

The University of Tennessee, Knoxville

# Office of Ombuds Services Fiscal Year 2022 Annual Report

*Submitted to the University of Tennessee, Knoxville  
Chancellor in August 2022*



OFFICE OF  
OMBUDS SERVICES

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## **About the Office of Ombuds Service**

The Office of Ombuds Services was established on May 1, 2019, to serve as a confidential resource for the University of Tennessee (UT), Knoxville community. The Office serves all employees, both faculty and staff, as well as graduate students.

### ***Mission Statement***

The Office of Ombuds Services staff serve as a no-barrier, first stop for those seeking information and insight from a trusted consultant who is independent, impartial, confidential, and informal. Office staff help visitors engage in problem-solving to help them make empowered decisions.

### ***Standards of Practice***

The Office of Ombuds Services operates consistent with the International Ombuds Association (IOA) Code of Ethics and Standards of Practice.

### ***Office Staff Professional Affiliation***

Dr. Lisa Yamagata-Lynch, the University Ombudsperson and Director, is a member of IOA and Tennessee Association of Professional Mediators (TAPM). Ms. Brooke Wichmann, the Associate Ombudsperson, is a member of IOA and the Association of Conflict Resolution (ACR).

### **How this Report was Prepared**

The preparation of this report was guided by the IOA Code of Ethics and Standards of Practice. To adhere to these code and standards, information that could identify visitors was stripped during data collection. While the findings introduced in this report are a synthesis of visitor traffic trends and experiences based on ombuds staff interpretations of observed particularities (Stake, 1995), the report does not provide specific information regarding individual visitor situations. Instead, when presenting findings about visitor experiences, composite narratives of graduate student, staff, and faculty experiences are presented based on prevalent themes. Additionally, this report does not provide generalizable claims about the entire population that the Office serves.



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## Executive Summary

The purpose of this annual report is to provide the UT, Knoxville community information regarding FY2022 Office of Ombuds Services operations and visitor experiences. This report was prepared following the specifications in the Office Charter and Faculty Handbook, and reporting guidelines of the International Ombud Association (IOA). Office operations highlights from FY2022 include:

(1) day-to-day operations, (2) operational growth, (3) efforts in meeting the Certified Organizational Ombudsman Practitioner® (CO-OP) Requirements, (4) strategies for addressing FY2021 recommendations, and (5) operational success indicators.



To understand visitor experiences, both quantitative and qualitative data were collected and analyzed while maintaining confidentiality. Analysis of visitor traffic trends shows that the Office of Ombuds Services served 505 visitors involving 243 unique cases. These visitors include 105 graduate students, 120 staff, 150 faculty (46 non-tenure track, 113 tenure track), 75 department/unit leaders, 14 undergraduate students, and 32 visitors external to the university. This shows an increase of 104 visitors compared to the previous year, and the Office reached a milestone serving more than 1000 visitors since its inception in May 2019.

The qualitative analysis of visitor experiences uncovered three common themes: (1) graduate student and faculty concerns about evaluative policy implementation and/or interpretation of departmental evaluative policy implementation, (2) staff concerns about adjustments to work since the pandemic, and (3) graduate student, staff, and faculty concerns about evaluative relationships. When examining individual visitor concerns with the IOA Uniform Reporting Categories (Dale, Ganci, Miller, & Sebok, 2008) the concerns were often related to evaluative relationships, work-related stress/work-life balance, and career progression and development. It was also observed that these IOA themes were interrelated with one another in visitor experiences.

Further analysis of visitor experiences uncovered that when visitors experienced challenges in evaluative relationships, work-related stress/work-life balance, and/or career progression and development those challenges were often related to: (1) crucial conversations (Grenny, Patterson, McMillan, & Switzler, 2021), (2) dignity violations (Hicks, 2011; 2018), and (3) psychological safety (Edmondson 1999; 2019). When visitor concerns were unresolved, visitors often experienced conflict that undermined their sense of belonging and empowerment.

Recommendations from FY2022 ombuds observations include:

1. Continue offering crucial conversations education to graduate students, staff, and faculty
2. Continue engaging university leaders in education about dignity-conscious leadership.
3. Continue developing comprehensive on-the-job professional development programs for employees and graduate students to shift the organizational culture surrounding evaluative relationships.
4. Develop and implement a custom, homegrown educational program that prepares both current and future campus leaders to approach and manage conflict as an opportunity for innovative change.
5. Reward staff, faculty, and campus leaders' engagement in professional development as a valued part of their work in the Annual Performance and Planning Review (APPR).

## Annual Report Overview

### Goals

The goals for preparing this report were to:

- Meet expectations set by the International Ombuds Association (IOA) Standards of Practice, as well as those of the university, to provide an annual report to the Chancellor and other organizational community members regarding office operations and visitor experiences.
- Demonstrate to visitors, potential visitors, and stakeholders how the Office of Ombuds Services serves the university community.
- Provide insights to the university community for continual organizational development.



While addressing the above goals, this report includes information regarding office operations, visitor experiences, and recommendations. Visitor experiences shared in this report do not refer to individual experiences, and instead provide a composite narrative about trends and themes that appeared across multiple visitor experiences.

### Recommendations from the Previous Year

Throughout FY2022, ombuds staff addressed recommendations from the FY2021 Annual Report. These recommendations included:

1. Expand organizational capacity for offering crucial conversations education to graduate students, staff, and faculty.
2. Engage university leaders in education programs about dignity-conscious leaders who do no harm to others and themselves by honoring dignity.
3. Design and develop a comprehensive on-the-job professional development program for employees and graduate students to shift the organizational culture surrounding evaluative relationships and cultivate a shared ownership of belonging in the university community by addressing crucial conversations, psychological safety, dignity consciousness, and individual as well as professional positionality.

This report includes discussions of how ombuds staff contributed to campus efforts.

## Operational Activities

### DAY-TO-DAY OPERATIONS

#### Staffing

During FY2022, after a successful national search, the Office hired Ms. Brooke Wichmann as the Associate Ombudsperson. Prior to joining our office Ms. Wichmann served as associate director of Colorado State University's Conflict Resolution Services center. Additionally, the Chancellor's Office approved the hiring of an Educational Program Coordinator. That new position was filled through a national search and the appointment will begin August 2022.

#### Continued Flexible Meeting Modality for Visitors

During FY2020, while university operations were under COVID precautions, the Office began offering virtual meeting options to visitors. Visitors now have the choice to request an in-person or a virtual meeting. To support this effort, on July 1, 2021, our office adopted an online booking system. OnceHub, a cloud-based meeting scheduling service that provides visitors the ability to

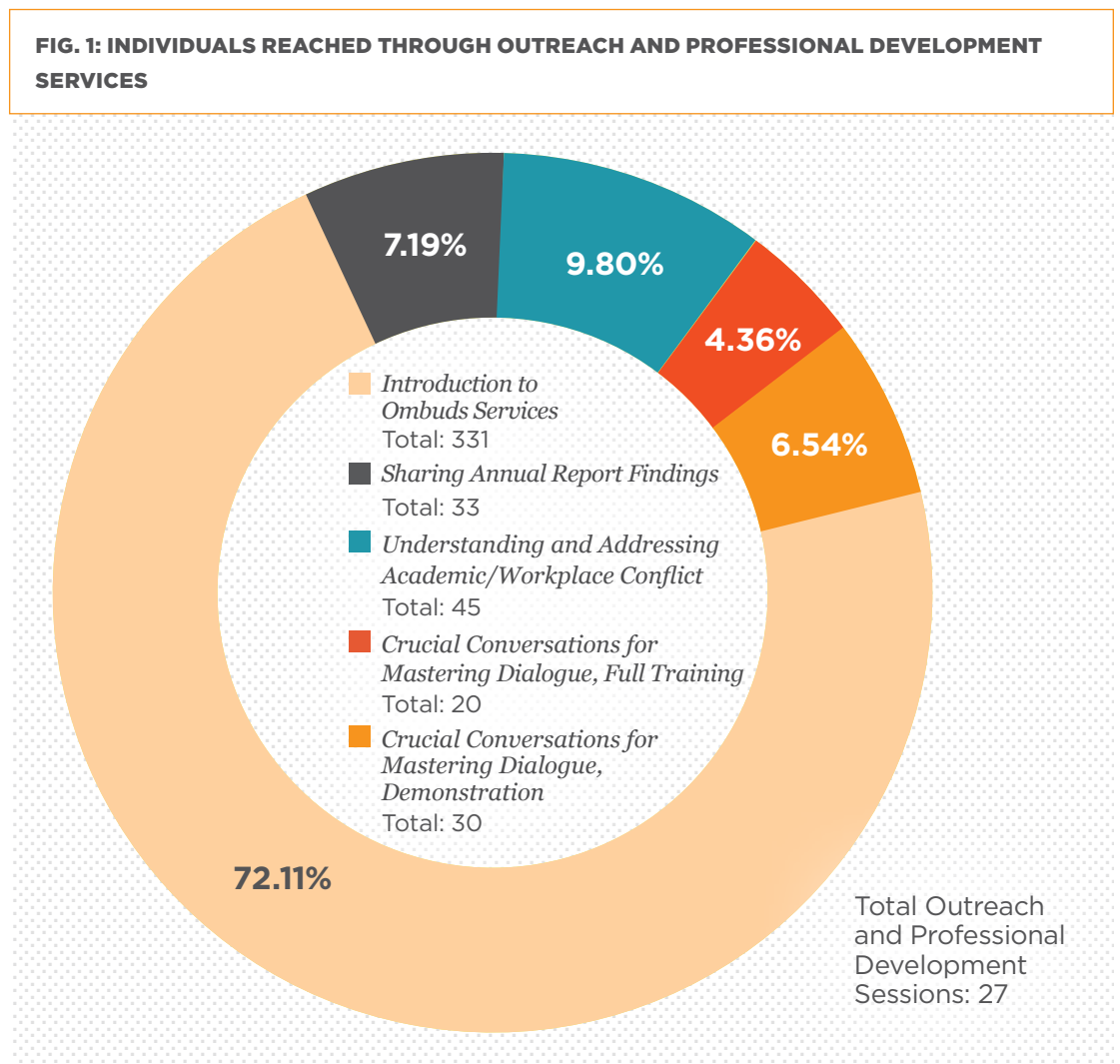
conveniently schedule meetings, virtually or in-person, with the ombuds of their choice. Booking information on the OnceHub site is encrypted and password protected.

### ***Maintaining and Expanding Physical Office Space***

The Office of Ombuds Services is currently located on the 4th floor of Dunford Hall in offices 2423 and 2432. In preparation for the arrival of the Educational Program Coordinator, Dunford Hall 2431 was secured as a third space.

### ***Outreach and Professional Development Services***

The ombuds facilitated a total of 27 outreach and professional development services in FY2022, reaching a total of 459 individuals through synchronous virtual and in-person events. **Figure 1** provides a summary of total number of individuals reached.



The workshop that yielded the most participants was Introduction to Ombuds Services. To meet demand, we facilitated 18 sessions of Introduction to Ombuds Services, working with a total of 331 participants. The Office delivered two sessions of a 90-minute workshop, entitled Understanding and

Addressing Academic/Workplace Conflict, to 45 individuals. We also provided two 60-minute training demonstrations, entitled Crucial Conversations for Mastering Dialogue, for 30 participants, and two full, 12-hour Crucial Conversations for Mastering Dialogue trainings that involved 20 participants. The University Ombudsperson shared annual report findings to 23 members of the campus community on National Ombuds Day in October and again to 10 members of the Faculty Senate Faculty Affairs Committee in April. In addition to the above sessions that our staff facilitated the Office was invited to participate in “Ready Set Connect,” an event that took place in June and was produced by the Human Resources partner office. At this event, we spoke with more than 50 participants and shared information regarding our office.



## OPERATIONAL GROWTH

### ***Facilitated Conversations – Implemented Fall 2021***

Facilitated Conversations is a service designed to help two individuals have a productive discussion about difficult situations. As impartial facilitators, the ombuds empowers participants to share and hear important information that each individual brings to a meeting so that they can make informed decisions. This voluntary process has the potential to disrupt unhelpful patterns of communication, promote mutual understanding, and foster collaborative problem-solving. Prior to the conversation, the ombuds meets with both individuals separately to prepare them to effectively engage in the process.

### ***Group Facilitation – Implemented Fall 2021***

Group Facilitation is a means of fostering respectful and constructive dialogue among participants from a group, unit, or team. As impartial facilitators, the ombuds creates an informal structure in which all participants can share concerns, clarify interests, and collaboratively explore options for moving forward. Group conversations involve multiple sessions, each with a specific focus. Participation is voluntary and visitors can choose to withdraw from the process at any time. Ombuds staff meet individually with all visitors, prior to the group facilitation, to help them understand and prepare for the process.

### ***Chancellor’s Ombuds Leadership Fellows Program – Implemented Spring 2021***

The Chancellor’s Ombuds Leadership Fellows Program is a unique professional development opportunity for tenure-track and non-tenure-track faculty. Dr. Spencer Olmstead, from the Child and Family Studies Department in the College of Education, Health, and Human Sciences, was our inaugural Leadership Fellow. During his fellowship, Dr. Olmstead shadowed ombuds meetings with visitors, engaged in interviews with campus leaders, completed the Crucial Conversations for Mastering Dialogue training, attended the virtual IOA conference, and developed a 90-minute workshop on giving and receiving feedback. Shortly before completing his fellowship, Dr. Olmstead applied and was appointed to the position of interim department head for his academic unit.

### ***Ombuds Internship Program – Implemented Spring 2021***

The Ombuds Internship Program provides graduate students with the opportunities to observe, engage in, and contribute to ombuds activities with our staff. Ms. Miranda Lough, a Master’s student in the College Personnel Program, served as the Office’s inaugural Ombuds Intern. Ms. Lough shadowed ombuds meetings with visitors, completed the Crucial Conversations for Mastering Dialogue workshop, attended the IOA conference virtually, and developed a 90-minute workshop

on Subtle Acts of Exclusion. Ms. Lough also served on the Educational Program Coordinator search committee.

### ***Ombuds Staff Professional Development***

Both the University Ombudsperson and Associate Ombudsperson engaged in several professional development opportunities. Specific activities are summarized in **Table 1**.

<b>TABLE 1: OFFICE OF OMBUDS SERVICES STAFF PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT ACTIVITIES</b>		
	<b>LISA YAMAGATA-LYNCH UNIVERSITY OMBUDSPERSON</b>	<b>BROOKE WICHMANN ASSOCIATE OMBUDSPERSON</b>
<b>HUMAN RESOURCES AND PROVOST'S OFFICE TRAINING</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• PEN America Creating Campuses for All Fostering Open and Respectful Exchange</li> <li>• Staff Performance Daily: Diversity, Engagement, and Inclusion</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Art of Public Deliberation</li> <li>• Empowering Staff and Cultivating a Creative Culture of Positivity</li> <li>• Higher Ed Hybrid Work: Is it Working?</li> <li>• Staff Performance Daily: Diversity, Engagement, and Inclusion</li> </ul>
<b>IOA FACILITATED PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• IOA Annual Conference (Virtual)</li> <li>• IOA Webinar: Ombuds Disrupting Inequities: Collaborating with Leadership to Address Systemic Issues</li> <li>• IOA Webinar: Utilizing Case Management Lens: A Systems-Level Approach to Identifying Trends Through Data Collection, Usage, and Reporting</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• IOA Annual Conference (Virtual)</li> <li>• IOA Mentorship Program</li> <li>• IOA Webinar: Advocates for Fair Treatment DEI Issues</li> <li>• IOA Webinar: The Artful Ombuds: Elevating Concerns While Masking Identities</li> <li>• IOA Webinar: Cultural Components in Conflict</li> <li>• IOA Webinar: Establishing Trust in Groups</li> <li>• IOA Webinar: In the Room Where it Happens</li> <li>• IOA Webinar: Preparing the Visitor for the Facilitated Conversation</li> <li>• IOA Webinar: Social Media for the Organizational Ombuds</li> </ul>
<b>MEDIATION AND CONFLICT RESOLUTION TRAINING</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• TAPM Community Mediation</li> <li>• TAPM The Future and Frontiers of Conflict Resolution</li> <li>• TAPM Transformative Mediation</li> <li>• University of Michigan Restorative Justice Training</li> </ul>	
<b>OTHER CERTIFICATIONS AND TRAINING</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Conflict Dynamics Profile® Certified Assessor</li> <li>• Gallup Successful Strengths Coaching</li> <li>• Thinking Collaborative: Cognitive Coaching Seminar® Foundation Training Certified Coach</li> <li>• University-Mandated Compliance Training</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Crucial Conversations for Mastering Dialogue</li> <li>• Crucial Conversations for Mastering Dialogue Provisionally Certified Organizational Trainer</li> <li>• University-Mandated Compliance Training</li> </ul>



## EFFORTS MEETING CERTIFIED ORGANIZATIONAL OMBUDSMAN PRACTITIONER® (CO-OP) REQUIREMENTS

Lisa Yamagata-Lynch, awarded CO-OP designation in 2020, engaged in professional development activities required for certification renewal in 2024. Brooke Wichmann is preparing for CO-OP certification review. In May 2022, Ms. Wichmann passed the examination required as the first step to becoming a Certified Organizational Ombudsman Practitioner®.



## STRATEGIES FOR ADDRESSING RECOMMENDATIONS FROM FY2021

The first recommendation from last year’s annual report related to expanding the Office’s capacity to provide Crucial Conversations education. Crucial Conversations for Mastering Dialogue (Grenny, Patterson, McMillan, & Switzler, 2021) is proprietary content owned by Crucial Learning requiring organizational trainers to complete a certification. To increase our office capacity to offer this education, the Associate Ombudsperson became a certified trainer. At present, both ombuds staff are certified trainers.

The second recommendation related to engaging university leaders in dignity-conscious leadership programs. In February, the ombuds staff hosted a full-day campus event with Dr. Donna Hicks, author of “Dignity: Its Essential Role in Resolving Conflict” and “Leading with Dignity: How to Create a Culture That Brings Out the Best in People.” During her visit, Dr. Hicks facilitated a total of 4 lectures and workshops that included the following audiences: the Chancellor’s Cabinet, academic and administrative leaders, academic department heads and directors, and graduate students, staff, and faculty. Many members from our partner offices such as the Graduate School, Human Resources, the Office of the Provost, and Title IX were invited to and attended one or more of these events. Our office will continue developing dignity-related educational programming to serve our campus.

The third and final recommendation involved designing and developing a comprehensive, on-the-job professional development program for employees and graduate students in order to shift the organizational culture surrounding evaluative relationships. To address this recommendation, the Chancellor’s Office approved our request to hire an Educational Program Coordinator. This position was filled through a national search and, when the new staff member arrives in August 2022, they will work in collaboration with members of partner offices to continue designing and developing professional development programming.

## OPERATIONAL SUCCESS INDICATORS

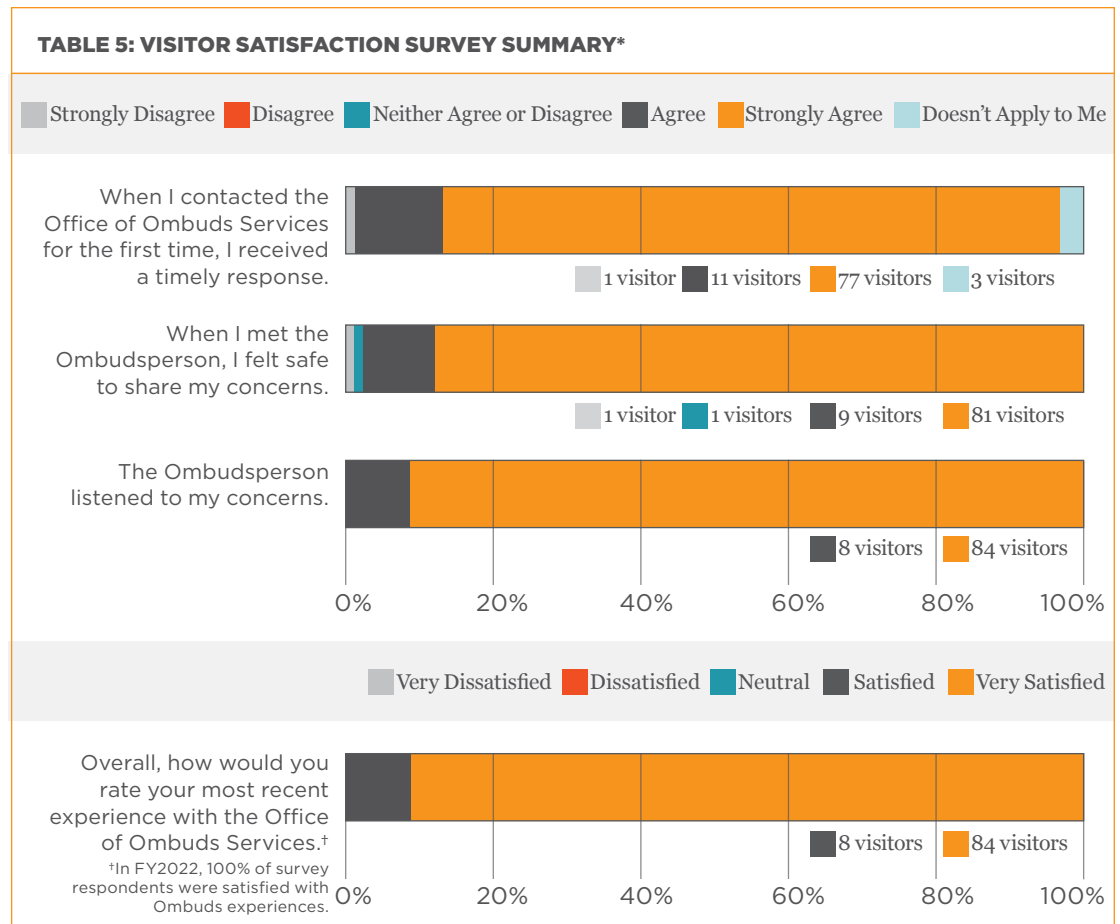
### *Office Recognition from Internal Organizations and the Professional Ombuds Community*

Our staff engaged in several campus activities related to leadership development and campus climate initiatives. These activities are listed in **Table 2** and **Table 3**. Additionally, as an active member of the professional ombuds community, the University Ombudsperson engaged in several leadership services. These activities are listed in **Table 4**.

<b>TABLE 2: OFFICE OF OMBUDS SERVICES UNIVERSITY OMBUDSPERSON CAMPUS-WIDE SERVICES</b>	
<b>LISA YAMAGATA-LYNCH, UNIVERSITY OMBUDSPERSON</b>	
<b>COMMITTEES AND TASK FORCES</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Bullying Task Force (Co-Chair)</li> <li>• Commission for Women Ex-Officio (Member)</li> <li>• Diversity Leads Group (Member)</li> <li>• Exempt Staff Council Ex-Officio (Member)</li> <li>• IDI Campus Implementation Advisory Group (Member)</li> <li>• Staff Administrative Leadership Retreat Planning Team (Member)</li> <li>• UTK Action Collaborative (Member)</li> </ul>
<b>LEADING ROLES IN EVENTS</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Commission for Women Standup and Speak up Anti-Bullying Event (Keynote Speaker on Psychological Safety)</li> <li>• Commission for Women Standup and Speak up Anti-Bullying Event (Breakout Co-Presenter)</li> <li>• University of Tennessee VetMed Student Led Cultural Humility Event (Keynote Speaker)</li> <li>• College of Education Health and Human Sciences Leadership Group (Invited Panel Member)</li> <li>• IOA/Action Collaborative Focus Group (Invited Participant)</li> </ul>

<b>TABLE 3: OFFICE OF OMBUDS SERVICES UNIVERSITY OMBUDSPERSON CAMPUS-WIDE SERVICES</b>	
<b>BROOKE WICHMANN, ASSOCIATE OMBUDSPERSON</b>	
<b>COMMITTEES AND TASK FORCES</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Office of Ombuds Services Educational Program Coordinator Search Committee (Chair)</li> <li>• Commission for LGBT People (Member)</li> <li>• UTK Action Collaborative (Member)</li> </ul>

<b>TABLE 4: UNIVERSITY OMBUDSPERSON LEADERSHIP SERVICES FOR THE OMBUDS COMMUNITY</b>	
<b>LISA YAMAGATA-LYNCH, UNIVERSITY OMBUDSPERSON</b>	
<b>SERVICE TO IOA</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• IOA Core Course Understand and Demonstrate the Value of your Ombuds Office Development (Team Member)</li> <li>• IOA and CO-OP Joint Task Force on Institutional Ombuds Program Accreditation (Member)</li> <li>• IOA Effectiveness Project (Team Member)</li> <li>• IOA Leadership Group (Member)</li> <li>• IOA Professional Development Committee (Co-Chair)</li> </ul>
<b>CONSULTATIONS TO OTHER OMBUDS</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provided guidance to several ombuds at other institutions regarding: (a) starting an ombuds office, (b) developing a charter, (c) engaging in data collection and analysis while addressing IOA Code of Ethics and Standards of Practice, and (d) preparing annual reports.</li> </ul>



### Program Evaluation Planning and Implementation

In FY2021 our staff partnered with 3 graduate students from the Educational Psychology and Counseling Department who were enrolled in EDPY - 651 Advanced Seminar in Evaluation 1. As a result of this collaboration, we implemented an appointment satisfaction survey on XM Qualtrics starting in July 2021. Visitors who scheduled meetings with an ombuds through OnceHub were sent the visitor satisfaction survey shortly after their meeting. During FY2022 a total of 97 visitors completed the survey. This represented 19.20% of total visitors to the Office. Selected highlights of survey results are summarized in **Table 5**.

The quantitative survey results showed that when visitors were presented with the statement “When I contacted the Office of Ombuds Services for the first time, I received a timely response,” 77 visitors (83.70%) responded strongly agree and 11 visitors (11.90%) responded agree. When visitors were presented with the statement “When I met the Ombudsperson, I felt safe to share my concerns,” 81 visitors (88.04%) responded strongly agree and 9 visitors (9.78%) responded agree. To the statement “The Ombudsperson listened to my concerns,” 84 visitors (91.30%) responded strongly agree and 8 visitors (8.70%) responded agree. Additionally, when presented the statement “Overall, how would you rate your most recent experience with the Office of Ombuds Services,” 77 visitors (85.56%) responded very satisfied, and 13 visitors (14.44%) responded satisfied. Overall, the responses to quantitative questions in the visitor satisfaction survey were overwhelmingly positive.

When examining qualitative survey responses, a common theme in visitor comments included that the ombuds staff were compassionate and empathetic during one-on-one confidential meetings. Visitors also commented that after speaking with the ombuds they gained a sense of being heard. There were other comments about how the ombuds staff served as a resource for helping visitors navigate complex organizational policies. Finally, there were visitors who commented that they appreciated being able to talk to the ombuds staff as a trusted impartial party with outside perspectives regarding their concerns

## Visitor Traffic Trends

To maintain confidentiality while ensuring that we engaged in reliable and systematic data collection and analysis, we identified the following measures to examine visitor traffic trends:

- **New visitors:** A measure that counts how many new individuals visited the ombuds every month. An individual was tallied once in a month as a new visitor no matter how frequently they visit that month. When individuals came to the Office for more than one month, they were tallied as a new visitor in the first month as well as for each month that followed.
- **New cases:** A measure that counts the number of cases that is introduced to the Office for the first time whether they involved one visitor or multiple visitors.
- **Ongoing cases:** A measure that counts the number of cases that required visitors to come to the Office for multiple months.

Additionally, to capture the intensity of visitor concerns, we identified the following measures:

- **Repeat visitors:** A measure that counts the frequency of how many additional times individuals came to see the ombuds in one month after they were counted as a new visitor.
- **Touchpoints:** A measure that counts how many individuals other than visitors the ombuds met in a month regarding a visitor concern. The ombuds only contacted touchpoints after gaining permission from visitors.

## Visitors and Cases

Visitors met with ombuds staff steadily throughout FY2022. Total traffic to the Office was 505 visitors involving 243 unique cases. This was an increase of 104 visitors compared to the previous year. **Figure 2** shows monthly visitor traffic trends including new visitors, new cases, and ongoing cases.

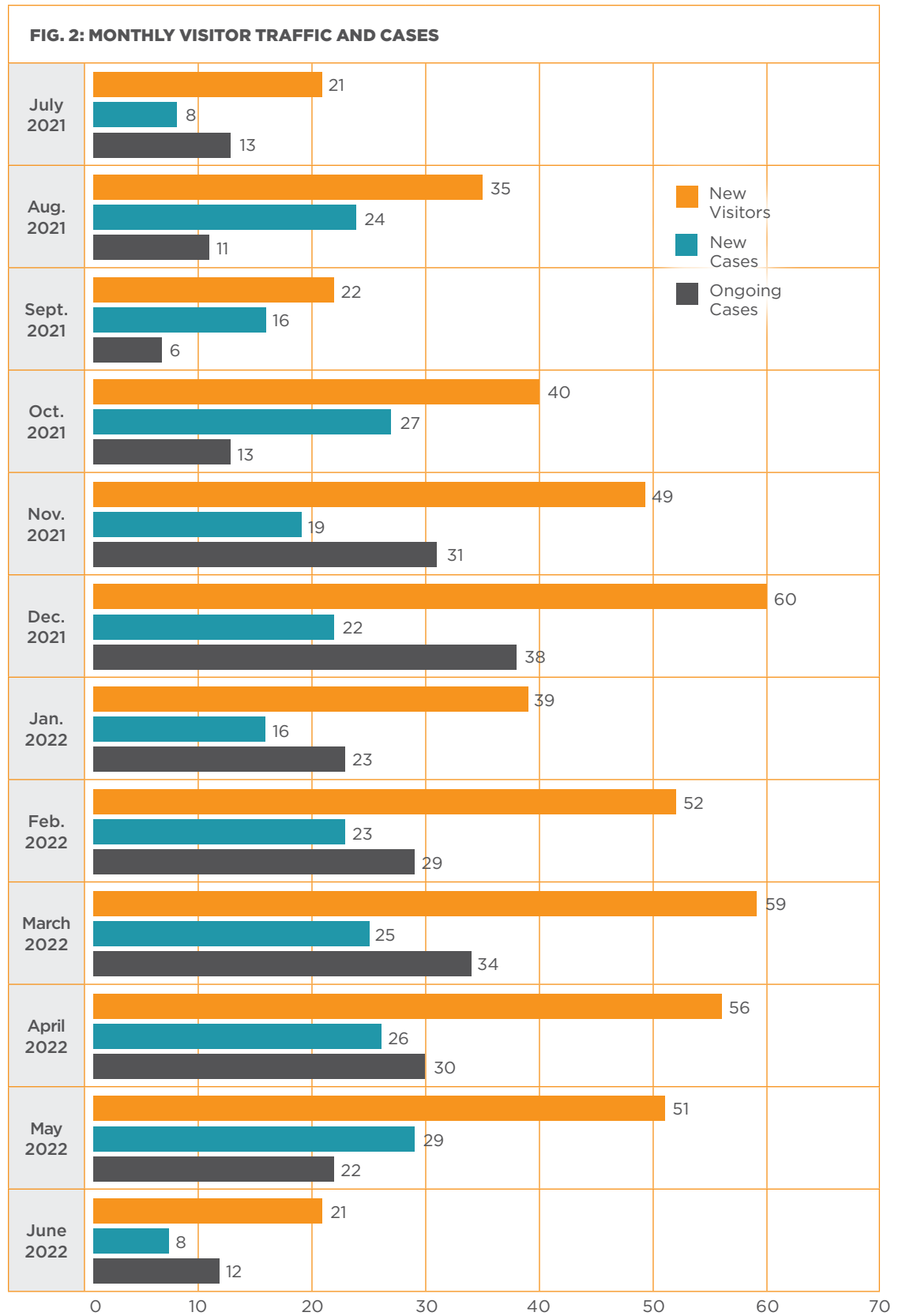
As seen in the figure, the months of December and March were months of peak visitor traffic. These months yielded high traffic because they tend to be times that visitors bring concerns about: (a) faculty and staff Annual Performance and Planning Review (APPR), (b) faculty tenure and/or promotion review, and (c) graduate student comprehensive exam, thesis, or dissertations.

**Figure 3** shows the distribution of total visitors based on their role at the university. Both staff and faculty were the largest group to visit our office with 159 faculty (46 non-tenure track, 113 tenure track) and 120 staff visiting the Office.

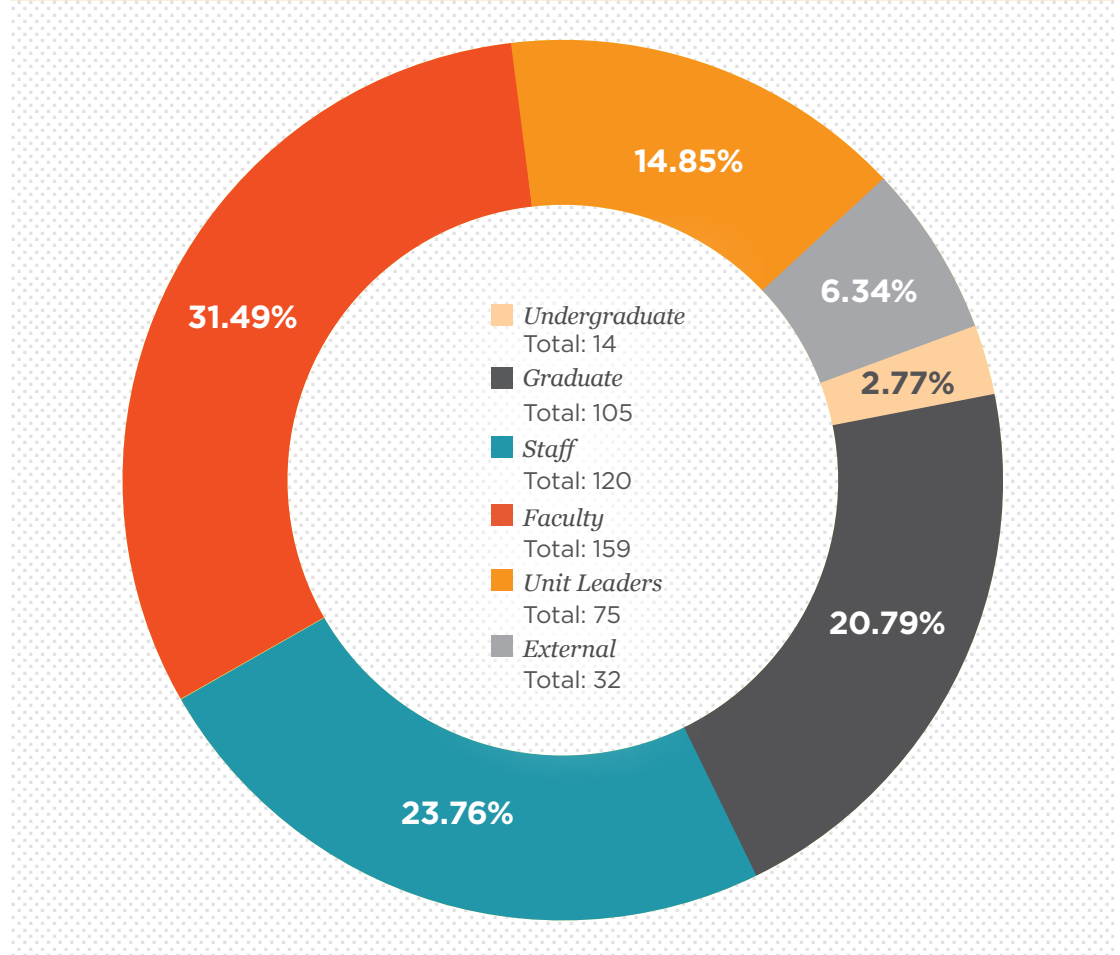
In addition to staff and faculty, the Office had visits from 105 graduate students, 75 department/unit leaders, 14 undergraduate students, and 32 visitors external<sup>1</sup> to the university.

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<sup>1</sup> External visitors are individuals who are not UT, Knoxville employees or students and may include individuals from other UT campuses and parents. Our office does not actively seek visitors who are external to UT, Knoxville; however, we also do not decline to help individuals who come to us for help based on who they are. In most cases our assistance are limited in scope for external visitors, and we refer them to resources that may help them.



**FIG. 3: TOTAL VISITORS BY ROLE**



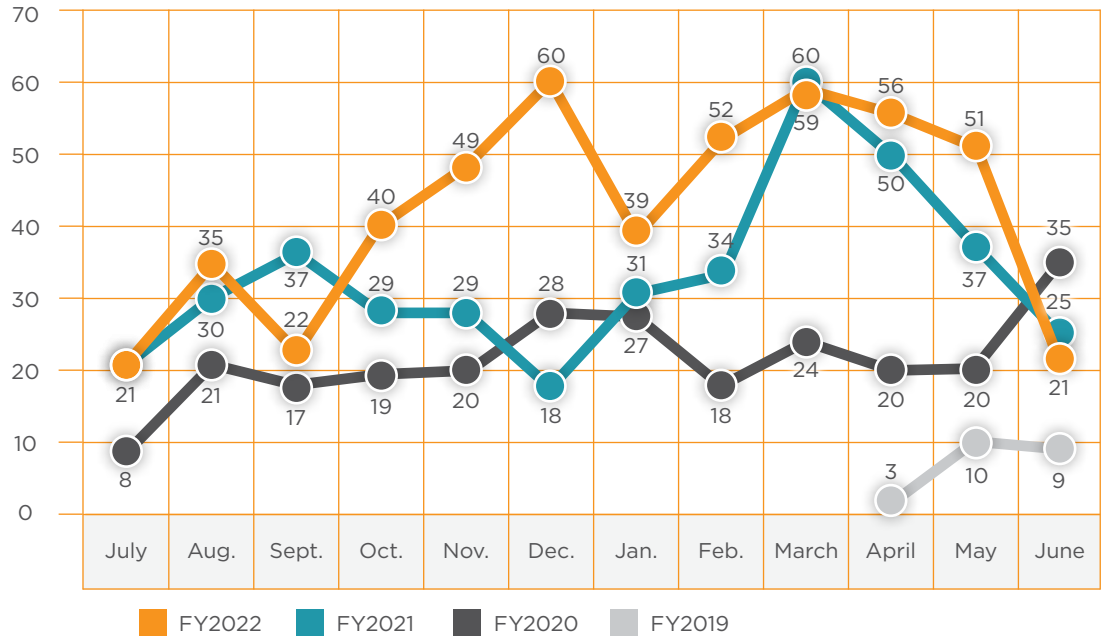
*Figure 4* shows monthly visitor traffic comparisons by fiscal year since our office was established in May 2019. During FY2022 the Office served its 1000th visitor since its inception. For every month in the fiscal year other than July, September and June, there was steady growth in new visitors per month.

### Visitor Intensity

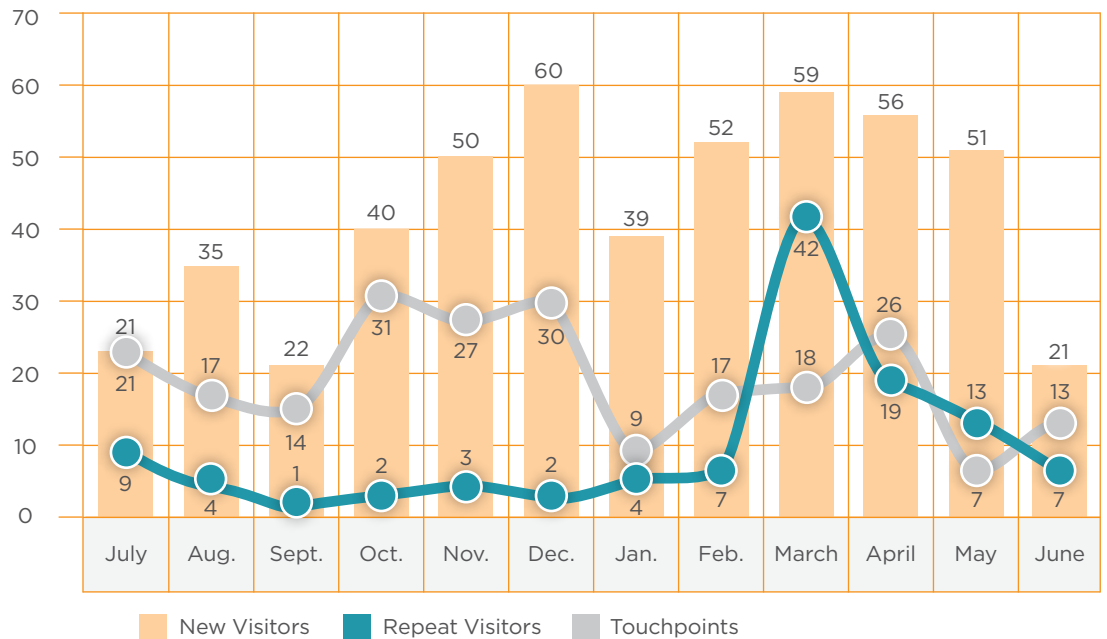
*Figure 5* presents a summary of visitor intensity data including repeat visitors and touchpoints. In the figure, both the rate of visitors, engagement in additional meetings with the ombuds per month and ombuds staff meeting with touchpoints are presented in comparison to the total visitors for that month. For example, during March there were 59 total new visitors and there were 42 instances that visitors met with an ombuds in addition to their initial meeting when they were counted as a new visitor. In the same month the ombuds met with 18 touchpoints regarding visitor concerns. Typically, visitors who experienced complex situations were likely to engage in repeated visits, and ombuds staff were likely to need to meet with touchpoints.

A general increase in repeat visitors was observed after January 2022. There were two possible changes in the Office that may have contributed to this trend. First, with an increase in ombuds

**FIG. 4: MULTIYEAR MONTHLY VISITOR TRAFFIC COMPARISON**



**FIG. 5: MONTHLY VISITOR TRAFFIC INTENSITY**



staff it is likely that there were more times available for visitors to schedule repeat meetings with an ombuds. Second, to accommodate the increase in staff, our office developed and implemented a new visitor traffic data collection tool in January. Previously, with a single ombuds in our office we entered visitor traffic data manually into a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet. With two ombuds in the Office, this approach became unsustainable. Thus, we created a new database with Google

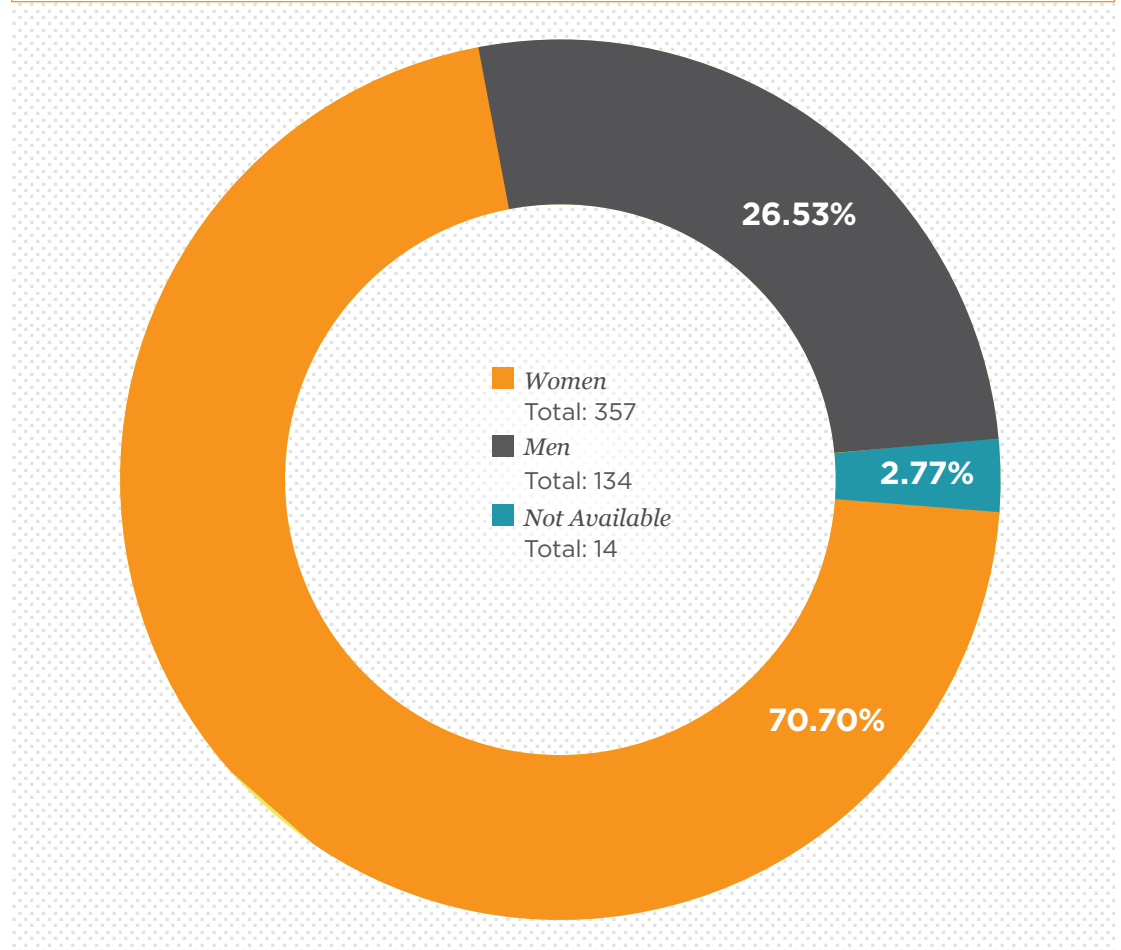
Forms and Sheets that allowed both ombuds to enter data. Ombuds data are anonymized prior to data entry, but the UT contract with Google provides extra layers of data security in several ways because it is certified for protected health information (HIPPA/PHI), Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA), and personally identifiable information (PII) data. Additionally, Google encrypts data at rest, on the server, and in transit. Finally, the files on the Google server can be accessed by individuals who own the account or individuals with whom the account owner shares specific files and/or folders. The new database and data entry procedures also resulted in collecting repeat visitor information more precisely than before. It is therefore likely that we were undercounting repeat visitors prior to January 2022.

### Visitor Demographics

**Figure 6** shows the gender identity distribution of visitors based on data available in the Human Resources system. Visitors for whom gender information was not available are marked “not available.” Of the total 505 visitors, 357 were women (70.7 %) and 134 were men (26.5% ). Additionally, there were 14 visitors for whom gender was not available.

**Figure 7** shows visitor race and ethnicity information based on EEO Category data available in the Human Resources system. Visitors for whom race information was not available are marked “not

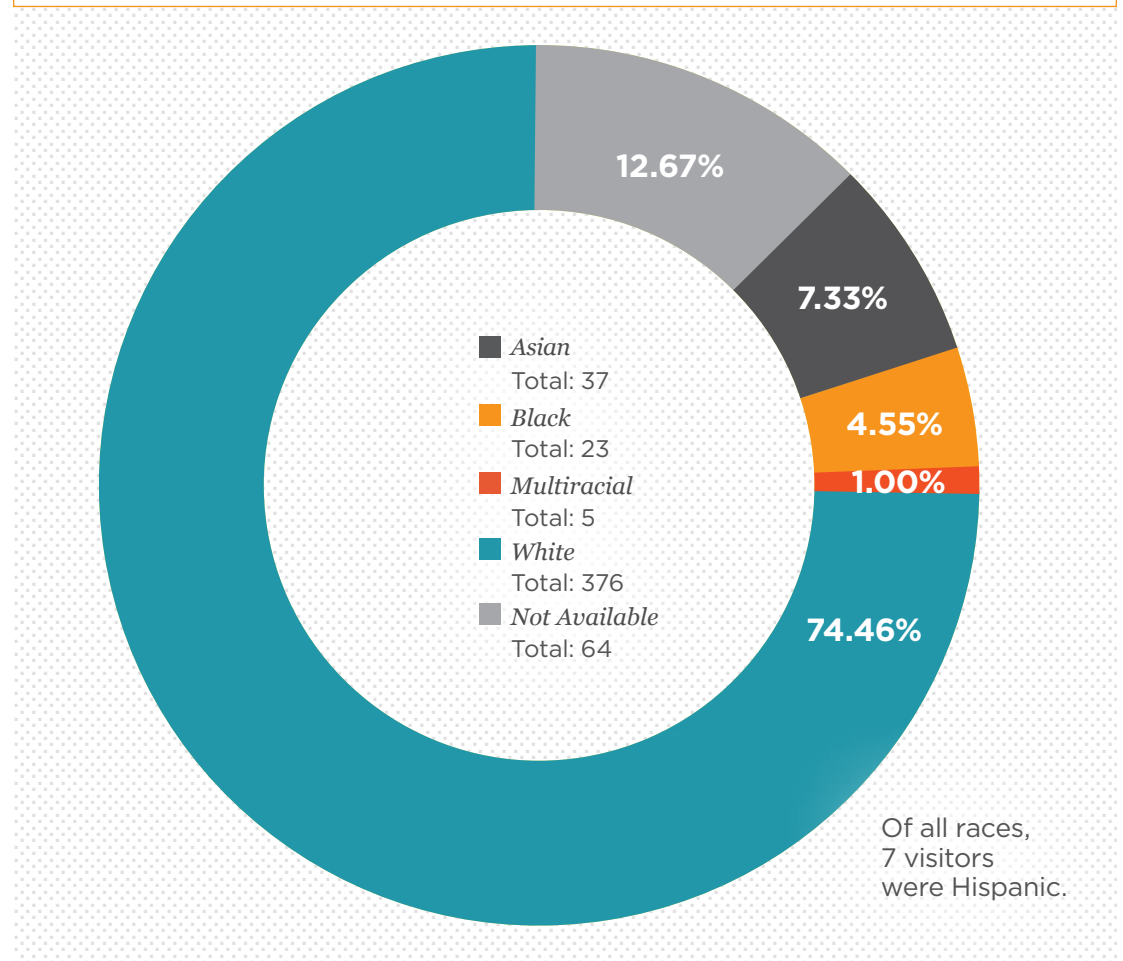
**FIG. 6: VISITOR GENDER IDENTITY DISTRIBUTION**





available.” Of the total 505 visitors, 376 identified as White (64.5%), 37 identified as Asian (7.3%), 23 identified as Black (4.6%), and 5 identified as Multiracial (1%). Additionally, among all races, 7 visitors identified as Hispanic (1%). There were 64 visitors for whom race was not available.

**FIG. 7: VISITOR RACE**



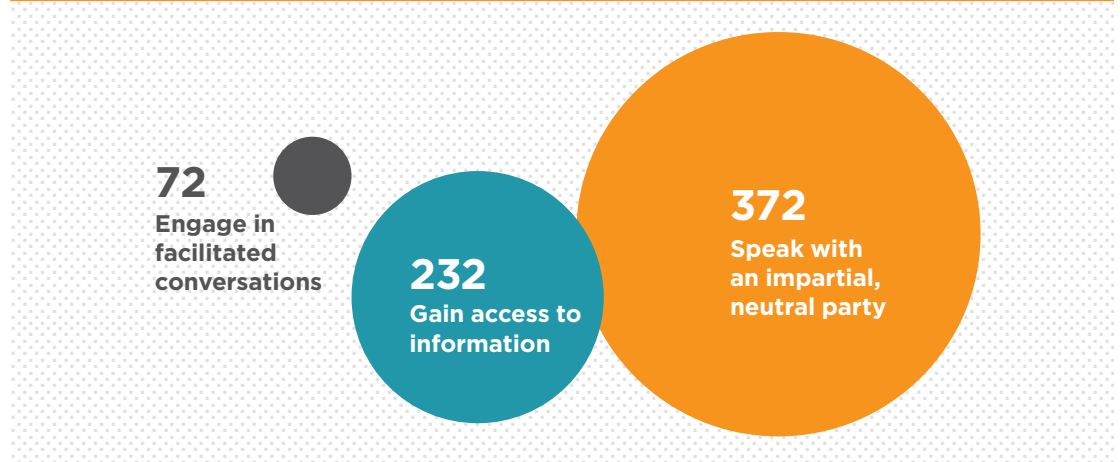
## Visitor Shared Experiences

### *Reasons for Visiting the Ombuds*

**Figure 8** shows what the ombuds observed as reasons why visitors took the time to meet with them. The total number of observed reasons is greater than the total number of visitors because visitors came to the ombuds for multiple reasons.

Reasons for meeting the ombuds fell into three categories: (a) to speak with an impartial neutral party, with 372 occurrences; (b) to gain access to information, with 232 occurrences; and (c) to engage in facilitated conversations, with 72 occurrences.

**FIG. 8: REASONS FOR VISITING THE OMBUDS**



### *Visitor Session Activities*

*Figure 9* shows the session activities that the ombuds engaged in with visitors. The total number of observed activities is greater than the total number of visitors because visitors and ombuds engaged in multiple activities.

**FIG. 9: VISITOR SESSION ACTIVITIES**



These observed activities included: (a) identifying needs and wants, with 244 occurrences; (b) brainstorming ideas, with 193 occurrences; and (c) exploring choices, with 131 occurrences. When meeting with an ombuds, visitors often explored what empowered decisions they could make as a best course of action for themselves.

## Themes in Visitor Conversational Narratives

### *Graduate Student and Faculty Concerns about Evaluative Policy Implementation*

Graduate student visitors' concerns about evaluative policy implementation were related to whether their department leaders and faculty were applying the policies described in the department graduate handbook in a fair and consistent manner. These concerns often started with questions about one or more of the following situations that the graduate students encountered: (a) committee membership, (b) comprehensive exam procedures, (c) thesis/dissertation pass/fail criteria and (d) funding eligibility. Graduate student visitors experienced greater challenges when their graduate handbook did not include details on exam/thesis/dissertation procedures and/or performance expectations because without these it was challenging for them to assert their grounds for an appeal. In these situations, graduate student visitors experienced a sense of vulnerability, fearing undesirable consequences if they were to ask department leaders or faculty questions about their situations.



Non-tenure-track and tenure-track faculty visitors' concerns about evaluative policy implementation were related to APPR, appointment renewal for non-tenure track faculty, and tenure and promotion review procedures for tenure-track faculty. These concerns often started with one or more of the following situations: (a) they received a lower than usual APPR assessment, (b) their APPR assessment progressed very slowly, and (c) their appointment renewal/tenure and promotion review deviated from written policies. When evaluation procedures deviated from written policy, faculty found it challenging to assess whether evaluations were fair. In these situations, faculty visitors often became frustrated and found themselves feeling powerless and fearful of potential undesirable consequences if they were to ask campus leaders questions about their situation.

### *Staff Concerns about Adjustments to Work since the Pandemic*

Staff visitor concerns about adjustments to work since the pandemic were related to new situations as staff came back to in-person work starting June 1, 2021. Some of these work adjustments included: (a) shifting from flexible work hours to more traditional work hours, (b) working physically at the Office with new staff who were hired during remote work, and (c) working with a mix of in-person and remote staff. These common adjustments did not necessarily all lead to difficult situations, and there were several instances where staff and supervisors were pleased with the new normal. However, when encountering challenges from these work adjustments, difficult conversations with colleagues and supervisors often resulted. In these situations, staff visitors often became frustrated and found themselves feeling vulnerable and fearful of potential undesirable consequences if they were to ask questions of their supervisors.

### *Graduate Student, Staff, and Faculty Concerns about Evaluative Relationships*

Graduate student, staff, and faculty visitors' concerns about evaluative relationships frequently stemmed from communication challenges that led to conflict. This is an ongoing observation from previous annual reports. Concerns about evaluative relationships often began with one or more of the following situations: (a) unclear work assessment feedback, (b) inequitable treatment, and (c) lack of communication from supervisors/department leaders. When visitors encountered these situations, they came to the ombuds for help navigating difficult conversations with their advisor/faculty/supervisor/department leaders. In these situations, visitors were fearful of potential undesirable consequences if they were to initiate conversations with their advisor/faculty/supervisors/department leaders.

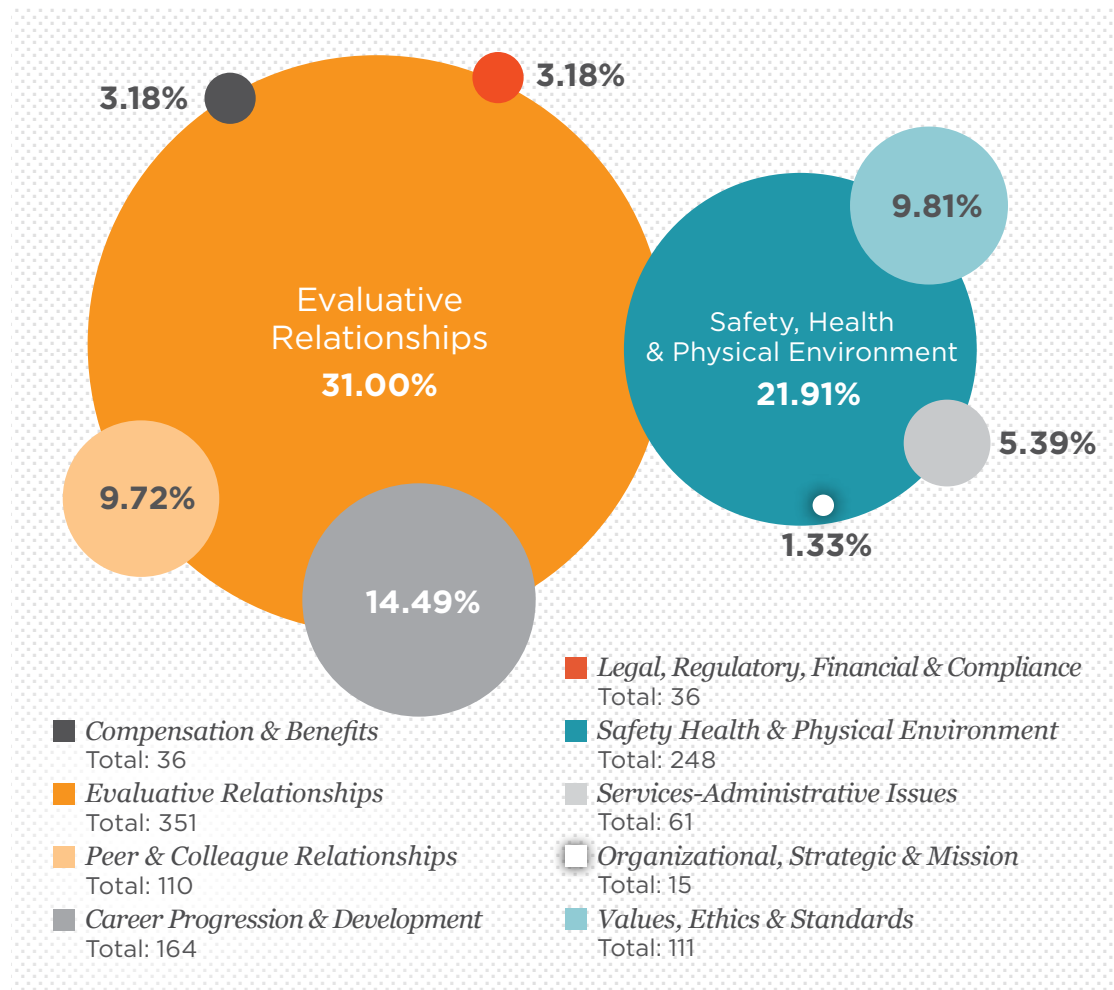
### Observed IOA Uniform Reporting Category Themes

The IOA Uniform Reporting Categories (Dale, Ganci, Miller, & Sebok, 2008) include the main themes listed below.

1. Compensation and Benefits
2. Evaluative Relationships
3. Peer and Colleague Relationships
4. Career Progression and Development
5. Legal, Regulatory, Financial and Compliance
6. Safety, Health, and Physical Environment
7. Services/Administrative Issues
8. Organizational, Strategic, and Mission Related
9. Values, Ethics, and Standards

**Figure 10** shows how often the ombuds observed visitor experiences that were related to these IOA Uniform Reporting Categories. The total number of observed categories is greater than the total number of visitors because visitor experiences were often related to multiple categories.

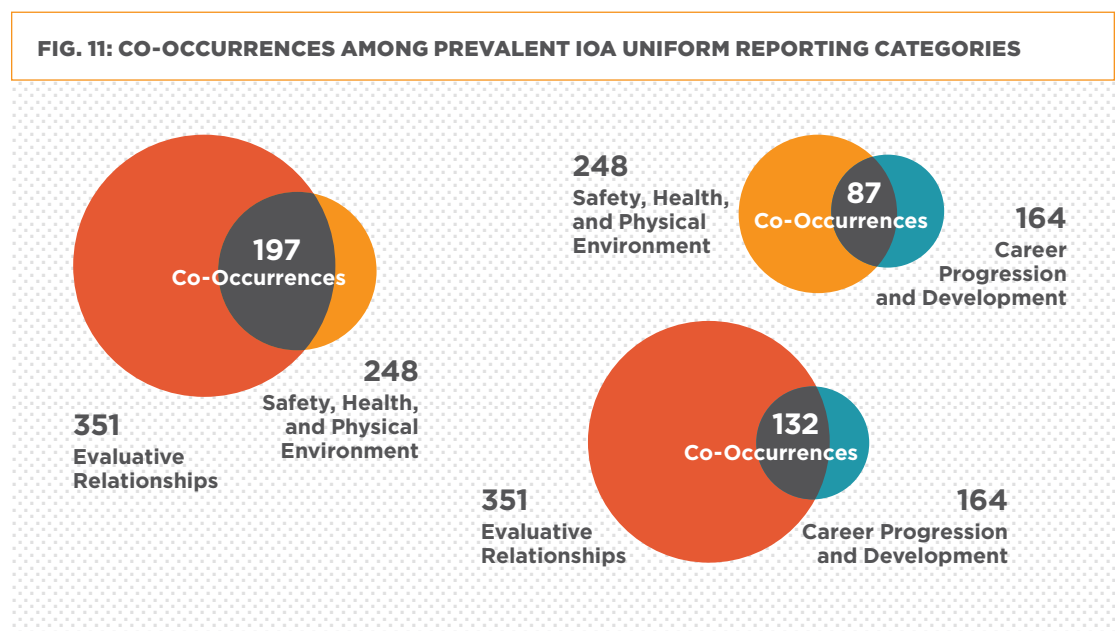
**FIG. 10: VISITOR EXPERIENCES AND IOA UNIFORM REPORTING CATEGORIES**



There were three prevalent IOA categories observed in visitor experiences. The top two were Evaluative Relationships, with 351 occurrences and Safety, Health, and Physical Health, with 248 occurrences. This overall trend was similar to observations from previous years. Within Evaluative Relationships, the top subcategories were Communication, Department Climate, and Respect-Treatment. Within Safety, Health, and Physical Health, the top subcategory was overwhelmingly Work-Related Stress and Work-Life Balance. The third prevalent category in visitor experiences was Career Progression and Development, with 164 occurrences, and the top sub-category was Career Progression.

We examined thematic code co-occurrences between the three prevalent IOA Uniform Reporting Categories observed in visitor experiences. **Table 6** summarizes the co-occurrence findings among pairs of prevalent IOA Categories. **Figure 11** provides a summary of the prevalent IOA Categories and co-occurrence relationship for each pair of codes. We found that among the 351 observed occurrences in Evaluative Relationships there were 197 co-occurrences with Safety, Health, and Physical Environment, most of which were related to Work Related Stress and Work-Life Balance. We also observed that there were 132 co-occurrences between Evaluative Relationships and Career Progression and Development. Additionally, we observed 87 co-occurrences between Safety, Health, and Physical Environment and Career Progression and Development.

TABLE 6: CO-OCCURRENCES AMONG PREVALENT IOA UNIFORM REPORTING CATEGORIES	
PREVALENT IOA CATEGORY CO-OCCURRENCES	CO-OCCURRENCES
Evaluative Relationships and Safety, Health, and Physical Health	197
Evaluative Relationships and Career Progression and Development	132
Safety, Health, and Physical Health and Career Progression and Development	87



The limitation to this analysis is that we are only able to identify co-occurrences between two thematic codes, and we are unable to report co-occurrences among all three, which were likely to have occurred.

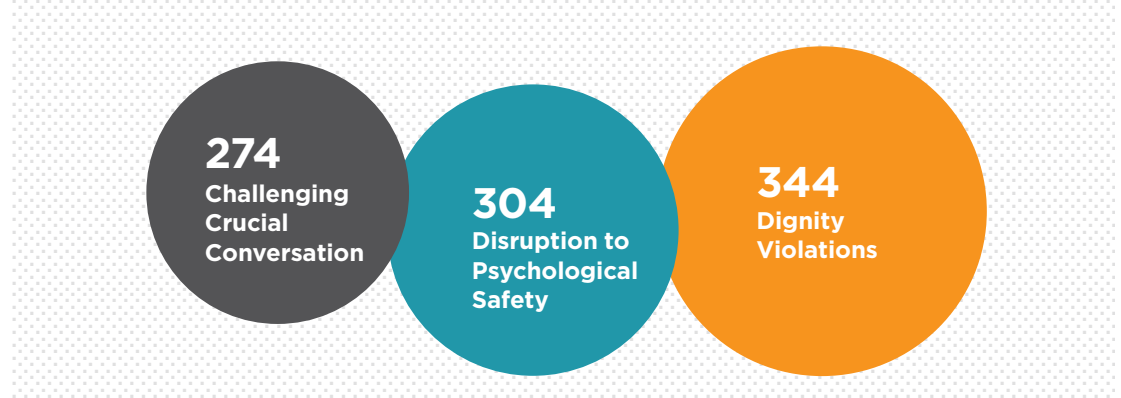
### ***Themes from the Literature Found in Visitor Experiences***

For the FY2021 Annual Report our staff engaged in an extensive review and synthesis of the literature that provided further insights to understanding visitor experiences. This year, we are including themes from this literature review as codes for the qualitative analysis of visitor experiences. These thematic codes from the literature include:

- ***Challenging Crucial Conversations***: when visitors found themselves stuck in a difficult conversation between two or more individuals about a high stakes topic in which their opinions varied and emotions were high (Grenny, Patterson, McMillan, & Switzler, 2011).
- ***Dignity Violations***: when visitors experienced harm to their inherent value and lost their sense of being understood as well as connection with others (Hicks, 2011, 2018).
- ***Disruption to Psychological Safety***: when visitors found it difficult to engage in interpersonal risk-taking with colleagues and were not able to express themselves authentically while working towards a shared goal as a team (Edmondson 1999; 2019).

**Figure 12** shows how often the ombuds observed visitor experiences that were related to Dignity, Disruption to Psychological Safety, and Challenging Crucial Conversations.

**FIG. 12: VISITOR EXPERIENCES AND DIGNITY, DISRUPTION TO PSYCHOLOGICAL SAFETY, AND CHALLENGING CRUCIAL CONVERSATIONS**



Our analysis shows that visitors experienced Dignity Violations with 344 occurrences, Disruption to Psychological Safety with 304 occurrences, and Challenging Crucial Conversations with 274 occurrences.

When examining co-occurrences between themes from the literature and the top three IOA Categories observed in visitor experiences, we found themes and categories to be interrelated. **Table 7** summarizes these findings.

There were 254 co-occurrences between Evaluative Relationships and Dignity Violations, 228 co-occurrences between Evaluative Relationships and Disruptions to Psychological Safety, and 219 co-occurrences between Evaluative Relationships and Challenging Crucial Conversations. There were 208 co-occurrences between Safety, Health, and Physical Health and Dignity Violations, 198 co-occurrences between Safety, Health, and Physical Health and Disruptions to Psychological

**TABLE 7: CO-OCCURRENCES AMONG PREVALENT IOA CATEGORIES AND THEMES FROM THE LITERATURE**

IOA CATEGORY AND THEORETICAL CONSTRUCT PAIRS	CO-OCCURRENCES
Evaluative Relationships and Dignity Violation	254
Evaluative Relationships and Disruption to Psychological Safety	228
Evaluative Relationships and Challenging Crucial Conversations	219
Safety, Health, and Physical Health and Dignity Violation	208
Safety, Health, and Physical Health and Disruption Psychological Safety	198
Safety, Health, and Physical Health and Challenging Crucial Conversations	169
Career Progression and Development and Dignity Violation	120
Career Progression and Development and Disruption to Psychological Safety	104
Career Progression and Development and Challenging Crucial Conversations	78

Safety, and 169 co-occurrences between Safety, Health, and Physical Health and Challenging Crucial Conversations. Additionally, there were 120 co-occurrences between Career Progression and Development and Dignity Violations, 104 co-occurrences between Career Progression and Development and Disruptions to Psychological Safety, and 78 co-occurrences between Career Progression and Development and Challenging Crucial Conversations.

Our analysis of visitor experiences showed that the three themes from the literature were inter-related. **Table 8** summarizes the co-occurrence findings among Dignity Violation, Psychology Safety, and Challenging Crucial Conversation.

**TABLE 8: CO-OCCURRENCES AMONG DIGNITY VIOLATION, DISRUPTION TO PSYCHOLOGICAL SAFETY, AND CHALLENGING CRUCIAL CONVERSATION**

THEORETICAL CONSTRUCT CO-OCCURENCES	CO-OCCURRENCES
Dignity Violation and Disruption to Psychological Safety	271
Dignity Violation and Challenging Crucial Conversation	221
Disruption to Psychological Safety and Challenging Crucial Conversation	196

There were 271 co-occurrences between Dignity Violations and Disruption to Psychological Safety, 221 co-occurrences between Dignity Violations and Challenging Crucial Conversations, and 196 co-occurrences between Disruption to Psychological Safety and Challenging Crucial Conversations.

## Findings

It can be summarized from the FY2022 ombuds data that graduate students, staff, and faculty visitors experienced Dignity Violations when they encountered Challenging Crucial Conversations especially in Evaluative Relationships. Oftentimes these conversations were about: (1) graduate student and faculty concerns about evaluative policy implementation, (2) staff concerns about adjustments to work since the pandemic, and (3) graduate student, staff, and faculty concerns about evaluative relationships. In these challenging conversations, visitors frequently found their psychological safety disrupted, which then introduced stress to academic/work-related activities. When these concerns were unresolved, visitors frequently found themselves in conflict with peers and/or advisors/supervisors/department leaders. Visitors encountered short-term and/or long-term challenges in gaining a sense of belonging as an empowered community member.



## Ombuds Recommendations

In a large organization such as UT, Knoxville, encountering challenging conversations and conflict is unavoidable. However, we can better equip our community with skills to engage in crucial conversations and navigate conflict. This can reduce the likelihood of community members encountering dignity violations and disruptions to their psychological safety. Therefore, recommendations from FY2022 ombuds observations include:

1. Continue offering crucial conversations education to graduate students, staff, and faculty.
2. Continue engaging university leaders in education about dignity-conscious leadership.
3. Continue developing comprehensive on-the-job professional development programs for employees and graduate students to shift the organizational culture surrounding evaluative relationships.
4. Develop and implement a custom homegrown educational program that prepares both current and future campus leaders to approach and manage conflict as an opportunity for innovative change.
5. Reward staff, faculty, and campus leaders' engagement in professional development as a valued part of their work in the Annual Performance and Planning Review (APPR).

## Data Collection and Analysis Methodology

### *Maintaining Confidentiality in Ombuds Data Collection and Analysis*

The ombuds staff identified quantitative measures and qualitative themes to examine using Stake's (2010) knowledge framework that refers to both statistical and professional/clinical knowledge. The ethical and practical commitments to independence and confidentiality in the IOA Code of Ethics and Standards of Practice does not allow ombuds to follow traditional methodologies for research. Therefore, while protecting these professional commitments, the following strategies were put into place.

- When collecting statistical data we did not track individuals through multiple months, and instead simply counted the number of visitors to the Office per month.
- When collecting and analyzing qualitative data, about visitor experiences, we did not



create in-depth records.

- When collecting both quantitative and qualitative data we did not associate data to information that would reveal visitor identity.

The ombuds staff relied on several digital research tools for collecting and analyzing non-identifiable data. Microsoft Excel and QSR Nvivo 12 were used for data entry and analyses during July to December when the Office operated with a single staff. In January 2022 in order to transition to a collaborative data collection and analysis procedures, we began using Google Forms and Sheets for data entry and Dedoose for analysis. Throughout FY2022 Excel, Forms, and Sheets were used for quantitative data entry and aggregate analyses of visitor traffic trends. Nvivo and Dedoose were used for qualitative data entry and analyses of visitor experiences.



Coding of visitor conversational narratives followed the Constant Comparative Methodology (Charmaz, 2014; Corbin & Strauss, 2014) to identify themes that emerged as well as the IOA Uniform Reporting Categories (Dale, Ganci, Miller, & Sebok, 2008). Initially, the codes that emerged from the FY2021 analysis were carried forward for FY2022. The ombuds staff also relied on existing literature as a guide throughout the coding process to identify additional emerging codes and to gain an understanding of visitor experiences. As the FY2022 data collection and analysis progressed, there were new codes that emerged from visitor experiences. These were added to the coding processes. Once the Associate Ombudsperson joined the Office, she was trained in the data entry and coding process. Both ombuds discussed emerging themes and adjusted coding practices accordingly.

While engaging in thematic analysis of visitor conversations, ombuds staff treated each visitor as a unique narrative data point and treated narratives as a form of public engagement of interpretations and negotiations of public meanings (Bruner, 1990). Details of each visitor narrative were not recorded, rather ombuds staff coded meaning shared in conversations with visitors soon after meeting. The ombuds staff

approached shared meaning as a social interaction between ombuds and visitor that brought shape and form to ideas for ongoing dialogue about their shared reality (Bruner, 2002). The thematic analysis took place with the assumption that people make meaning of and understand their lives through narratives and understanding these narratives can provide a window into how individuals understand their world (Kim, 2016).

### ***Trustworthiness and Rigor in Ombuds Reporting***

The ombuds staff relied on trustworthiness (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) and rigor (Tracy, 2010) as theoretical constructs in qualitative research to strengthen the credibility of findings. Following recommendations by Lincoln & Guba (1985) and Tracy (2010), the ombuds staff attempted to maintain trustworthiness and rigor through the following practices.

- Involving multiple ombuds in data collection and analysis
- Reporting on worthwhile ideas
- Presenting theory and methods
- Being systematic
- Being reflexive
- Presenting visitor world views
- Addressing subjectivity
- Being humble while making conclusions

- Being transparent about methodological challenges
- Collecting data from multiple sources

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