

2025-26 REPORT

FACULTY OMBUDS

WEST CHESTER UNIVERSITY





WCU’s Faculty Ombuds 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.

Dr. Bessie Lee Lawton (Communication and Media) was appointed as Faculty Ombuds in Spring 2025 and Dr. Linda Stevenson (Political Science) has been the alternate beginning summer of 2025.

The Ombuds office works collaboratively with many different entities at WCU. First, a special thank you goes to our administration, and especially Acting Provost Dr. Josh Auld, for the continued support they provide to the office. Much appreciation also goes to our shared governance leaders APSCUF President Dr. Chris Stangl, Faculty Senate President Dr. Kurt Kolasinski, Council of Chairs Chair Dr. Cassie Striblen, as well as Associate Provost for Learning and Teaching Innovation Dr. H. Naomie Nyanungo. We have sought the assistance of many other groups and individuals on campus such as the college Deans, Multicultural Faculty Commission, APSCUF-BIPOC Faculty Alliance, 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, present anonymized data summarizing the work done by the office in the 2025-26 academic year, and summarize results of a survey to elicit feedback.

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.

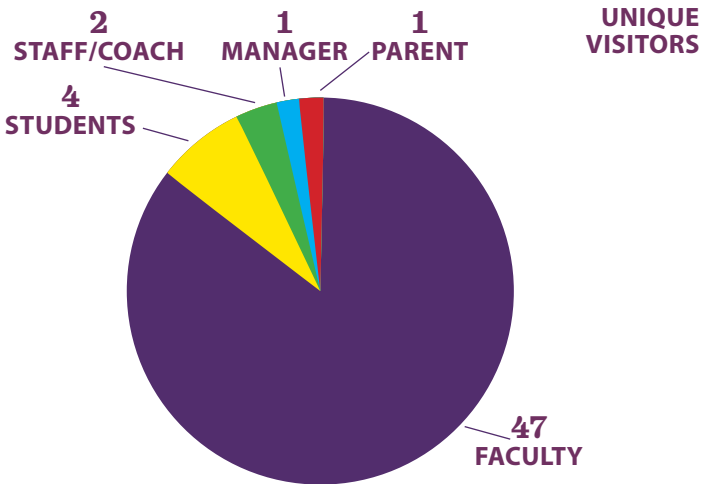
INFORMAL: The Faculty Ombuds, as an informal resource, does not participate in any formal adjudicative or administrative procedure related to those seeking assistance. The Faculty Ombuds has no administrative decision-making power.

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.

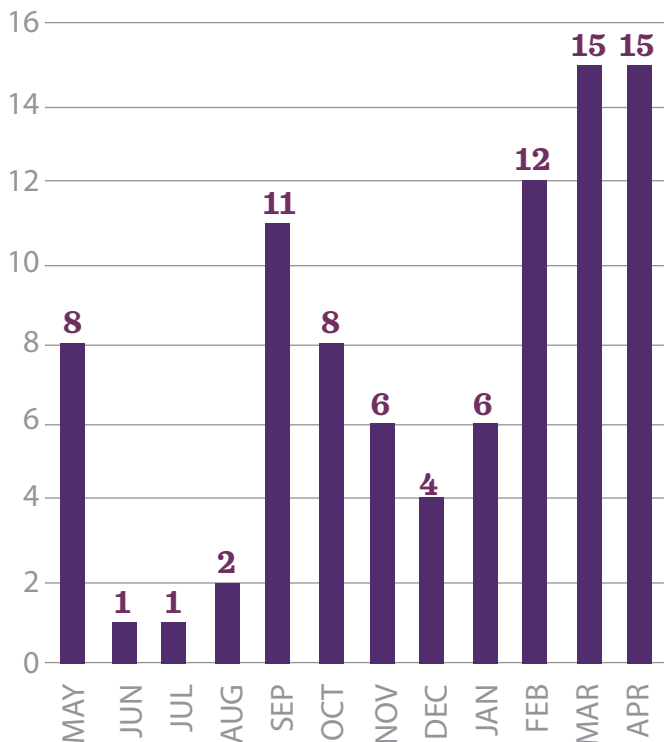
VISITORS

From May 2025 to April 2026, the Ombuds office had 89 visits, representing 55 unique individuals. Sessions ranged from 15 minutes to 2.5 hours. 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 requests from various nonfaculty sources. We meet with and refer them to the appropriate office if deemed necessary.)

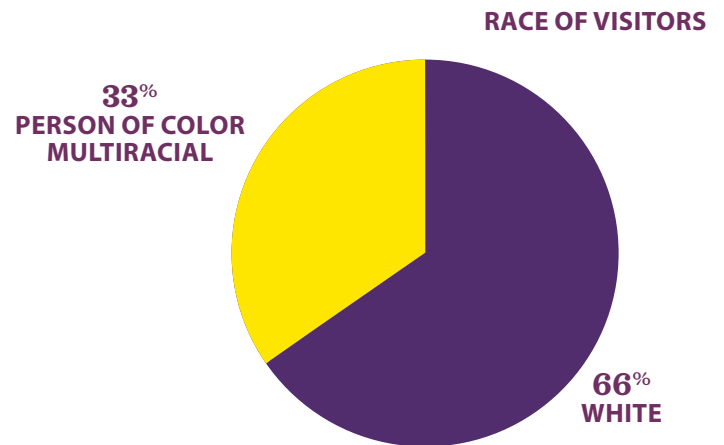


This graph shows the number of visitors each month. For 2025-2026, spring was a busier semester, although early fall also saw a peak in terms of visit requests.

VISITORS BY MONTH (TOTAL 89)

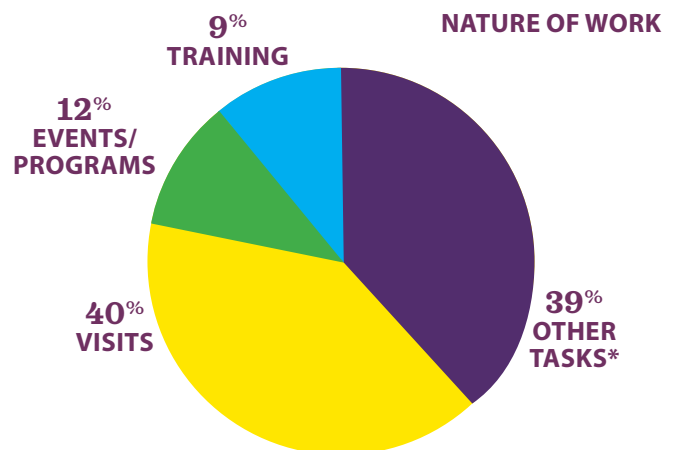


Visitors ranged from various ranks of regular tenure-track faculty to adjuncts. Anonymized data on this pie chart shows the breakdown of the visitors by race/ethnicity. About 33% of visitors were faculty of color/multiracial, which is greater than the proportion of this population among WCU faculty overall.



NATURE OF WORK

About 80% of the work involved visits and related tasks such as consulting with various offices on campus regarding policies and procedures, research, data-gathering, referrals to other campus entities, networking, shuttle diplomacy, and facilitated conversations. The Faculty Ombuds has also been appointed Tri-Chair of Standard II (Ethics and Integrity) of the upcoming Middle States Self-Study Workgroup. Another 12% of the time was spent on programming. Since part of the role of the Faculty Ombuds is to share patterns of concern with administration and to recommend policies/co-sponsor programs to address them, the office sponsored several events, which are discussed later in this report. Finally, the rest of the time was spent for professional development, generally through continued training with the International Ombuds Association.



*Includes meetings, emails, shuttle diplomacy, research, consultations with administration/HR/A{SCIUF/other offices, reporting, networking, Middle States

UNIFORM REPORTING CATEGORIES

The International Ombuds 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:

Evaluative relationships made up the biggest portion of visits (38%) to the Ombuds office, followed by *Peer and colleague relationships* (20%). *Evaluative relationships* refer to issues or inquiries arising between people in non-parallel relationships (e.g., chair-faculty, supervisor-employee, faculty-student). *Peer and colleague relationships* 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 interpersonal concerns that spanned both these relationship categories revolved around respect, treatment, bullying, communication, retaliation, harassment, violence, feedback, support, evaluation, trust, assignments/schedules, equity of treatment, departmental climate, and lack of faculty consultation.

Values, ethics, and standards (13%) was the third category. These included issues related to academic honesty, code of conduct, conflict of interest, and absence of rules/policy.

Safety, health, and physical environment (9%) covered concerns about work-life balance, psychological safety/mental health, and physical safety.

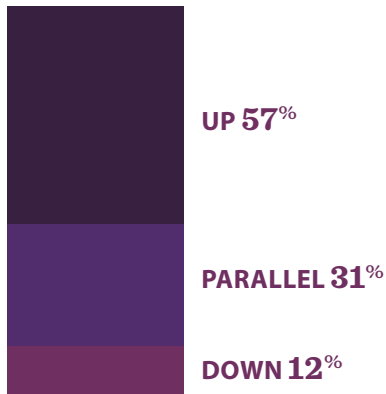
This was followed by *Career progression and development* (7%), involving concerns about administrative processes and decisions regarding entering and leaving a job or what it entails, (i.e., recruitment, nature and place of assignment, tenure/promotion, job security, and separation.)

Other categories raised by 5% or less were *Services-administrative issues* (5%), *Legal, regulatory, and financial compliance* (4%), *Compensation and benefits* (2%), and *Organizational, strategic, mission-related issues* (1%).

NUMBER PER REPORTING CATEGORY (MULTIPLE RESPONSE)



It can be illuminating to see the direction of concern, whether these were mostly directed upward (faculty concerns about managers/supervisors), downward (faculty concerns about students or supervisor concerns about faculty), or parallel (faculty versus another colleague). The bar graph below shows the breakdown of these directions.



PROGRAMMING OUTREACH AND GO-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: conflict communication and management, university policies/processes, and preparing incoming Chairs and Assistant Chairs for their roles as leaders in their departments. 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 workshop co-sponsored with Faculty Senate and the Teaching and Learning Center entitled ***Boundaries and Conflict in the Workplace and Classroom***

was held in Fall 2025. Two speakers, Dr. Lindsey Mosvick (Director of the Center for Women and Gender Equity) and Dr. Bree Gould (Assistant Professor of Counseling and Professional Services) facilitated a workshop attended by 23 faculty members.

2. A Fall 2025 workshop co-sponsored with APSCUF entitled ***Grievances and Complaints: Understanding the Processes and the Different Institutional Bodies Involved*** had APSCUF President Dr. Chris Stangl, APSCUF Past Grievance Chair Dr. Seth Kahn, Senior Vice-President and Chief Human Resources Officer William Helzlsouer, and Director of Equal Opportunity and Compliance Dr. Tashell Jenkins as panelists. It was attended by 22 faculty members.

3. A session on ***Boundaries and Conflict in the Workplace and Classroom: What Could you do in Specific Situations?***, co-sponsored with Faculty Senate and APSCUF-BIPOC Faculty Alliance in Spring 2026, was attended by 15 participants. Dr. Mosvick and Dr. Gould continued their fall session by workshopping specific scenarios with faculty members.

4. A ***Chair Success Academy*** is being planned for Summer 2026, to prepare incoming Chairs and Assistant Chairs on not just their upcoming administrative tasks but also to share information on constructive and conflict communication, interpersonal relationships, and strategic planning. Co-Sponsors of this Academy are the Council of Chairs, Teaching and Learning Center, and APSCUF.

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.





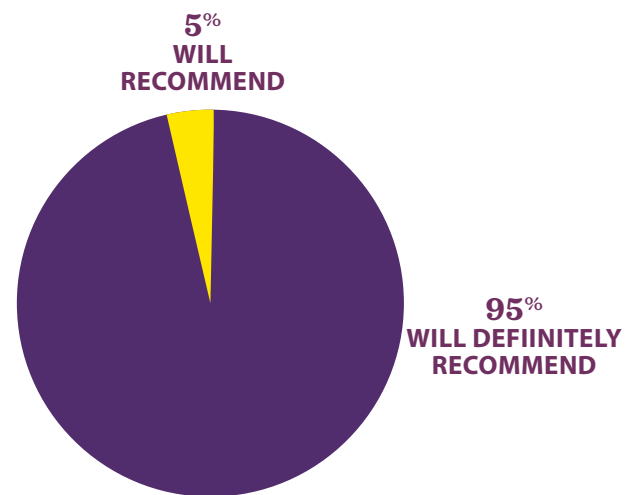
SEEKING FEEDBACK

The Faculty Ombuds office sent out an anonymous survey to faculty who visited the office in 2025-2026. The survey was sent to 40 participants, since some faculty were on leave, and more faculty had visited the office after the survey was sent out. Half responded, and a summary of results from the 20 responses received are presented in this section.

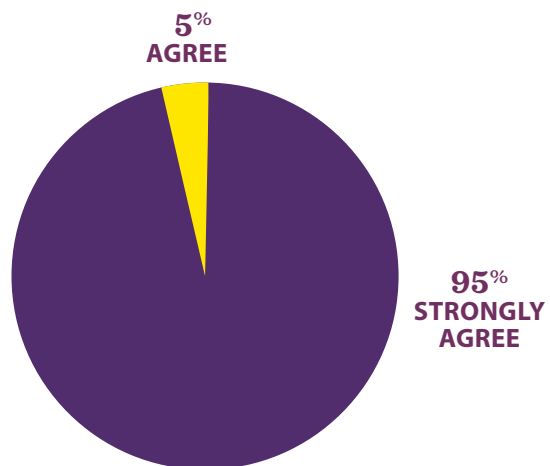
The survey asked three evaluative questions and an open-ended question that allowed respondents to share whatever they wanted to express regarding their Ombuds experience.

Respondents stated that they would overwhelmingly recommend the office to other faculty members, and that they felt the office was a safe space to discuss their concerns.

WILL YOU RECOMMEND THE OMBUDS' OFFICE TO OTHER FACULTY?



DO YOU FEEL THE OMBUDS' OFFICE WAS A SAFE SPACE TO DISCUSS YOUR CONCERNS?



Open-ended responses underscore one role of the Faculty Ombuds office, which is to assist faculty in knowing (and finding out as needed) what WCU policies and processes are. To illustrate, here is a quote from a faculty member.

“...possesses deep institutional knowledge and is able to help faculty effectively navigate WCU. I would likely have left WCU already. Realistically, I would have tried to consult other faculty but had limited options.”

Another question asked whether respondents felt they had options to help address their concerns after their visit. Almost all (90%) strongly agreed/agreed. The graph below makes sense because not all situations have options

for addressing the concern directly, or there might not be options that faculty are willing to take at that point in time.

A few other quotes remind us that the Faculty Ombuds serves as a **pressure release valve**, where faculty can vent their frustrations, even if there might not be a solution to their concern. The office is also a venue that allows faculty to open up instead of remain silent, helping to foster a **Speak Up Culture** with a guarantee of confidentiality and neutrality.

“Having an understanding, reasonable, outside perspective to help de-escalate situations, allowing me to remove myself from the tension and have a non-partisan person guide the discussion between colleagues”

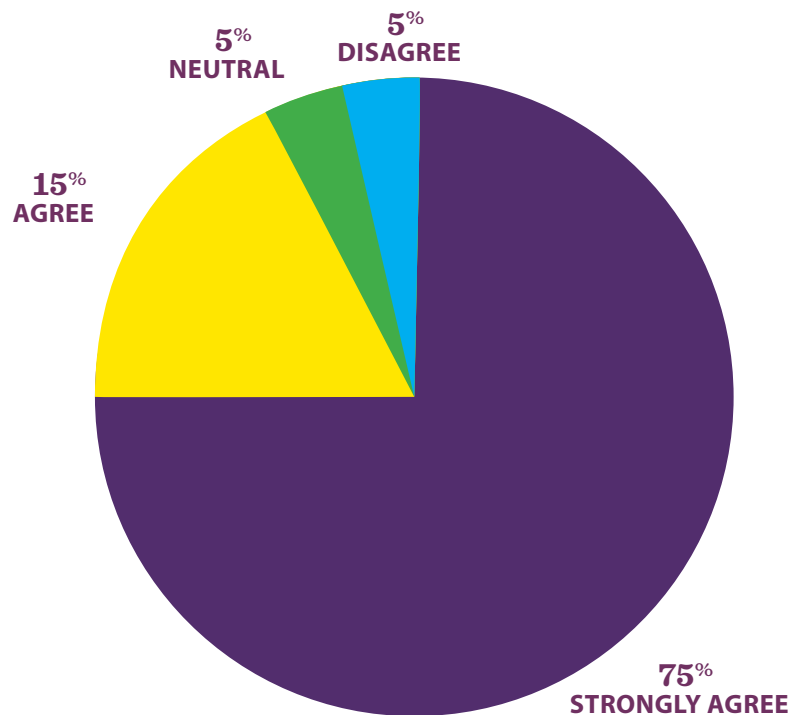
“When I just needed to bounce ideas off someone confidentially, this was a very valuable service. Even if the outcome was not to take any action, the process was incredibly helpful.”

“It felt a little bit like therapy!”

Overall, the feedback provided was positive, and the Faculty Ombuds office will strive to continue serving faculty using the standards of practice of the profession. It has been a real privilege to serve faculty (and a few other constituencies) this academic year, and I am most grateful to all the visitors for their willingness to share their concerns and for placing their trust in me. I look forward to a productive 2026-2027!

Bessie Lawton

DO YOU FEEL YOU HAD OPTIONS TO HELP ADDRESS YOUR CONCERNS AFTER YOUR VISIT?





Dr. Bessie Lee Lawton
Faculty Ombuds



Dr. Linda Stevenson
Alternate