



UWG OMBUDS OFFICE REPORT

FY 2024





OMBUDS

7/12/2024

Dear UWG faculty, staff, and students,

I am pleased to offer this annual report from the University Office of the Ombuds for FY 24. In the report, you will find information on caseload and general trends, as well as highlights of the ways in which the office interacted with the campus community throughout the past year. It has been a pleasure continuing to get to know members of our organization from all across campus as I worked with you in individual consultations, workshops, reading groups, and more.

As always, the Ombuds Office is a confidential, neutral, independent, and informal space where UWG faculty, staff, and students can report concerns, consult about issues, and discuss constructive and productive options for paths forward when dealing with a campus-related conflict or problem. The office offers conflict coaching, facilitated conversations, policy guidance, campus referrals, and a space where voices at all level of the organization can be heard. It also provides upward feedback to administration on trends and areas of concern on campus.

Thank you for your continued support of the office, and do feel free to get in touch anytime.

Sincerely,

Dr. Julia L. Farmer
University Ombuds

Office of the University Ombuds Report, FY 2024

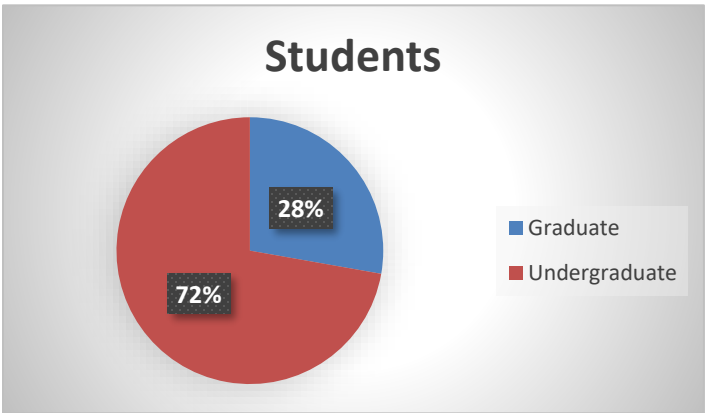
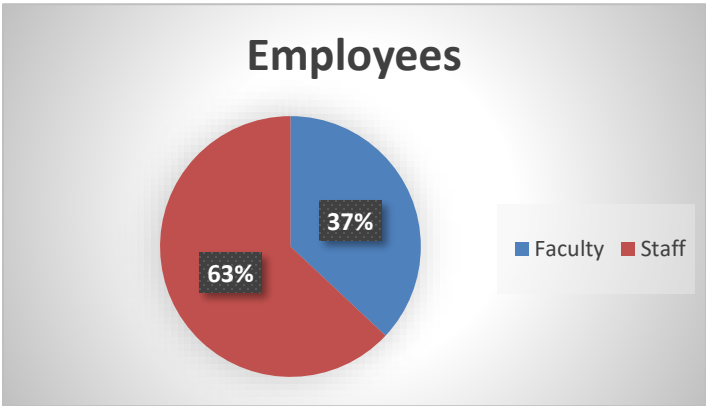
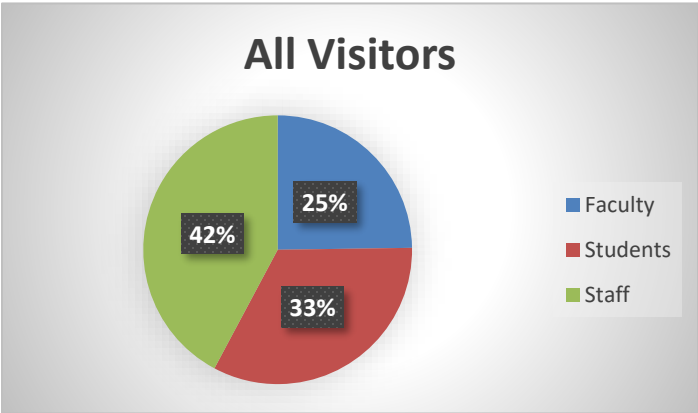
Cases

	Employee Visitors	Student Visitors
CACSI	13	14
COE	3	6
RCOB	2	6
LIBR	4	n/a
THSSON	1	3
University College	4	2
SCFM	1	2
AA-Other or Unknown	7	3
Administrative Services	7	n/a
Advancement	1	n/a
Business and Financial Services	5	n/a
Other (Non-AA)	1	n/a
Strategic Enrollment Management	8	n/a
Student Affairs	16	n/a

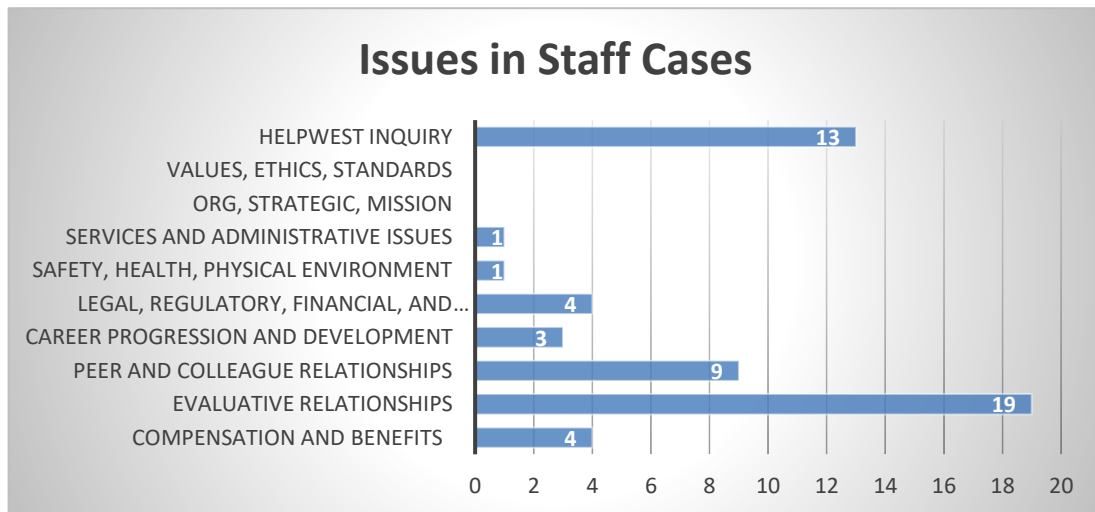
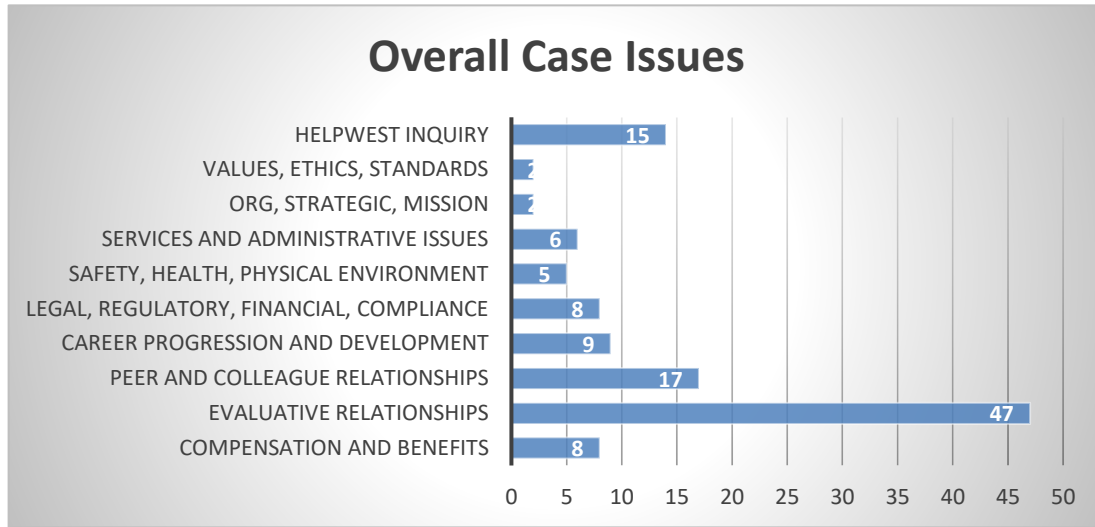
TOTAL VISITORS: 109

*Some cases involve consultations by multiple parties and/or multiple consultations by individuals. Visitors are only counted once per month per case. Visits are designated by where a student's major is housed, or the area where the employee works, when known. In some cases, concerns involved areas or relationships outside of the area where the person is housed.

Distribution of Visitors

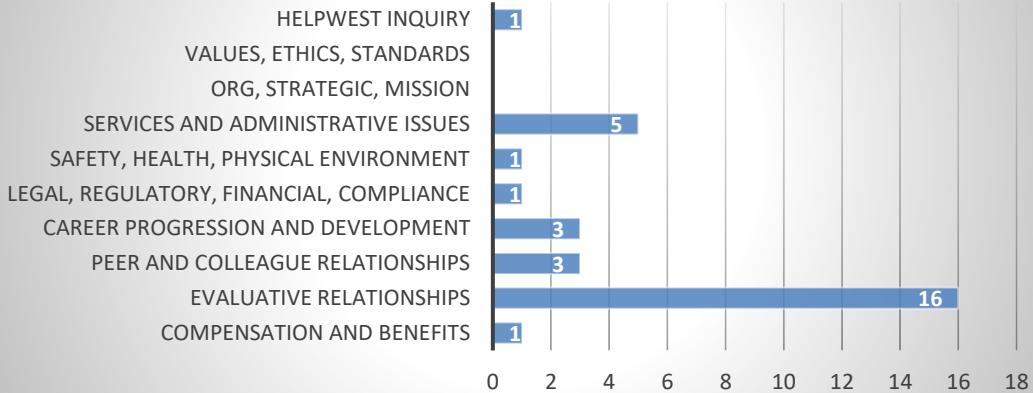


Issue Categories Raised in Cases

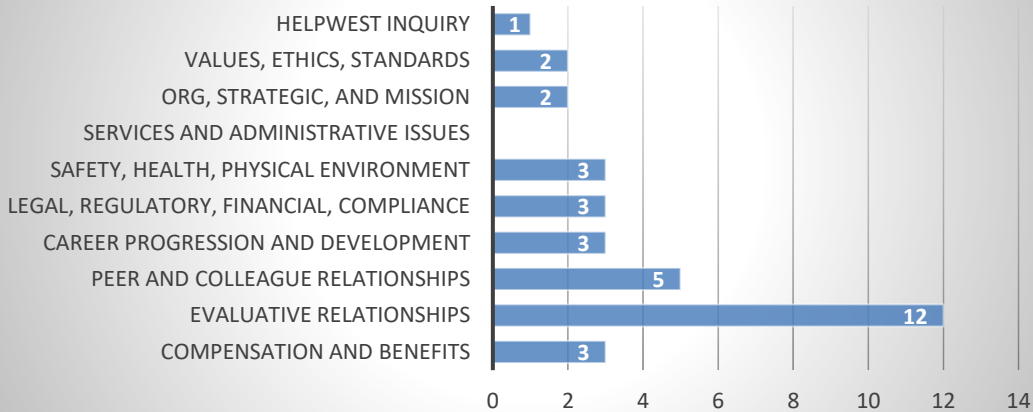


*Some cases involve more than one issue category.

Issues in Student Cases



Issues in Faculty Cases



*Some cases involve more than one issue category.

HelpWest Data

HelpWest, which is UWG's employee benevolence fund, continues to assist UWG faculty and staff who are facing unexpected financial hardship due to circumstances beyond their control. This year the HelpWest fund was able to assist nine employees in several different divisions, providing a total of \$4500 in assistance.

Employees were assisted in the following divisions:

Administrative Services: 3

Academic Affairs: 2

Business and Financial Services: 1

Strategic Enrollment Management: 2

Student Affairs: 1

The HelpWest fund could not exist without the generosity of our fellow employees. Requests for assistance and donations can be made at westga.edu/helpwest. Thank you to everyone who has contributed to the fund over the years.



Trends

FY24 saw increased traffic to the Ombuds Office. A total of 109 visitors consulted with the office, which represented a 13% increase with respect to the previous year. Particularly of note was the increase in student traffic to the office. The number of student visitors nearly doubled compared with FY23. The number of staff visitors relative to faculty visitors has also increased significantly over the past several years, with the breakdown of employee visitors now roughly reflecting the proportion of staff to faculty employees on campus.

For staff, cases falling under the broad category of peer and colleague relationships were especially concerned with perceived lack of respect and uncivil treatment. The other most frequent subcategories under staff peer and colleague relationships were issues around diversity, as well as concerns about the impact of rumors or gossip on an individual's reputation. For staff cases involving concerns around evaluative relationships, the most frequent subcategories of concern were also respect and treatment, as well as the quality or quantity of communication between the visitor and their supervisor.

For faculty, the most frequent subcategory of cases involving evaluative relationships was consultations by faculty leaders about possible ways of handling conflicts in their units. Concerns about trust and integrity in evaluative relationships were also more frequent for faculty than for staff. Beyond that, faculty subcategories of concern around both evaluative and peer relationships were fairly similar to the staff subcategories mentioned above, with the exception of diversity-related concerns, which were somewhat less prevalent among faculty cases.

For students, by far the most common concern prompting a visit to the Ombuds Office had to do with performance appraisal and grading. These issues comprised just under half of the cases involving evaluative relationships. Other subcategories of concern involving evaluative relationships that appeared multiple times were respect/treatment and communication. In terms of peer relationships, trust and integrity appeared multiple times as subcategories of concern. Within the broad category of services and administrative issues, the most common subcategory of concern for students was administrative decisions and application of rules. It should be noted that concerns about services now arise much less frequently than they did several years ago. Also worth noting is that student requests for mediation have increased over the last year. In some cases these requests involved facilitated discussions with peers, and in others they involved facilitated conversations with faculty. It seems that word is getting out to students about the various ways in which the Ombuds Office can assist them in tackling any university-related challenges they encounter in constructive ways.

Campus, Community, and Professional Connections

The Ombuds Office continues to collaborate with many different units on campus to get the word out about our services, as well as to provide the campus community with the opportunity for professional development, teambuilding, skills building, and more. The UWG Ombuds also continues to represent the university both locally and nationally through professional service and presentations. Below are just a few highlights of these activities over the past year:

- Number of workshop/training topics offered increased by 75%
- Number of professional development and skills/teambuilding sessions offered more than tripled relative to the year prior.
- Collaborated with Housing and Residence Life to offer conflict management training to RA's
- Collaborated with HRL to offer self-advocacy workshop for Senior RA's
- Collaborated with HR to provide training in de-escalation, conflict styles, and more to various campus units
- Collaborated with the IFE mentoring initiative to offer training in navigating communication and conflict in mentoring relationships for interested employees
- Collaborated with the Center for Student Involvement and Inclusion to offer conflict management workshop for aspiring student leaders
- Participated in Orientation to provide incoming students with information on the Ombuds Office and how it can be of use to them
- Provided professional development sessions for employees in Legal Affairs, the Advising Center, UWG Online, Continuing Education, CACSI, and more
- Visited Cornerstone sections to introduce the Ombuds Office to new UWG students and help them develop productive conflict management skills that can serve them throughout their time at the university and beyond
- Offered training in Disrupting Defensiveness to Greystone employees
- Conducted three different book discussion groups open to faculty and staff
- Served as Associate Editor of the *Journal of the International Ombuds Association*
- Served on the International Ombuds Association's Communications Committee
- Attended USG's Teaching and Learning conference to present on the asynchronous course for faculty on navigating conflict with students that the Ombuds Office developed in partnership with the IFE
- Served on the Freedom of Expression and HelpWest committees and on the Ethics Week planning team
- Contributed chapter to forthcoming book, *The Organizational Ombuds: Foundations, Fundamentals, & The Future*
- Participated in multiple campus outreach events, including New Faculty Orientation, Newnan Tie Dye event, Newnan Spring Fling, and Benefits Fair

Sample Comments From the Campus Community on the Value of the Office's Services

- “Thank you so much for your help on this. It made such a difference.”
- “You've been so helpful, and it's been a relief to have someone on my side who knows how to navigate these things.”
- “The Ombud held true to her word to her word to reach out to key persons in the situation to resolve the issue. She was an empathetic listener and did not add to or downplay my concerns.”
- “I appreciated the fact that I felt heard and that I could have an outside perspective on my thoughts and concerns.”
- The Ombuds ensured that my concern would be kept confidential.”
- “Dr. Julia Farmer is awesome! I wish more people here at UWG were like her.”
- “UWG has played a vital role in my life and I want to ensure it remains the University I have come to know and love. Your response and the resources provided shows me that despite this little hiccup... the West Georgia spirit is still alive and well.”
- “Thank you so much! ... I so appreciate your thoroughness and advocacy”
- “I can tell how much [the Ombuds] actually genuinely cares about helping me. She is working to solve the problem rather than just make it disappear and dismissing my needs.”
- “Having someone listen, hear me and help me”
- “Many thanks ... for leading such a wonderful workshop! You provided concrete strategies for maintaining productive communication in a range of structural and emotional contexts. Your insights, as always, are incredibly valuable!”
- “[The workshop] was very relevant for the challenges we face.”
- “Thank you for visiting our class today! They loved it!”
- “Thanks for the class. It was interesting and useful.”
- “My students really enjoyed your session.”
- “Dr. Farmer was a great presenter! I liked the group activities as well.”
- “[The class] was engaging.”