

Staff Ombuds Office
The University of Texas at Austin
Annual Report 2011-2012



I. ABOUT THE UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS AT AUSTIN STAFF OMBUDS OFFICE

A Brief History

The UT Austin Staff Ombuds Office opened July 2011 in Bridegeway 300. During the first months, the office had to undertake three crucial tasks simultaneously. The most important was to provide services to right away. The second was to set up the office and develop procedures and practices that guaranteed the efficiency and integrity of our work. The third was to get the word out about what we did and let staff know that we were open for business. On March 8, 2012, we held our grand opening in our permanent space in Walter Webb Hall.

In our first year of operations, we dealt with a wide variety of issues from many different sectors of the Austin campus. As we worked on our individual cases, we concurrently established an office charter, clarified Office activities regarding the formal grievance procedures, and implemented security measures to enhance confidentiality. In addition, we developed informational materials including a brochure and a web site. We also participated in training and conferences to further develop our skills and became part of the active information network of ombuds at other institutions, especially within Texas.

Our first year activities included a rigorous, ongoing evaluation of our day-to-day work as we honed our services based on a growing store of experience with the multitude of issues that were brought to our office and identified through our reflective practice.

How Does the Staff Ombuds Office Operate?

Our principles and practices

The Staff Ombuds Office follows the principles and practices established by the International Ombudsman Association (IOA). The foundations of these principles are confidentiality, impartiality, informality, and independence. We do not identify or discuss a visitor's particular concerns with anyone without that visitor's permission. The only exception occurs when we believe that disclosure is necessary to address an imminent risk of serious harm. We do not advocate on behalf of one party. Our job is to advocate for a fair process, to consider the rights and concerns of all parties involved, and not to take sides. The Ombuds is an independent office. Although the Ombuds is administratively housed within the President's Office, the Office does not provide the President, or anyone else, with personally identifying information concerning any visitor to our office unless the visitor requests it and we agree to do so. Our office is also an informal one. If an individual wishes to put the university on notice for something, our office is not the place to do so but we can direct them to the place to do so.

Our process

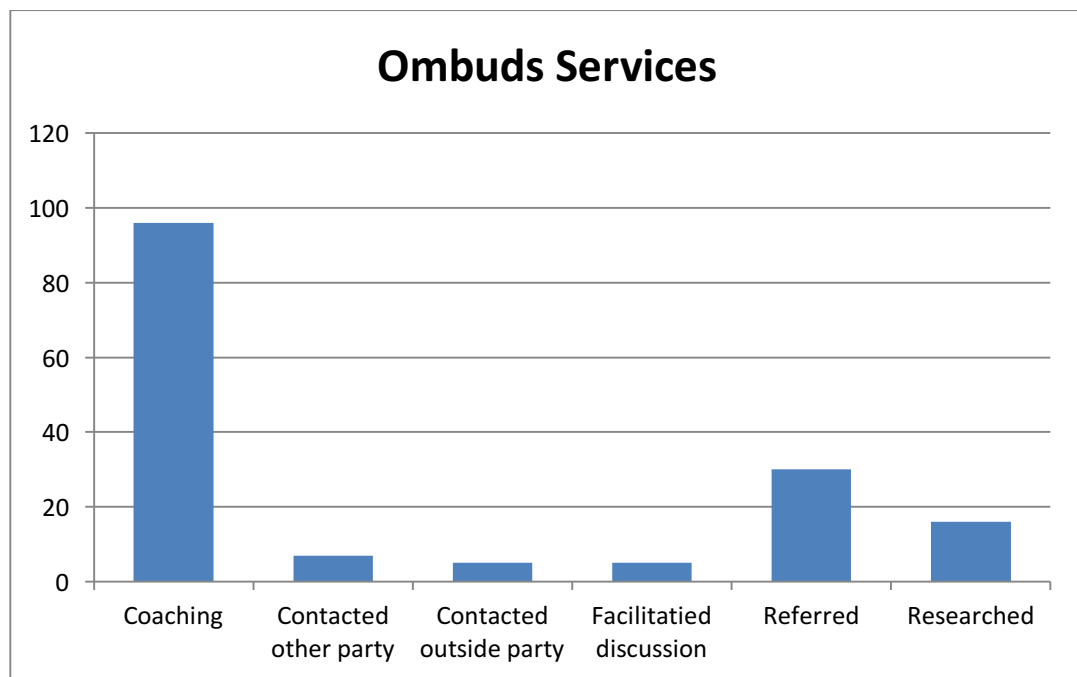
When a person comes to our office or calls us (ombuds practice is to call these people "visitors") we listen in an open, patient, and non-evaluative way. Our job is to make sure that people using our office have a chance to express their concerns fully. These conversations are, of course, confidential. Our work depends on our office being a safe place to talk.

The Staff Ombuds helps visitors solve problems that range from overcoming simple, practical difficulties to complex, longstanding conflicts involving groups of people. What happens after we have heard the visitor speak about his or her issues varies a great deal.

Sometimes people who come to see us decide that having a chance to tell their stories are enough. Typically, however, visitors want help in figuring out how to resolve their issues.

To help resolve their issues, the Office moves through the process of helping visitors to clarify their thinking and to identify their options. People often decide to pursue their options on their own after we help them to clarify what these options are. Sometimes the Office assists visitors by helping them develop the skills and confidence necessary for this next step. At other times the Office gets directly involved in helping individuals or groups work out their differences through, for example, shuttle diplomacy, joint meetings or facilitations. We also serve people by referring them to other UT Austin resources and outside resources who can best address their concerns.

During our first year we had 187 visitors from 72 departments on campus. Each case on average involves more than one issue raised by the visitor and more than one kind of service provided by the Staff Ombuds Office. **Ombuds Services** (below) offers a useful picture of our work.



These three services make up the overwhelming proportion of what we do: coaching (in 96% of the cases), referring visitors to other resources (29%), and researching (15%).

Typically we provide each with a number of services. Here are some examples of how our various services are used at once. After we help visitors clarify their thinking and identify their available options, visitors may decide to take the next step by themselves but want the Office to help them hone their interpersonal and communication skills to do it effectively. On average, each case involves over two of these Ombuds services.

What else do we do?

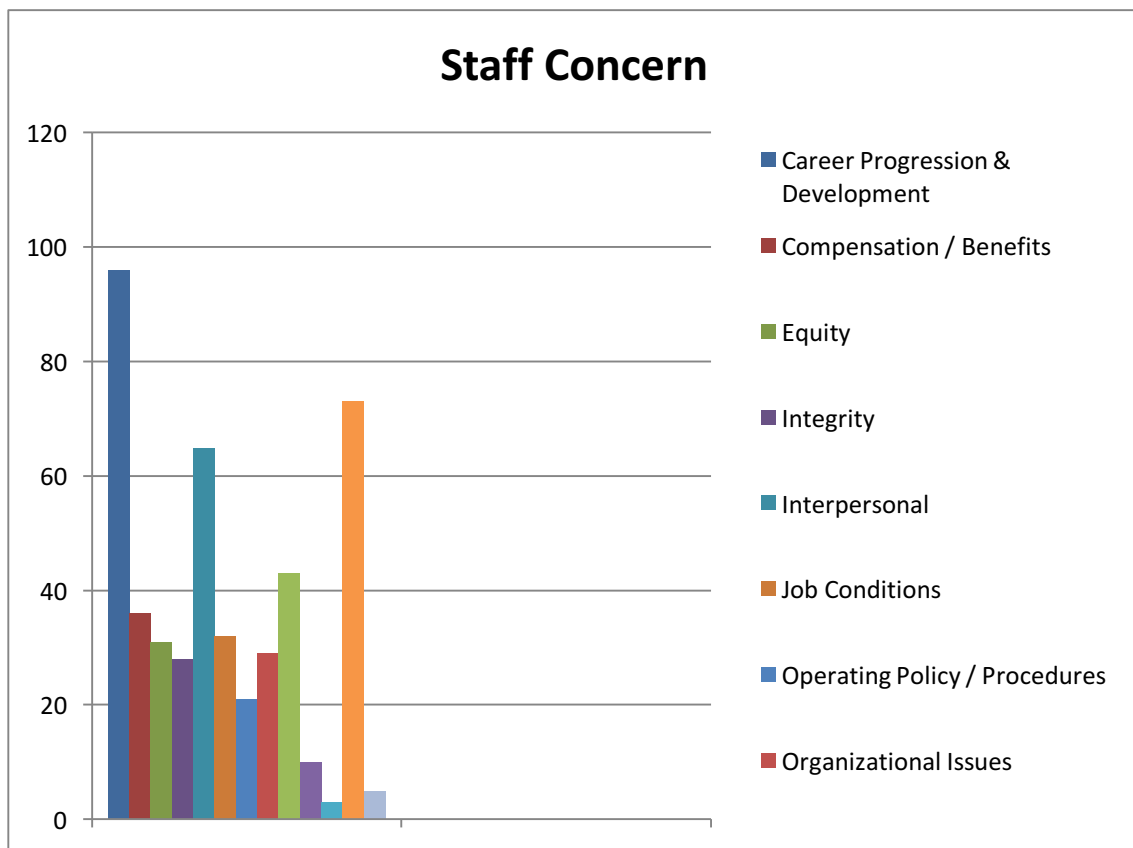
Trends: Through our wide-ranging casework, the Office is in a unique position to observe problematic trends and systemic issues at UT Austin that may need to be addressed. Surfacing these issues is one of the duties of an organizational ombuds. Our Office confers with administrators concerning these issues, as appropriate. This annual report is another way of surfacing these concerns.

Outreach: Outreach is an important part of any ombuds office. It is particularly important for a new office like ours. Getting the message out is challenging because we serve a diverse non-centralized community with new members entering and exiting the system on a regular basis. During our initial year we made over 50 formal and informal outreach presentations to staff and other groups. See **Appendix A-Outreach**.

II. ANALYSIS OF OUR CASES

What Kinds of Issues?

The issues our office most dealt with were the following Career Progression and Development (51%), Treatment/Civility (39%) and Interpersonal (34%). See **Staff Concern** (below). At least 47% of cases were initiated by non-supervisor employees- 25 % of our cases were initiated by supervisory employees. 64% of the cases were initiated by women.



III. TRENDS AND ISSUES THAT NEED ATTENTION

With only one year of data, it is hard to see trends. However, the three most common issues of this year are:

Career Progression and Development

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 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.

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 issue. Often people act in nasty 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 the behavior an acceptable way of doing business. This anger, withdrawal and resentment become part of the culture. A clear and sustained commitment by all levels of administration can help change this culture.

Interpersonal

These issues are a result of normal day to day interactions and usually have much to do with communication issues. Skills can be built 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.

IV. FUTURE DIRECTIONS FOR THE STAFF OMBUDS OMBUDS

Increasing our capacity to work with groups or units that are experiencing organizational challenges

Our goal is to offer a full range of resources necessary to handle the individual problems, do a comprehensive conflict analyses of the individual’s organization, and carry out the problem-solving, dispute resolution, and training essential to get the organization on the right track.

Training and workshops:

In the past year we helped cosponsor a series of employee engagement talks:

Smart Thinking with Dr. Art Markman

Igniting Creativity & Innovation with Liz Aebersol

Managing Change at Work with Dr. Michael Hasler

This fall we will offer a workshop entitled “Getting What You Want”.

Acknowledgement: We want to acknowledge the many people with whom we worked collaboratively on issues during our first year. The number and skills of problems-solvers at The University of Texas at Austin has impressed us. Some are in highly visible positions, and some not. We are especially thankful for those of you who have been willing to go beyond the individual problem at hand and explore the broader, organizational-level ways to improve communication and trust. You have made our job easier and the results more effective. Thanks.

Appendix A - OUTREACH

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

Asian/Asian American Faculty & Staff Assoc.
Assoc. for Professionals in Academic Affairs
Athletics - brochures
Black Faculty & Staff Association
Bureau of Economic Geology off campus locations - emails
 Houston Research Center , Midland Research Center,
 Devine Geophysical Test Site
Butler School of Music –listserv
Campus Club
Campus Safety & Security
CBA – McCombs School Of Business – plasma screen
Center for Electromagnetics (PRC) – listserv, brochures
Center for Electromagnetics listserv, brochures
Center for Transportation Research, Engineering - email
Center for Women’s Studies – email
College of Fine Arts – Staff Council Summer Breakfast Taco Event
College of Liberal Arts - listserv
Course Scheduler Network - listserv
Daily Texan - article
Dean of Students Staff Mgt Team Meeting
Division of Diversity - newsletter
Environmental Health and Safety
Facilities Services and Project Management and Construction Services
 Personnel Policy Resource Team
Facilities Services Management Team
Facilities Services shop meetings
Facilities Svcs Day Crew meeting
Facilities Svcs Night Crew meeting
Facilities Svcs PRC Crew brown bag meeting
Food Service
Food Service Team Day Carnival
Gender and Sexuality office
Graduate Coordinator Network –listserv
Graduate School of Business – plasma screen
Harry Ransom Center - listserv
Hispanic Faculty/ Staff Assoc.
Hogg Foundation - email
HOT (Hearts of Texas) Campaign - email
Housing & Food Services
HR Forum
iForty

International Office – email, brochures
ITS Leadership
Longhorn Life, insert of Daily Texan - interview
Marine Science Library – brochures, flyers
McDonald Observatory - email
NEWO (New Employee Orientation) – advertisement
Office of Admissions off campus locations
 Dallas, East Texas (in Longview), El Paso, Houston, New York City,
 Rio Grande Valley (in Harlingen), West Texas (in Lubbock)
Office of Institutional Equity
Office of the Dean of Students - listserv
Open House, all day in WWH
Parking garages – advertisement
Pickle Research Campus
Police Supervisors
Pride & Equity Faculty & Staff Association
Rec Sports - intranet
Registrar’s Office, CONNECT
Safety Council Day Meeting
Safety Council Night Meeting
School of Nursing - email
School of Social Work
Student Affairs Council on Enrollment Services – listserv
Student Deans Committee – listserv
Texas Exes - email
Town Meeting
Undergrad Program Office
University Communications Group
University Health Services
University Teaching Center – plasma screen
University Unions – plasma screens
UT Academic Counselors Assoc., aka Academic Advisors
UT Austin website - Staff Portal, Quick Links
UT Libraries
UT Shuttle Buses – advertisement
UT Staff Council
UT Staff Council Executive Committee members
UT Staff Toastmasters - email
Utilities & Energy Management
West Pickle Research Campus