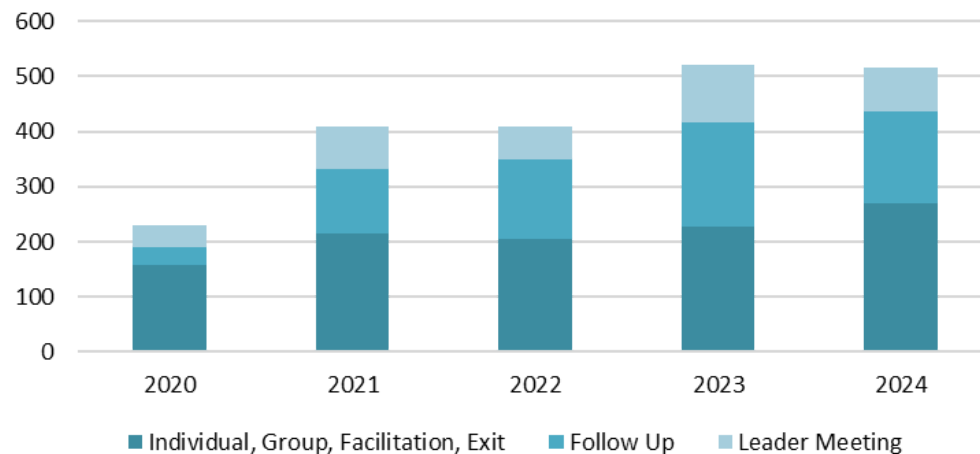


(*Advanced Practice Provider (APP) tracked as a separate category as of 2022)

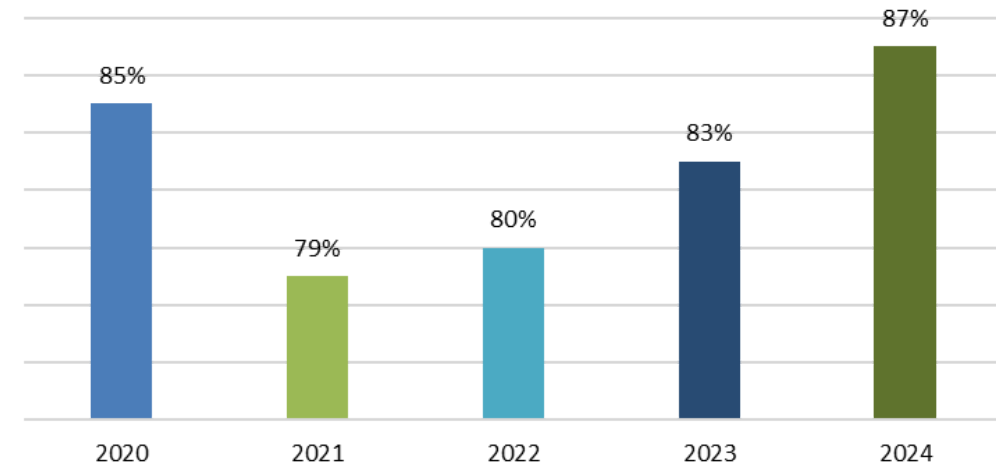
Trends in Subcategories of Concerns by
Percentage of Visitors Reporting
2020-2024



Type of Contact
2020-2024



Evaluative Relationship Concerns
by Percentage of Visitors Reporting



Institutional Activities

Select Presentations

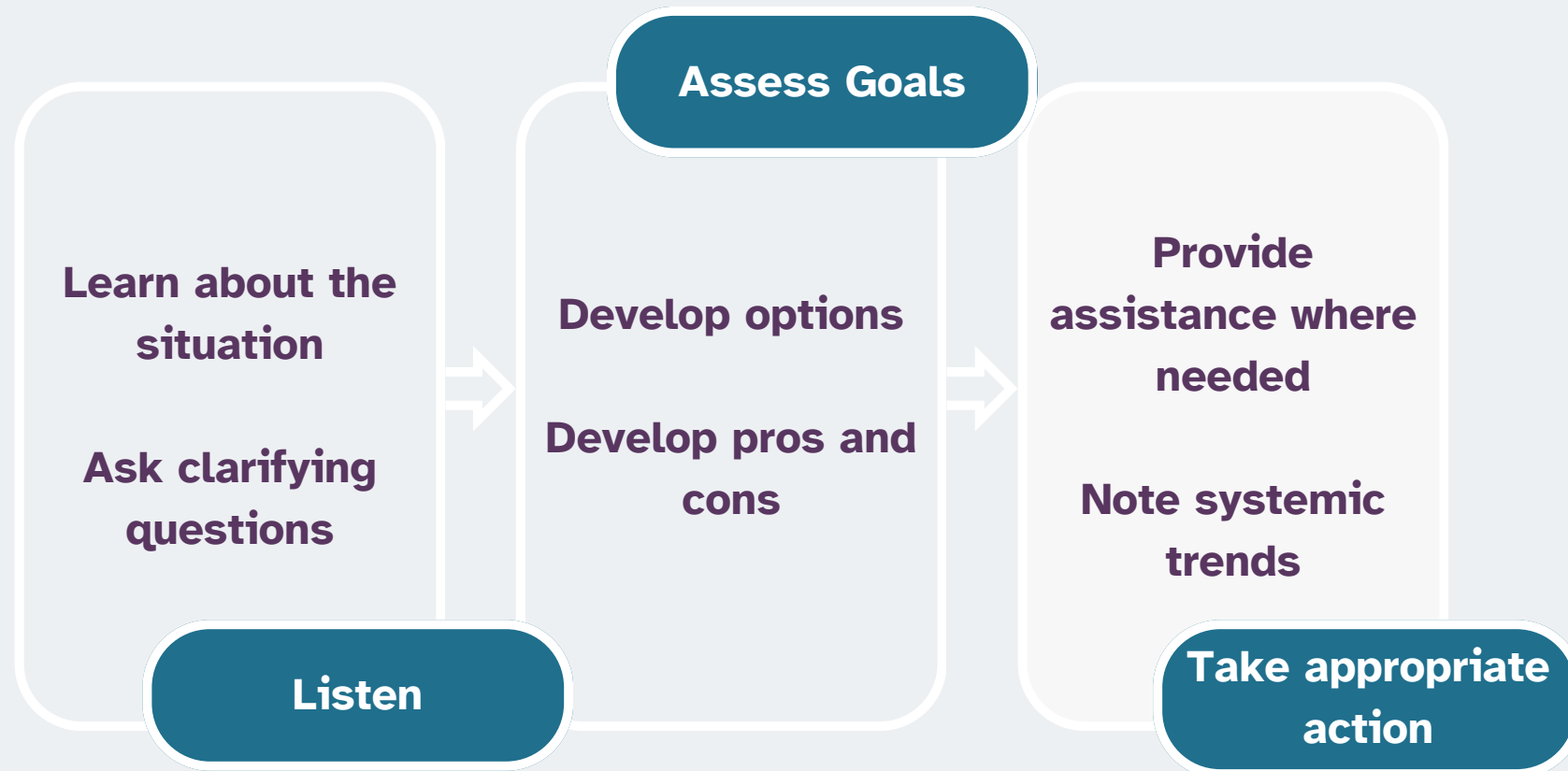
- Ombuds Office: An Introduction & Overview
- MCW Ombuds Office Ten-Year Report Overview
- Resolving Conflict Through Curiosity
- Dignity and Equity in a Hierarchy
- Cultivating a Culture of Collaboration
- Insight: Using Self-Awareness to Adapt & Evolve
- Conflict 101: The Basics of Navigating Conflict
- Basic Conflict Navigation: A Primer for Leaders
- Dignity & Teamwork in a Hierarchy
- The Dynamics of the Leader-Follower Relationship
- Disagreement in a Hierarchy: Challenges and Opportunity



Ex-Officio Committee Participation

- Administrative Leadership Group
- Executive Committee of the Faculty
- Faculty Council
- Professionalism Enrichment Committee
- University Advisory Council
- Freedom of Expression Committee

A Visit with an 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

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



MCW Ombuds
Office Website



MCW Ombuds
Office Visitor Survey



Ombuds2512
Blog

INTERNATIONAL OMBUDSMAN ASSOCIATION
Reporting Categories

VERSION 2
October 2007

January 2024-December 2024
Questions, Concerns, Issues or Inquiries
where Information or Options are Explored

Category	of	Percent	Comments
1 Compensation & Benefits Questions, concerns, issues or inquiries about the equity, appropriateness and competitiveness of employee compensation, benefits and other benefit programs.			
Sub-total		67	3.1%
1.a Compensation (rate of pay, salary amount, job salary classification/level)	39	58%	
1.b Payroll (administration of pay, check wrong or delayed)	0	0%	
1.c Benefits (decisions related to medical, dental, life, vacation/sick leave, education, worker's compensation insurance, etc.)	15	22%	
1.d Retirement, Pension (eligibility, calculation of amount, retirement pension benefits)	3	4%	
1.e Other (any other employee compensation or benefit not described by the above categories) Please specify below: Other 1: Bonus structure Other 2: Other 3:(add additional rows, if necessary)	10	15%	
2 Evaluative Relationships Questions, concerns, issues or inquiries arising between people in evaluative relationships (i.e. supervisor-employee, faculty-student.)			
Sub-total		1134	52.3%
2.a Priorities, Values, Beliefs (differences about what should be considered important - or most important –often rooted in ethical or moral beliefs)	44	4%	
2.b Respect, Treatment (demonstrations of inappropriate behavior, disregard for people, rudeness, crudeness, etc.)	136	12%	
2.c Trust, Integrity (suspicion that others are not being honest, whether or to what extent one wishes to be honest, etc.)	106	9%	
2.d Reputation (possible impact of rumors and/or gossip about professional or personal matters)	54	5%	
2.e Communication (quality and/or quantity of communication)	159	14%	
2.f Bullying, Mobbing (abusive, threatening, and/or coercive behaviors)	25	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)	36	3%	
2.h Retaliation (punitive behaviors for previous actions or comments, whistleblower)	62	5%	
2.i Physical Violence (actual or threats of bodily harm to another)	0	0%	
2.j Assignments, Schedules (appropriateness or fairness of tasks, expected volume of work)	91	8%	
2.k Feedback (feedback or recognition given, or responses to feedback received)	50	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)	0	0%	
2.m Performance Appraisal/Grading (job/academic performance in formal or informal evaluation)	47	4%	
2.n Departmental Climate (prevailing behaviors, norms, or attitudes within a department for which supervisors or faculty have responsibility)	103	9%	
2.o Supervisory Effectiveness (management of department or classroom, failure to address issues)	102	9%	
2.p Insubordination (refusal to do what is asked)	4	0%	
2.q Discipline (appropriateness, timeliness, requirements, alternatives, or options for responding)	26	2%	
2.r Equity of Treatment (favoritism, one or more individuals receive preferential treatment)	71	6%	
2.s Other (any other evaluative relationship not described by the above categories):	18	2%	

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Category	of	Percent	Comments
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		164	7.6%
3.a Priorities, Values, Beliefs (differences about what should be considered important - or most important –often rooted in ethical or moral beliefs)	17	10%	
3.b Respect, Treatment (demonstrations of inappropriate regard for people, not listening, rudeness, crudeness, etc.)	38	23%	
3.c Trust, Integrity (suspicion that others are not being honest, whether or to what extent one wishes to be honest, etc.)	29	18%	
3.d Reputation (possible impact of rumors and/or gossip about professional or personal matters)	12	7%	
3.e Communication (quality and/or quantity of communication)	42	26%	
3.f Bullying, Mobbing (abusive, threatening, and/or coercive behaviors)	7	4%	
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)	8	4%	
3.h Retaliation (punitive behaviors for previous actions or comments, whistleblower)	11	7%	
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) Please specify below: uncategorized	2	1%	
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		154	7.1%
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)	15	10%	
4.b Job Classification and Description (changes or disagreements over requirements of assignment, appropriate tasks)	11	7%	
4.c Involuntary Transfer, Change of Assignment (notice, selection and special dislocation rights/benefits, removal from prior duties, unrequested change of work tasks)	9	6%	
4.d Tenure-Position Security, Ambiguity (security of position or contract, provision of secure contractual categories), Career Progression (Promotion, Reappointment, or Tenure)	23	15%	
4.e Career Progression (promotion, reappointment, or tenure)	36	23%	
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)	5	3%	
4.g Resignation (concerns about whether or how to voluntarily terminate employment or how such a decision might be communicated appropriately)	12	8%	
4.h Termination/Non-Renewal (end of contract, non-renewal of contract, disputed permanent separation from organization)	16	10%	
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)	2	1%	
4.k Career Development/Coaching/Mentoring (classroom, on-the-job, and varied assignments as training and developmental opportunities)	18	12%	
4.l Other (any other career progression not described by the above categories):	7	5%	

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Category	of	Percent	Comments
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		98	4.5%
5.a Criminal Activity (threats or crimes planned, observed, or experienced, fraud)	0	0%	
5.b Business and Financial Practices (inappropriate actions that abuse or waste organizational finances, facilities or equipment)	24	24%	
5.c Harassment (unwelcome physical, verbal, written, e-mail, audio, video, psychological or sexual conduct that creates a hostile or intimidating environment)	14	14%	Race 6 Gender 4 OPC 3 Other 1
5.d Discrimination (different treatment compared with others or exclusion from some benefit on the basis of, for example, gender, race, age, national origin, religion, etc. (being part of an Equal Employment Opportunity protected category - applies in the U.S.))	29	30%	9 Race 11 Gender OPC 8 Other 1
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)	12	12%	
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)	5	5%	
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):	12	12%	
6 Safety, Health, and Physical Environment Questions, concerns, issues or inquiries about Safety, Health and Infrastructure-related issues.			
Sub-total		141	6.5%
6.a Safety (physical safety, injury, medical evacuation, meeting federal and state requirements for safety training and equipment)	6	4%	
6.b Physical Working/Living Conditions (temperature, odors, noise, available space, lighting, etc)	1	1%	
6.c Ergonomics (proper set-up of workstation affecting physical functioning)	0	0%	
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)	8	8%	
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)	113	80%	
6.j Other (any safety, health, or physical environment issue not described by the above categories):	12	8%	

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7 Services/Administrative Issues Questions, concerns, issues or inquiries about services or administrative offices including from			
Sub-total		118	5.4%
7.a Quality of Services (how well services were provided, accuracy or thoroughness of information, competence, etc.)	11	9%	
7.b Responsiveness, Timeliness (time involved in getting a response or return call or about the time for a complete response to be provided)	28	24%	
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.)	70	59%	
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)	5	4%	
7.e Other (any services or administrative issue not described by the above categories):	4	3%	
8 Organizational, Strategic, and Mission Related Questions, concerns, issues or inquiries that relate to the whole or some part of an organization.			
Sub-total		108	8.7%
8.a Strategic and Mission-Related, Strategic and Technical Management (principles, decisions and actions related to where and how the organization is moving)	12	8%	
8.b Leadership and Management (quality/capacity of management and/or management/leadership decisions, suggested training, reassignments and reorganizations)	27	14%	
8.c Use of Positional Power, Authority (lack or abuse of power provided by individual's position)	17	9%	
8.d Communication (content, style, timing, effects and amount of organizational and leader's communication, quality of communication about strategic issues)	8	3%	
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)	6	3%	
8.f Organizational Climate (issues related to organizational morale and/or capacity for functioning)	19	10%	
8.g Change Management (making, responding or adapting to organizational changes, quality of leadership in facilitating organizational change)	11	8%	
8.h Priority Setting and/or Funding (disputes about setting organizational/departmental priorities and/or allocation of funding within programs)	19	10%	
8.i Data, Methodology, Interpretation of Results (scientific disputes about the conduct, outcomes and interpretation of studies and resulting data for policy)	6	3%	
8.j Interdepartment, Interorganization Work, Territory (disputes about which department/organization should be doing what/taking the lead)	63	34%	
8.k Other (any organizational issue not described by the above categories):	2	1%	

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Category	of	Percent	Comments
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		104	4.8%
9.a <i>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)</i>	37	38%	
9.b <i>Values and Culture (questions, concerns or issues about the values or culture of the organization)</i>	49	47%	
9.c <i>Scientific Conduct, Integrity (scientific or research misconduct or misdemeanors, e.g., authorship; falsification of results)</i>	14	13%	
9.d <i>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)</i>	4		
9.e <i>Other (Other policy, procedure, ethics or standards issues not described in the above categories):</i>	0	0%	
TOTAL		2168	

