



Mission

Promote a civil and inclusive campus community by assisting with individual concerns through service and education, as well as serving as a change agent to address group conflict and systemic concerns.

Vision


We envision a university community with a culture of healthy, safe and open dialogue, skilled in cooperative problem resolution.

Serving the Oregon State University Community

The University Ombuds Office (UOO) fosters a civil, inclusive, and healthy university climate through conflict management service, education, and systemic feedback. OSU's Ombuds assist faculty, staff, students, and administrators with their concerns through informal, impartial, and confidential conflict management assistance. Since the office's creation on February 13, 2012, through its tenth year on February 12, 2022, Ombuds assisted students and employees ("visitors") with over 2,500 cases involving over 5700 visitors, each visitor with their own unique perspectives, issues, and goals towards resolving a case.

The University Ombuds also serves as a dedicated neutral advocate for change to address systemic issues that affect climate and Oregon State University's ability to promote early and effective conflict resolution. Information outlining the scope of Ombuds services can be found in the [office charter](#). OSU's Ombuds follow the professional standards of practice set forth by the International Ombudsman Association (IOA). Their services are distinct from other conflict management options at the university in that they are structured and enacted in practice to meet IOA standards and principles to be informal, impartial, independent, and confidential.

Ombuds listen, help visitors gather information and explore options, provide informal mediation or facilitation services when appropriate, make referrals and collaborate with other offices with the visitors' permission. By helping constituents manage their conflicts early and at an informal level, the UOO contributes to visitors' ability to be productive professionally and academically, reduces stress related illness, and helps improve professional and learning relationships. In turn, each employee or student served contributes to a more collaborative and inclusive climate. At the organizational level, Ombuds services help reduce the costs of unresolved or un-managed conflict which include turnover, absenteeism, lowered morale and productivity, and managers spending excessive time addressing employee and student issues. An overview of the value the University Ombuds Office provides to OSU can be found [here](#).

 Additional information is available on [our webpage](#).



Structure and Access

Oregon State University’s Ombuds serve all members of the OSU community. This includes OSU constituents at Extension offices, OSU-Cascades, Hatfield Marine Science Center, and Portland sites. Consistent with most university and corporate Ombuds offices, the University Ombuds reports directly to the president to assure the independent role of the office is maintained, and to provide the president with feedback on the overall climate and systemic issues affecting the University. Ombuds are often defined as an “ear to the people,” available to hear all our constituents’ voices, providing insights and surfacing issues that may not be heard through other channels.

Ombuds: confidential sounding board, navigator, mediator, change agent

... “ear to the people”

STANDARDS OF PRACTICE

Independent

Impartial

Informal

Confidential

VALUE TO OREGON STATE

Cost reduction

Risk prevention

Contributor to inclusive climate & SP 4.0

Advocate for organizational health

Functioning independently from decision-making offices allows UOO to be impartial both in practice and perception. Ombuds are not part of any formal, investigative, decision-making processes and therefore do not have any real or perceived stake in the outcome of their visitors’ circumstances. Perceiving Ombuds services as neutral, impartial, and safe are often key factors influencing the decision by visitors to access the UOO. The level of confidentiality maintained by Ombuds is higher than most OSU offices. Ombuds do not keep any identifying records and are not an office of notice. The only exceptions to when confidentiality cannot be promised is in matters relating to threats to public safety, child abuse, if there is imminent risk of serious harm, or if compelled by a court of law. Because of this level of confidentiality, and the independent and informal nature of the office, issues will often be brought to UOO’s attention that may not arise through other avenues. Ombuds are uniquely positioned and qualified to address multi-faceted conflicts on a variety of issues.

UNIVERSITY OMBUDS OFFICE: TEN YEARS OF SERVICE

FEBRUARY 2012 - FEBRUARY 2022



Oregon State University

Choosing Ombuds

Accessing the University Ombuds Office is voluntary. When visitors choose to work with UOO they are looking for an “off the record” listener, skilled in helping them think through options and providing expert level assistance to help navigate complex systems or facilitate an informal conversation, when appropriate. The level and type of assistance provided by Ombuds is visitor driven – they choose their path towards resolution. Faculty & Staff University Climate Surveys (years ‘14, ‘16, and ‘18) consistently show the highest average rating of “comfort” in choosing Ombuds to address workplace conflicts.

VISITOR FEEDBACK	
<i>“Before I came to the Ombuds Office, I was considering...”</i>	
Giving up and enduring the consequences	52%
Not talking to anyone	41%
Leaving my position	33%
Leaving other (i.e., housing)	16%
Filing a grievance or complaint	21%
Leaving my major	7%
Filing a lawsuit	6%



Source: Internal survey, University Ombuds Office, 2019-2022

Of those referred to the University Ombuds Office in Year 10, 65% were self-referrals and 15% from colleagues and peers, reflecting continued awareness of our office and access to our services. Co-workers, students, supervisors and senior administrators who have had good experiences with UOO also continue to make many of the referrals to the office.

REFERRALS TO OMBUDS, YEAR-TO-YEAR										
	Y1	Y2	Y3	Y4	Y5	Y6	Y7	Y8	Y9	Y10
Self	35%	42%	50%	59%	59%	60%	67%	68%	70%	65%
Colleague/peer	9%	13%	19%	4%	10%	15%	10%	11%	12%	15%
Subtotal	44%	55%	69%	63%	69%	75%	77%	79%	82%	80%
Next most frequent referrals from:	EOA SEIU	SEIU EOA Grad School	Admin EOA	Admin EOA	OHR EOA	OHR Admin EOA	Supervisor Admin	Supervisor EOA	Supervisor Admin	Supervisor Admin



Connection to SP4.0

Oregon State’s Ombuds play an important role in creating an inclusive, respectful, and productive climate for working and learning at the university. Specifically, the work of UOO aligns with SP4.0 Goal 4: A culture of belonging, collaboration, and innovation. Working collaboratively and respectfully to address conflict is modelled, coached, and applied by Ombuds through individual consults with visitors, facilitated group resolutions, promoting innovative ways to address conflict, and working with teams to create effective and inclusive learning and working environments. In general, providing Ombuds assistance to constituents at every level of the university enables them to perform more effectively their work toward the mission and goals outlined in SP4.0.

Metrics

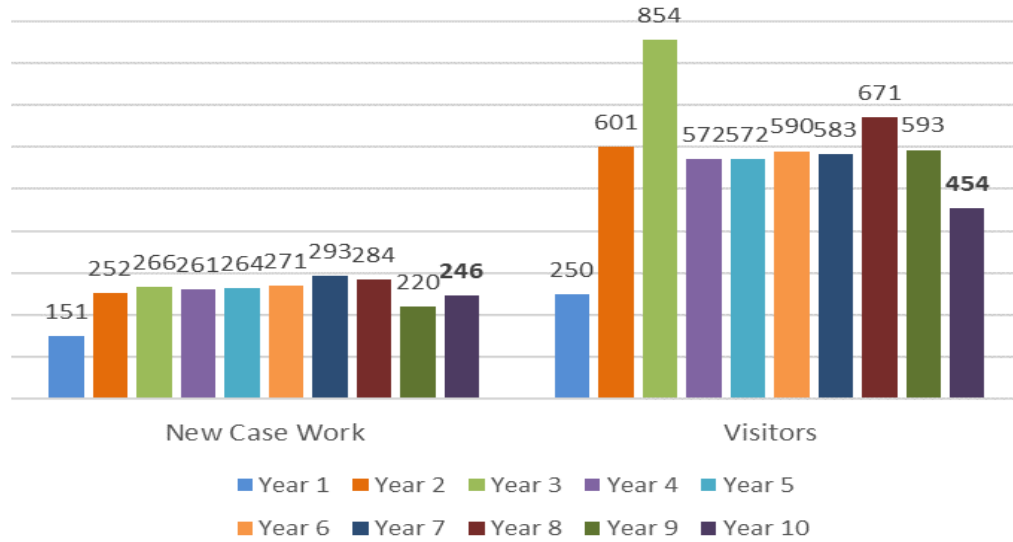
The confidential nature of Ombuds’ work limits their ability to fully collect and track data. However, Ombuds are able to capture information that is useful for identifying trends; conveys the frequency of use and need for their services; and can be used to share the depth, complexity, and impact of their work internally with key partners for collaboration. OSU’s Ombuds code anonymous data related to each visitor’s concerns. No personally identifying records are maintained. The Ombuds do not ask for demographic information. If visitors share that a perceived cultural difference, micro-aggressions, or bias impacted their conflict situation, the Ombuds will code that. Annual summaries that include caseload, number of visitors to the office and case role relationships are updated each year and included in the document: [How Ombuds Add Value to Oregon State University](#).

Cases and Visitors Defined

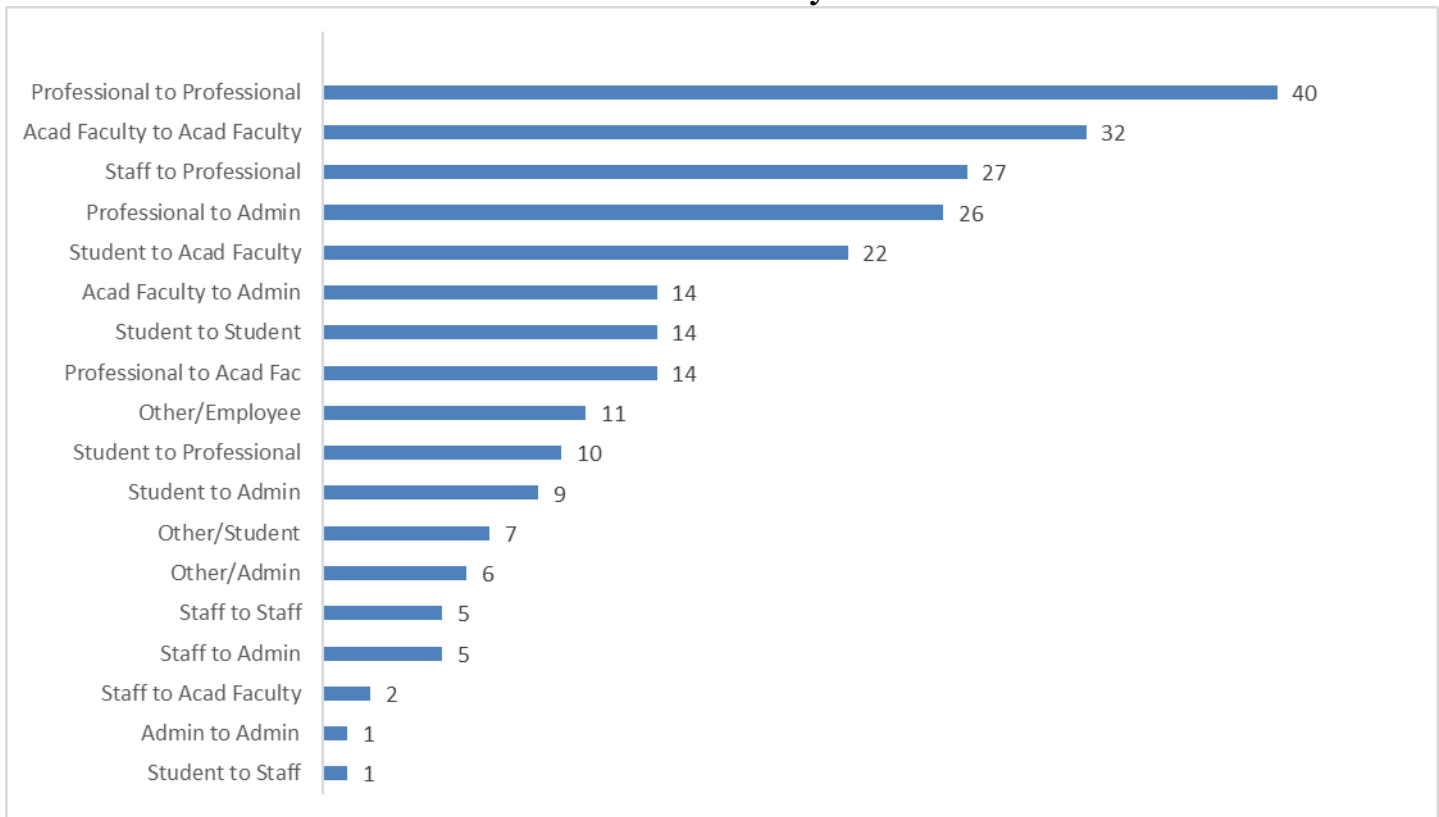
A “case” is identified when a new (or previous) visitor or group presents a new problem or issue to the Ombuds that results in a discussion where the Ombuds helps to develop, discuss, and offer options. It may or may not require multiple appointments with the visitor and/or other parties. “Visitors” are employees, students, and related members of the OSU community who bring issues to the Ombuds for assistance, including all primary constituents involved in managing the case. One case may involve one visitor, two people navigating informal options or conversations, or it may involve several people working through a group conflict. The following two charts include 1) new case activity and related numbers of visitors for each year, and 2) the classification of relationships by constituent type in Year 10. The relationship types represented for Year 10 are proportionately reflective of the past few years of activity. The majority of cases, 77% in Year 10, continue to be employee to employee, or primarily employee affected. Fifty-nine percent of those cases involved a relationship with a positional power difference (direct supervisor or manager to subordinate). Informal and confidential options provided by Ombuds offer a safe space for employees who perceive risks related to disclosing their concerns, and to supervisors invested in improving working relations in a supportive and non-adversarial manner.



Years 1-10: New Case & Visitor Activity



Year 10: Visitor Cases by Classification



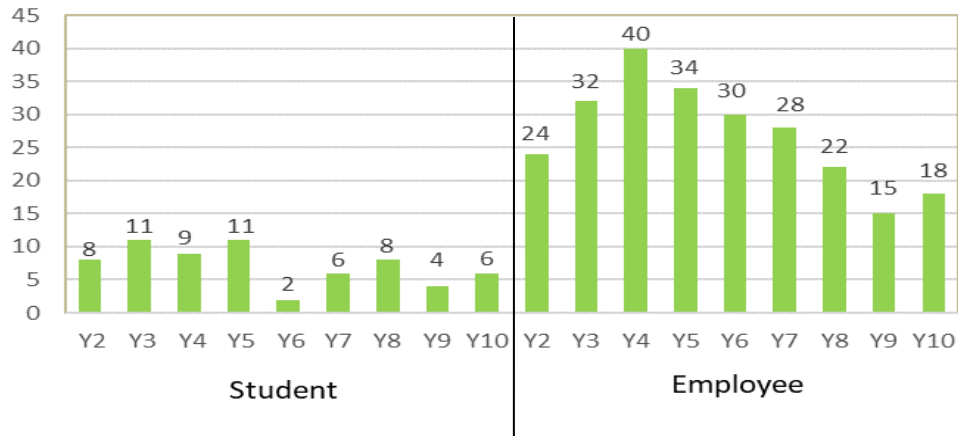
“Professional” refers to Professional Faculty (unclassified professional staff).

“Acad Faculty” refers to Academic Faculty including all levels of professorship and instructors.

“Other” includes parents, OSU affiliates and partners, alumni, and other members of the OSU community.



Perceived Cases of Bullying by Year



Bullying is a process that escalates over time. Ombuds assist students and employees with cases of perceived bullying before they escalate to the level of violating policy, when cases of bullying can potentially lead to irreparable harm to individuals and team members.

Cases Involving Perceived Bias by Year

	Y5	Y6	Y7	Y8	Y9	Y10
Gender	17	18	27	21	17	25
Race	15	16	12	15	16	19
Age	7	4	12	7	3	5
Disability	7	3	4	6	5	6
Veteran	1	0	0	1	0	2
Other*	15	8	7	5	8	17
Total**	54	44	51	47	40	61
% of total cases	20%	16%	17%	17%	18%	25%

Students and employees often share that bias and microaggressions are impacting the conflicts they are trying to address. Ombuds help visitors work through adversity to address current issues while respecting the diverse needs and considerations of our visitors. Ombuds make referrals to supporting offices when appropriate and collaborate with those offices when the visitor gives permission.

*Other refers to concerns related to class, religion, marital status, citizenship status, political affiliation, remote work accessibility, pregnancy and English fluency.

**A single case may have more than one bias concern. "Total" is not a subtotal of the bias counts above.



Outreach, Trends, and Actions for Change

The University Ombuds Office helps visitors work through conflicts using personalized approaches, education, and preventive outreach. Like many offices impacted during the pandemic, Ombuds needed to adjust their approach to outreach and prevention in Years 9 and 10 to work within a reduced budget, fluctuating caseload, and unique needs of our visitors. In Year 10, UOO provided 18 program outreach presentations. Trainings were limited to case specific education and special sessions with collaborating administrative units on conflict management and bullying. Moving into year 11, UOO will expand its preventive outreach and education opportunities while using the most efficient and effective tools we've learned and honed over the past two years. Along with our visitors' and campus needs, we are adapting to an everchanging environment.

Ombuds goals are determined each year by the individual cases brought to the office and the systemic trends identified from pattern issues. A "trend" is identified based on frequency of conflict type occurrence, likelihood of reoccurrence, and severity of impact. Some trends can be addressed through case resolution and coordination with administrative units to correct or improve processes. Large unit trends are addressed by reviewing data with leadership for that unit and coordinating solutions specific to their needs. System wide patterns of conflict are revealed through UOO's annual coded data in concert with input and data from colleagues identifying related trends. The most frequently coded case types seen in UOO vary for student visitors each year. However, key issues commonly surfaced by employees have been consistent the last few years.



Year 10: Most Frequently Perceived Issues

Employees	Undergraduate Students
1. Management Issues	1. Values/Ethics/Standards
2. Career Progression/Development	2. Culture/Microaggression/Bias
3. Values/Ethic/Standards	3. Academic Progression
Graduate Students	Bias
1. Academic Progression	34% of Undergraduate student cases
2. Advisor/Mentee Relationship	26% of Graduate student cases
3. Values/Ethics/Standards	23% of Employee cases

Most frequent issues seen by Ombuds:

In Year 10, management topics commonly included conflicts stemming from lack of supervisory/managerial skills, lack of inclusive transition management, and negative outcomes from operational decisions. Other frequent issues included negative impacts on career progression, ineffective communication, lack of collegiality/civility, perceived bias, conflict climate issues affecting teams, and ethical standards related to processes. Strained relations between students and advisors continue to be frequent issues arising for graduate students. Conflicts affecting academic progression were high for all student groups. The most frequently coded issues overall were ineffective management, inhibited career progression and development, issues related to values, ethics or standards, and 24 cases of perceived bullying. Employee and student affected cases of bullying have declined each year, although Year 10 saw a slight increase. Twenty-five percent of all cases in Year 10 included one or more perceived biases or microaggressions affecting the visitor’s conflict. This is a significant increase from previous years.

Most student and employee visitors are in varying levels of distress when they visit the UOO, with many sharing health-related effects from lengthy processes to address their conflicts, adversarial disputes, the negative effects of bullying, and/or fears and distress related to harmed relations with supervisors, professors, advisors, or peers. Ombuds are uniquely positioned and skilled to listen to all concerns and meet people where they are in the moment, helping them focus on goals to navigate a path towards resolution.



Addressing systemic trends:

During Years 1 & 2, the University Ombuds worked with groups invested in addressing the prevalence of bullying at OSU. A policy was established with a two year roll out of education to managers and employees, with Ombuds taking the lead on educational presentations and early intervention. This process was established in coordination with Equal Opportunity and Access (originally Office of Equity and Inclusion) who continues to enforce the policy and process formal requests for resolution.

By Year 4, Ombuds were reflecting on high numbers of cases where a perceived bias or lack of intercultural communication skills were affecting visitors' conflicts. UOO began anonymously coding these case categories to share data with colleagues and to promote intercultural dialogue. Coordinating systemic solutions to address bullying and promoting efforts to create a more civil and inclusive campus, are two examples of the many ways Ombuds work collaboratively to respond to systemic trends and create change.

For more than four years, the most frequently coded issues brought to the University Ombuds Office relate to management practices. Recommendations continue to be made to provide support for managerial development as well as accountability. Specifically, training and coaching for operations management, transitional management, effective and consistent supervisory practices, and clearly stated role expectations are essential to provide managers with the tools needed to lead, make sound decisions, and communicate effectively with employees.

Continued Service

As the University Ombuds Office continues serving OSU into our eleventh year, our mission, values, and commitment remain the same. Ombuds will continue to promote a civil and inclusive campus through informal conflict management assistance, available to all members of OSU.