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No problem is too big or too small.
Let's talk!

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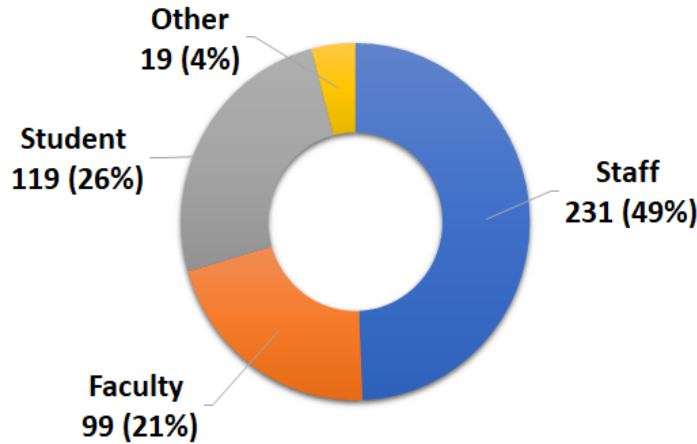
*"My contacts were very nice, listened to my concerns, and offered appropriate suggestions".
~Anonymous*

IOWA | Office of the Ombudsperson

ANNUAL REPORT 2022-2023

The Ombuds Office serves the UI community by providing **confidential, impartial, informal, and independent** problem solving and conflict resolution services. This year, **468 new** visitor appointments were conducted. It is important to note that an increase or drop in the number of contacts does not necessarily indicate growing or reduced concerns in the organization.

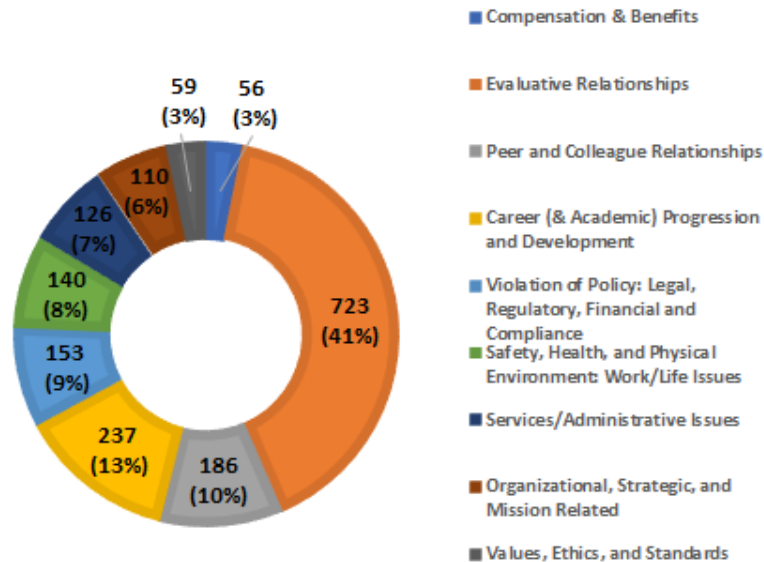
TYPES OF VISITORS



Professional & Scientific Staff accounted for **40%** of the total visitors assisted this fiscal year.

Of these **new** appointments, **57%** of visitors returned to the office to discuss the initial concern in a follow-up capacity resulting in **265 revisit** appointments.

VISITOR CONCERNS

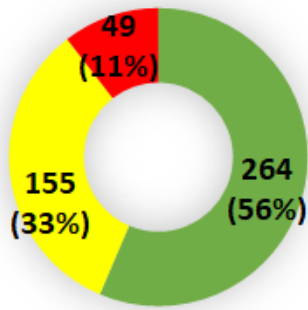


A total of **1,790 concerns** were captured. It is important to note that this reflects individual contacts to the office raising **multiple** concerns and a restriction of **four** allowable selections per visitor.

The top concerns under **Evaluative Relationships** are:

- 1) **Communication**-Quality and/or quantity of communication
- 2) **Performance Appraisal/Grading**- Job/Academic performance in a formal or informal evaluation
- 3) **Respect/Treatment**-Demonstrations of inappropriate regard for people, not listening, rudeness, and/or crudeness
- 4) **Supervisory Effectiveness**- Failure to address issues and/or manage the department/classroom

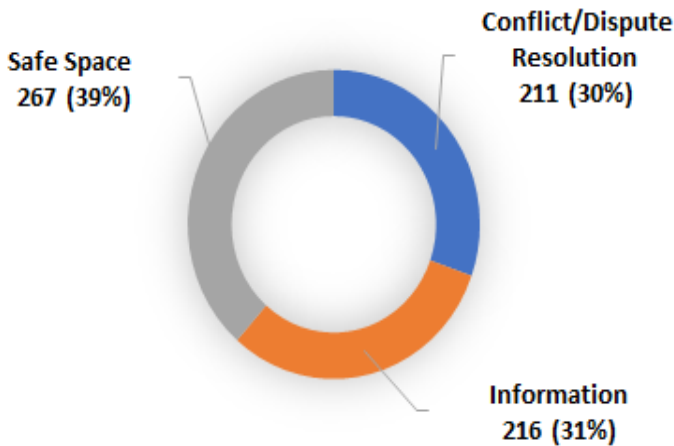
CASE COMPLEXITY & ANALYSIS



Green cases are fairly straightforward and mostly interpersonal conflicts involving fewer than four people. **Yellow** cases typically have more people involved with multiple issues and increasingly serious consequences. **Red** cases are highly complex with high stakes, often lasting several months or impacting multiple parts of the organization.

It is important to note that **Loss of productivity** is a **risk** that accounted for **33%** of the visitor appointments and is the **largest** perceived risk to campus. A visitor may have **multiple** perceived risks or **none** at all.

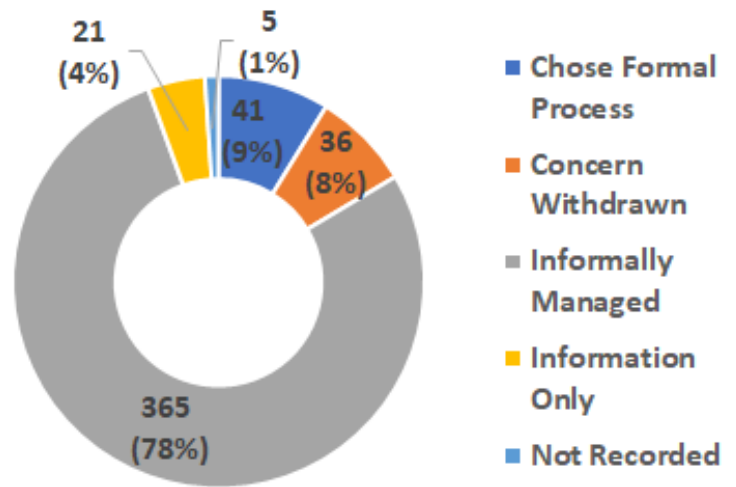
SERVICES PROVIDED



The top **Themes** captured by the Ombuds office are:

- 1) **Workplace Dynamics-17%**
- 2) **Interpersonal Conflict-14%**
- 3) **DEI Concerns-9%**

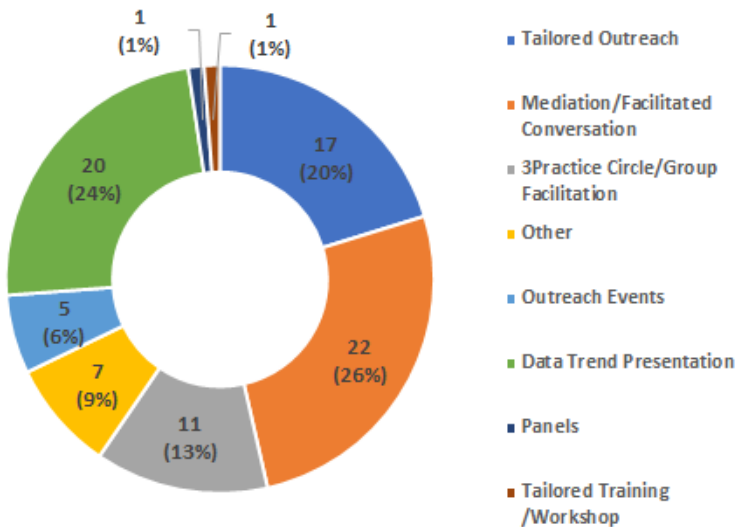
OUTCOMES



The top **Actions** by the Ombuds office consisted of:

- 1) **Consultation/Problem Solving-31%**
- 2) **Discuss Applicable Policies/Process-14%**
- 3) **Listening-13%**
- 4) **Coaching-12%**
- 5) **Referral to Resource-10%**

ADDITIONAL SERVICES



SATISFACTION SURVEY

- **84%** of visitors who responded to the anonymous survey indicated they were **satisfied** with the service of the Office of the Ombudsperson.
- **87%** of visitors who responded to the anonymous survey **agreed** that they would contact the Office of the Ombudsperson for help if the need arose in the future.
- **87%** of visitors who responded to the anonymous survey **agreed** that they would refer others to the Office of the Ombudsperson for assistance.

"As a department DEO, I have greatly benefited from the advice and help from the Office of the Ombudsperson several times over the last few years." ~Anonymous

Ombudspersons reached approximately **1,430** individuals through the **84 Additional Services** conducted by the Office of the Ombudsperson.



HIGHLIGHTS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The primary concerns of visitors to the Office of the Ombudsperson were: 1) inconsistencies in the use of Clarification of Expectations and Performance Improvement Plan documents; 2) the performance review process for staff; 3) respect and treatment in the workplace. The observations and recommendations provided below were drawn from multiple discussions with visitors to the Office of the Ombudsperson during the applicable reporting period.

Performance Expectations

Clarification of Expectations: The “Clarification of Expectations” document typically aligns with the need to address the performance or conduct of an employee. It can be beneficial in terms of communicating the standards and expectations of the job and to share policies that clarify the consequences of any continued noncompliance on the part of an employee. Visitors to our office most frequently expressed concerns regarding inconsistencies in the employee’s experience after receiving the document: although the document often emphasized the need for immediate compliance and performance improvements, the letters reviewed by the Office of the Ombudsperson did not always specify what was needed to address concerns, nor did they provide the metrics needed to track the employee’s progress. Instead, some visitors reported that there was no follow-up conversation to confirm when or if the employee had satisfactorily addressed the concerns of the supervisor and department. Visitors often expressed an increase in stress and anxiety upon receipt of the document, in part due to their not having a clear understanding of the changes desired or the path to progress. They were also unclear about how the Clarification of Expectations might affect their future performance reviews.

Performance Improvement Plan: The “Performance Improvement Plan” document is used to address a performance concern that must be improved in order to continue in the job. Over the last year, several visitors expressed concerns that this formal non-disciplinary document did not contain clear guidelines that would set measurable goals, had no timeline listed for review, and did not identify resources on how to improve performance. In addition, visitors were troubled by language indicating that their failure to comply with the plan could result in termination. Visitors with a strong sense of value and commitment to the University of Iowa have indicated that language used in the document produced a traumatic response. Many visitors with these concerns shared that receiving the Performance Improvement Plan was the first time they were informed that they were not meeting the performance expectations of the department.

Recommendations: The procedures, documentation, and language involved in providing Clarification of Expectations and Performance Improvement Plans to employees should be reviewed to ensure that consistency and best practices are being followed. When appropriate, the Office of Ombudsperson could be included as a resource on the Clarification of Expectations and Performance Improvement Plan documents. Our office can provide assistance before issues escalate by allowing visitors to express their concerns and emotional reactions in a safe space and by facilitating referrals to other resources, such as EAP, for dealing with stress or anxiety.

HIGHLIGHTS AND RECOMMENDATIONS, CONT'D

Performance Reviews

The Office of the Ombudsperson heard concerns from some staff that their supervisors edited the supervisor's comments in the online performance review system after the review meeting had taken place and the employee had submitted their final comments. Visitors reported that these revised supervisor comments marked the first time they had received feedback and/or heard about performance issues. As a result, visitors have been reaching out to our office looking for an appropriate appeal process for performance feedback. Secondary concerns heard by the office came from staff members who were transferring to new positions within the University. Some reported that their reason for transferring was dissatisfaction with the previous supervisor, while that supervisor still had the purview to conduct the employee's performance review. Another concern pertained to performance review meetings being scheduled just one or two days before the deadline. In these cases, visitors felt pressured to accept the supervisor's comments because there was no time to review them in detail.

Recommendations: Review the processes for providing ongoing feedback as a part of the performance review cycle. Consider creating additional opportunities to provide information and guidance for employees who have concerns about the timing and content of performance feedback. Create a "best practices" document for supervisors about how to transfer employees.

Navigating Respect and Treatment in the Workplace

Over the last year, visitor reports indicated that organizational units across campus were having difficulty navigating workplace relationships. Visitors in the subordinate role have consistently shared concerns that their supervisors are not appropriately responsive when they raise these issues. In addition, visitors also shared that they are experiencing rude, abrasive, and disrespectful behavior from colleagues and their supervisors. They described being subject to conduct demonstrating an inappropriate and/or disrespectful regard for others. This behavior has created unnecessary workplace stress, caused disruptions, and contributed to a significant reduction of productivity in various units across campus. The Office of the Ombudsperson observed a direct correlation between this behavior and the request for "Respect in the Workplace" trainings and workshops. One of the main goals of our office is to address concerns of visitors by providing consultation, problem solving, and conflict resolution services to the campus community. To that end, our office can conduct conflict resolution training and workshops when it directly ties to the resolution of a visitor's concern.

Recommendations: The Office of the Ombudsperson is available to work with any employee or unit experiencing issues rooted in interpersonal conflict. We work with visitors to determine the best ways to move forward for resolution, using a range of approaches that include the use of mediation, a facilitated conversation, a 3Practice Circle, and/or group facilitation. Several units, particularly in health sciences and health care at the University of Iowa, have taken advantage of these services to optimize patient care. Utilizing one or more of these services affords an opportunity for the affected units to gain clarity on diverse perspectives, identify the underlying reasons for the problematic behavior, and decide how to move forward. An advantage here is that visitors, units, and teams become responsible for what the resolution should look like. The Office of the Ombudsperson encourages the university to continue to highlight and make available programs, workshops, services, and resources that individuals and units can utilize to assist them in working more effectively to support the strategic goal of retaining our talented people.