University of Maryland

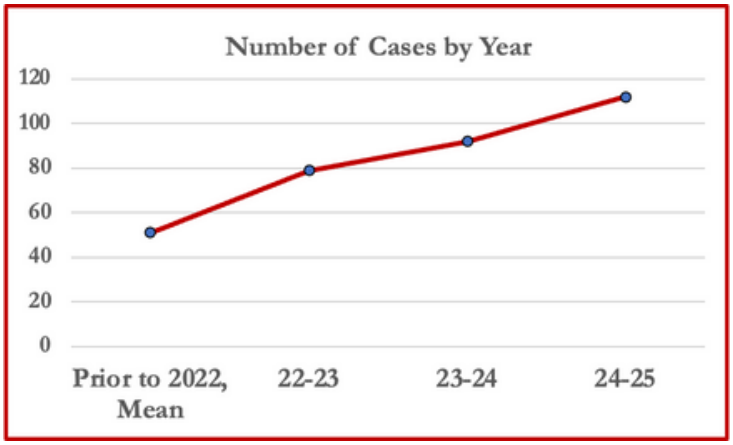
# FACULTY OMBUDS ANNUAL REPORT

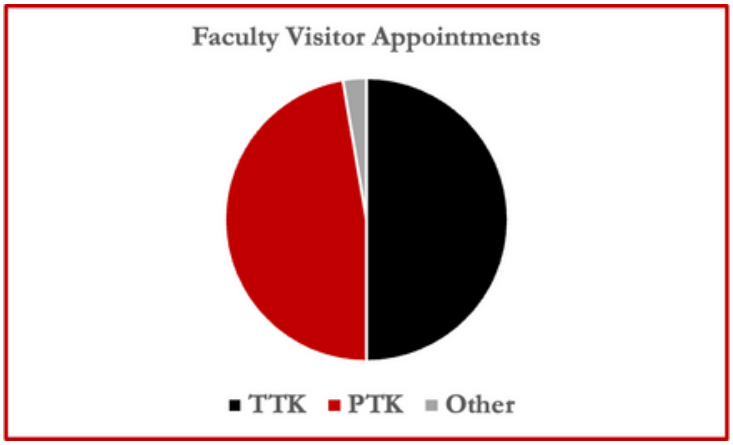
July 1, 2024– June 30, 2025

Karen M. O'Brien, Ph.D.
Nazish M. Salahuddin, Ph.D.

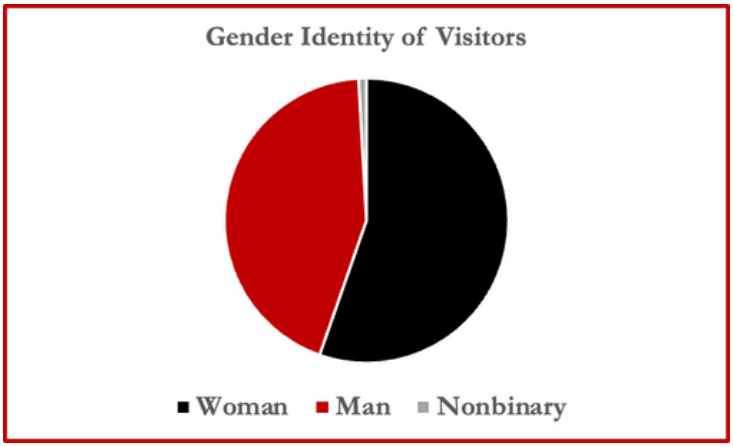
# FACULTY VISITORS

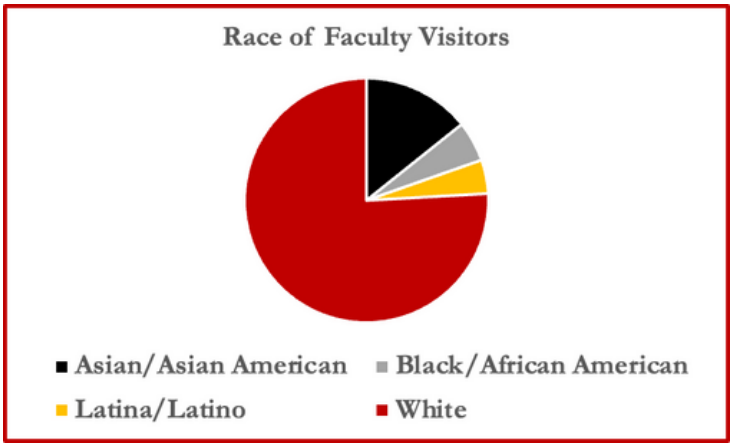
From July 1, 2024 through June 30, 2025, the faculty ombuds worked with 112 faculty regarding workplace conflicts or concerns. In the previous two years, 92 and 79 cases were managed, respectively. Prior to 2022-2023, the average number of cases per year in the last eight years for which data were available was 51.3 (SD=4.7), indicating a significant increase in faculty visitors to the ombuds office in academic year 2024-2025. Interestingly, 34% of the cases brought to the ombuds in 2024-2025 were from faculty who had previously used faculty ombuds services.

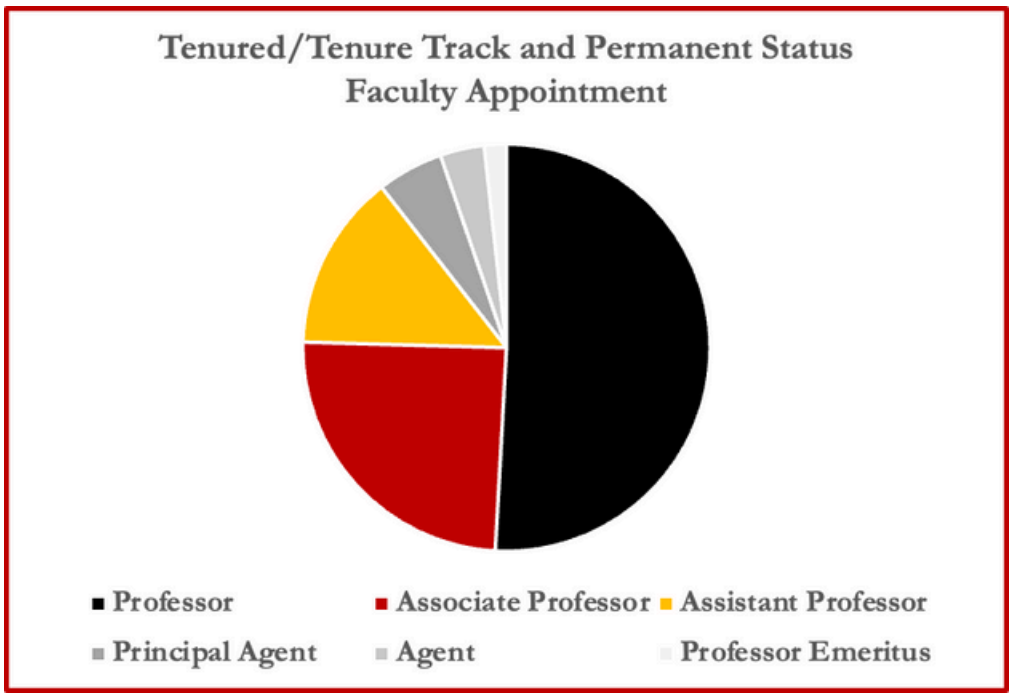


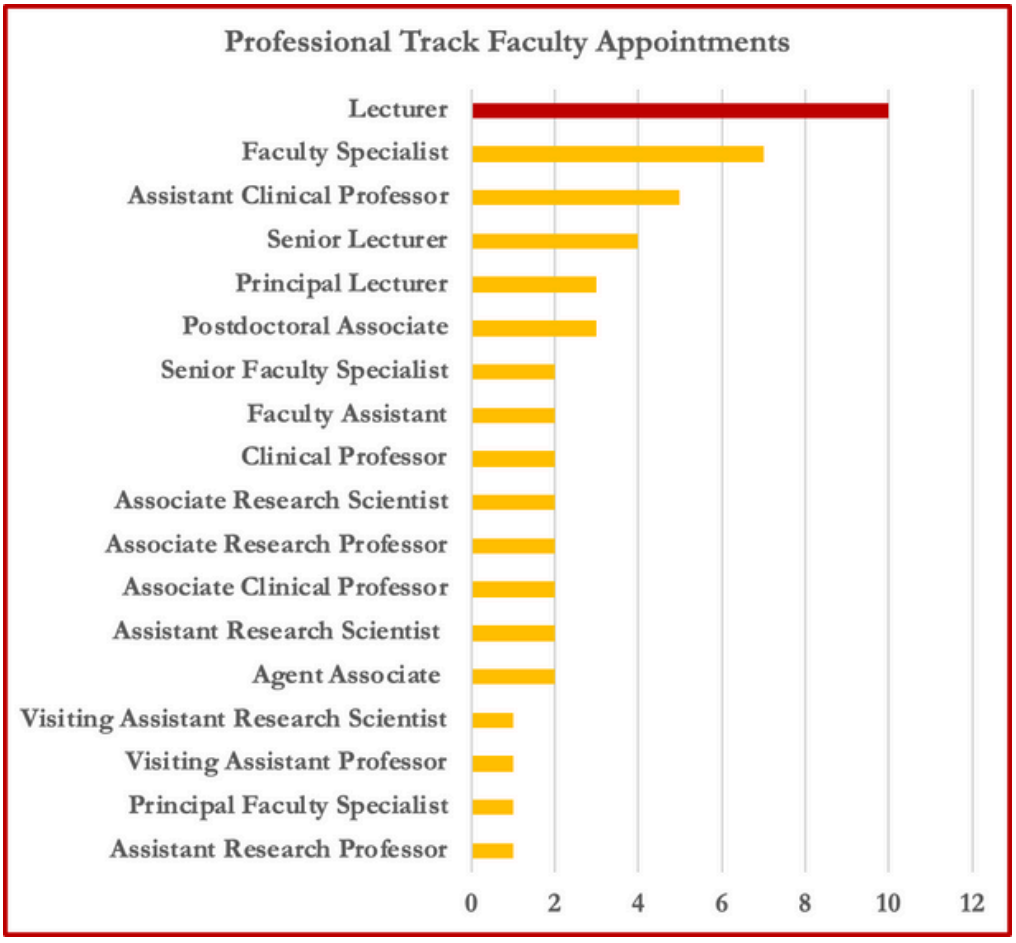



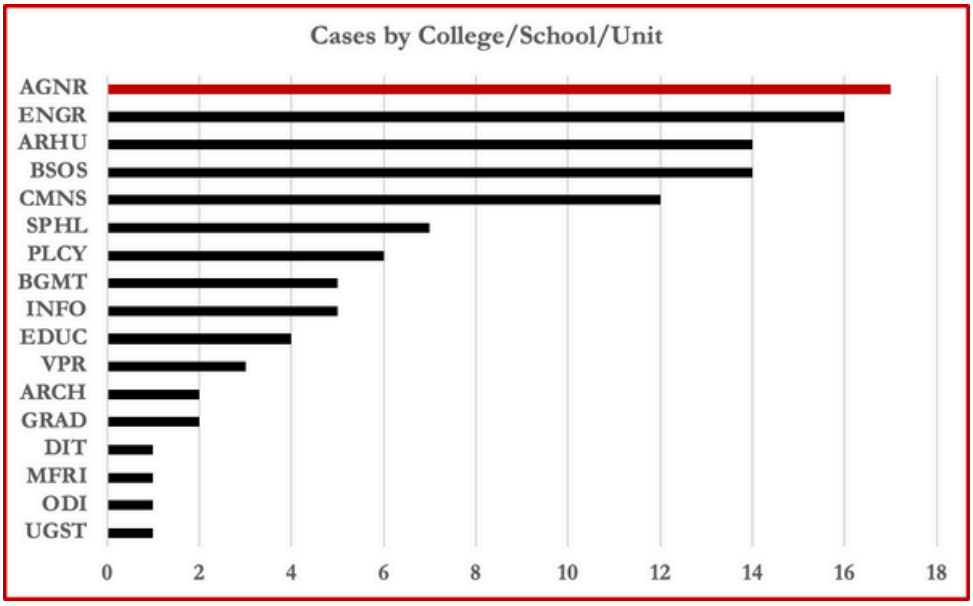

Faculty who met with the ombuds to discuss their concerns included 56 tenured/tenure-track and 53 professional track faculty (in addition to two staff and one community member who discussed faculty-related concerns). The majority of visitors were women (55.36%), 43.75% were men and one person was nonbinary. Most were White (75.89%), with 14.29% Asian/Asian American, 5.36% African American/Black, and 4.46% Latina/Latino visitors. Among the tenured/tenure-track faculty, the vast majority were professors. The most common appointments among the professional track faculty were lecturer, faculty specialist, and assistant clinical professor. The faculty who met with the ombuds were representative of 17 colleges/units and 55 departments/centers, with the majority of cases coming from the College of Agriculture and Natural Resources and the A. James Clark School of Engineering.




Tenured/Tenure Track and Permanent Status
Faculty Appointment
Professor
Associate Professor
Assistant Professor
Principal Agent
Agent
Professor Emeritus


Professional Track Faculty Appointments
Lecturer
Faculty Specialist
Assistant Clinical Professor
Senior Lecturer
Principal Lecturer
Postdoctoral Associate
Senior Faculty Specialist
Faculty Assistant
Clinical Professor
Associate Research Scientist
Associate Research Professor
Associate Clinical Professor
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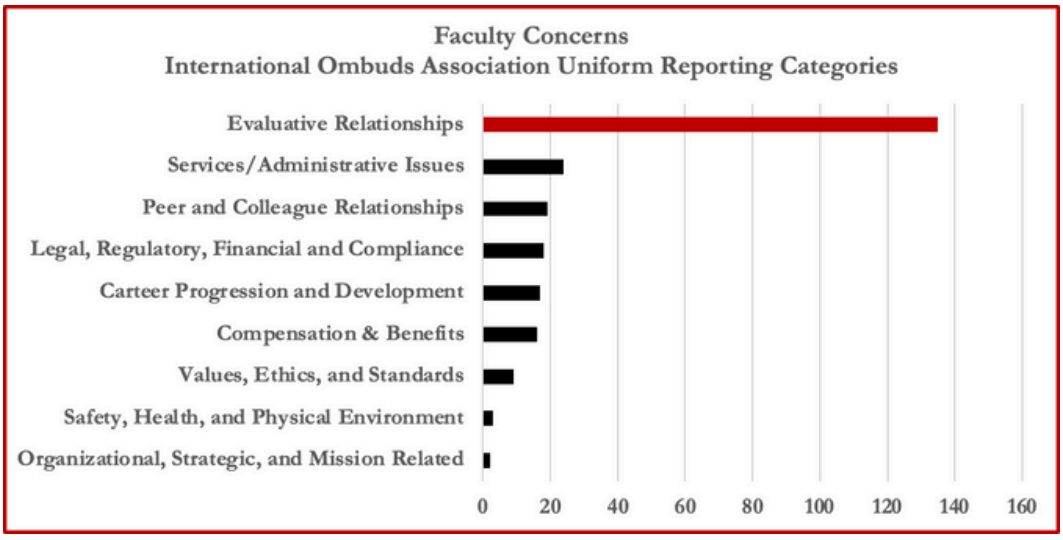


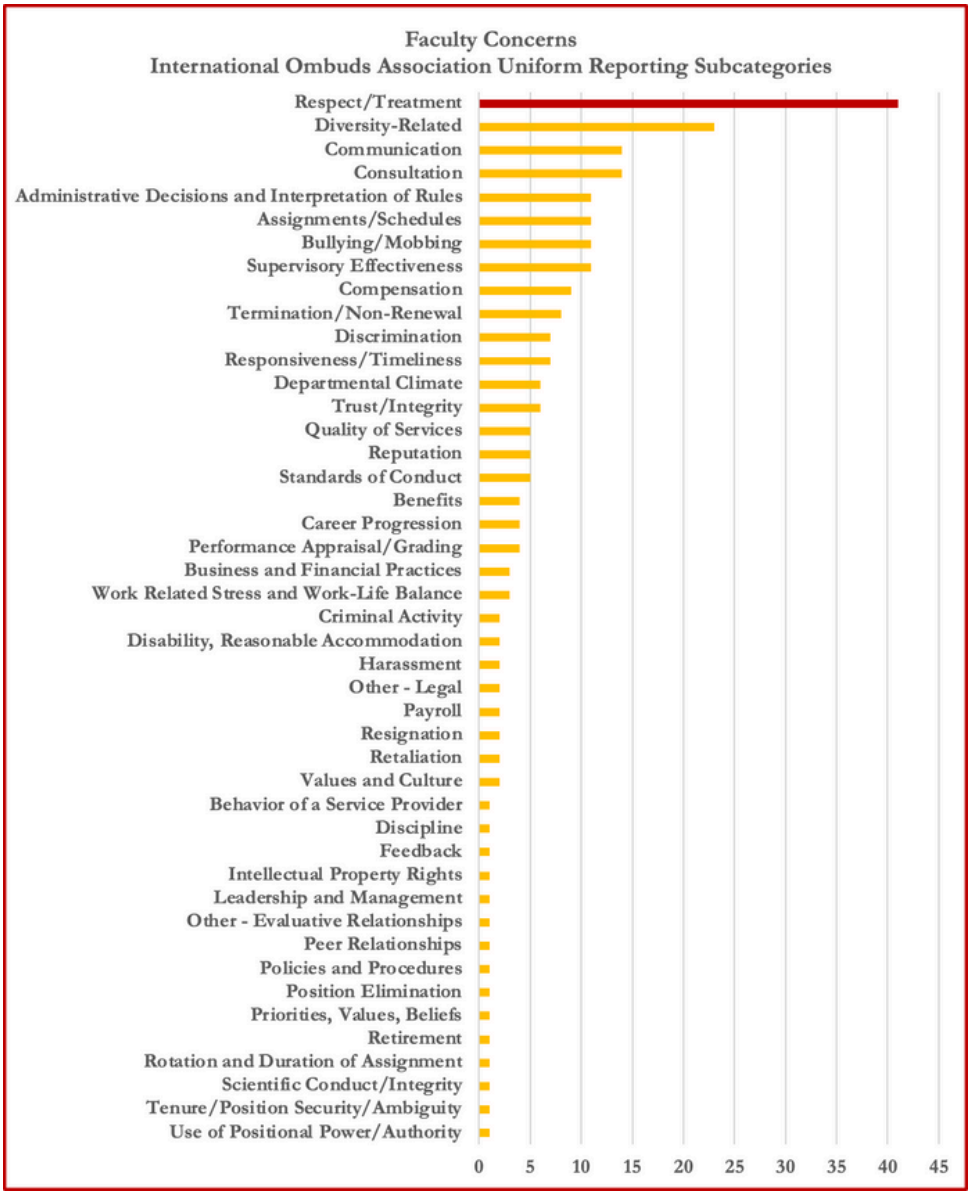

AGNR=College of Agriculture & Natural Resources; ARCH=School of Architecture, Planning & Preservation; ARHU=College of Arts & Humanities; BMGT=Robert H. Smith School of Business; BSOS=College of Behavioral & Social Sciences; CMNS=College of Computer, Mathematical, & Natural Sciences; DIT=Division of Information Technology; EDUC=College of Education; ENGR=A. James Clark School of Engineering; GRAD=Graduate School; INFO=College of Information Studies; MFRI=Maryland Fire and Rescue Institute; ODI=Office of Diversity and Inclusion; PLCY=School of Public Policy; SPHL=School of Public Health; UGST=Office of Undergraduate Studies; VPR=Division of Research

# FACULTY CONCERNS

The concerns brought to the faculty ombuds were coded using the uniform reporting categories created by the International Ombuds Association (2007). Many of the visitors reported multiple concerns, and every case was unique. The majority of reasons for contacting the ombuds office were related to difficulties in evaluative relationships (i.e., concerns between supervisors and employees, faculty at different levels, or faculty and students). In the subcategories chart below, the number of concerns in the International Ombuds Association uniform reporting subcategories are provided to illustrate the specific types of concerns brought to the faculty ombuds. Across all subcategories, the highest number of concerns were related to disrespectful behavior in the workplace. There were a significant number of diversity-related concerns that involved race, gender, or immigration status.

Some examples of concerns brought to the ombuds include unprofessional conduct including yelling and name calling, intimidating, disparaging and rude behaviors, and harmful race- or gender-related comments from colleagues, unit heads, or graduate students. Additional examples include not following university policies for promotion of professional track faculty, being asked to work while on family medical leave, denying co-authors access to data or analyses, not being given a contract after multiple requests, being denied annual leave pay at the time of non-renewal, gender disparities in salaries, unhealthy work environments, failure to onboard and off board effectively, lack of training and feedback, and needing consultation regarding how to address problematic faculty behavior or conflicts in a unit.

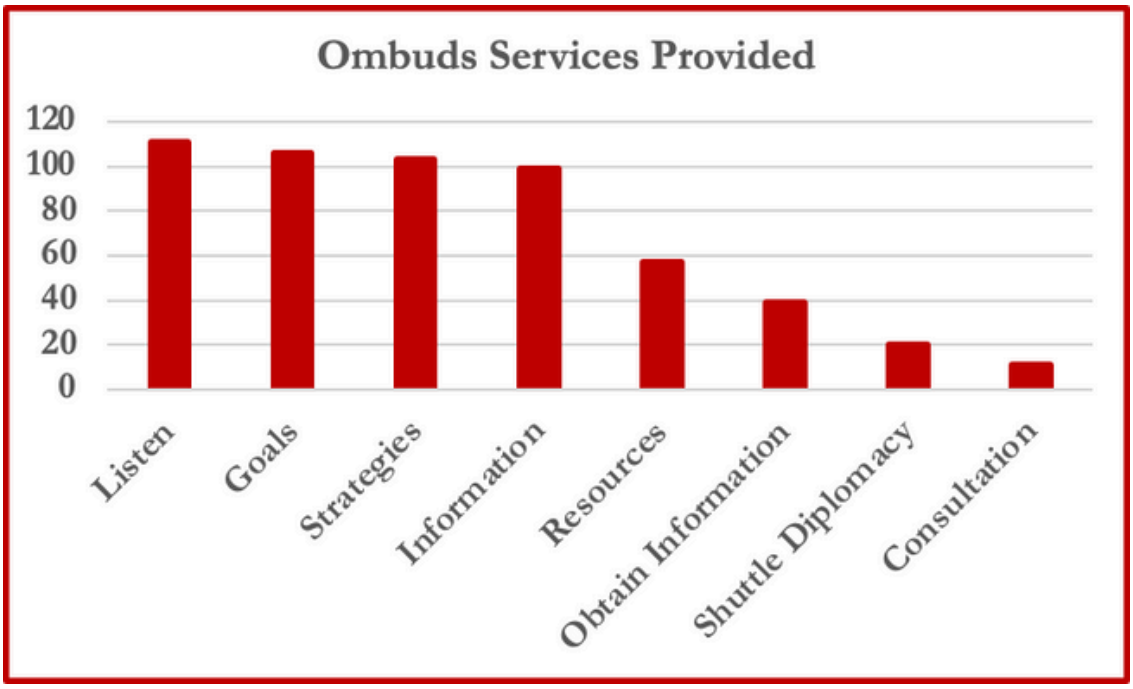

Faculty Concerns
International Ombuds Association Uniform Reporting Categories
Evaluative Relationships
Services/Administrative Issues
Peer and Colleague Relationships
Legal, Regulatory, Financial and Compliance
Carteer Progression and Development
Compensation & Benefits
Values, Ethics, and Standards
Safety, Health, and Physical Environment
Organizational, Strategic, and Mission Related
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20
40
60
80
100
120
140
160


Faculty Concerns
International Ombuds Association Uniform Reporting Subcategories
Respect/Treatment
Diversity-Related
Communication
Consultation
Administrative Decisions and Interpretation of Rules
Assignments/Schedules
Bullying/Mobbing
Supervisory Effectiveness
Compensation
Termination/Non-Renewal
Discrimination
Responsiveness/Timeliness
Departmental Climate
Trust/Integrity
Quality of Services
Reputation
Standards of Conduct
Benefits
Career Progression
Performance Appraisal/Grading
Business and Financial Practices
Work Related Stress and Work-Life Balance
Criminal Activity
Disability, Reasonable Accommodation
Harassment
Other - Legal
Payroll
Resignation
Retaliation
Values and Culture
Behavior of a Service Provider
Discipline
Feedback
Intellectual Property Rights
Leadership and Management
Other - Evaluative Relationships
Peer Relationships
Policies and Procedures
Position Elimination
Priorities, Values, Beliefs
Retirement
Rotation and Duration of Assignment
Scientific Conduct/Integrity
Tenure/Position Security/Ambiguity
Use of Positional Power/Authority
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# SERVICES

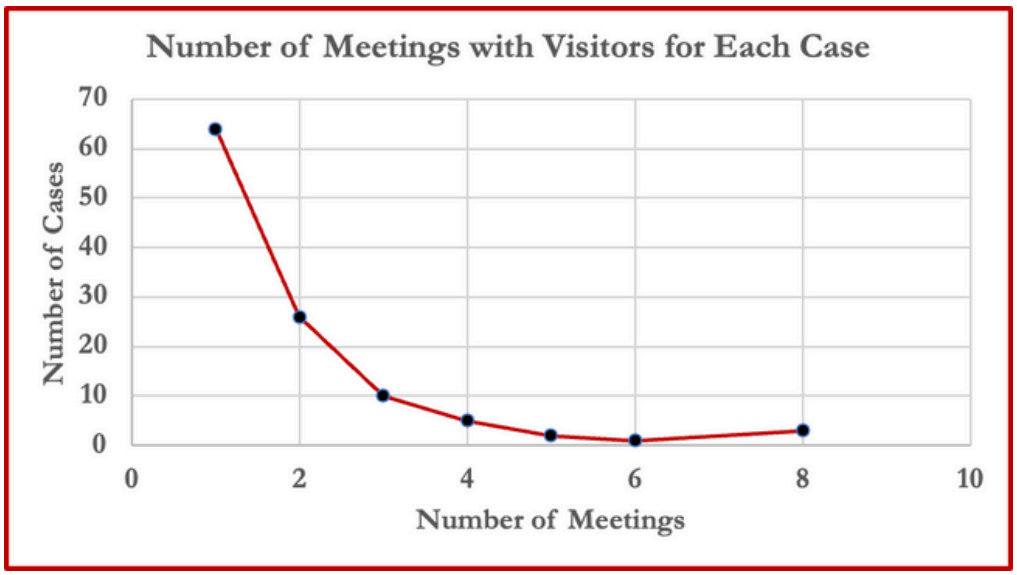
When providing services, the faculty ombuds follow the Standards of Practice of the International Ombuds Association (2020). All interactions are confidential with the exception of cases involving imminent harm to self or other, sexual or research misconduct, workplace violence, or criminal activity. The ombuds is impartial and does not side with or advocate for faculty visitors. Meetings with ombuds are informal and "off the record;" no identifiable records are kept unless requested by the faculty member or required by the grievance policy. Finally, the faculty ombuds work independently of any office at the University of Maryland.

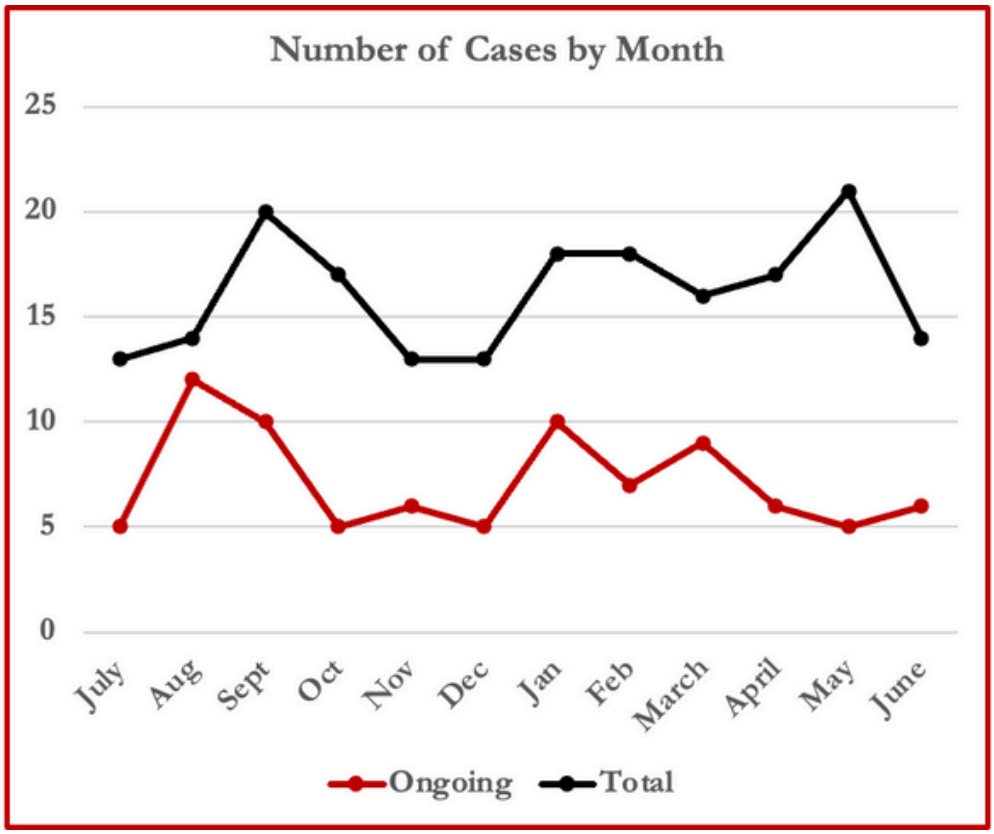
Ombuds services were provided in person, by phone, and using Zoom. Each case began with a meeting in which the ombuds explained the ombuds role and limits to confidentiality, and offered the faculty member a place to voice concerns, clarify goals, and discuss strategies for addressing their concerns. Many cases involved communication via email in addition to face-to-face meetings. Needed information was obtained and referrals to campus resources were provided. In 20 cases, shuttle diplomacy was used to talk with other individuals involved in the concern (with permission from the faculty member).



# CASE INFORMATION

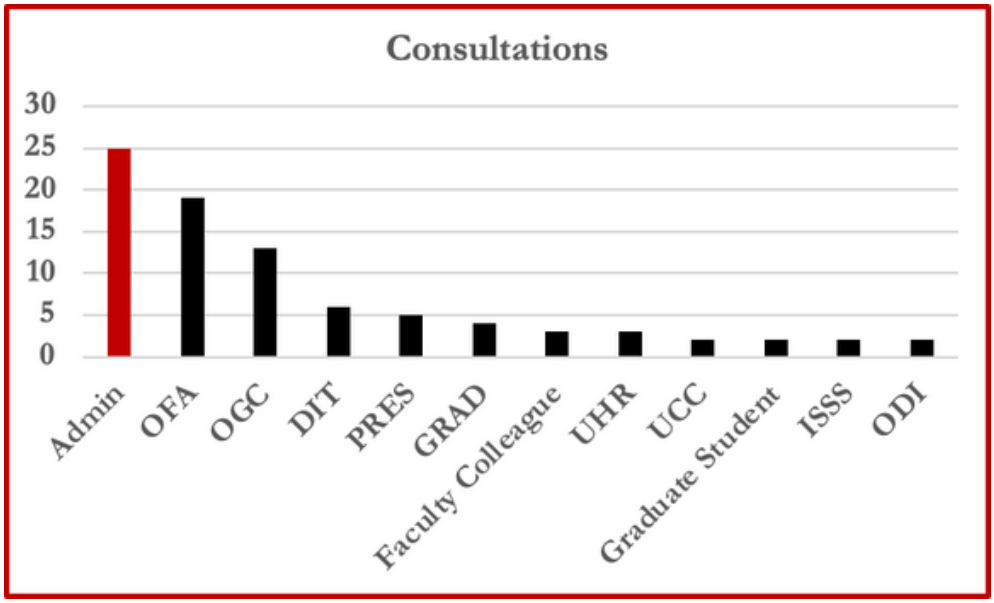
In most cases, the ombuds met with faculty visitors for one to two sessions (M=1.86; SD=1.46). A small number of cases required considerable and ongoing attention and consultation. Many of the cases also involved considerable email correspondence. All but two of the 112 cases were closed by June 30, 2025. Two formal faculty grievances were adjudicated by the University Senate in academic year 2024-2025. The number of cases per month varied, with most faculty visitors being seen in September and May, and the fewest in July, November and December.

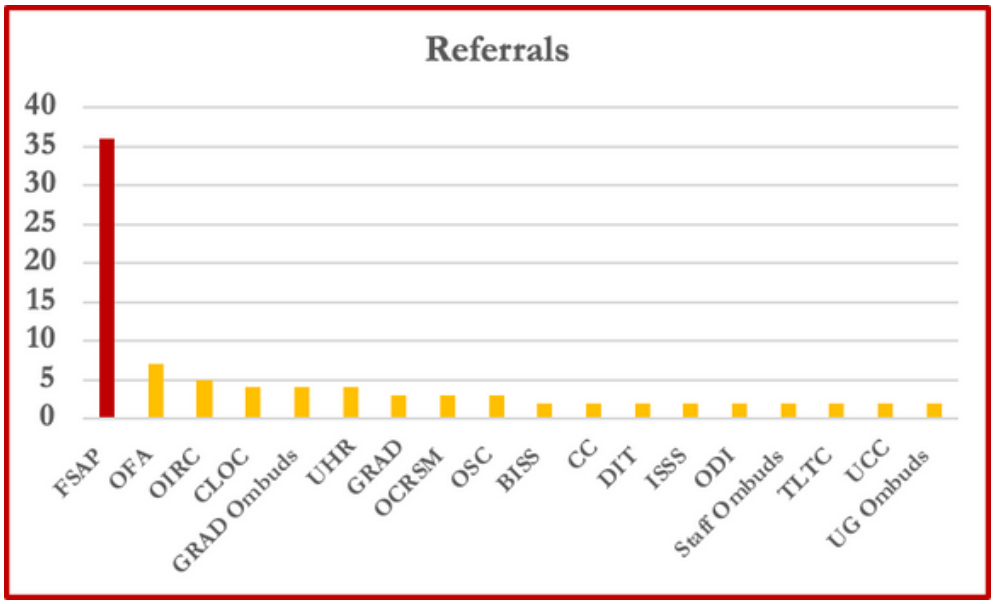


# CONSULTATIONS AND REFERRALS

In 44 of the 112 cases, the faculty ombuds consulted with others to try to reach informal resolution of the concerns or obtain needed information. These cases required, on average, three meetings with others involved in the concern (M=3.05, SD=2.93), and additional email correspondence. The ombuds most often consulted with administrators (e.g., chairs, deans, and supervisors), followed by the Office of Faculty Affairs, the Office of General Counsel, the Office of the President, the Division of Information and Technology, and the Graduate School. Referrals were provided to faculty for several offices at the University of Maryland, with most referrals being to the Faculty Staff Assistance Program. The tables below highlights consultations and referrals that occurred more than one time.




ADMIN=Chair, Dean, Supervisor; BISS=Bias Incident Support Services; CC=Counseling Center; CLOC=Center for Leadership and Organizational Change; DIT=Division of Information Technology; FSAP=Faculty Staff Assistance Program; GRAD=Graduate School; GRAD Ombuds=Graduate School Ombuds; ISSS=International Students and Scholars; OCRSM=Office of Civil Rights and Sexual Misconduct; ODI=Office of Diversity and Inclusion; OFA=Office of Faculty Affairs; OGC=Office of General Counsel; OIRC= Office of Integrity and Responsible Conduct; OSC=Office of Student Conduct; PRES=Office of the President; TLTC= Teaching and Learning Transformation Center; UCC= University Career Center; UG Ombuds=Undergraduate Student Ombuds; UHR=University Human Resources

# CONTRIBUTION HIGHLIGHTS

## CAMPUS OUTREACH AND COLLABORATION

In 2024-2025, 14 outreach presentations/events were provided by the faculty ombuds to educate the campus community about the work of the ombuds and to advance healthy workplace practices. For example, presentations were given at the TerrapinSTRONG and PTK Faculty symposia, TLTC Innovations in Teaching and Learning Conference, orientation programs for academic administrators and postdoctoral associates, Faculty Affairs Fearless Unit Leadership Series, Breaking the M.O.L.D. leadership program, and the Office of Diversity and Inclusion Leadership Council meeting. Several new presentations were developed (e.g., reducing faculty burnout). The faculty ombuds website was updated to reflect the presentation offerings (http://go.umd.edu/FacultyOmbudsPresentations).

In addition, the faculty ombuds created an infographic titled, "*Promoting a Healthy Workplace: Fast Facts for Faculty,*" to educate faculty about resources to enhance well-being and address challenges (http://go.umd.edu/fastfacts).

The faculty ombuds met with several campus partners (e.g., Office of Faculty Affairs, Office of Diversity and Inclusion, and Office of Integrity and Responsible Conduct) and are contributing to the ADVANCE Program's work to identify ways to support women faculty of color.

## KNOWLEDGE ADVANCEMENT

The faculty and staff ombuds, with our graduate assistant, published an article titled, "*Doing our best work: Bringing identity awareness and cultural humility to the ombuds role,*" in the *Journal of the International Ombuds Association* (https://go.umd.edu/JIOAombuds2024).

## CONTINUING EDUCATION

The faculty ombuds attended 32 continuing education programs (e.g., workplace mental health and well-being, navigating intergroup and identity based conflict, ADA accommodations, burnout prevention, psychological experience of minoritized professionals at work, disrupting conflict before it starts, and increasing supervisor savvy around culture, race, and identity). The faculty ombuds also participated in the Big Ten Ombuds gathering at the University of Southern California.

## COMMITTEE MEMBERSHIP

At the University of Maryland, the faculty ombuds served as members of the Conflict Resolvers Network, and as an ex officio member of the Faculty Senate and the Senate Faculty Affairs Committee. The faculty ombuds also contributed to the Commission on Higher Education reaccreditation review (i.e., Standards 1 and 2). The faculty ombuds maintain membership in the International Ombuds Association.

# OBSERVATIONS, GOALS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

**1.** The University of Maryland strives to pursue excellence, contribute meaningfully to the public good, and provide a welcoming, inclusive, diverse, and healthy work environment. For the past three years, disrespectful behavior was the concern most often brought to the faculty ombuds. Continued focus on the prevention of harmful behaviors is needed to ensure a healthy workplace and achieve our core value of inclusivity and belonging for all faculty, staff, and students.

- **GOAL:** Meet individually with administrators to educate them about ombuds services, build consultative relationships, and enhance key components of workplace well-being as defined by the U.S. Surgeon General's framework for healthy workplaces (Murthy et al., 2022)
- **GOAL:** Distribute an infographic for administrators that provides recommendations for healthy work environments, beginning with those in colleges/units with the greatest number of ombuds cases in 2024-2025
- **GOAL:** Develop and share resources and a flowchart for administrators on how to work with challenging faculty
- **RECOMMENDATION FOR UMD:** Provide and require extensive leadership training for chairs, administrators and supervisors

**2.** Professional track faculty face increased job insecurity in the context of state and federal funding losses. They also report a lack of mentoring, delayed contracts, and only learning about performance concerns when contracts are not renewed.

- **GOAL:** Offer presentations for administrators on best practices for working with professional track faculty
- **GOAL:** Educate administrators about existing off boarding procedures and best practices in providing transitional support for faculty whose appointments have been terminated
- **GOAL:** Collaborate with campus partners to create an infographic that highlights campus resources for faculty who receive termination notices
- **RECOMMENDATION FOR UMD:** Provide mechanisms for access to career resources and job search assistance to faculty whose contracts have ended (e.g., how to transfer skills to non-academic jobs)

**3.** Individuals who use the faculty ombuds services are not representative of all UMD faculty. Among tenured/tenure track faculty, most were professors, and among professional track faculty, most were lecturers. The majority were White.

- **GOAL:** Continue to educate the campus community (with a focus on faculty who are underrepresented in the use of ombuds services) about the work of the ombuds and our role in informal conflict resolution
- **GOAL:** Collaborate with the Office of Diversity and Inclusion, the ADVANCE Program, and the LGBTQ+ Equity Center to increase access to ombuds services and trust among all faculty
- **GOAL:** Create a presentation for faculty of color to highlight how ombuds services can be used to address the concerns typically brought to the ombuds by faculty of color
- **RECOMMENDATION FOR UMD:** Create a faculty of color network with whom campus partners, including the ombuds, could collaborate to address concerns and provide services to promote a healthy work environment for all

**4.** Contribute to knowledge generation to advance the work of ombuds engaged in conflict resolution

- **GOAL:** Conduct a research study on the ways in which identities play a role in ombuds work, and how ombuds cope and care for themselves when engaged in challenging identity-related cases
- **GOAL:** Submit a manuscript based on this research for consideration for publication
- **GOAL:** Create and provide presentations based on research findings for the campus and ombuds communities

# CONCLUSION

For many faculty, the University of Maryland provides a welcoming and supportive work environment that enables them to pursue excellence in research, teaching, and service to others. Unfortunately, some faculty experience challenges in the workplace that are difficult to resolve. The mission of the University of Maryland faculty ombuds is to work with faculty who have concerns, and contribute to a respectful, equitable, inclusive, and healthy work environment where all faculty members can achieve excellence in their work. The faculty ombuds serve as confidential and impartial individuals who listen to faculty concerns, think through challenging work-related situations, brainstorm strategies to address salient issues, provide needed information and helpful resources, and assist in resolving conflicts in an informal and independent manner.

For the past three years, the number of cases brought to the faculty ombuds has increased. In each year, most cases were related to difficulties in evaluative relationships (i.e., concerns between supervisors and employees, faculty at different levels, or faculty and students). The concerns typically involved disrespectful or unprofessional behaviors in the workplace. Moreover, some faculty shared problematic diversity-related experiences that negate the university's mission to provide an equitable and welcoming community.

The primary focus of our work in 2025-2026 will continue to be to assist faculty who are experiencing concerns in the workplace. In addition, we plan to engage in prevention efforts by creating resources and meeting with administrators to promote strategies for ensuring healthy workplaces. It is our hope that education will reduce the prevalence of harmful behaviors so all faculty can thrive and feel a sense of belonging and pride at the University of Maryland.

Finally, it truly takes a village to address the many concerns shared with the faculty ombuds. We are most grateful for the knowledge, expertise and consultation provided by Michele Eastman, Mashanda Mosley, John Bertot, Ursula Gorham, Devin Doolan, and Ellin Scholnick. Our graduate assistant, Karoline Trovato, also contributed meaningfully to the work of the ombuds. We very much appreciate the opportunity to serve as faculty ombuds at the University of Maryland.

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