



University Ombuds

REFLECTIONS

July 1, 2023 - June 30, 2024

UNIVERSITY OF NORTH CAROLINA
CHARLOTTE

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I am so appreciative of the opportunity to serve as your University Ombuds. This "Reflections" report is intended to provide a balcony view of the types of challenges faced by those who visited the office, and share some insights into the types of innovative, collaborative solutions that made a positive difference.

It is important to underscore UNC Charlotte's continuous dedication to student success and well-being. To that end, I am happy to announce the UNC Charlotte has committed to expanding services to undergraduate students. A new Associate University Ombuds position was authorized to support this effort, and recruitment efforts will soon be under way.

As a final thought, I often share that the journey together is just as important as the destination. Please reach out if you would like to have a confidential, off-the-record discussion about your journey. Visit the website below which has a convenient scheduling link.

I look forward to talking with you soon!



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

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OMBUDS ROLE & FUNCTIONS

The University Ombuds program serves as a confidential resource for faculty, staff, and graduate students, providing an informal avenue to address workplace and academic challenges, dilemmas, and conflicts. Serving as a thought partner, the Ombuds helps visitors explore a variety of potential options to informally address problems. Through this process, visitors can weigh the pros and cons of different choices and decide for themselves the best course of action. Ombuds engagements occur at multiple levels, including individual, group, educational, and systemic feedback levels.

INDIVIDUALS. Using interest-based approaches, the University Ombuds strives to prevent problems from escalating by enabling individuals and groups to apply collaborative strategies. The majority of interactions with the ombuds were one-one-sessions, but requests for assistance with groups were on the rise.

GROUPS. The group engagement process involved the Ombuds gathering the range of perceptions from group members while maintaining anonymity, identifying patterns and trends, and helping the group discover opportunities for improvements and positive change.

TRAINING. This year the Ombuds continued to provide a number of professional development sessions on a variety of topics, including team collaboration, giving and receiving feedback, interest-based problem-solving, and conflict resolution. The goal of these sessions were to create a learning environment that emphasized continuous improvement and motivated participants to try creative and innovative ways to apply

FEEDBACK. Finally, the Ombuds continued to share with administrators emergent and systemic concerns and explored options for possible improvements to University policies and practices.

ETHICAL STANDARDS

As a Certified Organizational Ombuds Practitioner®, the University Ombuds acts in accordance with the International Ombuds Association’s [Code of Ethics](#) and [Standards of Practice](#). Chancellor Gaber signed the University Ombuds Charter on May 6, 2022, which set the parameters of the ombuds program consistent with these standards.

CONFIDENTIALITY

A visitor’s identity, and the content of communications with the Ombuds, are considered confidential to the maximum extent permitted by law. The Ombuds is designated as a confidential resource for the purposes of Title IX, and not a “campus security authority” as defined in the Clery Act.

IMPARTIALITY

The Ombuds is a designated neutral and impartial resource who does not take sides or serve as an advocate for any person or entity. The Ombuds avoids conflicts of interest and conduct that could be perceived as a conflict of interest.

INFORMALITY

Visiting the University Ombuds is not analogous with “filing a complaint,” as the Ombuds does not have a role in investigating or adjudicating any formal process nor does the Ombuds have a reporting responsibility to other University offices that perform those roles.

INDEPENDENCE

The University Ombuds administratively reports to the Chancellor and 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.

For a full description of these standards, please review the [University Ombuds Charter](#).

USAGE METRICS

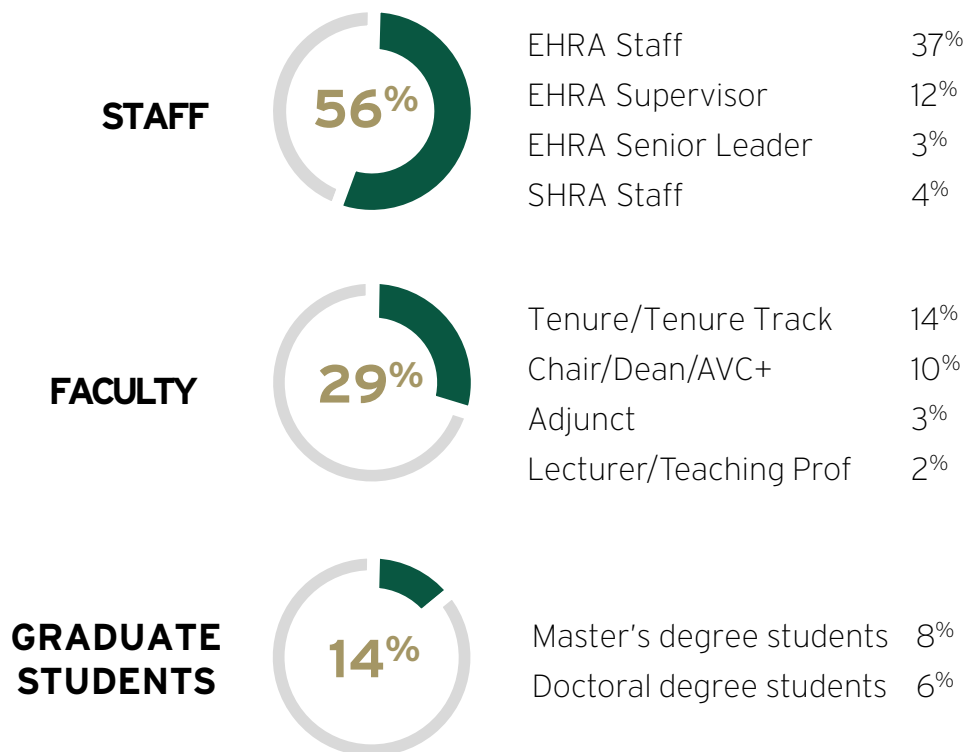
This section provides broad, aggregate, nonattributable data about Ombuds program usage that is shared in a manner that protects confidential information.

TOTAL VISITORS: 322

Visitors by Semester



Visitors by Classification



NOTE: 1% of visitors were categorized as "Other"

Visitors by Department

Academic Affairs: 58% (Colleges, 43% | Office Units, 15%)
 Administration: 26%
 Anonymous/Undisclosed: 16%

ISSUE CATEGORIES

The 322 visitors shared **560** issues with the University Ombuds:

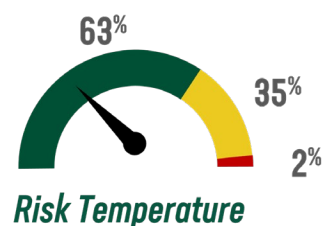
Evaluative Relationships 150 (27%)	Interpersonal behaviors (respect & engagement)	54, 10%
	Communication (clarity & transparency)	29, 5%
	Supports collaboration & teamwork	24, 4%
	Program improvement (innovation & change)	15, 3%
	Self Improvement (reflection & growth)	15, 3%
	Values (ethics, integrity, inclusivity)	13, 2%
Mission & Culture 53 (9%)	Clear structures & decision-making processes	16, 3%
	Environment of respect, acceptance and belonging	14, 3%
	Priority setting & funding	9, 2%
	Corporate communications (clarity & transparency)	8, 1%
	Culture of ethics, integrity, & continuous improvement	3, 1%
	Shared mission, vision, goals & strategies	3, 1%
Colleague & Team Relationships 150 (27%)	Respect	53, 9%
	Communication	41, 7%
	Competence, skills, abilities, reliability	22, 4%
	Cooperation & collaboration	21, 4%
	Commitment, dedication, effort	5, 1%
	Shared Values, common goals	5, 1%
	Roles and Responsibilities	3, 1%
Personnel & Administrative 101 (18%)	General administrative decisions	44, 8%
	Decisions with adverse consequences	32, 6%
	Hiring & selection processes & decisions	9, 2%
	Career progression & professional development	7, 1%
	Pay and Benefits	5, 1%
	Position changes	3, 1%
Appearance of Risk Areas 106 (19%)	Abuse of power & bullying	27, 5%
	Business and financial practices	18, 3%
	"Isms" (e.g. differential treatment, disability, etc.)	14, 3%
	Retaliation for speaking up	14, 3%
	Mismanagement with adverse impacts	12, 2%
	Failure to address serious concerns	9, 2%
	Turnover, lack of backfill, burnout	6, 1%

THEMES & IMPACTS

CASE COMPLEXITY AND RISK

As a preliminary note, I'd like to characterize the various types of cases shared. Broadly speaking, the visitors are going through some workplace challenges that vary in difficulty and complexity. More often than not (63% of the time this year), visitors believed that the issues they were presenting were "not a huge deal" and relatively benign. Ombuds often refer to the Benjamin Franklin quote, "An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure." Potential visitors are encouraged to use available resources and get the support needed early, when the matter remains a low risk situation, to help prevent it from escalating into a higher risk situation.

In over a third of the cases, visitors conveyed a scenario with moderate level of potential risk. These cases often involved multiple issues, adverse impacts, implications of policy violations, and often other visitors raising a similar or the same issue. Finally, a small percentage of cases this year (2%) involved situations with the potential for high risk and highly consequential outcomes (such as health, ethics, and safety concerns).



TOP CONCERNS

Looking at the numbers of issues raised this academic year, **respect** and **communication**, from the perspective of both colleagues and supervisors, were mentioned 177 times. Together, these issues represent one third of all issues shared throughout the academic year. It is also worth noting that the issue of perceived "bullying/abuse of power" more than doubled this year, increasing from 12 to 27 mentions by visitors.

Of the 322 visitors, 120 (37%) specifically verbalized being impacted by the issue that they raised to the ombuds. Increased stress and lowered morale was of course mentioned the most (32, 27%). Other stated impacts included:

- Seeking outside employment or taking other positions (18, 15%);
- Elevated adverse health impacts, such as high anxiety or depression (17, 14%);
- Impact on the university's reputation or relationships with stakeholders (14, 12%);
- Reduced productivity, engagement, and effectiveness (13, 11%); and
- Impeding the mission of the work unit (11, 9%).

INTERVENTION STRATEGIES

Ombuds typically hear about situations that aren't going well. We listen and learn about prior attempts at resolution that perhaps didn't work as expected, or moments of frustration that made matters worse. Oftentimes we serve as coaches. In this way we help visitors identify their goals and help them think through the steps for achieving them. It appears there is a natural tendency to gravitate toward more formal options. With this in mind, sometimes the visitors' goals involve filing a formal complaint. It may involve a desire to throw out the proverbial yellow flag on a decision that was made without any input from stakeholders or a process that ran afoul of established practices.

Organizational ombuds can certainly provide assistance in those types of situations. We can help them find the proper person or office to raise the matter formally. With permission from the visitor, we can have discussions with senior administrators about anomalous situations that could perhaps benefit from a double-check on the situation (and done so in a way that protects the visitor's identity). While these types of interventions can effect positive change, they evoke a top-down response. And, managerial or leadership intervention may be exactly what is proper and necessary given the circumstances, particularly in the medium-high to high risk cases. But these types of interventions take the actions out of the hands of the visitors. In most cases, ombuds try to empower visitors to address issues on their own, and can play a valuable role as a coach to help them explore ways to do that effectively.

BRIDGING THEORIES AND MODELS INTO PRACTICE

In most cases, ombuds try to empower visitors to address issues on their own. In that way the ombuds and visitor become thought partners. They explore a wide range of possible options that might make the situation better. During these interactions, Ombuds often draw on their education, training, and experience to provide possible insights into unique or different ways of handling situations. Ombuds also draw on the vast literature involving the art and science of conflict resolution, peace, collaboration, etc. to help translate these theories and models into practical, actionable strategies.

EFFECTIVE BEHAVIORS

This section is intended to reflect on some of the attitudes and actions taken by visitors that seemed to help contribute toward a positive outcome.

APPROACHES AND BEHAVIORS THAT HELPED

- Normalized dialogue and discussion
- Shared a compliment
- Showed courage to address an issue directly
- Referenced a shared inside joke to lighten the mood
- Owned their past actions/reactions
- Walked and talked in a comfortable outside setting
- Embraced new ideas
- Made conciliatory statements (e.g. "I didn't realize that; "I hadn't thought about that before"
- In private, pointed out language that was "othering" and divisive
- Acknowledged it has been difficult, but shared genuine desire to work through it
- Acknowledged the other person's story without judgment or qualifiers
- Carefully chose words to avoid accusations, blame, & passive slights
- Asked if they were open to considering a few additional options (to expand thinking to more than a couple possible solutions)
- Showed sincere interest
- Listened calmly and patiently to a difficult perspective from a colleague; then followed up with a sincere apology
- Took an optimistic approach
- Expressed commitment to working it out

This is not an exhaustive list, nor is it intended to be a magic wand. Rather, these examples are shared with two purposes in mind. The first is to acknowledge and show appreciation for the courage, patience, and dedication it took to work towards resolution. This is, in and of itself, at the top of the list of impactful behaviors. The second reason for sharing these are to help spark the imagination for new and unique ways of approaching workplace challenges. Visitors who displayed these behaviors, or experienced these from others, shared that it made getting through the difficult situation a little easier.



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