

SHSU Faculty and Staff Ombudsperson Office 2024-2025 Annual Report

Prepared and submitted by:

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SHSU Faculty & Staff Ombuds
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Message from the SHSU Faculty and Staff Ombuds

It is an honor to share with you SHSU Faculty and Staff Ombuds Office report for the 2024-2025 academic year. I am Falguni Mukherjee, and I serve as the faculty and staff ombuds (ombudsperson)¹.

As Faculty and Staff Ombuds, it is my privilege to support members of our university community by providing a confidential, impartial, and informal resource for navigating workplace concerns, interpersonal challenges, and organizational issues. This role is grounded in the principles of independence, neutrality, confidentiality, and informality, allowing individuals to speak freely and explore options without fear of retaliation. While the ombuds office is still relatively new at SHSU, it has built a solid foundation for conflict management and resolution services by following those principles. For many office visitors² the ombuds office serves as their first stop to discuss issues, identify resources, seek information, and can lead to contact with other university offices and resources.

Over the past year, I have engaged with faculty and staff across a wide range of issues—including communication breakdowns, supervisory conflicts, interpersonal issues with colleagues, policy concerns, etc. The past year I have also continued to maintain a strong focus on increasing awareness and integration of ombuds office services among campus faculty and staff. The ombuds office in collaboration with Human Resources Office, Division of Employee Engagement offered its inaugural campuswide workshop on basic conflict management strategies which was very well received by the campus community. Additionally, I continued with educational outreach and professional development activities. Moreover, I worked on relocating the ombuds office to a new space and establishing a welcoming environment for office visitors in the new space. This year's report outlines the themes and trends that have emerged from these interactions.

I invite you to visit the [SHSU Ombuds Office webpage](#) for additional information available on the website, viz. the Ombuds Office Charter, mission of the Office, guiding principles of the Office, FAQ, training resources etc.

I am grateful to the individuals who placed their trust in the Ombuds Office this year, and I remain committed to serving you as your faculty and staff ombuds.

Respectfully Submitted,

Falguni Mukherjee, Ph.D.
Faculty and Staff Ombudsperson
Sam Houston State University

¹ Ombuds is an alternative term for ombudsperson and is used by the International Ombuds Association (IOA) to communicate to the widest possible community.

² The International Ombudsman Association (IOA) refers to people who seek assistance from an ombudsperson as “visitors.”

2024-2025 Academic year in a glance

Office infrastructure

- Relocated ombuds office to new location
- Prepared physical space
- Maintained and updated website, ensuring all policies are adhered to
- Created new website for ombuds office
- Updated and maintained secure, anonymous database
- Made curated informational and training material available for the campus on ombuds website
- Kept updated with IOA Standards of Practice and Code of Ethics for the office

Professional Development

- IOA's Regional Advisory Committee events
- IOA symposiums, webinars, workshops
- IOA community connections
- Expanded internal and external networks
- Ombuds mentoring

Outreach and synergistic activities

- Presented at New Faculty Investment
- DOSO and BIT College liaison
- Presented to Council of Academic Department Chairs
- Offered campuswide workshop on Basic Conflict Management techniques
- Ombuds office annual report for 2023-2024

Visitors

- 85 appointments in 2024-2025: faculty and staff

About the office

The SHSU faculty and staff ombuds office helps SHSU faculty and staff members to manage and resolve workplace related issues and concerns in a confidential, informal, neutral, and independent manner.

Location:

White Hall, Suite C106
Huntsville, TX 77340
Phone: (936) 294-2222
Email: ombuds@shsu.edu

Constituents served:

All SHSU faculty and staff members across all campuses are welcome to reach out to the ombuds office. Appointments can be made in-person, online via Zoom or Teams and by phone.

The ombuds office is a voluntary resource and all faculty and staff members may consult with the university ombuds without fear of retaliation.

Mission

The SHSU ombuds office provides a safe place where faculty and staff members can discuss workplace conflicts, or concerns in a neutral and confidential environment, without fear of retaliation. The ombuds office is an avenue for constructive problem solving and conflict resolution. The ombuds office operates independently and supplements existing university resources for conflict resolution and fair treatment (e.g., Human Resources, Office of Title IX and Discrimination Resolution, Office of Compliance and Insurance, etc.). It provides an alternative to formal conflict resolution channels.

The SHSU Ombuds Office operates as per the [Standards of Practice](#) (SOP) and [Code of Ethics](#) (COE) of the [International Ombuds Association](#) (IOA).

SHSU faculty and staff ombuds is an organizational ombuds. The ombuds therefore does not advocate for faculty or staff members or for the university. The ombuds is a neutral resource providing its services on an informal and off-the-record basis. The ombuds office provides following services to faculty and staff:

- Provide a neutral and confidential channel of communication.
- Explain or clarify University policies and procedures.
- Listen actively to faculty and staff concerns.
- Provide information and explore options to address concerns and constructively resolve/manage conflicts.
- Assist in identifying short-term and long-term goals and steps to achieve those goals.
- Coach visitors to address their concerns.
- Identify existing resources and refer faculty and staff to appropriate resources/processes.
- Provide information about appropriate SHSU office for formal reporting and official channels for grievance procedures.
- Facilitate conversations, upon agreement, between members of the University community to resolve issues.
- Collect anonymized data on emerging trends and patterns while maintaining confidentiality and provide upward feedback.

The strategies adopted by the ombuds will depend on the issues presented, the context of the situation, the dynamics of the division, short-term and long-term goals of the faculty or staff, and discretion of the ombuds.

Principles of practice

The SHSU Ombuds Office operates as per the Standards of Practice (SOP) and Code of Ethics (COE) of the International Ombuds Association (IOA). Therefore, the SHSU Ombuds Office's services are **confidential, independent, informal, and neutral**.

A comprehensive description of the principles of practice of the Ombuds Office is located on the following [page](#) of the SHSU Ombuds Office webpage.

Activities

Ombuds office infrastructure

- The ombuds office has moved to a new location. The ombuds office is now located in White Hall in suite C106. Relocation efforts involved:
 - ✓ Coordinating with Facilities Management and SHSU IT departments to move the office to the new space.
 - ✓ Preparing the new office space with furniture, technology, telephone service, etc. to establish a working space that is private and a welcoming environment for my visitors.
- Maintain ombuds office website and keep it updated to adhere to all SHSU and TSUS policies
- Part of Web Advisory group to work on creating a new website for the ombuds office, content creation for the new ombuds office website per IMC guidelines
- Maintain ombuds office secure database and keep the secured database updated with anonymized data
- Provide training materials on topics related to conflict management on the ombuds webpage

Outreach and synergistic activities

The past year I continued efforts to increase awareness and integrate ombuds office services among faculty and staff on campus. This was done in different ways

- Presented at New Faculty Investment
- Presented to Council of Academic Department Chairs
- DOSO and BIT College liaison
- Offered campus-wide workshop on Basic Conflict Management techniques
This summer the ombuds office offered a seminar on Basic Conflict Management Techniques. This was the first time the ombuds office offered a seminar since its inception. A total of 154 faculty and staff registered to attend the seminar with 112 attendees on the day of the event. The ombuds office collaborated with Human Resources Office, Division of Employee Engagement to offer the seminar. I have undergone the necessary training to be able to offer a campus wide seminar or workshop in the future that includes campus wide communication, adding the seminar on Talent Management and registering participants.
- Ombuds office annual report for 2023-2024

Professional Development

Over the past year, I have pursued educational and professional development opportunities to deepen the knowledge and skills essential for effective ombuds practice. These activities have also helped me strengthen both internal and external networks, enhancing my ability to serve in the ombuds role.

- Participated in IOA's Regional Advisory Committee events
- Participated in IOA symposiums, webinars, workshops
- Participated in IOA community connections meetings, a series of meetings featuring topical discussions facilitated by members of the IOA Board of Directors
- Expanded internal and external networks
- Attended mentoring meetings with my ombuds mentor
- Continued to strengthen my knowledge of the ombuds profession through self-learning, engaging in virtual meetings and discussion boards hosted by the IOA

Assisting visitors

Over the past year, one of my primary priorities has been providing ombuds services to SHSU faculty and staff. As an ombuds, my central responsibility is to support individuals who voluntarily seek assistance in navigating concerns or conflicts. To fulfill this role effectively, I have dedicated significant effort to developing the knowledge and skills necessary to serve visitors in alignment with the International Ombuds Association (IOA) Standards of Practice and Code of Ethics.

Use of the Ombuds Office is entirely voluntary, and all faculty and staff have the right to consult with the university ombuds confidentially and without fear of retaliation.

The data presented in this report is aggregated to ensure the confidentiality of all visitors.

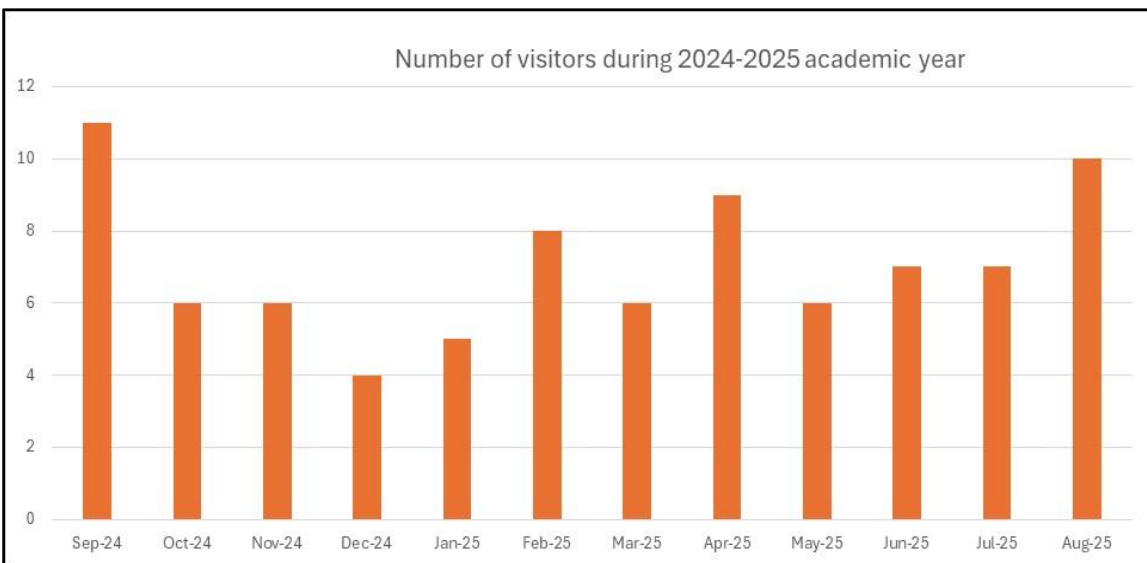
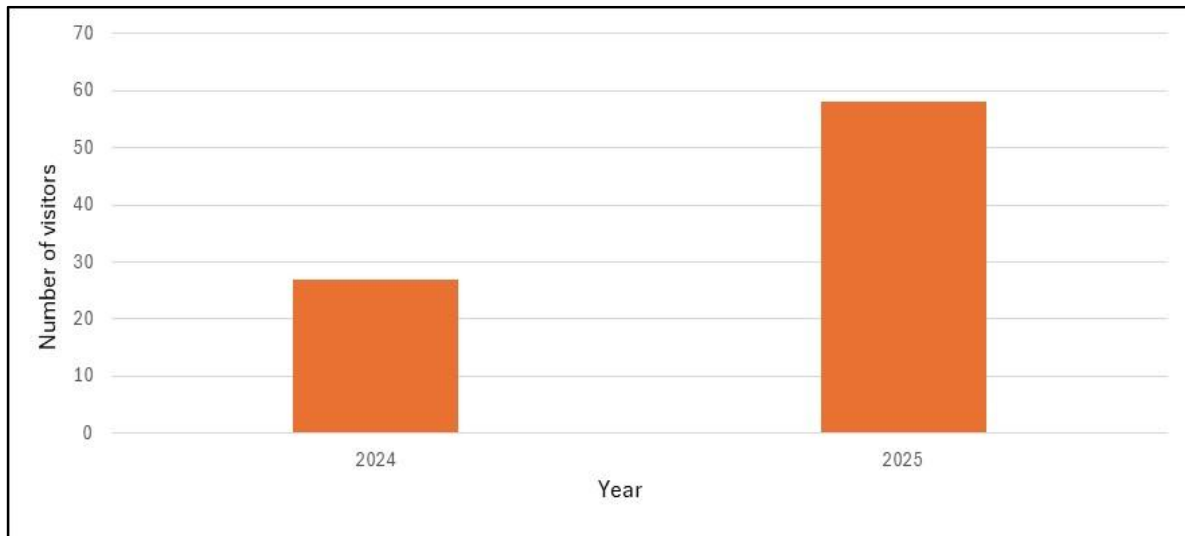
Visitor Summary: A total of 85 visitors (faculty and staff) sought the services of the ombuds office. Some sought services for first time while there were some who sought ombuds office services a second time for ongoing concerns or for new issues.

In 83 cases a single visitor was involved. One case involved a pair of visitors. 50 cases involved staff, and 35 cases involved faculty.

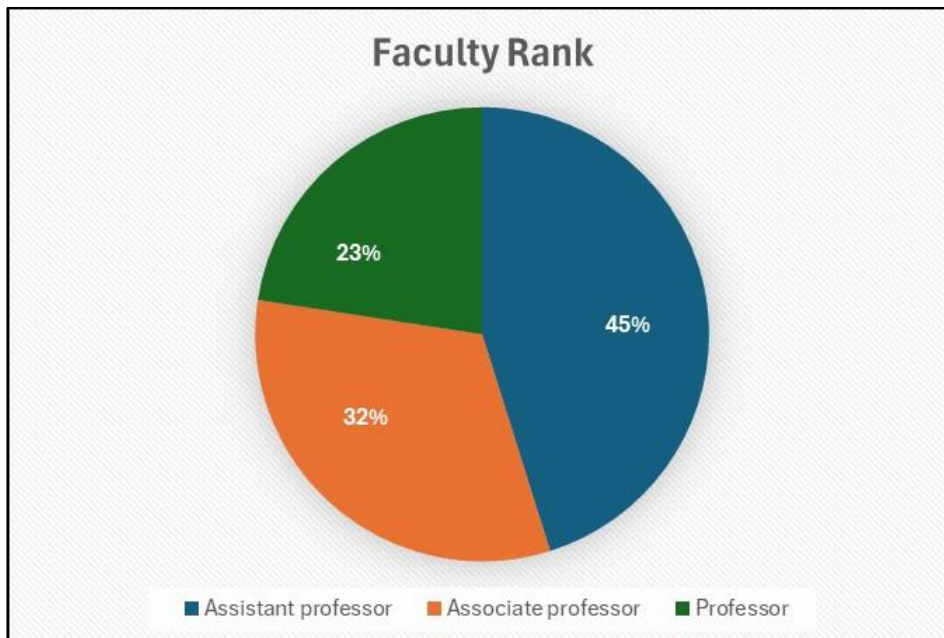
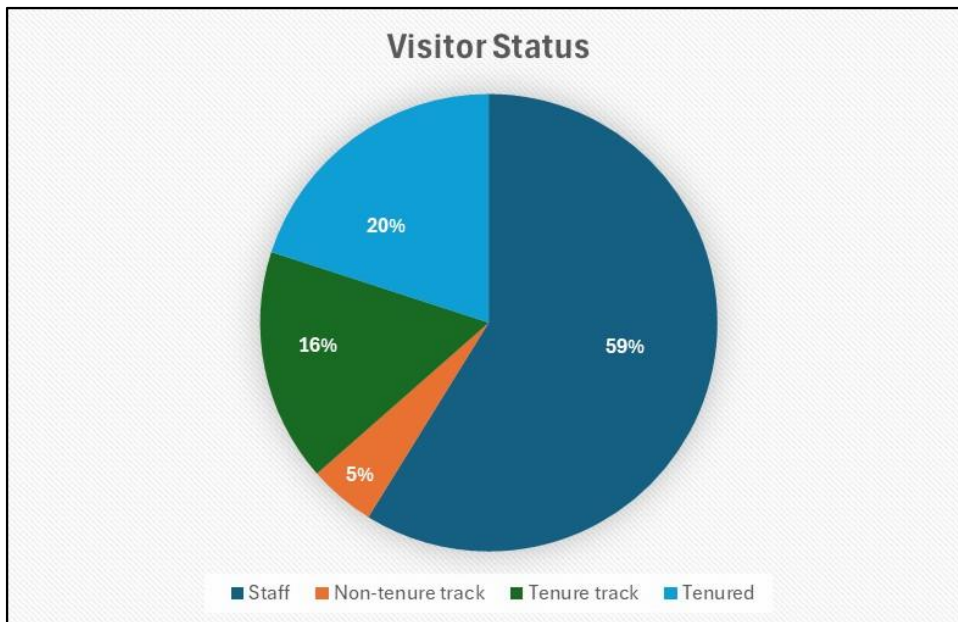
No two appointments were identical in nature. The duration of individual appointments varied significantly, ranging from 30 minutes to 155 minutes. This variation was influenced by several factors, including the complexity of the issues presented, the context in which they arose, and the need to ensure that each visitor had adequate time to express their concerns and be heard.

An analysis of 85 appointments indicates that the average duration was approximately 72 minutes.

Number of appointments varied by month as shown in the charts below



Visitor classification: Visitors who sought the services of the ombuds office represented a mix of staff and tenured, tenure track and non-tenure track faculty members.



Referrals

Visitors are referred to the ombuds office through different sources. Some reported that they were recommended by their colleague or a peer to visit the ombuds office, others noted being advised by non-peer faculty or staff member, faculty or staff mentor, supervisor, Human Resources office, Department Chair, Academic College Dean's office and other campus offices. A few were referred to the ombuds office by the office of Human Resources or their immediate supervisor. Some learned about the ombuds office from reading the brochure or visiting the ombuds webpage.

A variety of issues and concerns are discussed, or questions are raised during an appointment with a visitor. Based on the context, the ombuds office makes referrals to other university offices such as Office of Title IX and Discrimination Resolution, Academic Dean's office, Teaching and Learning Center (TLC), Office of Research and Sponsored Programs (ORSP), Human Resources office, Office of Internal Audit, etc.

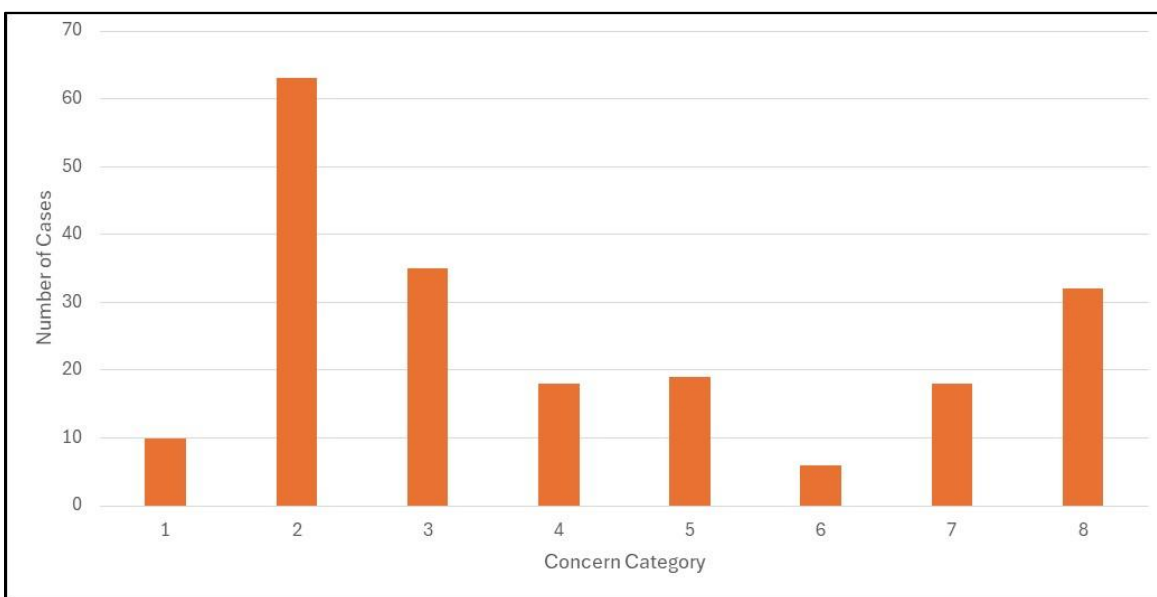
Visitors overwhelmingly reported positive experiences in their interactions with the Ombuds Office. Many expressed gratitude for the university offering such a resource. Comments included: “I felt so much better after speaking with the ombuds,” “It felt good to be heard,” “This is a valuable resource,” “You have a calming effect,” and “You help me center myself.” The word cloud below reflects common themes and sentiments shared by visitors.



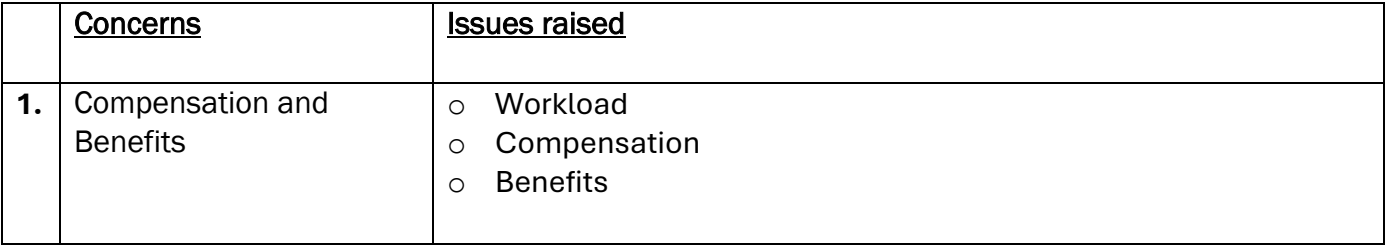
Summary of concerns

Faculty and staff at SHSU may contact the Ombuds Office with any questions or concerns related to their work life. Often, during these conversations, additional underlying issues or related concerns also emerge and are addressed.

Over the past year, all concerns brought to the Ombuds Office have been organized into eight categories, following the International Ombuds Association's (IOA) Uniform Reporting Categories. The chart below illustrates the frequency of concerns raised within each category. A summary table following the chart provides further detail of the issues and concerns raised, reflecting the perspectives of the faculty and staff who utilized the Ombuds Office services.



Below is a visual representation of the key discussion points, shown as a word cloud.



2.	Evaluative Relationship (<i>Department chair, assistant/associate chair, Dean, and unit managed, Director, supervisor, and employee relations</i>)	○ Inequity of treatment, ○ A lack of trust and integrity, ○ Beliefs, values, priorities, ○ Standards or norms in unit, ○ Lack of guidance, ○ Lack of direction, ○ Unable or unwilling to assist, ○ Policy implementation, ○ Fear of retaliation, ○ Effectiveness of supervisor, ○ Lack of respect, ○ Bullying, verbal abuse, ○ Intimidation ○ Damage to department, College, unit, or program, ○ Policy missing, ○ Policy in need of revision, ○ Retaliatory behavior, ○ Disciplinary action ○ Communication ○ Departmental climate ○ Equity of treatment – favoritism, preferential treatment ○ Voice/participation in unit governance ○ Performance evaluation ○ Fairness of assignments, appropriateness of schedules, expected volume of work ○ Use of positional power or authority
3.	Peer and Colleague Relationships	○ Respect and treatment ○ Trust and integrity ○ Reputation – impact of rumors about professional or personal matters ○ Communication ○ Bullying, verbal abuse and /or coercive behavior ○ Discrimination ○ Retaliation for previous actions, behaviors, whistleblower

4.	Career Progression and Development	○ Job Application/Selection and Recruitment Processes (<i>recruitment and selection processes, facilitation of job applications, short-listing and criteria for selection, disputed decisions linked to recruitment and selection</i>) ○ Job Classification and Description (<i>changes or disagreements over requirements of assignment, appropriate tasks</i>) ○ Involuntary Transfer/Change of Assignment (<i>notice, selection and special dislocation rights/benefits, removal from prior duties, unrequested change of work tasks</i>) ○ Tenure/Position, Security/Ambiguity (<i>security of position or contract, provision of secure contractual categories</i>) ○ Career Progression (<i>promotion, reappointment, or tenure</i>) ○ Rotation and Duration of Assignment (<i>noncompletion or over-extension of assignments involuntary transfer to specific roles/assignments, requests for transfer to other places/duties/roles</i>) ○ Termination/Non-Renewal (<i>end of contract, non-renewal of contract</i>) ○ Position Elimination ○ Career Development, Coaching, Mentoring
5.	Legal, regulatory, and financial compliance	○ Lack of or insufficient due process ○ Harassment ○ Discrimination ○ Violation reporting
6.	Safety, Health and Physical Environment	○ Work related stress ○ Work life balance
7.	Administrative Issues	○ Quality of services ○ Administrative decision ○ Policy clarity ○ Policy implementation ○ Behavior of administrative staff
8.	Values, ethics, and standards	○ Standards of conduct – fairness, applicability, or lack of behavioral guidelines ○ Values and culture