

SHSU Faculty and Staff Ombudsperson Office January 2023 to July 2024 Report

Prepared and submitted by:

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SHSU Faculty & Staff Ombuds
July 2024

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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 duration of January 2023 to July 2024. I am Falguni Mukherjee, and I serve as the faculty and staff ombuds (ombudsperson)¹.

After a successful pilot year in 2022, the Provost's Office made a decision to continue to support the university ombuds office as a resource for staff and faculty at SHSU. This is the second report in my tenure as SHSU faculty and staff ombuds. While the ombuds office is still relatively new at SHSU, it has built a solid foundation across the University by providing independent, confidential, informal, and impartial conflict engagement and management services.

The past year (*January 2023 to July 2024*) included continued efforts to communicate and integrate ombuds office services to faculty and staff on campus. Additionally, I continued with educational outreach and professional development activities. In 2022 I focused on building the ombuds office from the ground up, engaging in extensive professional development activities, making introductions with numerous campus offices and departments, meeting with campus partners, and otherwise preparing to begin meeting with visitors² from August 2022. In 2023 and 2024 (up to the month of July), I continued with those efforts. However, my top priority was providing ombuds services to visitors.

The ombuds office is a confidential, impartial, independent, and neutral resource that all faculty and staff members may access voluntarily and obtain assistance to address a wide range of issues. For many office visitors the ombuds office serves as their first stop to discuss issues, identify resources, seek information, and can lead to contact with other university office and resources.

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."

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 appreciate the support, and assistance that I have received from multiple offices on campus and the incredible members of SHSU community. I hope that our faculty, staff, and all members of SHSU community and those that I have met, see the value the faculty and staff ombuds office adds to SHSU.

I look forward to continuing to serve as your faculty and staff ombuds.

Respectfully Submitted,

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

January 2023 to July 2024 in a glance

Refined office infrastructure

- Maintained and updated website
- Updated secure, anonymous database
- Worked with vendor to establish secure database on cloud
- Curated informational and training material
- Keep updated with IOA Standards of Practice and Code of Ethics for the office

Professional Development

- Presented and attended Texas Association of Mediators-North Texas chapter
- Attended 18th annual IOA conference
- 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 College of Osteopathic Medicine faculty assembly
- DOSO and classroom management

Visitors

- 83 appointments in 2023 - faculty and staff
- 45 appointments in 2024 (July 2024) - faculty and staff

Note: In 2023 the ombuds was on FMLA leave in November and December

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.

The office was established upon recommendation of the SHSU Impact Planning Committee, and the Office of the Provost, with endorsement by the Office of the President. After a successful pilot year in 2022, the Provost's Office made a decision to continue to support the university ombuds office as a resource for staff and faculty at SHSU.

Location:

Academic Building III, Suite 245
1806 Avenue J,
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.

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 office promotes accountability and fair treatment of all members of the university community. 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 the 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](#) on the SHSU Ombuds Office webpage.

Activities and Accomplishments from January 2023³ to July 2024

Professional development: I engaged in educational and professional development activities to help me broaden and deepen my knowledge and skills needed for effective ombuds practice. These activities also assisted me in strengthening my internal and external networks to draw on in service to the ombuds role.

- Presented and attended a Q&A session organized by the North Texas chapter of Texas Association of Mediators
- Attended the 18th Annual International Ombuds Association (IOA) conference.
- Participated in the 2023 IOA Regional Advisory committee events.
- Attended IOA webinars (two in 2023 and two in 2024)
- Participated in an IOA workshop on group engagement, and facilitation.
- Participated in a two-day ombuds symposium.
- Participated in IOA community connections meetings, which are a series of meetings featuring topical discussions facilitated by members of the IOA Board of Directors
- Continued to strengthen my knowledge of the ombuds profession through self-learning, engaging in virtual meetings and discussion boards hosted by the IOA and discussion with other ombuds.
- Attended mentoring meetings with an ombuds mentor provided by IOA.

Refining the ombuds office infrastructure:

- Updated the SHSU ombuds webpage.
- Refined the secure database for collecting anonymized data for purposes of the annual report.
- Reached out to connect with vendors that provide confidential databases for ombuds practice to narrow down to one vendor.
- Worked with the vendor to get a quote and install a confidential database for SHSU ombuds office.

³ In 2023 the ombuds was on FMLA leave in November and December

- Continued to work to keep my ombuds and faculty positions separate.
- Curated educational material and training material related to conflict management, conflict resolution, teamwork etc. for the ombuds webpage.

Outreach: In 2023, I continued efforts to communicate and integrate ombuds office services to faculty and staff on campus.

- Presented about the ombuds office resource at faculty assembly for the College of Osteopathic Medicine.
- Worked with the Dean of Student's Office on classroom management and behavioral intervention.

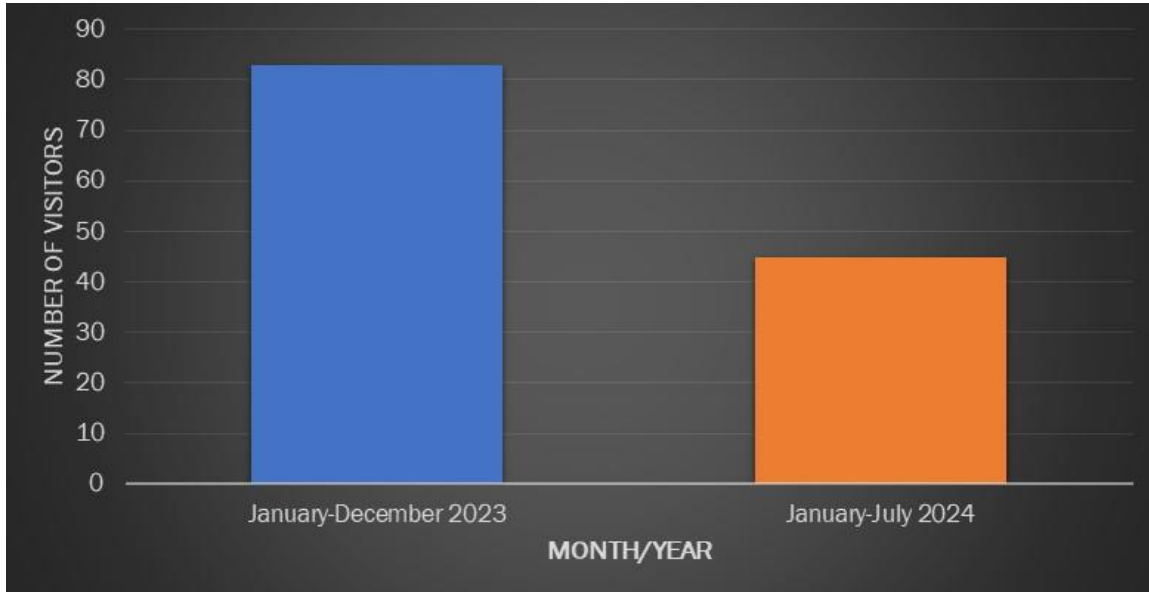
Assisting visitors: The past year my top priority was providing ombuds services to visitors. The primary role of an ombuds is to assist those who reach out to seek services. My efforts to develop necessary knowledge and skills were important for helping visitors who reached out to the ombuds office. The efforts also prepared me to serve visitors in accordance with the IOA Standards of Practice and Code of Ethics.

Use of the Ombuds Office is completely voluntary and all SHSU faculty and staff members have the right to consult with the university ombuds without fear of retaliation.

Data in this report is presented in aggregate form to protect confidentiality.

Visitor Summary

Number of visitors: A total of 128⁴ visitors have sought services of the ombuds office (83 in 2023 and 45 in 2024 so far). A few faculty and staff members sought services a second time for ongoing concerns or for new issues. In 124 cases a single visitor sought services whereas in three cases a pair of two visitors sought services and in one case three visitors were involved. Of the 128 visitors, 65 were faculty and 63 were staff members.

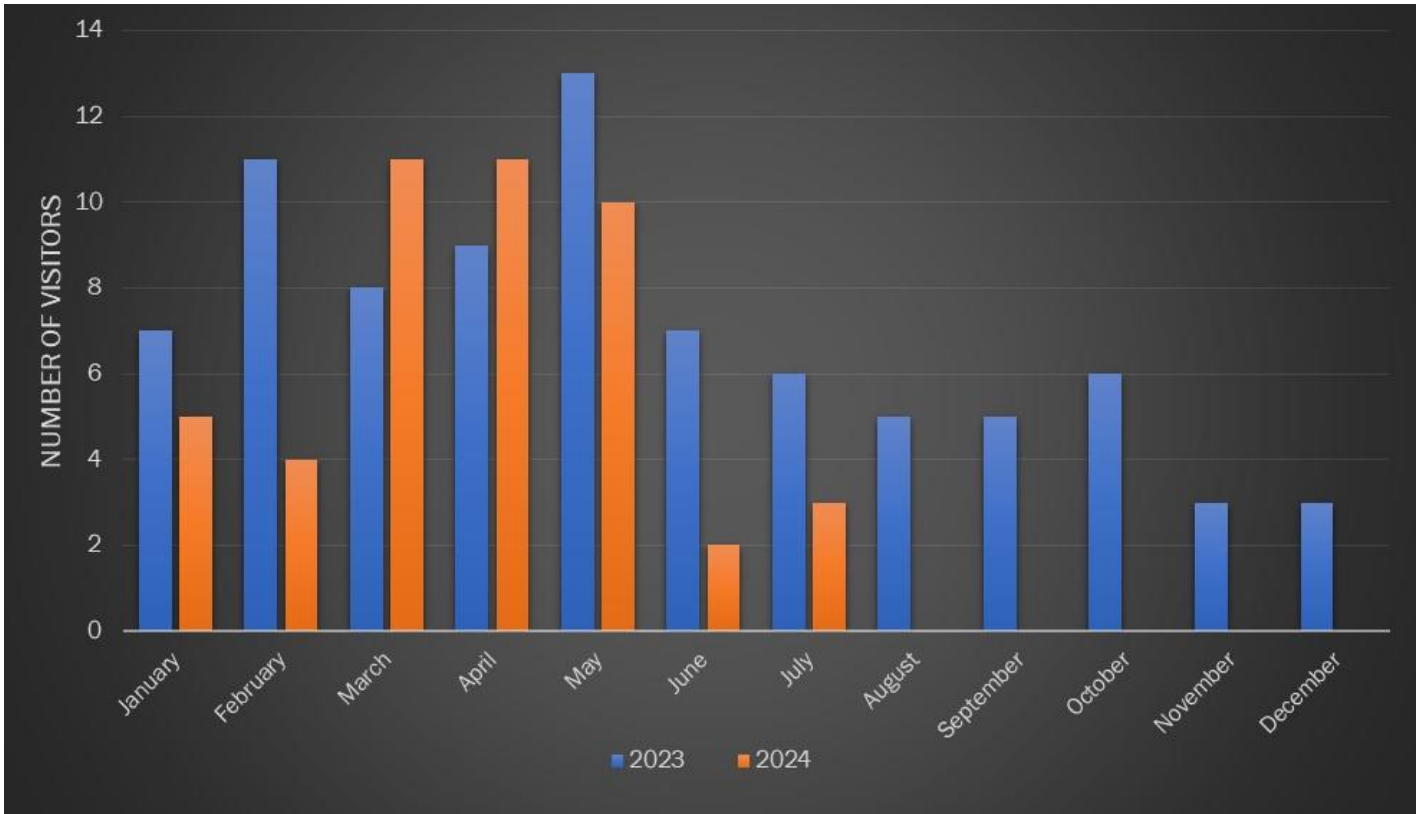


No two appointments are same. Appointments lasted anywhere from 45 minutes to 225 minutes. Appointments lasted for varying duration depending on the issues and concerns being raised, complexity of the situation, context, and to ensure that a visitor had an opportunity to be heard. The average time spent on 128 appointments was approximately 72 minutes.

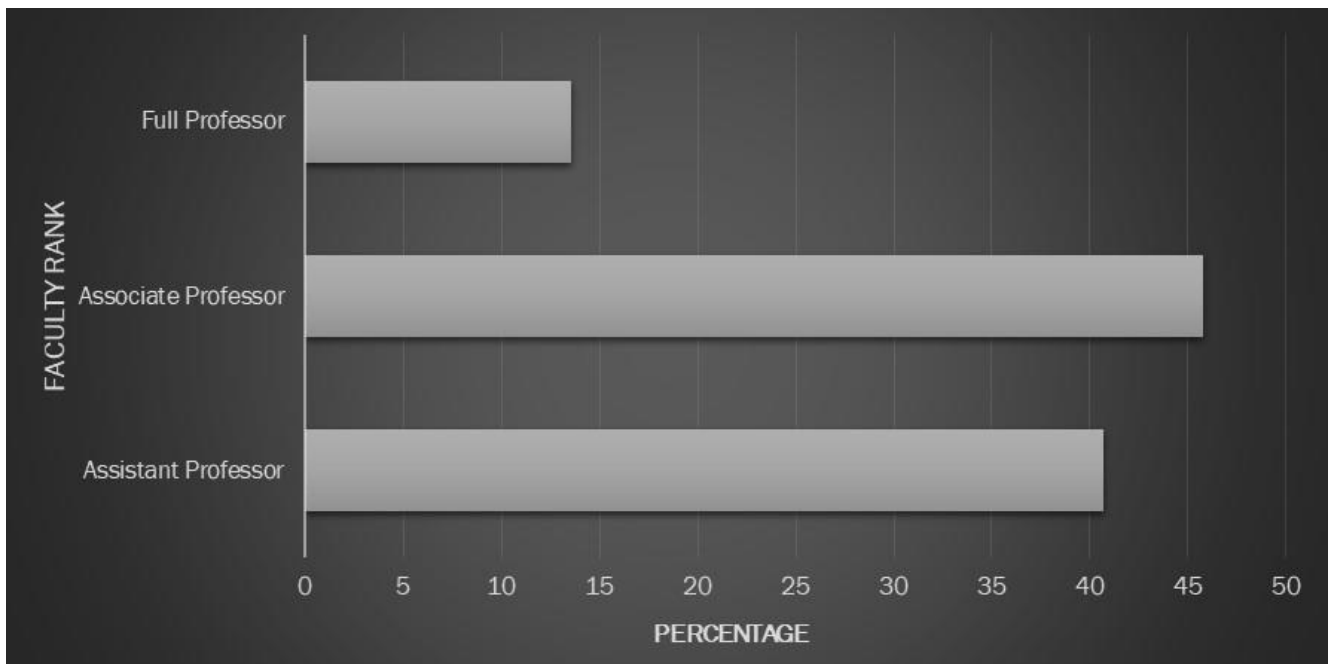
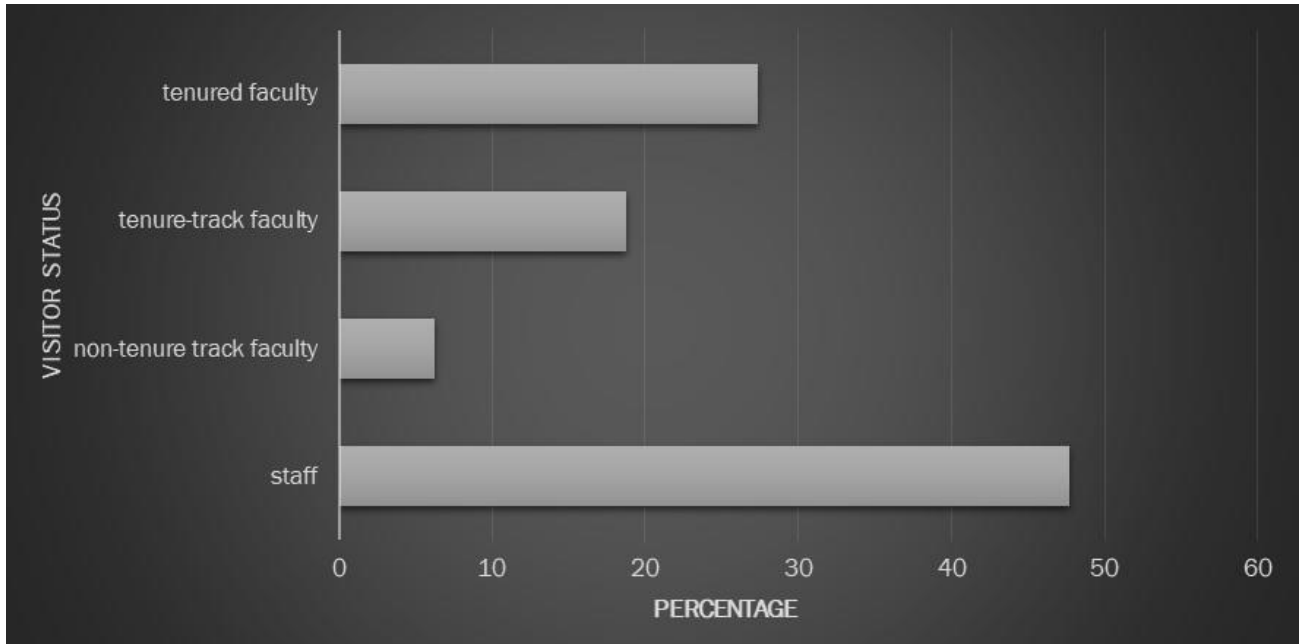
Number of appointments varied by month as shown in the chart below.⁵

⁴ This includes visitor data from January 2023 to July 20, 2024. In 2023 the ombuds was on FMLA leave in November and December

⁵ Ombuds was on FMLA leave in November and December 2023.



Visitor status: Visitors who sought services of the ombuds office represent a mix of tenured, and tenure track faculty members at assistant, associate, and full professor ranks, non-tenure track faculty members as well as staff members.



Referrals

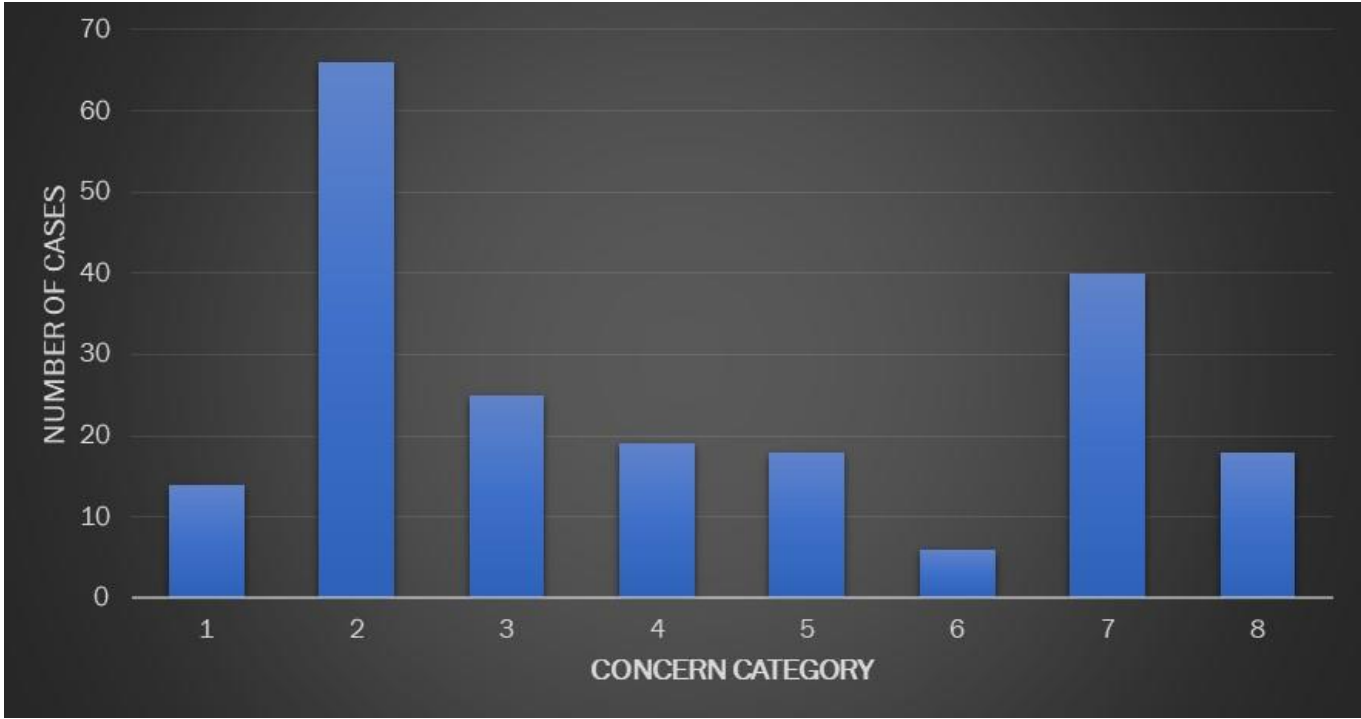
Visitors became aware of the ombuds office through a variety of sources. Visitors who shared how they heard about the ombuds office reported hearing about the resource from a colleague or a friend, from a non-peer faculty or staff member, faculty or staff mentor, supervisor, Human Resources office, Academic College Dean's office and other campus offices. Some were referred to the ombuds office by the human resources office or their immediate supervisor. Some learned about the ombuds office from reading the brochure or visiting the ombuds webpage. Some shared knowing about this resource from ombuds presentation made during the 2022 new faculty investment or the staff senate presentation.

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, Academic Dean's office, Professional and Academic Center for Excellence (PACE), Office of Research and Sponsored Programs (ORSP), Human Resources office, etc.

Summary of concerns raised.

Faculty and staff members may reach out to the ombuds office with any questions or concerns related to their work life at SHSU. During the appointment other related problems and underlying concerns and issues arise and are discussed.

All issues and concerns that were raised with the ombuds office from January 2023 to July 2024 have been grouped into eight categories based on the [IOA's Uniform Reporting Categories](#). The table following the chart below provides a summary of issues and concerns raised by faculty and staff members who used the services of the ombuds office. Issues and concerns have been categorized based on the perspectives of visitors who sought the services of the ombuds office. The chart below depicts the frequency with which concerns were raised in those eight categories.



	<u>Concerns</u>	<u>Issues raised</u>
1.	Compensation and Benefits	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Workload ○ Compensation ○ Benefits
2.	Evaluative Relationship (<i>Department chair, assistant/associate chair, Dean, and unit managed, Director, supervisor, and employee relations</i>)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ 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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ 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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ 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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Lack of or insufficient due process ○ Harassment ○ Discrimination ○ Violation reporting
6.	Safety, Health and Physical Environment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Work related stress ○ Work life balance
7.	Administrative Issues	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Quality of services ○ Administrative decision ○ Policy clarity ○ Policy implementation ○ Behavior of administrative staff
8.	Values, ethics, and standards	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Standards of conduct – fairness, applicability, or lack of behavioral guidelines ○ Values and culture