UNIVERSITY OF NORTH CAROLINA

CHARLOTTE

UNIVERSITY OMBUDS

REFLECTIONS



2026



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MESSAGE FROM THE OMBUDS TEAM

It is our privilege to support the UNC Charlotte community in our role as your University Ombuds team. This Reflections report highlights the range of concerns shared with our office and the ongoing collaboration that helps drive positive change across campus.

Over the past year, we have broadened our outreach efforts to raise awareness of our services and encourage open, constructive dialogue. These connections are central to our work, ensuring that everyone in the university community recognizes they have access to our office.

This year also represented a significant achievement for our team. Jen Amano attained individual certification as a Certified Organizational Ombuds through the International Ombuds Association (IOA), and our office was the first in our state to earn IOA program certification. These milestones reflect our strong commitment to professional standards and best practices.

We continue to ground our work in the core principles of confidentiality, impartiality, informality, and independence, as outlined by the IOA. With the university's support, we offer a trusted environment where individuals can safely discuss concerns, explore options, and navigate complex situations. We remain dedicated to fostering collaboration and respect across the university environment and look forward to continuing this important work together.

We encourage all members of the university community to connect with us for a confidential, off-the-record discussion about navigating conflicts, concerns, or challenges related to their experience at the university. We look forward to hearing from you!

Scott & Jen

Scott Deyo, M.S., Certified Organizational Ombuds
University Ombuds

Jen Amano, M.Ed. Certified Organizational Ombuds
Associate University Ombuds

Strategic Alignment

The University Ombuds supports the goals and guiding commitments outlined in UNC Charlotte's strategic plan. Through confidential conflict engagement, relationship building, organizational feedback, and support for fair processes, the office contributes meaningfully to institutional priorities.

Integrity and Respect

The University Ombuds office promotes fairness, ethical behavior, civil dialogue, and respect across the university community.

Student Success

Through coaching, guided self-advocacy, and informal problem-solving, the University Ombuds helps students resolve problems that can affect persistence, engagement, and academic progress.

Well-Being

By helping visitors and work units resolve workplace concerns early and at the lowest possible level, the Ombuds can help improve communication, collaboration, work relationships, morale, and engagement.

Organizational Effectiveness

Systemic feedback from Ombuds activities helps the university identify where policies and processes can improve, and supports operational efficiency and excellence in the contributions of work units to the university, the community, and the state.

Research Excellence

The Ombuds supports the university's research environments by helping to improve teamwork among collaborators, supportive cultures within labs, and effective conflict resolution that might otherwise impact research progress.

OMBUDS ROLE AND VALUE

The University Ombuds serves the UNC Charlotte community by promoting and enabling the timely and constructive resolution of concerns. By supporting individuals early in the process, the Ombuds helps prevent issues from developing into more complicated, costly, or formal matters. This proactive engagement minimizes disruption, preserves professional and academic relationships, and maintains a more productive and collaborative campus environment.

Beyond individual interactions, the Ombuds office plays an important role in institutional improvement. Through attentive listening and identification of trends, the office provides leadership with de-identified insights that can be used to inform decisions and enhance policies, practices, and communication. The Ombuds also strengthens the campus climate by offering a neutral, confidential space where students, faculty, and staff can openly discuss concerns, consider different perspectives, and explore possible solutions. These conversations can build trust and improve communication across departments and teams.

While remaining independent and informal, the Ombuds office helps mitigate risk by recognizing emerging concerns and highlighting potential challenges before they escalate into formal complaints. By encouraging ethical behavior, respectful conflict engagement, and awareness of available resources, the office contributes to a culture of accountability and integrity.

The scope of Ombuds work includes a wide range of issues, from interpersonal misunderstandings to broader organizational dynamics. By assisting individuals in navigating both everyday and complex situations, the office helps cultivate an environment where concerns can be raised safely. During times of transition or change, the Ombuds serves as a steady resource for the campus community. By helping community members address and adapt to uncertainty at all levels, the office can help the university identify policy gaps, clarify processes, and enhance organizational effectiveness.



PROFESSIONAL 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

Confidentiality is one of the most consequential pillars 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. With explicit permission, the Ombuds may disclose a visitor's identity and information 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.

PROGRAM CERTIFICATION

In May 2026, the UNC Charlotte University Ombuds office was awarded the “Certified Ombuds Program” credential by the International Ombuds Association (IOA). This Program Certification is granted to ombuds offices that demonstrate full alignment with IOA’s Standards of Practice. The comprehensive review covered governing documents, reporting structure, confidentiality protocols, office history, outreach practices, methods for talking to visitors, case tracking practices, and other areas. This credential reflects the staff’s commitment to professional excellence and UNC Charlotte’s investment in an exemplary ombuds program. For faculty, staff, and students who turn to the office for confidential support in navigating workplace and academic concerns, this program certification affirms that those services are aligned with the most rigorous professional standards.



EDUCATION AND ENGAGEMENT

The Ombuds Office conducted 61 outreach activities during the academic year. These efforts increased awareness of Ombuds services across the university while strengthening relationships with faculty, staff, students, and administrative partners.

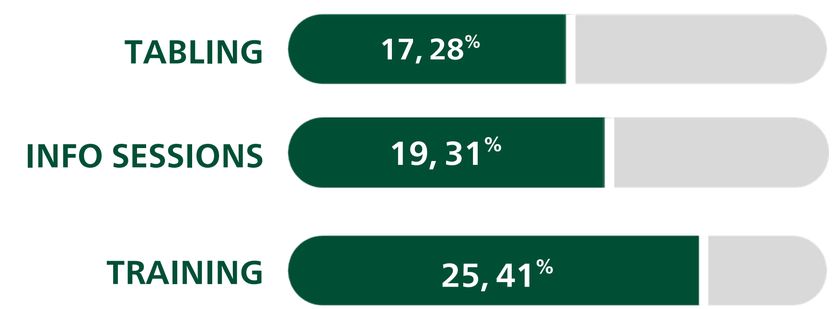
Educational training topics included change management, giving and receiving feedback, collaboration, psychological safety, interest-based problem-solving, and conflict management. Outreach engagements spanned units throughout Academic and Student Affairs.



A notable opportunity this year involved tabling at New Student Orientation Resource Fairs where we were able to introduce students and their families to Ombuds services at the beginning of their UNC Charlotte journey.

We extend our sincere gratitude to our campus partners for their collaboration and support in expanding outreach efforts and fostering greater engagement across the university community.

61 OUTREACH ACTIVITIES



RECORDS AND DATA

The University Ombuds does not collect or retain records that include the names of visitors. We do, however, notate information on the services provided, general usage, and the broad types of issues our visitors share with us. This type of data is provided in a broad, aggregate manner that is non-attributable and protects confidential information. The following section provides a high level view of the topics our faculty, staff, and students shared throughout the year.

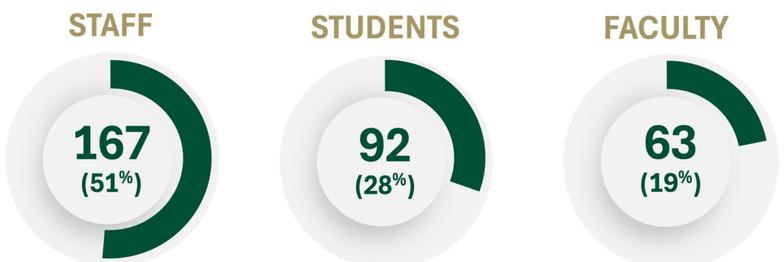
PROGRAM USAGE

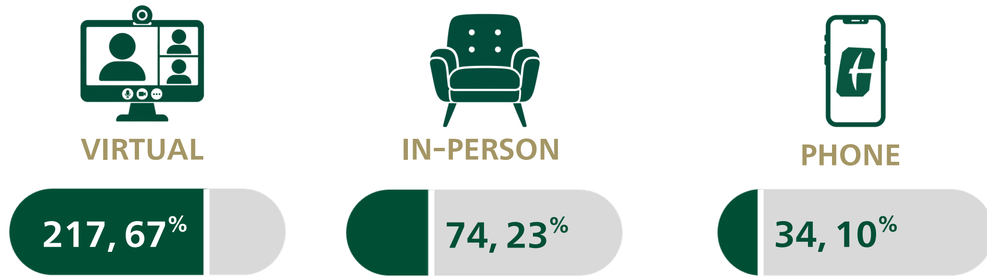
325
TOTAL VISITORS

During the 2025-2026 reporting period (July 1, 2025 through June 30, 2026), the University Ombuds office welcomed 325 visitors. This was up from 312 the prior year, an increase of 4 percent. Of these cases, 68 percent were initial consultations, and 32 percent were follow-up discussions.

Staff remained the largest visitor group, accounting for more than half of all contacts, a 59 percent increase from the previous year. Within this group, EHRA staff represented 34 percent of overall visits and SHRA staff represented 18 percent. Faculty visits decreased from 102 last year to 63 this year, a 38 percent reduction. Within this group, tenure and tenure-track faculty accounted for 11 percent of overall visits, lecturers and teaching professors accounted for 6 percent, and chairs, deans, and administrators above that level accounted for 2 percent.

Students accounted for 29 percent of overall program usage. Undergraduate student usage continued to rise, with 30 students meeting with the office this year, double the previous year's total and 9 percent of overall program usage. Doctoral students represented 11 percent of visits, master's students represented 7 percent, and students in certificate programs represented 2 percent. Visitors classified as "other" accounted for 1 percent of program usage, which typically involved non-students seeking information or general guidance. The office assisted these visitors in identifying appropriate university resources or personnel to assist with their inquiry.

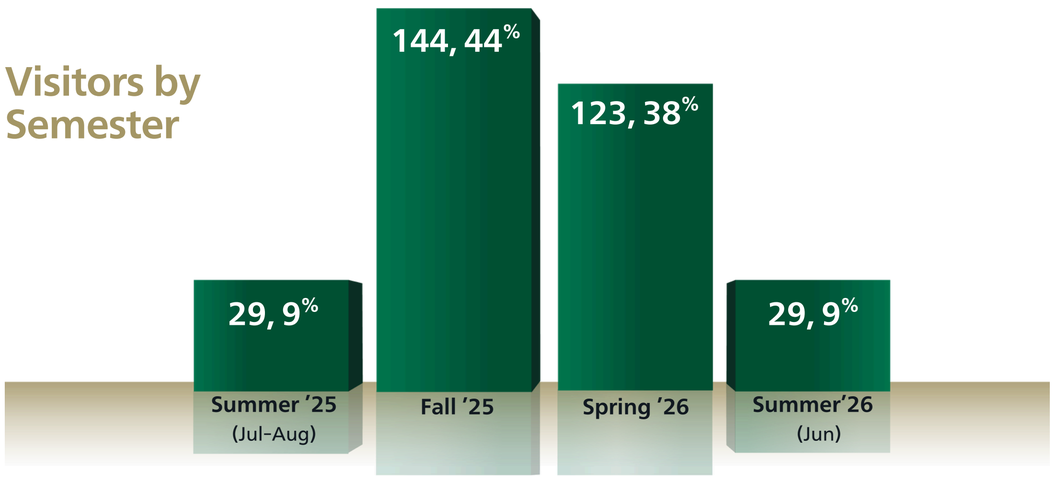




Of the 325 visitors, 217 (67 percent) sessions were conducted virtually, 74 (23 percent) were in person, and 34 (10 percent) engaged over a phone call.

Fall and Spring together accounted for 82 percent of the year's visitors. Fall 2025 was the busiest semester overall. November 2025 was the busiest single month of the reporting period, with 45 visitors (14 percent of annual traffic), followed by February 2026 with 37 visitors (11 percent) and October 2025 with 36 visitors (11 percent).

Summers and the month of December saw the least traffic, an understandable pattern that aligns with the fewest students on campus, winter closure, and personal leave schedules.

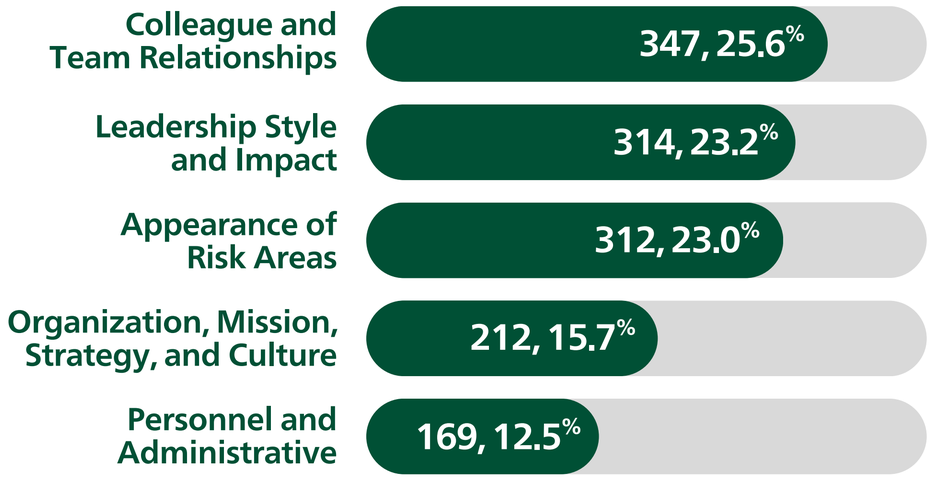


VISITOR CONCERNS

The 325 visitors raised 1,354 issues during the reporting period, an average of four issues per case. Issues are grouped into five categories. Colleague and team relationships accounted for the largest share (347 issues, 25.6 percent), followed by leadership (314, 23.2 percent) and appearance of high-risk areas (312, 23.0 percent). Organization, mission, strategy and culture (212, 15.7 percent) and personnel and administrative matters (169, 12.5 percent) made up the remainder. The first three categories together represent nearly 72 percent of all issues raised.

Communication and respect accounted for approximately 30 percent of all issues shared. Communication concerns appeared among colleagues (90), leaders (83) and in organizational communications (29), totaling 202 issues. Respect and interpersonal conduct accounted for 207 issues, similarly focused around immediate colleagues, leaders, and the broader work environment. There were 103 concerns about speaking up, whereby 52 visitors did not feel that their concerns were being taken seriously or were ignored, and 51 felt they were retaliated against for raising concerns. Issues involving roles, decision-making structures, adverse actions and administrative decisions totaled 233 (17 percent), and were related to how decisions were made, explained and applied.

1,354 ISSUES SHARED

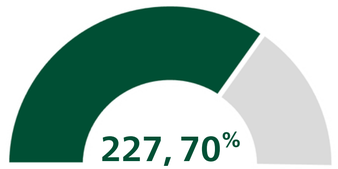


See the Appendix for the full list of issues shared.

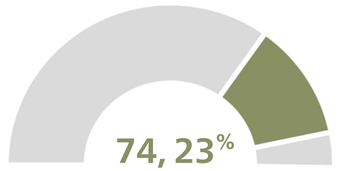
CASE COMPLEXITY AND RISK

No two matters brought to the University Ombuds look alike. Some involve a narrow concern, like an employee trying to locate a campus resource or rehearsing how to open a conversation with a supervisor. Others remain limited to a couple of people but raise heavier questions, such as perceived bias, retaliation, or bullying. Then there are cases with a number of many moving parts, where whole departments or cross-functional teams are drawn in and several processes, policies, and resource partners intersect. The University Ombuds attempts to capture the complexity and seriousness of what is at stake for the individual, the work unit, and the university.

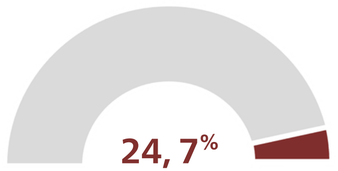
Reflecting on each visitor's concerns and issues shared, the ombuds estimated a risk level of low, medium, or high to capture the "temperature" of the situation as a whole. The following provides the dashboard metrics and description of each level.



Low-risk cases generally involved one or two visitors who raise a limited number of issues with minor impact on themselves and others. They do not appear to meet the threshold where a visitor might consider initiating a formal process.



Medium-risk cases involve numerous issues, or other individuals who may have similar concerns. These cases carry an elevated weight of concerns, adverse effects on the individual or work, or have the potential for a formal complaint.



High-risk cases involve issues with the potential for highly consequential outcomes for a work unit or the University as a whole, with significant connections to health, safety, financial, operational, reputational, environmental, or regulatory risk.

A TYPICAL ENGAGEMENT WITH THE OMBUDS

A meeting with the University Ombuds is a chance to talk through a concern, challenge, question, or conflict in a confidential setting. Many visitors arrive unsure of what they need, what options exist, or how to describe what they are experiencing. That is common, and it is a perfectly good place to start. Preparation is optional, and visitors do not need to have anything figured out beforehand.

Most meetings follow a familiar pattern. We begin by explaining the four defining features of the Ombuds role (informal, independent, impartial, and confidential). The visitor then describes the situation in their own words, and we listen and ask questions to understand it. From there, we act as a thought partner, helping the visitor identify possible options and next steps and talk through the advantages and drawbacks of each possible option. Visitors are free to consider these options on their own time. No decisions are expected during the meeting, and some people choose to take no further action.

Talking Through the Challenge. In the conversation, we ask questions to understand the situation from several angles. We want to know about the problem itself, but we are also interested in what matters most to the visitor and what they hope to achieve. Learning about these underlying interests often brings out options that were not obvious at first. Visitors can expect questions along these lines:

- How would you summarize your concerns? What are the main issues for you?
- What problem or problems are you trying to solve?
- What are your underlying interests? Why is this important to you?
- What impact(s) are these issues having?
- How have you tried to solve this already? What has worked? What hasn't worked?
- What outcome(s) are you seeking to achieve? What would make the situation better?
- What pathways do you believe could make that happen?

Other Considerations. If you have documents, emails, policies, or notes that provide context, you are welcome to bring them to your meeting. To protect confidentiality, we encourage you to avoid sending detailed information about your concern by email. It is often better to discuss sensitive details in the meeting. Bringing documentation is entirely optional, and many conversations are productive without any.

Most importantly, you don't need to have it figured out. People contact the Ombuds Office at many stages of a concern. Some want to explore options, others have questions about university processes, and some simply want a confidential space to think through a situation. Wherever you are, we're here to listen, help you clarify what matters most to you, and explore possible paths forward.

APPENDIX: ISSUES SHARED

Leadership Style & Impact 314 (23.2%)	Communication: clear, frequent, transparent	83 (6.1%)
	Interpersonal behaviors: respect, fairness, responsiveness	73 (5.4%)
	Values: ethics and integrity	49 (3.6%)
	Enabling teamwork and collaborative resolution	46 (3.4%)
	Self Improvement: reflective & responsive to feedback	37 (2.7%)
	Program improvement: openness to new ideas & change	26 (1.9%)
Organization, Mission, Strategy, & Culture 212 (15.7%)	Culture of excellence and accountability	56 (4.1%)
	Structure and decision-making processes	47 (3.5%)
	Environment: respect, cooperation, & empowerment	47 (3.5%)
	Corporate communications: clarity & frequency	29 (2.1%)
	Shared mission, vision, goals, & strategies	18 (1.3%)
	Priority Setting & Funding	15 (1.1%)
Colleague & Team Relationships 347 (25.6%)	Communication	90 (6.6%)
	Respect	87 (6.4%)
	Cooperation and collaboration	62 (4.6%)
	Roles and Responsibilities	55 (4.1%)
	Shared Values, common goals	22 (1.6%)
	Competence, skills, abilities, reliability	20 (1.5%)
	Commitment, dedication, effort	11 (0.8%)
Personnel & Administrative 169 (12.5%)	Adverse action & decision	60 (4.4%)
	Administrative decisions	58 (4.3%)
	Position changes	17 (1.3%)
	Career progression & professional development	16 (1.2%)
	Hiring: selection processes & decisions	13 (1.0%)
	Alternative work arrangements	3 (0.2%)
	Pay and Benefits	2 (0.1%)
Appearance of Risk Areas 312 (23.0%)	Handling of serious concerns	52 (3.8%)
	Retaliation for speaking up	51 (3.8%)
	Management & business decision impacts	45 (3.3%)
	Abuse of power & bullying	40 (3.0%)
	Business and financial practices	35 (2.6%)
	Discrimination, harassment, & accommodation	27 (2.0%)
	Safety & security	22 (1.6%)
	Conflicts of interest & favoritism	18 (1.3%)
	Turnover, backfill, burnout	14 (1.0%)
	Privacy	8 (0.6%)

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ombuds@charlotte.edu

ombuds.charlotte.edu

