

UNIVERSITY OF NORTH CAROLINA
CHARLOTTE

UNIVERSITY OMBUDS



REFLECTIONS

February 1, 2022 – June 30, 2023



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Note from the Ombuds

I am truly honored to serve as UNC Charlotte's inaugural University Ombuds for faculty and staff. This is also the perfect time to announce that beginning August 2023, the office will also serve graduate students.

Since being appointed on February 1, 2022, I have had the distinct pleasure of meeting so many passionate members of our community. Your selfless dedication and service, combined with your unwavering commitment to our students and each other, is what makes the UNC Charlotte experience remarkable. These qualities are indicative of a deep sense of community and pride that bond us together. They also serve as the magnetic force that propels us to honor our relationships by persistently working through difficult situations together.

Having been in this role for a little over a year, I wanted to take this opportunity to share some "Reflections" on my time thus far. Preliminarily, I will take this opportunity to reiterate the unique nature of the ombuds role in terms of what we do, what we don't do, our professional standards, and services offered. As is customary in the ombuds profession, this will serve as the first of what will be an annual report of broad, nonattributable data, trends, and themes shared with the Ombuds throughout the year.

I look forward to continuing our conversations and serving as a thought partner for strengthening relationships, collaboration, and UNC Charlotte as a whole. Go Niners!



A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Scott M. Deyo".

Scott M. Deyo, M.S., CO-OP®
University Ombuds



WHAT IS AN OMBUDS?

The University Ombuds program is a confidential resource for faculty, staff, and graduate students to informally work through challenging workplace problems, dilemmas, and conflicts. The Ombuds is a thought partner to help its visitors explore the range of options to help resolve conflicts, problematic issues, or concerns, think through the pros and cons of the various choices, and help visitors come to a decision on how to proceed.

The University Ombuds uses a number of interest-based techniques, such as coaching, facilitated discussions, listening sessions, and shuttle diplomacy to help prevent problems from escalating and empower faculty and staff to find productive, collaborative solutions to their own problems. In addition, the University Ombuds provides feedback to University administration on emerging or systemic concerns, and provides recommendations for positive change to University policies and practices when appropriate.

Broadly, the University Ombuds program intends to provide support to:

- Address issues promptly, fairly, and at the appropriate level;
- Improve communication and conflict management skills;
- Foster transparency and communication at all levels;
- Strengthen professional relationships; and
- Promote an engaged, inclusive, and supportive University culture.

In all circumstances, the University Ombuds must act with the utmost integrity and professionalism in accordance with the University's standards of ethical conduct:

- Act with honesty and integrity;
- Promote fairness and support a fair process;
- Remain non-judgmental, with empathy and respect for individual differences;
- Promote diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging;
- Communicate accurate understanding through active listening;
- Promote the voluntariness of the program, self-determination, individual empowerment, and collaborative problem-solving; and
- Endeavor to be an accessible, trusted, and respected informal resource.

TRAINING & REAL-TIME TIPS

The University Ombuds provided a number information sessions throughout the year on a variety of topics, including team collaboration, giving and receiving feedback, interest-based problem-solving, and conflict resolution for leaders. Blending information-sharing, group discussion, and practical tips, these sessions were designed with the following intended outcomes:

- Enable effective communication across cultural, social, and personal differences
- Harness team members' collective strengths and expertise that drives collaborative knowledge sharing, resources, and ideas, leading to increased productivity and efficiency
- Foster empathy, active listening, and open-mindedness, which are essential for building positive relationships
- Help create a culture of continuous learning and skill development at all levels
- Develop strategies to navigate disagreements and find common ground, which enables stronger team dynamics and higher levels of collaboration
- Leverage insights and expertise, whereby team members can identify creative solutions, overcome obstacles, and address challenges more effectively
- Embrace diverse perspectives and experiences to stimulate creativity and innovation
- Give participants effective strategies to explore alternative ideas, challenge assumptions, and think critically, even in the face of stark differences
- Leverage diverse knowledge, skills, and experiences to help spark innovative solutions to difficult problems
- Promote a culture where individuals feel valued and respected, which in turn creates an atmosphere that fosters higher employee engagement, satisfaction, and retention



PROFESSIONAL OMBUDS CODE OF

As a Certified Organizational Ombuds Practitioner®, the University Ombuds acts in accordance with the University Ombuds Code of Professional Ethics. Chancellor Gaber signed the University Ombuds Charter on May 6, 2022, which set the parameters for the University Ombuds.

INDEPENDENT

- Reports directly to the Chancellor's Office and operates independently of any other University department, unit, function, or entity
- Does not have other roles or duties that compromise independence
- Has sole discretion over whether or how to engage regarding individual, group, or systemic concerns, including whether to bring concerns to the attention of appropriate administrative individuals

CONFIDENTIAL

- Protects the identities of visitors and content of communications; only maintains anonymous, aggregate data about broad issues and trends; notes are temporary memory aids and off-the-record
- Keeps information confidential except in matters involving imminent risk of serious harm to self or others or there is a statutory duty to report
- Is designated as a confidential resource for the purposes of Title IX, and is *not* designated as a Clery Act "campus security authority"



ETHICS & STANDARDS OF PRACTICE

with the International Ombuds Association's Code of Ethics and Standards of Practice.
atters of the ombuds program consistent with these standards.

IMPARTIAL

- Functions as an impartial, neutral, and unbiased resource that fairly and objectively considers issues and all people who may be affected
- Promotes equitably-administered processes and does not advocate on behalf of any person or group on campus
- Facilitates communication, dialogue, and collaborative problem-solving and helps identify a range of reasonable options to surface or resolve concerns

INFORMAL

- Is not authorized to make, change, or set aside any business or policy decisions for the University
- Is not authorized to accept legal notice of claims, complaints, or grievances against the University
- May not conduct formal investigations or adjudicate cases, but *may* conduct informal inquiries and request, and promptly receive, information and data to help understand and potentially resolve an issue

Here are ways the Ombuds interacts with you and the University:

- Listens to understand the wide range of complex issues
- Remains impartial to individuals and outcomes and avoids taking sides
- Helps visitors develop a wide range of potential options, and explore the possible ramifications of those options
- Helps consider the underlying interests of all involved parties, and help explore potential ways to meet those interests
- Coaches visitors on potential ways to more effectively work with other individuals or groups
- Helps visitors increase their confidence and competence in voicing concerns directly
- Explores different strategies for addressing difficult issues, bridging differences, improving collaboration, and resolving conflict
- Discusses a wide range of possible resolution avenues, including formal resources, that can potentially resolve the issue as appropriate
- Asks which choice(s) visitors are feeling comfortable with, and which action(s) they may wish to take. The Ombuds will not tell or compel anyone to take a specific action in any situation. Visitors are in full control over what actions they wish to take, including taking no action at all
- Assists in surfacing issues and giving voice to concerns, when given permission to do so, to create awareness of issues among appropriate decision-makers
- Facilitates discussions between individuals with the goals of increasing understanding and helping them work toward resolution or workable outcomes
- Provides a confidential venue for larger numbers of individuals impacted by an issue to anonymously share their perspectives on the topic and ideas for resolution
- Identifies new issues and opportunities for systemic change within the University
- Shares insights, anomalies, and systemic issues in an anonymous way to help identify opportunities for improvements and positive change

OMBUDS LISTENING SESSIONS

This process was designed to help specific departments and work units proactively achieve a greater understanding of their current climate by gathering the range of perceptions, identifying patterns and trends, and helping them discover opportunities for improvements and positive change. Departmental leaders often requested this service when they felt there were opportunities to strengthen professional relationships, and their goal was to continue to foster an engaged, inclusive, and supportive culture.

To that end, private one-on-one sessions were conducted with everyone in the department who wanted to participate. The identities of participants were not shared. To reiterate Ombuds professional standards, communications with the Ombuds are confidential. For this process, participants gave the Ombuds specific permission to share broad themes in a way that did not reveal their identity.

The Ombuds asked three broad questions to spark dialogue: 1) What is working well, and why?, 2) What isn't working well, and why?, and 3) What improvements would you make? After meeting with everyone, the Ombuds provided verbal feedback (no written reports) to leadership (at various levels as appropriate) and the group. These verbal out-briefs typically highlighted areas that team members appreciated, areas of concern, and a range of practical behaviors and actions that team members and leaders could implement to help improve the work environment.





This section provides information about the Ombuds program and its usage, including broad, aggregate, nonattributable data and trends in a manner that protects confidential information.

USAGE *&* THEMES

297 VISITORS

The inaugural University Ombuds program opened its doors to faculty and staff on February 1, 2022, so this initial report covers activity through June 30, 2023. During this timeframe, 297 visitors sought assistance from the Ombuds. The figures in this section depicts the modes of engagement, activity by semester, visitors by department, and visitor employment type.

Modes of Engagement

Virtual



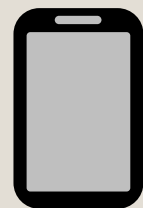
132 (44%)

In-Person



88 (30%)

Phone



77 (26%)

Visitors by Department

ACADEMIC AFFAIRS	189 (64%)
<i>Colleges</i>	153 (52%)
<i>Offices/Departments/Units</i>	36 (12%)
OTHER ADMINISTRATION	87 (29%)
ANONYMOUS/UNDISCLOSED	21 (7%)

Activity by Semester

Spring 2022

Summer 2022

Fall 2022

2-1-2022

58, 22%

42, 14%

70, 24%

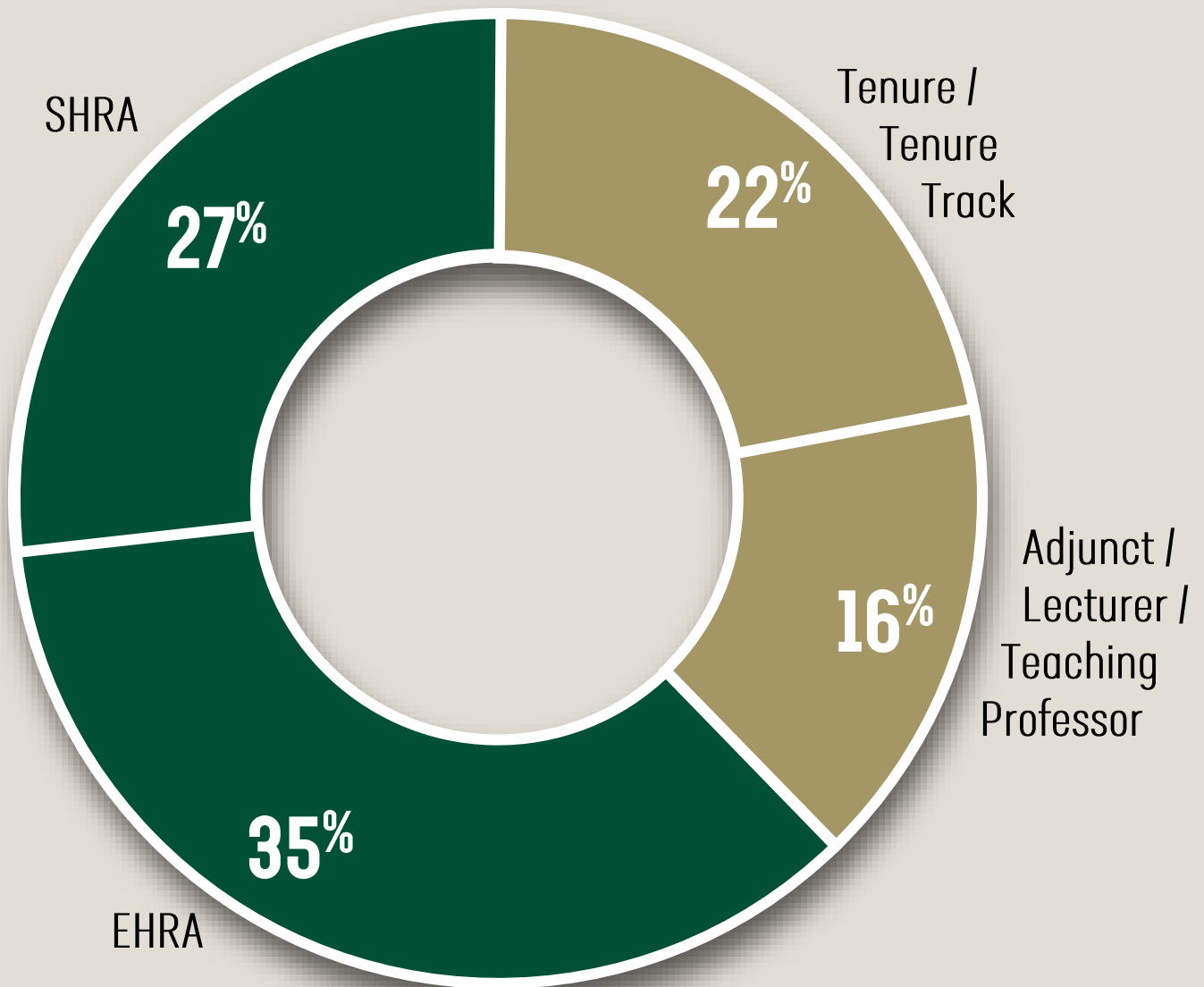
Visitor Employment Type

STAFF

62%

FACULTY

38%



Spring 2023

Summer 2023

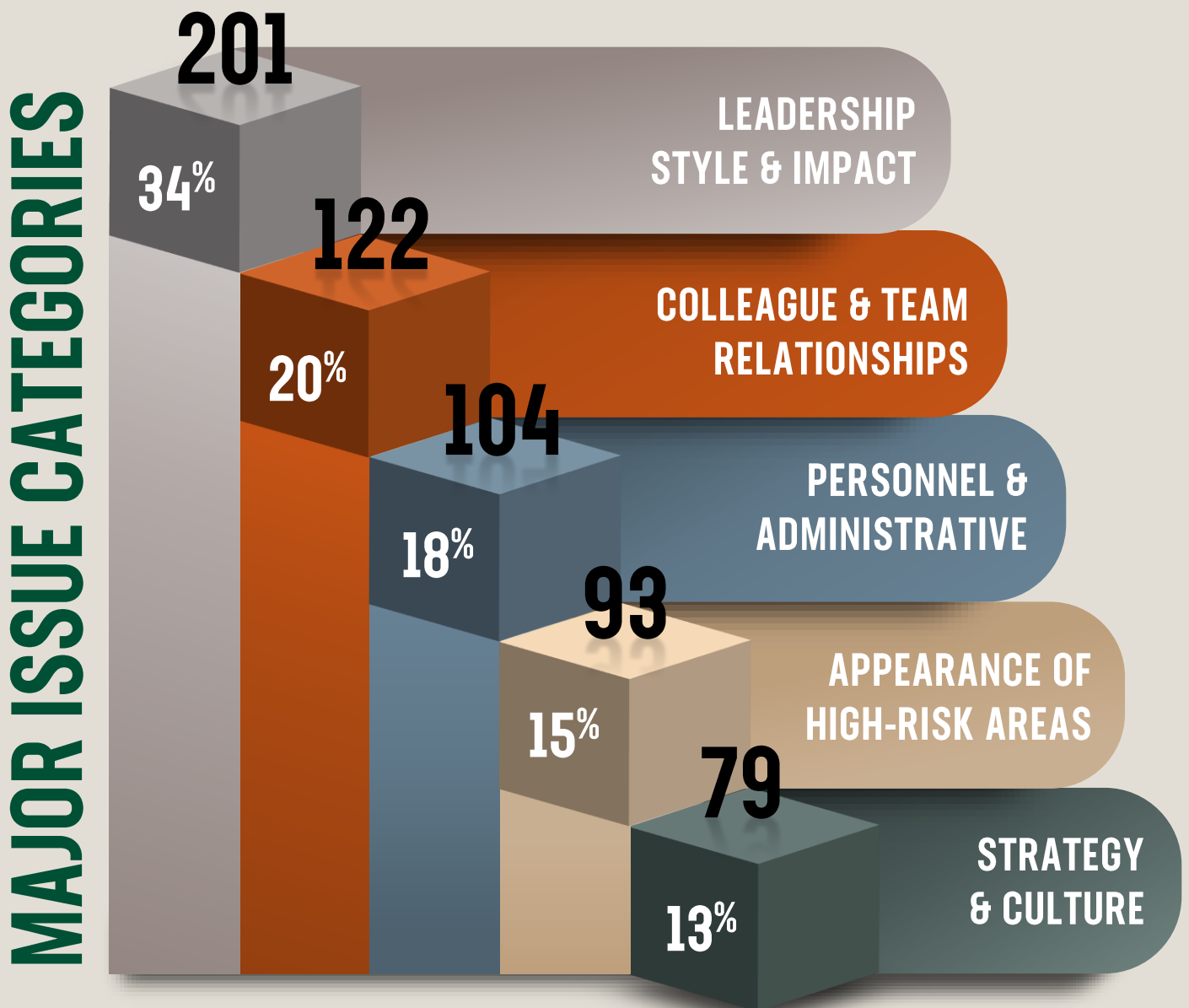
114, 38%

13, 4%

6-30-2023

599 ISSUES SHARED

The University Ombuds does not collect and retain records that include the names of visitors. Rather, the data tracked is broad, aggregate, nonattributable, and in a manner that protects confidential information. The following categories provide a high level view of the types of topics shared throughout the year.



TOP THEME:

LEADERSHIP STYLE & IMPACT

The #1 issue presented by visitors involved interpersonal behaviors of their leader.

- Specifically, 57 (10%) did not believe that their leaders were treating them with respect, or engaged in behaviors that were unfair, disengaging, unresponsive, or unprofessional.
- There were perceptions that their leader was not promoting a collaborative team environment or addressing workplace concerns in a respectful way (46, 8%).
- Concerns that their leader was not communicating frequently, clearly, or transparently was mentioned 37 times (6%)
- There were 21 (3.5%) concerns related to a broad set of values, such as their leader's ethics, integrity, and perceived commitment to diversity, equity and inclusion
- Visitors expressed concern and frustration over their leaders lack of openness and willingness to improve the program. As such, they did not solicit or value new ideas and overall were not open to business process changes (20, 3%).
- Similarly, there were concerns and frustrations that their leader:
 - Did not express an interest in improving;
 - Was not aware of the negative impact they were having on others; and
 - Was not holding themselves accountable by trying to improve

OTHER TOP ISSUES

- Within the category of “Colleague & Team Relationships,” cooperation and collaboration was raised 39 times (7%) and respect was mentioned 38 times (6%).
- Within the “Personnel & Administrative” category, general administrative decisions were discussed 41 times (7%). Both adverse actions and hiring and selection processes were discussed 18 times (3%).
- Issues that were presented to the Ombuds as having an appearance of high-risk involved the failure to address serious concerns (16, 3%), “Isms, Discrimination, Harassment, Disability/Reasonable Accommodation” (15, 3%), retaliation for speaking up (14, 2%), and bullying/abuse of power (12, 2%).
- Looking at the major category of “Organization, Mission, Strategy, & Culture,” the diversity, equity, inclusion, & belonging environment was raised 23 times (4%). “Priority setting and funding” and visitors not knowing the decision-making process were both raised 20 times (3%)

CASE COMPLEXITY & RISK

Every situation shared with the University Ombuds is unique. Some cases may have only an issue or two, such as an employee simply trying to find a campus resource, or wanting to talk through some ways to frame a conversation with their supervisor. Other issues may still only involve one or two other individuals, but may encompass matters of greater magnitude, such as perceived microaggressions or bias. Finally, there are situations layered with broad dynamics and complexities. Such cases might involve entire departments, cross-departmental teams, and have interconnections with multiple processes, policies, and resource partners. Moreover, a case’s complexity and seriousness also implicates its potential risks, to the individual, work unit, and the university. To help track this element, the University Ombuds assigned a simple dashboard metric to weight each case to indicate its appearance of having either a low, medium, or high risk. The following provides a general description of each level.

Risk Descriptors

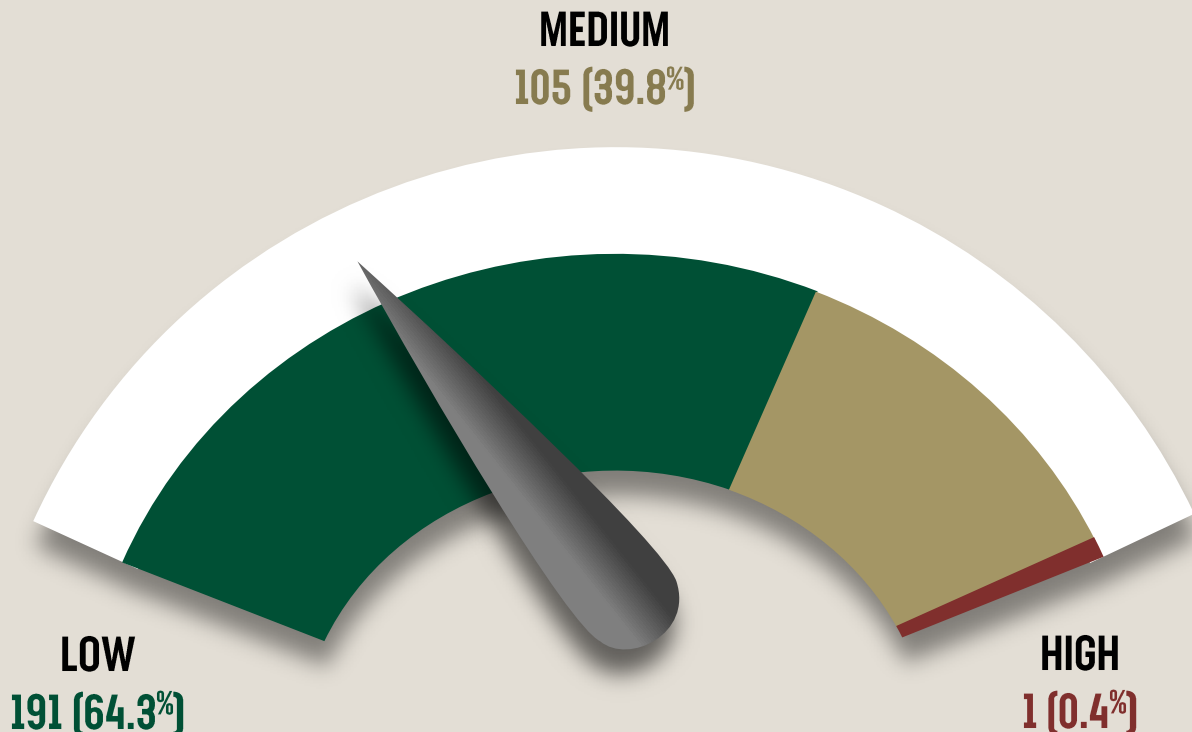
Low Risk: One or two individuals; limited number of issues; minor impact on individual and others; issue does not appear to meet threshold for formal processes

Medium Risk: Numerous individuals are involved or experiencing similar concerns, sometimes unbeknownst to one another; elevated weight of concerns and/or numerosity of issues presented; adverse impacts on the individual; residual/ compounding adverse impacts on the departmental unit; potential for grievance, Civil Rights & Title IX complaint, ethics, or safety concerns (not involving imminent risk of serious harm)

High Risk: Issue(s) presented have the potential for highly consequential outcomes to a Department, the University as a whole, and beyond. The issues may have significant health, safety, financial, operational, reputational, environmental, or regulatory risks.

Case Risk Metrics

n=297



ISSUE CATEGOR

Leadership Style & Impact	201	33.6%
Interpersonal behaviors: respectful, fair, engaging, responsive, professional	57	9.5%
Promotes collaboration, teamwork, and respectful problem resolution	46	7.7%
Communicates clearly, frequently, and transparently	37	6.2%
Values: ethics, integrity, diversity, equity, and inclusion	21	3.5%
Program improvement: solicits/values new ideas; encourages change	20	3.3%
Self improvement: reflective and accountable	20	3.3%
Colleague & Team Relationships	122	20.4%
Cooperation, collaboration	39	6.5%
Respect	38	6.3%
Communication	16	2.7%
Commitment, dedication, effort	12	2.0%
Competence, skills, abilities, reliability	12	2.0%
Shared values, common goals	4	0.7%
Roles and responsibilities	1	0.2%
Personnel & Administrative	104	17.4%
Administrative decisions	41	6.8%
Adverse action/decision	18	3.0%
Hiring & selection processes & decisions	18	3.0%
Pay and benefits	12	2.0%
Career (progression, professional development)	7	1.2%
Position changes	6	1.0%
Telework	2	0.3%
Culture of ethics, integrity, & continuous improvement	9	1.5%
Shared mission, vision, goals & strategies	4	0.7%
Corporate communications are clear, informative, & frequent	3	0.5%

ORY METRICS

Appearance of High-Risk Areas

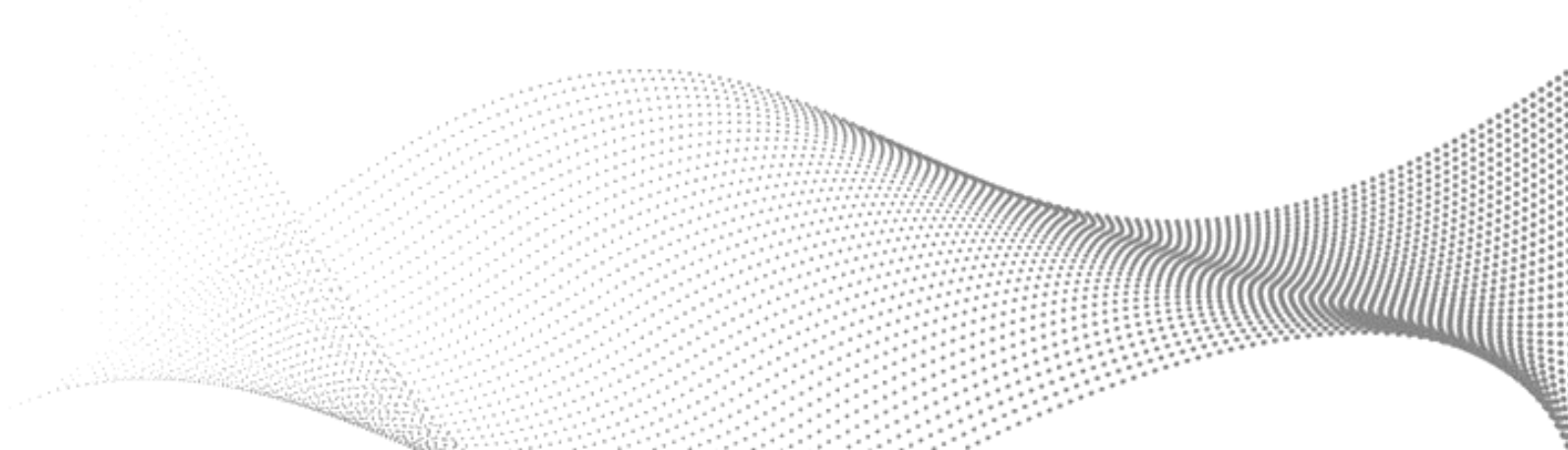
93 15.5%

Failure to address serious concerns	16	2.7%
"Isms", discrimination, harassment, disability/reasonable accommodation	15	2.5%
Retaliation for speaking up	14	2.3%
Abuse of power, bullying	12	2.0%
Turnover, lack of backfill, burnout	11	1.8%
Safety & security	10	1.7%
Mismanagement/adverse impacts of business decisions	8	1.3%
Business and financial practices	6	1.0%
Conflicts of interest / favoritism	1	0.2%
Privacy	0	0.0%

Organization, Mission, Strategy & Culture

79 13.2%

Diversity, equity, inclusion, & belonging environment	23	3.8%
Clear structure/decision-making processes	20	3.3%
Priority setting & funding	20	3.3%
Culture of ethics, integrity, & continuous improvement	9	1.5%
Shared mission, vision, goals & strategies	4	0.7%
Corporate communications are clear, informative, & frequent	3	0.5%





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