July 27, 2020

Dear UWG faculty, staff, and students,

The Ombuds Office is pleased to offer this report on its activity for Fiscal Year 2020. I hope that you will find this report useful in learning about trends on campus, and I invite you to contact me anytime you have a concern or problem--whether large or small-- that you would like to talk through confidentially. The Ombuds Office is a confidential, neutral, informal, and independent space where faculty, staff, and students are free to share university-related concerns and discuss paths forward.

I wish you all the best as we navigate the challenges of the coming year.

Sincerely,

[Signature]

Julia L. Farmer
University Ombuds
The Office of the University Ombuds has been established to provide an accessible, informal channel of communication to facilitate non-adversarial means of dispute resolution and to promote conflict management and cooperation throughout the University community. The office will work to resolve concerns, complaints and questions about University policies, procedures and practices in a neutral, impartial, independent, and confidential manner.

In their dealings with visitors (i.e.: faculty, staff and students), Ombuds staff will act with integrity and will advocate, not for any individual, but for fairness, equitable treatment, and respect throughout the University community. Ombuds staff shall be properly trained and will adhere to the Code of Ethics and Standard Operating Practices of the International Ombudsman Association. They shall also serve as sensors and resource persons in identifying systemic institutional problems.
The UWG Ombuds Office provides an array of services to visitors. These include:

- Active listening and assistance with brainstorming of options
- Conflict coaching
- Policy guidance
- Informal facilitated conversations
- Referrals to appropriate resources on campus
- Guidance on formal routes for dealing with concerns
- Shuttle diplomacy

Ombuds do not tell visitors what route to take but help them talk through options and decide on the path that they feel best suits their circumstances and needs. Ombuds do not participate in formal processes such as appeals or grievances, should a visitor ultimately decide to pursue that route.

The UWG Ombuds Office also provides various services to the broader campus community. These include:

- Outreach
- Trainings and workshops
- Annual reporting on trends
- Making recommendations for institutional improvements
As with many units on campus, FY 2020 was a period of transition for the Ombuds Office.

At the beginning of the fiscal year, Julia Farmer was appointed as interim faculty ombuds. At the end of the first quarter, the full-time Director of Ombuds Services, Tahirih Varner, left the university. As a result, for the second quarter of the year, there was no one occupying that role. Dr. Farmer completed her Master’s in Conflict Management degree from Kennesaw State University in the fall of 2019. In January of 2020, due to budgetary constraints, she was moved into the full-time role for all faculty, staff, and students, and the part-time position was eliminated.

Around the start of the fourth quarter, the majority of faculty, staff, and students began working and studying from home due to the COVID-19 pandemic, which affected the traditional mode of operations of the Ombuds Office as well as the demand for services.
The Ombuds Office was represented in a non-voting, *ex officio* capacity on the following campus groups:

- HelpWest committee
- Presidential Policy Committee
- Presidential Committee on Accessibility
- President's Advisory Committee
- Presidential Commission on Campus Inclusion
- Provost's Council
- Title IX Communications Committee

In addition, Ombuds staff participated in many professional development activities, such as conferences, coursework, fora, and webinars. A non-exhaustive sample includes the following:

- Completion of Master's degree in Conflict Management from KSU
- Attendance at the Association for Conflict Resolution annual conference
- Participation in IOA Academic Ombuds sector online forum
- Participation in IOA Student Ombuds sector online forum
- Participation in Georgia Office of Dispute Resolution online mediation webinar
- Participation in ABA Ombuds section Diversity Icebreaker webinar
- Participation in IOA webinar on establishing trust in groups
The Ombuds Office continued to work to get word out to campus about its services throughout the year. Some of the outreach activities in which we participated included the following:

- New Faculty Orientation
- Wolf Life New Employee Orientation
- General Faculty Meeting
- New Faculty Academy

The Office also offered student trainings, classes, and workshops through venues such as the following:

- First-year seminars
- Mediation training for Resident Assistants
- Conflict styles and difficult conversations training for Student Affairs graduate assistants

Workshops and other forms of assistance are also available to employee groups or departments. Assistance can include workshops on the above topics or others, as well as facilitated conversations, development of group norms, or other types of group working environment assistance available upon request.

The Ombuds Office also began a social media campaign to attempt to raise awareness of the office among students and employees. We encourage all UWG constituents to like or follow us at the following handles, in order to keep up with what the office is up to and to receive periodic conflict management tips:

Facebook: UWGOmbudsOffice    Twitter: uwg_ombuds
### CONSTITUENTS SERVED BY AREA

**ACADEMIC AFFAIRS**

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<th>Employees</th>
<th>Students</th>
<th>Unique Cases</th>
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<td><strong>59</strong></td>
<td><strong>15</strong></td>
<td><strong>48</strong></td>
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Numbers reflect constituents served through confidential consultations and facilitated conversations, and through the HelpWest program.

*NOTE: Data below do not reflect full extent of Ombuds Office activity for the year. Complete first-quarter data for the full-time Ombuds position are unavailable.*
### CONSTITUENTS SERVED BY AREA
(NON-ACADEMIC AFFAIRS)

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<td><strong>TOTAL</strong></td>
<td><strong>85</strong></td>
<td><strong>28</strong></td>
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</table>

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**NOTE:** Data below do not reflect full extent of Ombuds Office activity for the year. Complete first-quarter data for the full-time Ombuds position are unavailable.
**VISITOR DEMOGRAPHICS**

**RACE/ETHNICITY**

- White: 62.3%
- Black: 21.4%
- Hispanic: 2.5%
- Asian: 2.5%
- Other/Unknown: 11.3%

**GENDER**

- Female: 57.9%
- Male: 40.3%
- Non-binary or unknown: 1.9%
The International Ombudsman Association has adopted the following nine uniform reporting categories for tracking visitor concerns or questions:

- Compensation and benefits
- Evaluative relationships
- Peer and colleague relationships
- Career progress and development
- Legal, regulatory, financial, and compliance
- Safety, health, and environment
- Services and administrative issues
- Organizational, strategic and mission related
- Values, ethics and standards

The graphs below represent the percentage of cases in which the above concerns or questions were reflected. Note that individual cases may involve more than one concern.
Student concerns were predominantly focused in two areas: evaluative relationships (primarily concerns about relationships with faculty and/or department administrators) and quality of university services.

The chart below reflects the concerns and questions brought to the office by students. Again, it should be noted that some cases involved more than one concern.
HelpWest is the UWG employee benevolence fund, previously known as OneUWG, which provides emergency financial assistance to faculty and staff who have experienced unexpected financial hardship. The fund was established in 2017 by then-Provost Dr. Micheal Crafton and is maintained through contributions by employees. Requests are processed through the Ombuds Office in order to ensure confidentiality for those seeking assistance and are approved by the HelpWest subcommittee of the Barriers Team. Voting subcommittee members represent each division, as well as Faculty Senate and Staff Advisory Council. Subcommittee members do not receive identifying information regarding recipients when considering requests.

**Requestors by Division:**

- Academic Affairs: 7
- Business and Finance: 10
- Student Affairs: 2

**Total funds distributed FY20:**

$6840
First, it should be noted that the above visitor data likely particularly under-reflect staff visits to the office, in that while Dr. Farmer was in the Faculty Ombuds role during the first part of the year, she was more likely to interact directly with faculty than with staff. That said, it is evident that there were some similarities as well as some key differences between concerns brought to the Ombuds Office by faculty and staff. Evaluative relationships (which may refer to supervisee concerns about supervisors or vice versa) ranked at the top for both groups in terms of the percentage of cases in which they appeared as at least one of the primary concerns. Peer and colleague relationships were also a significant concern for both groups. Taken together, one can see that collegiality concerns are a driving force in traffic to the Ombuds Office for both groups.

There are certain key areas where faculty and staff concerns diverge, however. Staff are much more likely to bring questions or concerns regarding compensation and benefits than are faculty. While this has manifested itself to some extent in the confidential work-related conversations that visitors have had with the Ombuds (as evidenced by the above pie chart), where it manifests itself most clearly is in the patterns of HelpWest requests received. Of the 19 HelpWest requests received in FY20, 17 were from staff.

Faculty, on the other hand, show significantly more concern with issues around career progression and development in general, on top of (or in conjunction with) concerns about evaluative relationships. While it may be tempting to see this pattern as rooted in the stresses of the tenure process, about twice as many tenured faculty contacted the office as untenured faculty during FY20. Many of the faculty cases involved concerns about the review process, whether at the annual, third-year, tenure, or promotion level.

Of the students who consulted with the Ombuds Office whose affiliation is known, they were fairly equally divided between graduate and undergraduate students. Given the ratio of undergraduate to graduate students on campus, this proportion of student visitors stands out somewhat. It is unclear at this time whether the greater proportional demand from graduate students reflects a larger number of concerns on their part or simply a greater awareness of the office’s services. Either way, there is clearly more work to be done in getting the word out to students about the office, given the count of student visitors relative to employee visitors.

Student concerns fell primarily into two areas: academically-related concerns about grades or other sorts of decisions made by faculty or administrators, and concerns about treatment received in student services areas across campus. A common pattern with regard to concerns about student services was a perceived lack of responsiveness or lack of communication.