



**UWG OMBUDS OFFICE
ANNUAL REPORT
FY 2022**



OMBUDS

Introduction

Dear UWG faculty, staff, and students,

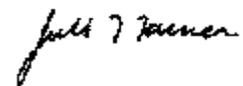
As we bring FY22 to a close, the UWG Ombuds Office offers this report to the campus community. In it, you will find discussion of trends and issues that have made their way to the office over the course of the fiscal year.

As always, the Ombuds Office is here to serve you by helping you think about ways to navigate conflicts, challenges, or concerns. The Ombuds Office is a neutral, confidential, informal, and independent space where all visitors can expect to be heard.

The Ombuds Office also offers student and employee trainings and workshops related to conflict management skills, as well as the opportunity for facilitated discussions and dialogue. If you find yourself dealing with a difficult issue or conflict, the sooner you reach out, the greater the options you are likely to have for moving forward, before things escalate.

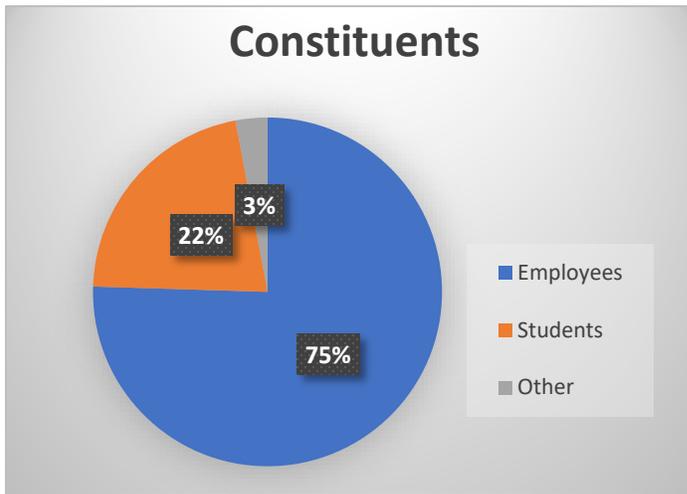
Please feel free to get in touch anytime.

Sincerely,

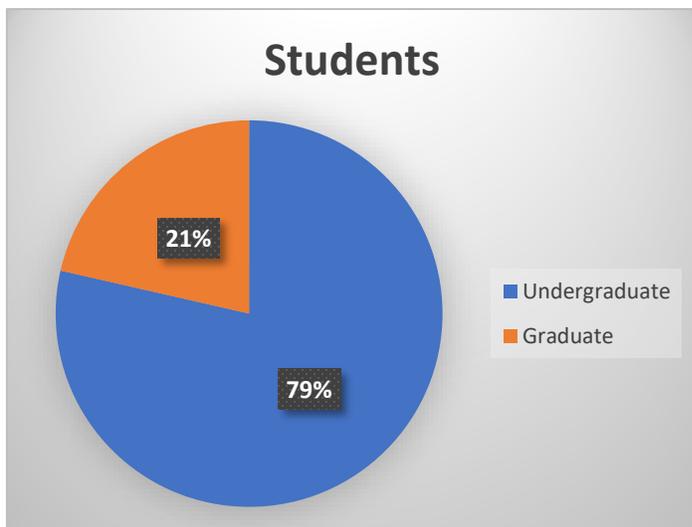
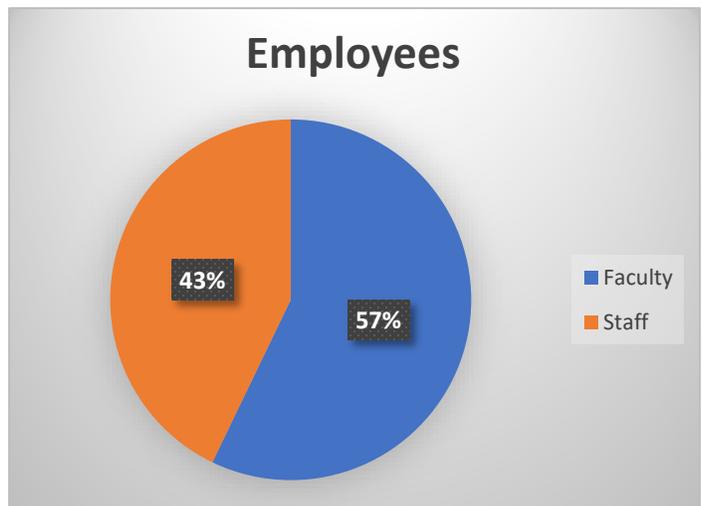
A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Julia L. Farmer". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial 'J'.

Dr. Julia L. Farmer
University Ombuds

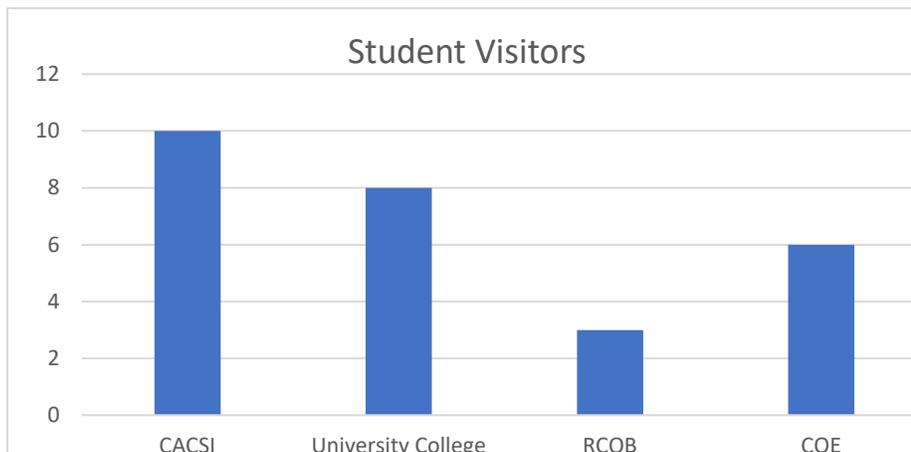
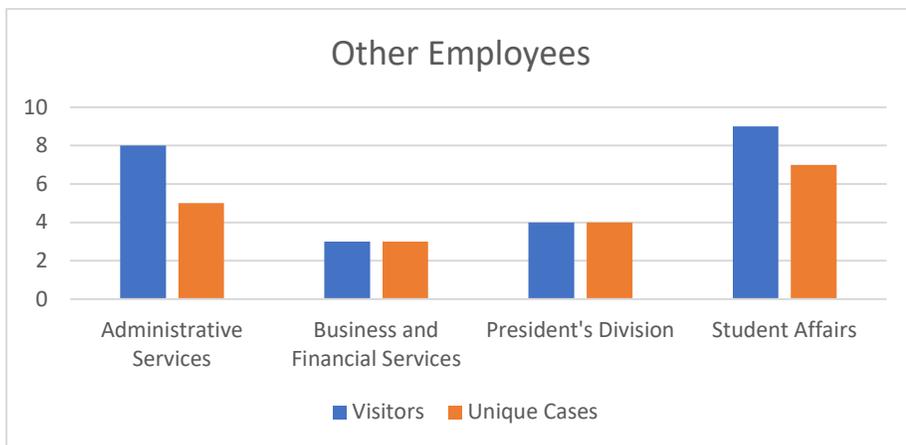
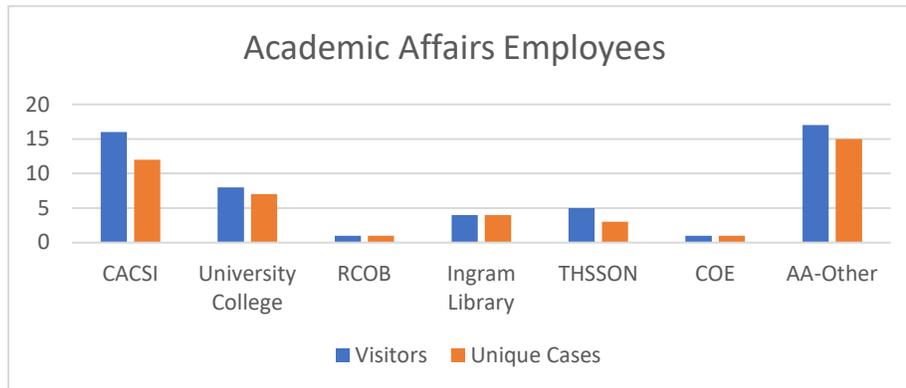
Visitors FY 22



TOTAL VISITORS: 109
UNIQUE CASES: 98

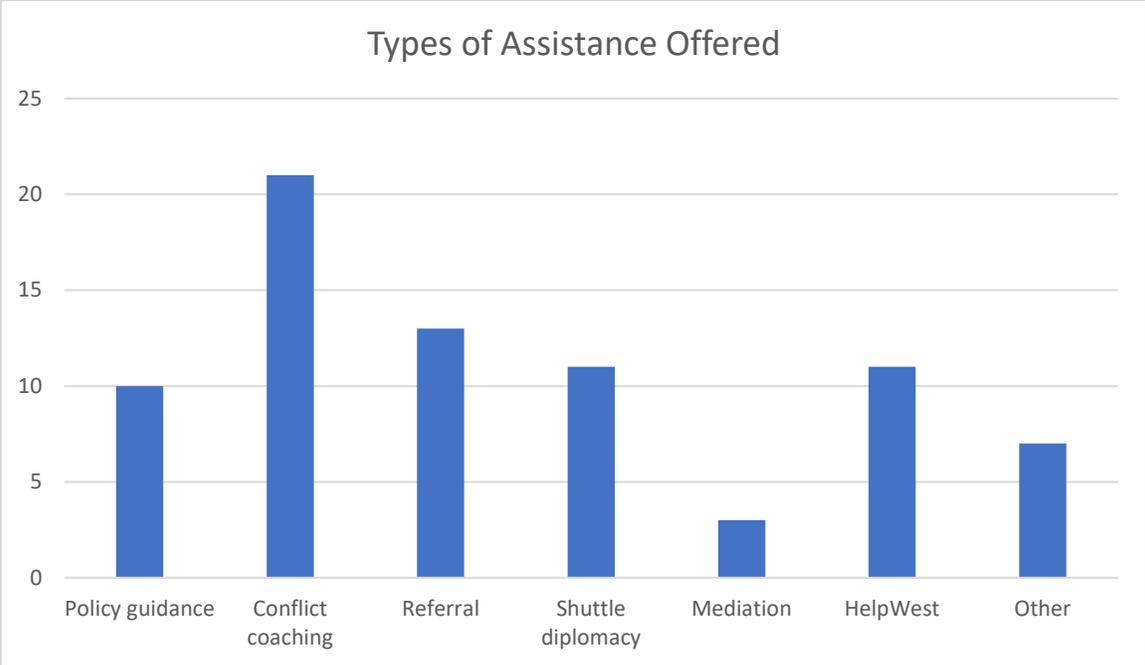
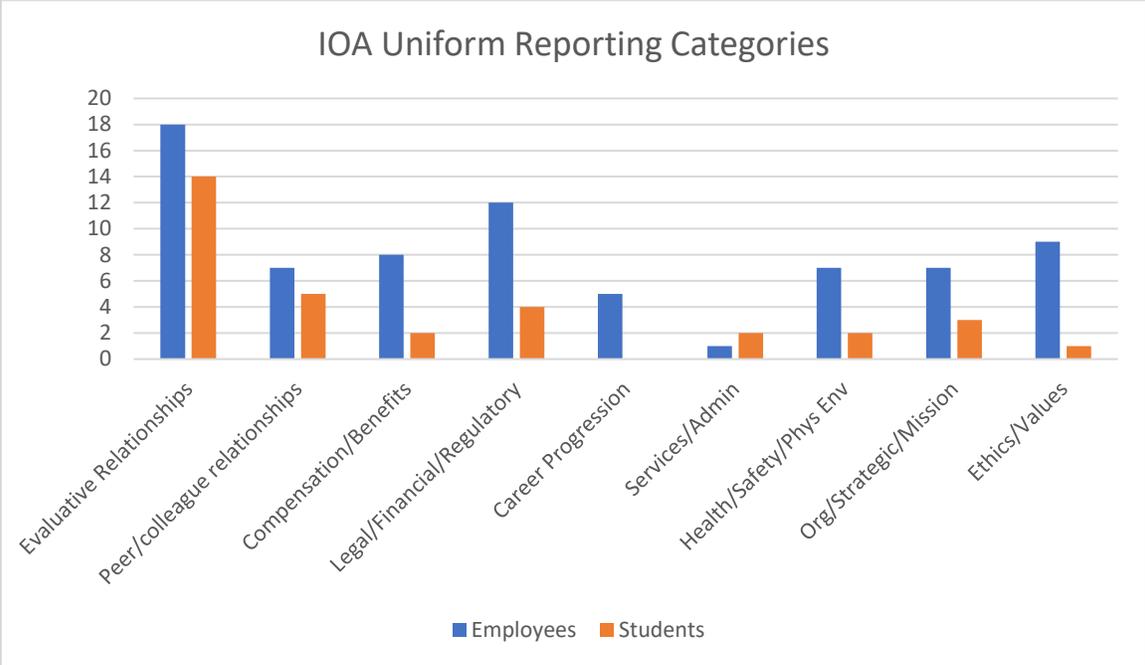


Employee Visitor Distribution



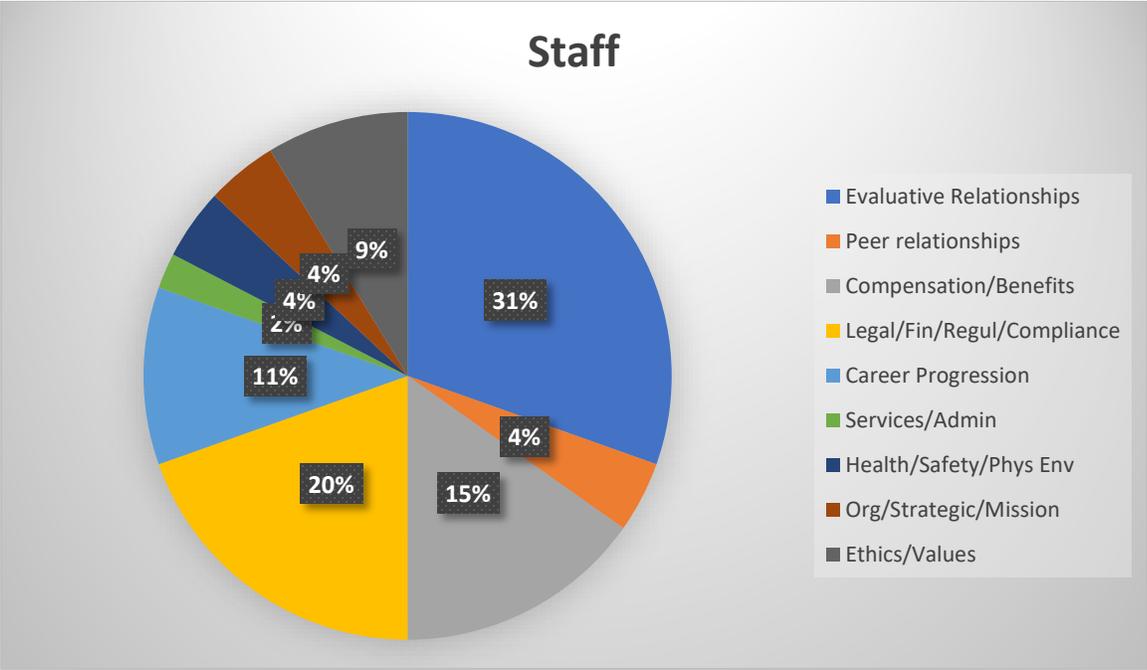
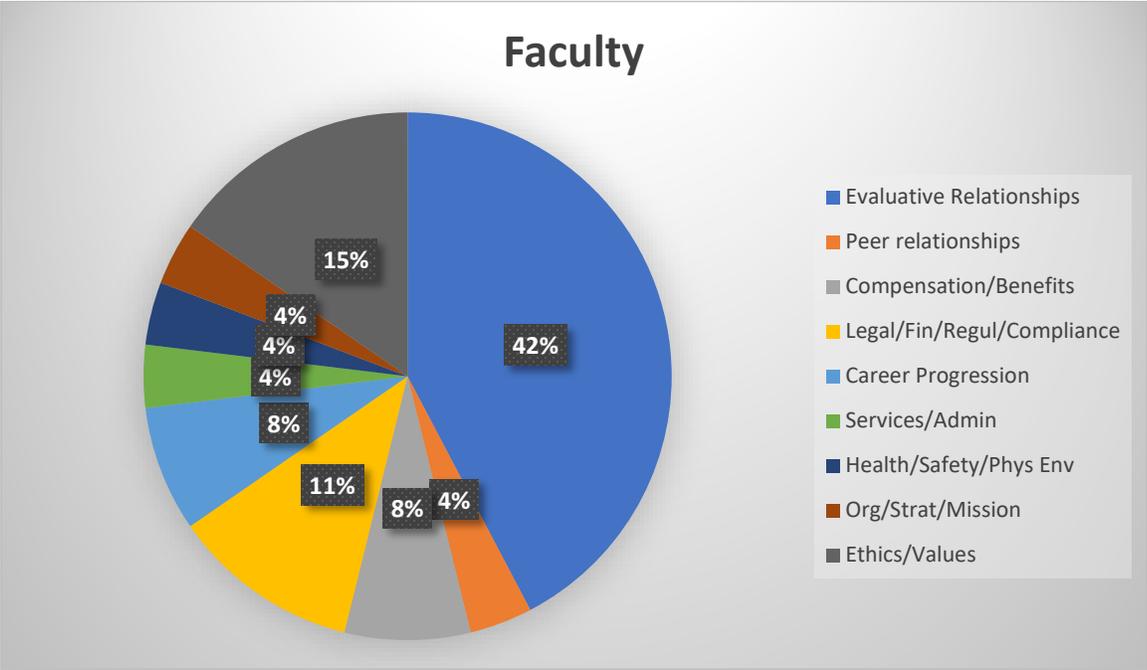
*Visitors are counted once per month when consulting multiple times about the same case. A visitor is defined as someone who reaches out to the Ombuds Office of their own accord to consult about an issue. Contacts initiated by the Ombuds Office in order to try to resolve issues do not count in these numbers. Visitors are classified by home department (for employees) or major/concentration (for students). Some issues involve areas outside where the visitor is housed.

Issues Presented

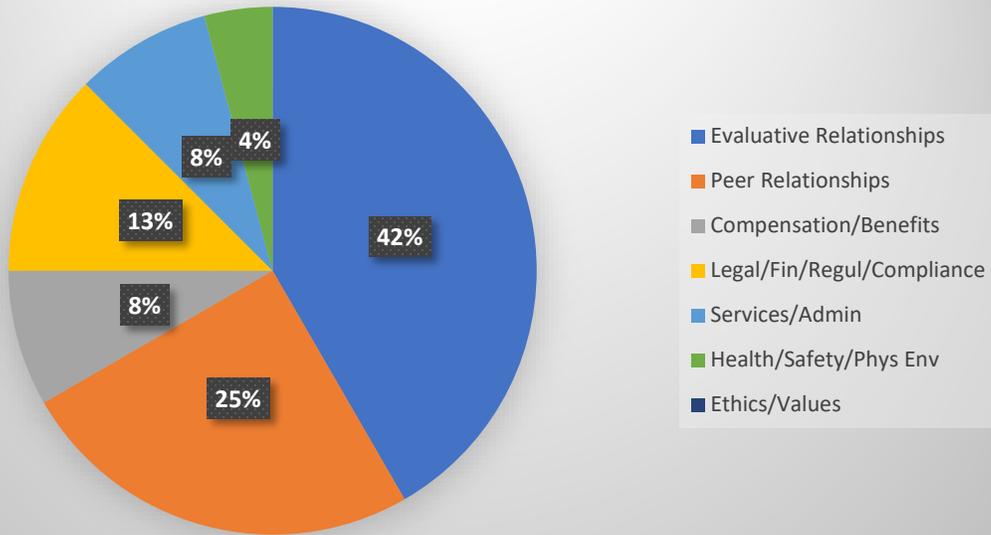


***All cases involve active listening and assistance with thinking through options. The above are additional types of assistance offered following discussion, based on the choices and preferences of the visitor. Some cases involve more than one type of issue.**

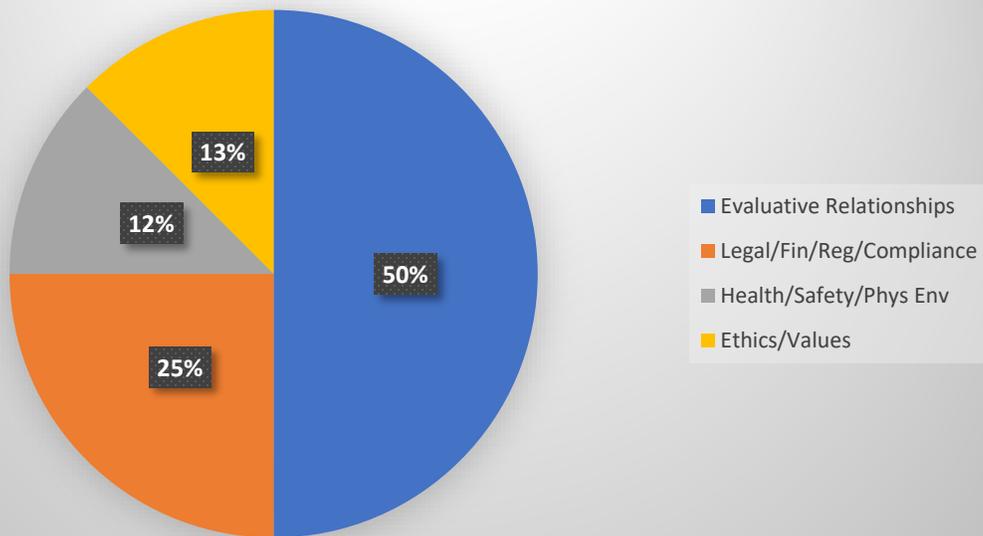
Issues Presented by Constituency Type



Undergraduates



Graduate



HelpWest

The HelpWest Employee Benevolence Fund provides financial assistance to faculty and staff facing unexpected financial hardship due to circumstances beyond their control. Requests are processed through the Ombuds Office, which submits requests to the HelpWest Steering Committee for approval after confirming documentation and stripping the requests of any identifying information.

In FY, HelpWest granted a total of **\$5,320** in assistance. Approved requests came from the following divisions:

Academic Affairs: 8

Business and Financial Services: 1

President's Division: 1

Administrative Services: 1

Donations to the fund may be made at westga.edu/helpwest. Requests may be initiated at that site as well.



Trend Analysis

In FY 2022, the overall number of visitors to the Ombuds Office held fairly steady when compared with FY 2021, although the number of distinct cases rose by approximately 21%. While last year Covid was a key factor in a significant number (20%) of cases, that was no longer the case this year.

When comparing data related to faculty and staff, compensation and benefits emerge as a key issue for staff at nearly double the rate they do for faculty. Issues that fall in this category can include things like delayed pay, pay rates, and pay adjustments. Issues related to compensation and benefits were approximately three times more frequent this year for staff than they were in the last fiscal year.

Consultations regarding peer and colleague relationships were down significantly for both faculty and staff this year. These same sorts of consultations showed marked growth among students, however. The percentage of student cases involving peer/colleague relationships doubled in FY22 compared with FY21. Peer issues brought to the Ombuds Office by students involved conflicts arising in classroom and residential settings, as well as in the area of student employment. Undergraduates were far more likely to bring these sorts of issues to the office than graduate students were.

One other trend of note regarding students is a significant decline in the number of student cases involving administrative and service issues compared to last year. While last year 21% of student consultations with the Ombuds Office involved these sorts of cases, this year only 9% of student cases involved concerns about administrative services.

Interestingly, the group with the highest percentage of cases falling into the legal/financial/regulatory/compliance category was graduate students (although the overall number of graduate students consulting with the office was admittedly low, which could skew data). Broadly speaking, this category can include issues related to discrimination and harassment, accessibility, waste and abuse, and other sorts of issues that could create a legal risk. Staff were closely behind graduate students in consulting about these sorts of issues, with 20% of staff cases and 25% of graduate student cases involving at least one issue that falls into this category.

Campus and Professional Connections

The UWG Ombuds Office endeavors to establish connections throughout the campus community as well as with other members of the Ombuds profession. Awareness of the office among constituents at the home institution is essential for the Ombuds Office to be at its most effective. In addition, connections with other Ombuds are crucial for continued learning and professional development, which in turn enhance the services offered by the office and help raise the profile of UWG. Below are just some examples of these sorts of activities and connections undertaken in the past year.

- Provided conflict management training for peer tutors
- Cornerstone course presentation: Negotiation Skills
- Cornerstone course presentation: Managing Conflict
- Ombuds Office reading group: *High Conflict: How We Get Trapped and How We Get Out*
- Ombuds Office reading group: *Crucial Conversations: Tools for Talking When Stakes Are High*
- Pack Premiere
- HelpWest committee, chair
- Led the creation of *CookWest: A Taste of UWG*
- Ethics Week planning committee
- Outreach visits with various student groups
- New Faculty Orientation
- Tabling sessions at General Faculty Meeting, Celebrate West
- Appointed member of the International Ombuds Association Communications Committee
- Published review of *Bridges, not Blockades: Transcending University Politics* in the *Journal of the International Ombuds Association*
- Presented at the International Ombuds Association annual conference

Sample Visitor Comments on the Value of the Ombuds Office

- “Validation of my concerns and better able to understand my issue within the broader context.”
- “Having a neutral party involved in my situation was helpful to more wholly understand the situation from the outside. Talking through the issue helped me see the situation from both sides more than I did before the meeting.”
- “Hearing my options and having an objective person hear me.”
- “Getting feedback and some helpful suggestions from the Ombuds about how to handle an interaction with my colleague was just what I needed. I felt heard, the situation understood, and they presented some different perspectives, and suggested that I speak with my colleague to address our uncomfortable communication about a minor work issue that had initially left both me and my colleague feeling misunderstood.”
- “They are friendly and compassionate.”
- “Immediate response and help, kind, listened to the student’s side.”
- “I had clarity and realized different options I have to make my professional life at the campus more meaningful.”
- “Help[ed] me figure out and weigh further options.”
- “Knowing that there was someone I could talk to that didn’t take sides, it helps to have an objective viewpoint.”
- “Better conflict management and communication skills.”
- “Dr. Farmer listened to my concerns and I felt that I was ‘heard.’”