

UWG OMBUDS OFFICE REPORT

FY 2023





OMBUDS

7/7/2023

Dear UWG faculty, staff, and students,

I am pleased to offer this annual report from the University Office of the Ombuds for FY 23. In the report, you will find information on caseload and general trends, as well as highlights of the ways in which the office interacted with the campus community throughout the past year. It has been a pleasure continuing to get to know members of our organization from all across campus as I worked with you in individual consultations, workshops, reading groups, and more.

As always, the Ombuds Office is a confidential, neutral, independent, and informal space where UWG faculty, staff, and students can report concerns, consult about issues, and discuss constructive and productive options for paths forward when dealing with a campus-related conflict or problem. The office offers conflict coaching, facilitated conversations, policy guidance, campus referrals, and a space where voices at all level of the organization can be heard. It also provides upward feedback to administration on trends and areas of concern on campus.

Thank you for your continued support of the office, and do feel free to get in touch anytime.

Sincerely,

Dr. Julia L. Farmer

University Ombuds

Office of the University Ombuds Report, FY 2023

Cases

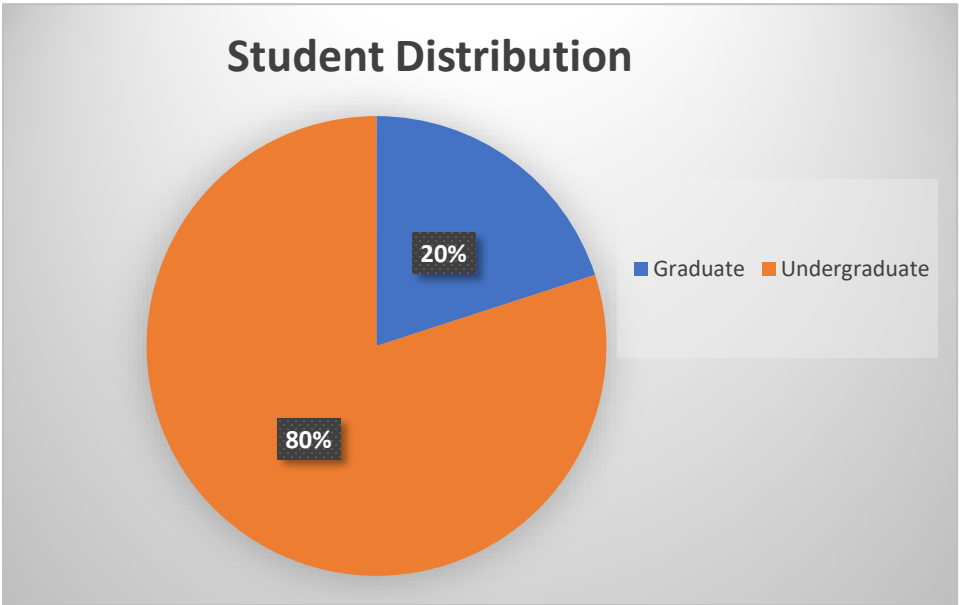
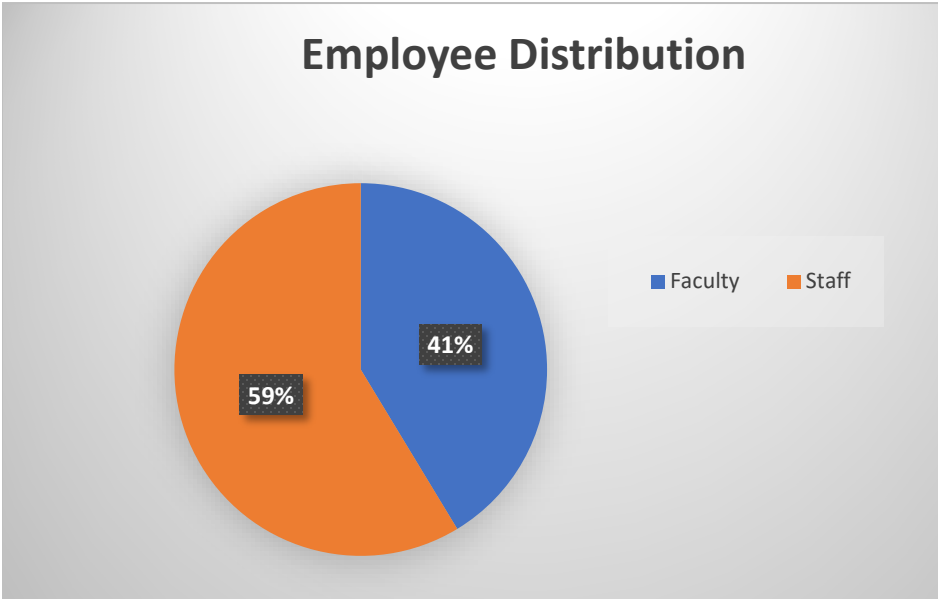
	Employee Cases	Student Cases
CACSI	6	5
COE	5	4
RCOB	1	3
LIBR	5	n/a
THSSON	-	2
University College	2	4
Unknown	-	2
AA-Other	13	n/a
Administrative Services	10	n/a
Advancement	-	n/a
Business and Financial Services	2	n/a
Other (Non-AA)	5	n/a
Strategic Enrollment Management	5	n/a
Student Affairs	8	n/a

UNIQUE CASES: 82

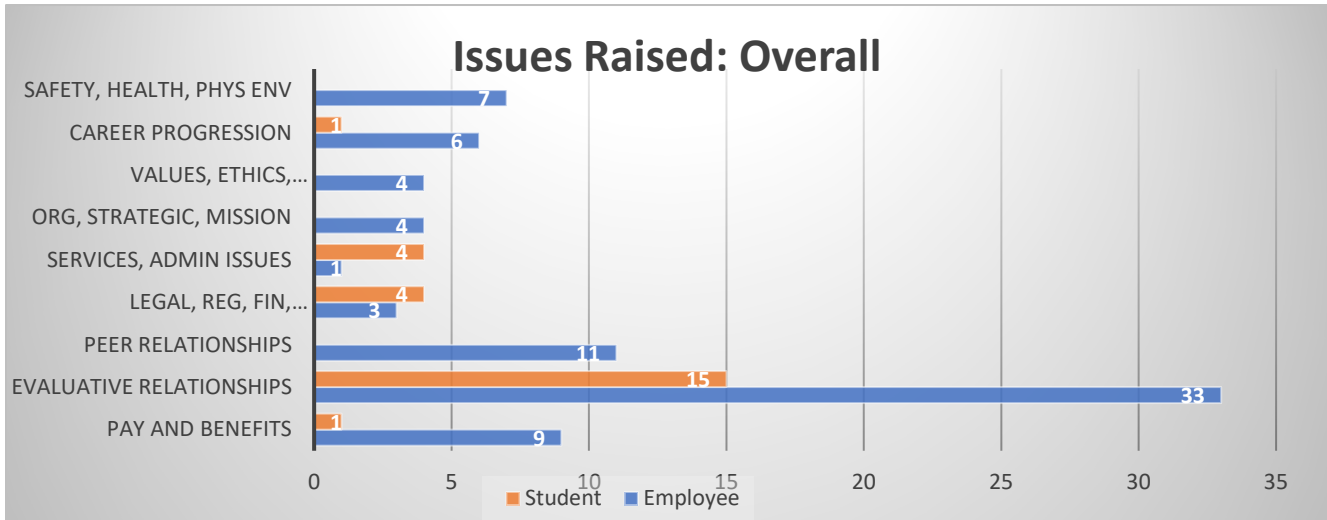
TOTAL VISITORS: 96

*Some cases involve consultations by multiple parties and/or multiple consultations by individuals. Visitors are only counted once per month per case. Visits are designated by where a student's major is housed, or the area where the employee works, when known. In some cases, concerns involved areas or relationships outside of the area where the person is housed.

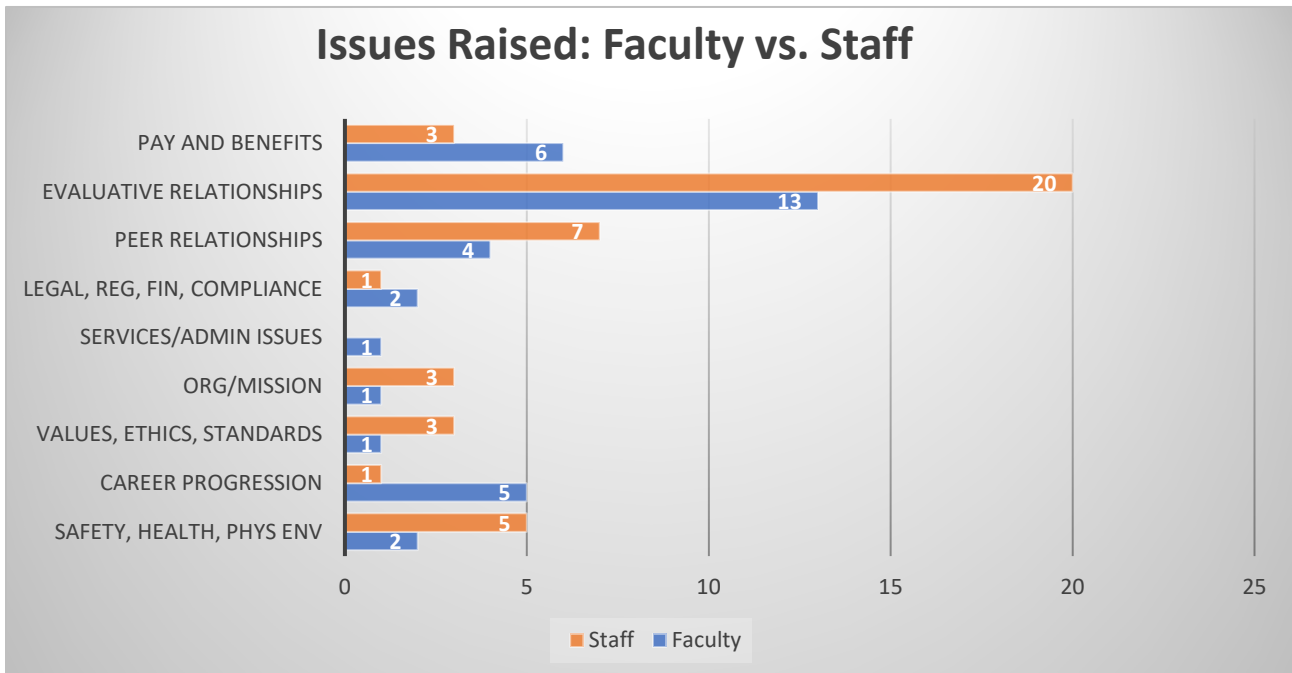
Distribution of Visitors



Issues Raised in Cases



*Some cases involve more than one issue category.



HelpWest Data

HelpWest, which is UWG's employee benevolence fund, continues to assist UWG faculty and staff who are facing unexpected financial hardship due to circumstances beyond their control. This year the HelpWest fund was able to assist seven employees in several different divisions, providing a total of \$3,460 in assistance.

Employees were assisted in the following divisions:

Administrative Services: 2

Academic Affairs: 2

Business and Financial Services: 1

Strategic Enrollment Management: 2

The HelpWest fund could not exist without the generosity of our fellow employees. Requests for assistance and donations can be made at westga.edu/helpwest. Thank you to everyone who has contributed to the fund over the years.



Trends

Some familiar trends continued this year in issues presented during consultations with the Ombuds Office. As has been the case in many previous years, evaluative relationships were the leading topic of discussion. (Visitors concerned about evaluative relationships can be those consulting about relationships with supervisors or supervisees or can be students concerned about issues with a faculty member in a course. Less frequently, students may consult about issues related to evaluative relationships in campus employment.) For employees, issues around performance appraisal were the most frequent subcategory of concern in this area, followed by issues of general feedback (separate from performance appraisal) and respect. Supervisors also frequently consulted about ways to improve their work (and relationships) with supervisees.

The next most frequent area of concern for employees revolved around peer relationships. Most often, these consultations involved issues with colleagues in other departments, although some intra-departmental issues occurred as well. The most frequent subcategories of concern in this area were trust/integrity and communication.

Finally, the third most frequent area of concern for employees involved pay and benefits. Concerns in this area arose particularly in relation to salary inversion and compression, along with payroll administration issues.

Two categories of concern where there were significant disparities between the rates at which faculty and staff reported them were Career Progression and Safety, Health, and Physical Environment. With regard to the former, faculty concerns around tenure and promotion were the primary issue, with staff coming to the Ombuds Office about career progression issues much less frequently. As far as Safety, Health, and Physical Environment, staff were much more likely to report such concerns than faculty, especially in the subcategory of work/life balance. Work/life balance issues have stemmed largely from understaffing in many units but also from the adjustment back to in-office work after a period of more remote work.

As mentioned above, the most significant factor in student visits to the Ombuds Office involved concerns about their academic experience. Graduate student dismissals were by far the largest area of concern for that group. Undergraduate concerns most frequently related to faculty availability, communication, and/or grading.

Sample Accomplishments, Outreach, and Professional Development

- Awarded CO-OP® certification from the International Ombuds Association
- Completed IOA Course: Understanding and Communicating the Value of the Ombuds Office
- Conducted conflict management training for Peer Academic Coaches
- Led Ombuds Reading Group on the book *Getting Along: How to Work With Anyone (Even Difficult People)* (spring) and *Think Again: The Power of Knowing What You Don't Know* (fall).
- Created new asynchronous course for faculty in partnership with IFE: Communicating With Students
- Published two invited blog posts through the University of Colorado's Ombuzz blog, with the series title "Conflict Tips Through the Lens of Science and Nature"
- Presented at IOA annual conference: *Ripped From the Higher Ed Headlines: How Might the Ombuds Help?*
- Presented on negotiation for RCOB Dean's Council
- Presented Conflict Tips to Cornerstone XIDS class
- Developed and presented session on conflict management for visiting students from Uzbekistan
- Newnan Spring Fling
- New Faculty Orientation
- Apple a Day Vendor and Wellness Fair
- Served on IOA's Communications Committee
- Chaired HelpWest steering committee
- Contributed chapter ("One-to-One Practices in Organizational Ombuds Practice") to forthcoming IOA volume, *The Organizational Ombuds: Foundations, Fundamentals, and its Future*.
- Developed two new sessions for Continuing Education: Personality and Problem Solving, and The Art of Negotiation. Presented on campus and at Greystone.
- Participated in New Student Orientation
- Completed Mental Health First Aid training and became certified

Sample Comments from Visitors and Workshop/Training Participants

- [On the Continuing Ed Negotiation course:] “Thank you so much for presenting on this topic. There were so many good tools & tips; I am looking forward to utilizing them in the near future!”
- [On the Continuing Ed Personality and Problem Solving course:] “This will help me a lot in my ‘newer’ role in the office;” “Helped me consider more ways to solve challenges”
- “Thank you for being the type of person to keep hosting these reading groups. I really enjoyed this experience.”
- “Thank you so much for presenting to [us] on conflict resolution. We will use the techniques you shared with us during our appointments.... Thank you for helping us succeed this year!”
- “Thank you so much for the help! I was able to resolve the situation with him thanks to you! I’m so happy you’re here to help students in these situations!”
- [On the IFE course:] “What a great course! I’ve now (finally) completed it. Really enjoyed it a lot. Thank you for creating this helpful training tool.”
- [On the IFE course:] “It was wonderfully helpful and an excellent way to spend my office hours this morning. Thank you so much for the opportunity to better understand my own conflict styles as well as the styles of others. I also really love the Group Norms activity! I can't wait to use it!”
- “I am so glad you are here and so resourceful.”
- “Thank you for everything. I know this is probably something that shouldn’t be an issue for most people.”
- “I appreciated the unbiased perspective of Dr. Farmer, and her willingness to meet with me to discuss my concerns.”
- “Ombuds gave me the space to express my concerns about the workplace & co-workers and allowed me to do so in a safe space.”
- “[The Ombuds]... was always readily available and responsive.”
- “The Ombuds is always trying to find ways to help. She listens carefully and patiently and then offers solutions. I feel I can come to the Ombuds at any time and she will provide me with great advice, no matter what the situation is (with colleagues, staff, professors, and students). We are fortunate to have her in this position.”
- “[The Ombuds Office] helped me better navigate the politics of academia.”
- “Dr. Farmer listens and only offers advice when necessary. She realized I needed to talk about the issues so she listened respectfully. I felt heard and respected.”