



WISCONSIN

UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN-MADISON

October 13, 2025

Dear Provost Zumbrunnen,

We are pleased to submit the Annual Report for the UW-Madison Ombuds Office for the Academic Year 2024-2025.

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, staff and student employees, including post-docs and graduate students, 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:

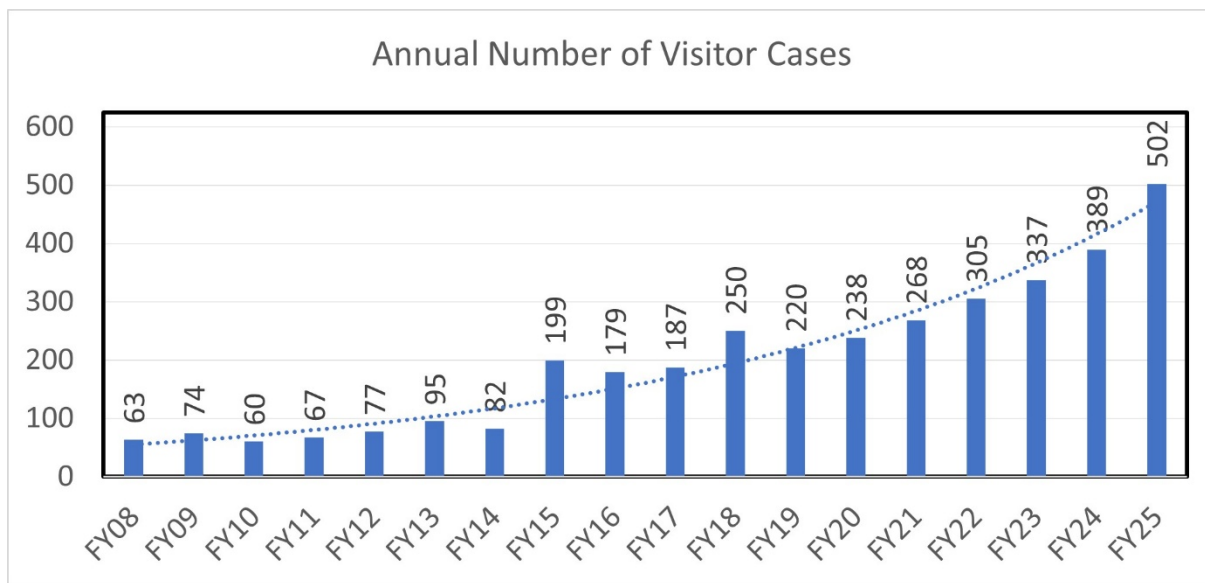
- Knowledge of university policies and resources
- Extensive cross-campus experience
- Strong communication skills
- Ability to be objective and impartial

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 22-23	AY 23-24	AY 24-25
Cases (29% increase FY24-FY25)	337	389	502
Hours/case	2.0	1.5	1.3
HIB	16.0%	7.2%	---
Evaluative Relationships	56%	44%	44%

Graph #1



There has been a significant increase in the number of cases addressed by the Ombuds. The number of cases again grew from 389 in the 2023-2024 academic year to 502 in 2024-2025 which reflects a 29% increase.

Table #2

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

IOA Category of Issues	Count	Percent (FY 25)
Evaluative Relationships	286	44%
Career Progression and Development	101	15.5%
Peer and Colleague Relationships	65	10%
Organizational, Strategic, and Mission Related	50	7.7%
Legal, Regulatory, Financial and Compliance	44	6.8%
Values, Ethics, and Standards	31	4.8%
Compensation and Benefits	25	3.8%
Services/Administrative Issues	25	3.8%
Safety, Health, and Physical Environment	23	3.5%

The above table lists the categories for workplace concerns. Please note, the table indicates when the issues discussed touched on a specific IOA category and hence each case could have multiple concerns. These categories reflect the workplace issues defined by the International Ombuds Association (IOA). The primary workplace concerns UW-Madison employees had in the 2024-2025 academic year were evaluative 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, 15.5% of Visitors reached out to the Ombuds Office about workplace concerns related to career progression and development. Consultations about and referrals to appropriate resources were critical in helping employees address their issues.

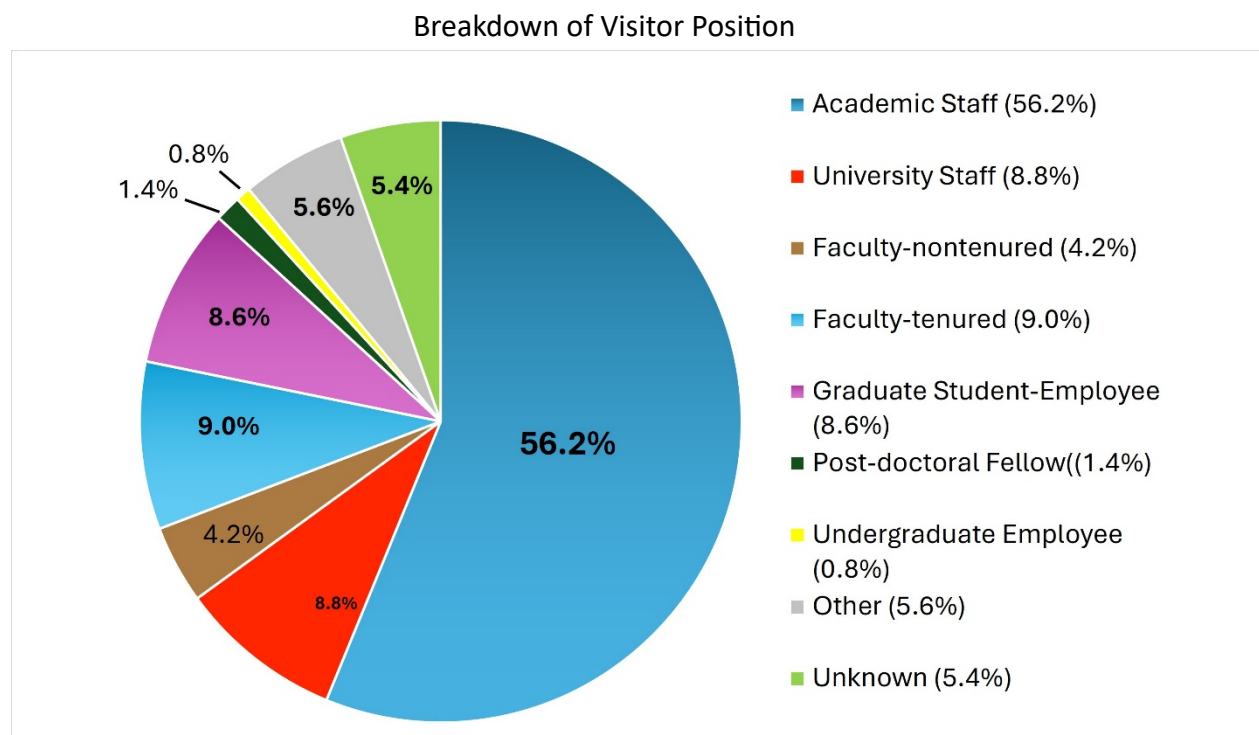
While the above table shows the categories and percentage of UW-Madison employees who had workplace concerns, it was not uncommon for employees to share multiple complex workplace issues in their meetings with Ombuds.

Table #3

Whom Do We Serve?

Position Types	Count	Percent AY 25 (AY23-24)
Faculty – tenured	45	9% (10%)
Faculty - non-tenured	21	4.2% (7%)
Academic Staff	281	56.2% (50.0%)
University Staff	47	8.8% (7%)
Postdoc	7	1.4% (2%)
Graduate Student – Employee	43	8.6% (12%)
Undergraduate Student Employee	4	0.8 % (1%)
Other + Unknown	53	11%

Graph #3



Percentage of Employees by Category (2025 Data Digest)

Academic Staff, as in previous years, continued to dominate our caseload (56.2%). Tenured Faculty (9%) and non-tenured Faculty (4.2%) continued to consult with the Ombuds Team, as well as University Staff (8.8%). There was a decline in the use of services by graduate students (8.6%) compared to the previous year (12%).

Using the actual number of employees in each employment type from numbers in the 2024-2025 Data Digest, we compared the percentage 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 (13.2%) than the percentage of all faculty (10%) in the employee population.

The percentage and headcount of Academic Staff at the University of Wisconsin-Madison continued to increase. In the 2024-2025 academic year, the percentage of Academic Staff Visitors (56.2%) almost mirrored the percentage of UW Academic Staff employees (57%).

As the Academic Staff at the University continues to increase, the percentage and headcount of University Staff continue to decline. During the 2024-2025 academic year, University Staff (8.8%) using Ombuds services continue to decline with the percentage of UW University Staff employees (17%).

The percentage of graduate students that the Ombuds worked with (8.6%) is less than the actual percentage of all graduate student employees (12%). Their role is somewhat different from that of regular employees. Graduate students have concerns about their teaching assistantships, or issues related 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 have been the highest of all IOA categories for Visitor cases. During the 2024-2025 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. Data were not compiled on employees wanting to talk with an Ombuds about what the employee defined as "hostile and intimidating behavior." The determination of what constitutes HIB is made by the Office of Compliance.

Ombuds have referred visitors seeking information to the online course "Hostile and Intimidating Behavior: Policy and Process." Visitors are informed that the Office of Compliance is the office handling HIB complaints. In many instances, visitors realize that

filing an HIB complaint is not what they are seeking in resolving their workplace concerns, but they need other options or resources, such as mediation services.

3. Ombuds have noted that both complainants and respondents involved in a complaint process have a very difficult time repairing and improving their workplace relationships during and after the complaint process is completed.
4. **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.
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 and the resources to interpret and understand these policies.
6. **Requests for Ombuds/Mediation services.** Ombuds/Mediation services are usually requested by HR professionals, supervisors, directors, or administrators. 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.

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

Currently there are two Ombuds who have completed Mediation training. We will continue to offer training after an Ombuds completes 18 months of their 37 -month term. The first 6 months will be mentored by experienced mediators and in the last 12-13 months the Ombuds will serve as an experienced mediator. This process will allow us to provide continual and even expanded mediation services

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
Institutional memory of the Ombuds team. Ombuds serve staggered three-year terms.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Extensive use of Ombuds Box ● Review/update Orientation/Operations Manual annually ● Mentor new Ombuds ● Role for new Ombuds for first six months: Learner ● Rotate Ombuds Roles -Convener, Recruitment, Training, Technology, Outreach ● Work closely with Provost Office Staff
Continue to build and nurture campus partnerships and introduce newest Ombuds	<u>Meet with Campus Partners</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● VP for Faculty & Staff – quarterly ● Secretary of the Academic Staff – quarterly ● Secretary of the Faculty – semi-annually ● Employee Assistance Office ● Employee Career Counseling Office ● Office of Strategic Consulting ● Workforce Relations, School and College HR Directors, HR Reps ● HIB Liaisons ● Employee Disability Resources Office ● Cultural Linguistic Services ● Chief Human Resources Officer <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"> • Continuously fine tune and present our own Ombuds Training, updated annually • Visitor case reviews at weekly Ombuds staff meeting • Campus Partners (partial list above) regularly attend weekly Ombuds staff meetings to provide updated information • Weekly meetings and case reviews/presentations are not only excellent tools for continuous training, but for individual and staff evaluations.

Respectfully submitted,

The Ombuds Team:

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