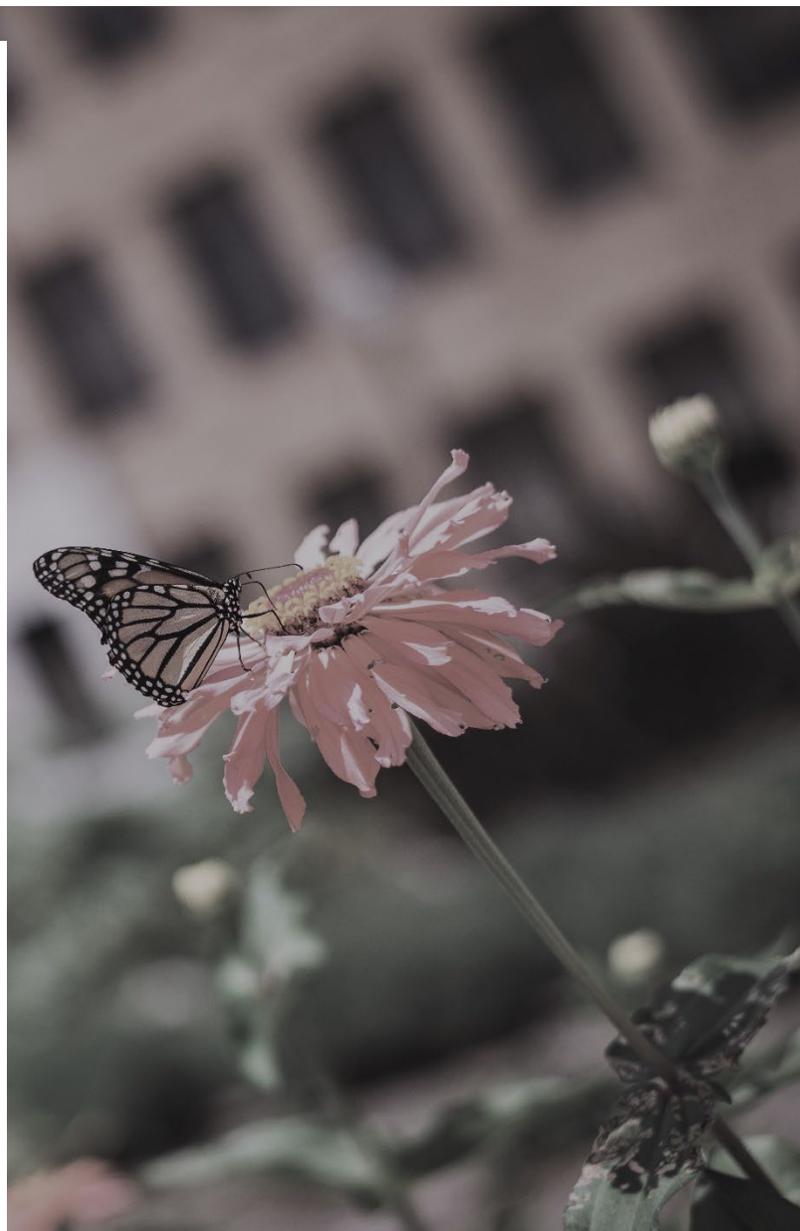# Faculty Ombudsperson

Annual Report and Three-Year Analysis

Indiana State University
August 1, 2021 – July 31, 2022

Authored by:

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Introduction

This report provides an overview of activities for the faculty ombuds office from 8/1/2021 – 7/31/2022. In addition, it provides an analysis of visitors and concerns for the period of 8/1/2019 – 7/31/2022. An overall summary and recommendations are provided.
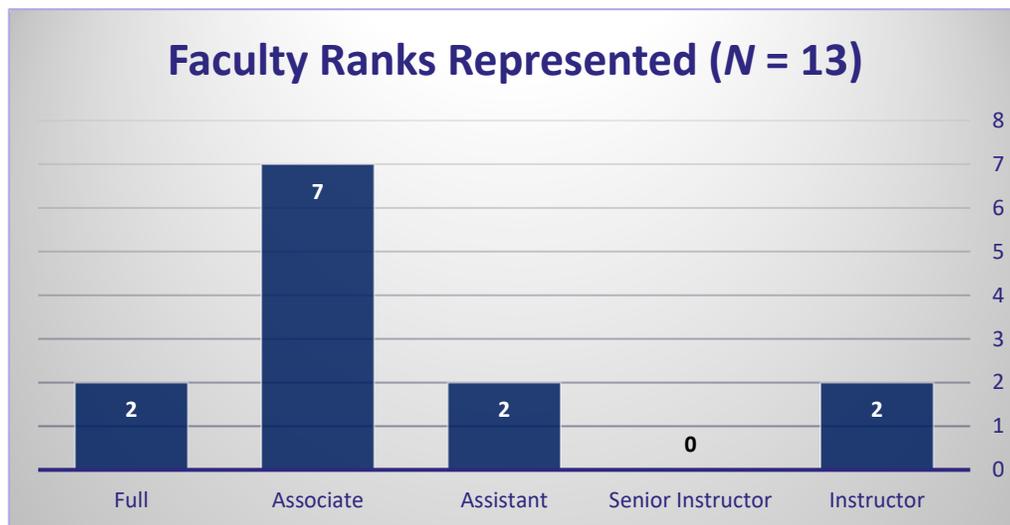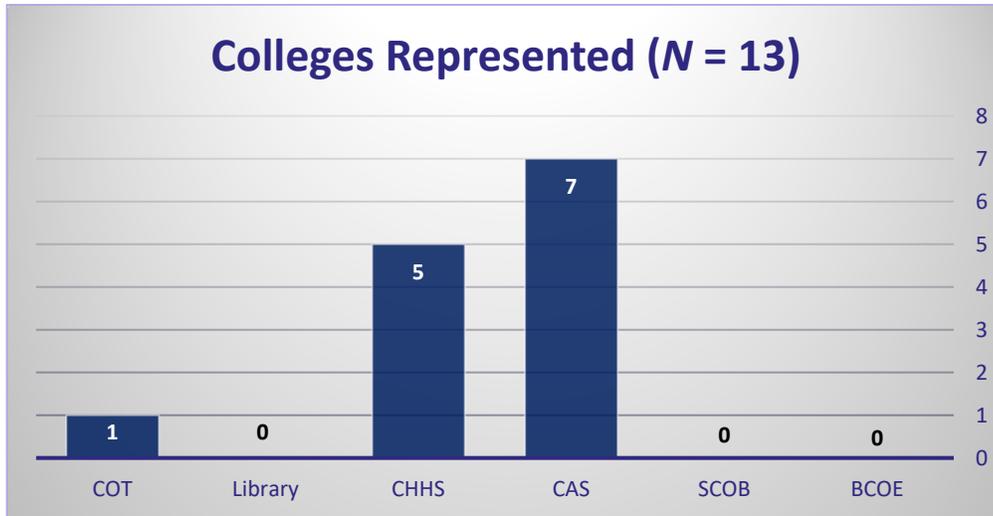
Overview of Activities and Visitors, 2021-2022

Overview of Activities
◊ Approximately 15 hours meeting individually with visitors
◊ Approximately 5 hours of follow-up activities, including;
  o Researching/clarifying policy and resources
  o Meeting with other individuals at visitors' request
  o Facilitated conversations
◊ Informational material development (see "Resources" at https://www.indstate.edu/faculty-ombudsperson)
◊ Conflict resolution training sessions for College Deans and Department Chairpersons

Overview of Visitors
◊ Thirteen visitors initiated visits with the ombuds office
  o About 60% of visitors were female
  o About 70% were tenured faculty
  o Most were from the Colleges of Arts and Sciences (54%) and Health and Human Services (38%).
◊ Four additional individuals accepted meeting invitations at the ombuds' request
◊ Average time per visitor concern: approximately 1.3 hours (range .5 – 7)

Faculty Ranks Represented (*N* = 13)

Rank	Count
Full	2
Associate	7
Assistant	2
Senior Instructor	0
Instructor	2

Colleges Represented (*N* = 13)

COT	Library	CHHS	CAS	SCOB	BCOE
1	0	5	7	0	0

Concerns and Issues Summary, 2021-2022

Primary Concerns

The International Ombudsman Association uses Uniform Reporting Categories to categorize visitor concerns (see the Appendix for a summary). Visitors presented 15 primary concerns for discussion and consultation. Each of the 15 primary concerns were categorized and are summarized in the chart below:

Distribution of Primary Concerns (*N* = 15) across Uniform Reporting Categories

Services/Administrative Issues = 1 (7%)

Compensation/Benefits = 1 (7%)

Peer/Colleague Relationships = 3 (21%)

Evaluative Relationships = 10 (71%)
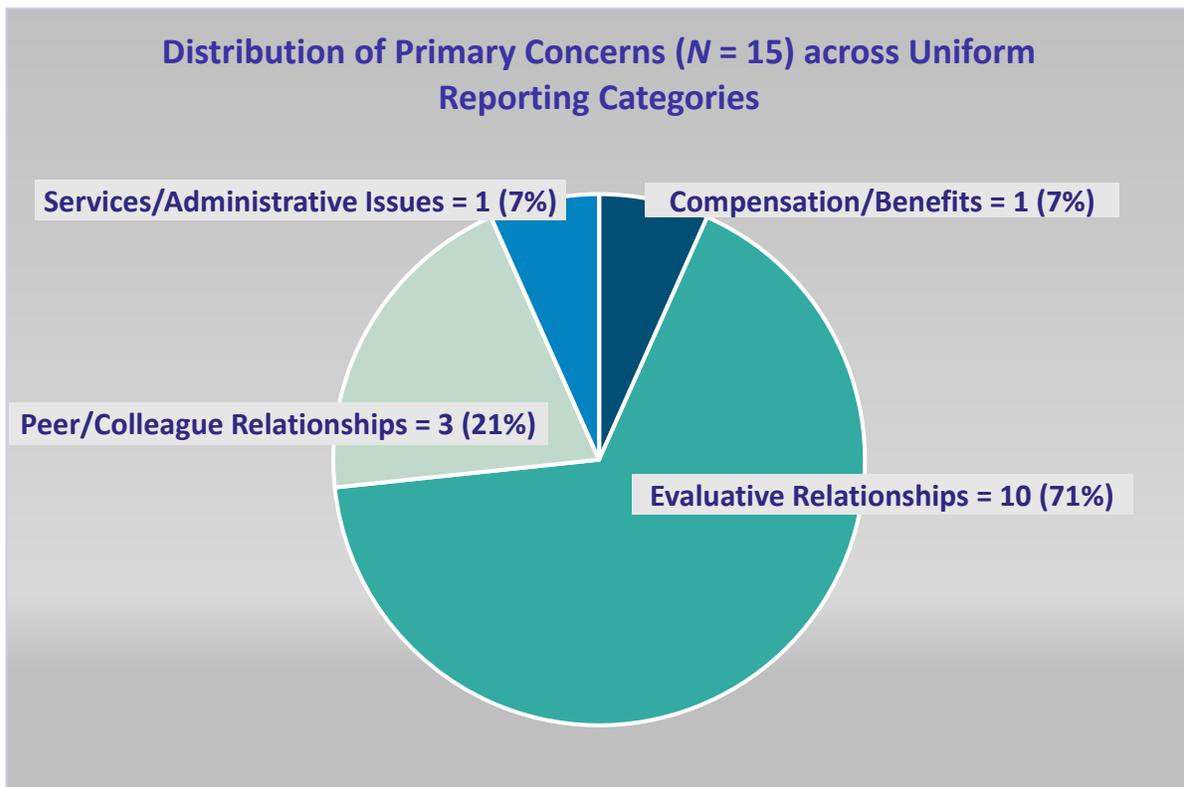
All Concerns

Most visitors identified multiple concerns that were interrelated (average concerns per visitor = 2; range = 1-4). In total, the ombuds office consulted with visitors about 29 distinct concerns. These concerns were also categorized using the Uniform Reporting Categories as summarized below:

Distribution of All Concerns (N = 30) across Uniform Reporting Categories

Services /Administrative Issues = 2 (7%)

Career Progression/ Development = 3 (10%)

Compensation/Benefits = 1 (3%)

Peer/Colleague Relationships = 5 (17%)

Evaluative Relationships = 19 (66%)
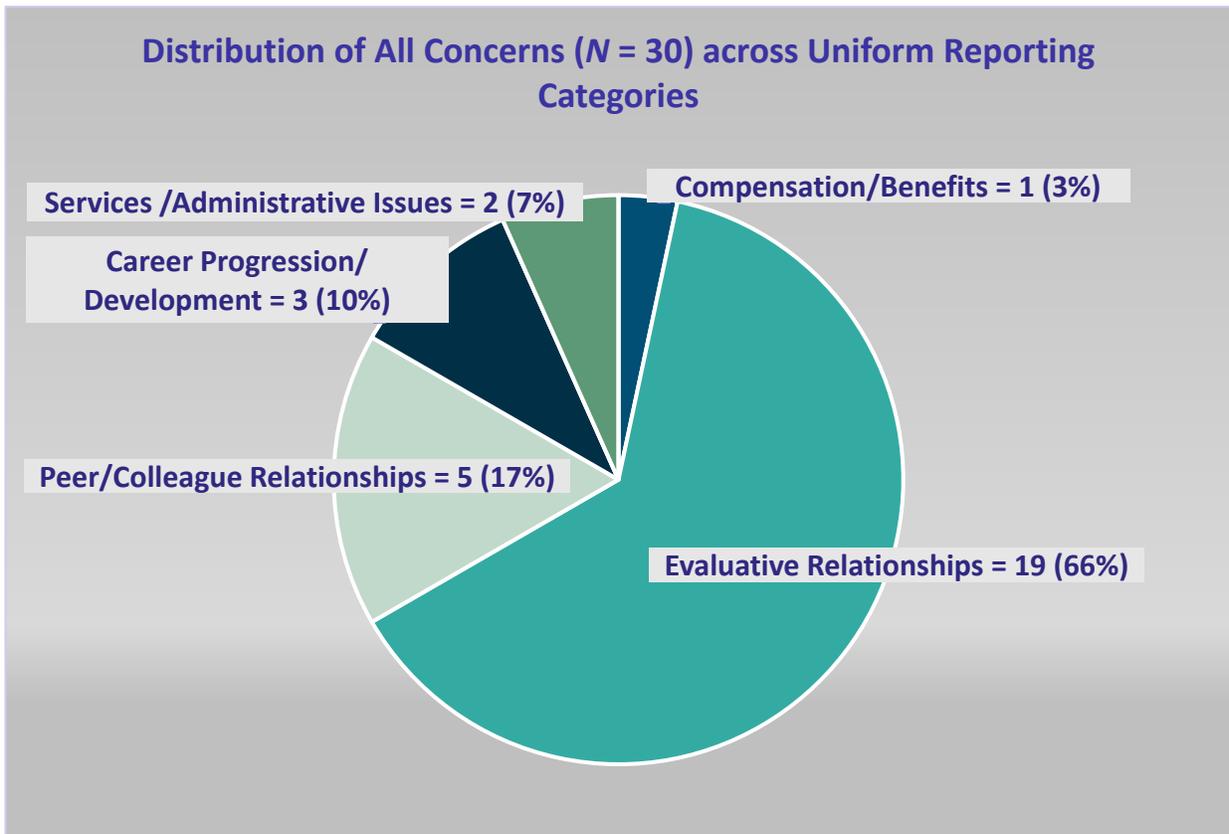
Summary

A majority of visitor concerns pertained to difficulties with immediate supervisors. During 2021-2022, most concerns were related to perceived unfairness or bias in promotion, tenure, or biennial review decisions. Other concerns included instances of bullying from colleagues, inequitable and ineffective leadership practices, and unfair application of disciplinary procedures.

Three-Year Analysis, 2019-2022

Demographic Trends

◊ Overall, visitors tend to be unique from year to year; the ombuds office saw 48 unique visitors in the three-year period.

◊ Two-thirds of visitors (67%) were female.

◊ Most visitors were tenured (53%) or tenure-track (29%) faculty, with year-to-year fluctuations in relative representation. Visitors were about evenly distributed between tenured and untenured faculty.

◊ Most visitors were from the Colleges of Arts and Sciences (31%) and Health and Human Services (37%), with year-to-year fluctuations.

Visitors by Rank, 2019-2022 (*N* = 51)

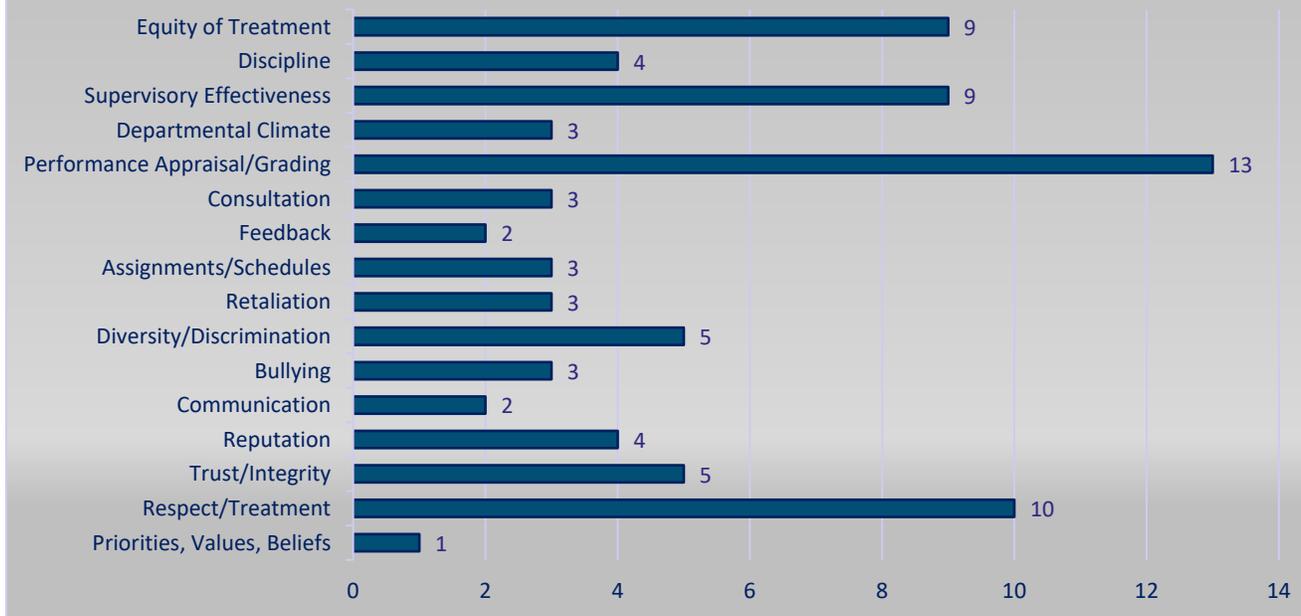**Visitors by College, 2019-2022 (*N* = 51)**
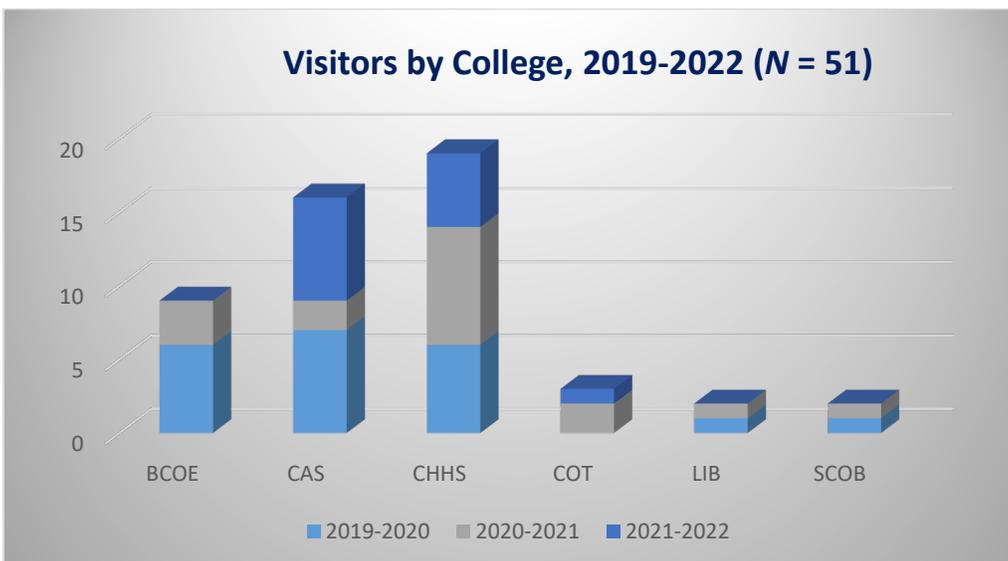
Concerns across Uniform Reporting Categories

Concerns about evaluative relationships were the most common in each of the reporting years and in terms of both the primary concern and all concerns. Concerns about peer or colleague relationships consistently represented the second most common concern, with other issues distributed across categories. The types of concerns raised were fairly consistent across colleges and faculty ranks. The following table presents a summary of primary concerns and all concerns reported over the three-year period:

Uniform Reporting Category	Primary Concerns *n* (%)	All Concerns *n* (%)
1. Compensation and Benefits	1 (2.2%)	2 (1.5%)
2. Evaluative Relationships	28 (60.9%)	79 (60.8%)
3. Peer & Colleague Relationships	7 (15.2%)	15 (11.5%)
4. Career Progression & Development	3 (6.5%)	6 (4.6%)
5. Legal/Regulatory/Compliance	2 (4.3%)	6 (4.6%)
6. Safety, Health, Physical Environment	1 (2.2%)	2 (1.5%)
7. Services/Administrative Services	3 (6.5%)	11 (8.5%)
8. Organizational, Strategic, Mission-Related	1 (2.2%)	5 (3.8%)
9. Values, Ethics, & Standards	0 (0.0%)	4 (3.1%)
Total	*46 (100%)*	*130 (100%)*

Concerns about evaluative relationships were further examined to better understand the nature of common issues. Most concerns pertained to conflict between faculty and department chairs, with performance appraisal (e.g., promotion and tenure, biennial review) being the most common issue. Other frequently identified concerns related to perceived inequities or lack of transparency in non-appraisal types of decision-making, supervisors treating faculty with disrespect or dismissiveness, and unprofessional or unhelpful leadership and management practices.

All Evaluative Relationship Concerns (*N* = 79), 2019-2022

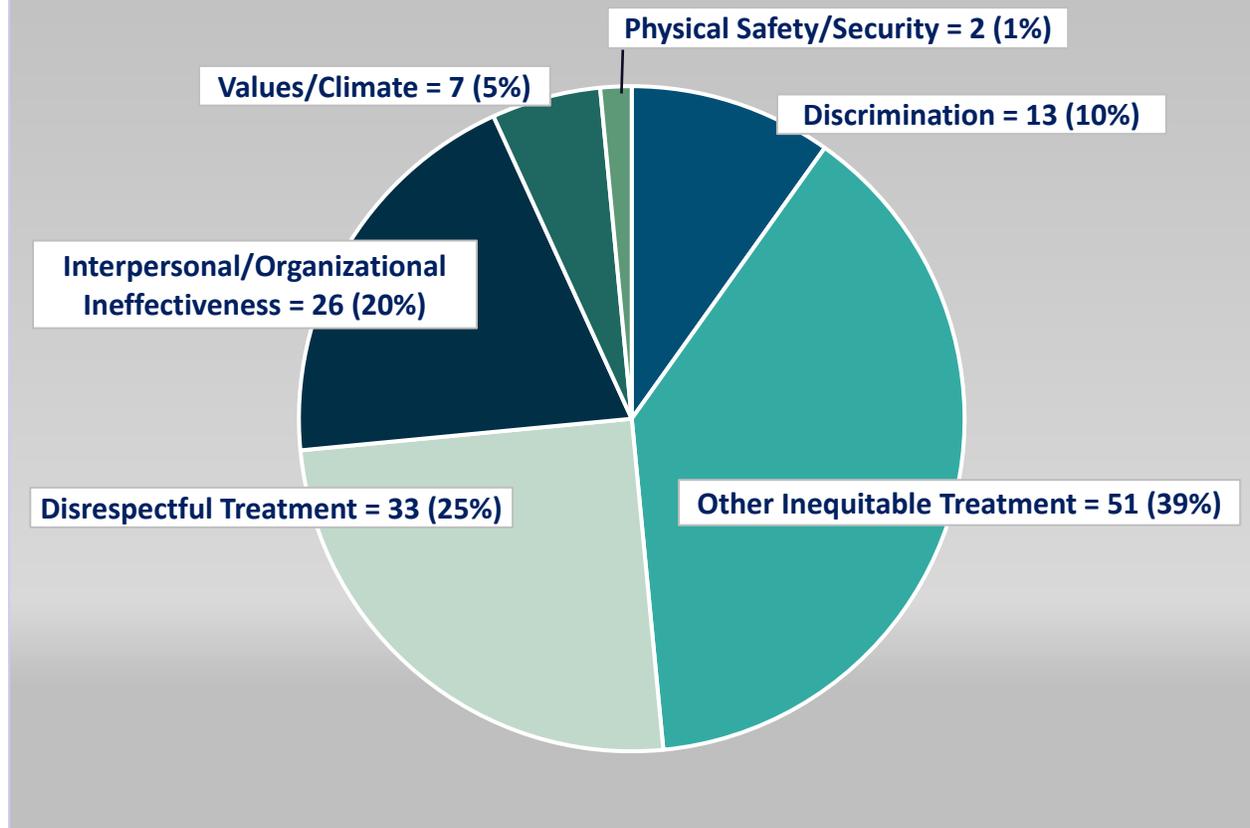| Category	Count
Equity of Treatment	9
Discipline	4
Supervisory Effectiveness	9
Departmental Climate	3
Performance Appraisal/Grading	13
Consultation	3
Feedback	2
Assignments/Schedules	3
Retaliation	3
Diversity/Discrimination	5
Bullying	3
Communication	2
Reputation	4
Trust/Integrity	5
Respect/Treatment	10
Priorities, Values, Beliefs	1

Thematic Exploration of Concerns

Some common themes of concern were observed across the Uniform Reporting Categories. These were aggregated according to the following definitions:

◊ **Discrimination** included concerns about differential unfair treatment due to a protected status, and specific discussions about taking formal action in response to harassment or discrimination.

◊ **Other Inequitable Treatment** included concerns about unfair or inconsistent applications of policy/practices, favoritism, and preferential treatment not based on a protected status.

◊ **Disrespectful Treatment** included concerns about disrespect, bullying/targeting, gossiping, and perceived retaliation.

◊ **Interpersonal/Organizational Ineffectiveness** included concerns related to poor communication or ineffective management/supervision practices at the department/college level, as well as ineffective business practices or leadership practices at the institutional level.

◊ **Values/Climate** included concerns about poor climate/morale or differing ideas about professional values or acceptable standards of conduct.

◊ **Physical Safety/Security** included concerns about physical facilities and feelings of safety while on campus.

Thematic Analysis of Concerns (*N* = 130), 2019-2022

Physical Safety/Security = 2 (1%)

Values/Climate = 7 (5%)

Discrimination = 13 (10%)

Interpersonal/Organizational Ineffectiveness = 26 (20%)

Disrespectful Treatment = 33 (25%)

Other Inequitable Treatment = 51 (39%)

Based on the thematic examination, almost half of faculty concerns pertained to perceived inequitable, unfair, biased, or discriminatory behavior by supervisors, colleagues, or university leadership. This included a significant number of concerns related to unclear, inconsistent, or arbitrary interpretation and/or application of policies and procedures. Examples included recommendations of conditional reappointment, decisions of not meeting expectations, enforcement of the outside work policy, initiation of disciplinary actions, and allocation of resources and responsibilities (e.g., summer teaching assignments, travel funding).

The second major theme of concerns related to incivility in the workplace. In many instances, the concerns were about bullying, disrespectful, or retaliatory behavior of department chairpersons toward faculty. In other instances, the concerns were between faculty and peer colleagues or faculty and staff members. Most often, these latter concerns were combined with the perception that the department chairperson was aware of but had failed to effectively address the issue. Finally, a subset of concerns about disrespectful behavior had to do with supervisors ignoring or dismissing faculty concerns.

For the most part, untenured faculty were concerned with the implications of inequitable decision-making on their likelihood of being reappointed, promoted, and/or tenured. They were, generally,

hesitant to initiate formal appeals or proceedings for fear of retaliation and chose to focus instead on how they could address matters informally and independently. Untenured faculty who reported concerns related to workplace discrimination or incivility were less likely to persist toward resolving the issues and more likely to report that they planned to leave the university or were considering other career opportunities. Conversely, tenured faculty were generally more concerned with voicing and resolving their concerns regardless of topic and were more willing to utilize existing university structures and policies to reach a resolution.

Summary and Recommendations

Based on the summary of common concerns and observed needs of faculty and administrators over the past year and the three-year period, the following recommendations are offered:

1. Faculty often hear about the office from a colleague, chairperson, or administrator. There is a continued need for the faculty to publicize and promote the services of the ombuds office.
2. There appears to be a tendency on the part of both faculty and administrators to ignore or avoid conflict in the early stages. This often creates unresolved tension in supervisory relationships and may contribute to faculty perceptions of inequitable or retaliatory decision-making in instances of performance appraisal, discipline, or resource allocation. Formal appeals and grievances may therefore be reduced by faculty and administrators adopting a more active role in open dialogue and collaborative problem-solving. To this end:
   a. Deans, chairpersons, and faculty would benefit from regular opportunities for informal conflict resolution training, to establish conflict as a natural and potentially constructive aspect of human relationships and to begin building skills for recognizing, defining, and working to resolve conflict situations. The ombuds office offered one series of two conflict resolution training seminars to deans and chairpersons in July 2022. It may be helpful to continue offering this or similar opportunities if they are found to be beneficial.
   b. Administrators may further benefit from opportunities to develop or practice informal third-party mediation skills, which could be helpful in facilitating conflict resolution among faculty and/or staff.
3. Faculty who find themselves engaged in formal university processes (e.g., promotion and tenure appeals, grievances, discipline/dismissal) are often unfamiliar with the policies and procedures involved in such proceedings. Further, faculty often experience fear of retaliation or favoritism in such processes when they concern conflict with chairpersons or other administrators. This is particularly true for untenured faculty. To better support faculty who participate in formal proceedings:
   a. Resources should be made available to help them locate and understand the policies and procedures available to them. A written grievance resource is available from the ombuds

website and should be updated regularly. Similar guides may be useful for other formal university processes.

   b. Faculty would benefit from having more individuals who are trained and willing to serve as informal peer mediators, and/or serve as resource or support persons for faculty involved in formal proceedings. The independence and neutrality of the ombuds office precludes the ombuds' involvement in formal proceedings.

4. In many instances, perceived inequities in decision-making could be avoided by increased transparency and communication. Recommendations include (a) written policies and procedures whenever possible; (b) transparent communication regarding administrative decision-making processes; and (c) checks and balances to ensure policies and procedures are applied equitably (e.g., across individuals, departments, faculty ranks).

Questions, Feedback, and Additional Information

For more information about the ombuds office, visit:

https://www.indstate.edu/faculty-ombudsperson

To contact the current faculty ombuds:

ISU-faculty-ombuds@indstate.edu

Questions and concerns about this report may be directed to:

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Appendix: Uniform Reporting Categories Summary

The International Ombudsman Association (IOA) recommends the use of 9 uniform reporting categories to describe the nature of visitor questions and concerns. Each category is further subdivided to provide as much specificity as possible in classifying issues. A brief description of the broad categories appears below:

1. **Compensation & Benefits**—equity, appropriateness, or competitiveness of salary or benefits.
2. **Evaluative Relationships**—issues between people in evaluative or hierarchical relationships (e.g., chairs and faculty)
3. **Peer & Colleague Relationships**—issues between people of equal status
4. **Career Progression & Development**—appointment, re-appointment (e.g., promotion/tenure reviews, performance reviews), changes of assignment, non-reappointment (e.g., termination, position security/elimination), career development (e.g., coaching/mentoring), and separation (e.g., retirement, resignation).
5. **Legal, Regulatory, Financial, & Compliance**—issues that may create a legal risk or liability if not addressed (e.g., waste, fraud, abuse).
6. **Safety, Health, & Physical Environment**—infrastructure and safety/security.
7. **Services/Administrative Issues**—quality or professionalism of services provided by administrative offices and issues pertaining to the interpretation, application, and impact of administrative rules and policies.
8. **Organizational, Strategic, & Mission Related**—issues related to the management, leadership, strategic direction, or decision-making, and priorities of the organization.
9. **Values, Ethics, & Standards**—issues related to the equity and application of ethical and conduct standards of the organization and issues related to inequity in policy or procedure, or policies lacking/in need of revision.

Reference

International Ombudsman Association (2007). *International Ombudsman Association Uniform Reporting Categories, Version 2.* Author. IOA Uniform Data Reporting Categories Desk Reference