



UNLV | OMBUDS
OFFICE

2024 Annual Report

Prepared by: Brie Starks



For more information:
<https://www.unlv.edu/ombuds>



UNLV | OMBUDS OFFICE



This is the fourth annual report from UNLV's Ombuds Office, summarizing the activities of the University of Nevada, Las Vegas's Ombuds Office during calendar 2024.

This report provides a measure of transparency for an office whose work is confidential by providing an in-depth analysis of visitor trends and a comprehensive overview of concerns discussed and various activities aimed at promoting informal conflict resolution undertaken by the Ombuds Office throughout year.

Through the Ombuds Office, faculty, staff, students, and other members of the UNLV community can explore their options and discuss strategies in one-on-one consultations. Groups can use the Ombuds and members of the mediation practice to facilitate discussions. Units can bring the Ombuds Office in to run interactive workshops on a variety of conflict and communications topics. And the Ombuds can listen to concerns and relay systemic and structural issues to campus leadership.

These different functions are united by a single goal: to help all members of the UNLV community to be happier here, and to support that community being as equitable and welcoming an environment as it can.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

THE OMBUDS OFFICE	4
FROM THE OMBUDS	5
THE OMBUDS OFFICE TEAM	6
VISITOR DEMOGRAPHICS	7
CONCERNS BROUGHT: TRENDS	8
CONCERNS: JAN-JUNE	9
CONCERNS: JULY-DEC	10
TOP CASES BY MONTH	11
TRENDS OVER THE YEAR	12
PROGRAMMING	13
MEDIATION PRACTICE	14
OMBUDS OUTREACH	15
LOOKING AHEAD	16
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS	17

ABOUT THE OMBUDS OFFICE

Reconstituted by President Keith E. Whitfield effective June 1, 2021, the Ombuds Office operates in accordance with the Code of Ethics and Standards of Practice of the International Ombuds Association (IOA), a member-led professional association that supports the work of organizational ombuds.

Independence

The Ombuds is independent in structure, function, and appearance to the highest degree possible within the organization.

Neutrality and Impartiality

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

Confidentiality

The Ombuds holds all communications with those seeking assistance in strict confidence. The chief exception to this privilege of confidentiality is where there appears to be an imminent risk of serious harm.

Informality

The Ombuds, as an informal resource, does not participate in any formal adjudicative or administrative procedure related to concerns brought to his/her attention.

Our office seeks to promote the well-being and productivity of UNLV's diverse constituents. The office serves all UNLV including full-time and part-time, classified staff, administrative faculty, academic faculty, executive administrative faculty, and graduate and undergraduate students.

At the Ombuds Office, visitors can discuss their concerns with a neutral and independent party hears their concerns while their privacy is protected by confidentiality.

Why Standards?

IOA standards, reflected in the Ombuds Office Charter, define the Ombuds role. As a neutral, impartial party, the Ombuds does not advocate for individuals or determine right or wrong in a conflict. This means that anyone can use the Ombuds Office, whether or not another party to their issue has previously used it.

Confidentiality ensures that those who use the office do so without fear that others will learn about their concerns. Due to the office's confidentiality, the Ombuds does not accept notice on behalf of the university.

The informality of the office makes it possible to raise concerns without starting a formal investigative or administrative process, which is ideal for employees who are unsure how to proceed and are more comfortable exploring options before initiating any course of action. As the Ombuds only acts informally, he cannot overrule the decisions of others at UNLV or create, eliminate, or alter policies or regulations adopted at any level.

The office's independence guarantees that those who use it get the office's full attention, and that options are discussed without preference for or against any institutional power.

FROM THE OMBUDS

The past year has been one of growth and resilience at UNLV and the Ombuds Office. As our campus recovered from the tragedy of December 6, 2023, the Ombuds Office offered increased support to all elements of the university community.

This report is an opportunity for me to reflect on how the Ombuds Office has served UNLV throughout 2024. The numbers say that we reached more people than ever before, with a 30 percent increase in visitor contacts and more than double the amount of workshops conducted than in any previous year. And my heart tells me that, through collective grief and individual challenges, this office was open and serving the campus community.

UNLV's Ombuds Office is operated in accordance with the International Ombuds Association's Code of Ethics and Standards of Practice. This entails embodying the fundamental principles of **independence** in structure and function; **impartiality**; **informality**, not participating in any disciplinary or legal processes; and **confidentiality**.

I remain proud of the work that this office does, eager to make it better, and committed to providing a place for anyone who feels like they have nowhere to go or no one to talk to. Conflict seems to be part of human nature, and it might not be realistic to think that it will disappear. So the question is, where can you go when you have a conflict at UNLV? As a zero-barrier office that protects the confidentiality of those who visit it, the Ombuds Office is often an ideal "first stop" for those who are experiencing a conflict as they assess how they wish to address it. Open to all and making no judgments, the office is a truly safe space for all who would like to explore their options. If you have any questions, do not hesitate to contact us.

Sincerely,
David G. Schwartz, Ph.D., CO-OP
Ombuds
University of Nevada, Las Vegas



THE OMBUDS TEAM



**David G. Schwartz, Ph.D., CO-OP
Ombuds**

David G. Schwartz, Ph.D., has served as a faculty member at UNLV since 2001, earning tenure in 2006 and promotion to full professor in 2013.

Before starting work as Ombuds, Dr. Schwartz studied the histories of gambling and Las Vegas, a field that he continues to publish in.

As Ombuds, Dr. Schwartz directs the office that serves UNLV's 10,000 academic, administrative, classified, temporary, student, and part-time employees, as well as the larger community of UNLV undergraduate, graduate, and professional students. The office provides a forum for all employees to confidentially discuss matters that concern them, and to receive training and coaching in conflict resolution techniques and strategies, as well as hosting a mediation practice. Dr. Schwartz also oversees the office's programming, including remote and in-person seminars and workshops.

Dr. Schwartz is a Certified Organizational Ombuds Practitioner (CO-OP), administered by the International Ombuds Association. Those with CO-OP credentials are recognized for their understanding of ombuds practice and their adherence to the IOA's Standards of Practice and Code of Ethics.



**Brie M. Starks, J.D., M.S.W.
Assistant Ombuds/Program Manager**

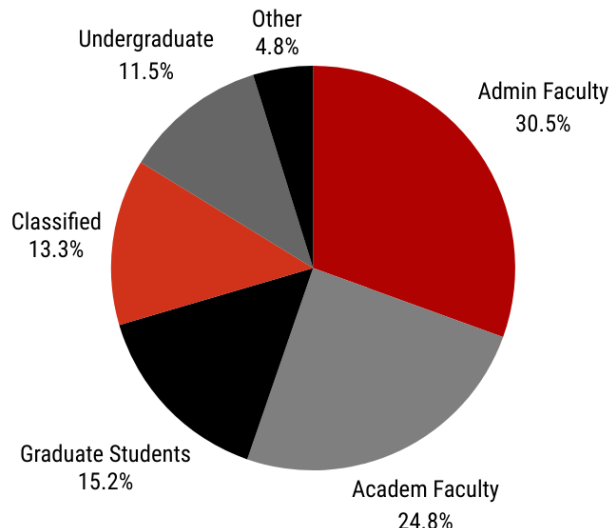
Brie M. Starks, J.D., M.S.W. (she/they) is an accomplished alternative dispute resolution specialist, community advocate, and legal professional.

As the Assistant Ombuds/Program Manager at UNLV, Brie plays a critical role in supporting the Ombuds Office's mission of serving the diverse campus community. Her responsibilities include managing daily operational tasks, coordinating business and fiscal operations, and developing workshops and outreach services for faculty, staff, and students. She will meet with individual visitors and groups, help develop skill-building presentations, and support the office's strategic goals while adhering to the International Ombuds Association's Standards of Practice and Code of Ethics.

Brie has completed specialized certifications, including an Alternative Dispute Resolution Certificate and a Certificate of Mediation. As a dedicated advocate to fair practices, she has designed high-impact training programs, conducted in-depth policy research, and facilitated conversations that drive meaningful social change.

OVERALL VISITOR DEMOGRAPHICS

Individual Consultations: Over the course of the year, the office had 913 contacts, spanning the following groups

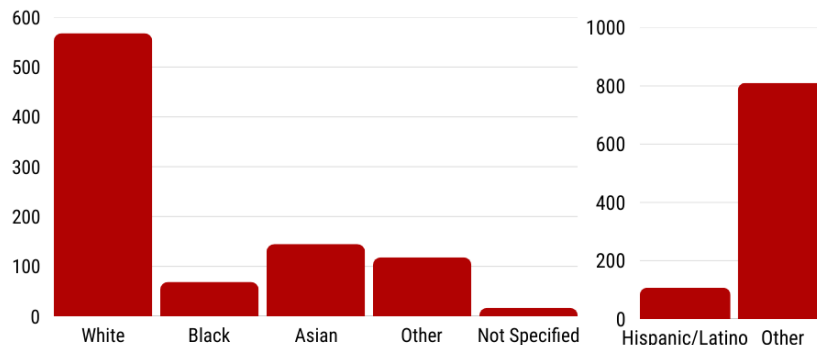


Performance by Visitor Type

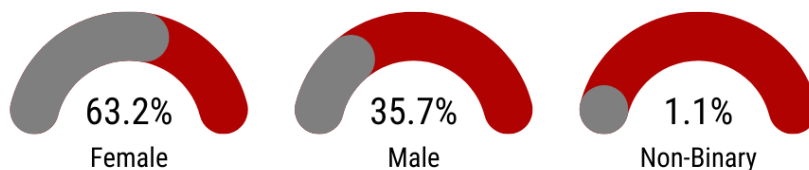
Administrative Faculty:	30.5%
Academic Faculty:	24.8%
Graduate/Professional Students:	15.2%
Classified Staff:	13.3%
Undergraduate Students:	11.5%
Other (Admin/Acad Leader, Parent, Community):	4.8%

Preformance by Visitor Racial/Ethnic Identity

White:	61.0%
Black:	7.5%
Asian:	15.8%
Other:	12.9%
N/A:	1.9%
Hispanic/ Latino:	11.7% (Y)
	88.3% (N)



Gender Identities



CONCERNS BROUGHT: TRENDS

Following IOA's best practices, the Ombuds logs those concerns using the IOA Uniform Reporting Categories (URC). The URCs reflect concerns typically brought to ombuds offices around the world. These issues are classified under nine main categories.

COMPENSATION & BENEFITS

Questions, concerns, issues or inquiries about the equity, appropriateness and competitiveness of employee compensation, benefits and other benefit programs.

EVALUATIVE RELATIONSHIPS

Questions, concerns, issues or inquiries arising between people in evaluative relationships (i.e. supervisor-employee, faculty-student.)

PEER AND COLLEAGUE RELATIONSHIPS

Questions, concerns, issues or inquiries involving peers or colleagues who do not have a supervisory-employee or student-professor relationship

CAREER PROGRESSION AND DEVELOPMENT

Questions, concerns, issues or inquiries about administrative processes and decisions regarding entering and leaving a job

VALUES, ETHICS, AND STANDARDS

Questions, concerns, issues or inquiries about the fairness of organizational values, ethics, and/or standards

LEGAL, REGULATORY, FINANCIAL AND COMPLIANCE

Questions, concerns, issues or inquiries that may create a legal risk for the organization or its members if not addressed

SAFETY, HEALTH, AND PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT

Questions, concerns, issues or inquiries about Safety, Health and Infrastructure-related issues

SERVICES/ADMINISTRATIVE ISSUES

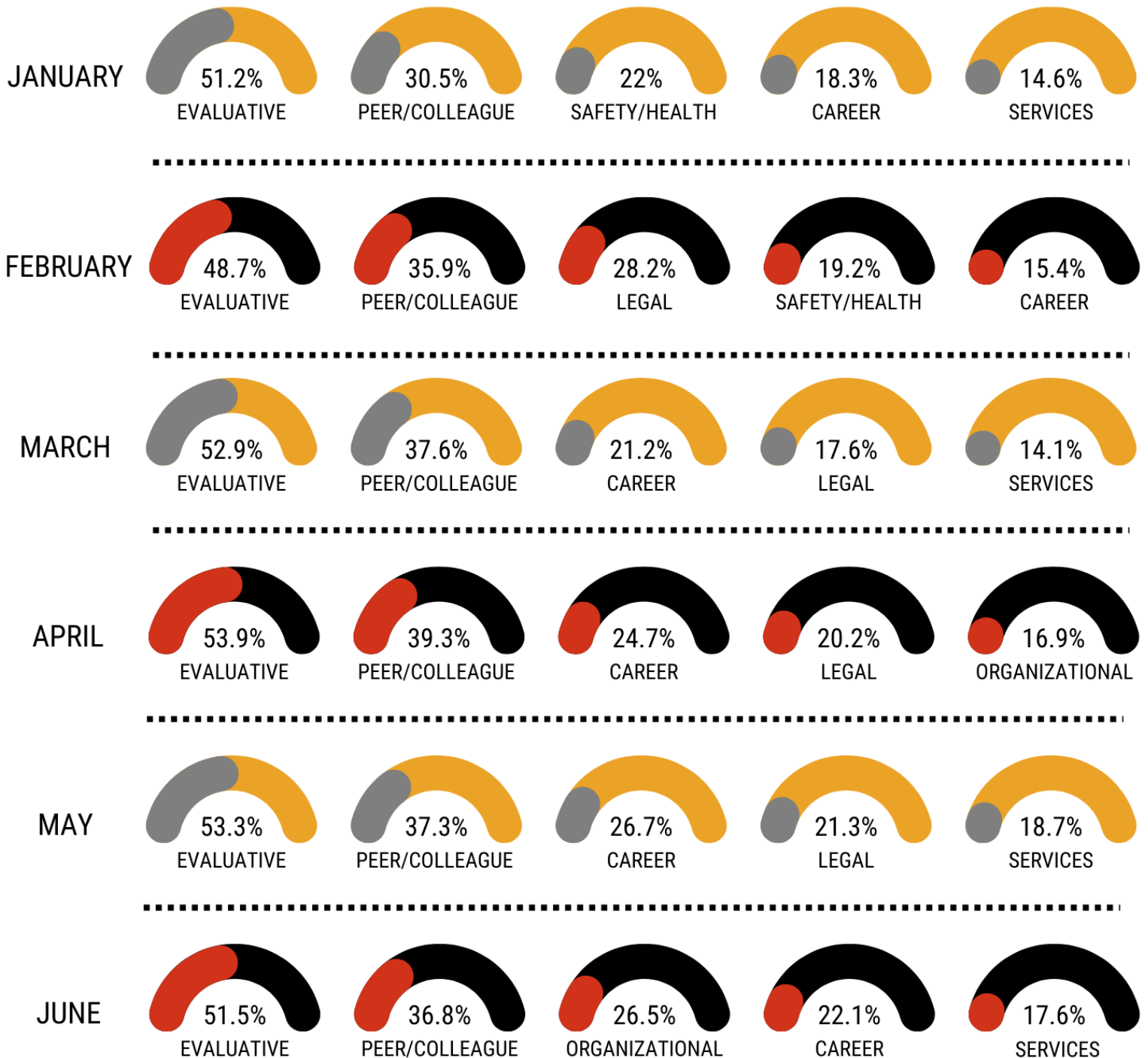
Questions, concerns, issues or inquiries about services or administrative offices including from external parties

ORGANIZATIONAL, STRATEGIC, AND MISSION RELATED

Questions, concerns, issues or inquiries that relate to the whole or some part of an organization

MONTH TO MONTH CONCERNS

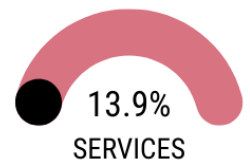
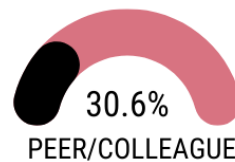
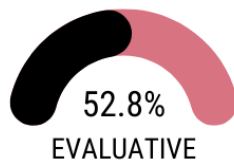
JANUARY - JUNE



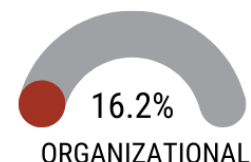
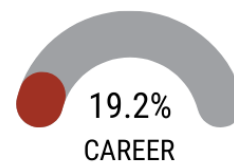
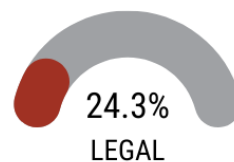
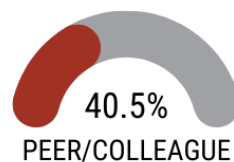
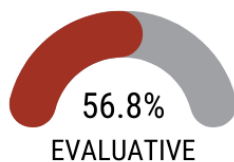
MONTH TO MONTH CONCERNS

JULY - DECEMBER

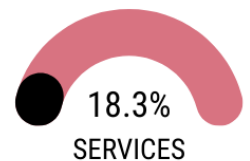
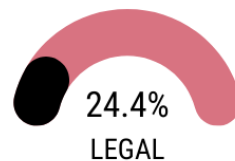
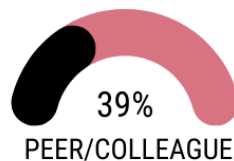
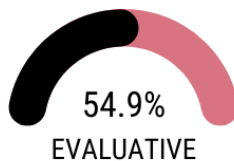
JULY



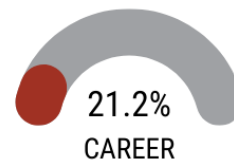
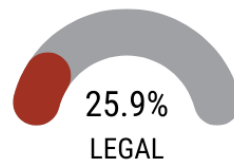
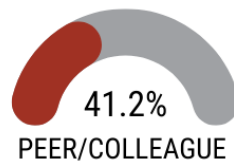
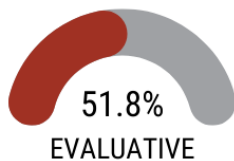
AUGUST



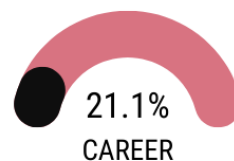
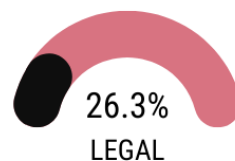
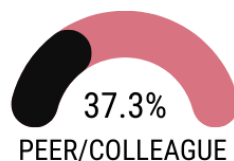
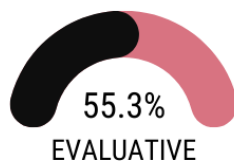
SEPTEMBER



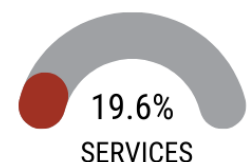
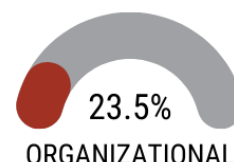
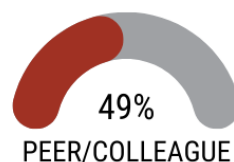
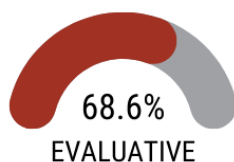
OCTOBER



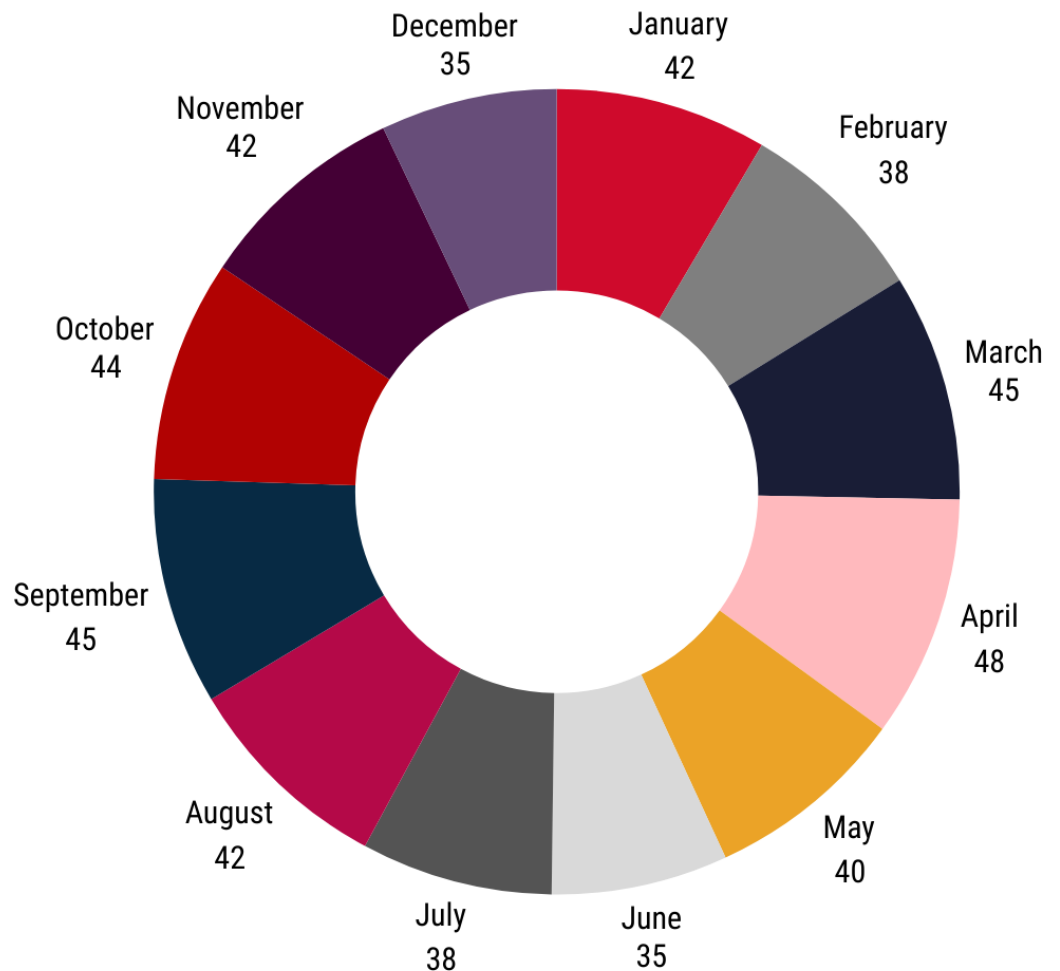
NOVEMBER



DECEMBER



TOP CASES BY MONTH: CATEGORY 2



- **Category 2** (Evaluative Relationships) consistently had the highest number of cases every month
- **Category 3** (Peer/Colleague Relationships) was typically second highest
- **Categories 4 and 5** frequently alternated in the third position
- **Categories 7 and 8** tended to appear more in certain months
- **Category 1 (Compensation)** rarely appeared in the top 5 for any month

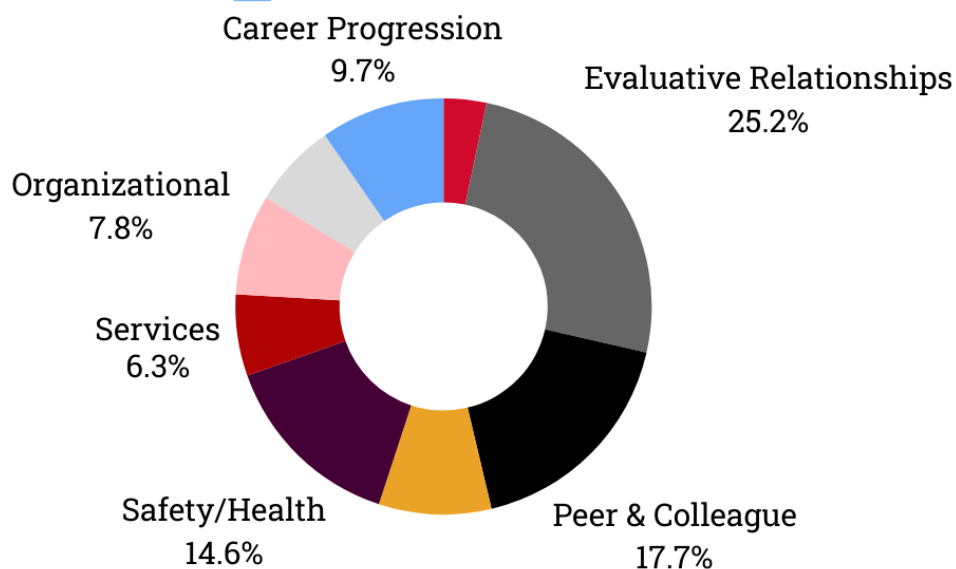
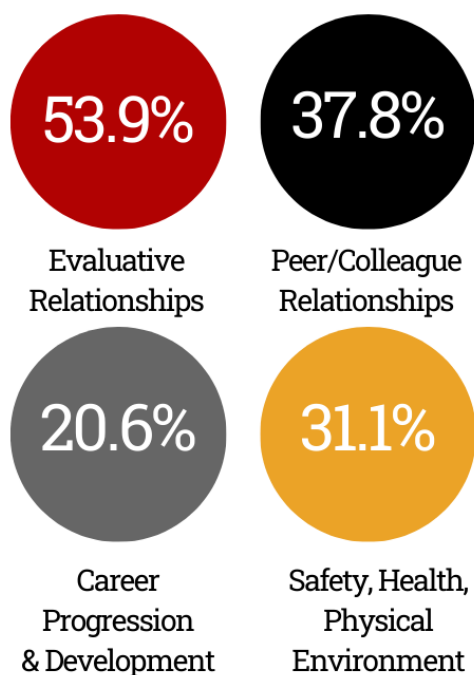
CONCERN TRENDS OVER THE YEAR



CONCERNS OVER THE YEAR JANUARY - DECEMBER

- Compensation
- Evaluative Relationships
- Peer & Colleague
- Financial/Legal
- Safety/Health
- Services
- Organizational
- Values/Ethics/Standards
- Career Progression

TOP CONCERNS



OUR 2024 PROGRAMMING

INFORMATIONAL SESSIONS

Throughout the year, the Ombuds Office conducted a series of presentations aimed at clarifying the purpose and functions of the office. The presentations were delivered to a diverse array of audiences, totaling 16 groups.

FACILITATED DISCUSSIONS

These sessions give groups a chance to discuss important subjects and tackle crucial issues with the help of a trained facilitator.

Through participating in retreats and facilitation, the Ombuds Office facilitated 15 guided discussions, assisting teams with establishing departmental communication norms, and developing best practices or choosing what they want to see in a leadership transition.

WORKSHOPS

In 2024, the Office partnered with campus departments, units, and the Human Resources Learning & Development team to conduct 54 interactive workshops.

Overall, workshops focused on improving communication skills, fostering effective conflict resolution, and encouraging the growth of positive interpersonal relationships.

Each program is customized to the audience, with unique scenarios and case studies geared towards the challenges in that unit. Workshops can last from 20 to 120 minutes. For most workshops, 60-90 minutes seems to be the sweet spot.

TOP WORKSHOPS

WORKING BETTER WITH CHALLENGING INDIVIDUALS

This interactive workshop will help participants work more effectively with challenging people, whether it is a passive-aggressive co-worker, an inept supervisor, a know-it-all colleague, or politically minded schemer. This program employs small-group discussions, role-playing exercises, and collaborative problem-solving to equip participants with strategies for maintaining functionality and minimizing frustration in the presence of challenging individuals.

INTERPERSONAL COMMUNICATION: SAY WHAT YOU MEAN

Through roleplay and group discussion, participants delve into three critical elements of effective communication: aligning the intended message with delivery and recipient perception, the impact of nonverbal cues, and assessing the benefits and drawbacks of email communication.

EXPLORING CONFLICT STYLES

After a brief introduction to Thomas and Kilmann's theory, participants will explore, through interactive activities and group discussion, how conflict styles can exacerbate disagreements and complicate productive resolutions. Free stickers included!



All mediators have completed the rigorous "Basic Mediation Essentials" Course offered by the Boyd School of Law. This comprehensive 40-hour program equips participants with the essential skills and knowledge required for effective mediation across various contexts. By ensuring that our mediators undergo this specialized training, we aim to uphold the highest standards of mediation practice.

Dr. Schwartz says: "Mediation, in the right circumstance, is the perfect tool for a resolution. Mediation works best when both parties have something to gain, and both are willing to be vulnerable with each other. When there is a true meeting of the minds, parties can have honest conversations that make their lives easier."

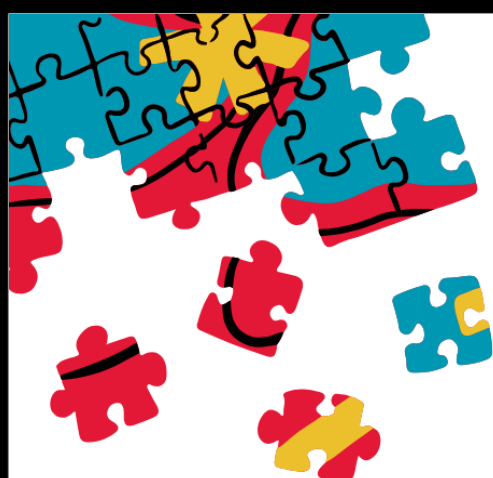


OMBUDS OUTREACH

In 2024, the Ombuds Office participated in several outreach activities. In addition to shadowing with several campus groups, the office was represented at New Student Orientation, New Faculty Orientation, the MSI Resource Fair, and the Fall and Spring Involvement Fairs.

Being accessible to the campus community is a key element of the Ombuds Office's drive to serve UNLV equitably.

LOOKING AHEAD



2025 Goals

- ✚ Increased outreach for office, particularly with undergraduate, graduate, and professional students
- ✚ Increased campus awareness of the mediation practice
- ✚ Continuous improvement in all ombuds operations
- ✚ Enhanced accessibility to all campus constituents via pop-up satellite offices
- ✚ Maintain highest levels of certification and training for all ombuds staff

"It was a very helpful experience. It was great talking to David, he was impartial and objective, which made it easier to identify where I needed to correct my own behaviors and what I can do to resolve work conflict in the future. He made himself available when I needed to talk through the issues working with my department. Overall, Ombuds, and David specifically, helped to make this situation much easier to digest and move toward a resolution."

- Office Visitor 2024

"It was so helpful to be able to talk to someone outside of my department about the issue I was having. I felt comfortable sharing about my issue and felt I got some great advice."

-Office Visitor 2024

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Do not hesitate to call or email to make an appointment to discuss any campus concern or interpersonal issue. As Dr. Schwartz likes to say, our door is open.

2024 UNLV Ombuds Office Annual Report

Text by David G. Schwartz

Text, Data analysis and Design by Brie Starks

© 2025 UNLV Ombuds Office



Office of the University Ombuds

University of Nevada, Las Vegas

Mail Stop: 1086

4505 S. Maryland Pkwy.

Las Vegas, NV 89154



702-895-1823



ombuds@unlv.edu



FDH 165

WE THANK YOU
FOR YOUR CONTINUED SUPPORT OF
OUR PROGRAMS