2024-25 REPORT

FACULTY OMBUDS

WEST CHESTER UNIVERSITY

WCU's Ombudsperson Office was established in March of 2020, having been advocated for by our Faculty Senate, supported by upper administration, and approved of by our faculty union, APSCUF.

WCU has been very fortunate to have Dr. Joan Woolfrey as the inaugural Faculty Ombuds since 2020, with Dr. Vicki McGinley serving as alternate Ombuds during this time. However, since Dr. Woolfrey and Dr. McGinley both retired at the end of the 2024-2025 school year, a search was conducted for their replacements in Fall 2024. Dr. Bessie Lee Lawton was appointed as incoming Faculty Ombuds and Dr. Linda Stevenson will be the alternate beginning summer of 2025. Drs. Lawton and Stevenson started training with the International Ombuds Association in Spring 2025 and attended the annual conference in April.

The Ombuds office works collaboratively with many different entities at WCU. First, a special thank you goes to our administration, especially Executive Vice-President and Provost Jeffery Osgood, for the support and openness they provide. Much appreciation also goes to our shared governance leaders APSCUF President Margaret Ervin, Faculty Senate President Israel Sanz-Sanchez, Council of Chairs Chair Kyle Kelly, as well as Associate Provost for Learning and Teaching Innovation Dr. H. Naomie Nyanungo and Faculty Associate for Teaching and Learning Janneken Smucker. We have sought the assistance of many other groups and individuals on campus such as the college Deans, Student Ombuds Lisa Montgomery, Multicultural Faculty Commission, Office of Equal Opportunity and Compliance, and Human Resources. To be sure, the success of the Ombuds office relies on continued collaboration across many campus offices, and we thank all of them for their support in working toward our common goal of helping everyone feel valued on campus.

In this report, we will briefly review the Standards of Practice of the International Ombuds Association and then present anonymized data summarizing the work done by the office in the 2024-25 academic year.

STANDARDS OF PRACTICE

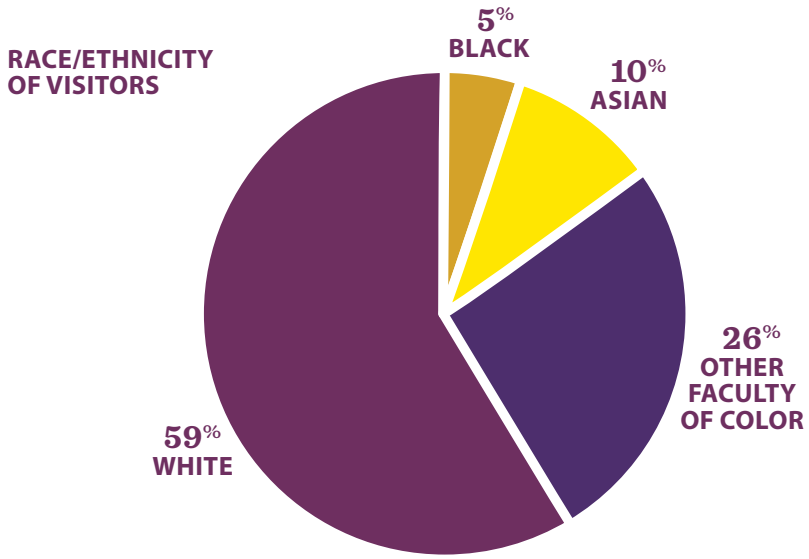
The Faculty Ombuds is guided by four Standards of Practice:

INDEPENDENT: The Faculty Ombuds is independent in structure, function, and appearance to the highest degree possible within the university.

INFORMAL: The Faculty Ombuds, as an informal resource, does not participate in any formal adjudicative or administrative procedure related to those seeking assistance. The Faculty Ombuds has no administrative decision-making power.

IMPARTIAL: The Faculty Ombuds, as a designated neutral, remains unaligned and impartial. The Faculty Ombuds does not engage in any situation which could create a conflict of interest.

CONFIDENTIAL: The Faculty Ombuds holds all communications with those seeking assistance in strict confidence and does not disclose confidential communications unless given permission to do so. The only exception to this privilege of confidentiality is where there appears to be imminent risk of serious harm or incidents of sexual misconduct covered by Title-IX.



VISITORS

From Summer 2024 to April 2025, 75 visitors worked with the Ombuds office, totaling 93 hours of direct meetings with visitors and many more hours of related tasks such as consulting with various offices on campus regarding policies and procedures, data-gathering, and referrals to other campus entities. The Faculty Ombuds responded to phone calls and email requests, participated in one-on-one Zoom meetings, and responded to consultation requests from faculty, staff, and students (and their parents) for information. (By virtue of our presence on the university website the Faculty Ombuds receives calls from various nonfaculty sources which are often referred to the appropriate office.)

Visitors ranged from various ranks of regular tenure-track faculty to adjuncts. Anonymized data above shows the breakdown of the visitors by race/ethnicity. About 40% of visitors were faculty of color, which is greater than the proportion of this population among WCU faculty overall.

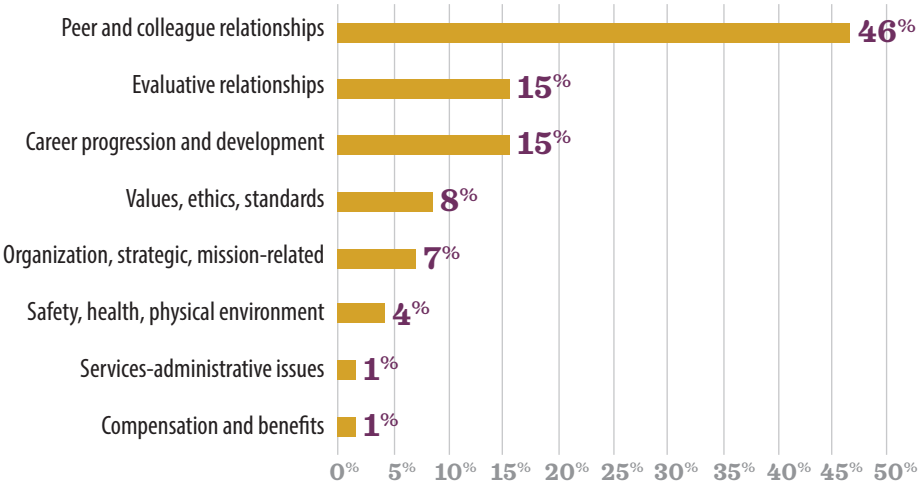
UNIFORM REPORTING CATEGORIES

The International Ombudsman Association **(IOA) has developed IOA Uniform Data Reporting Categories** – a set of categories and subcategories under which questions, concerns, issues, or inquiries can be tracked. This information is then used to classify the issues for which faculty members use the Faculty Ombuds services, identify trends in requests for services and develop professional development needs.

The questions, concerns, issues, or inquiries counted are those for which the Faculty Ombuds provides information related to the various uniform reporting categories or for which options are explored.

The top reporting categories are shown in the chart below:

PERCENT PER REPORTING CATAGORY



Peer and colleague relationships made up almost half of visits (46%) to the Ombuds office. These refer to situations involving peers or colleagues who do not have a supervisory–employee or student–professor relationship (e.g., two faculty members within the same department). Specific concerns this year revolved around interpersonal conflict, lack of trust/respect, communication, and departmental climate.

Evaluative relationships (15%) and ***Career progression and development*** (15%) were the next two categories. ***Evaluative relationships*** refer to issues or inquiries arising between people in evaluative relationships (i.e. supervisor-employee, faculty-student). In this category, faculty raised concerns about interpersonal conflict, discrimination, scheduling, and lack of respect/trust. ***Career progression and development*** involve concerns about administrative processes and decisions regarding entering and leaving a job or what it entails, (i.e., recruitment, nature and place of assignment, tenure/promotion, job security, and separation.)

Other categories were ***Values, ethics, and standards*** (8%), ***Organization, strategic, or mission-related*** (7%), ***Safety, health, and physical environment*** (4%), ***Services-administrative issues*** (1%), and ***Compensation and benefits*** (1%).

PROGRAMMING OUTREACH AND CO-SPONSORED EVENTS

One of the roles an Ombuds plays at an institution is to anonymously share concerns brought to the office with leaders of the university. Ombuds also take part in programming events that could help address those concerns. This year, programming revolved around three issues: the experience of faculty of color, departmental procedures, and interpersonal communication. In the spirit of creating connections and contributing to improving community culture, the Faculty Ombuds office worked collaboratively with several offices on campus to co-sponsor the following events:

1. **A co-sponsored worksho**p on Constructive Dialogue with the Teaching and Learning Center in the summer of 2024;
2. **Two networking sessions** in the Spring of 2025 co-sponsored by the Multicultural Faculty Commission to encourage communication among faculty of color;
3. **A session on *Allyship is Leadership*** with the Teaching and Learning Center and the Multicultural Faculty Commission; and
4. **A co-sponsored panel** with the Council of Chairs where Chairs and Assistant Chairs could get advice on practical questions they raised in a survey.

Looking ahead, the Faculty Ombuds looks forward to hearing faculty concerns, helping identify opportunities for change, and letting the issues and concerns faculty bring to the office guide the future projects the Faculty Ombuds Office will help to organize.