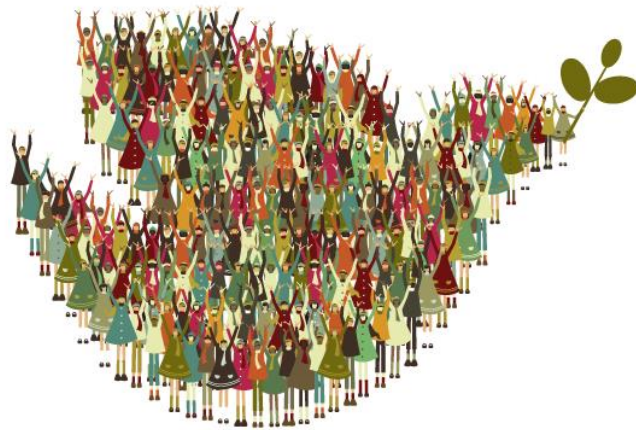


Staff Ombuds Office
The University of Texas at Austin
Annual Report 2012-2013



In 2012-2013, the Staff Ombuds Office handled 162 cases involving 172 visitors. Though there was some overlap in the types of issues raised in the caseloads between 2011-12 and 2012-13, there were some important and substantive differences. This year, we saw a marked increase in more organizational issues in our caseload. Often, these issues had to deal with structural changes in the workplace that led to the staff perceiving an increase in their individual workload. As the University responds its ongoing need to maximize the productivity of the staff, of greatest importance to our mission is to address these concerns in a fair and balanced manner that can help our employees improve their productivity within the very real constraints that The University of Texas at Austin faces.

One example of the more complex and nuanced problems we have dealt with this year over the previous years was one case in which we did a conflict analysis of an entire department. To do this, we met with each person in the department, asking them the same set of questions, anonymously compiling the information, sharing this with the group, and then working through the issues raised.

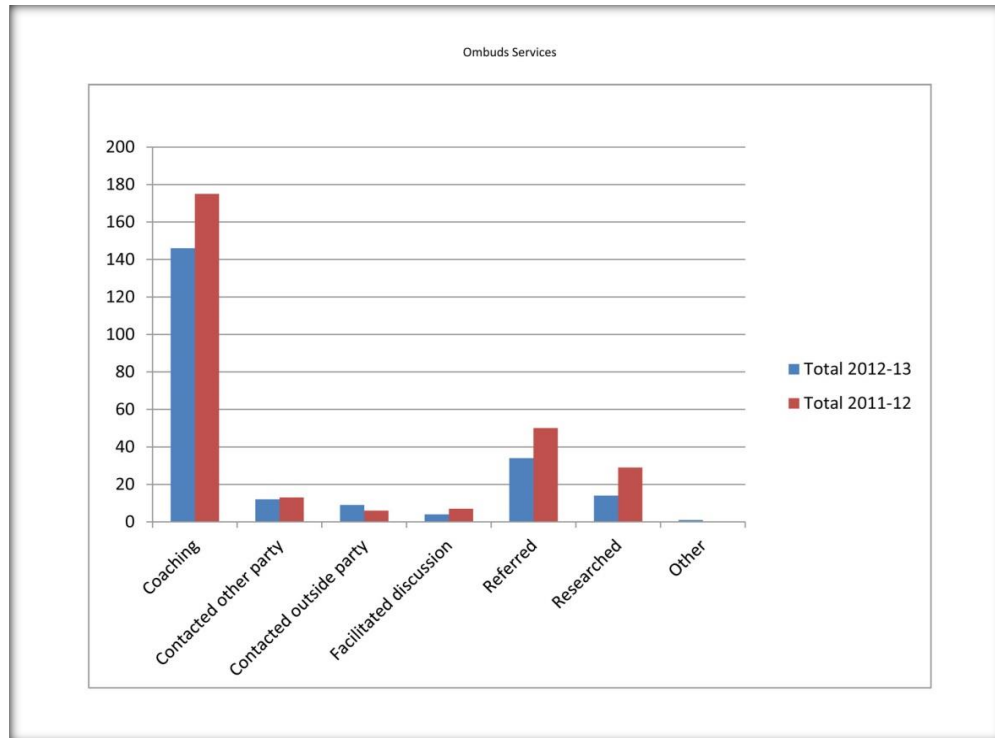
How Does the Staff Ombuds Office Operate?

Principles and practices

The Staff Ombuds Office is based on the principles and practices established by the International Ombudsman Association (IOA). The foundations of these principles are confidentiality, impartiality, informality, and independence. These are described in detail in our 2011-12 report (<http://www.utexas.edu/staff/ombuds/annual-reports>). Exceptions to confidentiality may be made with express permission from the visitor or as required by law or University policy, including if there is a perceived, imminent risk of serious harm and no other mechanism for reporting is available.

Activities

The graph below compares our 2011-12 year to the 2012-13 year. When a visitor comes in, we typically offer more than one service.



Coaching or developing options (88% of the cases) is our most common activity both this year and last. After a person first describes his or her problem, we guide them through their options and typically offer at least one other type of service or intervention. We average two activities per case. After coaching an individual, we usually referred them to other resources. Referral to other resources also remained our second most popular service (23%).

Our third most popular activity this year was a new category called conflict assessment (10%) which usually entails meeting with each individual department and is quite time-intensive. As noted previously, in these cases we spoke with each person in the department confidentially, compiled the responses and used this as feedback for the group to move forward.

Overall, our most common, case-related activities remained the same as last year: initially hearing out people's concerns, helping them see a range of ways to deal with them, and then assisting them in developing strategies either by themselves, or, in some cases, with the help of others including the Staff Ombuds Office.

Much of our work involves conflict resolution. We work with people who are in a conflict and help them work through these conflicts usually by the use of mediation skills. These discussions are informal and may continue on and off for weeks or months.

Training

Over the past year we helped co-sponsor a series of employee engagement talks:

Self-Compassion with Dr. Kristin Neff
Why Good People do Bad Things with Robert A. Prentice, JD
Bolstering Interpersonal Effectiveness with Dr. John A. Daly

We also offered two new workshops:

“Getting the Results You Want”
“Effective Teams: Overcoming Conflict”

We are happy to offer either of these training sessions to any group that may be interested. We also take requests for specific topics (time permitting), and we are developing a new training on civility which will be out shortly.

Patterns and Trends

In our work, we sometimes discover issues that go beyond that single, individual case. When necessary and in ways that protect confidentiality, we may report these to those who can take action. Our annual report is another way we share problematic or helpful trends to public review, discussion and hopefully remediation.

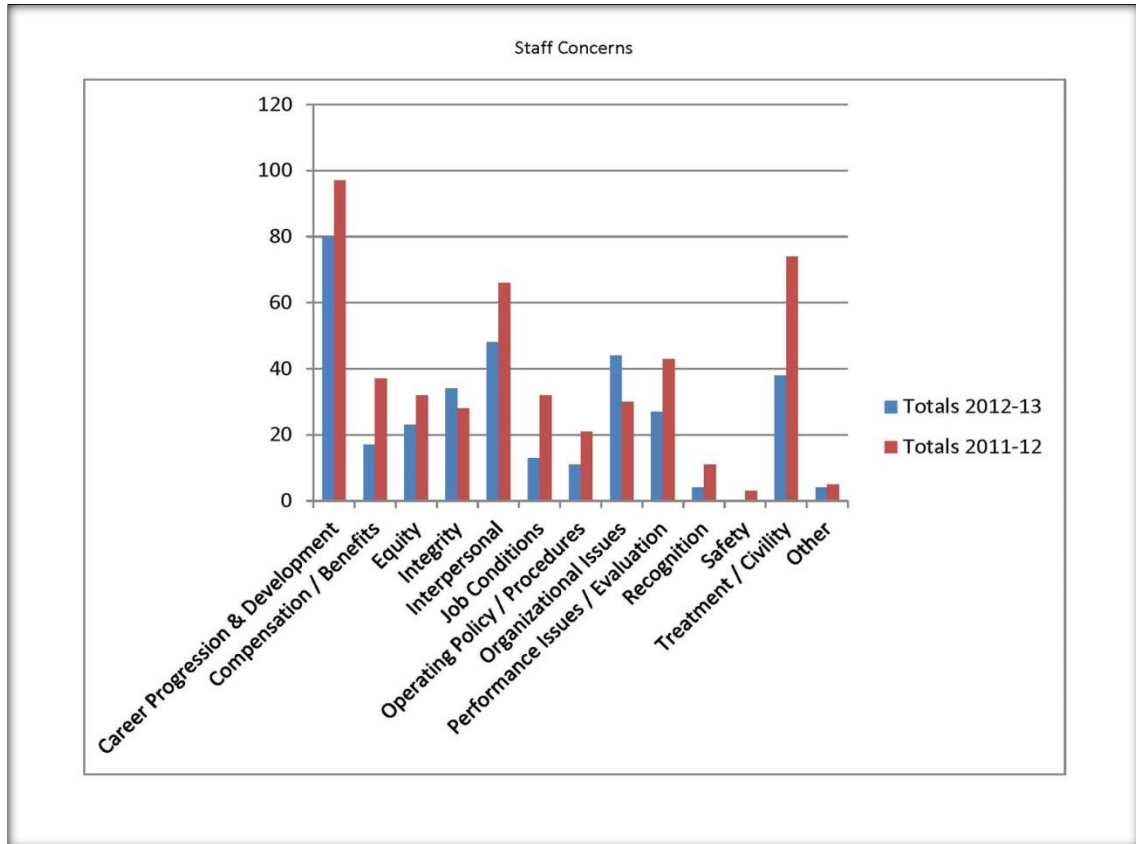
Outreach

We continued to get the word out about the Staff Ombuds Office and the kind of work we do. See **Appendix A- Outreach** for a list of the contacts from this year.

ANALYSIS OF OUR CASES

What Kinds of Issues?

The issues our office most frequently dealt with were the following: Career Progression and Development (49%), Interpersonal (29%), Organizational Issues (26%) and Treatment/Civility (22%). **See Staff Concerns** (below). 67% of the cases were initiated by women.



TRENDS AND ISSUES THAT NEED ATTENTION

The most common issues of this year are:

Career Progression and Development

This was our main issue last year as well. Many visitors come to us when they feel they are stuck in some way in their current position. It may be useful to look into other career pathways and develop “career tracks” or ways for employees to progress. This category also includes visitors who want to have an important conversation with their supervisor about something in the workplace and how it affects them. Generally, these visitors want to be successful at work and are looking for guidance.

Interpersonal

These issues are a result of normal day-to-day interactions and usually have a great deal to do with communication issues. Such skills can be developed and improved in this area and it can help to build rapport across campus. With appropriate skills, people can respond better to relationship challenges and maintain open communication and exchange ideas without unnecessary barriers.

Organizational Issues

This issue broke into the top three this last year. The year before 16% of the cases we had this as one of the issues. The 10% increase could be mirroring the changes that are happening at the university. A sub-issue in this category was increased workload due to organizational change.

Civility

These cases typically involve deep levels of anger and fear, and are among the most difficult problems to resolve. The rules for dealing with such behavior already exist. There needs to be more vigilant enforcement, especially at the department and colleague level and more willingness for others to become involved. Incivility and bullying should be addressed as an organizational problem. Often people act in negative ways because no one around them has seriously called this behavior into question. Sometimes unchallenged behavior becomes “the way things are.” Others, especially those with little power, adjust by avoiding any encounters with the bully, and this often stops them from effectively participating in workplace decisions. Such responses are understandable, but they perpetuate and encourage bad behavior and increase the chances that this becomes an “acceptable” way to behave in the workplace. Thus, anger, withdrawal and resentment become part of the employment culture. A clear and sustained commitment by all levels of administration must be implemented to change this culture.

Acknowledgements

We want to thank all the individuals who helped us in the past year.

It makes an enormous difference to our office to have people willing to help bring about fair solutions to problems. We also want to thank those who have asked the Staff Ombuds Office to do outreach and training. We know that your time is a very precious commodity. We appreciate your willingness to invest some of that valuable time with us.

Finally we want to thank the, staff who have come to us for assistance. It has been especially gratifying to discover how many of you want our office to help you develop the tools so that in the future you can help yourselves and your colleagues.

Respectfully submitted,

Jennifer Graf Sims, Staff Ombuds

Mike McKinley, Administrative Associate

August 27, 2013

Appendix A - OUTREACH

(Unless otherwise noted, Ombuds Office met with listed groups)

40 Acres of Wellness Scavenger Hunt
Al Aklawayn University, Morocco with Said Nouamani (in Austin)
Annual Report sent to all Deans and members of VP Council
Asian/Asian American Faculty & Staff Association
Black Faculty & Staff Association – two presentations
Campus Planning and Facilities Management, New Employee Information Session – two presentations
College of Communication
College of Education
College of Fine Arts
Deans Council – presentation
Dell Pediatric Research Institute – hosted table
Division of Diversity & Community Engagement – email to listserv
Division of Housing and Food Service Wellness Fair – participant
Facilities Holiday Party – participant
Graduate Studies
Health and Lifestyle Expo – hosted table
HFSA Holiday Assistance – committee participant
iForty
Institute for Cellular & Molecular Biology – email to listserv, flyers & brochures
Martin Luther King, Jr. Luncheon – participant
McCombs School of Business Town Hall Staff Awards – presentation
New Administrators Workshop – two presentations
Orange Santa – participant
Parking and Transportation – garage flyers
Population Research Center Health & Lifestyle Expo – hosted table
Pride & Equity Faculty & Staff Association – article in October newsletter
School of Business
School of Engineering
School of Information
School of Public Affairs
School of Undergraduate Studies – presentation
Strategic Workforce Solutions – University Resources pamphlet
Student Diversity Initiatives – presentation
Threat Assessment Meeting
Town Meeting – presentation
UT Libraries – presentation
UT Project on Conflict Resolution – presentation
UT Shuttle Bus – placard advertising
UT Staff Council – two presentations
VP Council Meeting