

The University of Tennessee, Knoxville

Office of Ombuds Services Fiscal Year 2023 Annual Report

*Submitted to the University of Tennessee, Knoxville
Chancellor in August 2023*



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 – Updated January 2023

Ombuds serve graduate students, staff, and faculty, empowering them to constructively navigate challenges related to their experiences at the University of Tennessee Knoxville. We build the community’s capacity to constructively manage current and future challenges, through individual consultations, mediations, and educational programming. We support organizational improvement by surfacing emerging concerns and systemic issues within the University. We contribute to the advancement of the ombuds profession through leadership, research, and service to the international ombuds community.

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, Tennessee Association of Professional Mediators (TAPM), and Association for Educational Communications and Technology (AECT).
- Ms. Brooke Wichmann, the Associate Ombudsperson is a member of IOA.
- Ms. Duren Thompson, the Educational Program Coordinator, is a member of IOA, AECT, American Association of Adult & Continuing Education (AAACE), and Association of Talent & Development (ATD)’s Smokey Mountain Affiliate.

Understanding Visitor Experiences

The preparation of this report was guided by the IOA Code of Ethics and Standards of Practice. In this report, individuals who took part in education and outreach are referred to as participants and individuals who received support services are referred to as visitors. Observations related to visitor experiences were drawn from narratives that visitors shared in meetings with ombuds. When specific occurrences and co-occurrences of observed themes are presented in this report, the value amounts to more than the number of monthly visitors because individual visitor’s experiences were often related to multiple themes. A synthesis of visitor experiences is presented based on ombuds interpretations of observed particularities (Stake, 1995). The report does not provide information regarding specific situations nor generalizable claims about the entire population that the Office serves.

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Executive Summary

This report was prepared following the specifications in the Office Charter and reporting guidelines of the International Ombuds Association (IOA). The purpose of this annual report is to provide a FY2023 data supported summary about:

- University of Tennessee (UT), Knoxville Office of Ombuds Services operations;
- services the Office provides;
- trends observed in education and outreach engagements;
- trends observed in visitor support services and visitor experiences;
- Office success indicators; and
- recommendations for FY2024.



Office staff facilitated 22 educational workshops and took part in 36 outreach events. In total, the Office served 1,409 participants through education and outreach. This was an increase of 950 participants from the previous year, which amounted to a 207% growth in education and outreach services. Participant workshop satisfaction survey results indicated a majority of participants were satisfied with the workshops they attended.

Visitor support services trends show that the Office served 513 new monthly visitors. The office managed 339 unique cases and 174 ongoing cases. Visitors included: 74 graduate students; 157 staff; 136 faculty; 105 deans, directors, department heads (DDDH), and supervisors; 14 undergraduate students; and 27 individuals external to the university. Visitor satisfaction survey results were overwhelmingly positive.

Analysis of visitor experiences uncovered 5 themes including: (1) challenges with complex reporting relationships, (2) staff and faculty challenges in conflict navigation, (3) DDDH and supervisors challenges with leading in conflict, (4) staff concern about job security, and (5) graduate student concerns about academic progress. Visitor concerns most often fell within the IOA Uniform Reporting Categories (Dale, Ganci, Miller, & Sebok, 2008) of communication in evaluative relationships and

work-related stress/work-life balance. Further analysis uncovered that visitors frequently experienced evaluative communication challenges in conjunction with dignity violations (Hicks, 2011; 2018) and disruptions in psychological safety (Edmondson 1999; 2019).

Recommendations from FY2023 ombuds observations include:

1. Develop a culture where campus community members view conflict as an opportunity for reflection, innovation, and positive growth.
2. Develop a campus culture that supports frequent, open, and constructive communication, particularly within evaluative relationships.
3. Provide educational opportunities that enhance campus community members' willingness and capacity to have meaningful dialogue and constructively manage conflicts.

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 by providing an annual report to the Chancellor and organizational community members.
- Demonstrate, with supporting data, how the Office of Ombuds Services serves the university through education, outreach, and visitor support services.
- Provide insights to the university community for continual organizational development.

This report includes information regarding office operations, services, observed visitor experiences, operational success indicators, and recommendations.



Previous Year Recommendations

Throughout FY2023, ombuds staff addressed recommendations from the FY2022 Annual Report. These recommendations included:

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) efforts.

Operational Activities

Strategic Planning

During FY2023, we held two strategic planning retreats in January and June. During these meetings, staff refined the Office's mission and vision statements, developed internal and external values statements, and determined office service goals for FY2024 and beyond. This strategic planning guided our office service expansion priorities and strengthened staff relationships. Moving forward, we will continue our strategic planning activities and hold retreats twice yearly.

Staffing

During FY2023, after a successful national search, we hired Ms. Duren Thompson as our Educational Program Coordinator. Duren's expertise is in technology integration, special education, adult foundational education, instructional design, and online teaching and learning. Prior to joining our office, Duren served 25 years as a professional development program coordinator and program manager

for preK-12 and adult educators. These programs were funded through numerous state and federal grants and contracts.

For FY2024, we obtained approval from the Chancellor’s Office to hire a Graduate Research Assistant who began work in our office on August 1, 2023.

Facilities

During FY2023 we were in preparation to move from Dunford Hall to Perkins Hall 101. In FY2024 we will serve visitors at Perkins Hall where we will operate in a suite where visitors will have access to a waiting room.

Professional Improvement

Certified Organizational Ombudsman Practitioner® (CO-OP)

CO-OP designation is awarded to ombuds who:

- hold a bachelor’s degree or equivalent from an accredited institution;
- pass the written CO-OP certification exam;
- have been a practicing ombuds for one year or 2,000 hours, performing the full scope of the ombuds duties and adhering to the IOA Code of Ethics and Standards of Practice; and
- complete an interview with satisfactory performance with a member of the CO-OP Eligibility Committee.

During FY2023, Brooke was awarded the CO-OP designation and started to engage in required certification renewal activities. Lisa was awarded CO-OP designation in 2020 and continued to engage in required certification renewal activities.

Ombuds Staff Professional Development

Ombuds staff members participated in professional development facilitated by UT offices, IOA, and other organizations. Table 1 summarizes FY2023 professional development hours for our staff.

TABLE 1: OFFICE OF OMBUDS SERVICES STAFF PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT			
FACILITATOR	LISA	BROOKE	DUREN
UT	8.25 hours	12.25 hours	39.5 hours
IOA	32 hours	16.5 hours	1 hours
OTHER ORGANIZATIONS	43 hours	60 hours	59.25 hours

Notable professional development events included:

- Compassion Focused Therapy Essentials, Association for Psychological Therapies (APT) Accreditation Level 2;
- Crucial Conversations for Mastering Dialogue Certified Organizational Trainer, Crucial Learning;
- Successful Strengths Coaching, Gallup;

- Certified Conflict Dynamics Profile Practitioner, Mediation Training Institute;
- Mental Health First Aid Training USA, National Council for Mental Wellbeing;
- Trauma-Informed Practice, Association for Psychological Therapies (APT); and
- IOA workshop Facilitation on Understanding and Communicating Ombuds Values.



Of the above professional development hours, Brooke will be able to request 32 hours for her CO-OP recertification in 2027 and Lisa will be able to request 56 hours towards her CO-OP recertification in 2024.

Services Provided to the Campus Community

The Office provides two branches of services: education and outreach for individuals interested in developing knowledge and skills for navigating conflict, and visitor support services for individuals who are experiencing challenges and would benefit from receiving situation-specific support. Our FY2023 activities for both areas of services are further described below.

Education and Outreach

Our office facilitated several educational workshops including:

- Crucial Conversations for Mastering Dialogue
- Dignity: A Key to Conflict Management
- Giving and Receiving Feedback Well
- Understanding Your Conflict Dynamics Profile (CDP)
- Working Together to Restore Psychological Safety

All workshops except for Crucial Conversations for Mastering Dialogue (Grenny, Patterson, McMillan, & Switzler, 2021) are 90-minutes long and free of charge.

Crucial Conversations is a 12-hour proprietary course owned by Crucial Learning that requires a content access fee.

Our office facilitated and took part in outreach engagements including:

- event tabling
- Getting Unstuck: Introduction to Ombuds Services
- Ombuds Data Showcase
- panel presentations
- partner office presentations

Getting Unstuck and the Ombuds Data Showcase provided more in-depth information regarding our services. Presentations with partner offices and panel presentations provided a quick snapshot of our services alongside those of other campus service organizations. At tabling events, coordinated by other campus offices, we met with individuals who wanted to learn more about our services and distributed materials.

Visitor Support Services

Our office provided multiple types of visitor support services including:

- Individual Consultation—one-on-one meeting between ombuds and visitors to discuss issues and concerns;
- Individual Consultation in Preparation for Mediation—one-on-one meeting between ombuds and visitor in preparation for mediation;
- Mediation—ombuds-facilitated conversation between two or more visitors; and
- Talking Circles—ombuds-facilitated reflective sharing and deep listening among multiple visitors where ombuds posed questions to the group and individual visitors took turns sharing while passing a talking piece.

Service Expansion

Expansion in Education and Outreach

Active Outreach to Promote Ombuds Services

We began actively networking with partner offices and campus organizations to raise awareness of ombuds services. These efforts led to increased invitations to be part of presentations and outreach events hosted by other offices.

Open Enrollment Education and Outreach Services

We began offering open enrollment education and outreach services through campus-hosted sites including the campus workshop registration site at workshop.utk.edu and the UT Events Calendar at calendar.utk.edu. These events were delivered virtually to reach all campus community members, including those not in the Knoxville area. During FY2023, we offered nine open enrollment sessions of Getting Unstuck: Introduction to Ombuds Services sessions with 57 participants, and facilitated nine open enrollment sessions of 90-minute workshops and two open enrollment sessions of 12-hour workshops to a total of 131 participants.

International Ombuds Day Celebration

We hosted an International Ombuds Day celebration in October. Celebration events included an Ombuds Data Showcase presentation, two 90-minute workshops, a partner office panel, and two Introduction to Ombuds Services presentations. We will continue to celebrate International Ombuds Day via educational programming each October.

Getting Unstuck—Introduction to Ombuds Services

We redesigned the existing Introduction to Ombuds Services presentation to increase visual appeal, engagement, and breadth of information. Aligned with our strategic planning, we incorporated a new value statement, key educational topics, and systems change messaging which lengthened the session from 15-20 minutes to 30-45 minutes.

Conflict Dynamics Profile (CDP)

We began offering the CDP assessment as a new service. CDP is an assessment tool developed by Eckert College faculty (<https://www.conflictdynamics.org/about-the-cdp/>) designed to help individuals and teams manage conflict effectively. This assessment examines how individuals in conflict may engage in constructive or destructive behaviors that are likely to influence the outcomes of the conflict. Additionally, the CDP identifies common triggers or “hot buttons” that may contribute to destructive conflict response. Respondents receive an assessment report about their conflict behaviors and hot buttons, and a development guide that provides information and tips for managing conflict. During FY2023, 236 individuals completed the CDP assessment,

primarily through our Understanding Your CDP workshop. Some individuals completed the CDP through meetings with ombuds. In most cases, we offer the CDP free of cost to graduate students. Departments that request CDP assessment for staff and faculty are charged a small license fee.

Conflict Navigator Program

We developed the Conflict Navigator Program to recognize full-time staff who complete 20 hours of conflict-management training through our office and partner offices. In alignment with our new strategic goals, this program is intended to foster a deeper understanding and application of conflict management approaches among all staff audiences. Our office will be able to provide limited scholarship funding for staff to pay for expenses associated with Crucial Conversations for Mastering Dialogue. Marketing for this program began in May 2023.

Expansion in Visitor Support Services

Increase Ombuds Accessibility

We continue to rely on OnceHub, an online cloud-based encrypted and password protected platform for individuals to schedule meetings with our staff. We updated our schedule request form to include a section for individuals to indicate any desired accommodations for their meeting. For visitor support services, we added two new meeting services to increase ombuds accessibility. First, we added phone appointments to our existing in-person and Zoom options. With phone appointments, depending on ombuds availability, visitors may be able to speak to an ombuds for immediate assistance by calling our office phone number during regular business hours. Second, we added Zoom after-hour services as an option for visitors on Monday through Thursday from 5:00pm to 8:00pm. This was added because meeting during regular business hours may not be an option for some of our graduate students, staff, and faculty.



Services for Previous Year Recommendations

During FY2023, our staff made efforts to address FY2022 recommendations 1, 2, and 4.

Recommendation 1 was related to continuing to offer Crucial Conversations educational workshops. During FY2023, Duren became a certified organizational trainer in our effort to increase Crucial Conversations education capacity. Currently all three office staff are certified organizational trainers for Crucial Conversations for Mastering Dialogue.

Recommendation 2 was related to engaging university leaders in dignity-conscious education. In February 2022 we invited Dr. Donna Hicks to UT and began developing and offering dignity education. Based on observations and feedback during FY2023, we will continue to refine the design of our dignity-conscious educational programming and develop a three-part series that focuses on dignity for self, dignity-conscious leadership, and honoring dignity in conflict.

Recommendation 4 was related to developing and implementing a custom, homegrown educational program preparing current and future campus leaders to approach and manage conflict as an opportunity for innovative change. During FY2023 we developed the Conflict Navigator Program that will be implemented in FY2024. This program will be open to staff, faculty, and DDDH.

Observed Trends

Education and Outreach Participation Trends

We experienced significant growth in education and outreach services as a direct result of Duren joining our office. We began collecting participant registration and attendance information for open enrollment events and speaking engagements.

During FY2023, our staff facilitated 22 educational workshops for 444 participants. Among the total participants, there were individuals who participated in more than one workshop. Table 2. summarizes FY2023 workshop offerings and participation.

TABLE 2: OFFICE OF OMBUDS SERVICES WORKSHOP OFFERINGS AND PARTICIPATION				
TOPIC	LENGTH	NUMBER OF OFFERINGS	NUMBER OF PARTICIPANTS	AVERAGE NUMBER OF PARTICIPANTS PER OFFERING
UNDERSTANDING YOUR CONFLICT DYNAMICS PROFILE (CDP)	90 min.	8	233	29.1
DIGNITY: A KEY TO CONFLICT MANAGEMENT	90 min.	5	88	17.6
GIVING AND RECEIVING FEEDBACK WELL	90 min.	4	71	17.8
WORKING TOGETHER TO RESTORE PSYCHOLOGICAL SAFETY	90 min.	2	23	11.5
CRUCIAL CONVERSATIONS FOR MASTERING DIALOGUE	12 hrs.	3	29	9.7

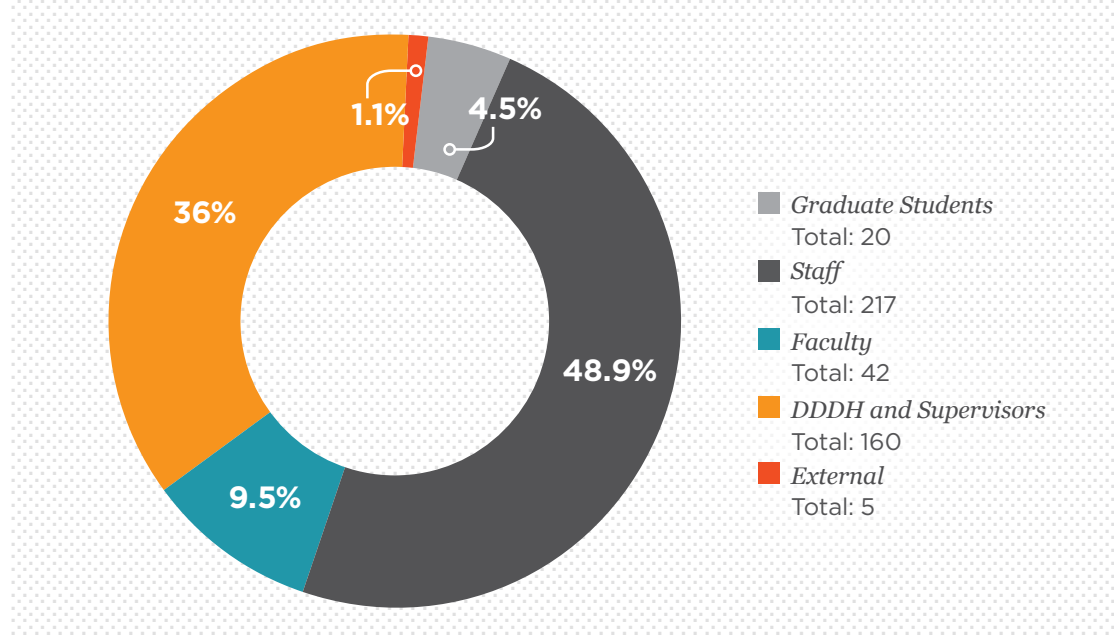
Where possible, workshop participants’ organizational roles were collected with attendance through the campus workshop registration site and self-reporting. Staff was the largest participant group with 217 (48.9%). DDDH and supervisors were the second largest group with 160 (36%) participants. In addition, there were 42 (9.5%) faculty participants, 20 (4.5%) graduate student participants, and 5 (1.1%) external participants including incoming graduate students and individuals from other UT campuses (Figure 1). Several of the DDDH and supervisor participants were part of a Provost’s Office leadership educational programing team and included faculty interested in becoming future leaders.

Our office staff engaged in a total of 36 outreach events that involved approximately 923 participants. Outreach events, in order of highest to lowest participation, were as follows:

- Getting Unstuck: Introduction to Ombuds Services, 19 events with 318 participants;
- event tabling, 5 events with 240 participants;
- panel presentations, 4 events with 216 participants;
- partner office presentations, 5 events with 121 participants; and
- Ombuds Data Showcase, 2 events with 28 participants.

During FY2023, we reached a total of 1,409 participants through education and outreach. This was an increase of 950 participants from 459 in FY2022, which amounts to a 207% growth in service.

FIG. 1: WORKSHOP PARTICIPANTS BY ROLE



Visitor Support Service Trends

When collecting and analyzing data related to our visitor support services, we identified metrics related to visitors and cases. Visitors are individuals who meet with the ombuds and cases are the situations that visitors share with the ombuds. To maintain confidentiality, while ensuring that we engage in reliable and systematic data collection and analysis, we identified the following metrics related to visitor traffic trend:

- **New visitors for the month:** The number of unique visitors who meet with the ombuds each month in a fiscal year. A new visitor for the month is tallied as one visitor no matter how frequently they visit in a month. If there are multiple new visitors for the month in one meeting, all are tallied as new visitors for the month.
- **New visitors for the year:** The number of unique visitors who meet with the ombuds in a fiscal year. If there are multiple new visitors for the year in one meeting, all are tallied as new visitors for the year.
- **Repeat visitors:** The number of visitors who meet with ombuds more than once in a month.
- **New cases:** The number of unique situations that visitors share with ombuds during a fiscal year. If there are multiple visitors in one meeting with a unique case, one visitor is counted as a new case and the rest are tallied as ongoing cases.
- **Ongoing cases:** The number of repeated situations that visitors share with the ombuds.
- **Touchpoints:** People other than visitors whom the ombuds meet with after gaining visitor permission to discuss a visitor situation and/or provide systemic feedback.

Support Services Provided

During FY2023 our office provided the following services to visitors:

- Individual Consultation, with 457 new visitors for the month, 315 new visitors for the year;
- Individual Consultation in preparation for mediation, with 22 new visitors for the month,

10 new visitors for the year;

- Mediation, with 30 new visitors for the month, 6 new visitors for the year; and
- Talking Circles, with 4 new visitors for the month, all were new visitors for the year.

Visitors can meet with the ombuds to prepare for mediation, then decide whether or not to take part in it. The number of individual consultations in preparation for mediation is higher than the number of new visitors who engaged in mediation because our service is voluntary, and mediation was not always appropriate for visitors’ situations. The number of new visitors for the year for mediation is noticeably higher than new visitors for the year because mediation involves multiple sessions of facilitated dialogue.

Visitors and Cases

Visitors met with ombuds staff steadily throughout FY2023. Total traffic to the Office was 513 new visitors for the month and 335 new visitors for the year involving 339 unique cases and 174 ongoing cases (Figure 2). We experienced the highest number of new visitors for the month in February with 65 visitors, and the lowest in June with 27 visitors. On average we met with 42.8

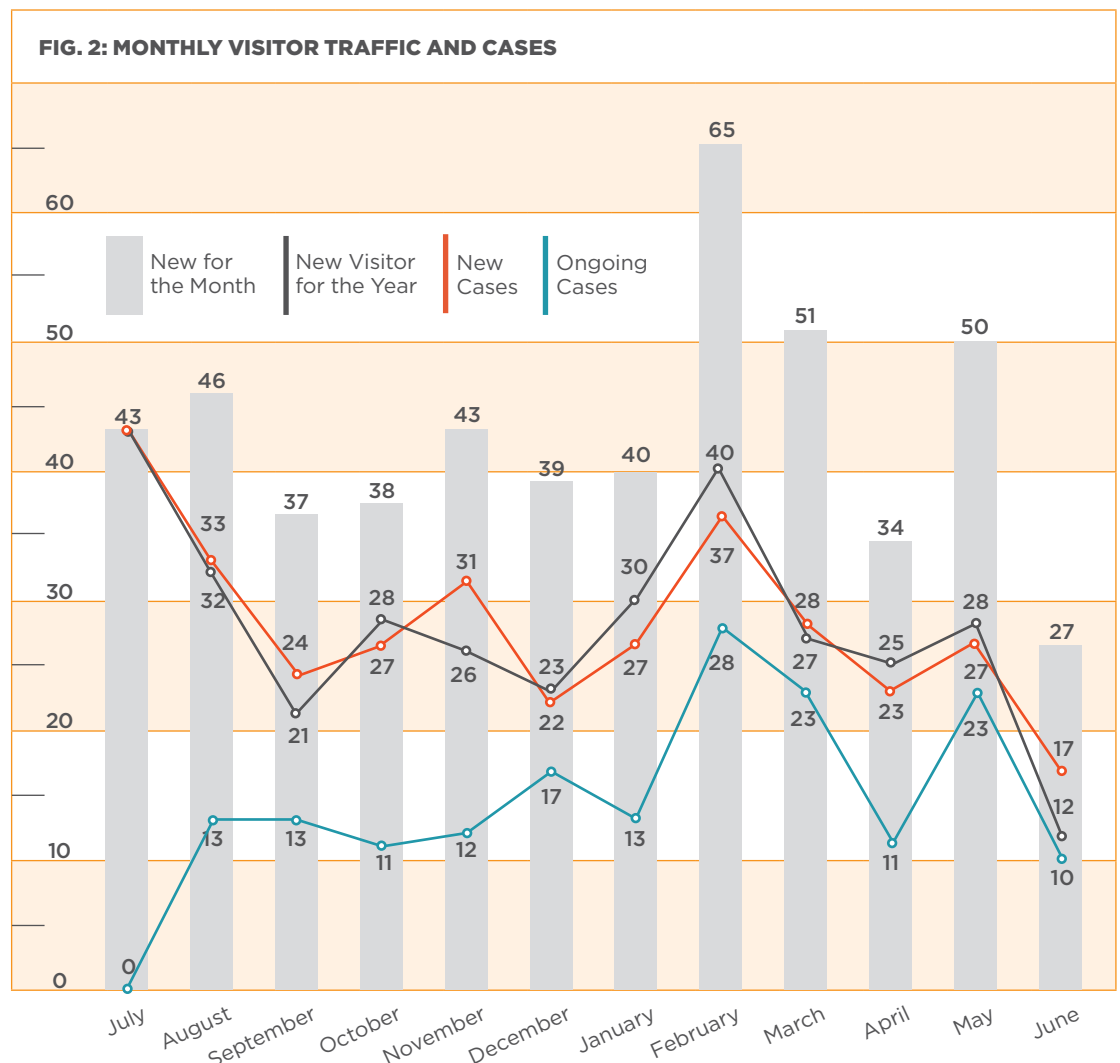
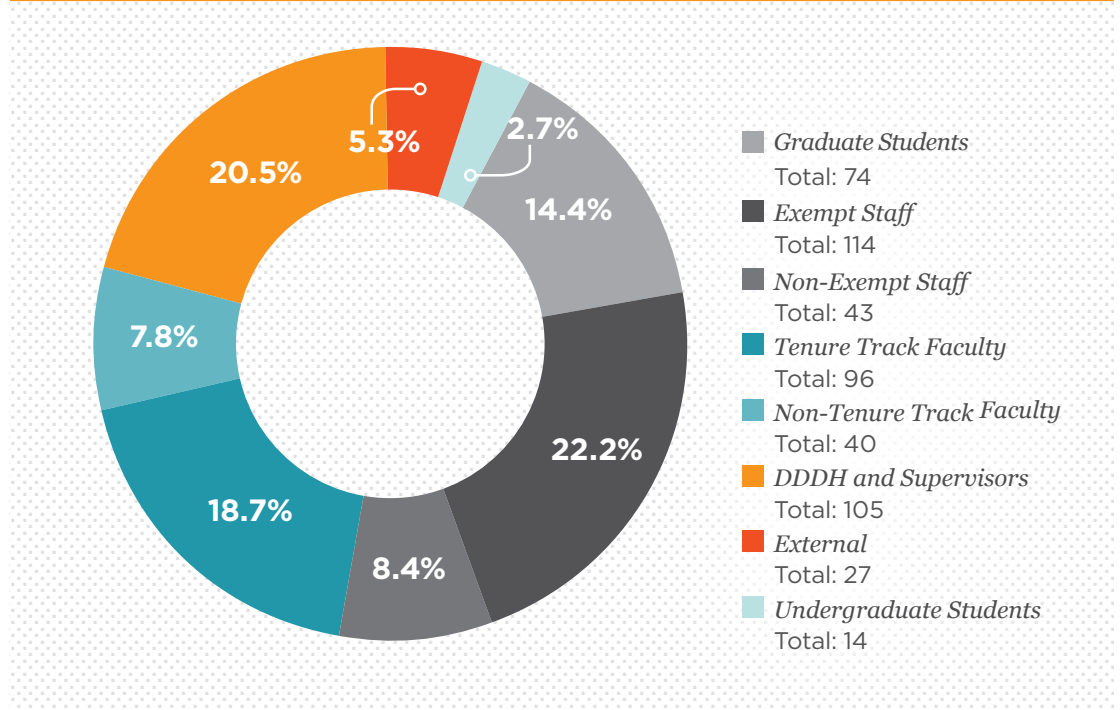


FIG. 3: VISITORS BY ROLE

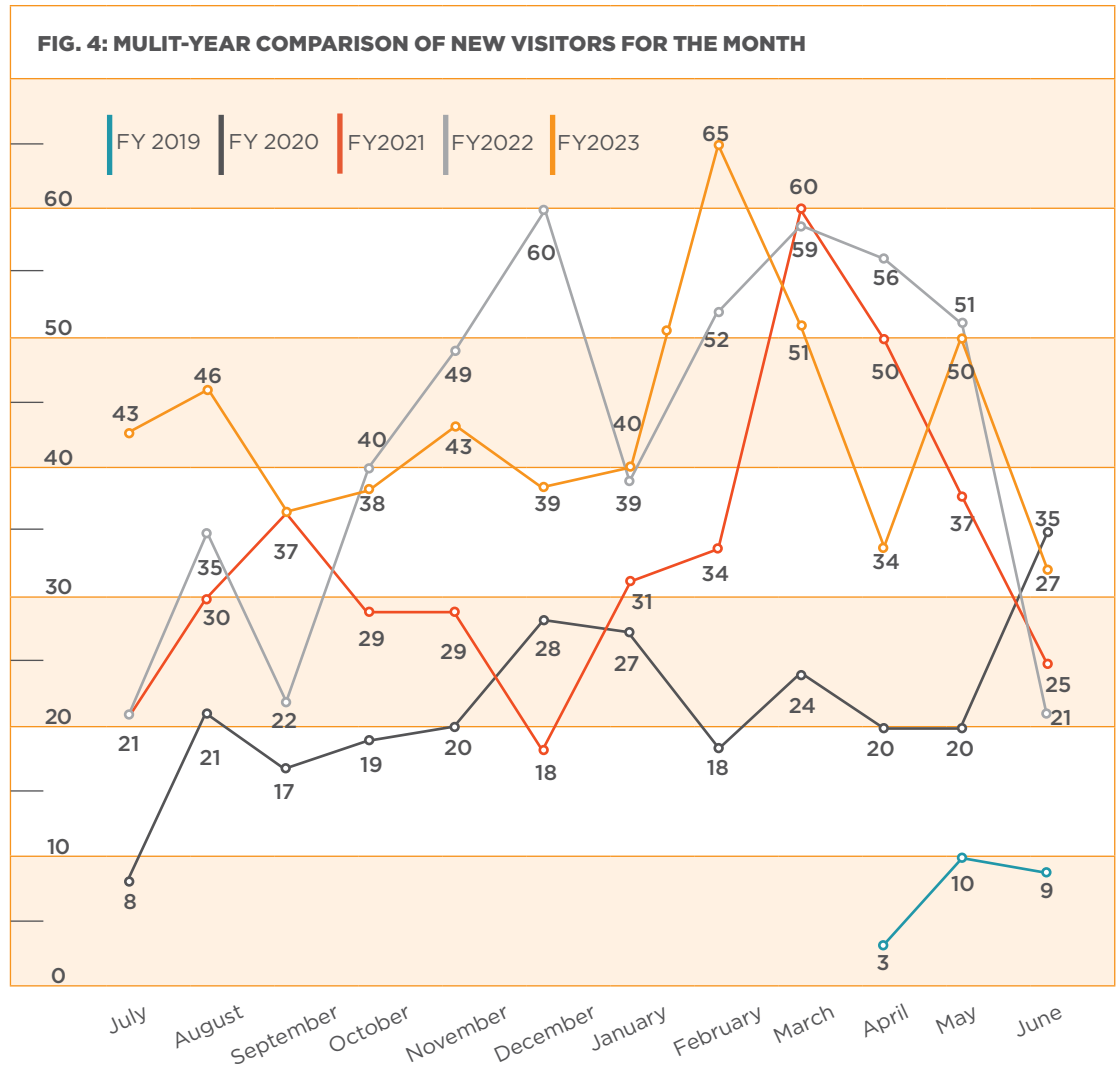


new visitors during a month. Note, because July is the beginning of the fiscal year, new visitors for the month and new visitors for the year are the same value.

Figure 3 shows monthly visitor organizational role distribution. Staff was the largest group to visit our office with a total of 157 staff visitors, of which 43 (8.4%) were non-exempt staff, and 114 (22.2%) were exempt staff. Faculty were the second largest group to visit our office with a total of 136 faculty visitors, of which 40 (7.8%) were non-tenure track faculty and 96 (18.7%) were tenure track faculty. DDDH and supervisors were the third largest group to visit our office with 105 (20.5%) visitors. In addition, there were 74 (14.4%) graduate students, 14 (2.7%) undergraduate students, and 27 (5.2%) visitors external to the university, which included former graduate students former employees, and individuals from other UT campuses.

Figure 4 shows monthly visitor traffic comparisons by fiscal year since our office was established in 2019. Since our office was put into place, at the end of FY2023 we served 1,698 new visitors for the month. Monthly visitor traffic in FY2023 was slightly different from previous years, but we yielded the highest number of new visitors for the month.

Between FY2019 and FY2021 our office experienced steady growth in serving new visitors for the month where the total annual traffic ranged from 22 to 401 visitors. At the current stage of our office development, we have reached a slower growth rate in visitor traffic and we are focusing on maintaining, rather than significantly expanding, visitor traffic levels. For this reason total monthly visitors between FY2022 and FY2023 were close in number with 505 visitors and 513 visitors respectively.



Case Intensity

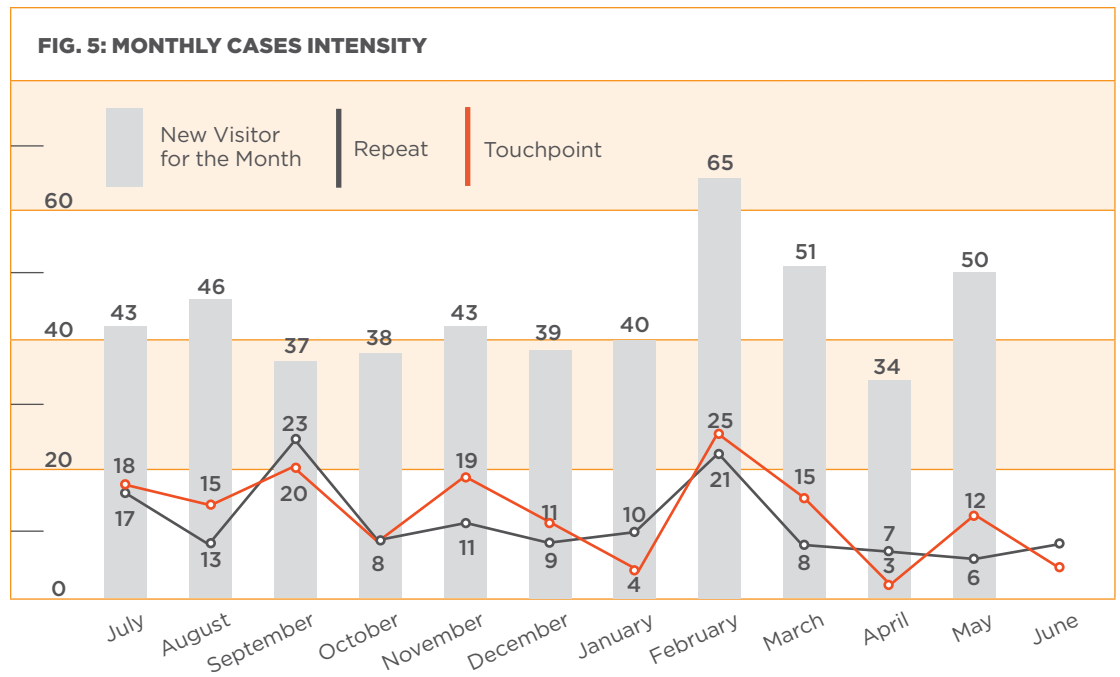
Figure 5 presents a summary of case intensity including repeat visitors and touchpoints. Both repeat visitors and touchpoints are shown in comparison to the total new visitors for a month.

We experienced the highest number of repeat visitors in September with 23 visitors, and lowest in May with six visitors. We experienced the highest number of meetings with touchpoints in February with 25 meetings, and lowest in April with three meetings. Typically, visitors who were experiencing complex ongoing situations were likely to engage in repeat visits, and ombuds were likely to meet with touchpoints.

Visitor Demographics

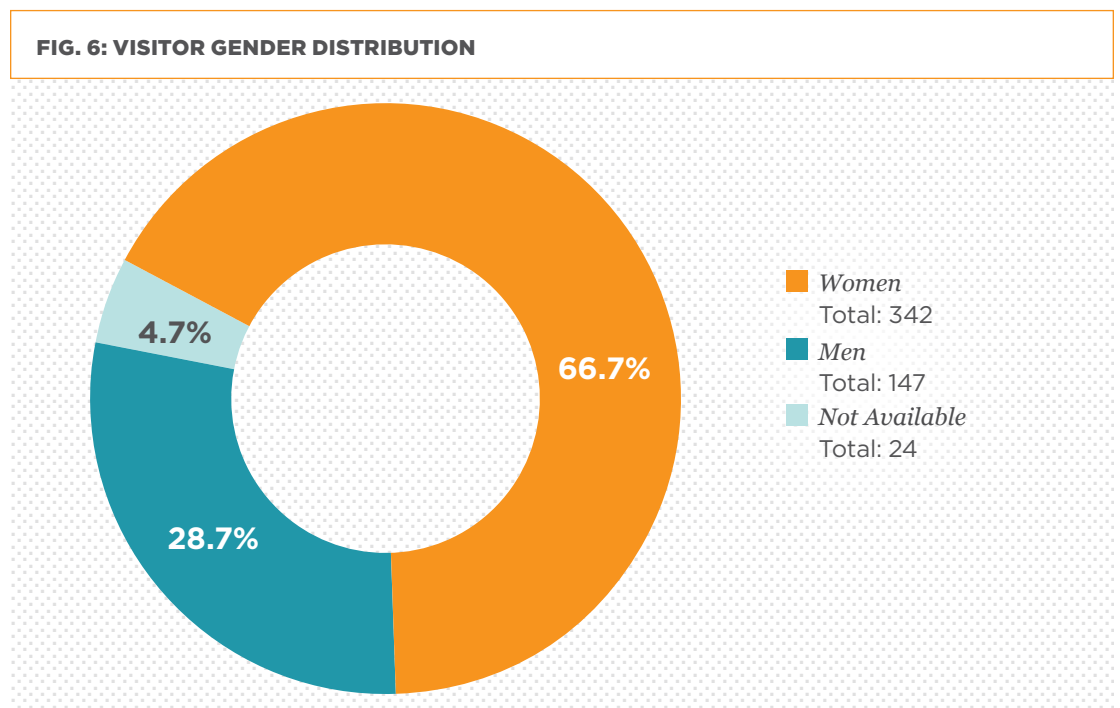
EEO category data for the campus was extracted from the latest 2022 UT Fact Book published by Institutional Research and Strategic Analysis (IRSA) and included:

- Distribution of Employees by EEO Category and Gender;



- Distribution of Employees By EEO Category and Race (Excludes International);
- Distribution of International Employees By EEO Category and Race;
- 5 Year Trend of Graduate/Professional Headcount Enrollment by Race/Ethnicity (Excludes International); and
- 5 Year Trend of Graduate/Professional Headcount of International Enrollment by Race/Ethnicity.

Figure 6 shows visitor gender information from the human resources system. Visitors for whom



gender information was not available are marked “not available.” Of the total 513 monthly visitors, 342 were women (66.7 %) and 147 were men (28.7%). Additionally, there were 24 (4.7%) visitors for whom gender data was not available.

Table 3 shows visitor gender distribution in comparison to graduate students, staff, and faculty. In FY2023, like previous years, women visitors were the largest group that we served. Interestingly, when consulting ombuds from several other universities, all reported serving a larger percentage of women than men. According to these ombuds, gender of the ombuds did not seem to influence this trend. The percentage of visitors whom we serve where gender is unknown is higher than the campus population. The explanation for this is most likely because of external visitors for whom we do not have access to data and so their gender is recorded as “not available.”

TABLE 3: VISITOR AND POPULATION GENDER DISTRIBUTION COMPARISON			
	WOMEN	MEN	NOT AVAILABLE
VISITORS	66.7%	28.7%	4.7%
CAMPUS POPULATION	53.2%	46.8%	0.04%

Figure 7 shows visitor race and ethnicity information from the human resources system. Visitors for whom race information was not available are marked “not available.” Of the total 513 monthly visitors, 18 (3.5%) were Hispanic of any race, 41 (8%) were Asian or Pacific Islander, 41 (8%) were Black or African American, and 363 (70.8%) were White. There were 50 (9.8%) visitors for whom race data was not available.

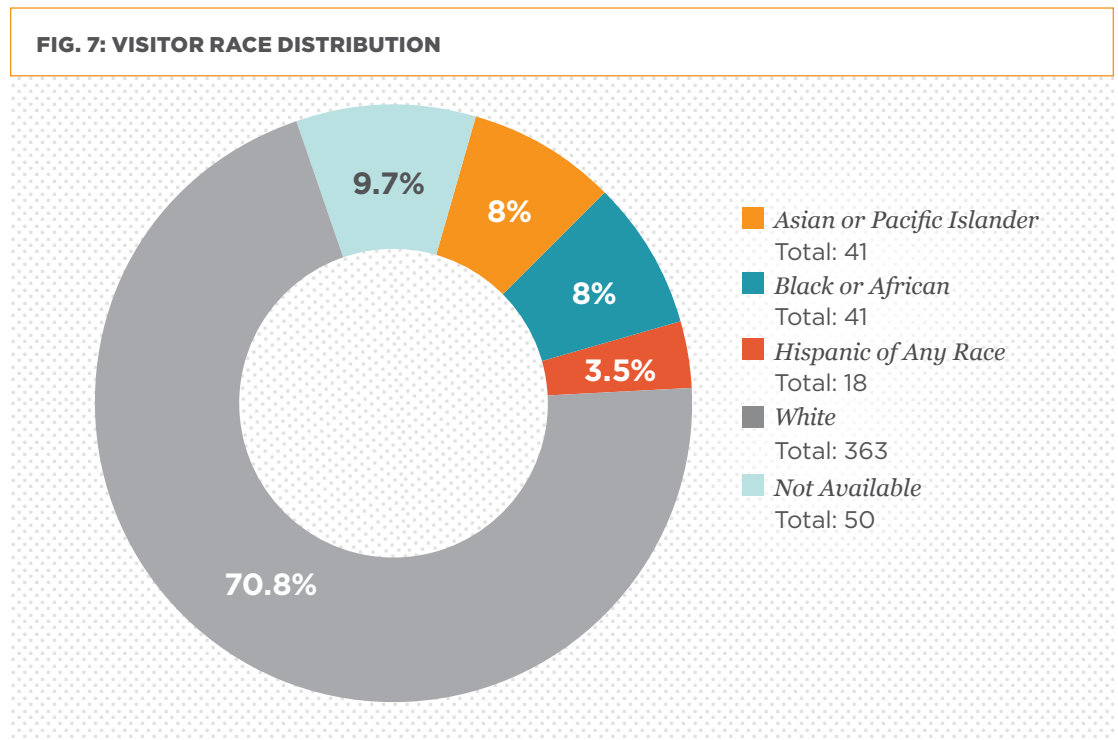


Table 4 shows visitor race distribution in comparison to graduate students, staff, and faculty. The percentage of visitors whom we serve where race is unknown is higher than the campus population. The explanation for this is most likely because of external visitors for whom we do not have access to data and so their race is recorded as “not available.”

In FY2023, the race and ethnicity distribution of individuals whom we served was very similar to the population data.

TABLE 4: VISITOR AND POPULATION RACE DISTRIBUTION COMPARISON							
	AMERICAN INDIAN OR ALASKAN NATIVE	ASIAN OR PACIFIC ISLANDER	BLACK OR AFRICAN AMERICAN	HISPANIC OF ANY RACE	WHITE	TWO OR MORE RACES	NOT AVAILABLE
VISITORS	0%	8%	8%	3.5%	70.8%	0%	29.12%
CAMPUS POPULATION	0.2%	7.4%	6.9%	4%	78.7%	1.8%	17.6%

Visitor Shared Experiences

From our conversations with visitors, we identified themes in visitor concerns. In this section we do not provide generalizable claims about the entire population that we serve, and instead we share observations of particularities (Stake, 1995) that visitors experienced.

Experience Working with Ombuds

Many visitors met with the ombuds to:

- gain information with 225 occurrences; and
- receive communication and/or conflict guidance, with 223 occurrences.

While meeting with the ombuds, visitors were likely to engage in:

- exploration and evaluation of options, with 320 occurrences;
- clarification of policies and procedures, with 150 occurrences;
- the identification of interests and goals, with 144 occurrences; and
- preparation for a difficult conversation, with 99 occurrences.

In many instances, gaining new information about policies and procedures and communication strategies provided visitors with the opportunity to explore and evaluate options. This helped them identify how to proceed in their situation.

Emerging Themes

Challenges with Complex Reporting Relationships

Graduate student, staff, and faculty visitors’ concerns about evaluative relationships have been observed by our office consistently throughout the years. During FY2023, we found that complex, or blurry, evaluative reporting lines contributed to destructive dynamics within departments/units. Evaluative relationships can become complex when visitors have:

- more than one supervisor who evaluates them;
- a supervisor who evaluates them and another person who provides functional supervision; and
- colleagues who serve as both evaluators and peers e.g. an untenured faculty working with tenured faculty who serve in both roles.

We observed that when evaluative relationships were complex visitors experienced challenges with unclear or misaligned performance expectations as well as uncertainty about supervisory roles and responsibilities. Additionally, visitors shared difficulties in prioritizing their work and concerns about being perceived as not adequately performing.

Staff and Faculty Challenges in Conflict Navigation

Non-exempt staff, exempt staff, non-tenure track faculty, and tenure track faculty met with the ombuds about challenges often related to:

- department leadership,
- evaluative relationships,
- peers, and
- performance evaluations.

In addition to the above, faculty experienced challenges that were related to:

- how to best assist students,
- research authorship, and
- inequitable service assignments.

We observed that when staff and faculty visitors experienced challenges navigating conflict, they needed help exploring options and strategies for addressing them.

DDDH and Supervisors' Challenges with Leading in Conflict

Several DDDH and other supervisory staff visitors faced challenges in effectively leading through conflict. Such difficulties were often related to:

- disagreements between students, staff, and/or faculty;
- a need to provide difficult feedback to students, staff, and/or faculty; and
- challenging department/unit dynamics.

We observed that DDDH and supervisory visitors found themselves stuck when they did not know how to manage conflict in their department/unit. In such situations, conflicts often persisted and got in the way of daily operations.

Staff Concern about Job Security

Non-exempt and exempt staff frequently met with ombuds when they were concerned about job security. These concerns often related to:

- performance evaluations,
- oral and written warnings,
- performance improvement plans (PIP),

- changes in job responsibilities, and
- new supervisor assignment.

We observed that when staff visitors were concerned about their job security, supervisors and employees both experienced communication challenges, especially regarding giving and receiving feedback. Staff shared a desire for more regular feedback from their supervisors. Staff were surprised when supervisors provided negative feedback for the first time during performance evaluations, oral or written warnings, and/or in PIPs.



Graduate Student Concerns about Academic Progress

Challenges that interfered with timely degree completion were a prominent concern among graduate student visitors. Such challenges were often related to:

- communication with advisor and/or committee,
- changing advisors that often added a year or more to academic progress,
- finding an advisor,
- assistantship renewal,
- authorship and/or intellectual property,
- meeting degree requirements, and
- financial issues, especially among international graduate students.

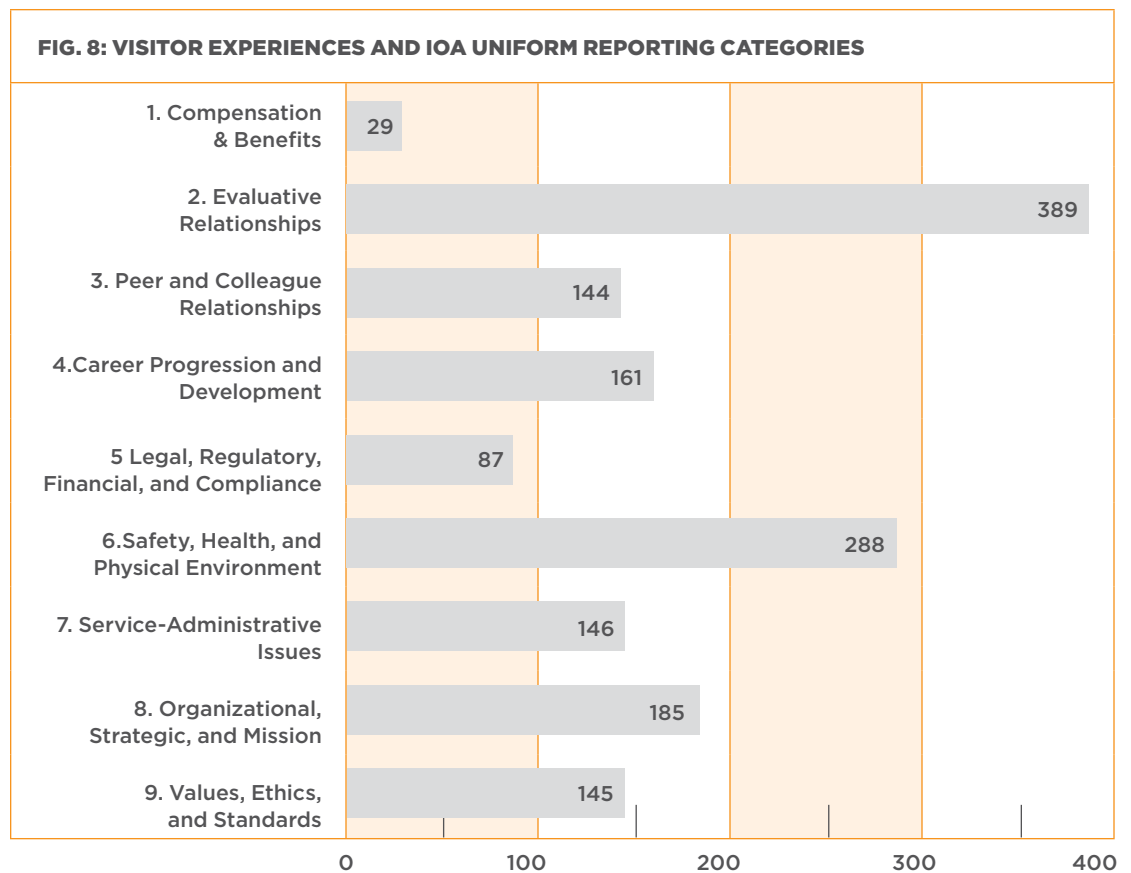
We observed that graduate student visitors experiencing communication challenges with their advisor often needed timely and constructive feedback. Students who had difficulty in securing an advisor or had to change advisors often experienced uncertainty as to whether they would be able to secure funding and/or meet degree requirements in a timely manner. International student visitors shared that they were experiencing financial challenges with housing and transportation that brought uncertainties to their ability to complete their degree.

IOA Uniform Reporting Category Trends

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 8 shows how often the ombuds observed visitor experiences related to 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.



We observed that there were 2 prevalent IOA categories in visitor experiences: Evaluative Relationships, with 389 occurrences, and Safety, Health, and Physical Health, with 288 occurrences. This trend was similar to observations from previous years. Within Evaluative Relationships, the most frequently observed subcategories were: Communication, Trust-Integrity, and Respect-Treatment. Within Safety, Health, and Physical Health, most frequently observed subcategories were overwhelmingly Work-Related Stress and Work-Life Balance.

We examined thematic co-occurrences among Communication, Trust-Integrity, and Respect-Treatment, and Work-Related Stress and Work Life-Balance. The top three pairs of codes with the highest number of co-occurrences were related to Communication. These pairs of codes, listed in order of most frequent to least frequent, were:

- Communication and Work-Related Stress and Work Life-Balance, with 176 co-occurrences;
- Communication and Trust-Integrity, with 152 co-occurrences; and
- Communication and Respect-Treatment, with 141 co-occurrences.

Themes from the Literature Found in Visitor Experiences

As in previous years, in FY2023 we continued to code visitor experiences based on themes we observed in the literature. Thematic codes from the literature include:

- **Stuck in Crucial Conversations:** when visitors were stuck in a difficult conversation about topics that were important, high stakes, and emotionally charged (Grenny, Patterson, McMillan, & Switzler, 2011).

- **Dignity Violations:** when visitors experienced harm to their sense of belonging and worthiness and had a difficult time seeing themselves being understood by others (Hicks, 2011, 2018).
- **Disruption to Psychological Safety:** when visitors did not feel safe to be their authentic self in work teams and became hesitant to engage in interpersonal risk-taking while working towards a shared goal with colleagues (Edmondson 1999; 2019).

We observed that all three themes in the literature were prevalent in visitors’ experiences. Dignity Violations had 303 occurrences, while both Crucial Conversation Feeling Stuck and Psychological Safety had 266 occurrences. When these themes were paired with the highest occurrences from the Uniform Reporting Category codes previously reported, the three pairs with highest co-occurrences from most frequent to least frequent were:

- Dignity Violation and Work-Stress and Work Life-Balance, with 220 co-occurrences;
- Dignity Violation and Psychological Safety, with 216 co-occurrences; and
- Psychological Safety and Work-Stress and Work Life-Balance, with 200 co-occurrences.

In FY2024, we will continue to engage in thematic analysis of visitor narrative experiences with themes in the literature. Additionally, to better understand visitor experiences based on themes that emerged from FY2023 visitor experiences, we will add the following themes from literature in our analysis:

- **Giving and Receiving Feedback:** when visitors give and/or receive information about job performance that can affect the receiver, the relationship between parties, and/or a work team (Stone & Heen, 2014).
- **Apology and Forgiveness:** when visitors are looking for a sign of remorse, regret, empathy, and/or social harmony from another person that can help heal emotional harm (Robinson, 2019).

Office Success Indicators

External Recognition

As active members of the professional ombuds community, our staff engaged in several leadership services for the IOA and for ombuds from other organizations (Table 5).

TABLE 5: OMBUDS STAFF LEADERSHIP SERVICES FOR THE OMBUDS COMMUNITY	
OMBUDS LEADERSHIP ACTIVITIES	
SERVICE TO IOA	IOA Core Course Understand and Demonstrate the Value of your Ombuds Office, Development Team Member (cross listed in professional development section) IOA and CO-OP Joint Task Force on Institutional Ombuds Program Accreditation, Member IOA Educational Strategies Group, Member IOA Leadership Group, Member IOA Professional Development Committee, Co-Chair
CONSULTATIONS TO OTHER OMBUDS	Provided guidance to several ombuds at other institutions regarding: (a) starting an ombuds office, (b) developing a charter, (c) managing complex cases, (d) engaging in data collection and analysis while addressing IOA Code of Ethics and Standards of Practice, and (e) preparing annual reports.

Word of Mouth Referrals

In Once Hub, our online meeting scheduling system, visitors can indicate how they learned about our office by selecting from a list of possible referral sources. Of the 362 visitor responses, the top three referral sources were:

- peers and/or colleagues, with 65 visitors;
- DDDH and supervisors, with 53 visitors; and
- Human Resources, with 24 visitors.

Education and Outreach Participant Satisfaction Survey Results

Participants in many of our workshop and outreach events were asked to complete an anonymous feedback survey at the end of each event and in a follow-up email. During FY 2023, 263 participants provided feedback out of 832 who received an invitation. This amounted to a 31.6% response rate. In this survey, participants were asked to respond to the following statements:

- The training was engaging.
- The content was relevant and helpful.
- Attending this training was a worthwhile use of my time.
- I would recommend this training to a friend or colleague.

Participants were provided five response choices for each question that included “strongly agree,” “agree,” “neutral,” “disagree,” or “strongly disagree.” For all 4 questions, close to 60% or more participant responses were “strongly agree” or “agree” (Table 6).

TABLE 6: WORKSHOPS AND SELECTED OUTREACH SESSIONS RESPONSES						
	STRONGLY AGREE	AGREE	NEUTRAL	DISAGREE	STRONGLY DISAGREE	NO RESPONSE
THE TRAINING WAS ENGAGING.	145 (55.1%)	7 (2.7%)	96 (36.5%)	14 (5%)	0	1 (0%)
THE CONTENT WAS RELEVANT AND HELPFUL.	161 (61.2%)	9 (3.4%)	87 (33.1%)	6 (2.3%)	0	1 (0%)
ATTENDING THIS TRAINING WAS A WORTHWHILE USE OF MY TIME.	161 (61.2%)	10 (3.8%)	74 (28.1%)	14 (5.3%)	2 (1%)	2 (1%)
I WOULD RECOMMEND THIS TRAINING TO A FRIEND OR COLLEAGUE.	159 (60.5%)	7 (2.7%)	84 (32%)	11 (4.2%)	2 (1%)	0

Participant Qualitative Comments

In addition to multiple choice questions, we provided participants with the opportunity to provide open-ended comments. A sample of participants’ comments to the question “What was the most enjoyable/useful part of the training?” are summarized in Figure 9.

FIG. 9: SUMMARY OF PARTICIPANT COMMENTS TO EDUCATION AND OUTREACH EVENTS



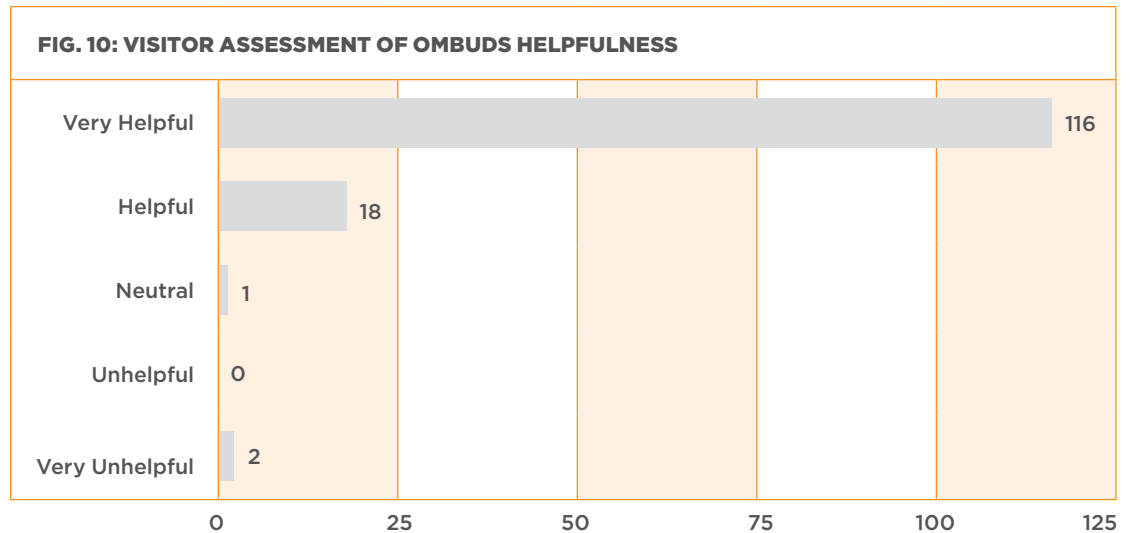
In the qualitative comments, participants commonly expressed appreciation for gaining a better understanding of how the ombuds can serve them in addition to the specific concepts and strategies presented. Overall, participants enjoyed ombuds workshop engagement structures, particularly the opportunities for reflection, peer discussion, and strategy application. Common themes included that our workshops were welcoming and comfortable, provided opportunity for personal insight, and included helpful, concrete examples. Participants shared that they gained a better understanding of how conflict affects them and their organization and how increasing their own use of constructive behaviors could help foster workplace dialogue.

Visitor Support Services Satisfaction Survey Results

Visitors who scheduled meetings with ombuds through OnceHub were automatically sent an anonymous visitor satisfaction survey shortly after their meeting. During FY2023, a total of 144 visitors completed this survey. The response rate represented 28.1% of total monthly visitors. Selected highlights from the survey are presented in this section.

Ombuds Helpfulness

Among five response choices ranging from “very helpful to very unhelpful,” 134 (97.8%) visitors who selected “very helpful” or “helpful” in response to the question: “How helpful was your recent experience with ombuds staff?” In contrast, three visitors selected “Neutral,” or “Very Unhelpful” (Figure 10).



Helpful Interactions with the Ombuds

Visitors were asked “What did you find to be helpful during your recent interaction with ombuds staff?” and given a list of multiple response options. Among visitors who responded, 50% or more indicated the following ombuds interactions were helpful:

1. empathetic listening, with 116 visitors (80.5%);
2. the opportunity to speak with someone impartial, with 109 visitors (75.7%);
3. help exploring my options, with 91 visitors (63.2%);
4. guidance/suggestions, 88 visitors (61.1%);
5. assistance thinking through complex issues, 83 visitors (57.6%);
6. help preparing for difficult conversations, 81 visitors (56.3%); and
7. confidentiality, 80 visitors (55.6%).

Ombuds Effectiveness

Visitors were asked to rate the effectiveness of ombuds in the following areas:

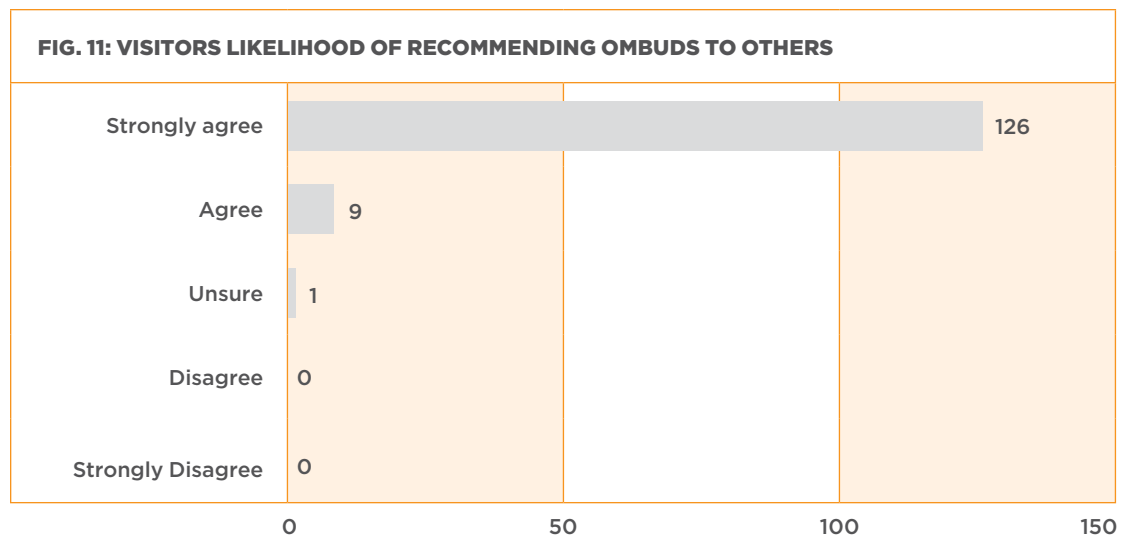
- Empowering me to make informed decisions.
- Understanding my issues/concerns.
- Making me feel comfortable talking with them.
- Treating me with kindness and respect.
- Explaining issues related to confidentiality.
- Providing timely communication/services.

Among six response choices ranging from “very good” to “very poor,” or “does not apply,” responses were overwhelmingly positive (Table 7).

TABLE 7: VISITOR ASSESSMENT OF OMBUDS EFFECTIVENESS						
	VERY GOOD	GOOD	ACCEPTABLE	POOR	VERY POOR	DOES NOT APPLY
EMPOWERING ME TO MAKE INFORMED DECISIONS.	116 (87.2%)	11 (8.3%)	2 (1.5%)	0	0	4 (3%)
UNDERSTANDING MY ISSUES/CONCERNS.	123 (92.5%)	10 (7.5%)	0	0	0	0
MAKING ME FEEL COMFORTABLE TALKING WITH THEM.	130 (96.3%)	5 (3.7%)	0	0	0	0
TREATING ME WITH KINDNESS AND RESPECT.	133 (98.5%)	2 (1.5%)	0	0	0	0
EXPLAINING ISSUES RELATED TO CONFIDENTIALITY.	115 (85.2%)	9 (6.7%)	1 (0.7%)	0	0	10 (7.4%)
PROVIDING TIMELY COMMUNICATION/SERVICES.	125 (94.8%)	5 (3.7%)	1 (0.7%)	0	0	1 (0.7%)

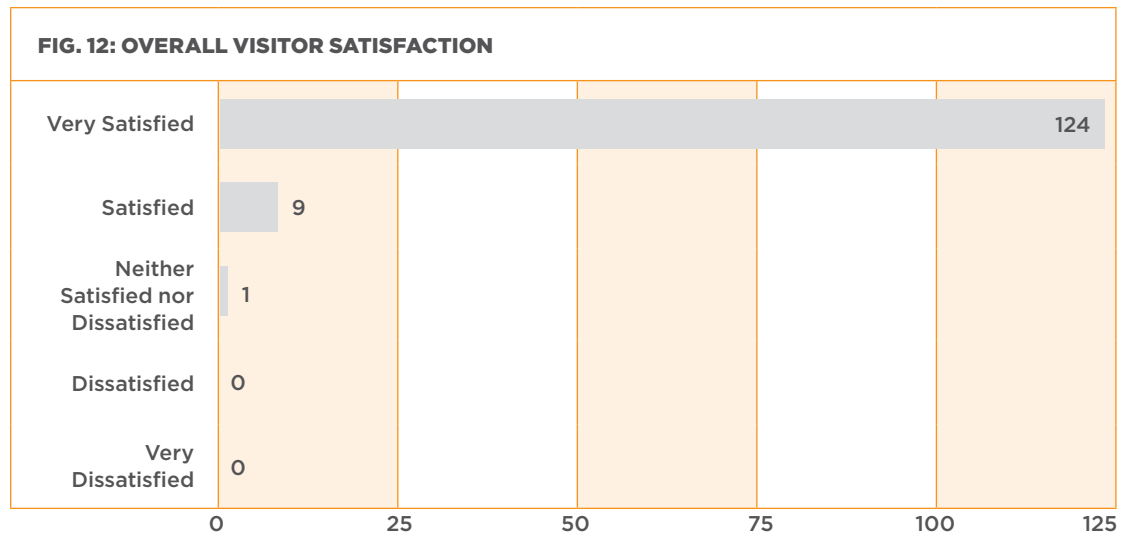
Recommending Ombuds to Others

Among five response choices ranging from “strongly agree,” to “strongly disagree,” 135 visitors (99.3%) who responded to the survey selected “strongly agree” or “agree” in response to the statement “I would recommend the Office of Ombuds Services to others.” One visitor selected “unsure,” and no visitor selected “disagree” or “strongly disagree” (Figure 11).



Overall Visitor Satisfaction with Ombuds

Among five response choices ranging from “very satisfied” to “very dissatisfied,” 133 visitors (99.3%) who responded to the survey selected “very satisfied” or “satisfied” as a response to the statement “Overall, how would you rate your most recent experience with the Office of Ombuds Services?” In contrast one visitor selected “neither satisfied or dissatisfied,” and no visitor selected “dissatisfied” or “very dissatisfied” (Figure 12).



Visitor Qualitative Comments

In addition to the multiple-choice questions, we provided visitors with an opportunity to give open-ended comments. A sample of visitor comments are summarized in Figure 13.

In the qualitative comments, visitors commonly expressed appreciation for their meeting with the ombuds. Common themes included that ombuds were helpful, impartial, and informative. Visitors shared that meetings with ombuds provided them with space to discuss difficult situations, explore options, gain clarity, and determine how to best move forward in their situation.

FIG. 13: SAMPLE VISITOR COMMENTS

“

I am very grateful that this office exists and that genuinely thoughtful and compassionate people work here.”

“

Extremely satisfied and appreciative of the helpful, kind, empathetic approach that was shown to me today.”

“

I found the assistance with developing options to approach the situation most helpful!”

“

[They] empowered me to make informed decisions and I felt supported and validated in my feelings.”

“

Safe and confidential space to express worries and issues.”

“

This is a wonderfully helpful resource and I'm very glad it exists.”

“

The existence of this office is vital.”

“

I am thankful for the opportunity to connect with Ombuds Services. I felt heard and safe.”

“

It is nice to have the option to speak with a third party confidentially without retaliation. Usually, I am seeking information on university policy, and this office is always able to provide answers.”

“

I am grateful that UTK has an ombuds office. I would not know what I would have done without them.”

“

When it came to figuring out my options, [the ombuds] was unbiased and gave me advice that truly provided an impartial perspective.”

“

It was so helpful to speak with an impartial party and workshop the conversation weighing benefits and detriments. It helped me feel more capable and prepared for a difficult conversation.”

Recommendations for FY2024

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 navigate conflict. This can reduce the occurrence of dignity violations and disruptions to psychological safety. Therefore, recommendations from FY2023 ombuds observations include:

1. Develop a culture where campus community members view conflict as an opportunity for reflection, innovation, and positive growth.
2. Develop a campus culture that supports frequent, open, and constructive communication, particularly within evaluative relationships.
3. Provide educational opportunities that enhance campus community members' willingness and capacity to have meaningful dialogue and constructively manage conflicts.

Data Collection and Analysis Methodology

Maintaining Confidentiality in Ombuds Data Collection and Analyses

While engaging in visitor support services and following the IOA Code of Ethics and Standards of Practice to the fullest extent. Ombuds staff identified quantitative metrics and qualitative themes to examine visitor experiences using Stake's (2010) knowledge framework for 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 commitments, the following strategies were put into place for data collection and analysis related to visitor support services:

- 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.

Ombuds staff relied on several digital research tools for collecting and analyzing non-identifiable data. Google Forms and Sheets were used as the quantitative database platform from July 2022 to December 2022 for data entry and aggregate analyses of traffic trends. Following December 2022, the staff transitioned their database platform to AirTable to better accommodate to Office's growth in staff and services. Staff used Dedoose to engage in qualitative data analysis of visitor conversational narratives.

Coding of visitor 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 FY2022 analysis were carried forward for FY2023. As the FY2023 data collection and analysis progressed, new codes emerged and were added. Throughout the year, ombuds staff debriefed observations regarding themes and trends in visitor experiences.

While engaging in thematic analysis of visitor experiences, 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 them. Ombuds staff approached shared meaning as a social interaction between ombuds and visitors that brought shape and form to ideas for ongoing dialogue about their shared reality (Bruner, 2002). 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

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 staff 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, and
- collecting data from multiple sources.

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