

OFFICE OF THE UNIVERSITY OMBUDS

ANNUAL REPORT

JULY 1, 2021-JUNE 30, 2022

For the Syracuse University Community



Syracuse
University

TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION, HISTORY AND PHILOSOPHY	1
ACCOMPLISHMENTS	2
OBSERVED TRENDS	3
SUMMARY	4
DATA FOR VISITORS AND OFFICE STATISTICS	5-10
APPENDIX	11

INTRODUCTION, HISTORY AND PHILOSOPHY

This serves as the 2021-22 annual report from Neal Powless, Syracuse University Ombuds. The report includes data from July 2021 through June 2022 in alignment with the University’s fiscal year which covers the summer, fall and spring semesters.

THE OFFICE OF THE UNIVERSITY OMBUDS was established in February 2018 at the recommendation of the University Senate Committee on Women’s Concerns and the Chancellor’s Workgroup on Diversity and Inclusion. Professor Emeritus Samuel Clemence was named to head the office in an interim capacity, and a search committee was formed to identify a permanent ombuds. Neal Powless assumed leadership of the office in January 2019 after serving in a variety of roles at the University since 2004. The ombuds’ office serves all graduate students, faculty and staff of Syracuse University.

The primary philosophy of the Office of the University Ombuds is to support and empower individuals to manage their conflicts in an environment that is confidential, informal, independent and neutral. Visitors have expressed finding great comfort in having a confidential place to explore options to resolve the conflicts they are experiencing. Each visitor is given an opportunity to share their experience, without judgement, and explore what options fit best for them. This experience has been cathartic for many and has allowed visitors to be open to engage in behaviors and conversations that have led to resolution.

“ I just wanted to say a huge, huge thank you for your fantastic workshop yesterday. Even though I was participating virtually, I felt so much a part of the workshop, and I really enjoyed learning from everyone. I really can’t thank you enough for being so open and willing to share your learning and expertise with our group, and I look forward to us offering this workshop to an even larger audience in the fall. I have no doubt how important and impactful this workshop will be on our wider SU campus community—all credit to your hard work. ”

REFLECTION FROM TRAINING

ACCOMPLISHMENTS

This year the ombuds' office has moved to a new location but remains in the Waverly Building. Through the transition in space, the office has increased the caseload and seen development in the following areas:

- Moved to our new office location: 111 Waverly Avenue, Suite 001
- Full in-person office operations with hybrid in-person/virtual/phone options for appointments and meetings
- Graduate student intern was hired to work with graduate students and each of the college's graduate programs
- Increased the office caseload by 38% from the previous year
- Small, medium and large group facilitated discussions have increased
- The ombuds is a contributing author to a chapter in *De Gruyter Handbook of Organizational Conflict Management* (De Gruyter 2022)
- Presentations, professional development trainings, conflict management trainings and individual coaching have continued steadily

“ I really appreciate your time over the past months in helping navigate this challenging situation. I am very happy that your involvement meant we were able to actually have this conversation. As I said, I think it was a very positive experience for all of us and a really educational experience for me in putting into action the person that I aim to be. I've learned so much from this process and want to reiterate how grateful I am for you and your office. ”

ANONYMOUS VISITOR

OBSERVED TRENDS

1. Members of the University community continue to be impacted by biases of others in relation to race, disability, age and gender that has made individuals feel excluded or singled out
2. Leadership communication and transitions have resulted in disrespectful, hostile, unfair, unequal and targeted dysfunction in some areas of the University
3. Negative and contemptuous communication has resulted in people leaving the University
4. Concerns about administrative/leadership favoritism, lack of collaboration and a lack of action has resulted in a loss of trust in leadership
5. Bullying and harassment concerns continue to be an issue throughout the University
6. A concern about congruence between University values and the actions of some does not seem to be in alignment

“ I hope this message finds you well. I wanted to not only thank you for your time and space that allowed me to process with you a couple of weeks ago when we met, but also thank you for the book recommendation. I was able to finish *The Power of Now* over the break and it definitely spoke to me—something to help me with the transitions in my life both personally and professionally. ”

ANONYMOUS VISITOR

SUMMARY

As time moves forward, there seems to be a sense of attempting to return back to what once was. I have seen countless reminders from artists, celebrities, knowledge holders and general members of the community that the world will not return to what we once believed it would be. This is a major transition, and one that many are struggling to maneuver through. I have had the good fortune to discuss this with people from all over the world—this struggle is not unique.

Syracuse University has been going through its own similar transition. Many hope this semester will look much like semesters past, and they may not be wrong. Similarly, the same types of things keep coming up in my office as well. Through this transition, humans still struggle to communicate effectively with other humans and the environment that surrounds them. Syracuse University still has large numbers of peer and leadership communication issues that get in the way of seeing the humanity of the individuals they are working with.

It has been my observation, that a key component that seems to be missing in troublesome interactions is a lack of patience. The lack of this quality has interfered with one-on-one interactions as well as interactions with the system as it transitions. There seems to be a push by some to return to what is recognizable to the past. This “push” can also be perceived by some as a lack of willingness to evolve. Even in a space of change, we must be patient with those that have a different perspective than ourselves. In this way, patience with each other can be one of the keys to better communication as we all evolve together.

“ Thank you again for your generosity with making time to speak to the students in my class! Your presence in the live session added to the meaningful experience in the course, and I know that many students were moved by your story and teachings. ”

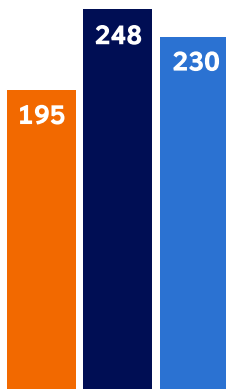
REFLECTION FROM PRESENTATION

DATA FOR VISITORS AND OFFICE STATISTICS

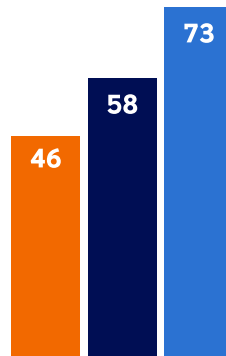
Comparison by Fiscal Year

By the Numbers

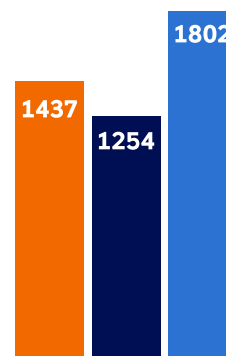
2021-22 2020-21 2019-20



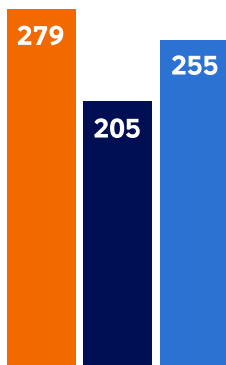
Individual Meetings



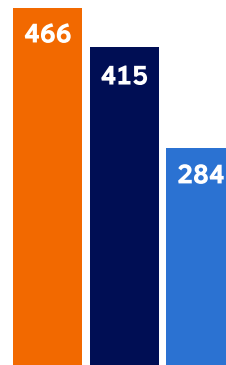
Presentations to Faculty, Staff, Organizations and Groups



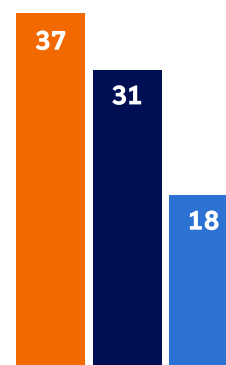
Individuals Reached Through Group Participation



Cases

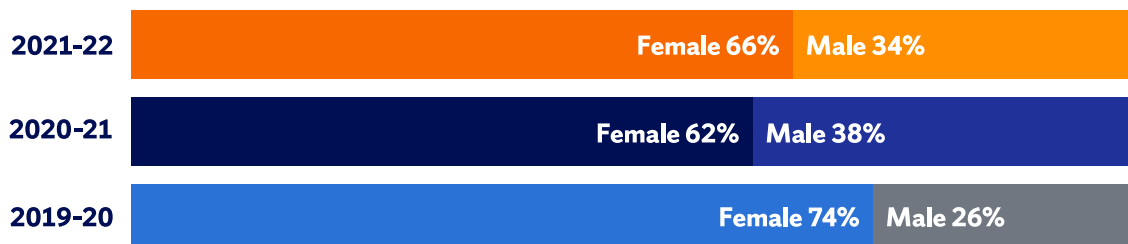


Individuals Reached Through Cases



Facilitated Discussions

Cases by Demographics

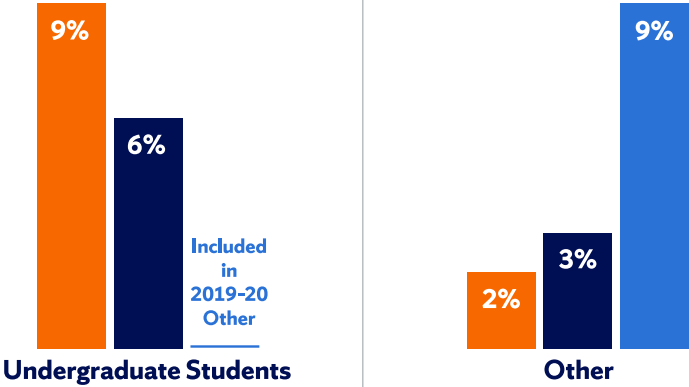
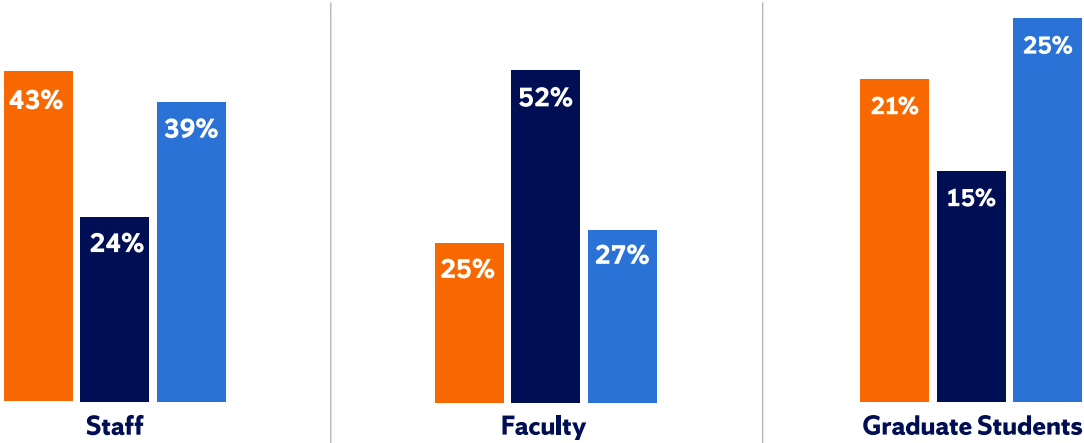


DATA FOR VISITORS AND OFFICE STATISTICS

(continued)

Cases by Status

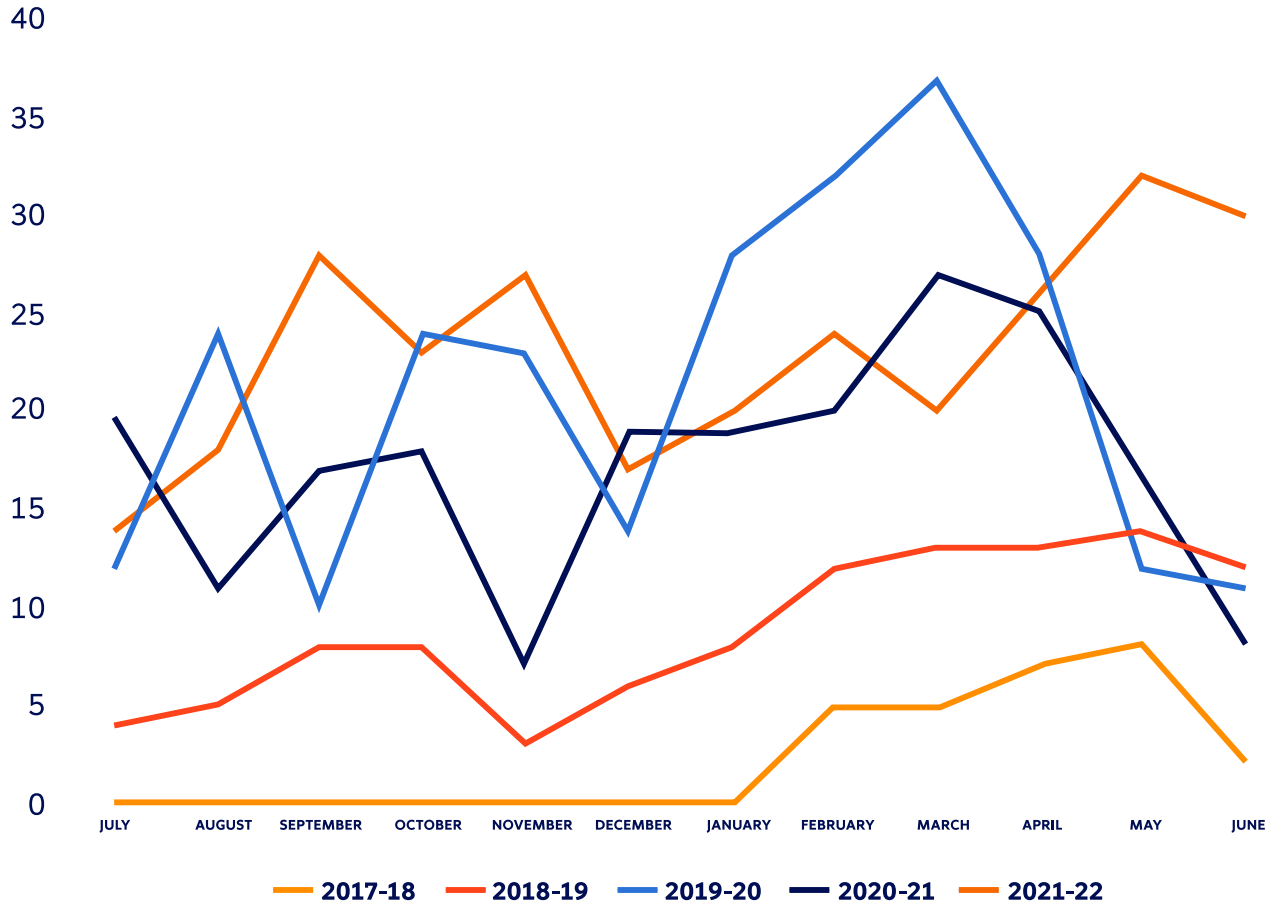
2021-22 2020-21 2019-20



DATA FOR VISITORS AND OFFICE STATISTICS

(continued)

Fiscal Year Comparison of Case Load

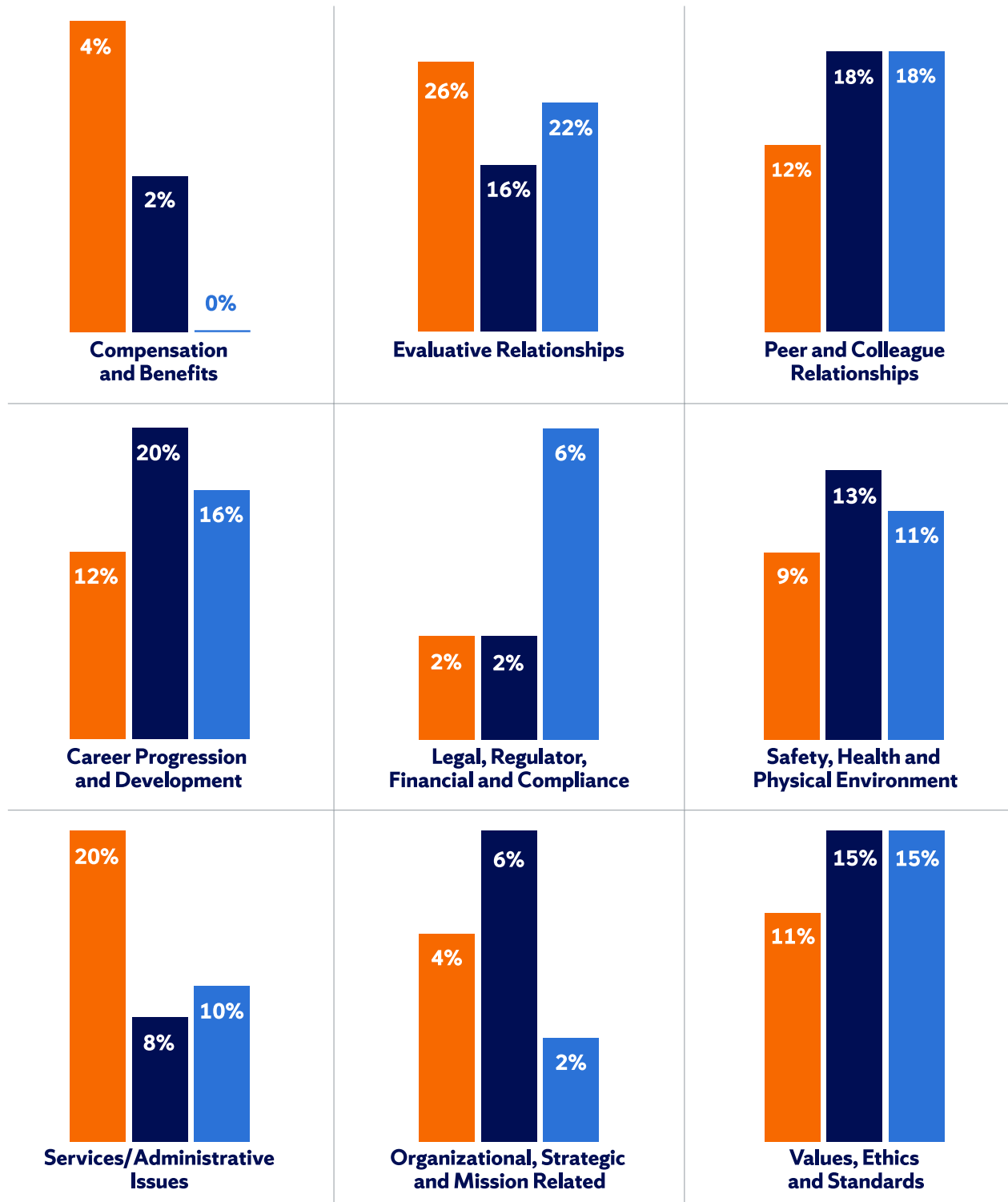


DATA FOR VISITORS AND OFFICE STATISTICS

(continued)

Systemic Categories

2021-22 2020-21 2019-20

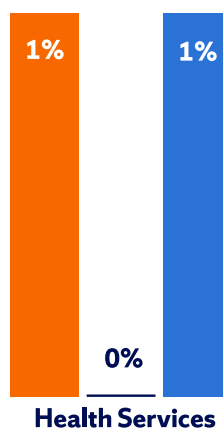
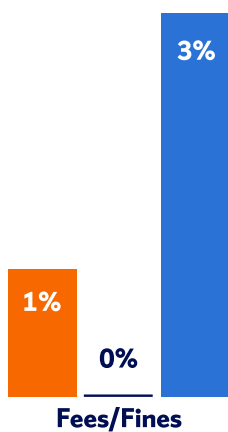
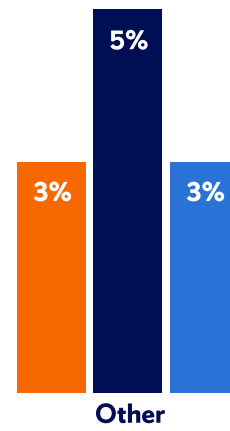
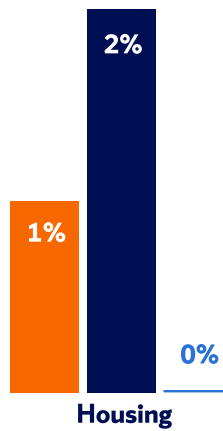
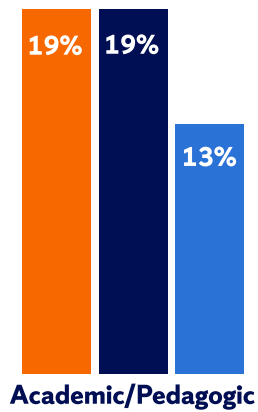
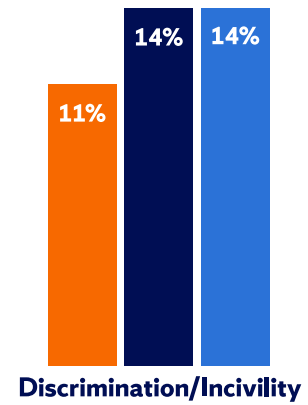
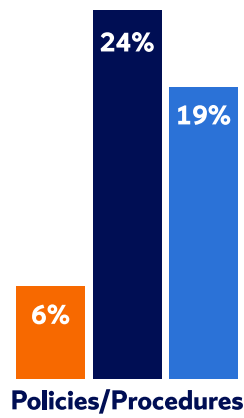
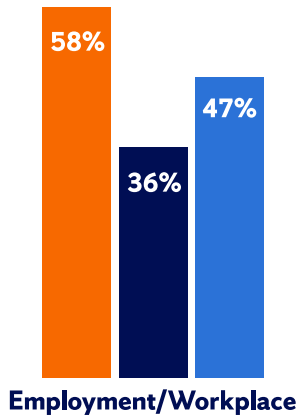


DATA FOR VISITORS AND OFFICE STATISTICS

(continued)

Nature of Concerns

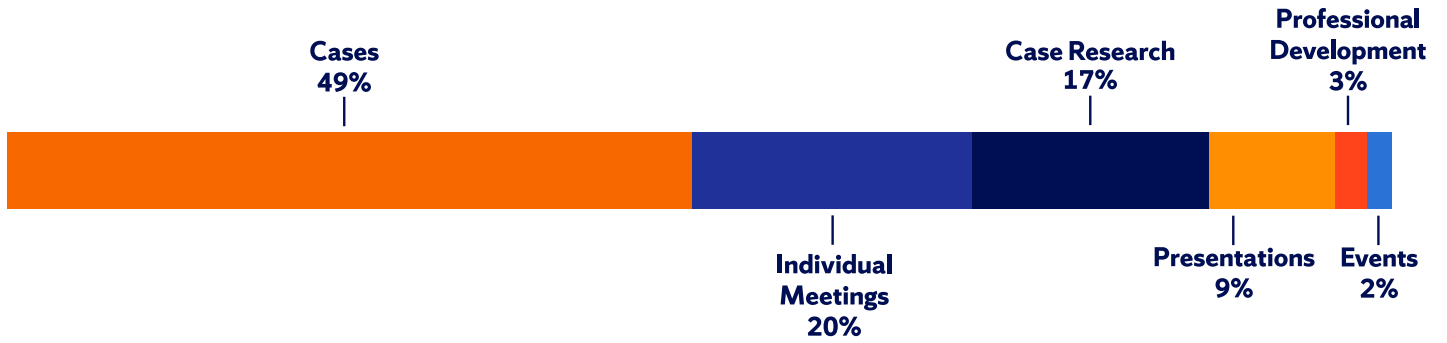
2021-22 2020-21 2019-20



DATA FOR VISITORS AND OFFICE STATISTICS

(continued)

Annual Review for the Ombuds Office



APPENDIX

Five Common Questions About the University Ombuds Office

1. What is an ombuds?

Taken from the Swedish word *ombudsman*, which roughly translates to “representative,” the ombuds exists to provide fair and equitable services and guidance to staff, faculty and graduate students. Often known as an “ear to the people,” the ombuds is an off-the-record, neutral body, operating with confidentiality, impartiality, informality and independence.

2. What does the ombuds do?

- The ombuds meets with staff, faculty and graduate students who seek a confidential avenue for addressing complaints, concerns and inquiries.
- The ombuds listens and provides guidance to visitors by:
 - assisting in clarifying university policies
 - helping evaluate options for conflict resolution
 - referring visitors to the right resources;
 - sharing tactics for effective communication during conflict(s)

3. What does the ombuds not do?

- The ombuds does not “solve” problems internally.
- The ombuds has no authority to take formal action in response to complaints, and they cannot compel officers or administrators to take specific actions.
- The ombuds does not take sides for or against any individual, cause, or position.
- The ombuds does not keep or share records unless given permission to do so by the visitor (the only exception being when there is an imminent risk of serious harm).
- Conversations with ombuds staff do not constitute notice to the University of any administrative or legal claims.

4. Why is the ombuds at Syracuse University necessary?

The ombuds specializes in listening and ensuring that staff, faculty and graduate students have a neutral space to express concerns that might exist in the University community.

5. Whom does the ombuds report to and how?

The ombuds provides reports to the Chancellor in a way that is independent of existing structures. By tracking trends and addressing concerns, the ombuds can help make suggestions for resolving concerns and supporting systemic change.