

# Report of the Ombuds for Graduate Students

July 1, 2019 through June 30, 2020

Submitted to the UNC Charlotte Graduate School  
by  
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Ombuds to Graduate Students

July 1, 2020

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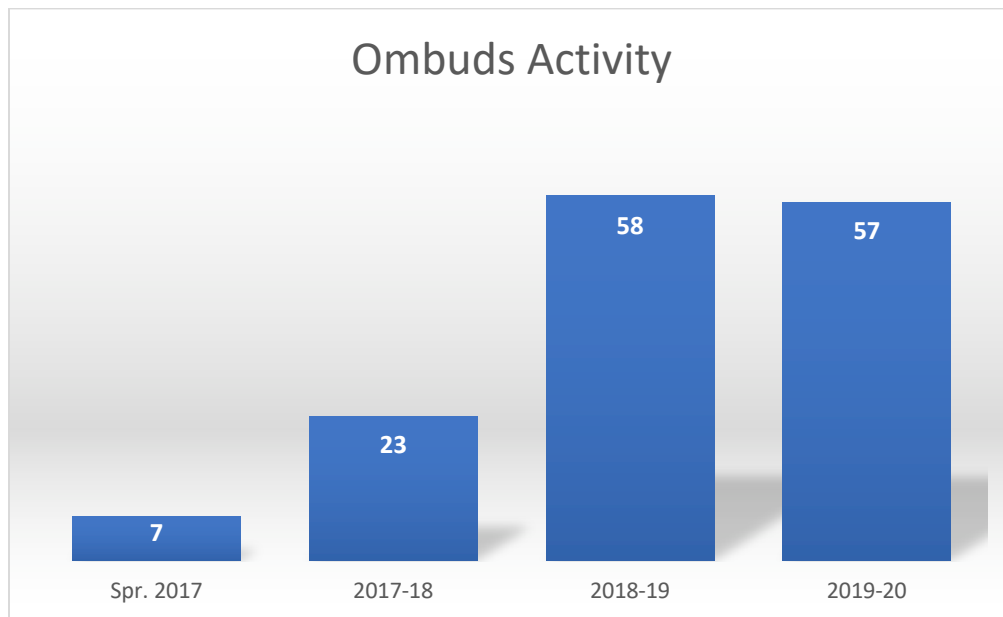
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# Report of the Ombuds for Graduate Students

## 2019-2020 Activity of the Ombuds

This report details the activities of the Ombuds for Graduate Students for the period between July 1, 2019 and June 30, 2020 and includes information about the number and types of activities as well as some analysis of interactions with students, faculty and staff over the past year. In particular, this report provides information about the types of consultations provided to students and issues that brought them to the Ombuds. Appendices A and B provide a summary list of activities with information about each interaction. The Ombuds keeps password-protected, de-identified records about consultations that includes month and year, college and program, basic demographic information about students, a brief summary of the issues, an estimate of the degree of complexity and time involved. Consultations are also coded using the International Ombudsman Association (IOA) Uniform Reporting Categories (see Appendix C).

Figure 1. Ombuds activity for Spring 2017, 2017-18, 2018-19 and 2019-20



The 2019-20 year was similar to 2018-19 in terms of activity and an increase over previous reporting periods. Figure 1 shows Ombuds activity for Spring 2017 as well as 2017-18, 2018-19 and 2019-20 academic years. These figures include student consultations as well as outreach and information efforts so all activity by the Ombuds. Figure 2 shows a month-by-month breakdown of all Ombuds activity including student consultations and outreach and information 2019-20 while Figure 3 provides a comparison of student consultations for 2018-19 vs. 2019-20. As we see in Figure 3 there were different “peaks” and “valleys” in activity across the two years but overall rates were similar.

Figure 2. Ombuds activity (Student Consultations and Outreach & Information)

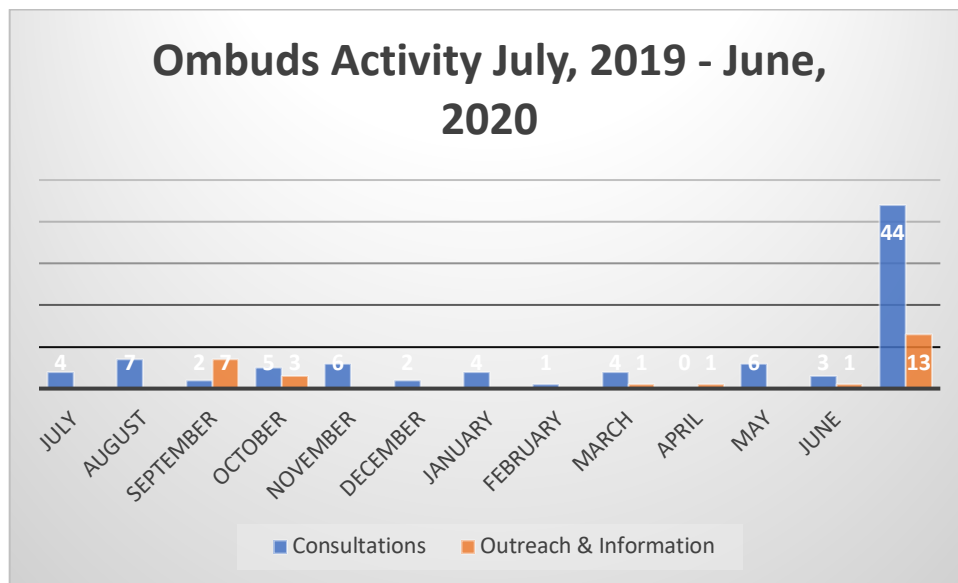
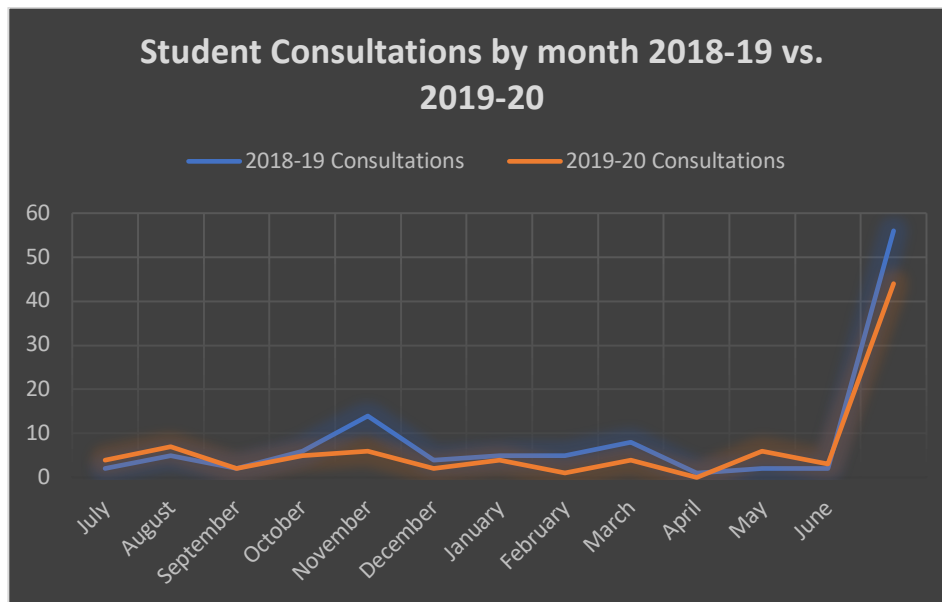


Figure 3. Ombuds student consultations 2018-19 vs. 2019-20



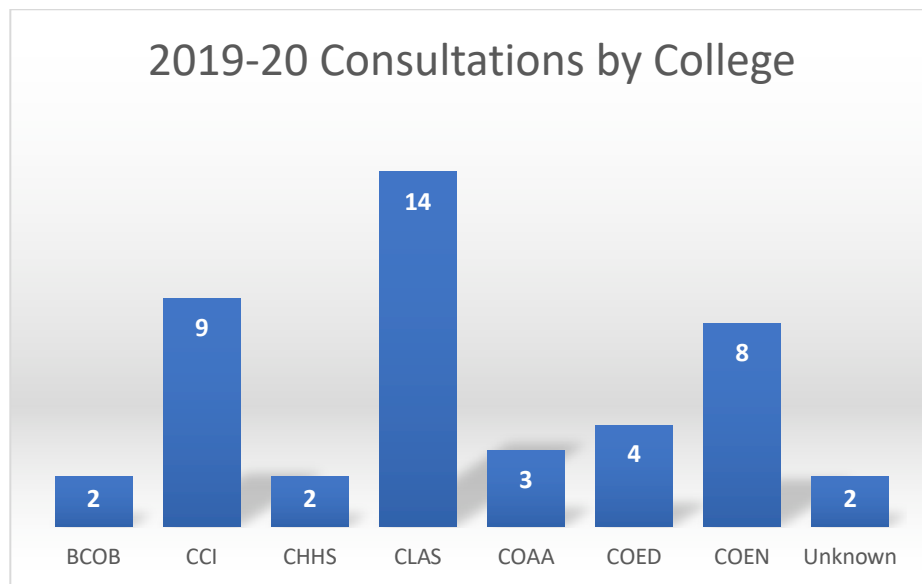
From July 1, 2019 through June 30, 2020, the Ombuds had 44 interactions with students and 13 contacts with faculty and staff, primarily to raise awareness of the program. This represents an increase in effort over previous years in outreach to programs.

The time required for consultations ranges between 30 minutes and 5 hours. At the upper end, this often means that there were several meetings or a lengthy consultation with additional

support. The average estimate of time is 1.68 hours per student served up slightly from 2018-19. For each consultation, the Ombuds estimates the level of complexity using a scale of 1 (basic or simple) to 5 (complex). Basic issues include providing information about resources on campus or where to get help in formatting a thesis or dissertation, for example. More complex issues often deal with interpersonal challenges among students or between a student and a faculty member. The average estimate of complexity for 2019-20 was 3.66 as compared to 3.04 in 2018-19 and 2.5 in 2017-18. This represents a perceived increase by the Ombuds in the complexity of issues students share in consultations.

Figure 4 provides a percentage breakdown of student consultations by college. This represents the majority of consultations with the Ombuds; however, college information about a student’s program and college was not available for all students who scheduled consultations.

Figure 4. Ombuds consultations by college July 1, 2019 and June 30, 2020



Approximately a third of consultations (32%) were with students in the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences, 20% in the College of Computing and Informatics, 18% in the William States Lee College of Engineering, and 9% in the Cato College of Education. The remaining colleges represented fewer than 7% of consultations each.

A fairly equal number of international and domestic students scheduled consultations with the Ombuds in 2018-19. Figure 5 provides a percentage breakdown of consultations for domestic and international students. This split is similar to figures reported in 2018-19. Figure 6 provides a breakdown by sex (Female, Male, Unknown) with about 60% of consultations with female students and 40% with male.

Figure 5. Percentage breakdown of Ombuds consultations for International and Domestic Students between July 1, 2019 and June 30, 2020

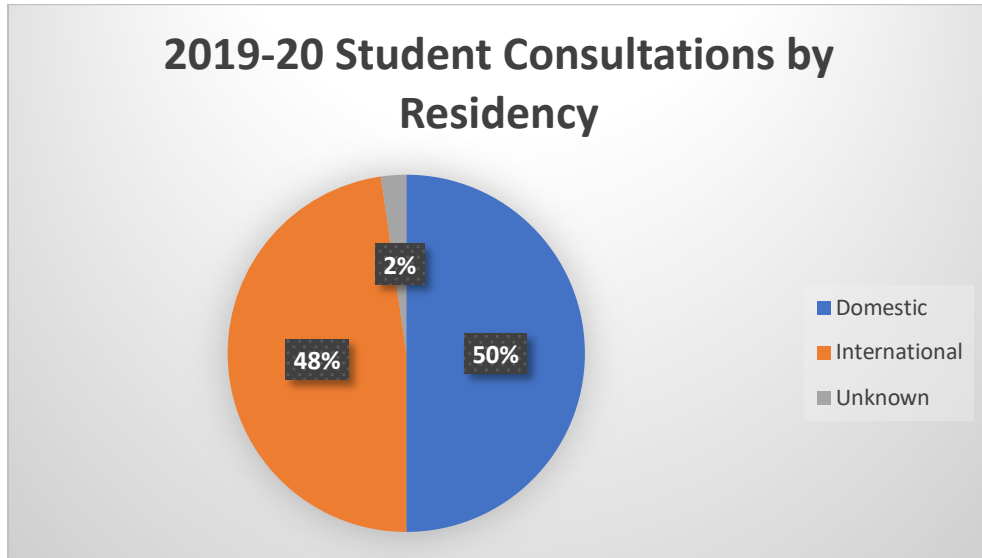
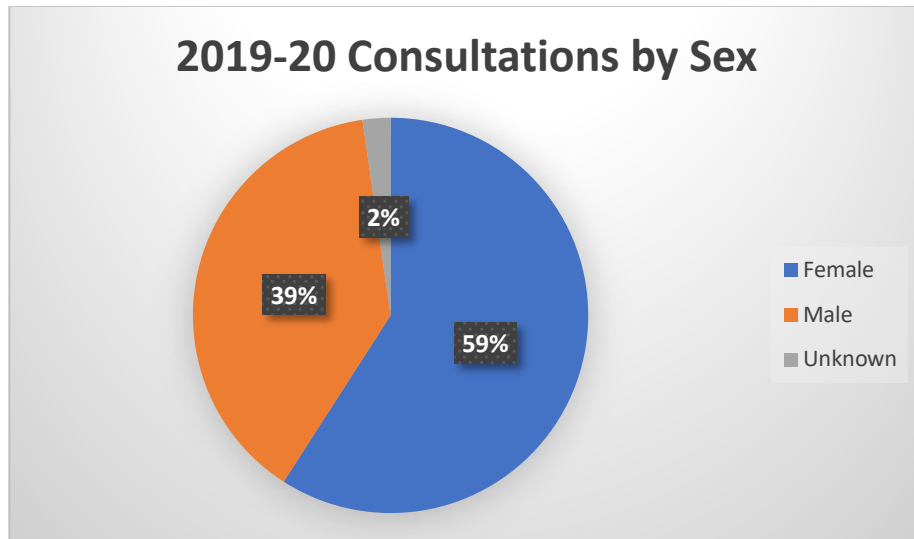


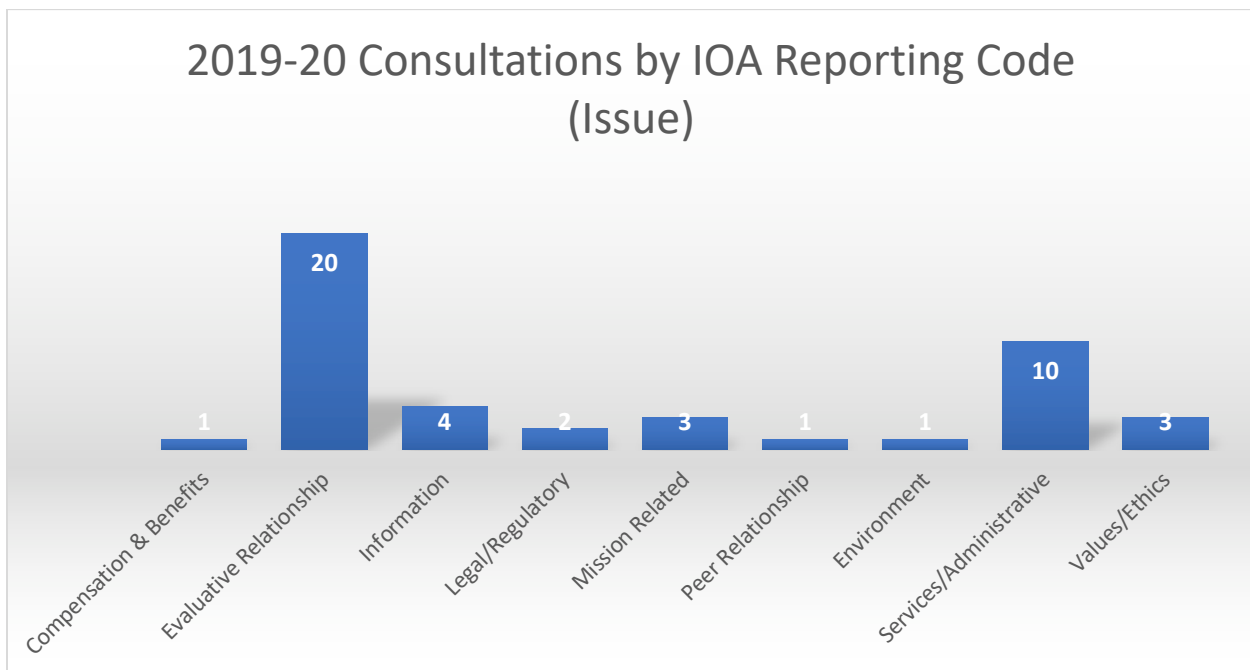
Figure 6. Percentage breakdown of Ombuds consultations by Sex between July 1, 2019 and June 30, 2020



The International Ombudsman Association (IOA) provides a list of uniform reporting categories that can be used to identify the types of issues brought to the Ombuds. These include issues dealing with *Evaluative Relationships*, *Career Progression and Development*, *Service and Administrative Issues*, and *Legal, Regulatory and Financial* issues to name four of the nine categories. These categories are used by the IOA and its members to track interactions and

work by Ombuds across settings including higher education, healthcare, government, and business so cover a range of issues including many that relate more to employer/employee issues. The IOA gathers this information from members to produce reports. See Appendix B for a full list of the IOA uniform reporting categories with descriptions for each. This report includes one additional reporting category that not included in the IOA list—*Information*—to capture those times when a student, faculty or staff members needed information not related to the IOA codes. For example, a student or faculty member might inquire about whom to contact for information about graduate assistantships or where to find a specific policy document on the UNC Charlotte website. Figure 7 provides a percentage breakdown of the consultation types brought to the Ombuds in 2019-20.

Figure 7. Ombuds consultation types using IOA categories (July 1, 2019 to June 30, 2020)



As we see, *Evaluative Relationships* represented 44% of consultations with the Ombuds. Typically, these are issues between a student and faculty such as a concern with treatment by an advisor, course instructor or program coordinator where there is a power differential between the student and faculty or staff. These also included concerns brought by students about related to their work on a grant or in a lab, for example. *Services and Administrative Issues* (22%) are those concerns dealing with the application of policies or timeliness of services. Examples include graduate appeals, withdrawal options, and rules regarding changing programs. Sixteen percent (9%) of contacts with the Ombuds were for information. These requests, which came from students but also faculty/staff and administrators, often related to where to find a policy or document online or what office to contact with a question. Other categories reported represent less than 7% each. See Appendix C for a description of the categories.

## Additional Activities in 2019-20

In addition to consultations, the Ombuds works with campus partners to increase awareness of the service. Here is a list of some of the activities in addition to student consultations during 2019-20:

- Inclusion of the Ombuds New Graduate Student Orientations and receptions held by the Graduate School.
- Meetings with graduate program directors (GPDs) in colleges including (Belk College of Business, College of Engineering, Cato College of Education, College of Computing & Informatics, College of Health & Human Services.
- Met with Associate Deans at a GEM meeting of the Graduate School and with the Director of Niner Central.
- Reminders sent to graduate program coordinators through GPDNet, GPSG and the newsletter of the Center for Graduate Life's Grad Student Weekly.

Outreach is an important in raising awareness about the Ombuds to graduate students but also to those who work with them including program coordinators, faculty, staff and department chairs. In 2018-19, more of these outreach efforts were directed at students through classes and workshops while in 2019-20 most were to GPDs. The Ombuds also worked with the Graduate School to update content on the Ombuds website and create a flyer to share with programs and students.

The Ombuds also met with the chair of the Graduate Student Funding Taskforce to share information about funding for graduate students that impacts international students. In particular, the challenge of tuition surcharges on international students when funding from home or families diminishes or becomes unavailable.

## Observations & Themes

The 2019-20 academic year brought new and significant challenges for graduate students but also themes that have been consistent over the past three years. With the closing of campus in March, 2020 consultations moving virtually into Google Meets and Zoom. On the whole, this format worked well and is a vehicle for consultations that should continue. It's convenient for students and may allow for easier access for some students to the Ombuds even when we return to fulltime face-to-face interactions on campus. The COVID-19 pandemic brought some new concerns—access to campus services and labs, changing expectations for graduate assistantships and changes to the content and format of dissertations. However, many of the concerns continued to center around relationships with faculty mentors and programs (evaluative relationships).

It's also important to consider the kinds of issues brought by students to the Ombuds and the complexity of those issues. The increase in the average estimate of complexity from 3.66 in



2019-20 from 3.04 in 2018-19 and 2.5 in 2017-18 suggests that issues students bring to the Ombuds are more challenging or complex, often requiring more time and more than one meeting to address. In 2019-20, a consistent theme relates to challenges between faculty and students (evaluative relationships). The work of the Ombuds is often to help students to resolve issues before they escalate and help the student consider resolution options. This often includes finding someone to serve as an intermediary (the department chair often or associate dean), ways to have a productive discussion with faculty and program coordinators, and information about appeals processes. It is vital that chairs and associate deans have the tools and training to facilitate these issues and to be responsive. Many chairs are proactive but this is an area that is critical to helping students resolve issues with faculty mentors. There are times when mediation could be helpful. The Ombuds currently does not offer this but it's something to consider either as part of the Ombuds role or with a mediation group on campus.

Funding continues to be an issue for students, international students in particular, but the work of the Graduate Student Funding Taskforce has helped reduce some of the key stress points. One area that comes up is having a source of funding for graduate students for one semester or one year to complete a program. It is not unusual for a student to reach the end of funding a department or college will offer and need one more semester's support. Again, this challenge is particularly critical for international students who have limitations on borrowing and work.

## 2020-21 Goals

Goals for the coming year include building on successes from the current academic year, particularly efforts at outreach and communication to students but, also, to do more to reach faculty and administrators with information about the Ombuds. Here are some goals for the coming year:

1. **Continue outreach efforts.** The Ombuds should continue to be a part of the New Student Orientation held for graduate students prior to the Fall and Spring semesters. This is one of the best ways to get in front of a large number of graduate students early in their program. Both the formal presentation and the informal “meet and greet” parts of this event are good venues for raising awareness. These can be done virtually or in person. It’s also important to continue outreach to Graduate Program Directors. For 2020-21, email and Zoom sessions offer a way to share information with students and GPDs. One idea is to host monthly information sessions (Ask the Ombuds or something like that) with a guest from one of our campus partners (Title IX, Health, Counseling Center, the Graduate School, graduate students who share some experience/expertise) followed by a short Q&A. These could be 30 minutes or so.
2. **Continue meeting with campus partners.** The Ombuds helps students connect to campus resources so it’s important to develop and maintain those contacts. While many campus offices are aware of the Ombuds there is a need to continue updating those contacts and sharing information.
3. **Professional Development.** The IOA training and workshops have been enormously beneficial. We can evaluate additional offerings in the coming year.

## Appendix A. Summary list of Outreach, Information & Referrals conducted in 2019-20

No.	Date	College	Program	Notes	Reporting Category
1	September 2019		Graduate Enrollment Management (GEM) Working Group	Met with Associate Deans at GEM meeting to share about work of Ombuds and to get their help identifying ways to reach out to GPDs in their colleges.	Outreach & Marketing
2	September 2019	BCOB	Belk College of Business	Discussion with the Associate Dean, Jennifer Ames Stuart, to find best way to reach out to GPDs in BCOB.	Outreach & Marketing
3	September 2019	Niner Central	Niner Central	Met with Kimberly Laney, Director of Niner Central, to share information about Ombuds and thoughts on when Niner Central may refer students to Ombuds.	Outreach & Marketing
4	September 2019	CCI	CCI GPD meeting	Met with GPDs in the College of Computing and Informatics to share about work of Ombuds.	Outreach & Marketing
5	September 2019	COED	Cato COED GPP meeting	Shared information about Ombuds with GPDs	Outreach & Marketing
6	September 2019		New Faculty Learning Community	Shared information about Ombuds with New Faculty Learning Community	Outreach & Marketing
7	September 2019		Graduate and Professional Student Organization	Shared information about Ombuds with GPSG	Evaluative Relationship
8	October 2019		Graduate Student Funding Taskforce	Met with chair to discuss funding concerns shared with Ombuds: 1) uncertainty with assistantships leading to fears of losing GASP funding for doc students, 2) challenges faced by international students who pay tuition surcharges.	Advocacy
9	October 2019	BCOB	BCOB Graduate Advisors	Shared information about Ombuds, answered questions	Outreach & Marketing
10	October 2019	CHHS	CHHS Graduate Program Directors	Shared information about Ombuds, answered questions	Outreach & Marketing
11	March 2020	CHHS		Guidance on whether a situation might involve a research integrity violation.	Insight
12	April 2020	CHHS		Checking in and sharing update on a consultation.	Information
13	June 2020	COAA		Faculty outreach about a grant idea used by a colleague. Referred to Faculty Ombuds Office.	Referral

# Appendix B. International Ombudsman Association (IOA) Uniform Reporting Categories



## INTERNATIONAL OMBUDSMAN ASSOCIATION Uniform Reporting Categories

**VERSION 2**  
**October 2007**

### 1. Compensation & Benefits

Questions, concerns, issues or inquiries about the equity, appropriateness and competitiveness of employee compensation, benefits and other benefit programs.

- 1.a **Compensation** (rate of pay, salary amount, job salary classification/level)
- 1.b **Payroll** (administration of pay, check wrong or delayed)
- 1.c **Benefits** (decisions related to medical, dental, life, vacation/sick leave, education, worker's compensation insurance, etc.)
- 1.d **Retirement, Pension** (eligibility, calculation of amount, retirement pension benefits)
- 1.e **Other** (any other employee compensation or benefit not described by the above sub-categories)

### 2. Evaluative Relationships

Questions, concerns, issues or inquiries arising between people in evaluative relationships (i.e. supervisor-employee, faculty-student.)

- 2.a **Priorities, Values, Beliefs** (differences about what should be considered important – or most important – often rooted in ethical or moral beliefs)
- 2.b **Respect/Treatment** (demonstrations of inappropriate regard for people, not listening, rudeness, crudeness, etc.)
- 2.c **Trust/Integrity** (suspicion that others are not being honest, whether or to what extent one wishes to be honest, etc.)
- 2.d **Reputation** (possible impact of rumors and/or gossip about professional or personal matters)
- 2.e **Communication** (quality and/or quantity of communication)
- 2.f **Bullying, Mobbing** (abusive, threatening, and/or coercive behaviors)
- 2.g **Diversity-Related** (comments or behaviors perceived to be insensitive, offensive, or intolerant on the basis of an identity-related difference such as race, gender, nationality, sexual orientation)
- 2.h **Retaliation** (punitive behaviors for previous actions or comments, whistleblower)
- 2.i **Physical Violence** (actual or threats of bodily harm to another)
- 2.j **Assignments/Schedules** (appropriateness or fairness of tasks, expected volume of work)
- 2.k **Feedback** (feedback or recognition given, or responses to feedback received)
- 2.l **Consultation** (requests for help in dealing with issues between two or more individuals they supervise/teach or with other unusual situations in evaluative relationships)

### 2.m Performance Appraisal/Grading

(job/academic performance in formal or informal evaluation)

- 2.n **Departmental Climate** (prevailing behaviors, norms, or attitudes within a department for which supervisors or faculty have responsibility.)
- 2.o **Supervisory Effectiveness** (management of department or classroom, failure to address issues)
- 2.p **Insubordination** (refusal to do what is asked)
- 2.q **Discipline** (appropriateness, timeliness, requirements, alternatives, or options for responding)
- 2.r **Equity of Treatment** (favoritism, one or more individuals receive preferential treatment)
- 2.s **Other** (any other evaluative relationship not described by the above sub-categories)

### 3. Peer and Colleague Relationships

Questions, concerns, issues or inquiries involving peers or colleagues who do not have a supervisory-employee or student-professor relationship (e.g., two staff members within the same department or conflict involving members of a student organization.)

- 3.a **Priorities, Values, Beliefs** (differences about what should be considered important – or most important – often rooted in ethical or moral beliefs)
- 3.b **Respect/Treatment** (demonstrations of inappropriate regard for people, not listening, rudeness, crudeness, etc.)
- 3.c **Trust/Integrity** (suspicion that others are not being honest, whether or to what extent one wishes to be honest, etc.)
- 3.d **Reputation** (possible impact of rumors and/or gossip about professional or personal matters)
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- 3.h **Retaliation** (punitive behaviors for previous actions or comments, whistleblower)
- 3.i **Physical Violence** (actual or threats of bodily harm to another)
- 3.j **Other** (any peer or colleague relationship not described by the above sub-categories)

### 4. Career Progression and Development

Questions, concerns, issues or inquiries about administrative processes and decisions regarding entering and leaving a job, what it entails, (i.e., recruitment, nature and place of assignment, job security, and separation.)

- 4.a **Job Application/Selection and Recruitment Processes** (recruitment and selection processes, facilitation of job applications, short-listing and criteria for selection, disputed decisions linked to recruitment and selection)
- 4.b **Job Classification and Description** (changes or disagreements over requirements of assignment, appropriate tasks)
- 4.c **Involuntary Transfer/Change of Assignment** (notice, selection and special dislocation rights/benefits, removal from prior duties, unrequested change of work tasks)
- 4.d **Tenure/Position Security/Ambiguity** (security of position or contract, provision of secure contractual categories)
- 4.e **Career Progression** (promotion, reappointment, or tenure)
- 4.f **Rotation and Duration of Assignment** (non-completion or over-extension of assignments in specific settings/countries, lack of access or involuntary transfer to specific roles/assignments, requests for transfer to other places/duties/roles)
- 4.g **Resignation** (concerns about whether or how to voluntarily terminate employment or how such a decision might be communicated appropriately)
- 4.h **Termination/Non-Renewal** (end of contract, non-renewal of contract, disputed permanent separation from organization)
- 4.i **Re-employment of Former or Retired Staff** (loss of competitive advantages associated with re-hiring retired staff, favoritism)
- 4.j **Position Elimination** (elimination or abolition of an individual's position)
- 4.k **Career Development, Coaching, Mentoring** (classroom, on-the-job, and varied assignments as training and developmental opportunities)
- 4.l **Other** (any other issues linked to recruitment, assignment, job security or separation not described by the above sub-categories)

## 5. Legal, Regulatory, Financial and Compliance

Questions, concerns, issues or inquiries that may create a legal risk (financial, sanction etc.) for the organization or its members if not addressed, including issues related to waste, fraud or abuse.

- 5.a **Criminal Activity** (threats or crimes planned, observed, or experienced, fraud)
- 5.b **Business and Financial Practices** (inappropriate actions that abuse or waste organizational finances, facilities or equipment)
- 5.c **Harassment** (unwelcome physical, verbal, written, e-mail, audio, video psychological or sexual conduct that creates a hostile or intimidating environment)
- 5.d **Discrimination** (different treatment compared with others or exclusion from some benefit on the basis of, for example, gender, race, age, national origin, religion, etc. [being part of an Equal Employment Opportunity protected category – applies in the U.S.] )
- 5.e **Disability, Temporary or Permanent, Reasonable Accommodation** (extra time on exams, provision of assistive technology, interpreters, or Braille materials including questions on policies, etc. for people with disabilities)
- 5.f **Accessibility** (removal of physical barriers, providing ramps, elevators, etc.)
- 5.g **Intellectual Property Rights** (e.g., copyright and patent infringement)
- 5.h **Privacy and Security of Information** (release or access to individual or organizational private or confidential information)
- 5.i **Property Damage** (personal property damage, liabilities)
- 5.j **Other** (any other legal, financial and compliance issue not described by the above sub-categories)  
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## 6. Safety, Health, and Physical Environment

Questions, concerns, issues or inquiries about Safety, Health and Infrastructure-related issues.

- 6.a **Safety** (physical safety, injury, medical evacuation, meeting federal and state requirements for training and equipment)
- 6.b **Physical Working/Living Conditions** (temperature, odors, noise, available space, lighting, etc)
- 6.c **Ergonomics** (proper set-up of workstation affecting physical functioning)
- 6.d **Cleanliness** (sanitary conditions and facilities to prevent the spread of disease)
- 6.e **Security** (adequate lighting in parking lots, metal detectors, guards, limited access to building by outsiders, anti-terrorists measures (not for classifying "compromise of classified or top secret" information)

- 6.f **Telework/Flexplace** (ability to work from home or other location because of business or personal need, e.g., in case of man-made or natural emergency)
- 6.g **Safety Equipment** (access to/use of safety equipment as well as access to or use of safety equipment, e.g., fire extinguisher)
- 6.h **Environmental Policies** (policies not being followed, being unfair ineffective, cumbersome)
- 6.i **Work Related Stress and Work–Life Balance** (Post-Traumatic Stress, Critical Incident Response, internal/external stress, e.g. divorce, shooting, caring for sick, injured)
- 6.j **Other** (any safety, health, or physical environment issue not described by the above sub-categories)  
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## 7. Services/Administrative Issues

Questions, concerns, issues or inquiries about services or administrative offices including from external parties.

- 7.a **Quality of Services** (how well services were provided, accuracy or thoroughness of information, competence, etc.)
- 7.b **Responsiveness/Timeliness** (time involved in getting a response or return call or about the time for a complete response to be provided)
- 7.c **Administrative Decisions and Interpretation/Application of Rules** (impact of non-disciplinary decisions, decisions about requests for administrative and academic services, e.g., exceptions to policy deadlines or limits, refund requests, appeals of library or parking fines, application for financial aid, etc.)
- 7.d **Behavior of Service Provider(s)** (how an administrator or staff member spoke to or dealt with a constituent, customer, or client, e.g., rude, inattentive, or impatient)
- 7.e **Other** (any services or administrative issue not described by the above sub-categories)  
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## 8. Organizational, Strategic, and Mission Related

Questions, concerns, issues or inquiries that relate to the whole or some part of an organization.

- 8.a **Strategic and Mission-Related/ Strategic and Technical Management** (principles, decisions and actions related to where and how the organization is moving)
- 8.b **Leadership and Management** (quality/capacity of management and/or management/leadership decisions, suggested training, reassignments and reorganizations)

- 8.c **Use of Positional Power/Authority** (lack or abuse of power provided by individual's position)
- 8.d **Communication** (content, style, timing, effects and amount of organizational and leader's communication, quality of communication about strategic issues)
- 8.e **Restructuring and Relocation** (issues related to broad scope planned or actual restructuring and/or relocation affecting the whole or major divisions of an organization, e.g. downsizing, off shoring, outsourcing)
- 8.f **Organizational Climate** (issues related to organizational morale and/or capacity for functioning)
- 8.g **Change Management** (making, responding or adapting to organizational changes, quality of leadership in facilitating organizational change)
- 8.h **Priority Setting and/or Funding** (disputes about setting organizational/departmental priorities and/or allocation of funding within programs)
- 8.i **Data, Methodology, Interpretation of Results** (scientific disputes about the conduct, outcomes and interpretation of studies and resulting data for policy)
- 8.j **Interdepartment/Interorganization Work/Territory** (disputes about which department/organization should be doing what/taking the lead)
- 8.k **Other** (any organizational issue not described by the above sub-categories)  
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## 9. Values, Ethics, and Standards

Questions, concerns, issues or inquiries about the fairness of organizational values, ethics, and/or standards, the application of related policies and/or procedures, or the need for creation or revision of policies, and/or standards.

- 9.a **Standards of Conduct** (fairness, applicability or lack of behavioral guidelines and/or Codes of Conduct, e.g., Academic Honesty, plagiarism, Code of Conduct, conflict of interest)
- 9.b **Values and Culture** (questions, concerns or issues about the values or culture of the organization)
- 9.c **Scientific Conduct/Integrity** (scientific or research misconduct or misdemeanors, e.g., authorship, falsification of results)
- 9.d **Policies and Procedures NOT Covered in Broad Categories 1 thru 8** (fairness or lack of policy or the application of the policy, policy not followed, or needs revision, e.g., appropriate dress, use of internet or cell phones)
- 9.e **Other** (Other policy, procedure, ethics or standards issues not described in the above sub-categories)  
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