



The University of Texas at Austin



Staff Ombuds Office

Annual Report 2013-2014

Dear Fellow Employees,

We are happy to share with you the Third Annual Report of the Staff Ombuds Office at the University of Texas at Austin. We are honored to continue serving you and your colleagues as a safe and confidential resource to address any concern you may face in the workplace. This report provides information about the workplace issues of employees as well as trends for the campus to consider. The Staff Ombuds Office views each employee interaction as an opportunity to increase organizational effectiveness.

By the end of our third year, we assisted more than 500 employees with a variety of concerns and questions. In our meetings, we explore available resources and prepare a plan of action to address employee issues. All this is done confidentially with the help of the Ombuds as a neutral sounding board and guide.

To the hundreds who have already worked with the Staff Ombuds Office, 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 some confidential assistance, please reach out to us. We are here to help. It is in this spirit of creative problem solving that the Staff Ombuds Office provides its 2013-2014 Report and looks forward to facilitating future organizational advancements.

Best regards,



Jen G. Sims
STAFF OMBUDS



Jeremy Roye
STAFF OMBUDS COORDINATOR



In Support of the Ombuds Function



Essential to any effective governance structure is timely, unfiltered and effective resolution of problematic behavior. The Ombuds Office has the potential to help UT:

- Reduce time and costs in conflict resolution
- Attract and retain talent
- Protect its reputation
- Promote trust and an ethical work environment
- Eliminate barriers to a productive and engaged workforce
- Reduce absenteeism and health claims
- Provide another resource where people have a chance to be heard

Research into other organizations that have Ombuds programs found that employees observe or experience actions they know are inappropriate but have chosen not to do anything about it. A recent Ethics Resource Center Study (2011) found that 22% of the employees reported that they had observed misconduct in their organizations and did not report it. Of those who did not report it, 70% thought no action would be taken, 57% feared their report would not be kept confidential, 41% feared retaliation, and 16% said they did not know who to contact.

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The Ombuds function helps eliminate the concerns about confidentiality and retribution and ensures that concerns get addressed.

Staff Ombuds Office Overview

Our 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. We do not identify or discuss a visitor's particular concerns with anyone without that visitor's permission. Exceptions to confidentiality may be made with 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. 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 and complements existing formal resources such as Human Resources.

Our Process

The Staff Ombuds helps visitors solve problems that range from overcoming simple, practical difficulties to complex, longstanding conflicts involving groups of people. 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. 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.

We then help them clarify thinking and identify options. Visitors often chose to pursue options on their own at this point. Sometimes the Office assists visitors to 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 that can best address their concerns.

Ombuds Services

This year, we served 120 visitors. When a visitor comes to us, we usually offer more than one service. Coaching is our most common activity. Referring and researching follow behind as our most utilized service. Overall, our most common case related activities remained the same as previous years: hearing our visitor’s concerns, helping them see a range of ways to deal with them, and

then assisting them in developing strategies to resolve an issue. Much of our work deals with problem solving and conflict resolution. Some of these discussions may continue on and off for weeks, months and years.

The graph below compares our activities from our years of operation.



Outreach & Training

We continued to increase our outreach to UT Staff as well as outside groups to get the word out about our services, answer questions, and increase awareness of the Staff Ombuds Office. Our outreach efforts include informational meetings, posters and ads, updating our website (please see <http://www.utexas.edu/staff/ombuds>) and increasing our social media followers through Twitter. See **Appendix A - Outreach** for a list of the contacts.

We offered a series of trainings this past year, for a total of 12 classes for 193 participants. (Materials from these trainings are now posted on our website.)

- Getting the Results You Want (4 classes, 50 total participants)
- Civility in the Workplace (5 classes, 101 total participants)
- Effective Teams (3 classes, 42 total participants)

Demographics

Our demographics show what a “typical” visitor might be like.

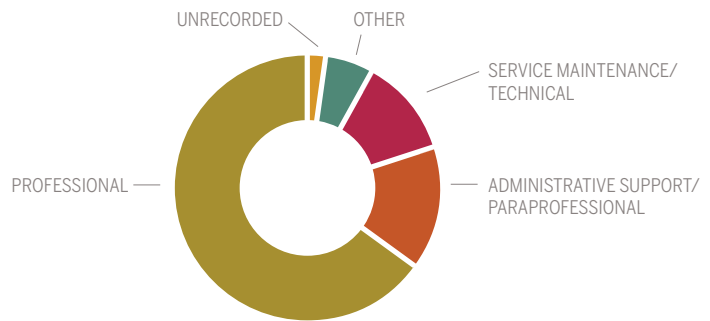
IDENTITY

This year 72% of our visitors were female. This could be due to women being more likely to seek help or that women are more likely to have concerns about their workplace. Every year we have seen more females than males.



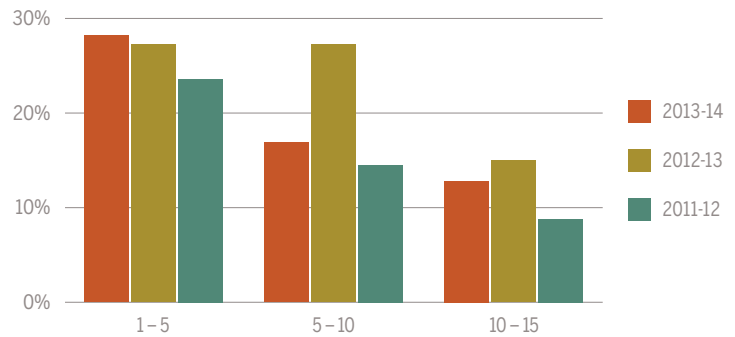
JOB STATUS

The percentage breakdown between job status groups seems fairly consistent over our years of operation with professionals making up 60-65% of our cases, depending on the year.



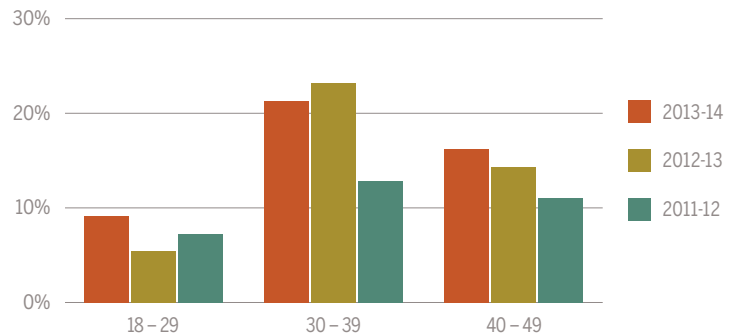
YEARS OF SERVICE

Those with fewer years of services were more likely to use our services.



AGE

The breakdown of our visitors has also been fairly consistent with those between 30 and 39 making up most of our visitors.

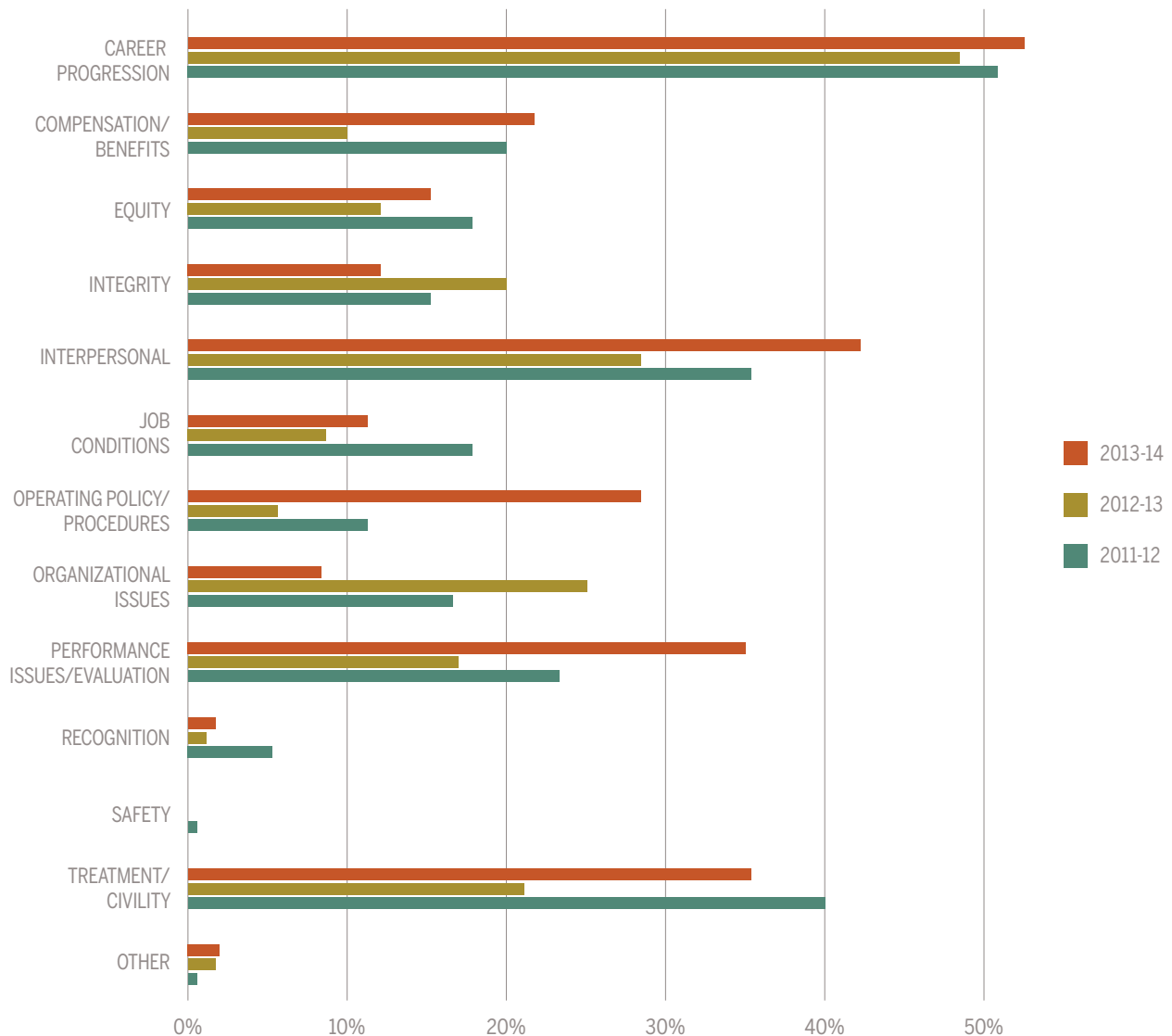


Trending Workplace Concerns

This year, the main workplace concerns had some overlap with past years, showing a more definitive trend in the types of cases that are brought to the office. Career progression continues to be a top concern. Perhaps this is the result of changes in some employees' jobs or reporting lines as the campus moved to Shared Services. At the time of its implementation, many we spoke to were concerned about the impact it would have on them.

Interpersonal issues and civility continued to top the list of concerns brought to the Staff Ombuds Office.

There was a marked increase in those bringing forward issues of operating policy/procedures and of performance issues/evaluation. This may also be connected to Shared Services.



While these demographics help describe our typical visitor and case, they do not do a good job of describing our more complex cases. Some of these examples are on the next page.

Complex Workplace Concerns

COMPLEX CASE 1

Contentious Situation

The Office dealt with several individuals in a department, working to address their extremely complex and contentious situation. The issues here surfaced to Compliance because the Office provided a safe place to discuss them. The problems within the department were so great that one employee engaged an attorney and filed a lawsuit, but the rest did not. We truly believe that it was due to our efforts with all concerned that this problem was less litigious and has been resolved.

COMPLEX CASE 2

Conflict Analysis of Department

We worked with a department to do a conflict analysis of their entire unit, speaking with all the employees and their supervisor. The supervisor agreed to participate in this process and this resulted in interviewing 15-plus staffers as well as the supervisor. To assist them, the Office produced a report of the feedback that was not attributable to any individual. The Ombuds Office addressed common themes through facilitation. The hiring of an Assistant Director was, in part, due to this process.

COMPLEX CASE 3

Ingrained Incivility

We also intervened with a department in which subtle but ingrained incivility was destroying office morale and productivity. The Ombuds engaged with the Director, the supervisors and the employees and provided a neutral sounding board for all concerned to air their individual issues through a training session. The outcome was an increase in positive feeling in the office and a decrease in the incivility at issue.

Assessment of Our Services

The Staff Ombuds Office is pleased to report that satisfaction with its services remained high. Some of the positive feedback we have received can be captured in the following feedback.

“The Ombuds helped me see things differently and I turned things around at my job. Thanks to this, I was able to stay in my position.”

“Thanks again for all your help last year; I haven’t forgotten how you helped me out. Things are going really well for me now. I hope things are going well with you and you are helping UT become a great place to work. Your contributions are vital. Best regards to you and your staff.”

“I wanted to write to thank you for visiting with me last Monday. You helped me somehow get control of my situation. I’m beginning to feel more creative than I have in the last two and a half years! The University is fortunate to have you – the staff needs others who listen.”

“I tried the approach that the Ombuds suggested and the workplace got better. The training was helpful and the strategies suggested were successful. Mark that as a win.”

Future Ombuds Activity

We are excited to be broadening our services and focus in the new year, including:

- Improving the data gathering process so that more accurate information is captured on risk categories such as grievances, litigation potential, negative publicity, and more specific information on workplace concerns such as bullying and fear of retaliation
- Serving Post Doctoral students as of this academic year

Conclusion

While the information contained in this report is not an indication of the total number of employees experiencing conflict on campus, it provides useful information about some of the factors influencing workplace conflict. The Staff Ombuds Office looks forward to discussing this information and ways to enhance the work environment with the campus community and leadership.

Appendix A — Outreach

All listed below were group or individual meetings except where indicated, and the vast majority of them were annual events

Asian/Asian American Faculty & Staff Assoc. – *listserv*
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
Bus Ads in shuttle buses
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 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*
Compliance Officers Group
Course Scheduler Network – *listserv*
CPFM New Employee Orientation
Daily Texan – *article*
Dean of Students Staff Management Team Meeting
Division of Diversity – *newsletter*
Environmental Health and Safety
Facilities Services and Project Management
and Construction Services
Personnel Policy Resource Team
Facilities Services Day Crew meeting
Facilities Services Management Team
Facilities Services Night Crew Meeting
Facilities Services PRC Crew Brown Bag Meeting
Facilities Services Shop 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*
Hearts of Texas Campaign – *email*
Hispanic Faculty/ Staff Association
Hogg Foundation – *email*
Hearts of Texas Campaign – *email*
Housing & Food Services
Housing Resource Fair
HR Forum
iForty
International Office – *email, brochures*
ITS Leadership
Longhorn Life, insert of Daily Texan – *interview*
Marine Science Library – *brochures, flyers*
McDonald Observatory – *email*
New Administrators Workshop
New Employee Orientation – *advertisement*
New Employee Orientation – *Ombuds slide now included in presentation*
Office of Admissions off campus locations – *emails*
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 – *flyers in elevators*
Pickle Research Campus
Police Supervisors
Postdoctoral Community
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
Spice of Life Expo
Staff Council
Staff Council Executive Council
Student Affairs Council on Enrollment Services – *listserv*
Student Deans Committee – *listserv*
Texas Exes – *email*
Town Meeting
Undergrad Program Office
University Communications Group
University Development
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*
UTSC Executive Committee Meeting with various members
Utilities & Energy Management
West Pickle Research Campus



We are located at:

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Se habla español.

*Email is not a confidential form of
communication. Please give us a call.*

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The University of Texas at Austin