

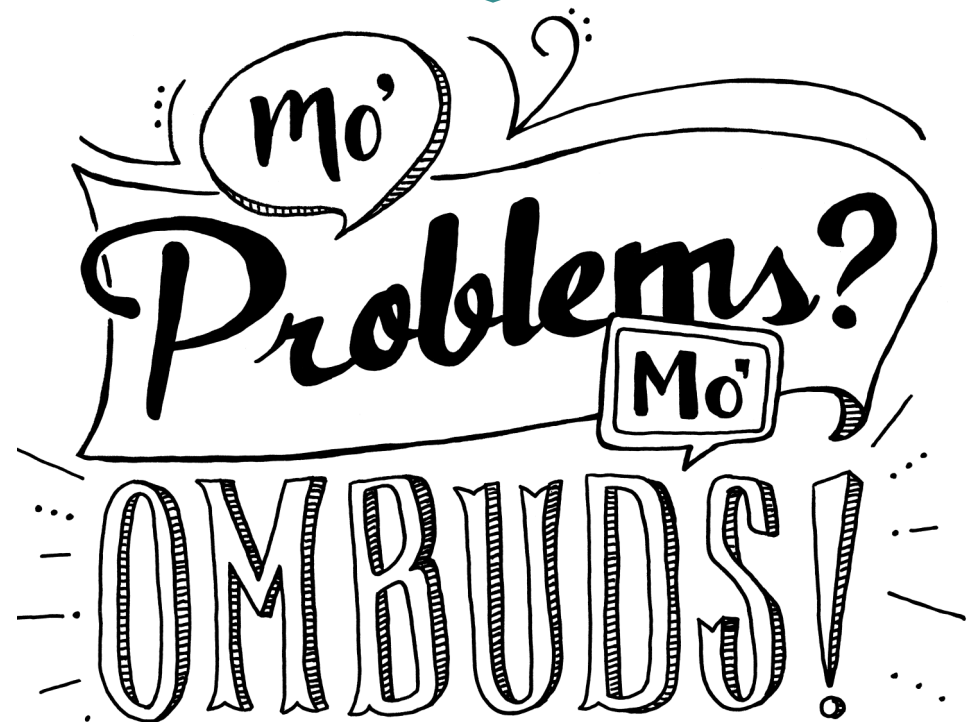
The University of Texas at Austin
Office of the Student Ombuds

Impact Report

2014-2015



The University of Texas at Austin
Office of the Student Ombuds



MISSION

The Office of the Student Ombuds (OSO) provides an impartial and confidential environment for students to safely voice concerns related to life at The University of Texas at Austin. The OSO functions in an independent and informal manner to provide information and help students discover options for prompt and effective problem solving and conflict resolution.

CORE PRINCIPLES

Our office strives to uphold the International Ombudsman Association Ethical Principles as appropriate.

Confidentiality *In order to create a safe place to voice concerns, evaluate issues, and generate options, the Ombuds maintains privacy and holds all communications with those seeking assistance in strict confidence unless given permission to do so and to the extent permitted by law and University policy.*

Impartiality *As an appointed neutral third-party, the Student Ombuds does not side with any individual, the University, or other parties involved.*

Independence *The Student Ombuds is independent in structure, function, and appearance to the highest degree possible within the University.*

Informality *The Student Ombuds, as an informal resource, does not participate in any formal adjudicative procedure related to concerns. However, the Ombuds does assist students in accessing formal procedures to help resolve concerns.*

I am happy to share with you the Annual Report for the 2014-15 Academic Year from the Office of the Student Ombuds (OSO) at The University of Texas at Austin. Our office is honored to serve the students at UT and other community members as a safe and confidential resource to address any dilemma students may be facing at the University.

Our office interacted with all levels of students and all UT colleges, in addition to many varying faculty members and administrators. Throughout the year, **nearly 1,900 students** called or visited our office.

In line with our professional ethical principles, the OSO delivers independent, impartial, informal, and confidential assistance to students and other visitors. The OSO is different from all other resources available to UT students. The OSO complements, but does not replace or compete with any other resource in the University. Students are reminded our office is first stop to find informal and effective means to address their concerns.

With the OSO, students explore available resources and **prepare a plan of action** to address their concerns and best meet their needs. All this is done confidentially with the help of an OSO staff member as a neutral sounding board to evaluate all options.

To the hundreds who have already worked with the OSO, we **thank you for putting your trust in us**. To those we have not yet met or served, we want to remind you we are here for you. If a situation arises and you think you could use **confidential assistance**, I encourage you to give us a call.

Best regards,



BRITTANY LINTON
Student Ombuds



WHY

DO STUDENTS GO TO THE OSO?

Students contact the Ombuds to:

► **Talk openly** about a university related problem without it affecting their role on campus

► **Become informed** about policies, procedures, and resources

► **Explore options** with safe sounding board

► **Strategize** a plan of action

► **Clarify** UT structures and processes

► **Gain insight** from a neutral resource on how to view and resolve their problem

I feel blindsided!
How did this even happen?

This isn't going as expected. What do I do now?

Is my professor allowed to do this?

Is there anything left that I can do?

I need someone on campus to listen and help...

WHO

SEEKS SERVICE AT THE OSO?

All UT students are eligible for OSO services...

starting with our first-year undergrads...



Freshman 7%	Sophomore 14%	Junior 20%	Senior 24%
Masters 11%	Doctoral 16%	Staff/Faculty 2%	Alumni/Other 6%

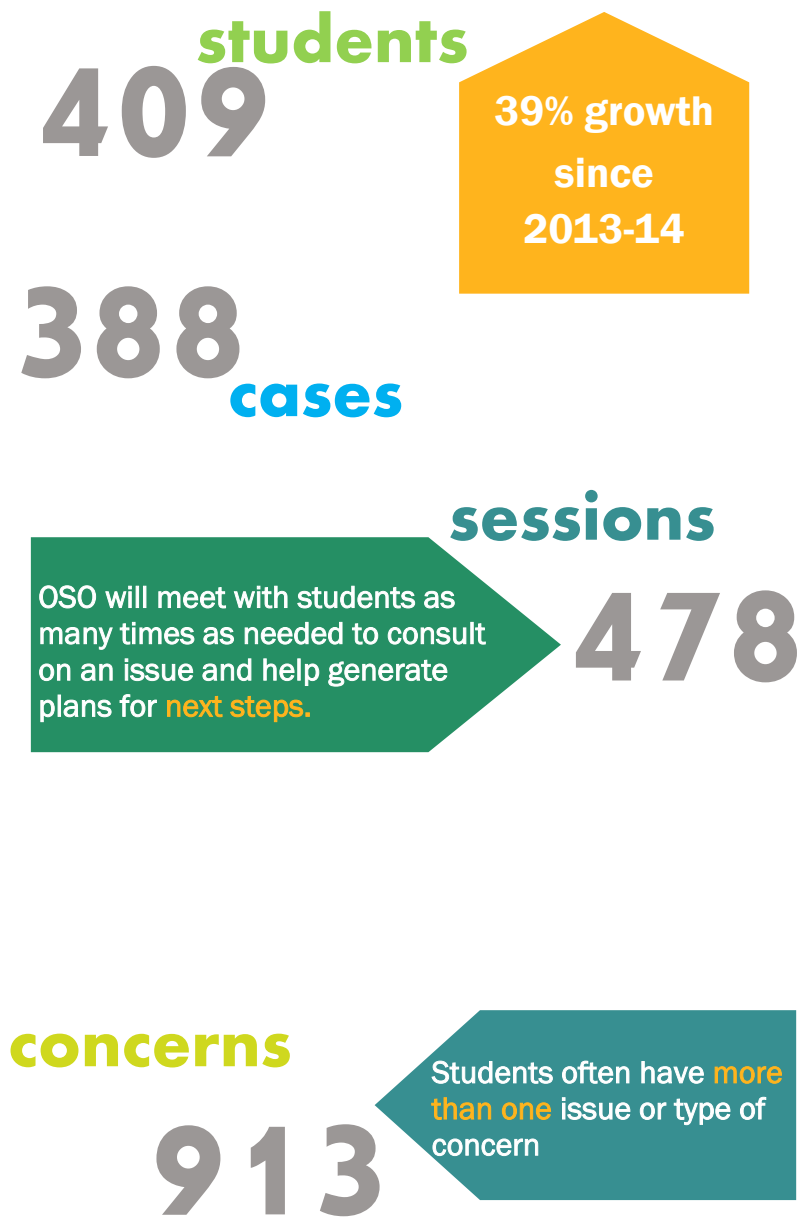
409 students with cases in 2014-15

...to our long-term graduate and professional students.

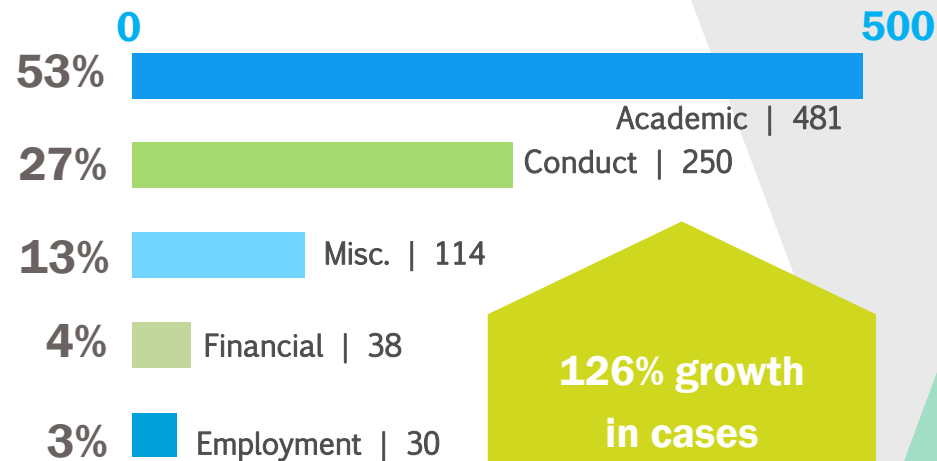
[and everyone in between]

OSO BY THE NUMBERS

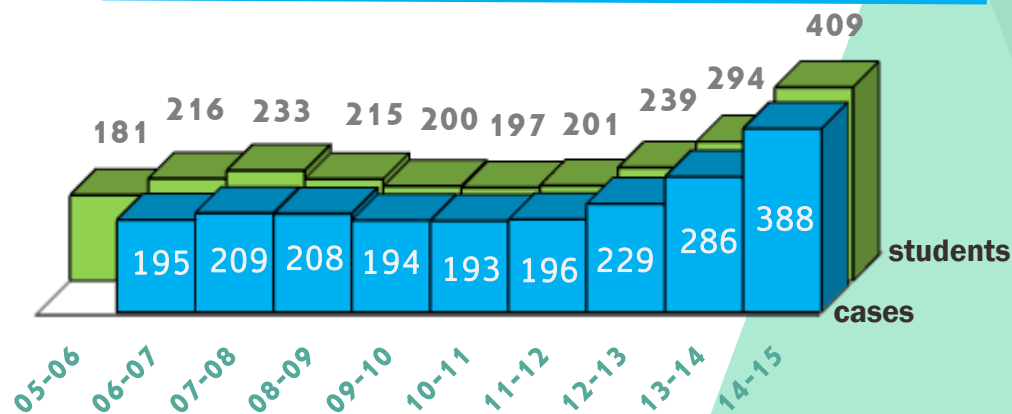
We help students with University concerns.



Concerns by category



Students served in reported cases | 2005-2015



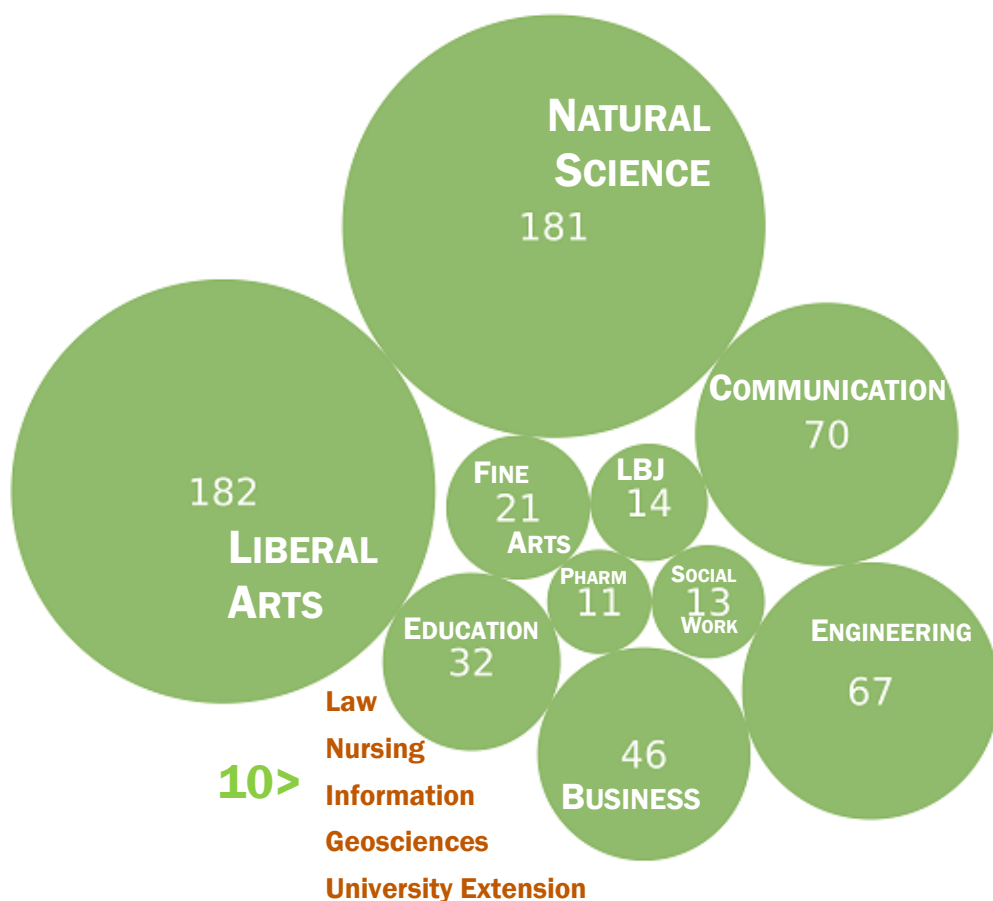
We've been serving students since

1968

WHERE DO STUDENT

662

concerns related to academic colleges.



10>

84
student concerns related
to university departments.

CONCERNS ARISE?

CSS	DDCE	DSA	P	DoS
Parking & Transportation (3)	Services for Students with Disabilities (8)	Rec Sports (7)	Student Financial Services (12)	Student Judicial Services (19)
University Police (2)	Office of Institutional Equity (1)	Housing & Food Services (6)	Registrar (2)	University Unions (4)
		Texas Student Publications (1)	International Student & Scholar Services (2)	Title IX Office (2)
		University Health Services (1)	Admissions (1)	Other (SES, SVS, Greek, etc) (2)
		Student Insurance (1)		

Campus Safety & Security (CSS)



Division of Diversity & Community Engagement (DDCE)



Division of Student Affairs (DSA)



Units of the Provost (P)



Office of the Dean of Students (DoS)*



Note: OSO managed 3 miscellaneous department concerns not shown on the graph.

*Given the number of offices the Dean of Students manages, it is classified separately from the Divisions of Student Affairs in OSO data management.

PROVIDING STUDENT FEEDBACK TO UNIVERSITY LEADERSHIP

**I don't want
this problem to
happen to other students.**

The OSO communicates concerns to various leadership structures throughout the University. To protect the confidentiality of students, upward feedback occurs

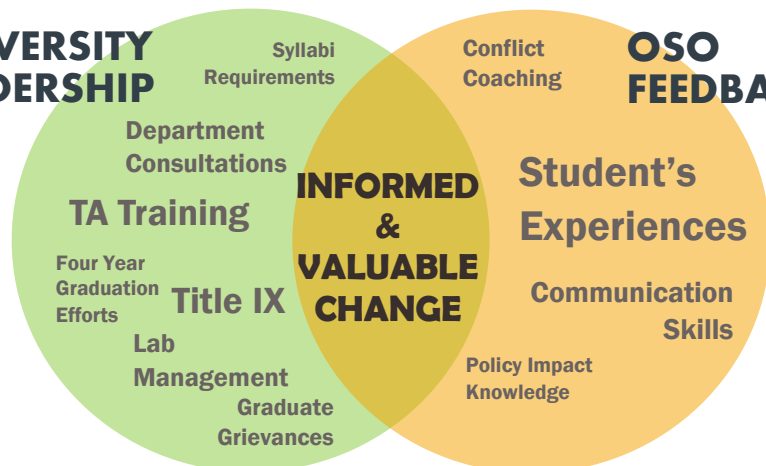
upward
feedback

Reporting trends to University leadership provides:

- Students to safely voice their opinions through structured discussions
- Filtered feedback to leadership to preserve confidentiality
- Closer look at institutional issues or problem areas
- Candid information on complex concerns

UNIVERSITY LEADERSHIP

OSO FEEDBACK



What's my next step?

OMBUDS' SERVICES

When a student comes to the OSO, staff typically support the case in

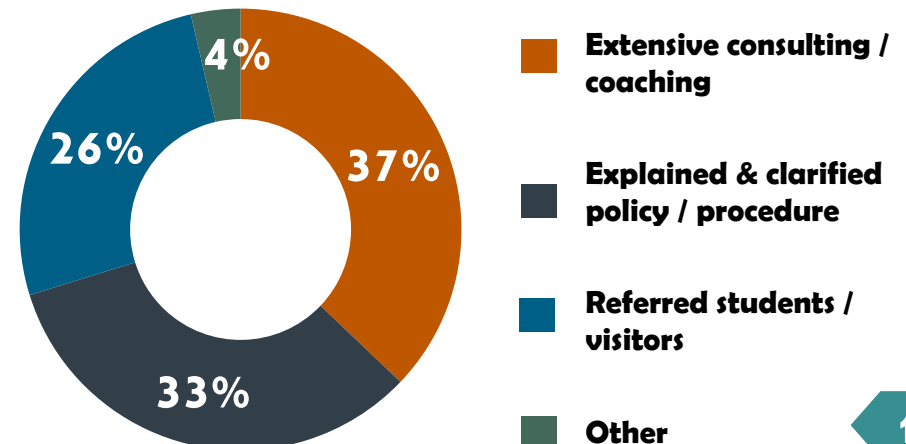
three or four different ways depending on the issues at hand:

- 1) **coaching and consulting**, including offering tips for communication skills
- 2) **explaining policies** and clarifying University procedures
- 3) **providing referrals** and bridging students to other University resources.

Other functions include contacting outside parties and researching creative solutions for more complex concerns. A fraction (0.6%) of other services included systemic reporting or taking action for a student's safety.

2161
actions

OSO'S PRIMARY SERVICES



Grade Disputes

When students receive final grades they think are unfair, options can seem limited. There may be communication breakdowns between professors and students, different perceptions of expectations, or basic human error. OSO can describe all the options for students who want to contest their grades.

Graduate Advising Issues

Graduate students often have complicated journeys on the path to their professional degrees. Graduate students are expected to be more independent than undergraduates, while their roles in the institution's hierarchy are not always clear. When a conflict arises between a graduate student and their advisor or dissertation committee, it can lead to significant stress for the student. OSO helps graduate students understand grad-school culture and navigate through murky situations with their critical professional relationships.

Academic Integrity

UT Austin takes academic integrity violations very seriously. When students are suspected of scholastic dishonesty, their stress levels can escalate quickly. OSO can clarify the institutional process around academic integrity issues and explain the steps involved in accepting or disputing a sanction.

Conduct Concerns

Students may not always realize how their conduct outside of the classroom affects their academic standing at UT. When trouble strikes on or off campus, disciplinary action may disrupt a student's progress toward graduation. OSO can consult with students when allegations are made and illuminate appropriate options so students can succeed.

Interpersonal Conflicts

While UT tries to foster a communicative and respectful environment for all students, staff, faculty and visitors, individuals don't always see eye to eye. Sometimes conflicts are based in honest misunderstandings, and other times the root of the problem is more subversive. Because OSO is informal, the office can troubleshoot with students and help them find solutions to their problems.

Enrollment

Being enrolled at The University of Texas is a huge accomplishment for students, but the path to graduation is not always smooth. Whether it's an unexpected health concern, family crisis, academic challenge, or other personal reason, enrollment status sometimes needs to change. Students can talk to the OSO to figure out how to change their course load and what resources are available to help them in the process.

COMPLEX BUT

While the OSO is committed to maintaining the confidentiality of actual cases...

COMMONPLACE

... fictional scenarios such as these demonstrate the depth of concerns students bring to the office.

Concern

Evan signed into iClicker for one of his classes as he was in route to class. Unfortunately, he was unable to attend class that day. His professor conducted a physical scantron check of attendance in order to compare it to the students that signed into iClicker. Evan decided to go talk to the Ombuds once he received an email from his professor informing him that she will be reporting his attendance discrepancy to Student Judicial Services for Academic Dishonesty. Evan was worried and knew that OSO was a place he could go to get answers about academic dishonesty policies and learn more about SJS.

Ombuds Response

The Ombuds listened closely to Evan's concerns and answered his questions related to the University's policies on academic dishonesty. The Ombuds also explained in detail the role of SJS as well as SJS's process and what options and rights Evan had. Evan went into his meeting with SJS with confidence and less anxiety because he knew what to expect. Evan clearly and calmly explained his side of the story in the meeting thanks to the professional communication skills he learned while in the Ombuds office.

Concern

Misha thought she was one year away from completing her doctoral degree. When Misha spoke to her Faculty Advisor, she was told that, she could not schedule her dissertation proposal until she finished two additional projects for her research lab which would take at least another year. Misha felt powerless and was unsure of her options so she came to the Ombuds office. She wanted to stand up for herself with her advisor but was uncertain about navigating the political waters of her program.

Concern

Liam felt he had a solid relationship with his professor and was comfortable debating with the professor in class. On one occasion, the professor was not as responsive to Liam's challenges and a heated argument ensued. The professor ended up pulling Liam's chair out from under him and told Liam to leave his classroom. Liam was very concerned and confused; he had never encountered this with a professor before so he came to the Ombuds office.

Ombuds Response

Relationships with faculty can be difficult to navigate. The Ombuds informed Liam of the University's policies around conduct for faculty and students and referred Liam to UT resources that would assist with the compliance and safety of both parties. Liam also expressed that he was unsure if he should continue in that class. The Ombuds then educated Liam of the University's drop policies if he no longer wanted to continue in that class and ways in which he could professionally pursue a conversation with the professor about continuing in his class or continuing with a different professor for the remainder of the semester.

Ombuds Response

The Ombuds helped Misha recognize what strengths and leverage points she had in this situation. Misha and the Ombuds identified some allies that she had in the department who she could reach out to if challenges continued with her current advisor. Misha stated that she had a strong relationship with another advisor who would be willing to take her on as a student and would help her graduate on time. The Ombuds helped Misha role play the conversation she would have with her current advisor in order to keep a working relationship with them and transition in a civil manner.

BUILDING CONNECTIONS...

Outreach

The OSO takes time every year to connect with students, faculty, and administrators across the campus. In the past year, the Ombuds amplified its services across campus:

25

Presentations on OSO services (up from 8)

13

Resource Fairs (up from 6)

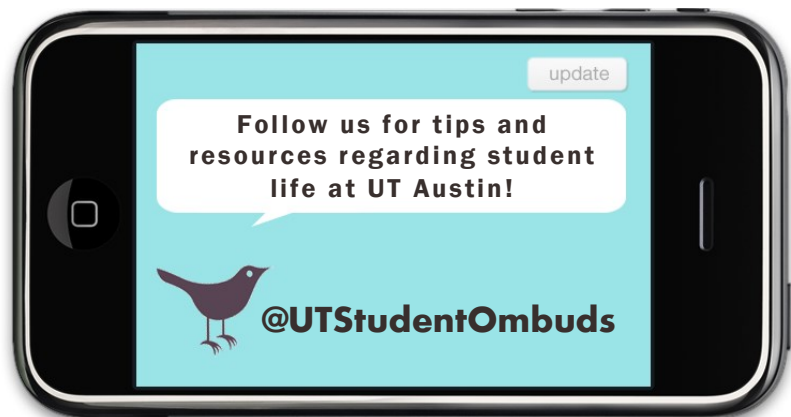
8

Workshops for students to learn conflict resolution skills (up from 4)

[**Contact OSO to request a workshop tailored for your student groups' needs**]

Improved connectivity

The OSO's Twitter account flourished in its second year of operation, connecting UT resources and tips with more students and community members. By the end of May 2015, OSO had **182 followers** and had disseminated **270 tweets**.

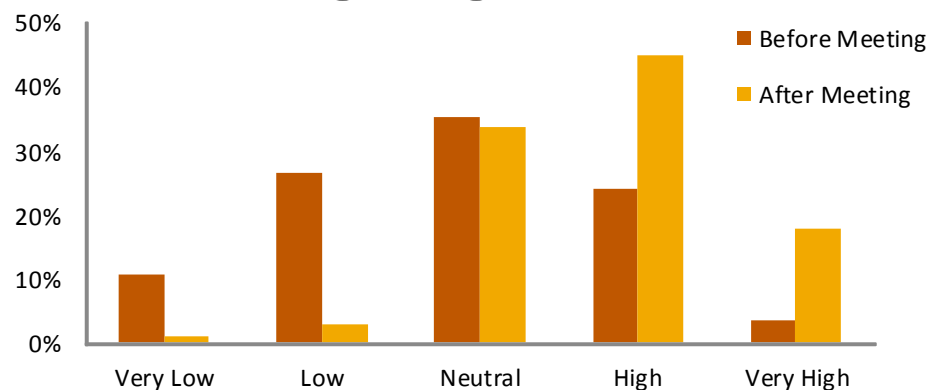


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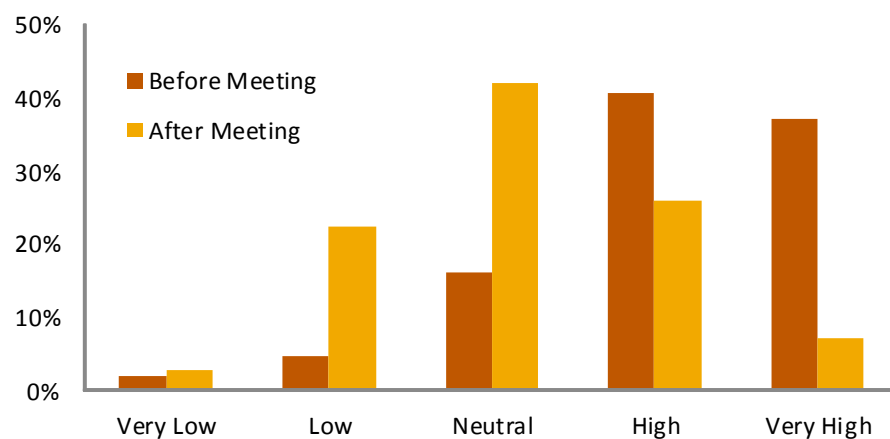
...AND MAKING AN IMPACT

In a post-meeting survey starting in Spring 2015, students were asked how their **levels of confidence and stress** changed based on their interaction with the Ombuds. By and large, students' confidence regarding their concern increased, while their stress levels decreased.

Level of Students' Confidence Regarding Concern



Level of Students' Stress Regarding Concerns



16

WHAT STUDENTS SAY AFTER A MEETING...

Extremely knowledgeable. The OSO staff helped me navigate my way through the university system.

I felt very at ease and comfortable speaking with the Ombuds. An excellent source for the next steps that I need to take in the process.

Anyone who has a grievance should speak with the Ombuds because their knowledge and compassion surpassed any person I met with about the matter.

I really REALLY appreciated your help. It was extremely helpful, and everything went better than I even planned!

I spoke up and now have the support of my advisors to continue my program. I'm finally out of the rough spot. For that, thank you so much!

I didn't get everything I'd hoped for. But I got something and felt better about talking it through at least and getting it off my chest! I felt understood.

2014-15 OSO Staff:

Brittany Linton
Principal Ombudsperson & Office Director

Vivian Wilbon
Administrative Associate

Lawrence Crockett
Graduate Assistant - Assistant Ombuds

Tim Long
Graduate Assistant - Assistant Ombuds

Contact information:

Call: 512-471-3825 **Email (not confidential):** StudentOmbuds@austin.utexas.edu

Visit:
Student Services Building (SSB)
100 West Dean Keeton, Austin, TX 78712
Ground Floor G1.404

Connect:
   @UTStudentOmbuds
www.utexas.edu/students/ombuds

OSO encourages students to contact the office if you would like support around any University-related concern. Our trained staff will walk you through your options, explain relevant policies, and help you build confidence in even the most complex and convoluted situations.