



UNIVERSITY OF NORTH CAROLINA
CHARLOTTE
UNIVERSITY OMBUDS



REFLECTIONS 2025

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MESSAGE FROM THE OMBUDS TEAM

We are honored to serve the UNC Charlotte community as your University Ombuds team. This Reflections report offers insight into the challenges brought to our office and the collaborative efforts that have helped foster meaningful change across campus.

This past year marked a significant period of growth for our program. We were excited to welcome Jen Amano as Associate University Ombuds, a key addition that has enabled us to expand our services to undergraduate students. This development reflects UNC Charlotte's ongoing commitment to supporting the success and well-being of all students, while continuing our work with faculty, staff, and graduate students.

As always, we remain deeply committed to the principles of confidentiality, impartiality, informality, and independence, in alignment with the International Ombuds Association's Code of Ethics and Standards of Practice. The university's continued support of these values empowers us to provide a safe, neutral, and confidential space where members of our community can explore concerns, navigate challenges, and seek constructive paths forward.

Our mission is to help strengthen relationships, foster collaboration, and promote a culture of engagement and respect across the university. Whether you're facing a workplace or academic dilemma, we invite you to reach out for a confidential, off-the-record conversation.

We look forward to continuing our work in support of a thriving and respectful campus community.



OMBUDS ROLE & VALUE

The University Ombuds provides value through early issue resolution, helping the university avoid disruption from unresolved conflict or ineffective problem resolution. They address concerns at the earliest possible stage before they escalate and help avoid time-consuming and costly formal administrative and legal procedures. This early intervention approach saves organizations significant resources while maintaining workplace harmony.

Ombuds contribute to continuous improvement efforts by facilitating discussions about policies, procedures, and implementation. They support systemic problem-solving initiatives and act as an "ear to the ground" for leadership, providing valuable feedback for informed decision-making. During university transitions, Ombuds assist by helping to ease pain points and leveraging collective knowledge. They also address issues that might remain hidden in normal reporting channels, bringing important concerns to light.

The University Ombuds helps to strengthen organizational culture by providing confidential spaces for faculty, staff, and students to not only voice concerns, but also share new ideas. This helps to build confidence in organizational processes and enhances transparency and accountability. Visitors of the University Ombuds office typically provide feedback that the office helped to create conditions for improved team collaboration and strengthened relationships between management and staff. These contributions help enable the university

to better meet the needs of faculty, staff, and students more effectively.

Although not structurally aligned with oversight offices, the University Ombuds office supports risk mitigation through early identification of possible compliance risks and prevention of formal complaints. They promote ethical workplace practices and serve as an early warning system for potential problems. This reinforces fair, responsible, and accountable work environments throughout the university.

Ombuds encounter and help address the full spectrum of issues, from unique and complex organizational challenges to professional disagreements and seemingly insurmountable obstacles. They handle both minor and major concerns while supporting innovation and new ideas that challenge established practices. This comprehensive approach helps to reinforce a speak-up culture that welcomes the identification of workplace challenges and celebrates the commitment to productive resolution.

During times of significant reform and change, Ombuds can play a vital role in improving communication at all levels, including addressing issues related to policies, procedures, practices, academic and research integrity, leadership styles and effectiveness, and administrative and decision-making processes. Overall, Ombuds help organizations remain focused on their central purpose by reinforcing practices that underscore their mission, vision, and core values.

OMBUDS ETHICS & STANDARDS

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.

INDEPENDENCE. The University Ombuds operates as an independent entity within the university structure, maintaining autonomy in appearance, purpose, practice, and decision-making without influence from other departments or units. This independence is reinforced through direct reporting to the Chancellor rather than through any intermediate entity that might affect the Ombuds' independence. The Ombuds holds no additional positions that could compromise this independence, while maintaining full administrative responsibility for the program including personnel, budget, and operations without undue external influence. Moreover, the Ombuds has discretion over whether and how to engage with individual, group, or systemic concerns, including whether and when to bring concerns to the attention of appropriate administrators.

CONFIDENTIALITY is one of the most consequential characteristics of Ombuds practice, whereby visitors' identities and communications are protected to the maximum extent permitted by law. The University Ombuds protects all information relating to those seeking assistance and will not disclose confidential information unless the matter involves imminent risk of serious harm. The office maintains only anonymous, aggregate data about service usage and broad issue types, treating work notes as temporary memory aids that remain confidential and off-the-record. As an off-the-record resource that does not retain permanent records, the Ombuds may disclose visitor identity and information only with explicit permission to assist with informal resolution, though such disclosure remains at the Ombuds' sole discretion. The office is designated as a confidential resource for Title IX purposes and is not a campus security authority under the Clery Act.

IMPARTIALITY. The Ombuds serves as a designated neutral and impartial resource who does not take sides or advocate for any person or entity, carefully avoiding conflicts of interest. This impartiality requires the Ombuds to function as an unbiased resource that fairly and objectively considers issues and all potentially affected people, maintaining no personal interest in the outcome of any matter, with the option to decline involvement when conflicts of interest may exist. Rather than advocating on behalf of any person or group, the Ombuds promotes equitably-administered processes while facilitating communication, dialogue, and collaborative problem-solving to help identify reasonable options for addressing concerns.

INFORMALITY. The University Ombuds provides exclusively informal assistance and is not authorized to make, change, or set aside University business or policy decisions beyond administering the Ombuds program itself. The office does not conduct formal investigations, adjudicate cases, act as an advocate or witness, assess innocence or wrongdoing, impose sanctions, or participate in formal disciplinary or grievance procedures. Any specific action related to an individual's issue requires that person's express permission and occurs only at the Ombuds' sole discretion when such action can be taken while safeguarding the individual's identity. While not authorized to accept legal notice of claims against the University, the Ombuds will assist visitors in identifying appropriate formal channels if they wish to pursue that avenue. The office is authorized to conduct informal inquiries and request information when helpful for understanding issues and facilitating early resolution of concerns, maintaining confidentiality to the extent permitted by law, and may attend University meetings as appropriate without serving as a voting member.

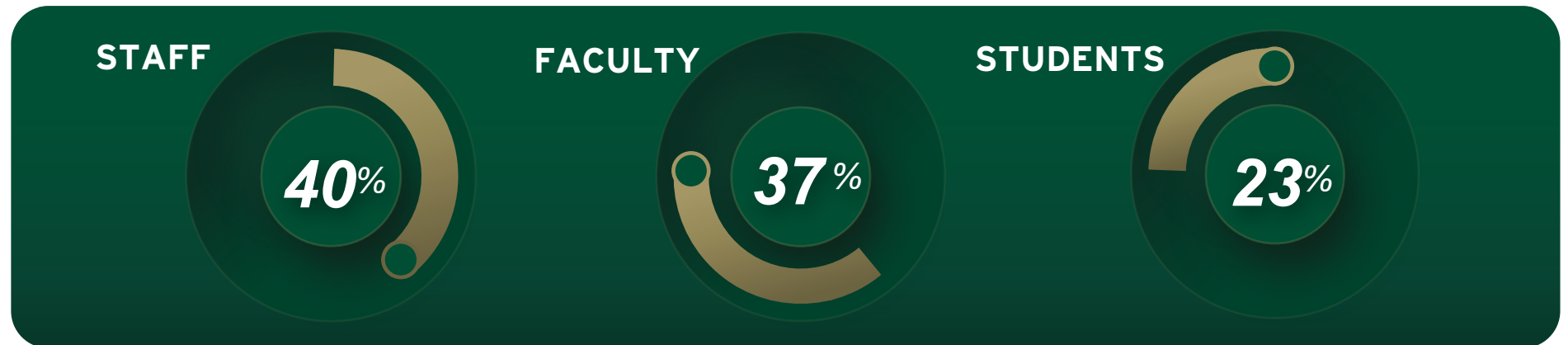
OMBUDS PROGRAM USAGE

This section presents general, summarized data on Ombuds program utilization. It is presented in a way that safeguards both visitor anonymity and the confidentiality of disclosed information.

SHIFTING PATTERN IN USAGE

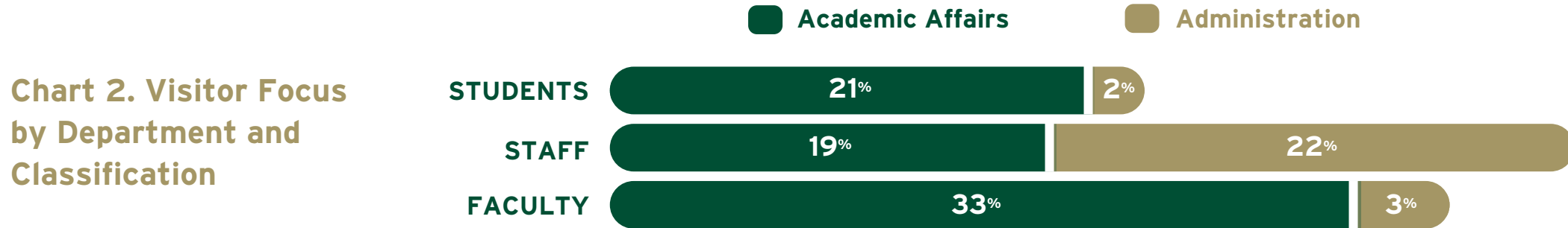
The University Ombuds office welcomed 312 visitors during the 2024-2025 academic year, representing a 3% decrease from the previous year's 322 visitors. Chart 1 below depicts the percentage of visitors by classification, including 40% staff, 37% faculty, and 23% students. Staff visits to the Ombuds office decreased from 172 to 113, representing a 59-visit decline or 34% reduction. However, visits from faculty members increased 16% from 88 to 102. Graduate student visits rose from 43 to 49, a 12% increase. We opened our doors for the first time to undergraduate students in the Spring 2025 semester and had 15 visits. We will continue marketing our services and will undoubtedly see this number increase next year.

Chart 1.
Visitor
Classification



Within the category of staff, visits from non-supervisory EHRA exempt staff had the most significant decline, dropping from 114 to 51, a reduction of 63 (55%) visits. Engagements from senior faculty leaders increased substantially, with visits from Chairs, Deans, and above rising from 30 to 54, an increase of 24 (80%) visits. SHRA staff visitors grew from 13 to 34, representing a 21-visit (162%) increase. Visits from EHRA supervisors decreased from 37 to 24. Among faculty categories, visits from tenured and tenure-track faculty decreased from 43 to 31, while lecturer and teaching professor visits increased from 5 to 11. Visits from master's students increased from 26 to 29 visits, and doctoral student visits rose from 17 to 20.

OMBUDS PROGRAM USAGE



Academic Affairs accounted for 73% of all visits, which increased 13% from last year. Visitors within Administration represented the remaining 27%. Within Academic Affairs, the majority of concerns related to the colleges, comprising of 66% of total visitors (and a 36% increase from last year). Offices and departments within Academic Affairs (outside the colleges) accounted for 7% of the overall visitor traffic. Faculty represented 36% of visitors (33% Academic Affairs, 3% to Administration); staff represented 42% of visitors (19% Academic Affairs, 22% Administration); and students represented 23% of visitors (21% Academic Affairs and 2% Administration). The majority of visitors within Administration were staff (22%); faculty and students addressing issues within Administration were 3% and 2% respectively.

Visitors by Month and Semester

February 2025 was the busiest month with 45 visitors, marking a 36% increase from the previous year and accounting for 14% of total annual traffic. April and May also had an increase from the year prior, with increases of 11% and 22% respectively.

Chart 3. Visitors by Semester

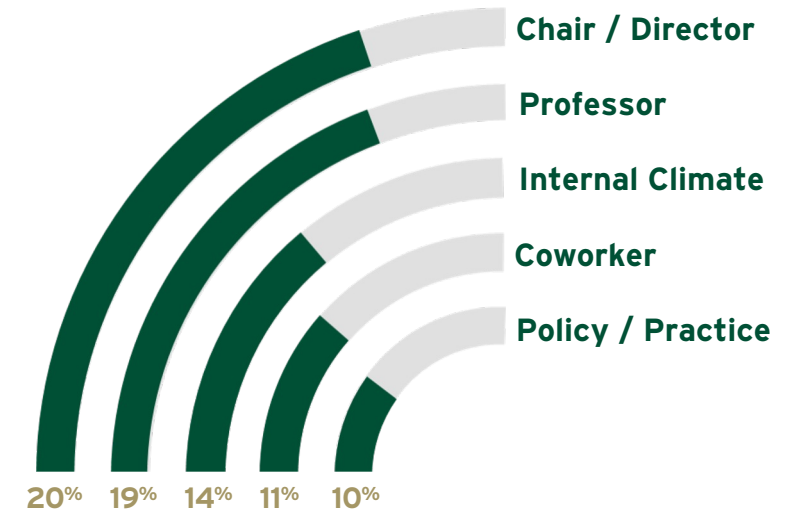


As Chart 3 above illustrates, the Spring 2025 semester had the highest number of visitors, comprising of approximately half of all annual visits, a pattern that was consistent with the prior year. Fall semester accounted for about one third of visits. The summer of 2025 was only comprised of 12% of annual traffic, but was 33% higher than summer last year.

VISITOR CONCERNS

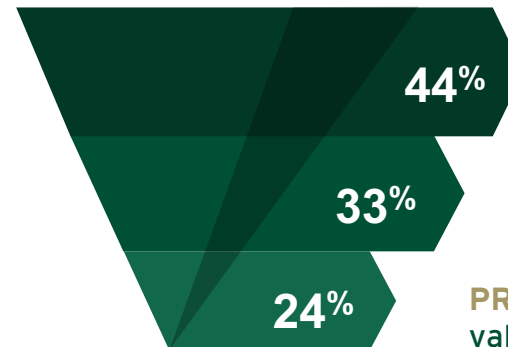
To help understand the types of issues shared, the University Ombuds tracks general usage patterns and issue themes in an aggregate, anonymous manner. When we're working with visitors, we look at their concerns through three lenses. First, we try to identify a single, primary concern that was the main focus of the visit. Second, we reflect on whether the issue is related to a relationship, process, or decision. Finally, we use a more detailed set of Ombuds issue categories to get a more complete picture of the issues presented. Leadership-related issues were mentioned the most, with Chair/Director concerns accounting for 20% of issues and Professor-related issues representing 19% of primary issues. These two categories combined totaled nearly 40% of the issues. Workplace climate and interpersonal dynamics constituted the second largest area of activity. Internal climate issues comprised 14% of cases, while coworker-related concerns accounted for 11% of contacts. Visitors with issues primarily about a policy or practice comprised of 10% of the cases. Chart 4 captures approximately two-thirds of the primary issues shared with the Ombuds. The remaining quarter of issues were related to matters pertaining to a dean or associate vice chancellor (9%), supervisor (7%), broad decisions or actions (7%); and the external climate (1%).

Chart 4. Primary Issue Shared



In the 1986 book "The Mediation Process," Christopher Moore outlined a "Triangle of Satisfaction" to frame three types of interests when helping parties work toward mutually beneficial outcomes. We saw that the majority of issues shared by visitors were reflected in this model. Chart 5 illustrates that nearly half (44%) of the issues concerned decisions, while about a third involved relationships and about a quarter of the issues related to processes.

Chart 5. Issues by Fairness Triangle



DECISIONS. Issues about whether decisions were seen as ethical, timely, and consistent with policy and practice

RELATIONSHIPS. People-centered issues related to respect, teamwork, and collaboration

PROCESSES. Issues about deliberative engagement - valuing and considering a variety of perspectives

MAJOR ISSUE CATEGORIES

The 312 individuals who visited the University Ombuds shared 538 issues this academic year, which was down from 560 issues last year, a 4% decrease.

Chart 6. Major Issue Categories

149
(28%)

Evaluative Relationships

Leadership issues remained the most common concern across the last two academic years. This year there were 149 leadership-related issues (28% of all issues), compared to 150 in the previous year (27%), a 1% drop.

84
(16%)

Mission & Culture

Issues related to the mission, strategy, and organizational culture increased from 53 issues last year (9% of issues) to 84 this year (16% of total issues), a 37% increase.

110
(20%)

Colleague & Team Relationships

This year issues about team members dropped from 150 issues last year (27% of issues) to 110 issues (20%) in the 2024-2025 academic year, a 36% decrease.

85
(16%)

Personnel & Administrative

Personnel and administrative related issues declined from 101 cases last year to 85 cases (16% of issues) this academic year, a 19% decrease.

110
(20%)

Appearance of Risk Areas

Issues that implicate elevated risk tied for second place with 110 issues in 2024-2025 (20% of total issues), up slightly from 106 issues the previous year (19%), marking a 4% increase.

SUBCATEGORY ISSUES

This section further explores the types of concerns raised within each major category.

EVALUATIVE RELATIONSHIPS

Concerns shared with the Ombuds about evaluative relationships was the largest major category with 149 issues, accounting for 28% of all concerns. This category involves questions, concerns, issues, or inquiries arising between people with different levels of authority, such as supervisor-employee, faculty-chair, student-faculty, etc. Clear, frequent, and transparent communication was the top issue within this subcategory. It was mentioned 46 times, accounting for 31% of the issues within this category and 9% of all issues shared with the Ombuds. Interpersonal behaviors of leaders was the second highest subcategory issue. Visitors shared concerns about whether their leader (typically referring to their first line supervisor) was respectful, fair, engaging, and professional. This set of concerns was mentioned 42 times (28% within the evaluative relationship category, and accounted for 8% of all concerns).

Values-related concerns including ethics and integrity were mentioned 22 times (15% within this category and 4% of all issues). Issues related to how the leader promoted collaboration, teamwork, and a respectful problem-solving environment were shared 17 times (11% within this category and 3% of all issues). There were two other categories of leadership style and impact. The first was related to the leader's initiative, effort, and commitment to improving their leadership style, which was cited 12 times (8% within this category, and 2% of overall issues). Finally, there were issues related to the leader's openness to program improvement, particularly with regard to soliciting and valuing new ideas and encouraging programmatic change. These issues were mentioned 10 times (7% within this category, and 2% of overall issues).

Chart 7. Evaluative Relationship Issues



COLLEAGUE & TEAM RELATIONSHIPS

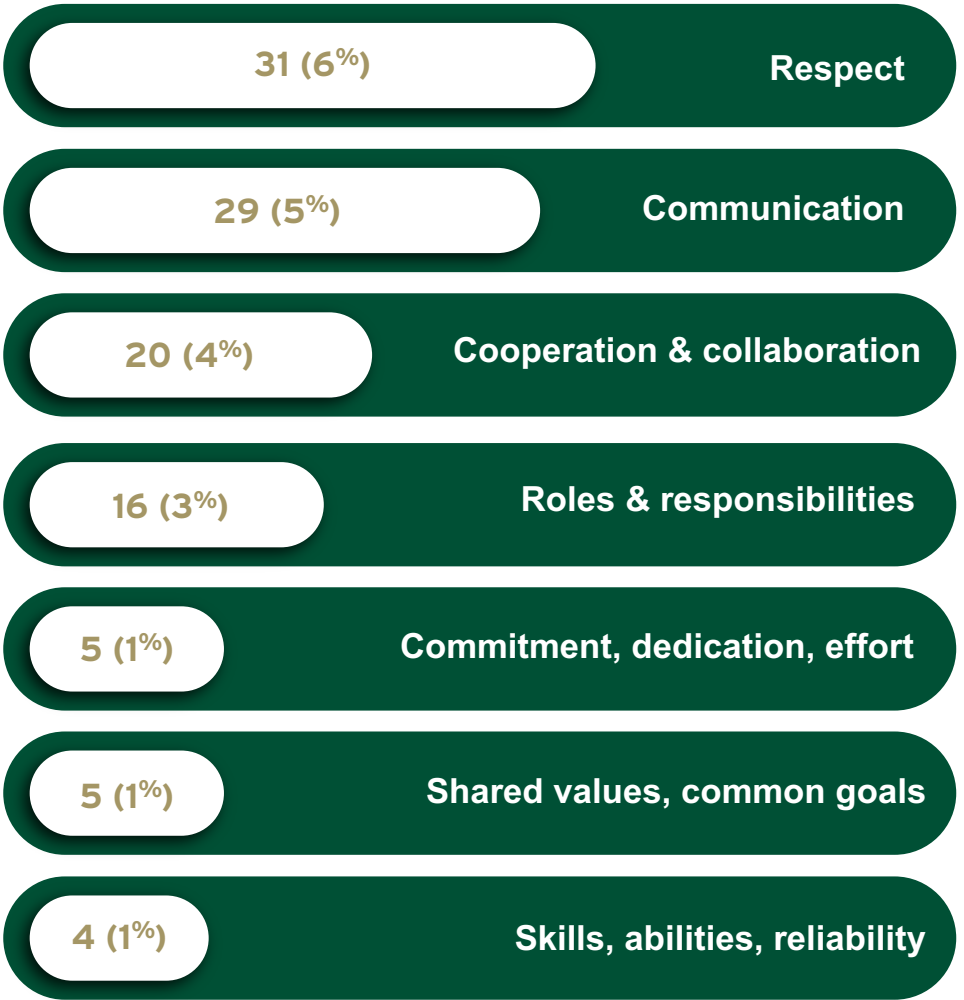
Ombuds visitors discussed issues related to their peers and work groups 110 times, representing 20% of all issues discussed. Chart 8 provides more context into the types of issues arising amongst colleagues and teams. Respect issues were mentioned 31 times, representing 28% the issues within this category and 6% of all issues shared. General communication issues were mentioned 29 times (26% within this category and 5% of all issues shared). Visitors discussed concerns about cooperation and collaboration with their colleagues 20 times, or 18% of the issues within this category and 4% of all issues. There were 14 additional issues, where visitors shared concerns about their colleagues' dedication and commitment, shared values and goals, and reliability.

APPEARANCE OF RISK AREAS

Similar to the number of issues shared about colleagues, visitors also shared 110 issues with the Ombuds that had the appearance of elevated risk. Perceptions of abuse of power and bullying represented the largest issues within this category, mentioned 24 times (22% of this category and 4% of all issues shared). Concerns about retaliation were shared 21 (4%) times, while perceptions of mismanagement and adverse business decisions were shared 19 (4%) times.

Additional issues were related to perceived discrimination and harassment (13, 2%); failure to address serious concerns (12, 2%); business and financial practices (9, 2%); safety and security (5, 1%); conflicts of interest/favoritism (4, 1%); privacy (2, .4%); and excessive turnover (1, .2%).

Chart 8. Colleague & Team Relationship Issues



**PERSONNEL &
ADMINISTRATIVE**

Personnel & Administrative issues totaled 85 cases, comprising 16% of all concerns. Decisions and actions with adverse impacts (such as letters of warning or dismissals) represented the largest set of issues within this category and shared 37 times (7%). Visitors shared 31 (6%) concerns about general administrative decisions. Concerns about career/academic progression arose 9 times (2%), while position changes comprised 4 cases (1%). Hiring processes and pay issues each represented 2 cases.

**ORGANIZATION,
MISSION,
STRATEGY
& CULTURE**

Visitors shared 84 issues about organizational mission, strategy, and culture, representing 16% of all issues:

Culture of Ethics, Integrity, & Continuous Improvement	26 (5%)
Clear structure/decision-making processes	19 (4%)
Environment of respect, acceptance and belonging	13 (2%)
Corporate communications are clear, informative, & frequent	10 (2%)
Priority Setting & Funding	9 (2%)
Shared mission, vision, goals & strategies	7 (1%)

IMPACTS

In addition to tracking issues shared, the Ombuds office tracked the impacts the situations were having on the visitors, whenever expressed. Nearly two in five cases involved emotional health consequences, with 22% of visitors experiencing increased stress and lowered morale. Another 20% reported concerns about the potential damage to the university's reputation or strained stakeholder relationships.

Another 20% reported concerns about the potential damage to the university's reputation or strained stakeholder relationships. Another 18% describe heightened anxiety, depression, or similar symptoms. On the one hand, a large majority of visitors shared that despite facing difficult workplace challenges, everyone pulled together to get the job done. Ten percent of visitors reported that the issues negatively impacted their work processes and service delivery. More urgently however, 17% of visitors felt the issues they were experiencing were adversely impacting the work unit's ability to accomplish mission-critical work. Issues that were escalated to senior leadership (sometimes excessively and seemingly unnecessarily) were a concern to 12% of the visitors. Ten percent of visitors shared that they were pursuing other employment options. Some employees expressed avoiding colleagues or withdrawing from team activities (9%). Eight percent of visitors experienced drops in productivity and engagement. And 3% of visitors shared elevated physical health impacts, such as sleep disruption, elevated blood pressure, and panic attacks.

An aerial view of a university campus featuring a large brick building with many windows, a green lawn, and a small pond with a bird sculpture. The entire image is covered with a semi-transparent green overlay.

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