

FY 2020-2021 Office of the Ombuds Annual Report

The Office of the Ombuds is a safe and confidential space where members of the UC Merced campus community can discuss any university related concern. The Ombuds is a designated neutral to facilitate the informal resolution of concerns of individuals, groups, and affiliates of UC Merced.

A Year Unlike Any Other

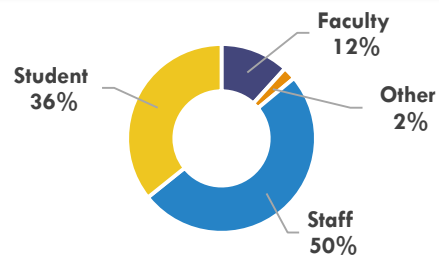
This fiscal year was a year that brought many unique experiences filled with incredible challenges, reflection, uncertainties, and for many, personal loss. Our campus community demonstrated resiliency through our collective experiences, determination, and grit, despite the looming tensions. And yet, there were many moments to celebrate our successes: from Chancellor Muñoz's appointment, to the designated essential workers that continued to work on-site, to the enormous undertaking of our transition, to in-person instruction and services in the Fall of 2021. Along with the pandemic, our country faced turmoil with race issues. The Black Lives Matter movement as not just a moment in our history, but an actual movement for positive change.

As in previous years, at least **50%** of visitors to our office were staff, while **36%** were students. The top categories of concern that visitors raised were **Evaluative Relationships, Peer & Colleague Relationships, and Organizational, Strategic, & Mission Related**. However, we also heard of the overarching concerns regarding work/life balance, the rise of mental health issues, and access to professionals in our area.

Ombuds Cases

Each person who meets with an Ombuds to receive confidential, informal, impartial, and independent services is counted as a "case". When one visitor has two distinct unrelated issues, it is captured as a separate case. In **FY20-21**, the Office of the Ombuds had a total number of **179 new cases**, while operating completely remote throughout the entire duration of the fiscal year. Of these new cases, **34%** of visitors returned to the office to discuss the initial concern in a follow up capacity. The Office of the Ombuds operates under the Code of Ethics and Standards of Practice of the International Ombuds Association:

Confidential Informal Impartial Independent



- **68 %** self-identified as female
- **29%** self-identified as male
- **34%** White/Caucasian with **21 of 61 visitors** categorized as MSP/SL level staff
- **25%** Hispanic/Latinx with **21 of 45 visitors** categorized as Undergraduate Students
- **11%** Indian/Pakistani with **16 of 20 visitors** categorized as PPS Supervisee

Top Visitor Concerns

Standards of Conduct

Abusive Conduct, Bullying, Mobbing

Respect/Treatment

Administrative Decisions & Reputation

Faculty

- Standards of Conduct
- Respect/Treatment
- Administrative Decisions
- Tenure/Position Security

Staff

- Bullying/Mobbing
- Use of Positional Power
- Standards of Conduct
- Leadership/Mgmt

Student

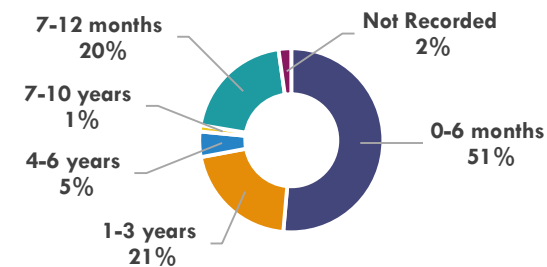
- Reputation
- Communication
- Respect/Treatment
- Administrative Decisions

Use of the Ombuds office is completely voluntary. Our office supplements but does not replace existing resources available to the campus community. For more information about our services and practice: <https://ombuds.ucmerced.edu/>

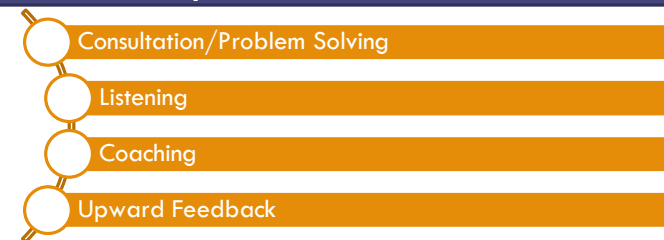
Case Complexity

Green	Yellow	Red
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 41% of overall cases (Least Complex) • 49% of Hispanic/Latinx cases 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 35% of overall cases • 36% of White/Caucasian cases 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 24% of overall cases (Most Complex) • 50% of Indian/Pakistani cases

Length of Concerns (N=179)



Top Ombuds Actions

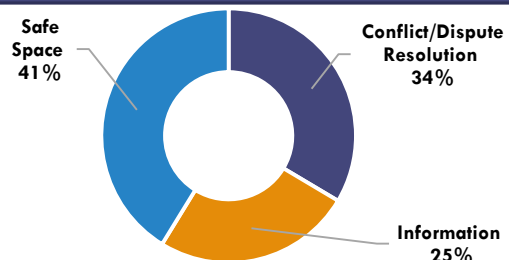


As a result of Ombuds involvement, **63%** of visitor cases were mitigated through informal management. In addition, a key role of the Office of the Ombuds is to provide upward feedback to leadership at UC Merced. **40 %** of cases resulted in some form of upward feedback to a supervisor/manager or leadership. Information is presented without including any details that could compromise the confidentiality of visitors and the integrity of Office of the Ombuds.

"I felt that all of my concerns were heard and I feel confident moving forward. It's comforting to know that I have another resource under my belt". ~Anonymous Visitor

It is not uncommon for cases to have received more than one service from an Ombuds during a visitor appointment. The services provided by the Ombuds are determined based on the concerns that are shared from visitors.

Services Provided



The Office of the Ombuds provides opportunities for visitors to give anonymous feedback based on services rendered: **42%** expressed they would have filed a formal action if the Office of the Ombuds were not available, **81%** said they were aware of their options to address their concerns, and **100%** strongly agreed that they would refer others to the Office of the Ombuds.

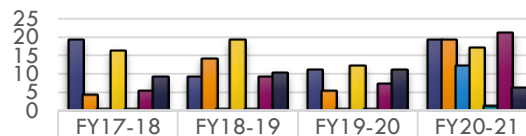
Associated Risk

During appointments, visitors typically disclose how the concerns that are being shared affect them. The impact of these concerns resulted in **62%** of visitors indicating a mental well-being issue. As a whole, **46%** of visitors specifically indicated the level of stress being experienced as a risk factor. In addition, the Office of the Ombuds identifies key risks based on concerns expressed by visitors.

Negative Publicity	23%
Loss of Department Productivity	20%
Unwarranted Attrition/Transfer	16%
Potential for Internal/External Grievance	16%
Significant Violations of Policy/Code of Conduct	9%
Financial Loss	7%
Litigation Potential	6%
High Risk Safety Issue	3%

In **FY20-21**, our overall outreach/trainings efforts increased by **106%** in comparison to **FY19-20** and were all conducted remotely. In addition, OO & Partner Trainings increased by **208%**, Tailored Outreach increased by **200%**, Mediation/Facilitated Conversations increased by **73%**, and Outreach Events increased by **42%** in comparison to **FY19-20**.

Additional Services



Service	FY17-18	FY18-19	FY19-20	FY20-21
Mediation/Facilitated Conversations	19	9	11	19
OO & Partner Trainings	4	14	5	19
Other (i.e. Consult/Inquiry)	0	0	0	12
Outreach Events	16	19	12	17
Panels	0	0	0	1
Tailored Outreach	5	9	7	21
Tailored Training	9	10	11	6

100% of the **FY20-21** training participants agreed that the training objectives were met.

Unpacking an Unusual Year

Consistent with last year's annual report, top case concerns revolve around **abusive conduct/bullying, respectful treatment, and questions/concerns surrounding the organization**. As a subset to these concerns, standards of conduct, questions around administrative decisions, and positional power/authority were also reported. Also, visitors continue to report the need for better strategies to address patterns of misbehavior that continue to go unaddressed and continue leadership development in conflict resolution, unconscious bias, and implementation of 360 reviews for constructive and meaningful leadership development.

The pandemic created and highlighted concerns regarding discriminatory comments surrounding ethnicity and Black Lives Matter, countries hit hard by COVID-19, and a call for police reform. International students/faculty reported feeling isolated and pressured to stay in the USA, while dealing with concerns for loved ones abroad. Campus community members expressed concern surrounding biases and treatment toward our police department.

Continued proactive dialogue in response to concerns of the pandemic, its fiscal impact, and adaptations of policy is needed. Employees express appreciation for remote/hybrid schedules to allow for greater work/life balance. The pandemic triggered unexpected strain on our mental health and finding professionals in the area is an issue. Online services allows for the opportunity to find creative ways to connect employees with mental health experts, including those outside our region. There is a need to assess and support campus units and activities focused on mental health awareness and services, including units not traditionally known for their mental health advocacy. Also, there is a continued need to supplement and support units addressing and providing basic need services.

Staff concerns regarding leadership and management include supervisory decisions, avoiding conflict, unacceptable behavior, job assignments, unequal treatment, lack of 1:1 meetings, and unclear expectations. Visitors expressed their supervisor lacked training and readiness for their role. Also, reports of inequities in stipend distributions remain in question.

Faculty members expressed concerns over the lack of transparency, poor decisions, or lack of and communication with the unit, division head, or administrative services. Concerns raised included tenure/contract and hiring inequity and timeliness of responses by the administration and their offices. Faculty report the need for an external committee to review authorship disputes. Also, stronger accountability to address faculty behaviors that cause workplace harm, tension, and disruption.

Undergraduate students raised concerns about the process for grade appeal and dispute allegations of academic misconduct and dishonesty. Many students are unfamiliar with the policies and feel lost navigating the process. Students also disclosed having to work nearly full time to supplement the loss of wages or jobs of family members due to the pandemic.

Graduate Students continue to report concerns around their relationship with their advisors, chairs, and dissertation committees. They share experiences of intimidation, threats, and lack of mentorship. This year, cases surrounding authorship were raised, especially when students transferred to another advisor.

It has been an unforgettable year. We will continue to adapt, assess, and adjust. We are not alone, but together we will always be **Bobcat Strong!**