



# WISCONSIN

UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN-MADISON

November 8, 2024

Dear Provost Isbell,

We are pleased to submit the Annual Report for the UW-Madison Ombuds Office for the Academic Year 2023-2024.

The Ombuds Office provides a safe place where UW-Madison employees can seek guidance regarding workplace concerns at any time, without fear of reprisal, and at no cost to them. It gives faculty and staff a confidential place to collaboratively explore complaints, clarify issues, and consider options and resources to address their concerns. Ombuds are impartial and non-aligned, working to promote fairness in the workplace.

UW-Madison Ombuds are retired faculty, academic staff, and university staff from across campus. Ombuds continually update their knowledge of processes and policies relevant to all university employment categories.

The Ombuds Office typically employs emeritus faculty and staff who work part-time as a team of consultants. There are seven individuals who share these responsibilities and who report to the provost.

Important qualifications for Ombuds include:

- Knowledge of university policies and resources
- Extensive cross-campus experience
- Strong communication skills
- Ability to be objective and impartial

The following charts and graphs provide a concise overview of the work of the Ombuds Office this past year. They provide information on the number of visitors, the types of issues they faced, the demographics of our visitor population and, where appropriate, some historical data that prove useful in identifying emerging trends (Table 1).

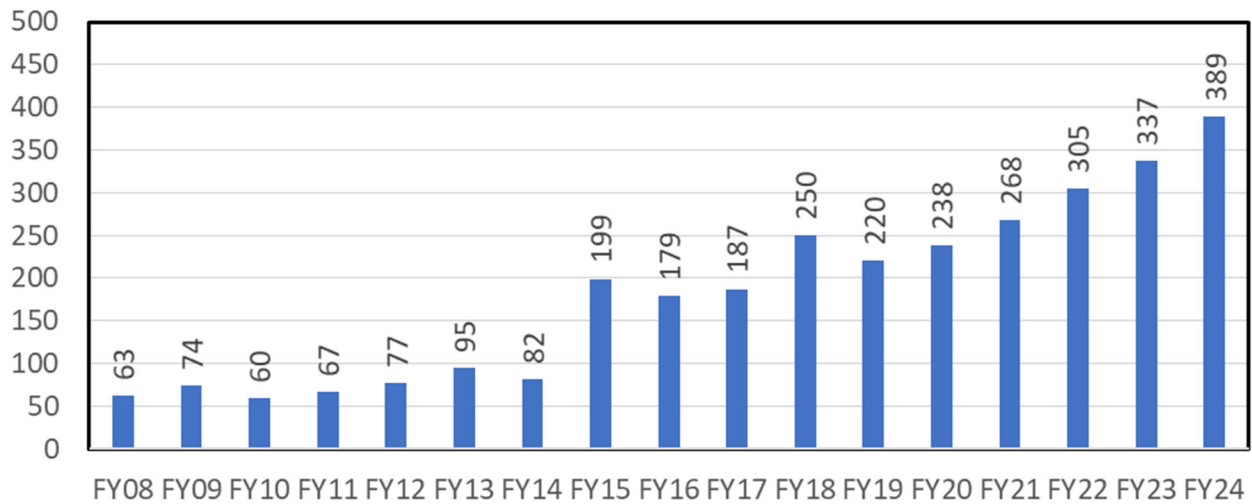
Table #1

Summary of Case Information

	AY 21-22	AY 22-23	AY 23-24
Cases (15.4% increase FY22-FY23)	305	337	389
Hours/case	2.4	2.0	1.5
HIB	21.3%	16.0%	7.2%
Evaluative Relationships	57%	56%	44%

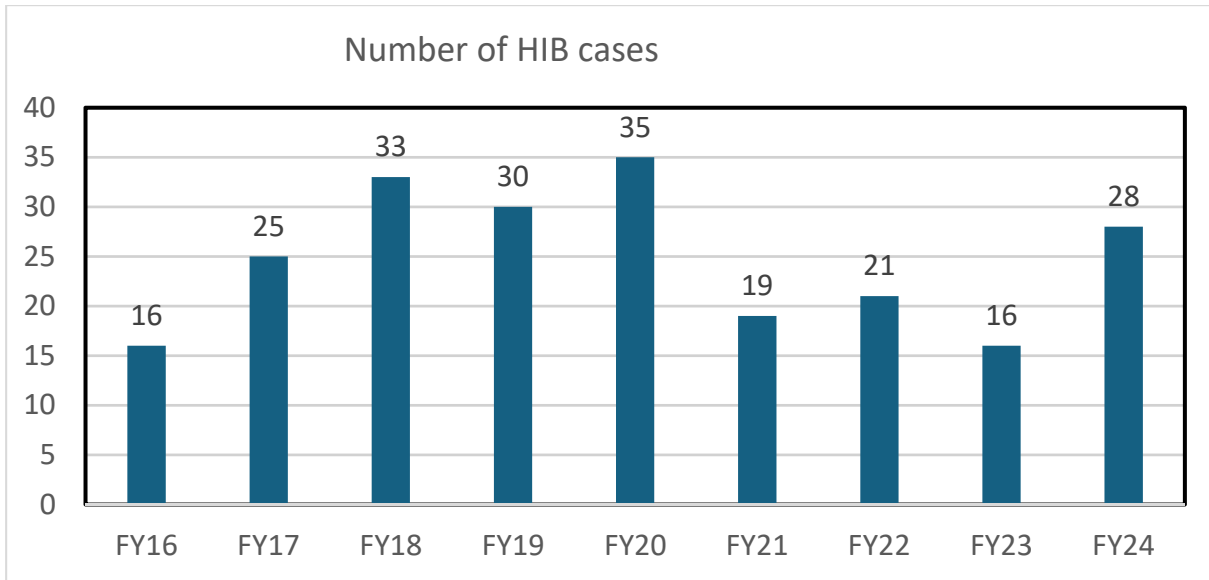
Graph #1

Annual Number of Visitor Cases



There has been a significant increase in the number of cases addressed by the Ombuds. The number of cases grew from 337 in the 2022-2023 academic year to 389 in 2023-2024 which reflects a 15.4% increase.

Graph #2



The data presented in the HIB graph represent three types of visitors with questions and/or concerns regarding the HIB process:

1. Visitors who are considering lodging an HIB complaint.
2. Visitors who are either complainants or respondents in current ongoing HIB investigations.
3. Visitors who are concerned with the outcomes of concluded HIB investigations.

In each instance visitors have questions and concerns regarding the HIB process. Those in all three groups are often worried about the length of the investigative process. Those in group 1) are most often concerned with confidentiality, retaliation, transparency and duration of the HIB investigative process. Visitors in groups 2) and 3) are typically troubled by the transparency of the process and its (possible) outcomes.

Table #2

Cases Listing an International Ombuds Association Category  
(cases have multiple IOA categories)

IOA Category of Issues	Count	Percent (FY 24)
Evaluative Relationships	132	44%
Peer and Colleague Relationships	62	21%
Career Progression and Development	62	21%
Organizational, Strategic, and Mission Related	26	9%
Legal, Regulatory, Financial and Compliance	24	8%
Values, Ethics, and Standards	21	7%
Compensation and Benefits	17	6%
Services/Administrative Issues	15	5%
Safety, Health, and Physical Environment	9	3%

The above table lists the categories for workplace concerns. These categories reflect the workplace issues defined by the International Ombuds Association (IOA). The primary workplace concerns UW-Madison employees had in the 2023-2024 academic year were evaluative relationships, peer and colleague relationships, and career progression and development.

As in previous years, evaluative relationships were the highest reported area of concern by employees. This year 44% of Visitors sought advice about issues in this area. Evaluative relationships are defined as supervisor – employee relationships which include major professor/principal investigator – graduate student.

Additionally, 21% of Visitors reached out to the Ombuds Office about workplace concerns related to both peer and colleague relationships, as well as career progression and development. Both consultation about and referrals to appropriate resources were critical in helping employees address their issues.

While the above table shows the categories and percentage of UW-Madison employees who had workplace concerns, it was not uncommon for employees to share multiple complex workplace issues in their meetings with Ombuds.

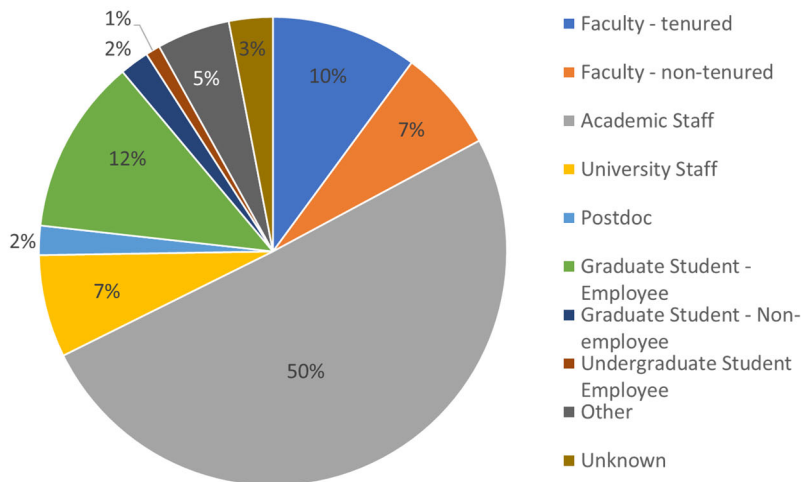
Table #3

Whom Do We Serve?

Position Types	Count	Percent AY 24 (AY22-23)
Faculty – tenured	39	10% (9.9%)
Faculty - non-tenured	27	7% (5.7%)
Academic Staff	196	50% (53.4%)
University Staff	27	7% (12.2%)
Postdoc	7	2% (2.1%)
Graduate Student – Employee	47	12% (9.3%)
Graduate Student - Non-employee	8	2% (1.2%)
Undergraduate Student Employee	5	1% (0%)
Other	21	5% (1.8%)

Graph #3

Breakdown of Visitor Position



Academic Staff, as in previous years, continued to dominate our caseload (50%). This group was followed by an increasing percentage of graduate student employees (12%) compared to past years. Tenured Faculty (10%) continued to consult with the Ombuds Team, as well as both Non-tenured Faculty and University Staff respectively at 7%.

Using the actual number of employees in each employment type from numbers in the 2023-2024 Data Digest, we compared the percent of our Visitors in each employment type to the actual percentage of employees by category.

For all Faculty, we saw a greater proportion of tenured and non-tenured faculty (17%) than the percentage of all faculty (10%) in the employee population.

The percentage and headcount of Academic Staff at the University of Wisconsin-Madison continues to increase. In the 2023-2024 academic year, 50% of Visitors to the Ombuds were Academic Staff; 53% of UW employees were Academic Staff.

As the Academic Staff at the University continues to increase, the percentage and headcount of University Staff continues to decline. During the 2023-2024 academic year, University Staff totaled 7% of our Visitors; 17% of UW employees were University Staff.

The percentage of graduate students that the Ombuds worked with (12%) corresponds to the actual percentage of all graduate student employees (12%). However, their role is somewhat different from that of regular employees. Graduate students have concerns about their teaching assistantships, or issues relative to their major professor/PI, or issues regarding their research such as intellectual property, or difficulties with their PI allowing them to complete their appointment, as well as HR or concerns with supervisors or colleagues. All incoming graduate students are informed of services the Ombuds Office can provide regarding some of their concerns at the Graduate Assistant Equity Workshops (GAEW) hosted by Luis Pinero's Office. Ombuds participate in a series of presentations for GAEW during the first part of the first and second semesters.

### **Major Issues Observed by Ombuds**

The Ombuds Team engages in discussions about cases at its weekly staff meetings, attends meetings/sessions across campus, and invites campus partners to its staff meetings to strengthen relationships and to stay apprised of policies and issues that may impact employees. From these discussions of cases and interactions with campus partners, major issues were identified.

1. **Supervisor Training, Coaching, and Accountability.** Historically, Evaluative Relationships has been the highest of all IOA categories for Visitor cases. During the 2023-2024 academic year, 44% of cases focused on Evaluative Relationships with Visitors concerned about disciplinary related issues, performance evaluation, and general difficulties with power differential. Ombuds have observed that one-on-one new supervisor coaching

and increased accessibility to supervisor training provides increased skills, knowledge, and tools for effective supervision.

2. Hostile and Intimidating Behavior. There was a slight increase in employees reporting hostile and intimidating behavior compared to the two previous years.

Ombuds have emphasized the need for clear information about HIB reporting, investigation, and final report processes including the differences involved in the informal and formal process. The online course “Hostile and Intimidating Behavior: Policy and Process” is a very good new resource for supervisors and employees.

3. Mentoring and Coaching. Ombuds have observed that many talented employees could benefit from job coaching and participating in a mentoring program. Many employees who are promoted into new positions are quite capable but lack experience in supervision, administration, and knowledge or good instincts about organizational behavior. Also, some newly hired employees have limited experience working in the academic enterprise and being a professional. While onboarding is critical to orienting new employees, it might also be helpful to encourage academic staff to participate in the Academic Staff Mentoring Program and, where appropriate, encourage job coaching and other professional development opportunities. Mentoring of tenure-track faculty is an added component in the professional development of junior faculty, and where needed, encouraged. The Office of the Secretary of the Faculty has information on the established faculty mentoring programs.
4. The Employee Career Counseling Office expansion has enabled more employees to access its services. This counseling service is an excellent resource for helping employees address career development concerns and explore professional opportunities.
5. Access to Policies and Procedures for all employees continues to be a concern. Faculty and Academic Staff policies and procedures are easily accessible on those governance web pages. It would be helpful for all UW employees to have easy access to policies and procedures on websites for all employment categories.
6. Requests for Mediation. For several years, Ombuds have observed that in some cases mediation could be an effective strategy to use to first address situations that arise in the workplace. It could be useful for supervisors, employees, and/or Human Resource staff to call in a mediator to work with them to resolve workplace issues and help to create a better workplace climate

In the spring of 2024, the Vice Provost for Faculty and Staff Affairs Beth Meyerand, requested a proposal from the Ombuds for an Ombuds/Mediator position. The proposal was approved for the pilot year of July 1, 2024 through June 30, 2025.

The Ombuds/Mediator position is held by a senior Ombuds who completed a three-year term of service and attended Mediator training in June 2024 and received a certificate of completion. The Ombuds/Mediator is part of the Ombuds team that meets weekly.

Mediation is a process for two (or more) employees to reach an agreement together concerning the resolution of a difficult work situation.

Ombuds provide a discussion of resources as well as options for an individual Visitor experiencing a difficult work situation.

The Ombuds/Mediator provides service to both parties in a difficult work situation, assisting them in resolving the situation together and providing resources to them as appropriate.

A summary of the challenges, goals and action plans are shown in Table #4.

Table #4

Challenges, Goals and Action Plans

Challenges	Goals and Action Plans
<p>Institutional memory of the Ombuds team. Ombuds serve staggered three-year terms.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Extensive use of Ombuds Box</li> <li>● Review/update Orientation/Operations Manual annually</li> <li>● Mentor new Ombuds</li> <li>● Role for new Ombuds for first six months: Learner</li> <li>● Rotate Ombuds Roles -Convener, Recruitment, Training, Technology, Outreach, Resources</li> <li>● Work closely with Provost Office Staff</li> </ul>
<p>Continue to build and nurture campus partnerships and introduce newest Ombuds</p>	<p><u>Meet with Campus Partners</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● VP for Faculty &amp; Staff – quarterly</li> <li>● Secretary of the Academic Staff – quarterly</li> <li>● Secretary of the Faculty – semi-annually</li> <li>● Employee Assistance Office</li> <li>● Employee Career Counseling Office</li> </ul>



	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Office of Strategic Consulting</li> <li>● Workforce Relations, School and College HR Directors, HR Reps</li> <li>● HIB Liaisons</li> <li>● Division of Diversity, Equity, and Educational Achievement</li> <li>● Employee Disability Resources Office</li> <li>● Cultural Linguistic Services</li> <li>● Chief Human Resources Officer</li> </ul> <p>[partial list]</p>
Continue to inform the campus about the services of the Ombuds Office	Participate in campus events, present at Graduate Assistant Equity Workshops, Faculty Senate, Academic Staff Executive Committee (ASEC), and Academic Staff Assembly meetings, University Staff Congress, and departmental and center meetings.
Continuous training of Ombuds	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Continuously fine tune and present our own Ombuds Training, updated annually</li> <li>● Visitor case reviews at weekly Ombuds staff meeting</li> <li>● Campus Partners (partial list above) regularly attend weekly Ombuds staff meetings to provide updated information</li> </ul>

Respectfully submitted,

The Ombuds Team:

Jane Dymond, Rob Howell, Gloria Hawkins, Thomas Kuech, Beth Dawson, Robin Kurtz, Susan Ellis Weismer

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