



## University of Oregon Ombuds Program

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# FY23 ANNUAL REPORT

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## ABOUT THE OMBUDS PROGRAM

The University of Oregon ombuds program (OP) provides comprehensive conflict resolution services for individuals and groups, as well as data tracking and upward feedback for systemic concern resolution. The ombuds program offers a distinct service in that it is the only campus resource providing informal, confidential, independent, and impartial services for students and employees.

The OP adheres to the International Ombuds Association (IOA) standards of practice, code of ethics, and best practices. The OP also upholds and promotes the vision, mission, and core values of the University of Oregon.



## FY23 OMBUDS STAFF



Brett Hathaway Harris (she/her) has served as the university ombuds and ombuds program director since 2016. Brett holds a J.D. and has a background in employment law, mediation, and organizational effectiveness work. Brett is an active member of the International Ombuds Association (IOA) and previously led the IOA's DEIB Committee. In 2023, she authored a chapter on data management for the IOA's forthcoming textbook. Brett was awarded an IOA President's Award in 2023 for leadership and service in the ombuds field.



Sara Ash (she/her) joined the University of Oregon as assistant ombuds in 2021 and was promoted to associate ombuds in 2023. Sara previously worked for over 13 years in student affairs. She holds a M.A. in Adult and Higher Education and is pursuing an EdD in Organizational Change and Leadership from the University of Southern California. Sara is an IOA member and has completed training in mediation and ombuds work through the IOA. She currently serves on the IOA Advocacy Committee.

## DESCRIPTION OF SERVICES

The OP serves all university students, faculty, and staff. Services are free and confidential.\* Many visitors to the ombuds program seek single-party services such as conflict coaching and/or guidance on university policies or processes. When appropriate, multi-party dispute resolution processes are offered to help resolve conflicts/concerns.

*\*Exceptions to confidentiality exist for situations wherein there is an imminent risk of serious harm or where otherwise required by law.*

### What to expect when utilizing the ombuds program



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#### INTAKE

Students and employees may reach out to the ombuds program for any university-related concern. Upon initial contact, staff conduct a brief intake which serves to designate the appropriate ombuds for the case and prepare the ombuds to provide services.

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#### CONSULTATION

During appointments, ombuds explain services and visitors share information about their university-related concern. Ombuds then begin the process of identifying options for handling the concern and providing single-party services.

##### Single-party services include:

- guidance on policies or processes
- information about and/or referral to other campus resources
- communication and conflict coaching
- management/supervisory coaching
- recommending dispute resolution options
- strategizing and preparing for next steps

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#### ACTION STEPS

After an action plan is developed, visitors take steps to resolve their concern. When appropriate, other participants are invited into the resolution process for mediation or other multi-party processes. The ombuds program aims to empower visitors to take steps toward resolution, but does not force any steps or outcome.

##### Multi-party services include:

- mediation
- group facilitation
- shuttle diplomacy
- conflict diagnosis/analysis
- informal climate assessment
- organizational assessment
- other group conflict resolution processes including restorative justice processes

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#### EVALUATION

Visitors are welcome to revisit the ombuds program for further consultation and advice as they proceed with steps to resolve their concern and/or work through multi-party dispute resolution processes.

## FY23 BASIC CASE DATA

**321** Total Cases

In FY23, the OP handled **321 total cases** consisting of **663 separate concerns/issues**.

**663** Concerns

**408 visitors** sought out program services and **766** members of the campus community participated in cases and dispute resolution processes.

**408** Visitors

**766** Participants

Total cases, visitors, and concerns have been relatively consistent in recent years. However, complexity of cases, assessed based on casework hours and number of services per case, continue to increase year by year. In FY23, ombuds spent around **2,800 hours** on casework.

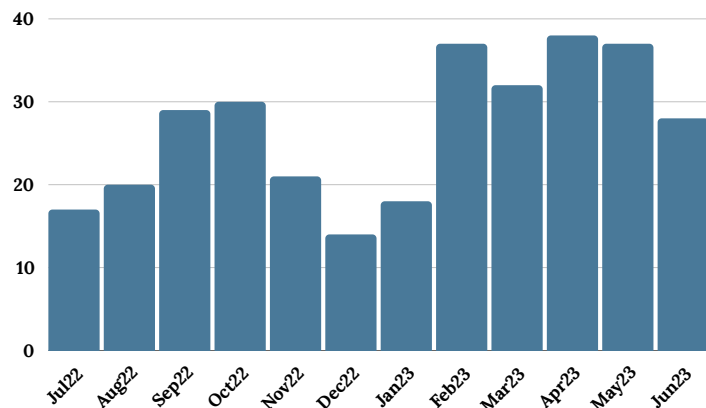
**2800** Case Hours

-A case is described by this office as a distinct matter brought for the purpose of consultation, coaching, dispute resolution assistance, and/or systemic complaint tracking. A case may contain one or many concerns/issues, and may include one visitor or numerous visitors who share the same concern(s).

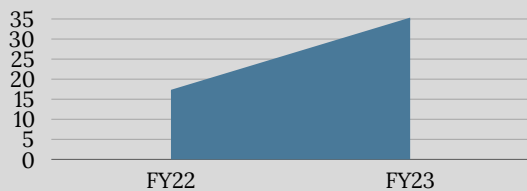
-A visitor is anyone who initiates contact with the OP for purposes of seeking services.

### NEW CASES PER MONTH

Ombuds caseload is cyclical and generally fluctuates according to busy times in the academic year. In summer months, the ombuds program aims to provide more in-depth services such as trainings and workshops to administrative units.



### DELIVERY OF SERVICES / REMOTE OMBUDS SERVICES



Despite a slight increase in requests for in-person services in FY23, remote services continue to be preferred for both single-party and multi-party services. This is consistent with the national trend for remote services in the ombuds field.\*

\*see <https://ombuds-blog.blogspot.com/2023/12/2023-year-in-review-biggest-story.html>.

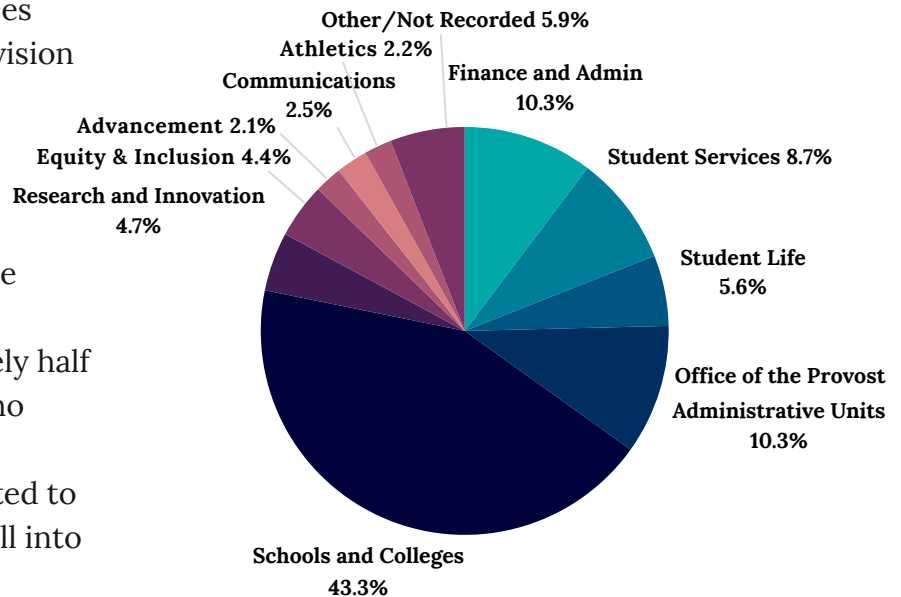
The start of the pandemic marked a shift in the delivery of ombuds services. All services were offered remotely, with no significant reduction in demand for services. Although services were again offered in person beginning in 2021, preference for remote ombuds services continues. In FY23, the ombuds office held approximately 1200 meetings; of those, only 35 in-person meetings were requested, or just under three percent (3%) of the total ombuds meetings.

## FY23 CASES

### CASES BY UNIVERSITY AREA / DIVISION

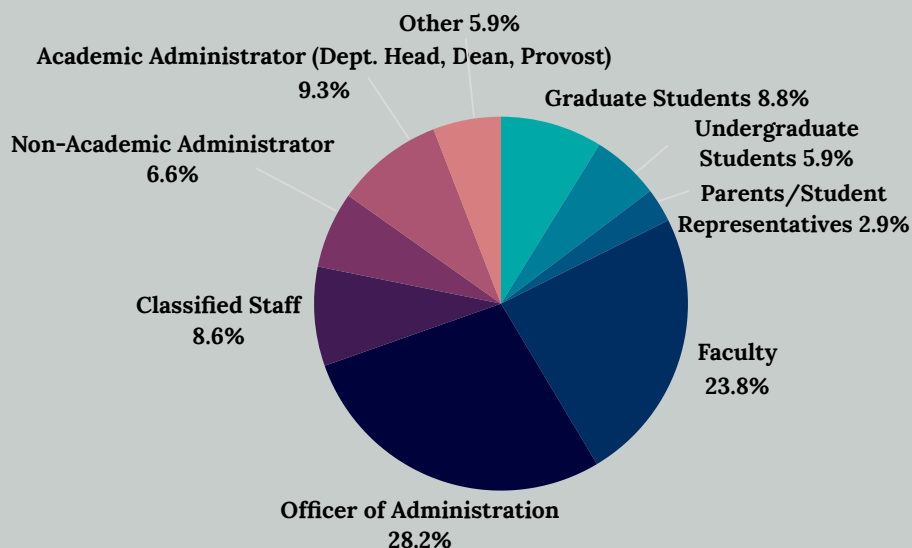
The ombuds program tracks cases according to university area/division to identify localized trends and provide the appropriate upward feedback.

In FY23, about 43% of cases were related to schools and colleges, proportional to the approximately half of total university employees who work in this area. A majority of student concerns (all those related to departments and faculty) also fall into schools and colleges.



### VISITORS AND CASE PARTICIPANTS

The ombuds program also records the constituency/affiliation of visitors for trend-tracking. In FY23, OAs and faculty utilized the ombuds program services at similar rates, marking a decrease in OA visitors and slight increase in faculty visitors. Use by administrators increased, correlating with higher cases related to supervisory duties and requests for management/leadership coaching.



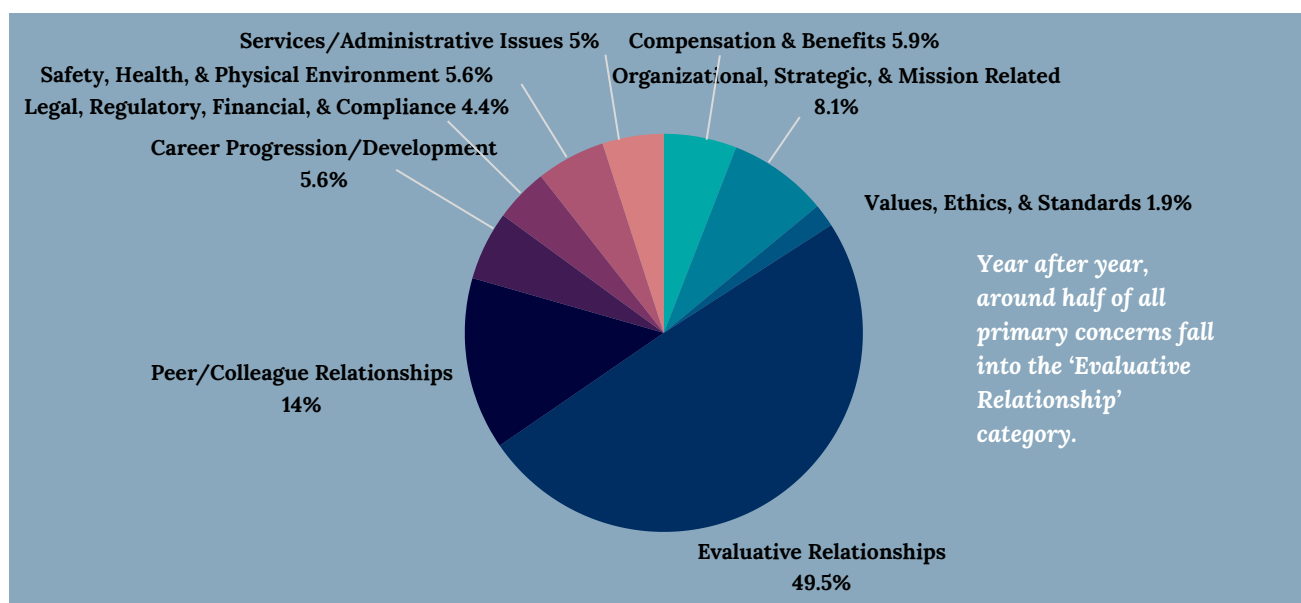
#### Case Participants

The majority of cases (229) involved only one party. 92 cases involved multiple parties, and 32 of these cases involved complex, large group dispute resolution processes.

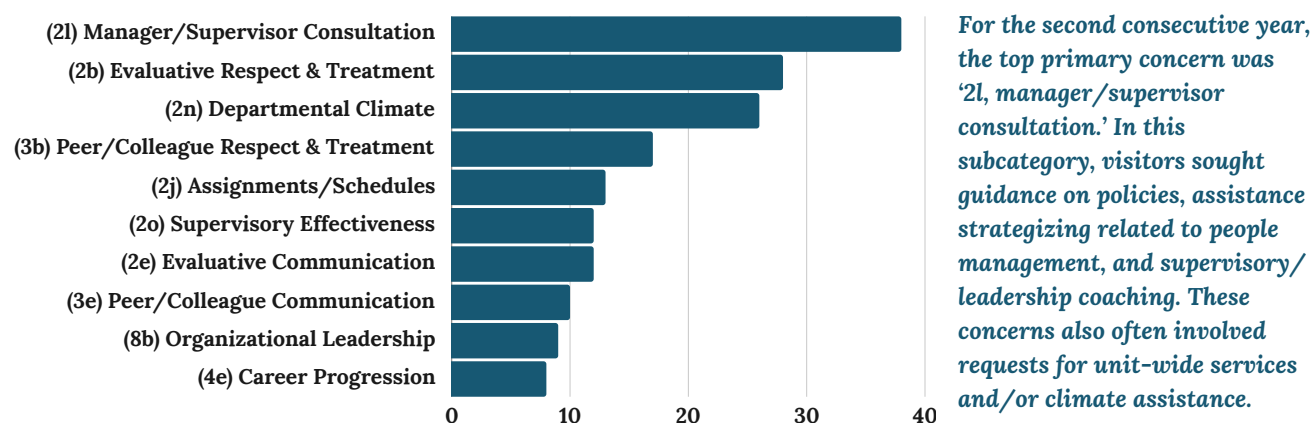
## FY23 PRIMARY CONCERNS

The ombuds program utilizes the International Ombuds Association (IOA) Uniform Reporting Categories to track concerns and identify localized and systemic trends. The IOA categories consist of nine broad categories containing over 80 subcategories. The ombuds program records all concerns brought for resolution and tracks the **primary concern** for each case. Primary concerns indicate the main reason the visitor seeks services.

### TOTAL PRIMARY CONCERNS BY BROAD IOA CATEGORY



### LEADING PRIMARY CONCERNS

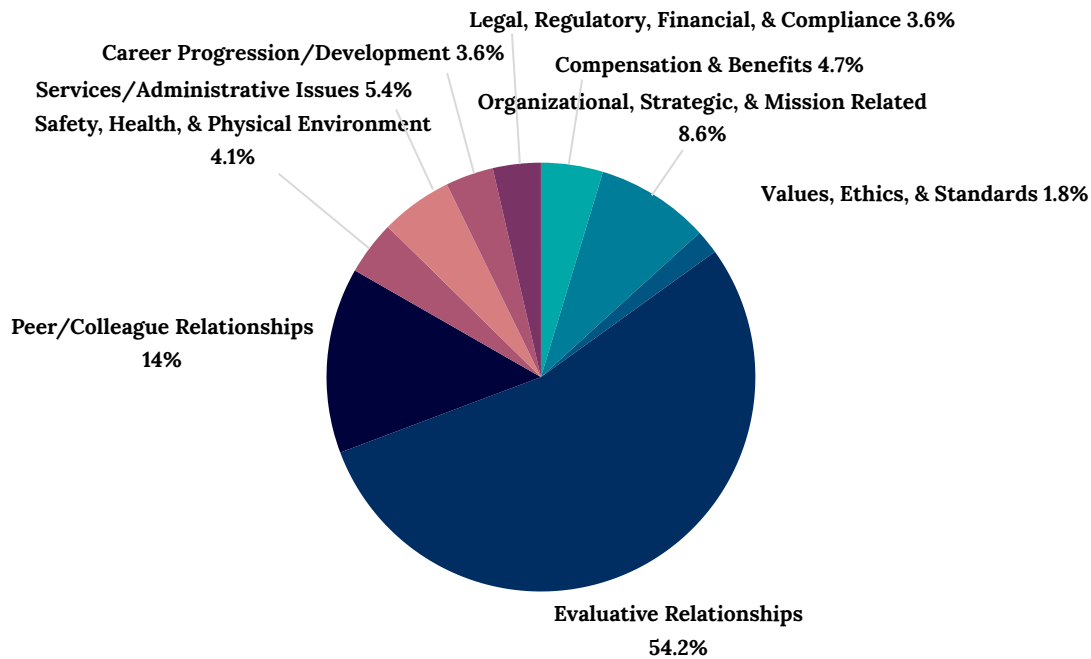


The figure above shows the ten leading primary concerns in FY23 according to subcategory. The majority of those on the list were leading concerns in FY22. New leading concerns include '2j, assignments and schedules,' which was closely related to remote work requests; '3b, organizational/divisional leadership;' and '4e, career progression.'

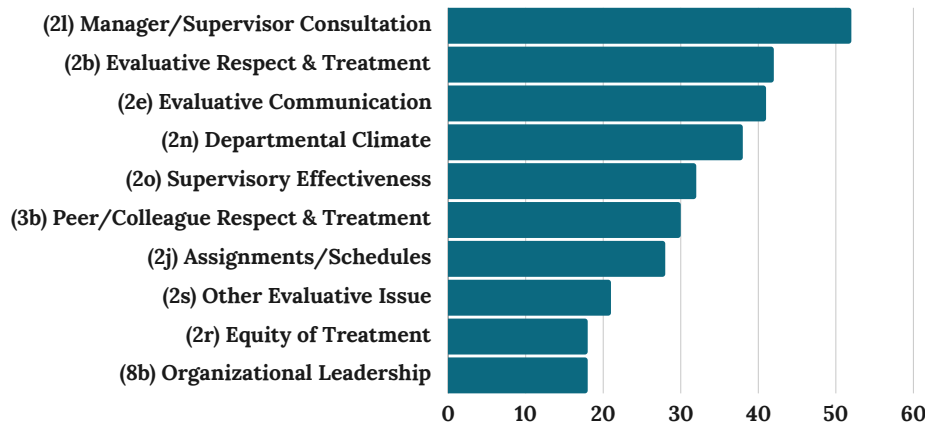
## FY23 TOTAL CONCERNS

In addition to tracking the **primary** concern in each case, the ombuds program tracks all additional concerns brought for resolution. There were a total of 663 concerns brought to the OP for resolution in FY23. The figure below shows all FY23 concerns as classified according to broad IOA category.

### TOTAL CONCERNS BY BROAD IOA CATEGORY



### LEADING TOTAL CONCERNS BY SUBCATEGORY



The figure above shows the ten leading 'total concern' areas in FY23 according to subcategory. In FY23, leading overall concerns mirror 'primary concern' categories, with emerging areas of 8b, organizational leadership, and 2j, assignments/schedules on the rise. 2r, equity of treatment, is a leading 'total concern' but not 'primary concern' area.



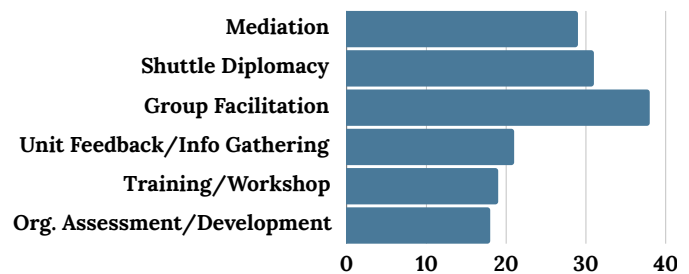
## FY23 SERVICES AND OUTCOMES

The majority of visitors to the ombuds program seek single-party services such as general consultation, conflict-coaching, and/or policy or process guidance. When appropriate, visitors ask other parties to participate in case resolution processes (multi-party services). There are oftentimes multiple services per case; for example, a visitor might initially seek single-party services such as conflict coaching and later choose to participate in mediation in order to resolve their concern.

### SINGLE-PARTY SERVICES



### MULTI-PARTY SERVICES



Although overall multi-party cases have been steady over the years, these cases have shifted from primarily feedback and shuttle diplomacy cases to more complex cases involving large group facilitations, organizational assessments and climate work. Case hours in the program reached a record high of 2800 in FY23.

### In FY23, 79% of all cases brought to the Ombuds Program were resolved.

The Ombuds Program determines resolution based on feedback by the visitor; single-party cases are recorded as resolved when the visitor indicates they have received the guidance/assistance needed, and multi-party cases are recorded as resolved when a negotiated resolution is reached or when parties indicate there has been a satisfactory conclusion.

