

# Office of the Ombuds

## Annual Report 2022-2023

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The Office of the Ombuds is a voluntary, safe, confidential, and informal resource where UC Merced community members can go for assistance with managing conflict, complaints, and concerns with a colleague, classmate, supervisor, department, or anyone else on campus.

The Office of the Ombuds of UC Merced provides an annual report based on data collected over the course of the fiscal year. This data consists of visitor's primary affiliation, visitor type, and high-level demographics, including gender, age, and ethnicity. This report highlights types of problems UC Merced faculty, staff and students are dealing with over the course of the year and how the Office of the Ombuds helps people handle them. The Office of the Ombuds also examines this data to identify patterns and trends occurring within the UC Merced community. These trends are reported to leadership as deemed necessary by the Office of the Ombuds.

It is important to note that the Office of the Ombuds at UC Merced is a confidential, informal, independent, and impartial conflict resolution resource for the UC Merced community; thus, the Office of the Ombuds does not retain identifiable records on any of the visitors coming to the office. All identifying records are routinely destroyed by the Office of the Ombuds. The Office of the Ombuds only tracks information to identify trends and patterns at UC Merced.

### **Ethical Principles**

The Office of the Ombuds adheres to the International Ombuds Association Standards of Practice, which are Confidentiality, Independence, Informality, and Impartiality. The Office of the Ombuds also abides by the UC Merced [Mission](#), [Diversity Statement](#) and the UC Merced [Principles of Community](#).

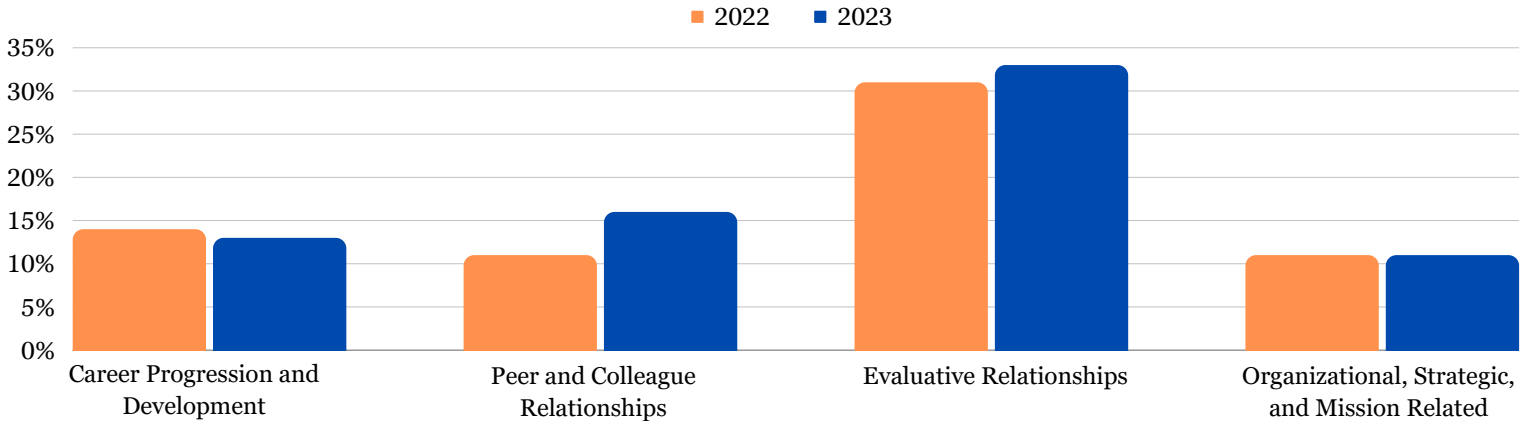
### **Executive Summary**

Between July 1, 2022, and June 30, 2023 ("2023"), the Office of the Ombuds of UC Merced handled 172 individual cases. This was a 5% decrease from the prior year. 46% of all visitors were "Staff," 22% were "Students," 30% were "Faculty" and 2% were "Other" constituents, such as parents and vendors.

The Office of the Ombuds tracked nine high-level categories. The top three high-level concerns were "Evaluative Relationships", "Peer and Colleague Relationships", and "Career Progression and Development". Evaluative Relationships was also the top concern in 2022, but Peer and Colleague Relationships was not a top three concern last year

## 2022 & 2023 Top Three High-Level Concerns

	2022	2023
Career Progression and Development	14%	13%
Peer and Colleague Relationships	11%	16%
Evaluative Relationships	31%	33%
Organizational, Strategic, and Mission Related	11%	11%



The most common services provided by the Office of the Ombuds were “Providing a Safe Space”, “Conflict/Dispute Resolution” and “Providing Information” to the visitor. The most common actions taken by the Office of the Ombuds were “Listening”, “Consultation/Problem Solving” and “Coaching”.

## Data Collection Methodology

The Office of the Ombuds collected data by using a volunteer disclosure form which captured high-level demographics, union affiliation, location of employment, length of concern, department or school, plans if a concern is not resolved, and who the visitor talked to before coming to the Office of the Ombuds. This form was used for all visitors, either during intake or during an in-person visit. Visitors were told that they had the option of not answering any questions they did not feel comfortable answering.

The Office of the Ombuds also captured data during the visit to determine what type of issue the visitor was dealing with. The Office of the Ombuds categorized visitor issues into nine categories, as recommended by the International Ombuds Association as shown in the Issue Categories section of this report.

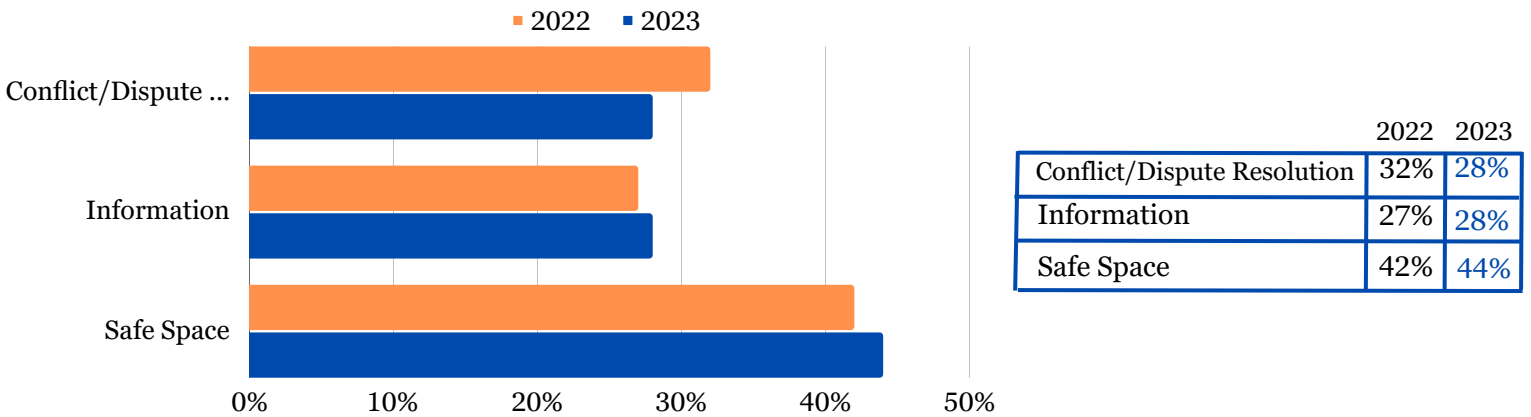
Each visitor was also sent a voluntary, anonymous survey form to better assess the effectiveness and efficiency of the Office of the Ombuds, if they provided a non-UC Merced email address. The results were captured on a form located on the Office of the Ombuds [website](#) and retrieved by the Ombuds by accessing the survey results as the administrator of the website.

## 2023 Touchpoints

In the fiscal year 2022 – 2023, The UC Merced Office of the Ombuds made contact with over 1500 students, faculty and employees through 66 tailored outreach, orientations, and mediations/facilitated conversations.

As mentioned earlier, the most common services provided by the Office of the Ombuds were “Providing a Safe Space”, “Conflict/Dispute Resolution”, and “Providing Information”. This is significant data because a primary reason for the ombuds office to exist is to provide a “barrier-free” resource for faculty, staff and students to raise issues that might not be raised anywhere else in the University. Last year’s services provided were very similar to this year’s.

### Services Provided by Ombuds

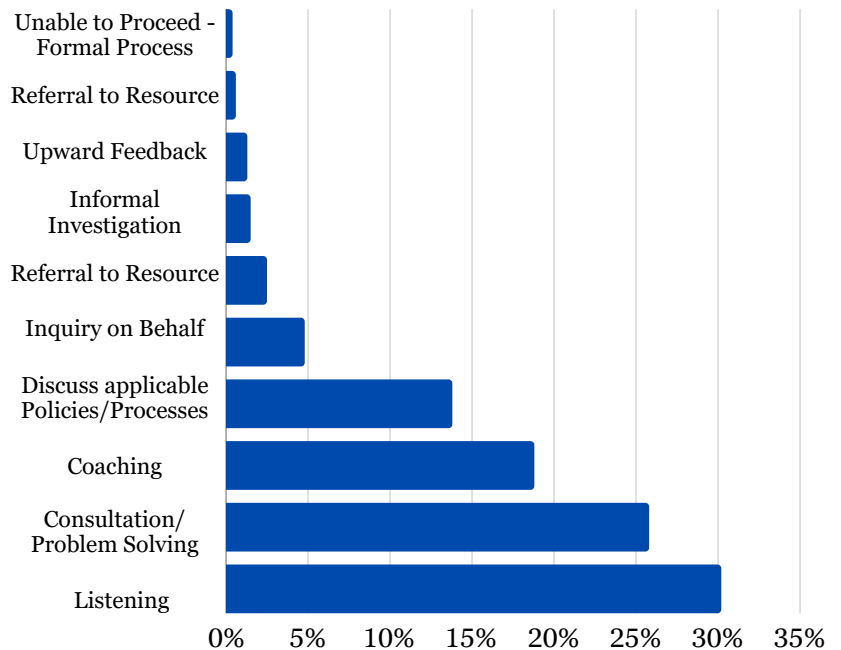


### Actions by the Office of the Ombuds

The Office of the Ombuds also tracked Ombuds actions once the visit was complete. The top three actions were “Consultation/Problem Solving” at 26%, “Listening” at 30%, and “Coaching” at 19%.

### 2023 Ombuds Actions

Unable to Proceed - Formal Process	0.4%
Referral to Outside Resource	0.6%
Upward Feedback	1.3%
Informal Investigation	1.5%
Referral to Resource	2.5%
Inquiry on Behalf	4.8%
Discuss applicable Policies/Processes	13.8%
Coaching	18.8%
Consultation/Problem Solving	25.8%
Listening	30.2%



## Issue Categories

The UC Merced Office of the Ombuds tracked nine broad categories of issues and concerns. The chart below breaks down by percentage (%) what types of issues all constituents brought to the Office of the Ombuds.

“Career Progression and Development” was the third most common category at 13% in 2023, down from 14% in 2022. These types of issues include complaints about job applications and selection, tenure, career progression, a lack of career growth, and professional development opportunities.

The second highest concern was “Peer and Colleague Relationships” at 16%, up from 11% of issues in 2022.

“Evaluative Relationships” was the most common category at 33%, up from 31% in 2022. These types of issues include problems an employee or student was having with someone they report to.

### Issues & Concerns

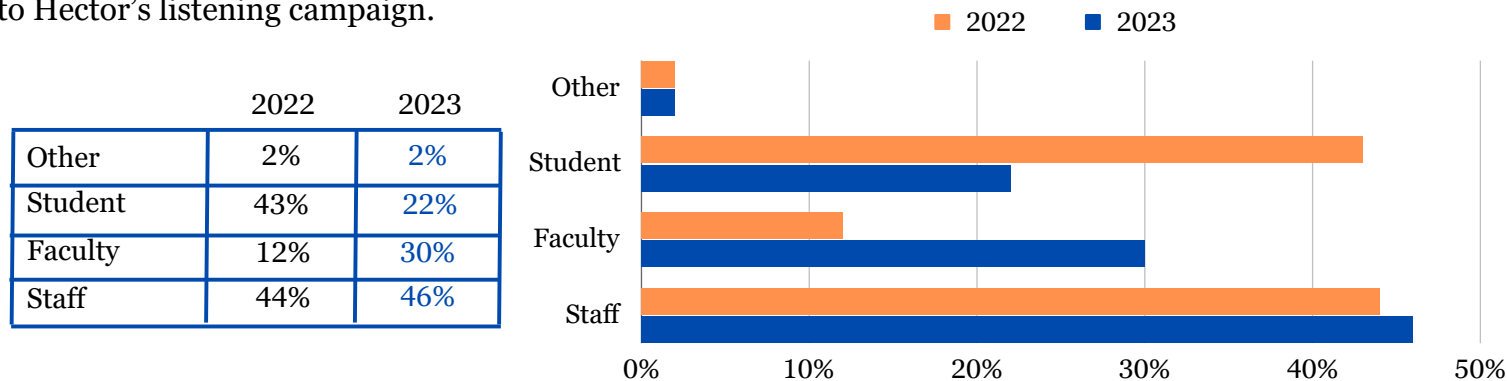
	2022	2023
Compensation & Benefits	2%	1.7%
Values, Ethics, and Standards	7%	3.1%
Services/Administrative Issues	6%	5.4%
Safety, Health, and Physical Environment	10%	5.9%
Legal, Regulatory, Financial and Compliance	9%	11%
Organizational, Strategic, and Mission Related	11%	11.3%
Career Progression and Development	14%	12.7%
Peer and Colleague Relationships	11%	15.6%
Evaluated Relationships	31%	33.1%

## Visitors

The UC Merced Office of the Ombuds tracked types of visitors by role, gender identity, and ethnicity to better understand who is and isn’t utilizing the Office of the Ombuds services. The following is a breakdown of visitors coming to the Office of the Ombuds.

### Visitor Type by Role

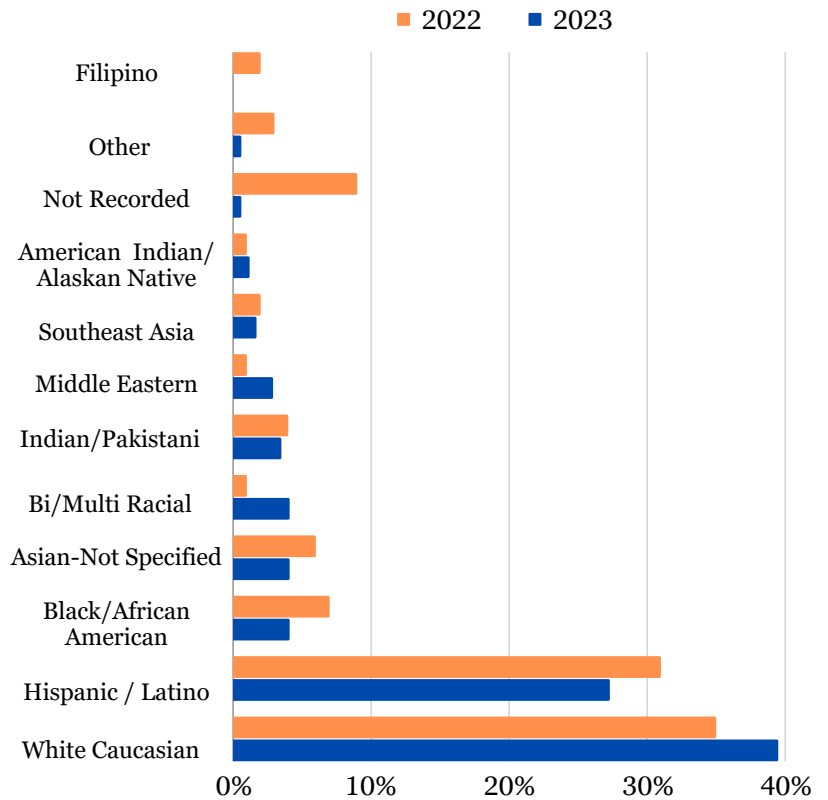
The UC Merced Office of the Ombuds serves all faculty, staff and students. Of the 172 visitors the Office of the Ombuds had this year, 46% were “Staff”, 22% were “Students”, 30% were “Faculty”, and 2% were “Other” types of constituents. There was a significant increase in faculty visitors, which may be attributed to Hector’s listening campaign.



## Visitor Type by Ethnicity

The top (self-reported) ethnicities to visit the Office of the Ombuds in 2023 were “White/Caucasian” at 40%, “Hispanics/Latino” at 27%; and “Black/African American”, “Asian-Not Specified”, and “Bi/Multi-Racial tied at 4%.

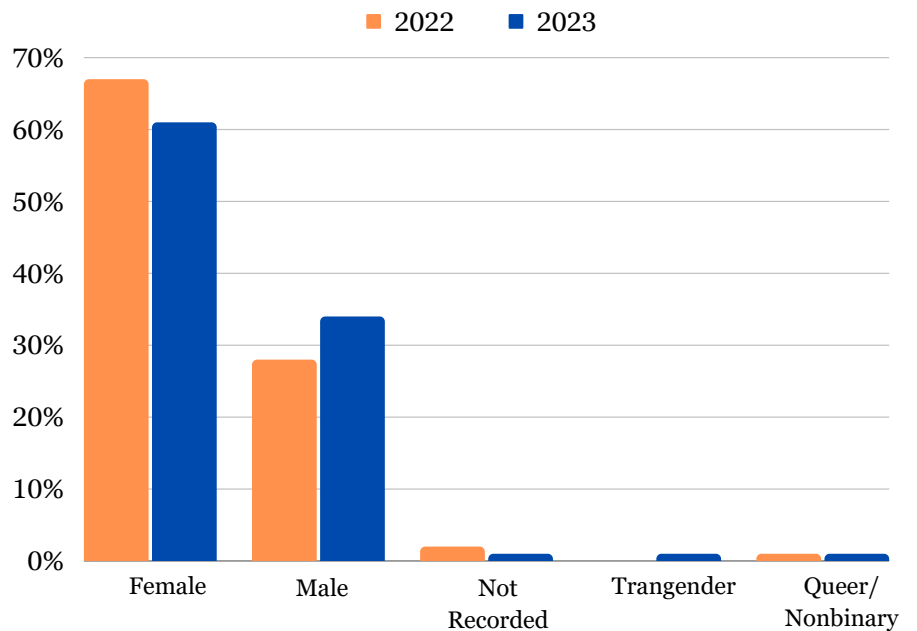
	2022	2023
Filipino	2%	0.0%
Other	3%	0.6%
Not Recorded	9%	0.6%
American Indian/Alaskan Native	1%	1.2%
Southeast Asia (Hmong, Laos, etc)	2%	1.7%
Middle Eastern	1%	2.9%
Indian/Pakistani	4%	3.5%
Bi/Multi Racial	1%	4.1%
Asian-Not Specified	6%	4.1%
Black/African American	7%	4.1%
Hispanic/Latino	31%	27.3%
White Caucasian	33%	39.5%



## Visitor Type by Gender Identity

Of all the visitors to the Office of the Ombuds, 61% identified as “Female”, 34% as “Male”, 1% as “Queer/Nonbinary”, 1% as Transgender, and 1% as were not recorded.

	2022	2023
Female	67%	61%
Male	28%	34%
Not Recorded	2%	1%
Transgender	0%	1%
Queer/Nonbinary	1%	1%



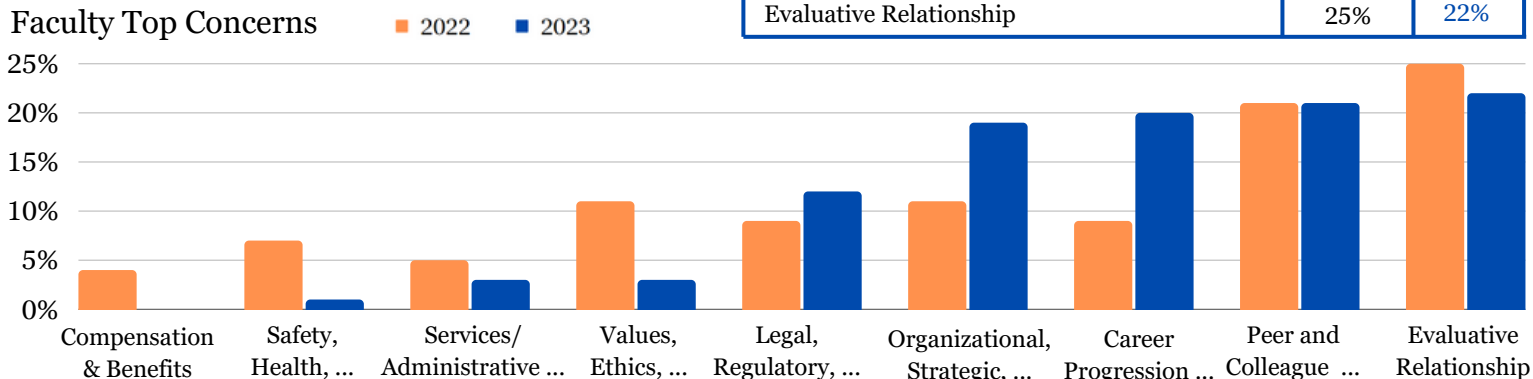
# Top Concerns by Constituents

## Faculty

Faculty visitors' top three concerns were "Career Progression and Development" at 20%, "Peer and Colleague Relationships" at 21%, and "Evaluative Relationships" at 22%. It is interesting to note that faculty visitors to the Office of the Ombuds had little to no concern regarding compensation and benefits. However, there was an increase in concern over Career Progression and Development.

	2022	2023
Compensation & Benefits	4%	0%
Safety, Health, and Physical Environment	7%	1%
Services/Administrative Issues	5%	3%
Values, Ethics, and Standards	11%	3%
Legal, Regulatory, Financial and Compliance	10%	12%
Organizational, Strategic, and Mission Related	11%	19%
Career Progression and Development	9%	20%
Peer and Colleague Relationships	21%	21%
Evaluative Relationship	25%	22%

Faculty Top Concerns

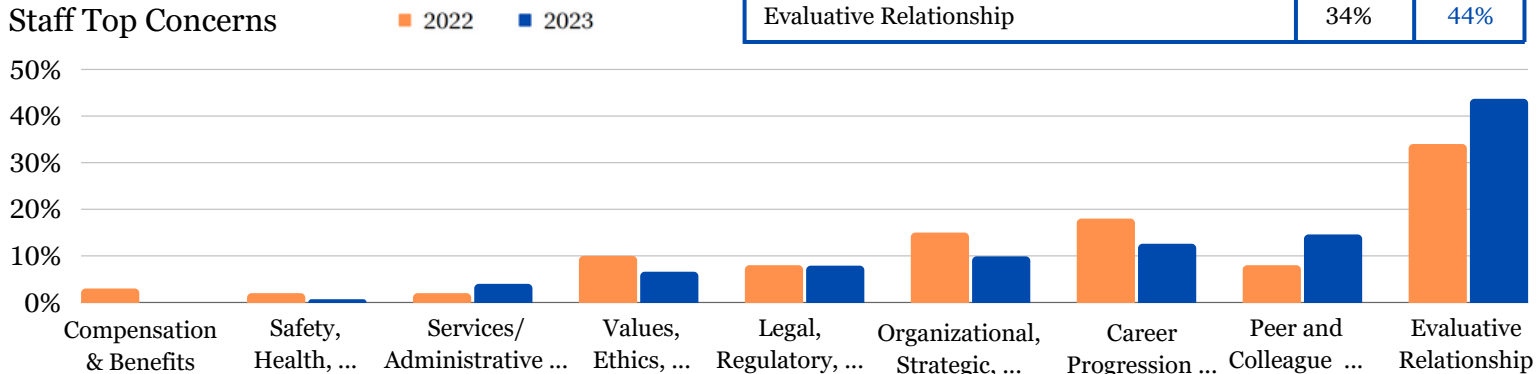


## Staff

Staff visitors' top three concerns were "Career Progression and Development" at 13%, "Peer and Colleague Relationships" at 15%, and "Evaluative Relationships" at 44%.

	2022	2023
Values, Ethics, and Standards	3%	0%
Services/Administrative Issues	2%	1%
Compensation & Benefits	2%	4%
Safety, Health, and Physical Environment	10%	7%
Legal, Regulatory, Financial and Compliance	8%	8%
Organizational, Strategic, and Mission Related	15%	10%
Career Progression and Development	18%	13%
Peer and Colleague Relationships	8%	15%
Evaluative Relationship	34%	44%

Staff Top Concerns



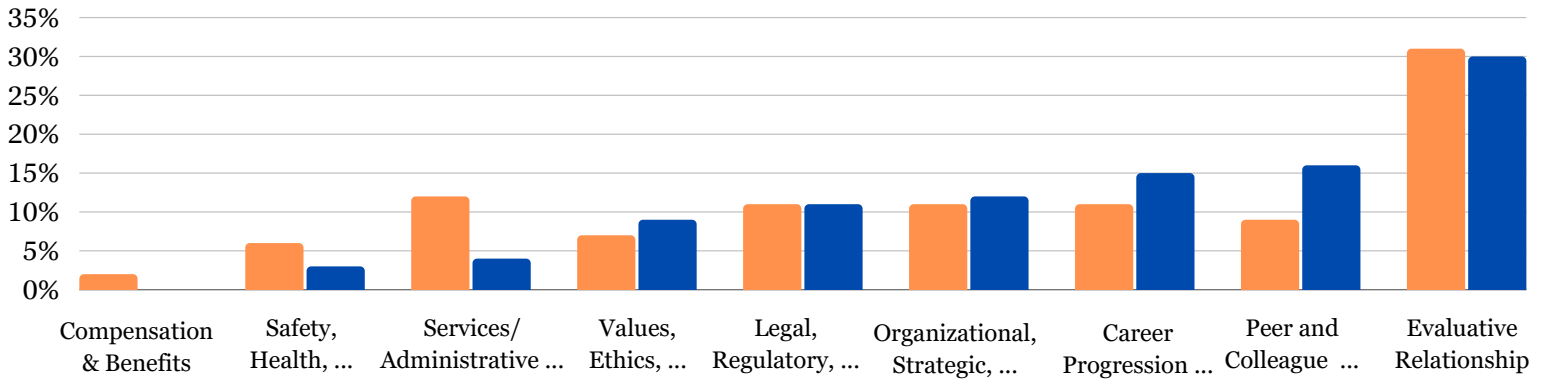
## Students

Student visitors' top three concerns were "Service/Administrative Issues" at 15%, "Legal, Regulatory, Financial and Compliance" at 16%, and "Evaluative Relationships" at 30%. Evaluative Relationships continues to be a top concern for students, as well as all other constituents.

	2022	2023
Compensation & Benefits	2%	0%
Organizational, Strategic, and Mission Related	6%	3%
Career Progression and Development	12%	4%
Values, Ethics, and Standards	7%	9%
Peer and Colleague Relationships	11%	11%
Safety, Health, and Physical Environment	11%	12%
Services/Administrative Issues	11%	15%
Legal, Regulatory, Financial and Compliance	9%	16%
Evaluative Relationship	31%	30%

### Students Top Concerns

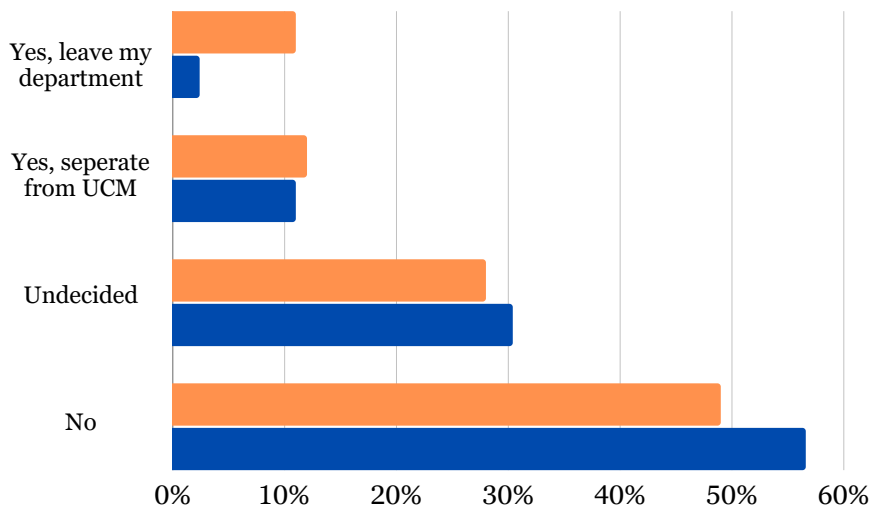
2022 2023



## Retention

The Ombuds Office also tracked whether or not a visitor was planning to leave their position if their concerns were not resolved. 2% stated they would leave the University, 11% stated they would leave their department, and 30% were undecided. The potential loss of UCM employees is 43%. It is also important to note that almost half of our visitors were not planning on separating from UC Merced, and there was an increase of "No" responses this year as compared to last year.

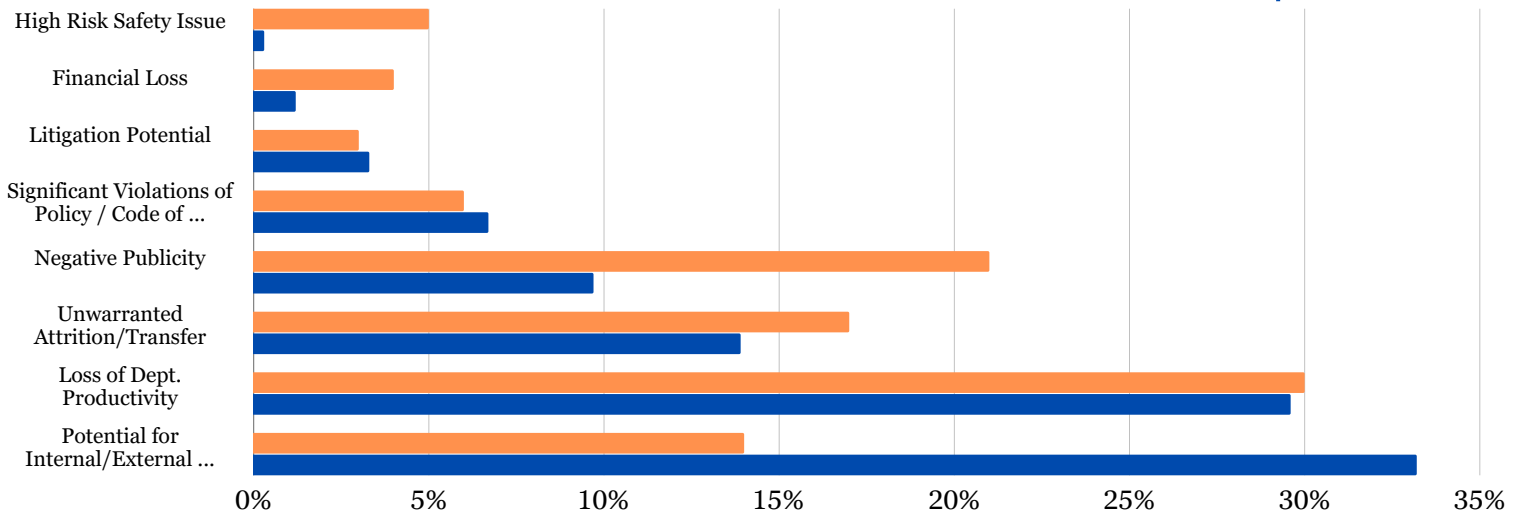
	2022	2023
Yes, leave my department	11%	2.4%
Yes, separate from UCM	12%	11.0%
Undecided	28%	30.4%
No	49%	56.6%



## Perceived Risk to UC Merced

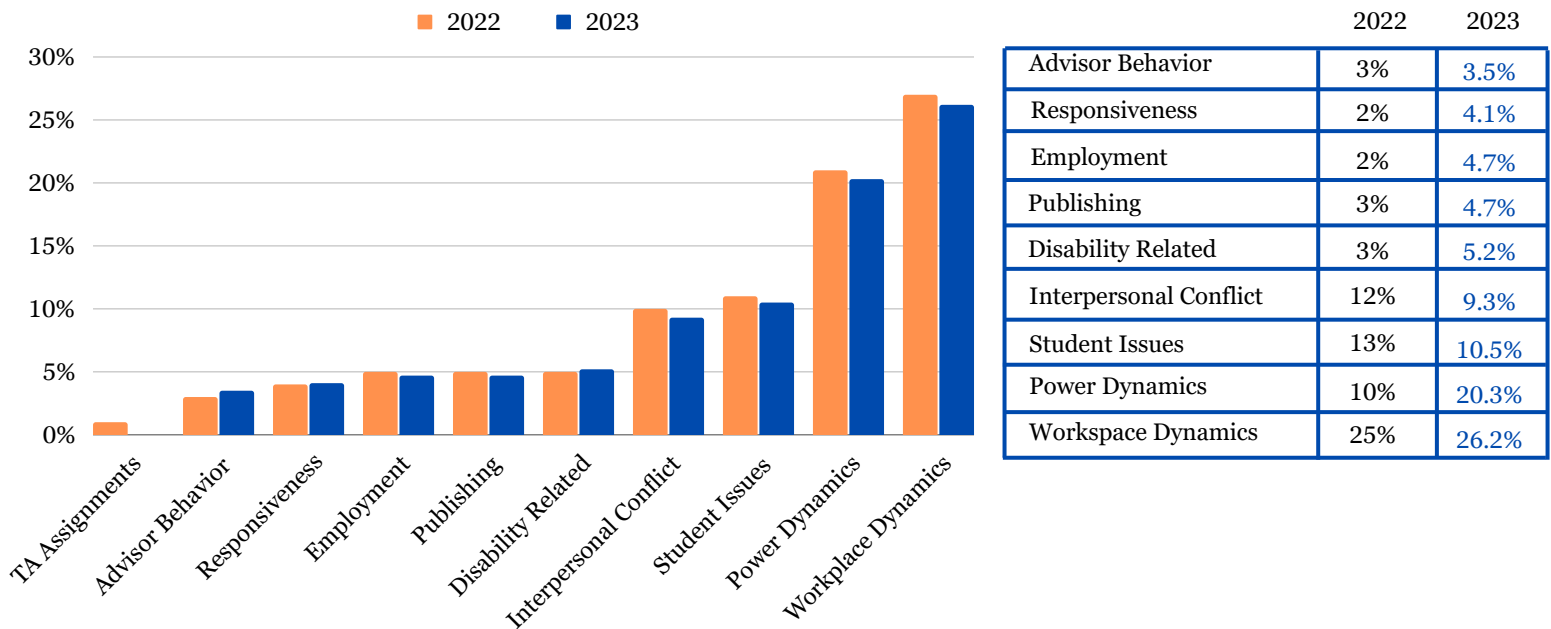
The Office of the Ombuds also captured what visitors perceived to be the risk to the campus. “Potential for Internal/External Grievance” was the highest concern at 33%, “Loss of Department Productivity” was at 30%, “Unwarranted attrition/transfer” was at 14%, and “Negative Publicity” was at 10%.

	2022	2023
High Risk Safety Issue	5%	0.3%
Financial Loss	4%	1.2%
Litigation Potential	3%	3.3%
Significant Violations of Policy/Code of Conduct	6%	6.6%
Negative Publicity	21%	9.7%
Unwarranted Attrition/Transfer	17%	13.9%
Loss of Dept. Productivity	30%	29.6%
Potential for Internal/External Grievance	14%	33.2%



## Themes

The following chart and graph show the major "Themes" that the Office of the Ombuds captured. Themes are reoccurring issues reported by multiple constituents. They can occur within specific areas or across the entire campus. The chart and table below reflect the top themes for 2023.





## Observations/Recommendations

2022

- Strengthen Employee Recognition Efforts and Initiatives
- Evaluate Relationship Concerns
- Support for Departments and Offices with multiple unfilled positions

2023

- Professional Developments for employees regarding the Abusive Conduct Policy
- Managerial Training regarding conflict resolution and effective communication with employees, and effectively managing and supporting BIPOC employees and BIPOC students
- Continued Retention Efforts by UC Merced Leadership

Given the continued conflict regarding “Evaluative Relationships”, UC Merced would benefit from training regarding the Abusive Conduct Policy. Employees may not know how to raise a concern regarding abusive conduct nor how their complaint would be processed.

There is a continued need for managerial training for faculty and staff. Faculty are especially unprepared to supervise faculty and students. The recent change in GSR has created confusion on the part of the students regarding what their supervising faculty can ask them to do. Increased visibility of GSR’s responsibilities has caused supervisory apprehension. Furthermore, abusive conduct on the part of supervisors is, in some units, tolerated because senior managers do not want to lose a “high performing” supervisor. Tolerating abusive behavior can create and perpetuate a hostile work environment, which in turn impacts retention and employee productivity.

There are also instances where Caucasian faculty and supervisors do not have the skills to effectively provide guidance and feedback to BIPOC supervisees and students because of a fear that they might say or do something that will be considered problematic. Hence, there is a need for training that addresses how faculty and supervisors can both support their students, faculty and supervisees, while also holding them accountable to meet academic or department expectations.

Employee retention also continues to be an issue UCM is dealing with. Of the 172 cases the Ombuds office handled, 43% of those visitors were leaving or considering leaving UCM. Recently, several UC Merced employees have transitioned to UCOP, putting a strain on the UC Merced community. There may need to be a limit as to how many employees from one campus can be hired by UCOP.

Major concerns over Oracle and lack of continuity and interface with other systems. Faculty are especially upset with the impact Oracle is having on their ability to fund research because reporting features currently available are not effective nor efficient. It is possible that more training is needed and more resources to support faculty and staff who use Oracle