University of Maryland

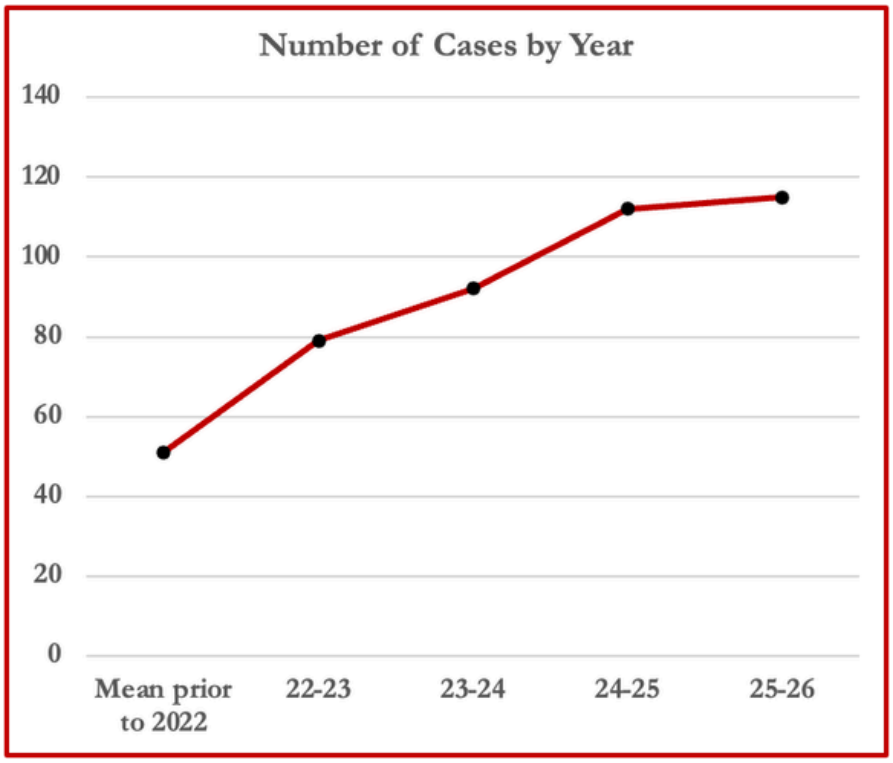
FACULTY OMBUDS ANNUAL REPORT

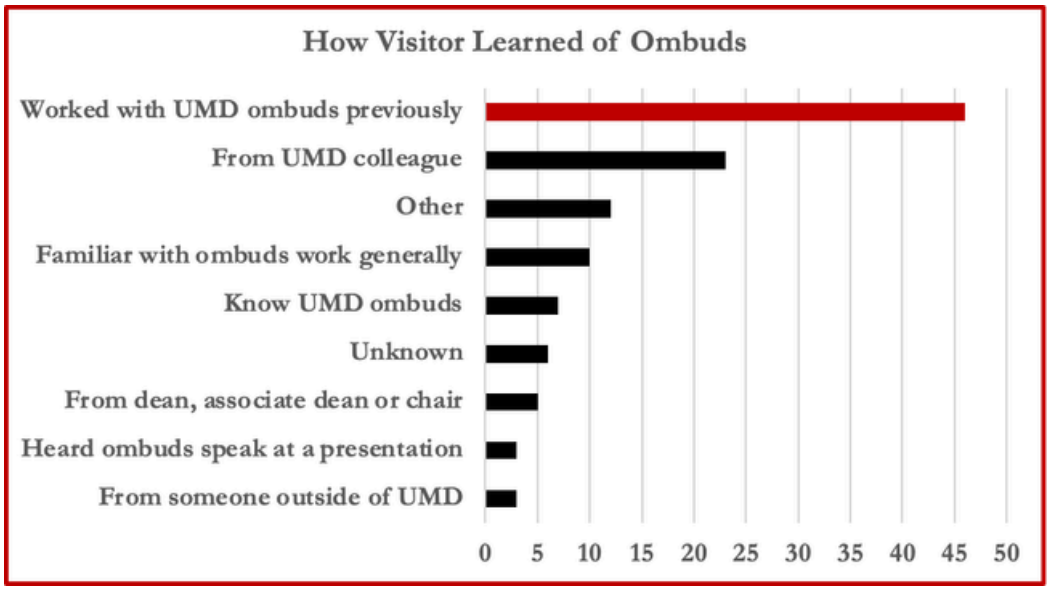
July 1, 2025– June 30, 2026

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

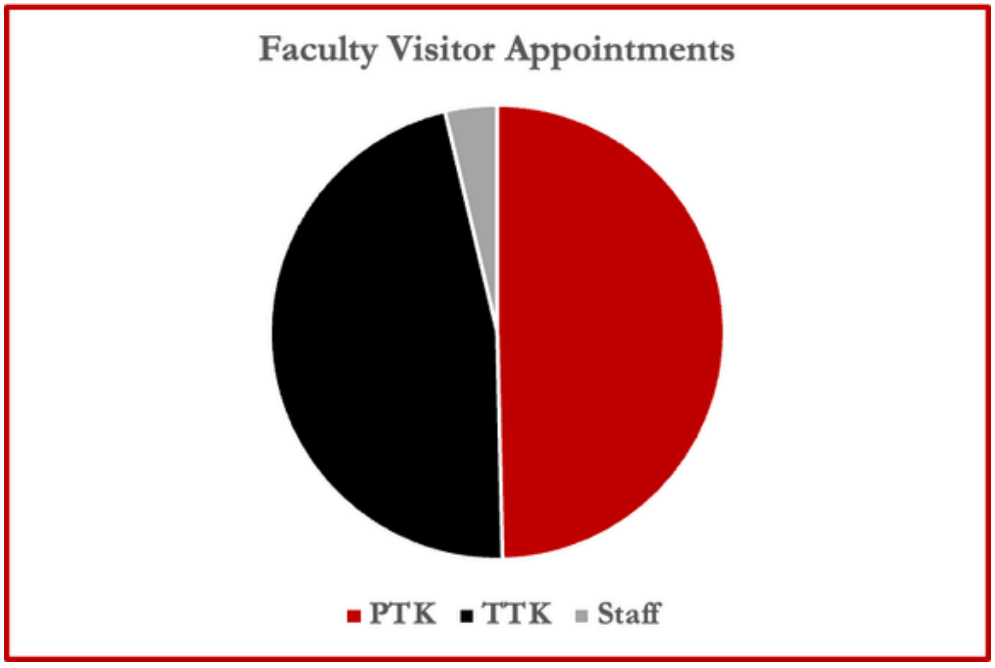
FACULTY VISITORS

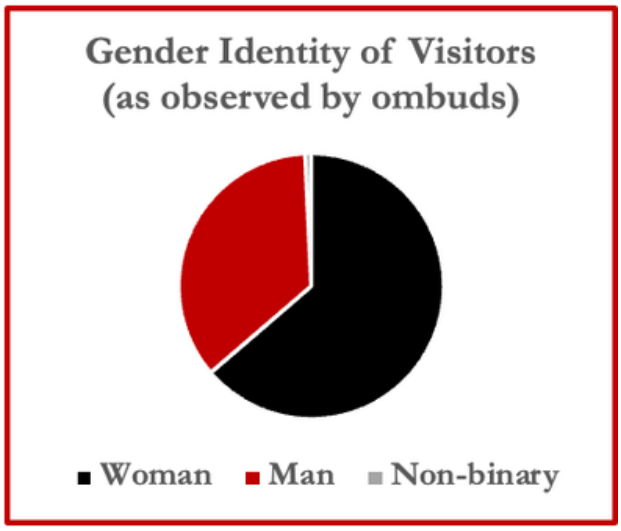
From July 1, 2025 through June 30, 2026, the faculty ombuds worked with 130 faculty and five staff members on 115 cases regarding faculty-involved workplace conflicts or concerns. The number of cases in AY25-26 was comparable to the number of cases requiring ombuds services in AY24-25, and was more than a 150% increase from the mean number of cases prior to 2022. Notably, 39% of the cases brought to the ombuds in AY25-26 were from faculty who had previously used faculty ombuds services. When asked how the faculty member learned about the faculty ombuds, most visitors indicated that they had previously worked with one of the University of Maryland ombuds.

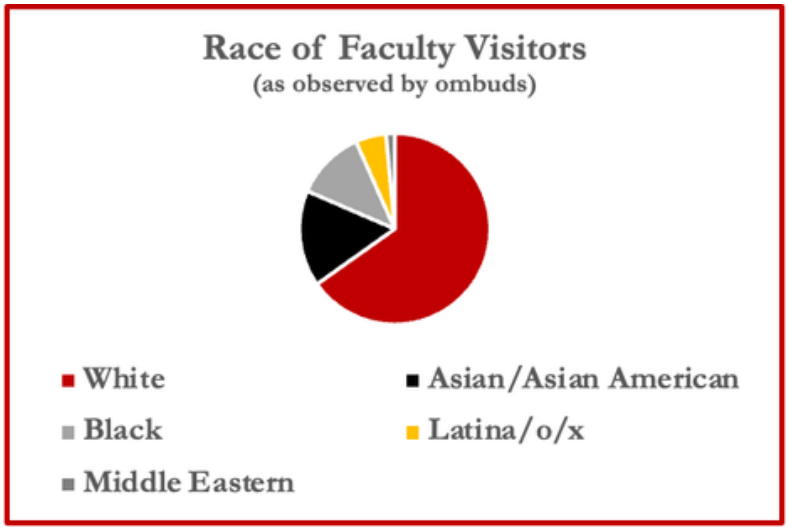




Faculty who met with the ombuds to discuss their concerns included 67 professional track and 63 tenured/tenure-track faculty (in addition to five staff members who discussed faculty-related concerns). The majority of visitors were women (63.7%), 35.56% were men and one person was nonbinary. Most were White (65.2%), with 16.3% Asian/Asian American, 11.9% African American/Black, 5.2% Latina/Latino, and 1.5% Middle Eastern visitors (gender and race were observed by the faculty ombuds). Among the tenured/tenure-track faculty, more than half were professors. The most common appointments among the professional track faculty were assistant clinical professor, lecturer, and faculty specialist. The faculty who met with the ombuds were from 16 colleges/units and 55 departments/units/centers, with the majority of cases coming from the College of Behavioral & Social Sciences, College of Agriculture and Natural Resources, the College of Computer, Mathematical, & Natural Sciences, and the A. James Clark School of Engineering.





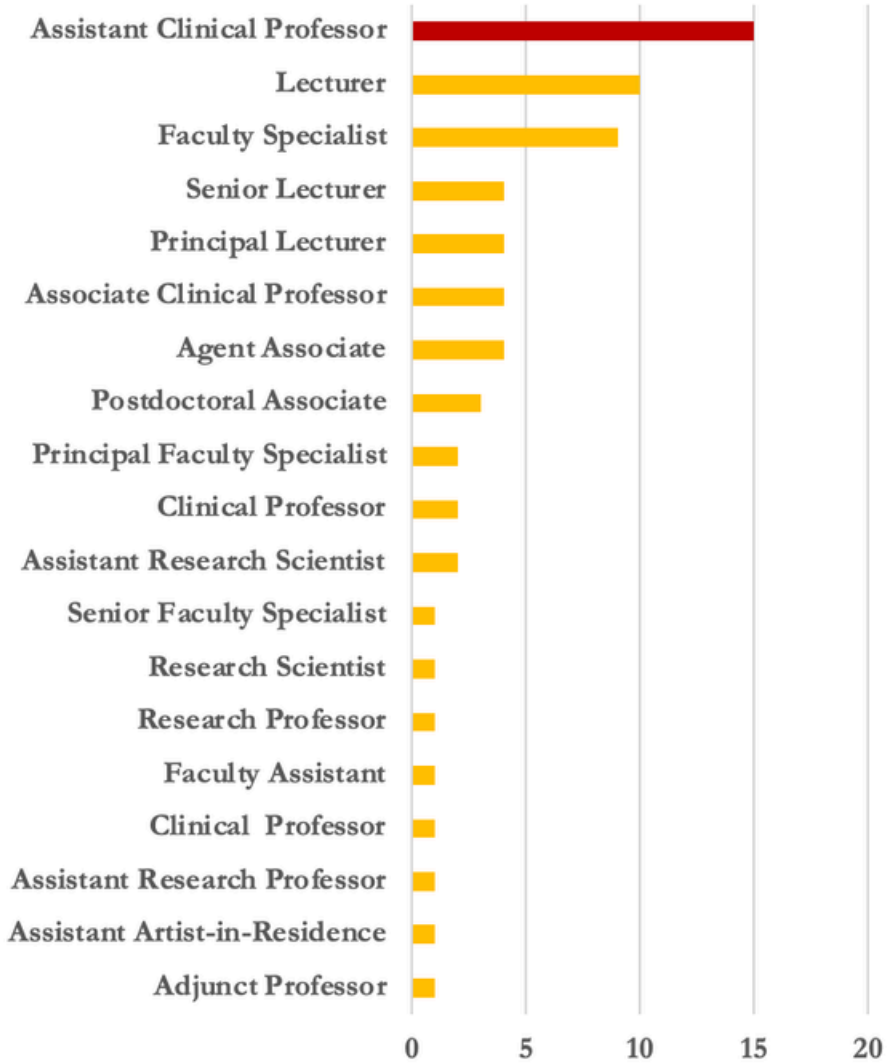


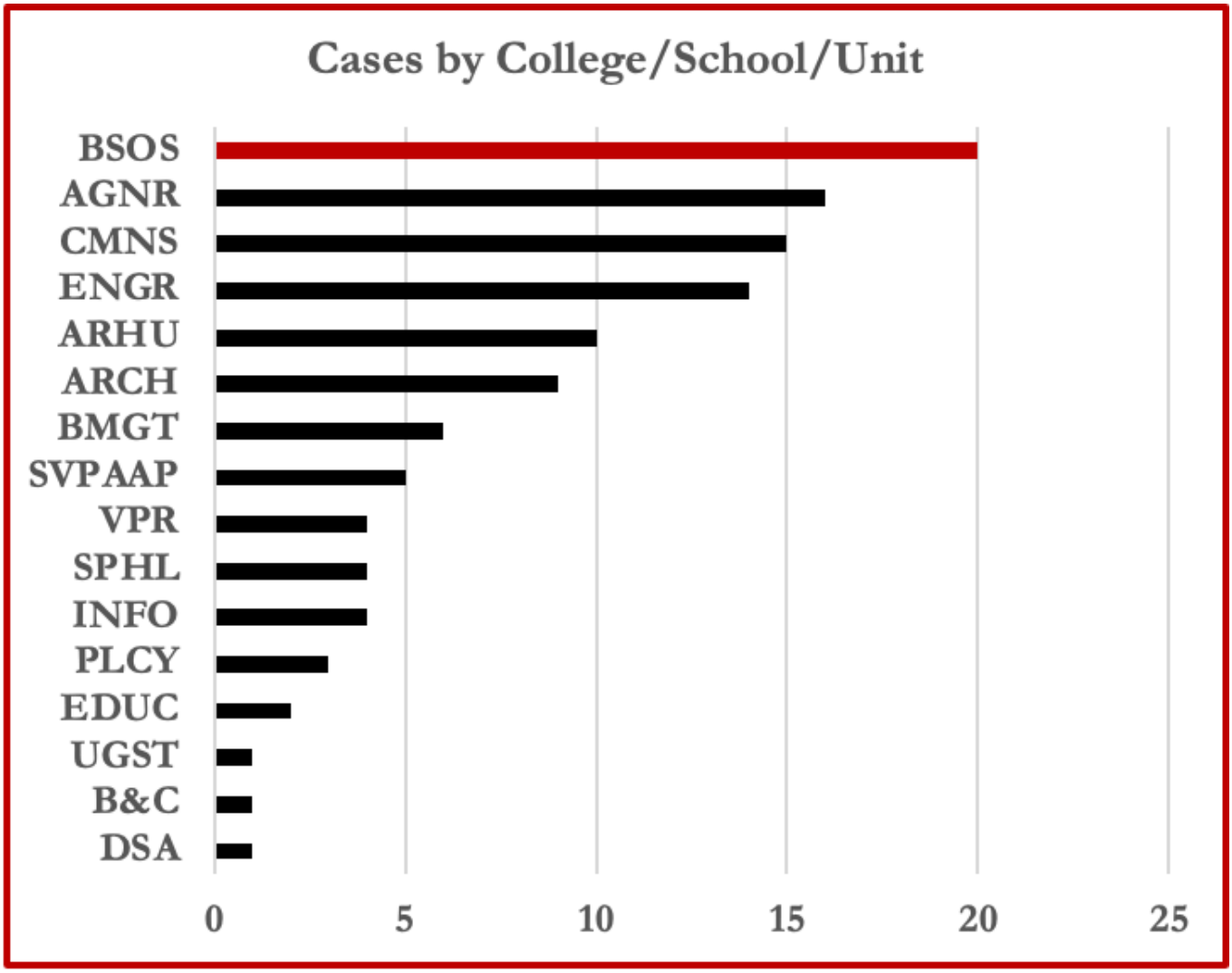
Tenured/Tenure Track and Permanent Status Faculty Appointment of Visitor



- Professor
- Associate Professor
- Assistant Professor
- Principal Agent
- Professor Emeritus

Professional Track Faculty Appointments of Visitor





AGNR=College of Agriculture & Natural Resources; ARCH=School of Architecture, Planning & Preservation; ARHU=College of Arts & Humanities; B & C= Belonging and Community; BMGT=Robert H. Smith School of Business; BSOS=College of Behavioral & Social Sciences; CMNS=College of Computer, Mathematical, & Natural Sciences; DSA=Division of Student Affairs; EDUC=College of Education; ENGR=A. James Clark School of Engineering; INFO=College of Information Studies; PLCY=School of Public Policy; SPHL=School of Public Health; SVPAAP= Senior Vice President for Academic Affairs and Provost Office; UGST=Office of Undergraduate Studies; VPR=Division of Research

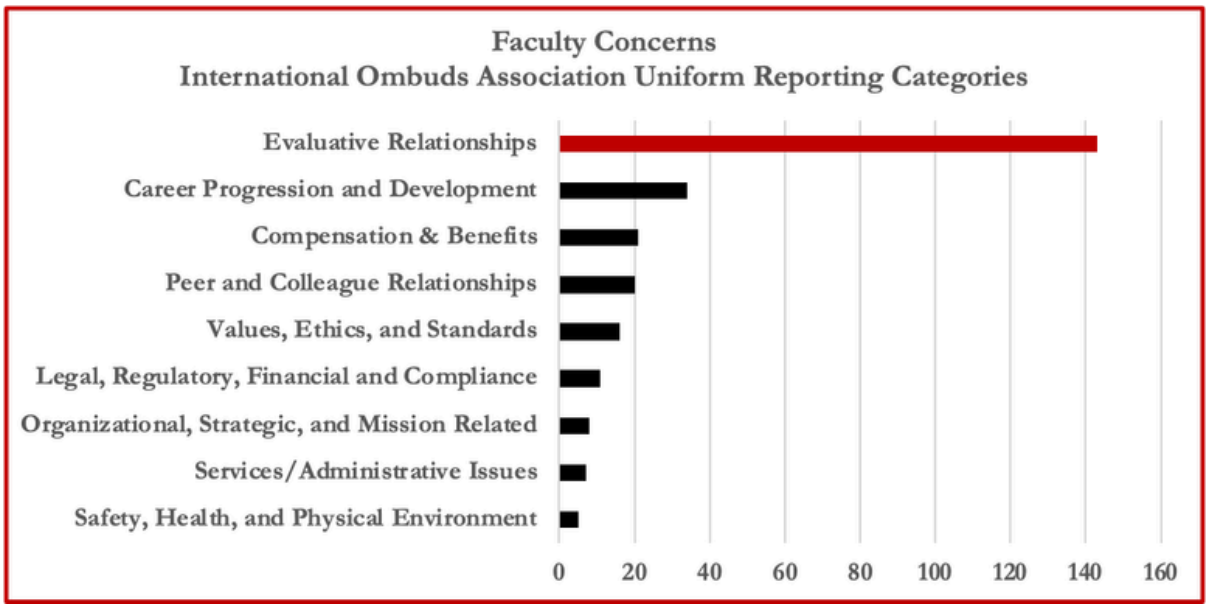
FACULTY CONCERNS

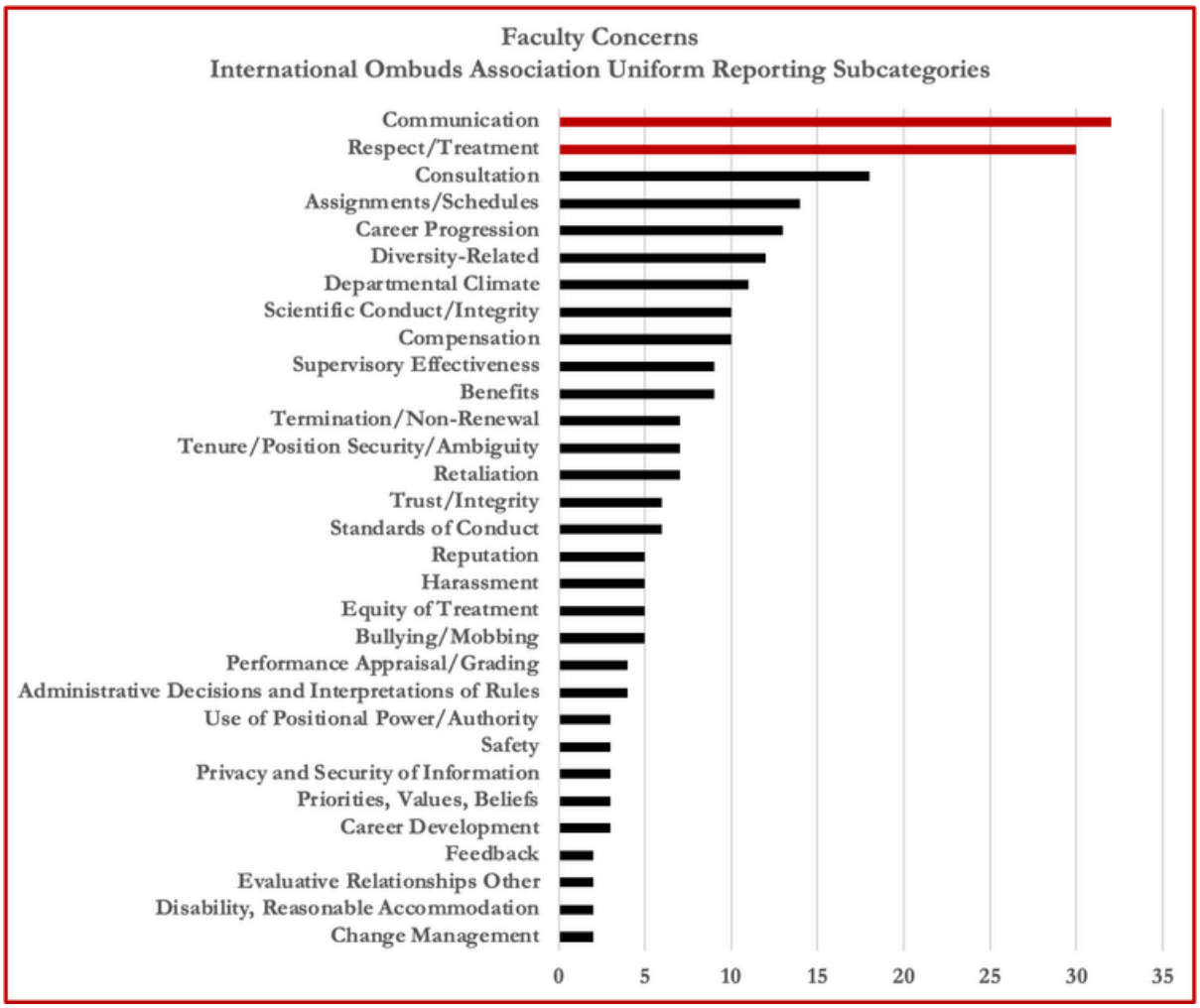
The concerns brought to the faculty ombuds were coded using the uniform reporting categories created by the International Ombuds Association (2007). Many of the visitors reported multiple concerns, and each case was unique. The majority of reasons for contacting the ombuds office were related to difficulties in evaluative relationships (i.e., concerns between supervisors and employees, faculty at different levels, or faculty and students). The specific types of concerns brought to the faculty ombuds (that occurred more than once) are reported below using the International Ombuds Association uniform reporting subcategories. Across all subcategories, the highest number of concerns were related to communication and disrespectful behavior in the workplace. A number of faculty sought consultation regarding how to deal with or address concerns among other faculty. There also were a significant number of concerns related to assignments/schedules, career progression, and diversity (e.g., mistreatment related to gender, race, disability status, ethnicity, identities, or intersecting identities).

Some examples of specific concerns brought to the faculty ombuds included how to communicate termination, non-renewal, or the poor job performance of a chair, colleague, or graduate student. Other faculty discussed the failure of administrators to communicate with faculty about decisions directly related to their work.

Additionally, some faculty discussed whether and how to communicate concerns to their chair. Other faculty reported disrespectful, demeaning, rude, harmful, antagonistic, and/or escalating behaviors toward themselves, colleagues, or graduate students. Several faculty requested assistance with how to intervene with faculty engaged in yelling, berating others, or disrupting faculty meetings. A number of faculty reported feeling devalued and excluded in their units. Concerns related to being treated differently due to gender, race, or disability were brought to the ombuds as well as explicit and offensive comments related to gender and/or race.

At times, administrators or faculty consulted with the faculty ombuds regarding how to intervene with faculty, graduate students, or administrators who were engaged in harmful behaviors toward one another or between faculty and graduate students. Other faculty reported concerns with their teaching load or course assignments. Faculty also talked with the ombuds about challenges or confusion associated with promotion to tenured or full professor, or believing that their administrator was thwarting their career progression.

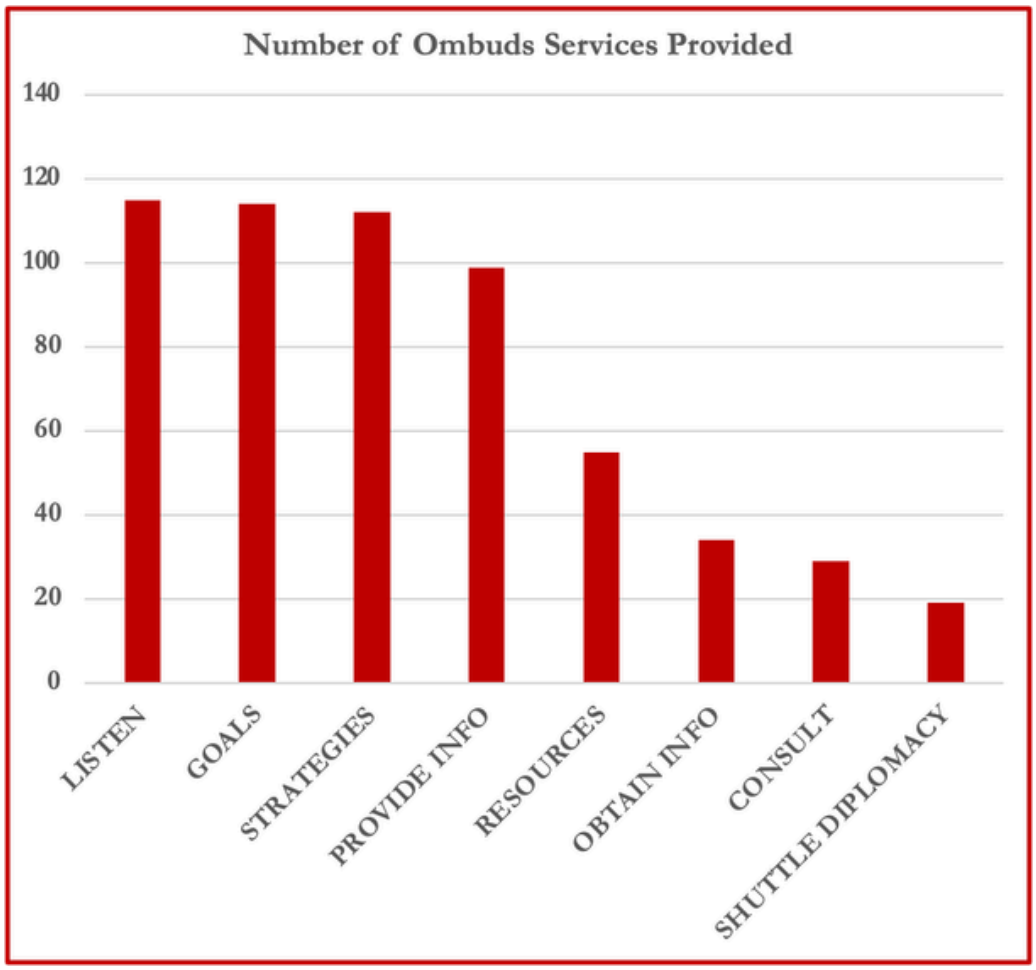

Faculty Concerns
International Ombuds Association Uniform Reporting Categories
Evaluative Relationships
Career Progression and Development
Compensation & Benefits
Peer and Colleague Relationships
Values, Ethics, and Standards
Legal, Regulatory, Financial and Compliance
Organizational, Strategic, and Mission Related
Services/Administrative Issues
Safety, Health, and Physical Environment
0
20
40
60
80
100
120
140
160


Faculty Concerns
International Ombuds Association Uniform Reporting Subcategories
Communication
Respect/Treatment
Consultation
Assignments/Schedules
Career Progression
Diversity-Related
Departmental Climate
Scientific Conduct/Integrity
Compensation
Supervisory Effectiveness
Benefits
Termination/Non-Renewal
Tenure/Position Security/Ambiguity
Retaliation
Trust/Integrity
Standards of Conduct
Reputation
Harassment
Equity of Treatment
Bullying/Mobbing
Performance Appraisal/Grading
Administrative Decisions and Interpretations of Rules
Use of Positional Power/Authority
Safety
Privacy and Security of Information
Priorities, Values, Beliefs
Career Development
Feedback
Evaluative Relationships Other
Disability, Reasonable Accommodation
Change Management
0
5
10
15
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SERVICES

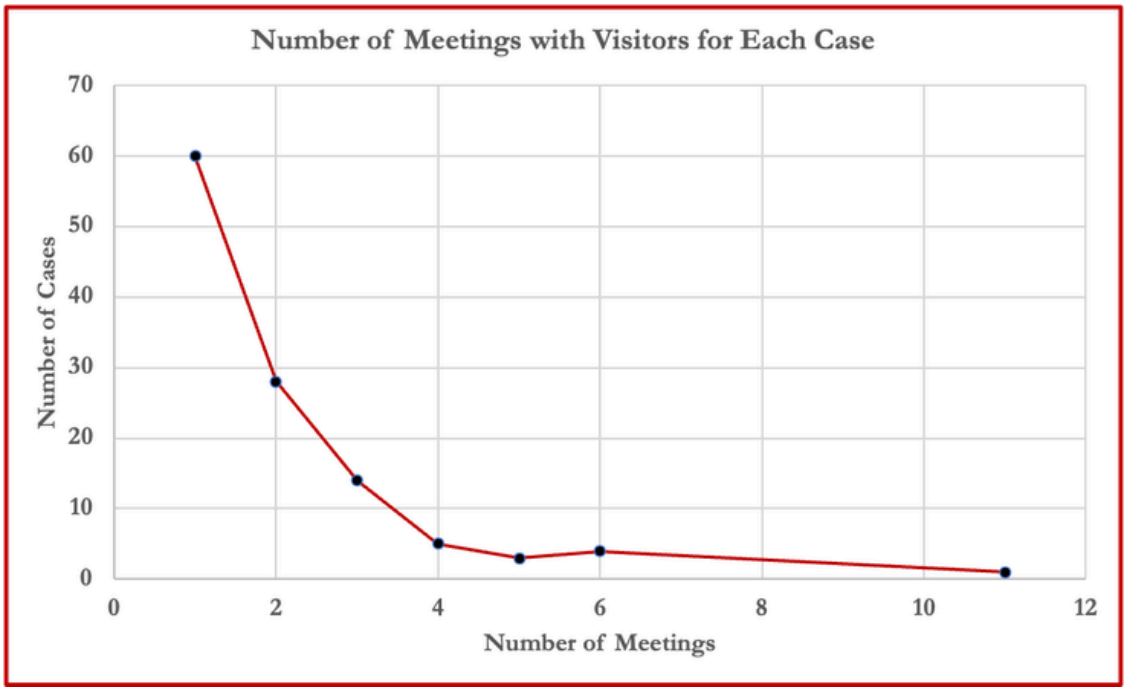
When providing services, the faculty ombuds follow the Standards of Practice of the International Ombuds Association (2020). All interactions are confidential with the exception of cases involving imminent harm to self or other, sexual misconduct, plagiarism or falsification or fabrication of data, workplace 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.

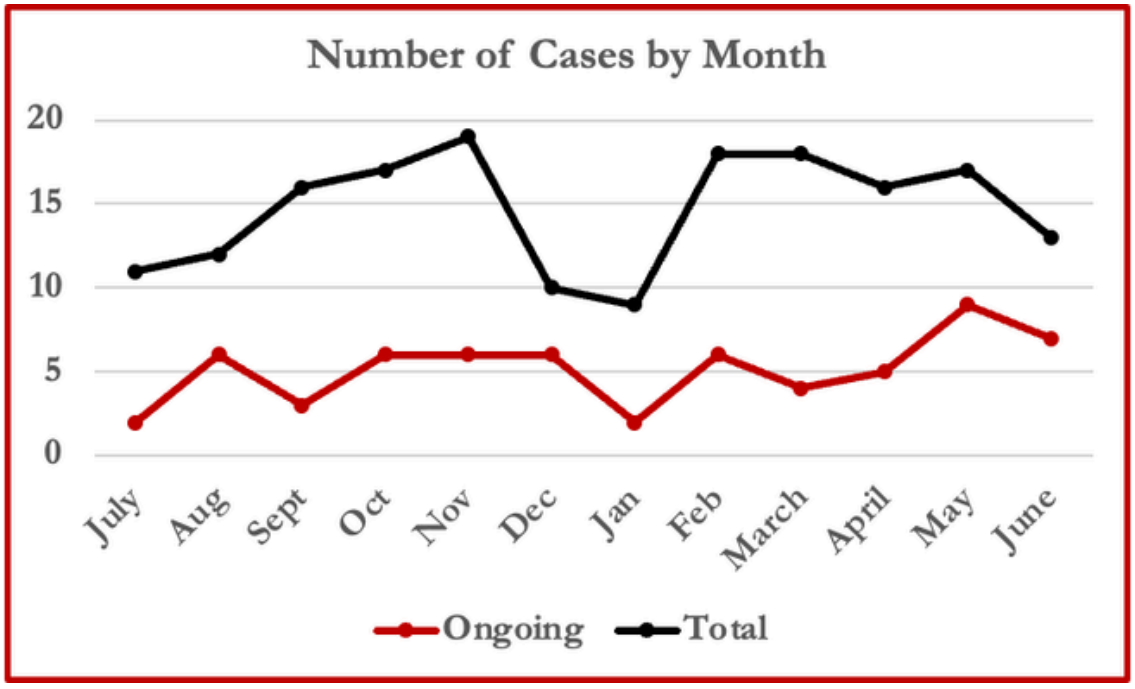
Ombuds services were provided in person, by phone, and using Zoom. Each case began with a meeting in which the ombuds explained the ombuds role and limits to confidentiality, and offered the faculty member a place to voice concerns, clarify goals, and discuss strategies for addressing their concerns. 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 19 cases, shuttle diplomacy was used to talk with other individuals involved in the concern (with permission from the faculty member).



CASE INFORMATION

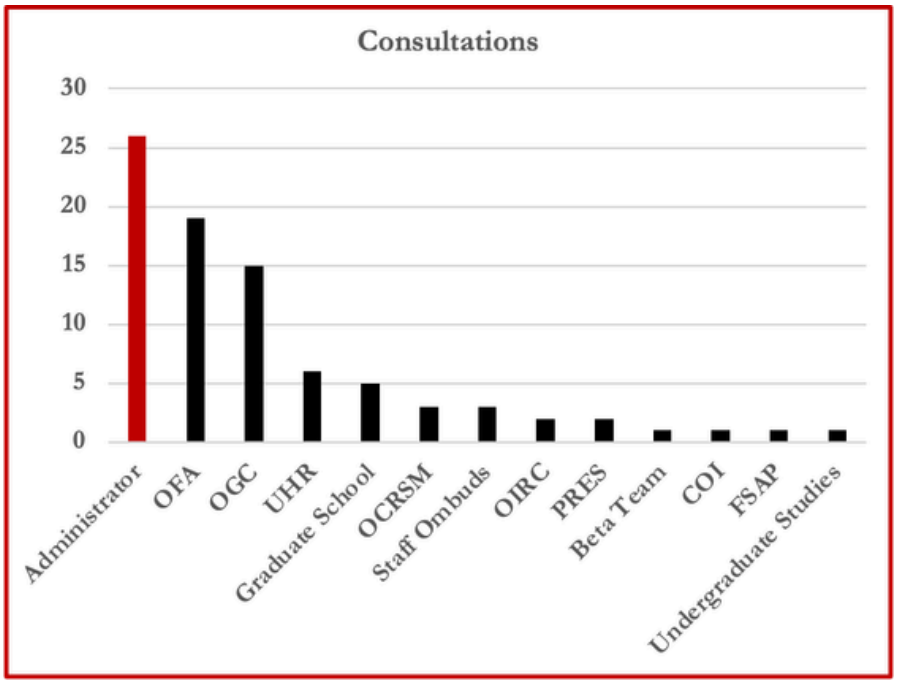
In most cases, the ombuds met with faculty visitors for one to two sessions (M=1.98; SD=1.53). A small number of cases required considerable and ongoing attention and consultation. Many of the cases also involved considerable email correspondence. All but four of the 115 cases were closed by June 30, 2026. No formal faculty grievances were brought to the University Senate in AY25-26. The number of cases per month varied, with most faculty visitors being seen in November, February, and March, and the fewest in December and January.

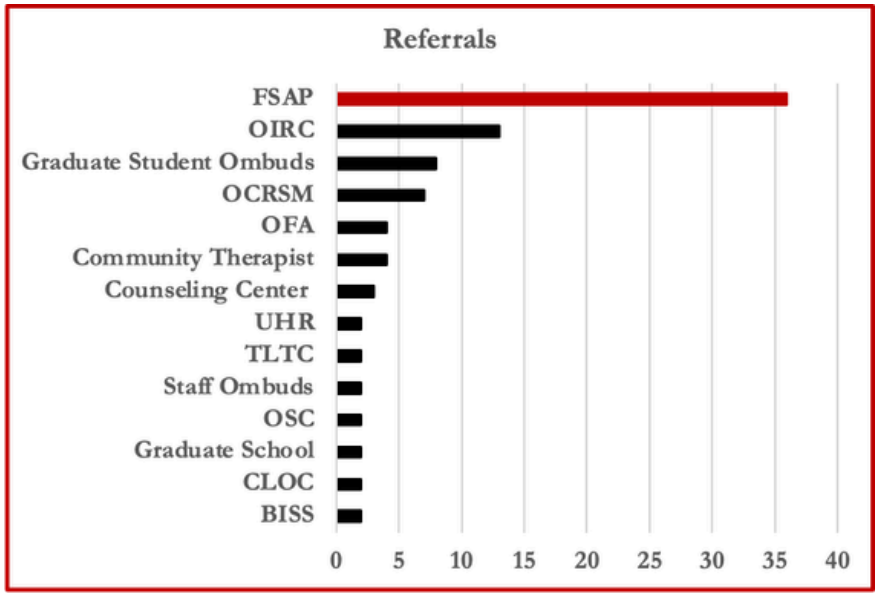




CONSULTATIONS AND REFERRALS

In nearly half of the 115 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, almost three meetings with others involved in the concern (M=2.85, SD=3.75) 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, University Human Resources, 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 highlight consultations and referrals that occurred in the work of the faculty ombuds.





Administrator=Chair, dean, supervisor; BISS=Bias Incident Support Services; CLOC=Center for Leadership and Organizational Change; COI= Conflict of Interest Disclosure Office; FSAP=Faculty Staff Assistance Program; OCRSM=Office of Civil Rights and Sexual Misconduct; 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; UHR=University Human Resources

CONTRIBUTION HIGHLIGHTS

CAMPUS OUTREACH AND COLLABORATION

In AY25-26, the faculty ombuds participated in 13 outreach presentations and four information sessions/resource fairs to educate the campus community about the work of the ombuds and to advance healthy workplace practices. Specifically, presentations were given at the TerrapinSTRONG and PTK Faculty symposia, orientation programs for academic administrators and postdoctoral associates, and the Faculty Affairs Fearless Unit Leadership Series.

In addition, the faculty ombuds created an infographic titled, "*Promoting a Healthy Workplace: Helpful Hints for Administrators*," that highlighted recommendations for chairs, deans and associate deans on how to enhance well-being and address challenges (e.g., impaired faculty) in the workplace (http://go.umd.edu/adminhints).

The faculty ombuds held face-to-face meetings with 30 deans, associate deans, and chairs to provide an overview of ombuds services and facilitate future interactions when concerns arise in their units.

The faculty ombuds also worked with the UMD app staff to have the *Fast Facts Infographic* information placed on the UMD app to enhance access to resources for faculty.

KNOWLEDGE ADVANCEMENT

The faculty and staff ombuds, with our graduate assistant, presented our research titled, "*Listening to ombuds' voices: An interactive discussion of findings from a study of identity-related perceptions and self-care strategies in ombuds work*" at the annual convention of the International Ombuds Association. We also submitted a manuscript based on this research for consideration for publication. In addition, the *Journal of the International Ombuds Association* chose our 2024 article, "*Doing our best work: Bringing identity awareness and cultural humility to the ombuds role*," as the Common Reading for the 2026 International Ombuds Association Annual Conference.

CONTINUING EDUCATION

The faculty ombuds completed 37 continuing education trainings (e.g., navigating challenging conflict situations, supporting faculty, promoting resilience, courageous leadership). The faculty ombuds also participated in the annual meeting of the International Ombuds Association and the East Coast Ombuds Meeting at Harvard University.

COMMITTEE MEMBERSHIP

At the University of Maryland, the faculty ombuds served as members of the Conflict Resolvers Network and the Faculty Support Team, and as ex officio members of the Faculty Senate and the Senate Faculty Affairs Committee. The faculty ombuds maintain membership in the International Ombuds Association. The faculty ombuds also chaired the search for the graduate student ombuds, and served on the search committees for the associate provost for faculty affairs and the associate director for PTK faculty initiatives.

OBSERVATIONS, GOALS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

1. The University of Maryland faculty, staff and students work together to advance our mission of pursuing excellence and addressing the grand challenges of our time. In AY26-27, the faculty ombuds will support this mission by creating connections, strengthening relationships, and assisting faculty and administrators to address concerns in the workplace 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:** Meet individually with at least 25 chairs, deans, and associate deans to educate them about ombuds services, build consultative relationships, and improve our ability to work together when concerns emerge.
- **GOAL:** Continue to serve on committees and provide presentations related to conflict resolution and healthy workplaces in the University community.
- **GOAL:** Organize a meeting of all of the University of Maryland ombuds (faculty, staff, graduate student, and undergraduate student ombuds) once a semester to reflect on our work and identify potential areas for collaboration.
- **RECOMMENDATION FOR UMD:** Increase the PTK ombuds position to .5FTE to enhance the work of the ombuds office and better meet the needs of the University; currently, the faculty ombuds collectively are .75FTE.

2. The University of Maryland seeks to provide a welcoming, inclusive, diverse, and healthy work environment. For the past four years, disrespectful behavior has been one of the top two concerns most often brought to the faculty ombuds. Challenges with communication emerged as the top issue in AY25-26. Continued and explicit attention to the expectation for respectful behaviors and communication by faculty is needed to ensure a healthy workplace and achieve our core value of inclusivity and belonging for all faculty, staff, and students.

- **GOAL:** Raise awareness about the faculty expectations document, the faculty conduct policy, and the faculty grievance policy through presentations and discussions with administrators and faculty.
- **GOAL:** Complete a literature review on best practices for increasing appropriate bystander interventions to address problematic interactions and harmful communication.
- **GOAL:** Revise existing ombuds presentations on healthy workplaces to include empirically-supported recommendations to empower bystanders to intervene in and communicate about unhealthy workplace behaviors.
- **RECOMMENDATION FOR UMD:** Include an expectation for respectful behavior toward/communication with others in annual faculty evaluations (in addition to research, teaching, and service accomplishments).

3. Some of the challenging cases brought to the ombuds involve administrators/chairs/unit heads/supervisors who act in problematic ways in their roles or who lack the skills to address problematic behaviors in the workplace.

- **GOAL:** Continue to reach out to new chairs/deans/associate deans to educate them about ombuds services.
- **GOAL:** Distribute our *Helpful Hints for Administrators* infographic to all deans, chairs and associate deans.
- **GOAL:** Include an invitation to meet individually with the faculty ombuds with the infographic, along with an acknowledgement of the challenging nature of administrative work in higher education.
- **RECOMMENDATION FOR UMD:** Ensure that administrators/chairs/unit heads/supervisors have the skills to lead their units by requiring in-person extensive training, providing on-going support/mentoring, instituting a formal mechanism for annual evaluations that include feedback from those being supervised, and reassigning administrators who are better suited to serve the University in non-administrative positions.

***Please note that all goals set in AY24-25 were met by the faculty ombuds with one exception as other units on campus led efforts on the goal to provide campus resources for faculty who receive termination notices.*

CONCLUSION

The University of Maryland faculty ombuds promote a healthy work environment that enables faculty to fearlessly pursue excellence in research, teaching, and service to others. The number of cases brought to the ombuds in AY25-26 was comparable to AY24-25, illustrating a leveling off of the considerable increase in cases in prior years. It is salient to note that the problematic behaviors reported to the faculty ombuds seemed isolated and not emblematic of the experiences of UMD faculty as a whole. In the Belonging & Community at UMD survey, many faculty reported positive experiences regarding their work at the University of Maryland.

Consistent with past years, faculty concerns brought to the ombuds were overwhelmingly present in evaluative relationships (i.e., concerns between supervisors and employees, faculty at different levels, or faculty and students), with a top concern continuing to be disrespectful treatment in the workplace. Challenges in communication rose to the most reported concern in AY25-26 (ranking third in AY24-25 and not among the top concerns in prior years). The faculty ombuds' efforts to address cases of disrespectful behavior and problematic communication (and myriad other concerns) were successful as no cases were brought to the University Senate for adjudication in AY25-26.

The primary focus of the work of the faculty ombuds in AY26-27 will be to 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. In addition, the faculty ombuds will engage in prevention efforts by meeting with administrators and faculty to share information regarding best practices for encouraging bystander intervention when observing problematic behaviors. It is our hope that education and empowerment of faculty may 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, many individuals played a salient role in the work of the faculty ombuds. We appreciate the knowledge, expertise and consultation provided by Blakely Pomieto, John Bertot, Devin Doolan, and Mashanda Mosley. Our graduate assistant, Karoline Trovato, also contributed meaningfully to the work of the ombuds. We remain profoundly grateful for the opportunity to serve as faculty ombuds at the University of Maryland.