UNIVERSITY OF OREGON
OMBUDS PROGRAM
1ST ANNUAL REPORT (FY2017)

PROGRAM DESCRIPTION

The Ombuds Program's (OP) mission is to provide effective conflict resolution and prevention services with the overarching goals of protecting fairness and promoting respect for all employees. The OP provides comprehensive conflict resolution services including a range of services for individual concerns, preventative training on communication and conflict topics, and early identification and upward feedback of systemic concerns. The OP offers a distinct service in that it is the only campus resource providing confidential, independent, impartial, and informal services for employees; such options increase the likelihood that employees will seek assistance with employment-related concerns that may carry a higher risk of retaliation or be more sensitive in nature. The OP is uniquely able to provide in-depth dispute resolution services and strives to effectively resolve complex concerns and surface systemic concerns needing to be addressed.

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

SCOPE OF REPORT

This report describes the activities of this program and shares unidentifiable case-related data from active cases in the 2017 fiscal year.

PROGRAM HISTORY

The ombuds program was in a period of transition after the departure of the first permanent ombuds in 2015. Interim ombuds Jennifer Reynolds, along with interim assistant ombudsperson Jenn Hudson and program administrator Becky Couch managed ongoing cases, relocated the program's physical space, completed a charter, and re-energized the program through outreach and training workshops during the interim period. Brett Harris joined the UO as the new permanent ombudsperson in August 2016, shortly after the start of the 2017 fiscal year.

PROGRAM ACTIVITIES

Further Establishing the Ombuds Program

Following the program's brief start-up period under the first ombuds and following transitional period, additional efforts were required to further establish the ombuds program during the 2017 fiscal year. This work included:
- strategic planning for the program;
- creating thorough office policies and procedures;
- creating complete program documents related to user services, confidentiality, and self-

help forms;
- integrating the new ombuds into the campus community;
- continuing outreach efforts to raise awareness of the still relatively new ombuds services;
- further developing the internship program for CRES students and assessing the possibility for interns to serve as a steady staffing resource; and
- assessing all program processes and marketing resources for effectiveness, compliance with International Ombudsman Association and university standards, and compatibility with long-term program goals.

To form connections and reacquaint the campus community with ombuds program services, the ombudsperson had introductory meetings with over 30 university administrators and program directors in the first six months of services. The ombudsperson made formal presentations on the office's services and role to various groups and departments on campus, including speaking at the OA Council, the Provost Leadership Retreat, a VPFA leadership meeting, a CAS management retreat, and other various events reaching employees across campus.

Steps were taken to more fully establish the OP through creation of policies and procedures to increase transparency regarding the functioning of the office and to ensure that similar processes are followed with all visitors. The OP also created an intake form, case tracking form, anonymous evaluation of services, confidentiality policy statement, informational documents for visitors regarding various dispute resolution processes, and additional self-help documents that provide guidance and support for managing conflict. Many of these are available on the program's website.

Training Sessions and Workshops

In addition to presentations on the role and services of the office, the OP presented 16 training sessions and/or workshops on communication- and conflict-related topics, reaching roughly 300 members of the campus community.

Visitor Services

This fiscal year, the OP provided dispute resolution services on a total of 246 cases[1] covering 823 total issues, and worked directly with 516 members of the university community in dispute resolution processes. The OP spent approximately 2,500 hours directly on casework. The following section of this report contains additional information regarding case data including services provided, outcomes, and visitor issues.

CASE DATA

As an informal and confidential resource, the OP does not keep records of specific cases. However, in order to report on work performed and provide data that may be useful to the campus community, the OP provides non-identifiable case data and overall trends.

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

Basic Case Data

The OP provided dispute resolution services for 246 cases[2] covering 823 total issues during the 2017 fiscal year. The OP provided dispute resolution services to 516 recorded members of the university community this year; 413 of these were visitors[3] to the office and the remainder participated directly in the dispute resolution process after being contacted by the ombudsperson.
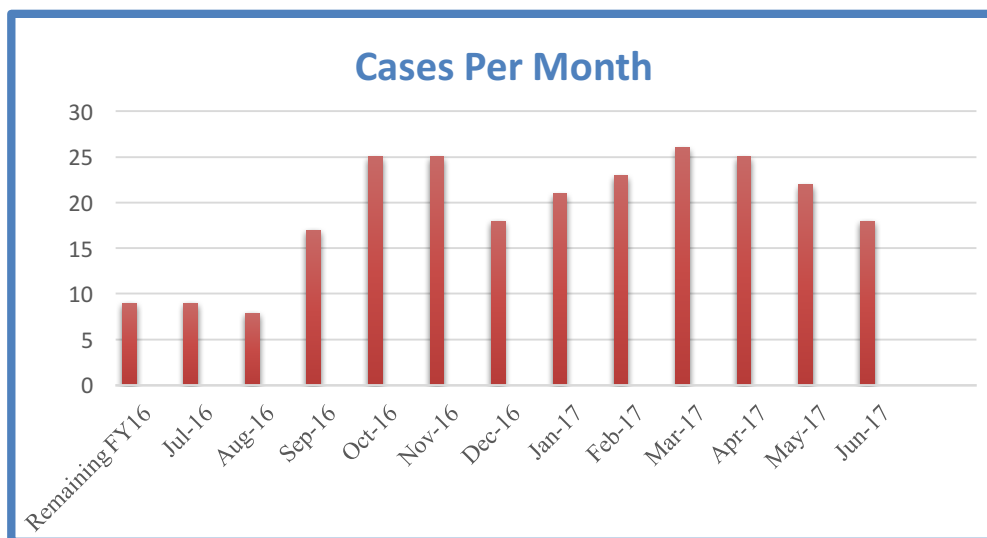

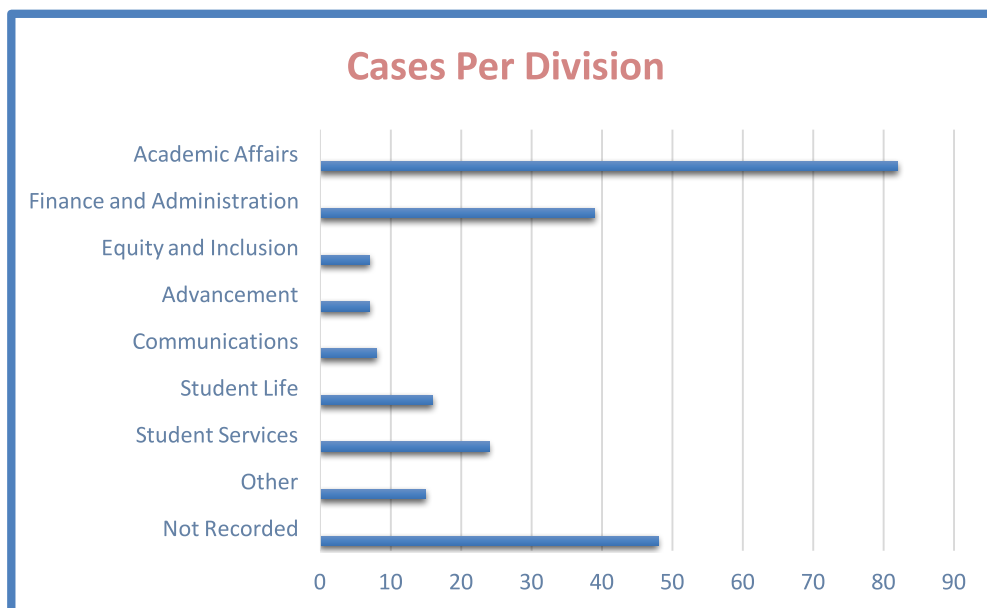Figure 1.0 shows the number of ombuds program cases per month during the 2017 fiscal year.

Figure 1.1 indicates the university division most closely related to each case from the 2017 fiscal year.

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[2] 235 were new cases; nine cases were initiated in the previous year but were managed during the 2017 fiscal year.
[3] A visitor is described as anyone who initiates contact with the OP for purposes of seeking services. Many ombuds use the term visitor rather than complainant or client so as to not confuse the nature of ombuds services with counseling or legal services.

Visitors

The majority of cases (170) involved only one visitor to the OP. The remaining cases ranged from two to 14 recorded visitors per case. Cases involved up to 28 recorded participants.

The OP records the constituency group represented by the primary visitor[4] in each case. This information can help the OP identify systemic concerns affecting a particular constituency and also serves to ensure that the OP is reaching all campus constituencies. In the 2017 fiscal year, the majority of primary visitors with recorded demographic information were manager and non-manager OAs (49 primary visitors), followed by classified employees (37 primary visitors).
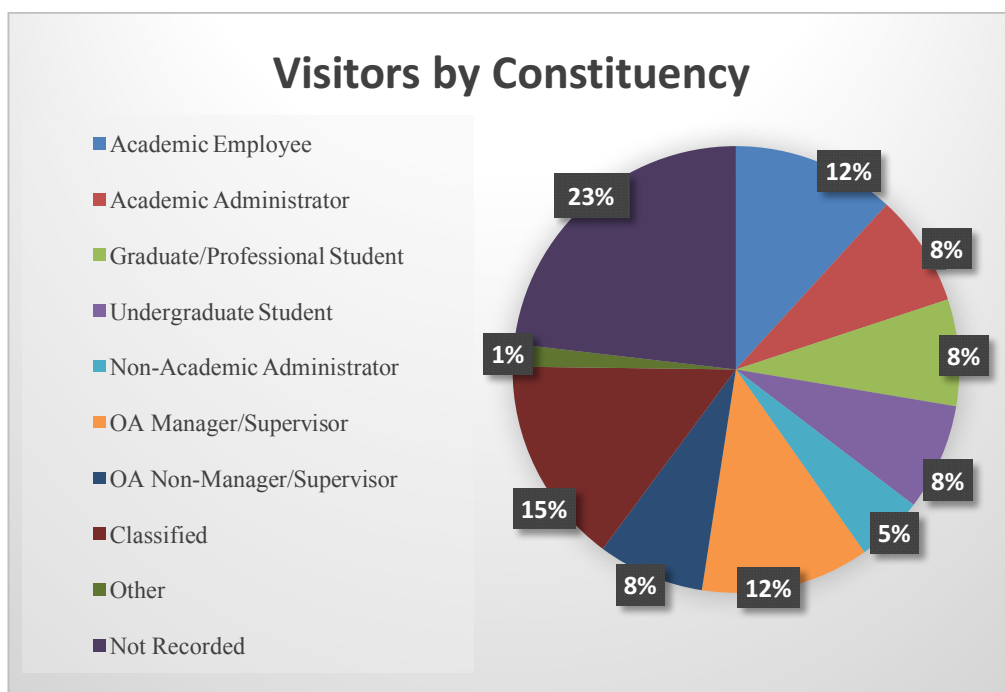
Visitors by Constituency

- Academic Employee
- Academic Administrator
- Graduate/Professional Student
- Undergraduate Student
- Non-Academic Administrator
- OA Manager/Supervisor
- OA Non-Manager/Supervisor
- Classified
- Other
- Not Recorded

12% 8% 8% 8% 5% 12% 8% 15% 1% 23%

Figure 2.0. Visitors by Constituency

Services and Outcomes[5]

- The OP facilitated conversations between two or more parties in 61 cases. Facilitated conversations include mediations, shuttle diplomacy, and/or group facilitations. In approximately 80% of these cases, the facilitated discussion(s) resulted in the concern being fully resolved or significantly improved.

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[4] The OP's current case tracking system only allows for recording visitor information for one visitor per case. The OP plans to use a more advanced system in the future allowing for tracking data related to all visitors.

[5] It can be difficult to accurately track the outcomes of concerns brought to the OP after a visitor ceases services. Many visitors do not provide contact information and cannot be reached for follow-up. Moreover, cases are often complex with multiple issues, making it difficult to determine when a concern is truly resolved. For this reason, the OP considers an issue resolved when a visitor reports and/or the ombuds determines through follow-up information that the main focus of the concern is fully resolved or resolved to a significant degree.

- The OP surfaced issues by providing upward feedback in 42 cases. Of these, the upward feedback process led to known resolution or significant improvement of the concern in 23 cases.
- The OP provided informal climate assessments[6] for six workplace units. The goal of such assessments is to surface concerns within a particular work environment and facilitate group processes leading to improvement of these concerns. In five of these cases, the original visitor(s) to the office reported that the concern was fully resolved or significantly improved.
- In 170 cases, the ombudsperson worked only with the initial visitor(s) and was not authorized to contact any other party for dispute resolution. The ombudsperson provided assistance through conflict coaching, consulting, problem exploration, generating possible options, and/or empowering the visitor(s) to manage the concern on their own. Of these cases, the OP services helped visitors fully resolve or significantly improve their concern in 123 cases.
- In 47 cases, visitors indicated a risk of adverse formal action that was avoided through utilization of the OP services. Adverse formal action is defined by this office as any formal action that would escalate the conflict at hand and put the visitor in an adverse position to the university and pose an organizational risk to the university. Examples of this include negative publicity, filing of a lawsuit, or filing a formal grievance that would put the visitor and university system at odds. It is important to note that in some cases, utilizing other campus resources including formal grievance processes are appropriate for the concern and do not create risk for the university (for example, in cases wherein a visitor files a harassment complaint against a co-worker), and these are not considered adverse formal actions.

Visitor Issues/Concerns

The OP uses the International Ombudsman Association's Uniform Reporting Categories (2007) to classify concerns/issues from visitors. This system includes nine broad categories and over 80 subcategories. In each case managed by the OP, the ombudsperson determines what seems to be the visitor's main concern and records it as the primary concern. Additionally, the ombudsperson classifies and records any other concerns for which the visitor seeks assistance. For this reason, there are often multiple issues/concerns recorded for each case.

The most prevalent **primary** concerns/issues brought to the OP this year were related to respect, treatment, and behavior in the workplace. Respect/behavior in evaluative relationships was the primary concern in 17 cases while respect/behavior in peer/colleague relationships was the primary concern in 15 cases. Other prevalent primary issues include peer/colleague communication (14 cases), concerns regarding departmental climate (14 cases), concerns regarding the quality and responsiveness of university services (10 cases), and concerns regarding overall organizational climate (9 cases). Cases involving departmental climate often included multiple visitors with the same concern; the highest number of visitors with any one concern this year were those concerned with departmental climate.

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[6] This service is an informal alternative to climate assessments provided through Human Resources; OP climate assessments do not include a written report and do not result in any formal record by the OP.

Primary Visitor Issues by Broad IOA Category

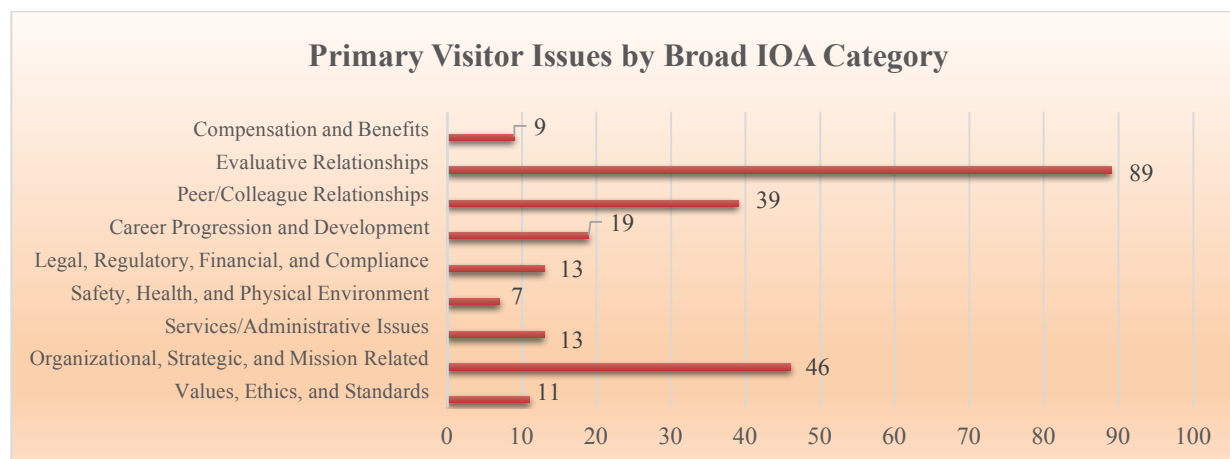| Category	Value
Compensation and Benefits	9
Evaluative Relationships	89
Peer/Colleague Relationships	39
Career Progression and Development	19
Legal, Regulatory, Financial, and Compliance	13
Safety, Health, and Physical Environment	7
Services/Administrative Issues	13
Organizational, Strategic, and Mission Related	46
Values, Ethics, and Standards	11

Figure 3.0 shows the primary concerns/issues per case as categorized within the broad IOA categories.

The majority of overall visitor issues (381) were in the 'Evaluative Relationships' category involving concerns arising between people in evaluative/hierarchical relationships such as the supervisor-employee relationship. In this category, predominant concerns were related to differences in priorities/beliefs (23), respect/behavior (47), trust/integrity (30), communication (49), schedules/assignments (24), departmental climate (36), and supervisory effectiveness (41).

Other leading issues of concern were related to respect/behavior (36) and communication (38) in peer/colleague relationships, and organizational climate (23) as related to the entire institution.
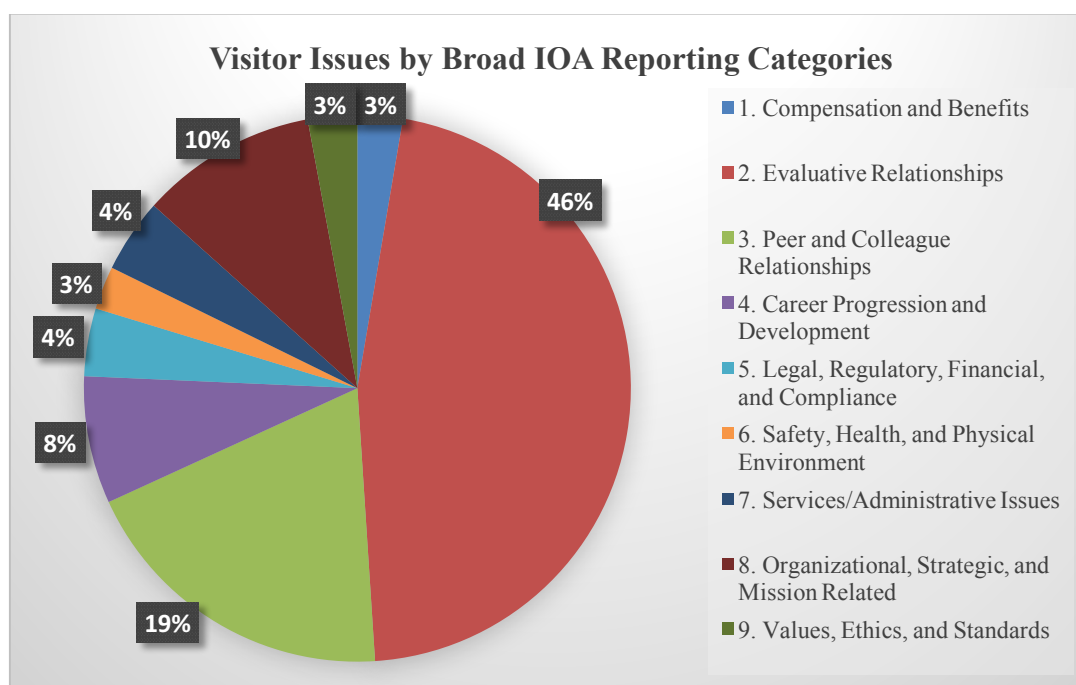

Figure 3.1 shows visitor issues categorized according to the nine broad IOA Uniform Reporting Categories. The most commonly described issues were in the 'Evaluative Relationships' category, with a total of 381 visitor issues falling within this category.

The OP works throughout the year to share trends related to case data. For example, when a trend is identified related to departmental climate, this trend is shared with department leadership

and oftentimes, the OP is involved in facilitations, informal climate assessments, and/or workshops aimed at addressing and resolving the concern.

FUTURE GOALS

Re-Establishing Student Conflict Resolution Services Program

In June, the Ombuds Department formally acquired the Conflict Resolution Services (CRS) program. This program was previously without a dedicated program director and has operated by the efforts of graduate students with oversight from student life. The program has had low utilization rates and inadequate space in the past; now in the OP's department, goals will include complete review of this program's services and operations and revitalization of the program through outreach efforts, relocating the program to a new and appropriate space, and expanding services. This effort is being led by the assistant ombudsperson and director of conflict resolution services.

Reducing Unnecessary Overlap in Services

Evaluation of OP services in the 2017 fiscal year indicated that there is significant overlap with other employee services, specifically ELR and AA/EO. Although some overlap is usual, a priority in the next year will be reducing unnecessary overlap and increasing service effectiveness by delineating roles and formalizing referral processes.

Increased Role in Risk Management

Over the last year, the OP began working with Internal Audit to share data and information related to systemic issues that could pose a risk to the university. The OP plans to formalize processes for contributing to risk management efforts and further develop a partnership with Internal Audit to this end.

Streamlining Data Management

In the past year, substantial effort has been dedicated to collecting data in a manner more consistent with IOA principles. While the current case tracking system has been revamped as part of this effort, the system is still less than adequate for both IOA compliance and its ability to track data and run reports easily. In the next year, the OP plans to identify options related to a more effective permanent method for case tracking.

Increased Role in Diversity and Inclusion

During the latter part of the fiscal year, the OP participated in campus-wide diversity and inclusion efforts by creating a Diversity Action Plan. Through this process, it was apparent that the OP can play a greater role in identifying campus concerns related to diversity and inclusion by collecting more nuanced case data and providing this aggregate data to the Office of Diversity and Inclusion in addition to the current practice of working directly with units on these concerns. In the next year, the OP plans to further this program.