



# ANNUAL REPORT FISCAL YEAR 2013-2014



THE UNIVERSITY  
*of*  
**WISCONSIN**  
MADISON

## Ombuds Office for Faculty and Staff

The University Ombuds Office facilitates understanding, communication, and resolution of conflict among members of the faculty, academic, and classified staff. The office serves as an impartial and confidential means of promoting dialogue among parties on campus. The office was established as part of the university's commitment to foster a courteous and considerate climate conducive to productivity and well-being for all university employees. In the following pages we provide a general accounting of our activities over the past fiscal year.

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### THE VISITORS

#### Demographic Characteristics

- 82 total number of Visitors
- 50% academic staff; 21% faculty (14 tenured, 3 non-tenured); 17% classified staff; 9% student employees, 2.5% non-university community members
- 16% targeted minority status
- 66% female
- 68% employed at UW-Madison for more than 5 years

#### General Concerns

- 172 total number of issues presented (some Visitors have multiple concerns)
- 41% reported concern with evaluative and supervisory relationships
- 25% reported conflicts with peers or colleagues
- 12% reported concerns about career progression
- 8% reported problems with organizational, strategic, and mission related matters
- 7% reported concerns relating to values, ethics and standards
- 5% reported concerns with employee compensation and benefits
- 2% reported concerns with legal, regulatory, or financial issues
- 2% reported problems with service and administrative issues
- 1% reported concerns with safety, health, or physical environment

#### Specific Examples of Concerns

- Issues relating to a lack of effective supervision

- Questions of tenure and position security or ambiguity
- Performance appraisal and general equity of treatment
- Problems associated with a lack of a good departmental climate
- Co-worker or supervisory conflict involving incivility, disrespect, or bullying
- Inadequate mentoring and support for career development
- Lack of clarity and regularity in procedures for performance reviews
- Lack of adequate compensation
- Involuntary transfer and/or change of assignment
- Communication, trust and integrity
- Issues stemming from work assignments and schedules
- Problems relating to scientific conduct and integrity

### **Ombuds' Actions with Visitors**

- 78% assistance with clarifying issues and options
- 56% act as sounding board
- 43% generation of alternative approaches and options for identified problems
- 11% provided information to our Visitor
- 10% accompanied visitor to meeting
- 5% sought information or assistance for our Visitor from other people within the University
- 2% arranged meetings among the visitor and University staff in a position to help
- 2% with the Visitor's agreement, we contacted the supervisor for information
- 1% acted as intermediaries in informal mediation and in group facilitation

### **Outreach and Related Activities**

- Consultations with individuals directly related to specific visitors
- Visits with campus leaders and units to prompt referral of Visitors: Letters and Science department chairs and directors; Academic Staff Executive Committee; Academic Staff Assembly; University Committee; Faculty Senate; Housing supervisory staff; Union representatives
- Presentations on Ombuds' services in all Equity Workshops for graduate assistants
- Participation at campus events to publicize Ombuds' services: e.g., Diversity Forum; Graduate Student Resource Fair; Benefits Fair; Academic Staff Assembly; New Chairs and Director's Orientation; OVPDC Retreat; Badger Watch Safety conference; Academic Staff Leadership Institute; OVPDC leadership series
- Liaison to Human Resources Working Group, Bascom Working Group, OVPDC, Medical and Pharmacy Schools Ombuds
- Ongoing conversations with UW Police, the PEOPLE Program, and the L&S Student Services Office about improved workplace climate
- Working with campus Diversity Plan development
- Involvement with anti-bullying initiatives on campus

### **Observed Problematic Trends on Campus**

- Lowering of morale because of budget constraints and reorganization
- General anxiety concerning the uncertain nature of positions
- Job dissatisfaction and/or management pressures regarding retirement
- Performance evaluation policies and procedures for academic staff
- Civility among faculty, academic and classified staff
- Impacts of ineffective human resource management by inexperienced or untrained supervisors on vulnerable staff
- Timely communication to staff being affected by supervisory, location, and procedural changes in the unit, e.g., crisis management, fiscal concerns.

### **Future Directions for the Ombuds Office**

- Continue to address UW workplace climate problems
- Participate in initiatives addressing “bullying” on campus
- Accommodate Ombuds’ practice to HR re-design
- Reach out to Classified Staff and underserved communities of workers, e.g., language and cultural minorities, late-shift workers
- Continue to build a constituency of campus partners to support Ombuds’ services
- Identify and disseminate “Best Practices” for achieving workplace equity and improving workplace climate
- Optimize opportunities for professional development of Ombuds staff
- Continue to provide leadership to Midwest community of academic Ombuds

### **Accountability of Ombuds Office**

The confidential nature of the services provided by Ombuds precludes an outcome assessment by visitors or third parties. Thus, we gauge our effectiveness through such indices as the timeliness of making initial contacts with Visitors, the number and range of interventions provided to visitors, and unsolicited feedback from Visitors and other Ombuds and HR providers. More and more visitors have told us that their colleagues have recommended our services, and this we believe reflects our positive impact on the university community. Quality assurance is maintained through weekly staffing meetings in which all on-going cases are discussed in detail. These meetings take place in our offices in Lowell Hall, and at least once per month we meet with our full-time counterpart, Ombuds Rosa Garner, on the Health Sciences campus. While some cases may be resolved in one meeting, others present a variety of challenges and require multiple meetings. Generally we encounter our visitors in one-on-one sessions, but certain circumstances have necessitated group encounters. In addition to visitor-centered activities, the impact on the campus community can be observed in our modeling of effective communication and problem-solving strategies with others in the Visitors’ work environments. Finally, we attempt to generalize what we learn in working with specific individuals to the larger campus community.