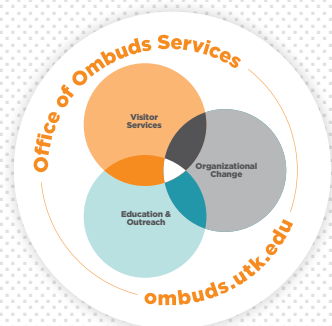


The University of Tennessee, Knoxville

Office of Ombuds Services Fiscal Year 2024 Annual Report

*Submitted to the University of Tennessee, Knoxville
Chancellor in August 2024*



CELEBRATING 5
YEARS OF SERVICE



OFFICE OF
OMBUDS SERVICES

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About the Office of Ombuds Service

The University of Tennessee (UT), Knoxville, Office of Ombuds Services was established on May 1, 2019. The Office serves as an independent, impartial, informal, and confidential resource for faculty, staff, and graduate students on the Knoxville campus. The Office was established by the Chancellor to provide the university community with an informal and internal channel of conflict resolution.

Mission Statement

The Office serves graduate students, staff, faculty, and campus leaders empowering them to constructively navigate challenges related to their experiences at UT, 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**, university ombudsperson and director, is a member of IOA, Association of Change Management Professionals (ACMP), Association for Educational Communications and Technology (AECT), Association of Talent Development (ATD), and Tennessee Association of Professional Mediators (TAPM).
- **Ms. Brooke Wichmann**, associate ombudsperson is a member of IOA.
- **Ms. Duren Thompson**, 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.
- **Mr. Mohammad "Shovon" Rahanur Alam**, graduate research assistant, is a member of IOA.

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Executive Summary

This report was prepared following the specifications in the office charter and reporting guidelines of the IOA. The purpose of this annual report is to provide a Fiscal Year 2024 (FY24) data-supported summary about:

- 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
- office areas of focus for Fiscal Year 2025 (FY25).

Office staff facilitated 48 workshops, providing 104.5 hours of educational content to a total of 771 participants. Compared to the previous year, the workshop offerings more than doubled, which led to substantial growth in participation. Participant workshop satisfaction survey results were overwhelmingly positive. Additionally, staff facilitated 59 outreach events, reaching 1,710 participants.

This was a substantial increase from Fiscal Year 2023 (FY2023).



Visitor support services trends show that ombuds served 370 unique individuals, with 659 contacts that included 492 new monthly visitors and 167 repeat monthly visitors. Visitor concerns involved 324 unique situations and 168 ongoing situations. By role, the ombuds served 81 graduate students, 125 staff, 83 faculty, 46 deans, directors, and department heads (DDDHH), and supervisors, 16 undergraduate students, and 19 visitors who were not from the Knoxville campus. Visitor satisfaction survey results were overwhelmingly positive.

Analysis of visitor experiences uncovered 4 themes including: (1) staff and faculty challenges with communication, (2) DDDHH and supervisor challenges with leading in conflict, (3) non-exempt staff challenges with dignity and psychological safety, and (4) graduate student challenges with dignity and psychological safety. 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 when their dignity was violated (Hicks, 2011; 2018) making it difficult to maintain psychological safety (Edmondson 1999; 2019).

Reflecting on FY24 data and findings, we have identified the following areas of focus for FY25:*

1. **Awareness Building:** Strengthen communication strategies to increase constituents' understanding of how ombuds services can empower them to navigate challenges related to experiences at UT.
2. **Evaluative Relationships:** Enhance educational programming and visitor services to support supervisors and academic advisors in constructive communication and leadership.
3. **Leadership Thought Partners:** Strengthen relationships with campus leaders to help them address organizational challenges in a way that promotes a culture of dignity and psychological safety.

*See Ombuds Area of Focus for FY25 on page 30.

Annual Report Overview

Goals

The goals for preparing this report were to:

- fulfill the office’s responsibility, as outlined in our charter, to provide an annual report to the chancellor and organizational community members;
- adhere to the IOA Standards of Practice;
- demonstrate, with supporting data, how the Office of Ombuds Services serves the university through visitor support services, education, and outreach; and
- provide insights for continued organizational change.

This report includes information regarding office operations, services, observed visitor experiences, operational success indicators, and office focus areas for the next fiscal year.



Operational Activities

Strategic Planning

We held our biannual strategic planning retreats in January and July. During the retreats, staff reviewed the office’s mission and vision statements and discussed office strategies, operations, and goals. In July, we decided that our FY23 recommendations were long-term organizational aspirations rather than tasks that could be achieved by a single office within a year-long period. While these aspirations will continue to serve as a guide in our support of the campus community, we will identify annual areas of focus that fall directly within the scope of our services going forward. These areas

of focus will guide our continual improvement plan. Thus, starting in this annual report, we will no longer have a section dedicated to recommendations, but will instead present our office areas of focus for the next fiscal year.

Staffing

After a successful search, we hired Graduate Research Assistant Mohammad “Shovon” Rahanur Alam who began working for our office on August 1, 2023. Since his hiring, Shovon has assisted Educational Program Coordinator Duren Thompson with educational programming and worked closely with Lisa to explore ways to engage in practical research about ombuds work.

Facilities

During FY24 the Office of Ombuds Services was located in Perkins Hall 101.

Continual Improvement

We are committed to a growth mindset and engage in continual improvement by examining how our services are meeting constituent needs and by engaging in staff professional development. Throughout FY24, our continual improvement efforts aimed to address recommendations from the FY23 Annual Report. These were to:

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; and
3. provide educational opportunities that enhance campus community members' willingness and capacity to: (a) have meaningful dialogue and (b) constructively manage conflict.



Service Improvements Addressing Constituent Needs

We examined various sources of data to assess how to address FY23 recommendations and better meet the needs of our constituents. These data sources included:

- previous year annual report findings;
- daily observations from our educational programming and visitor support services;
- workshop and visitor satisfaction surveys responses; and
- existing literature/knowledge about adult learning, conflict management, dignity consciousness, instructional design, organizational change, and psychological safety.

Reflections on our practice led to the conclusion that our campus community needs dedicated time in order to learn how to:

- communicate assertively at the workplace,
- receive performance feedback,
- care for personal dignity as a prerequisite for becoming dignity-conscious leaders, and
- restore personal psychological safety as a prerequisite for becoming leaders who foster psychological safety.

Additionally, we found that many participants commented in the anonymous survey that they needed more time to apply new concepts introduced in our workshops to their everyday work practices. In the following section we describe new and notable services that we developed and implemented to address the above-identified constituent needs.

Speaking Up: Communicating More Assertively

We developed a 90-minute workshop about assertive communication in the workplace. This workshop was designed to help participants learn how to stand up for themselves in a way that empowers them to be both respectful to themselves and to others. Shortly after implementing this workshop, we received requests to offer it as part of Human Resource's (HR) Leadership and Development (L&OD) New Leaders Advantage (NLA) Program.

Receiving Feedback Well: Collaboration with UT HR

We partnered with HR's Career Development staff to develop and facilitate a 90-minute workshop on constructively receiving feedback. This workshop was designed to help participants receive feedback well as they actively engaged in planning their professional and career development. This was a successful partnership with HR staff where we co-facilitated all workshops sessions.

Dignity: A Key to Conflict and Creating a Dignity-Conscious Work Environment Pairing

We redesigned our existing workshop *Dignity: A Key to Conflict*, adding new content to help participants recognize how and when they experience dignity violations. We also added content to help participants strategize ways to care for their dignity once it has been violated. Additionally, we developed a second 90-minute workshop on dignity, *Creating a Dignity Conscious Work Environment*, designed to help participants engage in leadership development and gain the knowledge and skills to become dignity-conscious leaders.



Working Together on Psychological Safety and Fostering a Psychologically Safe Workplace Pairing

We redesigned our existing workshop *Working Together on Psychological Safety: Discussions on Belonging*, adding content to help participants recognize common disruptions to psychological safety. We also added content to help participants identify strategies to restore their sense of safety. Additionally, we developed a second 90-minute workshop on psychological safety, *Fostering a Psychologically Safe Workplace*, designed to help participants engage in leadership development and gain knowledge and skills for fostering psychological safety at the workplace. Shortly after implementing this workshop, we received requests to offer it as

part of the Office of Provost's Leadership Acceleration and Development for Rising Stars (LADRS) and Leadership Enhancement and Peer Support (LEAPS) programs, as well as HR's NLA program.

Workshop Follow-up Coaching

We began offering workshop participants one-on-one and group follow-up coaching. In FY24 we offered follow-up coaching to Crucial Conversations for Mastering Dialogue participants and Conflict Dynamics Profile participants.

Service Improvements in Response to External Requests

During FY24, we received requests for our services from sister campuses. While our office needs to be mindful first and foremost of the needs of our campus community, we determined, after consultation with the Office of the Chancellor, that there are services we could extend to sister campuses without sacrificing our ability to serve constituents on the Knoxville campus.

Temporary Visitor Support Services to UT Chattanooga (UTC)

Our office began providing temporary services to UTC in September 2023. Initially we offered several Getting Unstuck: Introduction to Ombuds Services programs to raise awareness of the visitor services available through our office. For the remainder of the fiscal year, we provided visitor services. In FY25, UTC will have a full-time ombuds in place, and, once their office is established, we will transition UTC visitor support services to them.

Open Enrollment Virtual Workshop Broadening of Audience

After providing temporary visitor support services to UTC, we began receiving workshop enrollment requests from UTC employees. We decided to expand the audience for our open enrollment virtual workshops to include them. This experience made us aware that sister campus employees are able to register for our open enrollment workshops through workshops.utk.edu. After receiving new requests from other sister campuses, we decided to expand our open enrollment workshops to all UT sister campus employees. In FY24, our workshop enrollment included employees from both UTC and UT Health Science Center (UTHSC).

Continued Staff Professional Development

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 ombud 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 FY24, Lisa went under review for CO-OP recertification, and her certification was renewed through 2028. Throughout the year, Lisa and Brooke continued to engage in required future recertification activities.

Staff Professional Development

Ombuds staff members continue to participate in professional development facilitated by UT offices, IOA, and other professional organizations. **Table 1** summarizes FY24 professional development hours completed by our staff.

Notable professional development engagements facilitated by the IOA include:

- IOA Annual Conference
- IOA National Equity Project Part 1 and 2

Notable professional development engagements facilitated by other organizations include:

- Adult Education Research Pre-Conference on Bullying, Incivility, and Violence
- Association for Educational Communications and Technology Annual Conference
- The Association of Psychological Therapies (APT) Driving Good Mental Health in the Workplace
- APT Motivational Interviewing Certification
- California Caucus Conference of Colleges and University Ombuds (CalCaucus) Annual Conference
- Coalition on Adult Basic Education Annual Conference
- UT mini-term course Trauma-Informed Organizations

TABLE 1: OFFICE OF OMBUDS SERVICES STAFF PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT			
FACILITATOR	LISA	BROOKE	DUREN
UT	5 hours	5.5 hours	13.5 hours
IOA	27.3 hours	35.3 hours	2 hours
OTHER ORGANIZATIONS	102.3 hours	87 hours	99.8 hours
TOTAL HOURS	134.6 hours	127.8 hours	115.3 hours

Of the above professional development hours, Lisa will be able to request a minimum of 27.33 hours towards her CO-OP recertification in 2028 and Brooke will be able to request a minimum of 35.33 hours for her CO-OP recertification in 2027. Lisa and Brooke can request the CO-OP Eligibility Committee to review whether the hours of professional development facilitated by other organizations may also meet the CO-OP renewal requirements.

Office Services

In FY24, the Knoxville campus constituent population including graduate students and employees was 17,715 individuals. The office provided two branches of services to these constituents: (1) education and outreach for individuals who are interested in developing knowledge and skills to improve conflict management, dignity-conscious communication, and psychological safety; and (2) visitor support services for individuals who are experiencing challenges and would benefit from receiving situation-specific support. Additionally, we provided service to the ombuds field by engaging in practitioner research and sharing our findings. Our FY24 activities for all service areas are further described below.

Education and Outreach

Our office provided several types of educational programming through our open enrollment and by-invitation workshops including:

- original workshop content developed by our staff,
- assessment-based workshop content as certified facilitators,
- workshop content as certified organizational trainers, and
- the Employee Conflict Navigator Certificate (ECN) program.

Our original content workshops typically ran for 90-minutes with no cost to participants. Workshop content that our staff are certified to offer varies in length and carries a materials-access fee for participants. All our open enrollment workshops were delivered virtually on Zoom. We provided in-person workshops when requested by unit staff, faculty, and department leaders. In addition, ombuds staff provided workshop follow-up coaching.

Our staff engaged in several types of outreach events including:

- presentations,
- panel participation,
- vendor booth tabling, and
- dissemination of physical and digital materials.

Visitor Support Services

Our office provided multiple types of visitor support services including:

- individual consultation,
- individual consultation in preparation for mediation, and
- mediation.

We provided the above-listed services through in-person meetings at our office in Perkins Hall, through virtual meetings on Zoom, and on the phone. When visitors called the main office number and ombuds staff were available to take the call, we provided immediate service. We consider these immediate phone conversations with visitors as anonymous phone contacts because in most situations the ombuds were not aware of the visitor's identity.



Practitioner Research

Our staff contributed to the ombuds field knowledge development through:

- refereed journal article publications,
- professional conference presentations, and
- educational programming facilitation for other ombuds and educational leaders.

Observed Trends

Education and Outreach Participation Trends

In FY24, we experienced continued growth in demand for educational offerings. Our staff facilitated 48 workshops providing 104.5 hours of educational content to a total of 771 participants. In FY23 by comparison, we offered 22 workshops for a total of 444 participants. Our workshop offerings more than doubled, and enrollment increased by 73%. **Table 2** summarizes FY24 workshop topics, session lengths, number of offerings, and enrollment numbers.

TABLE 2: OFFICE OF OMBUDS SERVICES WORKSHOP OFFERINGS AND ENROLLMENT			
TOPIC	SESSION LENGTH	NUMBER OF OFFERINGS	ENROLLMENT
WORKSHOPS STAFF WERE CERTIFIED TO FACILITATE WITH PARTICIPATION FEES			
Crucial Conversations for Mastering Dialogue	12.0 hours	3	46
Understanding Your Conflict Dynamics Profile*	1.5 hours	14	216
STAFF-DEVELOPED, DIGNITY SERIES WORKSHOP			
Dignity: A Key to Conflict**	1.5 hours	9	146
Creating a Dignity-Conscious Work Environment	1.5 hours	2	25
STAFF-DEVELOPED, PSYCHOLOGICAL SAFETY SERIES WORKSHOP			
Working Together on Psychological Safety: Discussions on Belonging	1.5 hours	5	67
Fostering a Psychologically Safe Workplace	1.5 hours	4	68
STAFF-DEVELOPED, PERFORMANCE FEEDBACK SERIES WORKSHOP			
Receiving Feedback Well: Crafting a Constructive Response	1.5 hours	5	80
Giving Feedback Well: Creating Dialogue	1.5 hours	2	27
Speaking Up: Communicating More Assertively	1.5 hours	4	96
Total		48	771

*As a service to university leaders from other institutions, we offered Understanding your Conflict Dynamics Profile (CDP) as a breakout session during the American Society of Civil Engineers (ASCE) 2024 National Civil Engineering Department Heads Conference. Enrollment numbers in Table 2 include participants from the conference.

**As a service to the region, we offered Dignity: A Key to Conflict Management to members of the Tennessee Association of Professional Mediators (TAPM). Enrollment numbers in Table 2 include TAPM member participants.

Employee Conflict Navigator Certificate Program

During FY24, 15 individuals including staff, faculty, and campus leaders participated in our ECN program. The ECN certificate program requires participants to complete at least 18 workshop hours plus 2 hours of workshop follow-up coaching. Required workshops in the program include: 12 hours of *Crucial Conversations for Mastering Dialogue* and 1.75 hours of *Understanding Your Conflict Dynamics Profile*. Additionally, program participants are required to complete 4 or more workshop-hours related to communication and/or conflict management facilitated by our office or other UT offices.

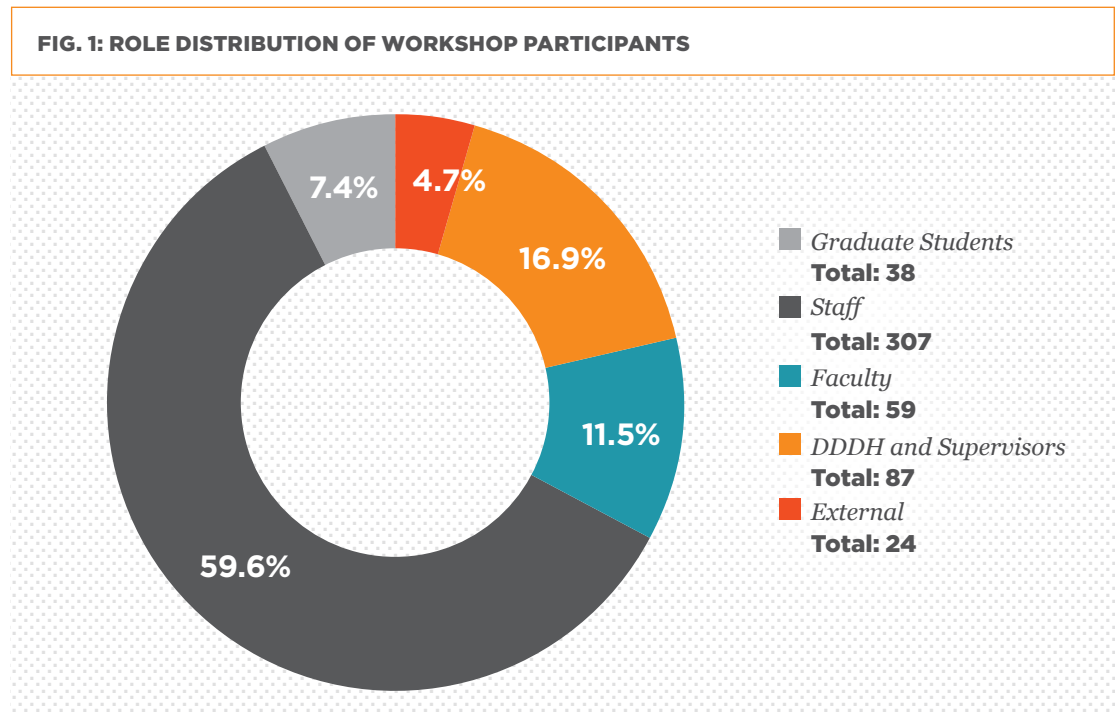
This year, we are proud to announce our inaugural ECN program participants who met all requirements and were awarded the ECN certificate. These ECN-certified employees include:

- **Laura Moyers**, business analyst for the Office of Innovative Technologies;
- **Margeaux Emery**, senior writer and producer for the Office of Marketing and Communications, UT Institute of Agriculture; and
- **Karin Grindall**, graduate coordinator for the Department of Chemical Engineering part of the Tickle College of Engineering.

Workshop Participant Roles

Where possible, we collected information regarding workshop participants' organizational roles through workshops.utk.edu and self-reporting. Of the 771 participants, we had access to organizational role information for 515 unique individuals. 414 of these were from the Knoxville campus, 71 from UTC, and 7 from UTHSC. Undergraduate participants and participants from external organizations are categorized as Other.

Figure 1 shows workshop participant organizational role distribution. Staff was the largest group of participants with 307 participants (59.6%). DDDH and supervisors were second largest with 87



participants (16.9%). In addition, there were 59 faculty participants (11.5%), 38 graduate student participants (7.4%), and 24 participants who were from other organizations or were undergraduate students (4.7%). Several DDDH and supervisor participants were part of the Provost's Office's leadership educational programming and included faculty interested in becoming future leaders.



Outreach Event Participation

Our office staff engaged in 59 outreach events that involved approximately 1,710 participants. These events are listed below in order of highest to lowest participation.

- Vendor Booth Tabling (8 events, 471 participants)
- By-Invitation Panel Discussions (5 events, 383 participants)
- Getting Unstuck: Introduction to Ombuds Services Presentations (26 events, 348 participants)
- Partner Office Presentations (4 events, 214 participants)
- Ombuds Data Showcase Presentations (6 events, 175 participants)
- Workshop Preview Presentations (5 events, 67 participants)
- Dissemination of Physical and Digital Materials (5 events, 52 participants)

Visitor Support Services Trends

Visitor Traffic Trend Metrics that Represent Ombuds Work Rate

To maintain confidentiality while ensuring engagement in reliable and systematic data collection and analysis, we identified the following metrics, collectively representing visitor traffic trends and ombuds work rate:

- **Individuals Served**, the number of unique individuals who have contact with the ombuds as visitors during the fiscal year;
- **New Visitors for the Month**, the number of unique visitors who have contact with the ombuds each month in a fiscal year;
- **Repeat Visitors for the Month**, the number of visitors who meet with ombuds more than once in a month;
- **Visitor Contacts**, the number of contacts that ombuds have with visitors, which includes both new visitors for the month and repeat visitors for the month;
- **New Situations**, the number of unique situations that visitors share with an ombuds during the fiscal year; and
- **Ongoing Situations**, the number of repeated situations that visitors share with an ombuds.

In past annual reporting, we relied heavily on New Visitors for the Month as a metric to represent visitor traffic trends. This year, we recognized that examining both new and repeat visitors for the month would provide a more comprehensive representation of visitor traffic trends. Starting FY25, we will begin collecting data for Repeat Visitors that is as detailed as the data we collect for New Visitors. In this current report there are times we only present information from New Visitors for the Month because we did not collect comparable data for Repeat Visitors for the Month.

Demographics of Individuals Served

In FY24, our ombuds served a total of 370 individuals, which included individuals who were not from the Knoxville campus. Of our 17,715 Knoxville campus constituent population, our ombuds served 351 (2.0%) individuals. As a reference point for comparison, we retrieved data from the university human resources system and reviewed campus EEO category data in the 2023-2024 UT Fact Book published by Institutional Research and Strategic Analysis (IRSA). In all EEO category comparison figures and tables below, the percentage of individuals who we served with unknown demographic data is higher than the population because anonymous phone contact visitors are included in the data.

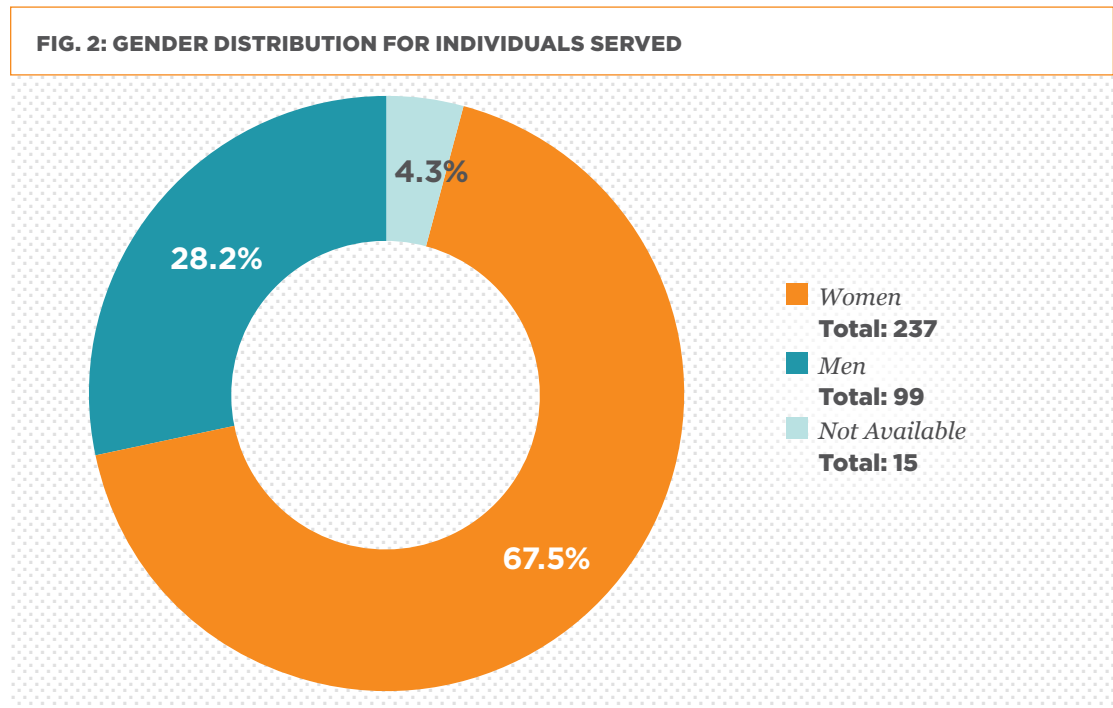


Figure 2 shows gender information retrieved from the human resources system. Individuals whose gender information was not available are marked “not available.” Of the 351 individuals we served from the Knoxville campus, 237 were women (67.5%), 99 were men (28.2%), and 15 were visitors for whom gender data was not available (4.3%).

Table 3 shows gender distribution of individuals who we served in comparison to the campus constituent data in the UT Fact Book.

TABLE 3: INDIVIDUAL SERVED AND POPULATION GENDER DISTRIBUTION COMPARISON			
	WOMEN	MEN	NOT AVAILABLE
INDIVIDUALS SERVED	67.5%	28.2%	4.3%
UT FACT BOOK DATA	53.1%	46.9%	0%

Figure 3 shows visitor race and ethnicity information retrieved from the human resources system. Individuals for whom race information was not available are marked “not available.” Of the 351 individuals served from campus, 31 were Hispanic of any race (8.8%), 23 were Asian or Pacific Islander (6.6%), 41 were Black or African American (7.4%), 227 were White (64.7%), and 4 belonged to two or more races (1.1%). There were 40 visitors (11.4%) for whom information on race was not available.

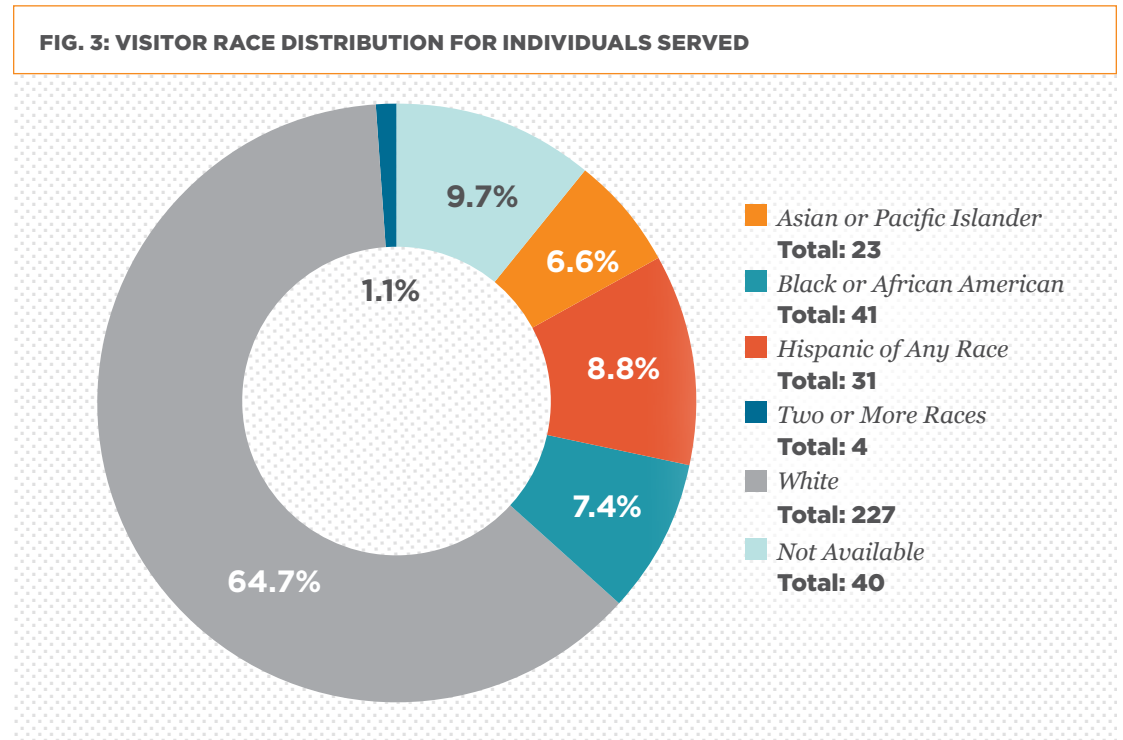


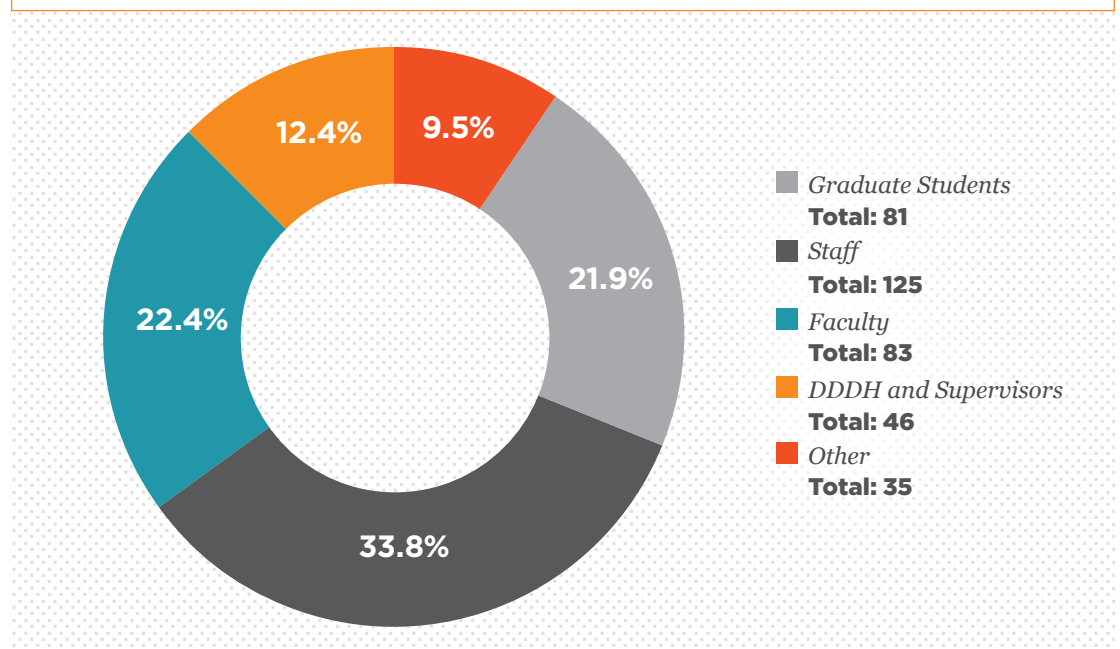
Table 4 shows visitor race distribution for individuals whom we served from campus in comparison to graduate students, staff, and faculty numbers included in the UT Fact Book.

TABLE 4: INDIVIDUAL SERVED AND POPULATION RACE DISTRIBUTION COMPARISON BOOK

	HISPANIC OF ANY RACE	AMERICAN INDIAN OR ALASKA NATIVE	ASIAN OR PACIFIC ISLANDER	BLACK OR AFRICAN AMERICAN	WHITE	TWO OR MORE RACES	NOT AVAILABLE
INDIVIDUALS SERVED	8.8%	0%	6.6%	7.4%	64.7%	1.1%	11.4%
UT FACT BOOK DATA	4.7%	0.3%	7.6%	7.1%	76.9%	2.0%	1.4%

Figure 4 shows individuals whom the ombuds served by their organizational roles including individuals not from the Knoxville campus. Staff was the largest group served with a total of 125 individuals of which 41 were non-exempt staff (11.1%), and 84 were exempt staff (22.7%). Faculty was the second largest group served with a total of 83 individuals of which 28 were non-tenure track faculty (7.6%) and 55 were tenure track faculty (14.9%). Graduate students were the third largest group the ombuds served with 81 individuals (21.9%). In addition, there were 46 DDDH and supervisors served (12.4%), and 19 individuals served who were not from Knoxville campus (5.4%). Finally, we served 35 other individuals (9.5%) who were either undergraduate students or individuals external to the university.

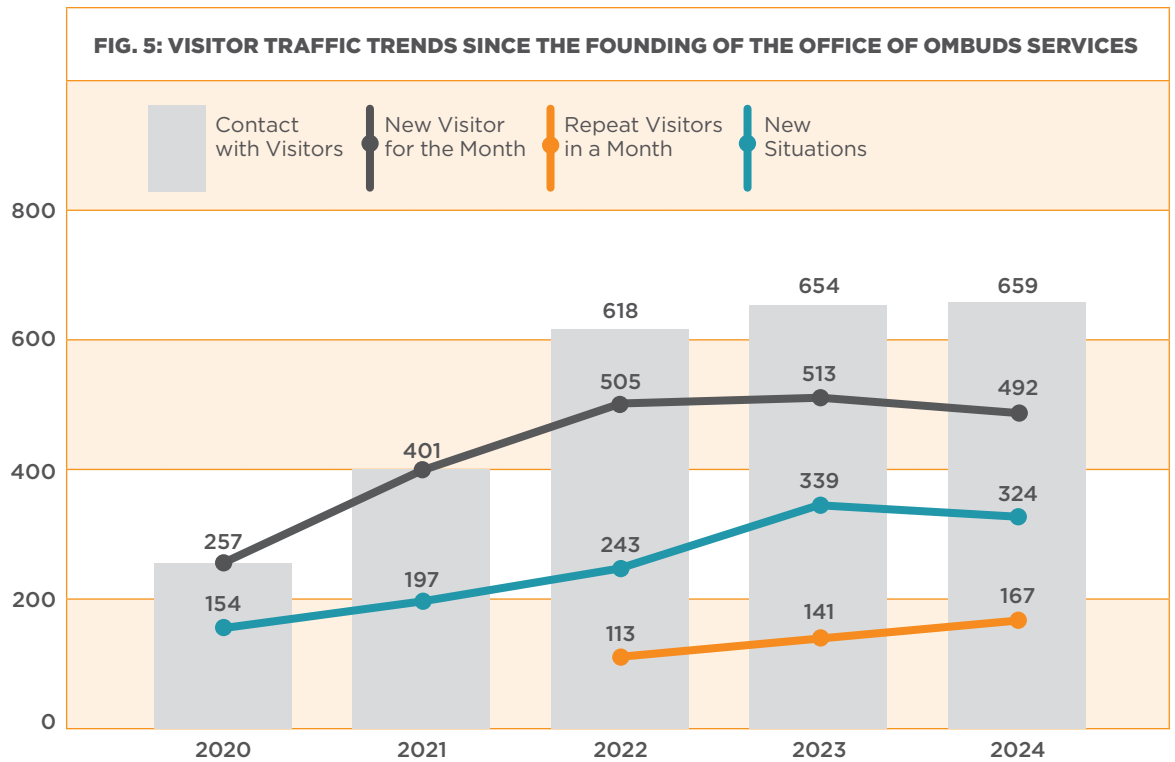
FIG. 4: ROLE DISTRIBUTION OF INDIVIDUALS SERVED



A notable observation regarding graduate students served is that a larger proportion of international graduate students had contact with ombuds compared to their representation in the campus population. According to the UT Fact Book, in Fall 2023 there were 7,421 graduate students, of which 1,063 were international students (14.3%). During that time our ombuds served a total of 81 graduate students. Of the graduate students whose nationality was known, 51 were US citizens (63.0%), and 22 were non-US citizens (27.2%). The number of international graduate students we served was almost double the amount represented by the campus population.

Visitors and Their Situations

Figure 5 shows a 5-year trend in visitor support services. Since the founding of the office, we have added new metrics to better understand visitor traffic trends and ombuds' work rate. These metrics have been added to Figure 5 from the year we put them into place. In FY24, ombuds served 370 individuals. Among those individuals, ombuds had 659 visitor contacts. Of the visitor contacts, 492 were New Visitors for the Month and 167 were Repeat Visitors for the Month. Visitors shared concerns with ombuds regarding 324 New Situations and 168 Ongoing Situations.



Over the first 5 years of operation, the office had more than 2,500 contacts with visitors. Visitor traffic trends across 5 years of operation show rapid growth in FY20 and FY21 when contacts with New Visitors for the Month increased from 257 to 401. Since FY22, when we began collecting data about Repeat Visitors for the Month, total ombuds contact with visitors rose from 618 to 659. This longitudinal trend demonstrates that over the last 5 years, the office has successfully increased its ability to serve visitors.

Based on comprehensive analysis, we attribute this trend to:

- increased office staffing,
- increased office name recognition through outreach and education,
- overwhelmingly high visitor satisfaction ratings regarding contact with ombuds,
- overwhelmingly high participant satisfaction ratings for ombuds educational programming,
- referrals from DDDH and supervisors,
- referrals from supportive partners’ offices, and
- word-of-mouth visitor referrals.

Comparison of Individuals Served and Visitor Traffic

Table 5 provides a comparison between individuals that ombuds served and visitor contacts with ombuds based on demographic information. While calculating this data, we used the following formula:

$$\% \text{ More in Contacts} = \frac{(\text{Visitor Contacts} - \text{Individuals Served})}{\text{Individuals Served} \times 100}$$

For FY24, we had to use New Visitors for the Month as a proxy for Visitor Contacts because we did not collect demographic information for Repeat Visitors for the Month. Therefore, in Table 5 and the discussions below, the number of contacts with visitors is missing data related to 167 Repeat Visitors for the Month.

Notable groups that had 50% or more higher rate of contacts with ombuds compared to number of individuals served included the following demographic groups:

- Asian or Pacific Islander, 78.3% more contacts than individuals served;
- Black or African American, 51.9% more contacts than individuals served;
- DDDH and supervisors, 71.7% more contacts than individuals served; and
- Other, not from the Knoxville campus, 52.6% more contacts than individuals served.

Some of the high contact with individuals in the group Other, not from the Knoxville campus, is likely explained by our services to UTC during FY24. While it is difficult to determine exactly why the above groups had a higher rate of contact with ombuds, we suspect the higher rate is due to the complex nature of situations that visitors experienced.

TABLE 5: COMPARISON BETWEEN INDIVIDUALS SERVED & CONTACTS WITH VISITORS			
GENDER			
	INDIVIDUAL SERVED	VISITOR CONTACTS*	% MORE IN CONTACTS
Woman	245	321	31.0%
Man	105	143	36.2%
Not Available	20	28	40.0%
RACE			
	INDIVIDUAL SERVED	VISITOR CONTACTS*	% MORE IN CONTACTS
American Indian / Alaska Native	0	0	0%
Asian or Pacific Islander	23	41	78.3%
Black or African American	27	41	51.9%
Hispanic of Any Race	31	39	25.8%
White	228	290	27.2%
Two or More Races	4	5	25%
Not Available	57	76	33.3%

TABLE 5 CONTINUED: COMPARISON BETWEEN INDIVIDUALS SERVED & CONTACTS WITH VISITORS			
ROLE			
	INDIVIDUAL SERVED	VISITOR CONTACTS*	% MORE IN CONTACTS
Undergraduate Student	16	19	18.8%
Graduate Student	81	98	21.0%
Non-Exempt Staff	41	55	34.1%
Exempt Staff	84	106	26.2%
Non-Tenure Track Faculty	28	31	10.7%
Tenure Track Faculty	55	75	36.4%
DDDH and Supervisors	46	79	71.7%
Other	19	29	52.6%

Ombuds Contribution to Systemic Organizational Situations

We identified Touchpoints as a metric that represents potential ombuds contribution to our organization. Touchpoints are people other than Visitors, often in leadership positions, who ombuds have contact with after gaining visitor permission to discuss their situation and/or provide systemic organizational feedback.

Through Touchpoint contacts, ombuds often assist organizational leaders by providing them an opportunity to:

- address issues that may be disruptive to the organization,
- identify patterns of communication/behavior that leaders may wish to address,
- assist in organizational change efforts,
- obtain information that is helpful to visitors,
- follow up on visitor situations that ombuds are working with leaders to strategize and engage with, and
- connect one resource with another to work collaboratively as needed in conflict management situations (Rowe & Gadlin, 2014).

During FY24 ombuds had 108 contacts with Touchpoints. In **Table 6**, 72 touchpoint contacts were related to individual matters, 22 were related to systemic organizational matters, and 14 were related to both individual and systemic matters.

When ombuds contacted Touchpoints related to individual matters, information was obtained on behalf of a Visitor that was relevant to their experiences. When we contacted Touchpoints related to systemic matters, it was likely to involve policies and procedures that could affect a wide group of individuals.

TABLE 6: TOUCHPOINT CONTACTS	
REASON FOR TOUCHPOINT CONTACT	FREQUENCY
INDIVIDUAL	72
SYSTEMIC	22
INDIVIDUAL AND SYSTEMIC	14
TOTAL	108

Visitor Shared Experiences

From 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, but instead share observations of particularities (Stake, 1995) in visitors' experiences.

Experience Working with the Ombuds

Many visitors met with ombuds for:

- communication conflict guidance (251 occurrences), and
- information (244 occurrences).

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

- exploration and evaluation of options (310 occurrences),
- clarification of policies and procedures (143 occurrences),
- identifying interests and goals (132 occurrences), and
- communication to prepare for difficult conversations (128 occurrences).

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

Emerging Themes

Staff and Faculty Challenges with Communication

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

- department/unit climate,
- evaluative relationships,
- peers,
- performance evaluations,
- trust and respect, and
- the fair application of university policies and procedures as well as departmental procedures.

We observed that when staff and faculty visitors experienced challenges with communication, they often expressed concern about potential repercussions, such behavior by others that might be retaliatory. They also wanted to ensure that their future communication with others would not come across as being rude or aggressive. In these situations, visitors needed help exploring options and strategies to openly communicate their interests and needs in ways that would be well received by others.

DDDH and Supervisors Challenges with Leading in Conflict

Several DDDH and other supervisory staff visitors faced challenges in effectively leading through conflict. They met with the ombuds to discuss:

- how to constructively manage conflict between students, staff, and/or faculty;
- how to address challenging department/unit dynamics; and
- how to manage performance issues and expectations with direct reports.

We observed that DDDH and supervisory visitors found themselves stuck when they did not know how to manage conflict in their department/unit. Many DDDH and supervisory visitors in these situations were aware of their positional power and wanted to explore paths that valued and balanced individual employee dignity, unit psychological safety, and the integrity of their unit.

- **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).
- **Disruptions 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).

Non-Exempt Staff Challenges with Dignity and Psychological Safety

Non-exempt staff frequently met with the ombuds when they were concerned about being treated by others in ways that violated their dignity and disrupted their psychological safety. These concerns often were related to:

- communications with supervisors,
- interactions with colleagues, and
- the department climate.

We observed that non-exempt staff visitors with the above concerns often worried about job security, shared a desire to leave their unit, and expressed feelings of being stuck and powerless.

Graduate Student Challenges with Dignity Violations and Psychological Safety

Graduate students commonly met with ombuds regarding treatment from their advisors that led them to experience dignity violations and disruptions to their psychological safety. These concerns were often related to:

- communication with advisor and/or committee,
- authorship and/or intellectual property, and
- fairness regarding performance assessments.

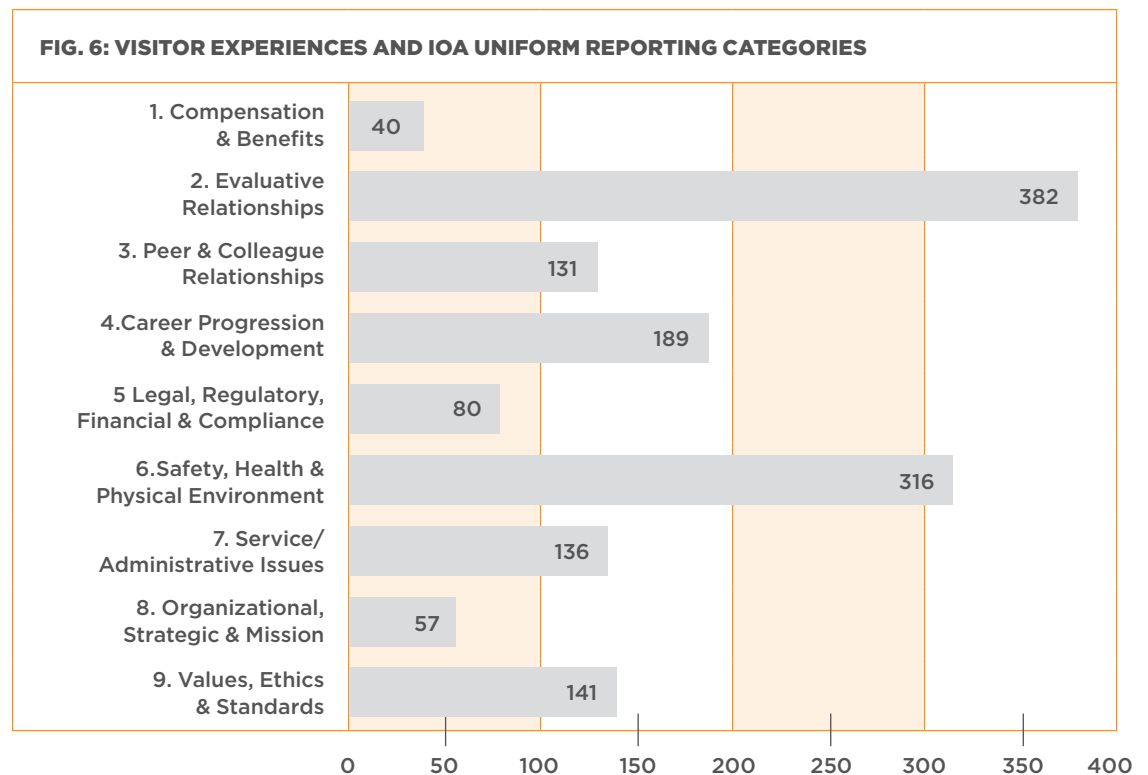
We observed that graduate student visitors with the above concerns often expressed wanting to change advisors or leave their program.

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 6 shows how often ombuds observed visitor experiences related to IOA Uniform Reporting Categories. The number of observed categories is greater than the number of contacts with 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 382 occurrences, and Safety, Health, and Physical Health, with 316 occurrences. This trend was similar to observations from previous years. Within Evaluative Relationships, the most frequently observed subcategories were Communication, Respect-Treatment, and Trust-Integrity. Within Safety, Health, and Physical Health, the most frequently observed subcategory was overwhelmingly Work-Related Stress and Work-Life Balance.

Practitioner Research

During FY24, we began putting efforts into identifying what office procedures would need to be in place for our staff to successfully engage in practitioner research. As a result, we developed an Authorship Agreement Guide and Data Security Plan, while being mindful of our commitment to the IOA Standards of Practice. We also began our practical research with a comprehensive exploratory review of the literature related to the ombuds field. This helped identify what types of research we would be able to pursue in the future. FY24 contributions our staff made by sharing knowledge to ombuds and other professional fields are enumerated below.



1. Peer Reviewed Article

- Yamagata-Lynch, L. C. (2024). Striving to effectively communicate ombuds values: Lessons learned by an ombuds working with data. *Journal of the International Ombuds Association* 17(1), 22-34.

2. Professional Conference Presentations

- Thompson, D. J. (2024). *Honoring dignity to improve resiliency & conflict management skills*. Pre-conference Workshop at Coalition for Adult Basic Education 2023 National Conference, Atlanta, GA.
- Yamagata-Lynch, L. C. & Patel, B (2024). *Getting unstuck from ombuds data collection and analysis: Seven simple principles*. International Ombuds Association Annual Conference, Indianapolis, IN.

3. Facilitation of Ombuds Educational Programming

- Yamagata-Lynch, L. C., Schwartz, D. G., & Patel, B., (2024). The numbers share (some of) the story: Using data in daily ombuds work. International Ombuds Association Seminar.

In terms of our practical research dissemination efforts, between our conference presentation and seminar facilitation, we reached 113 fellow ombuds participants.

Office Success Indicators

External Recognition

As active members of the professional ombuds community, our staff engaged in several leadership services for IOA, the ombuds community at large, and for institutional leaders from other organizations. These services are detailed in **Table 7** on the next page.

TABLE 7: OMBUDS STAFF LEADERSHIP SERVICES FOR THE OMBUDS COMMUNITY	
AWARDS	
Lisa	<p>IOA Presidential Recognition Award In recognition of outstanding volunteer for the professional organization</p>
LEADERSHIP ACTIVITIES	
Lisa	<p>IOA Leadership Positions IOA Board of Directors Member (Elected Position) Board of Certification for CO-OP (Appointed Position)</p>
Lisa	<p>Service to IOA Committees and Task Forces IOA Professional Development Committee, Chair IOA and CO-OP Joint Task Force on Institutional Ombuds Program Accreditation, Member</p>
Brooke	<p>Service to IOA Committees and Task Forces IOA Conference Committee, Member IOA Professional Development Committee, Member IOA Professionalization Task Force, Member</p>
Office	<p>Consultations to Other Ombuds and Organizational Leaders Provided guidance to several ombuds and leaders from other organizations regarding: (a) starting an ombuds office, (b) developing a charter, (c) managing complex visitor situations, (d) engaging in data collection and analysis while addressing IOA Code of Ethics and Standards of Practice, and (e) preparing annual reports.</p>

Visitor Referral Sources

Visitors can indicate how they learned about our office by selecting from a list of possible referral sources in OnceHub, our online meeting scheduling system. Of the 370 visitor responses, the top three referral sources were:

- presentation or event (61 visitors);
- peers and/or colleagues (57 visitors);
- advisor, supervisor, and DDDH (45 visitors); and
- previous work with ombuds (38 visitors).

This was the first year that presentation or events was identified as a top referral source for visitors, and we see that our efforts in education and outreach are steering visitors to our office.

Education and Outreach Participant Satisfaction Survey Results

In many of our workshops and outreach events, we invited participants to complete an anonymous satisfaction survey. Participants were provided a QR code that linked to the survey during the session, and to a link to the survey in an email shortly after their participation in one of our events. Participant survey response rate was 29.1%; of 1,119 invitations sent, 318 participants responded. Selected highlights are presented in the following section.

In the survey, participants were asked to respond to the statements below.

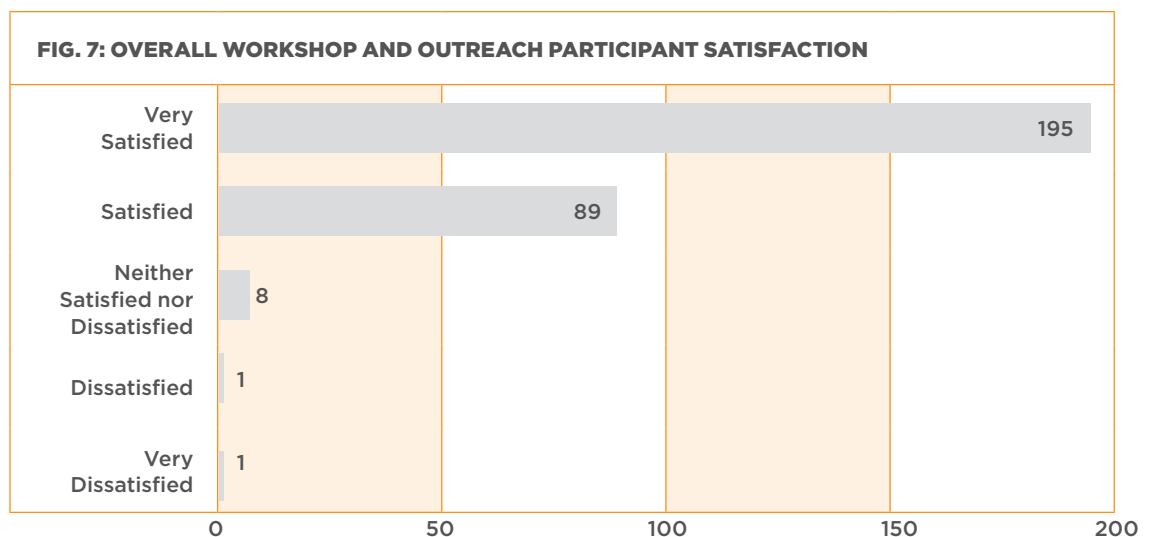
- The training was engaging.
- The content was relevant and helpful.
- Attending this training was a worthwhile use of my time.
- I would recommend this training to a friend or colleague.

Among 5 response choices ranging from “strongly agree,” “agree,” “neutral,” “disagree,” and “strongly disagree,” responses were overwhelmingly positive (**Table 8**).

TABLE 8: WORKSHOPS AND OUTREACH PARTICIPANT SURVEY RESPONSES					
	STRONGLY AGREE	AGREE	NEUTRAL	DISAGREE	STRONGLY DISAGREE
The training was engaging.	183 (57.0%)	121 (37.7%)	9 (2.8%)	1 (0.3%)	2 (0.6%)
The content was relevant and helpful.	216 (67.3%)	93 (29.0%)	6 (1.9%)	1 (0.3%)	1 (0.3%)
Attending this training was a worthwhile use of my time.	199 (62.0%)	105 (32.7%)	8 (2.5%)	2 (0.6%)	3 (0.9%)
I would recommend this training to a friend or colleague.	191 (59.5%)	111 (34.6%)	13 (4.0%)	1 (0.3%)	1 (0.3%)

Overall Workshop and Outreach Satisfaction

Among 5 response choices ranging from “very satisfied,” “satisfied,” “neither satisfied or dissatisfied,” and “very dissatisfied,” 284 participants (96.6%) who responded selected very satisfied or satisfied as a response to the statement “Please indicate your overall level of satisfaction with this workshop.” In contrast, 8 participants selected neither satisfied or dissatisfied, 1 participant selected dissatisfied, and 1 participant selected very dissatisfied (**Figure 7**).



Participant Qualitative Comments

In addition to multiple-choice questions in the survey, we asked participants to respond to the open-ended question “What was the most enjoyable/useful part of the training?” A sample of participant responses are summarized in **Figure 8**.

In the qualitative comments, participants often expressed appreciation for gaining:

- a better understanding of how ombuds can serve them in challenging situations, and
- new knowledge and skills they could apply to workplace situations.

Participants shared that our workshops were welcoming and comfortable and that they appreciated the inclusion of concrete examples. Participants also shared that they gained a better understanding of how conflict affects themselves, their team, and the organization.

Comments made that were specific to workshop activities, were favorable, indicating that our workshops encouraged them to:

- engage in self-reflection,
- engage in peer discussion, and
- engage in planning for practical applications of workshop content into challenging situations.

FIG. 8: SELECTED PARTICIPANT COMMENTS

“Overall, I felt like I had to take a hard look at myself and be honest about where I struggle in conflict. This has given me a sense of both how I can improve AND what I can communicate to my coworkers to have them better understand me.”

“All of the Ombuds workshops have been very thought-provoking and helpful in both my personal and professional life.”

PARTICIPANT IMPACT

“It opened an important conversation and provided studies and published works to reference when communicating these things to others. The neurological impact of dignity violations was so helpful.”

“The presenter made it easy to talk about conflict. They brought a relatable and humanizing touch to the workshop that encouraged our team to open up and dig into the discussion.”

WORKSHOP FORMAT & DELIVERY

“ I appreciated how customized it felt to our team. It also felt very judgment free.”

WORKSHOP FORMAT & DELIVERY

“ I was nervous about having to do breakout rooms and talk to people, but I found that to be the most engaging part. It was helpful to hear from others what they can struggle with during conflicts.”

“ The content was clear and actionable. The delivery was winsome and personable. The leaders did a great job presenting—their approachability set the tone of the session.”

“ I enjoyed seeing the collaboration between Ombuds and the HR Career Development team. This collaboration combined the psychological and applied theory of the Ombuds with the UT career focused knowledge of the career coach.”

WORKSHOP CONTENT

“ Keeping dignity at the core is such a wise point, and not one that feels automatic when engaged in conflict. Provided a framework and actionable steps to managing conflict.”

“ I really love that the workshop fosters critical self-reflection with practical terms to help foster a healthy work environment.”

“ I appreciate the depth of information shared. It felt comprehensive and palatable.”

“ Real life solutions for everyday challenges.”

GETTING UNSTUCK: INTRO TO OMBUDS SERVICES

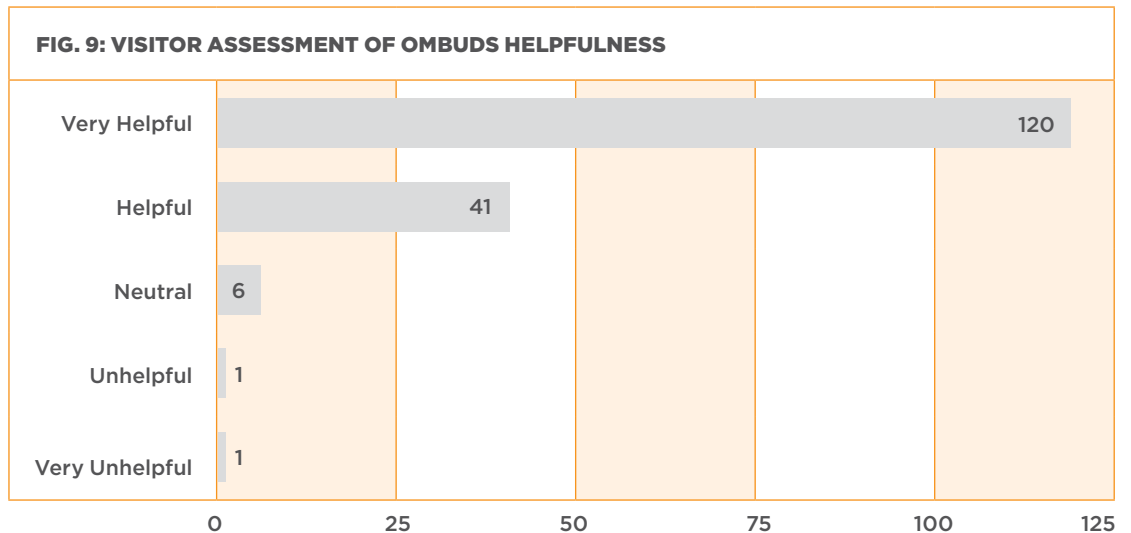
“ This has been the most engaging and useful workshop by far among the grad orientation sessions. The information was delivered in an engaging and thoughtful way and I learned a lot about a resource I never used or knew about. 10/10, no notes!”

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. The visitor satisfaction survey response rate was 60.9%: there were 279 visitor meetings scheduled through OnceHub, of which 170 visitors responded. Selected highlights are presented in the following section.

Ombuds Helpfulness

Among 5 response choices ranging from “very helpful,” “helpful,” “neutral,” “unhelpful,” and “very unhelpful,” 161 visitors (95.3%) who responded to the survey selected very helpful or helpful in response to the question: “How helpful was your recent experience with Ombuds staff?” In contrast, 6 visitors selected neutral, 1 selected unhelpful, and 1 selected very unhelpful (**Figure 9**).



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, 140 visitors (85.9%);
2. the opportunity to speak with someone impartial, 132 visitors (80.9%);
3. help exploring my options, 123 visitors (75.5%);
4. the confidentiality, 117 visitors (71.8%);
5. guidance/suggestions, 108 visitors (66.3%);
6. getting answers/information, 91 visitors (55.8%); and
7. assistance thinking through complex issues, 85 visitors (52.2%).

Ombuds Effectiveness

Visitors were asked to rate ombuds effectiveness in the statements below.

- Empowering me to make informed decisions.
- Understanding my issues/concerns.

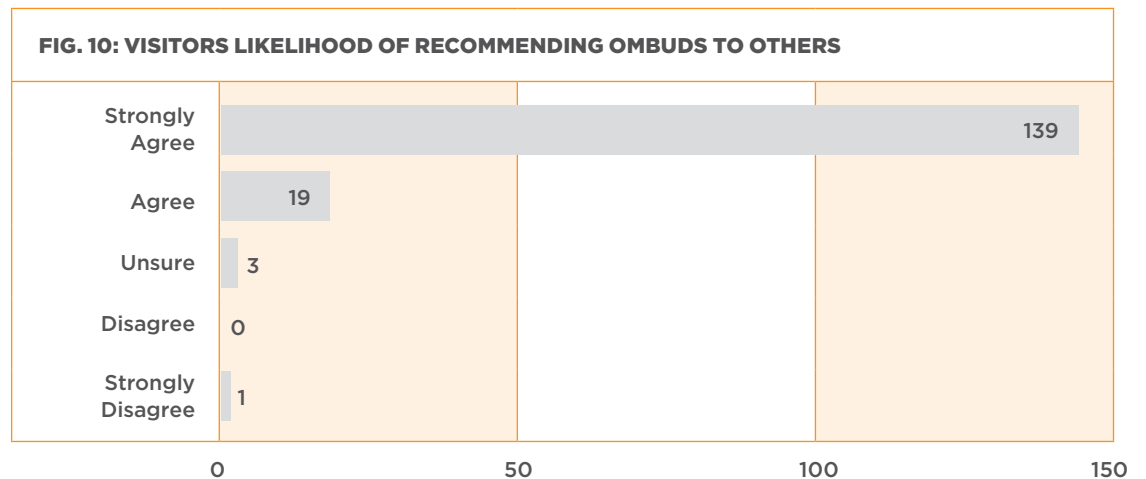
- Making me feel comfortable talking with them.
- Treating me with kindness and respect.
- Explaining issues in a way I could understand.
- Providing timely communication/services.

Among 5 response choices ranging from “very good,” “good,” “acceptable,” “poor,” or “very poor,” responses were overwhelmingly positive (**Table 9**).

TABLE 9: VISITOR ASSESSMENT OF OMBUDS EFFECTIVENESS					
	VERY GOOD	GOOD	ACCEPTABLE	POOR	VERY POOR
Empowering me to make informed decisions.	139 (83.2%)	22 (13.2%)	4 (2.0%)	1 (0.6%)	1 (0.6%)
Understanding my issues/concerns.	152 (91.0%)	11 (6.6%)	2 (1.2%)	0	2 (1.2%)
Making me feel comfortable talking with them.	154 (92.2%)	10 (6.0%)	2 (1.2%)	1 (0.6%)	0
Treating me with kindness and respect.	159 (95.2%)	6 (3.6%)	2 (1.2%)	0	0
Explaining issues in a way I could understand.	153 (91.6%)	9 (5.4%)	4 (2.0%)	1 (0.6%)	0
Providing timely communication/services.	151 (90.4%)	13 (7.8%)	2 (1.2%)	1 (0.6%)	0

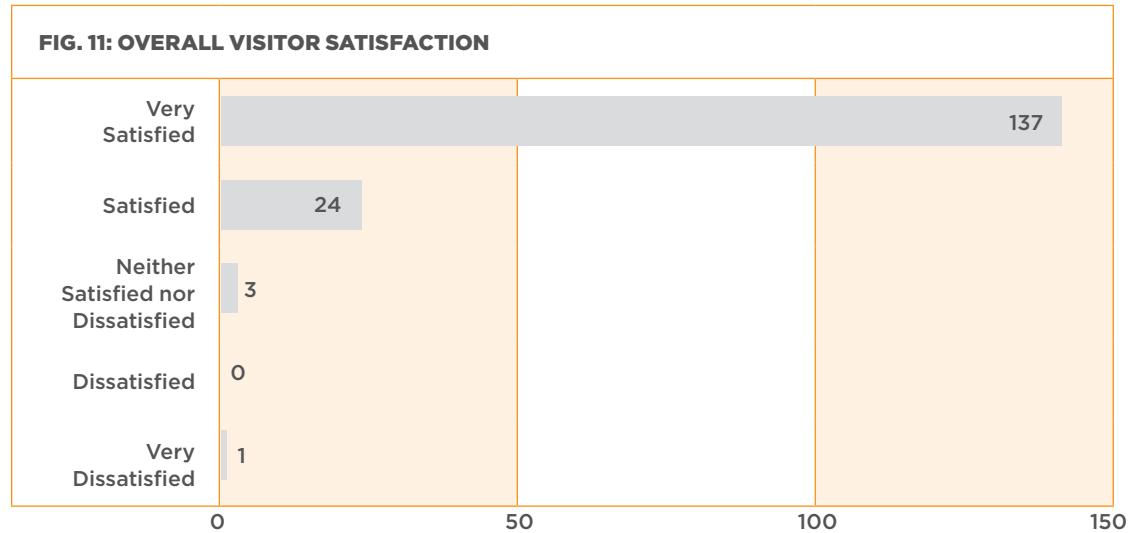
Recommending Ombuds to Others

Among 5 response choices ranging from “strongly agree,” “agree,” “unsure,” “disagree,” and “strongly disagree,” 158 visitors (96.9%) 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.” In contrast, 3 visitors selected Unsure, 2 selected Strongly Disagree, and no visitors selected Disagree (**Figure 10**).



Overall Visitor Satisfaction with Ombuds

Among 5 response choices ranging from “very satisfied,” “satisfied,” “neither satisfied or dissatisfied,” and “very dissatisfied,” 161 visitors (97.6%) 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, 3 visitors selected neither satisfied or dissatisfied, no visitor selected dissatisfied, and 1 visitor selected very dissatisfied (*Figure 11*).



Visitor Qualitative Comments

In addition to the multiple-choice questions in the survey, we asked visitors to respond to the open-ended prompt “Comments about your experience.” A sample of visitor responses are summarized in *Figure 12* on the next page.

Ombuds Area of Focus for FY25

After a careful consideration of ombuds services operational data from FY24, as well organizational aspirations, we identified the following FY25 areas of focus.

1. **Awareness-Building:** Strengthen communication strategies to increase constituents’ understanding of how ombuds services can empower them to navigate challenges related to experiences at UT.
2. **Evaluative Relationships:** Enhance educational programming and visitor services to support supervisors and academic advisors in constructive communication and leadership.
3. **Leadership Thought-Partners:** Strengthen relationships with campus leaders to help them address organizational challenges in a way that promotes a culture of dignity and psychological safety.

FIG. 12: SELECTED VISITOR COMMENTS

“The advice/guidance I received from the ombuds office was great. I didn’t really know what to expect when I scheduled the appointment, but it was very nice to have an impartial, confidential resource to talk through my situation. I liked that I was told that I could use their suggestions or that I could choose not to use them. I felt very comfortable sharing what was happening and it felt like a very safe environment to have a conversation.”

“The ombuds took a headache and a half and turned it into something much more manageable.”

STUDENT COMMENTS

“You made me understand that as a student I have more rights than I think.”

“This was extremely helpful in helping me not feel alone. [the ombuds] was super empathetic, and helped me start to prepare for a difficult conversation that I need to have. She also opened my eyes to resources available to me.”

“I really found that it centered myself amidst a very stressful decision. I came out of the meeting with an action plan and a fair way to resolve the issue.”

“[the ombuds] was incredibly kind, listened without judgment, and helped me navigate my next steps.”

STAFF COMMENTS

“Having an office on campus that is a safe space to air out details of situations and knowing that it will be kept as confidential as legally possible is the greatest comfort in a really uncomfortable situation.”

“I felt heard and listened to.”

“ I have recommended this service for many co-workers who are struggling with work issues—it’s like work therapy. I always feel such relief after my appointments. It’s such a comfort to me knowing that this service exists.”

“ The [ombuds] was wonderful at listening, offering information, and helping me to clarify my own questions and concerns to voice at meetings with others during this process.”

“ I appreciate [the ombuds] impartial ears and suggestions for next steps. I also appreciate feeling that my concerns were valued and important.”

FACULTY COMMENTS

“ I appreciate having someone to talk with who can help me think through a situation and knows how the university works. [The ombuds] is wonderful, supportive, and encouraging.”

Data Collection and Analysis Methodology

Maintaining Confidentiality in Ombuds Data Collection and Analyses

Ombuds staff identified quantitative metrics and qualitative themes to examine visitor experiences while relying on 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 (Yamagata-Lynch, 2024). Therefore, while protecting these commitments, the strategies listed below were put into place for data collection and analysis related to visitor support services.

- When collecting statistical data, we do not track individuals through multiple months, and instead simply count the number of visitors to the office per month.
- When collecting and analyzing qualitative data about visitor experiences, we do not create in-depth records.
- When collecting both quantitative and qualitative data we do not associate data with information that would reveal visitor identity.

Ombuds staff relied on several digital research tools for collecting and analyzing non-identifiable data. Airtable, a cloud-based service, was used as the quantitative database platform for data entry and aggregate analysis of educational programming, outreach, and visitor traffic trends. Qualtrics, a cloud-based service, was used for collecting and analyzing data for both the workshop and outreach participant satisfaction survey, and the visitor satisfaction survey. Dedoose, a cloud-based

service, was used for qualitative data entry and analysis of visitor conversational narratives. All of these data collection and analysis cloud-based services were in compliance with the Ombuds Data Security Plan.

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 FY23 analysis were carried forward to FY24 but as FY24 data collection and analysis progressed, new codes emerged and were added. Throughout the year, ombuds staff debriefed, collecting observations regarding themes and trends in visitor experiences as well as in workshops and events.



While engaging in thematic analysis of visitor experiences, ombuds staff treated the narratives that visitors shared each time they contacted the ombuds 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 with 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), ombuds staff attempted to maintain trustworthiness and rigor through the following practices:

- involving multiple staff in data collection, analysis, and identification of findings;
- reporting on worthwhile ideas;
- presenting theory and methods;
- being systematic;
- being reflexive;
- presenting participant and 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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