

FY25 OMBUDS REPORT

2024 - 2025 REPORT

Montgomery College Ombuds Office

Independent | Impartial | Informal | Confidential



117

UNIQUE VISITORS
FY25

3.2%

UTILIZATION
of workforce

+23%

USE
over FY24

An annual overview of Ombuds Office use, aggregate reporting categories, and non-identifying themes emerging from FY25 employee consultations.

Table of Contents

A Message from the Ombuds	3
Ombuds Services	4
FY25 Dashboard Facts	5
Use of the Ombuds Office	6
Visitor Distribution	7
Uniform Reporting Categories	8
FY25 Ombuds Observations Emerging from the Data	9
How the Ombuds Office Supports Informal Resolution	10
Training, Outreach, and Professional Engagement	11
Closing Reflection	12
Appendix: Reporting Notes and How to Read the URC Data	13
IOA Uniform Reporting Categories Desk Reference	14
IOA Uniform Reporting Categories Desk Reference (continued)	15
Back Cover	16

A Message from the Ombuds

The FY25 reporting year reflected both continuity and change. Employees continued to use the Ombuds Office as a confidential, informal place to talk through workplace concerns, understand options, prepare for difficult conversations, and consider next steps in ways that may help resolve concerns early, reduce unnecessary escalation, or clarify when formal channels are appropriate.

The data in this report tells a practical story. Use of the office increased from 95 visitors in FY24 to 117 visitors in FY25. That represents a 23 percent year-over-year increase while still falling within the expected higher-education ombuds utilization benchmark of approximately 1 to 5 percent of the eligible employee population. At Montgomery College, FY25 utilization was approximately 3.2 percent of the workforce.

What the data suggests

The increase in use should not be read as a finding that the College is failing. It is better understood as evidence that employees are using the office, that informal support is becoming more visible, and that recurring themes can now be described with greater clarity.

Several themes appeared across FY25 activity: strain in evaluative relationships, communication and process uncertainty, role instability during organizational change, psychological safety concerns, telework as a perceived equity issue, and questions about how formal and informal pathways connect. These themes are presented in aggregate and are not findings about any individual, department, or unit.

This report is intended to help the College community understand how the Ombuds Office was used during FY25 and to provide leadership with non-identifying insight into areas where clearer communication, consistent practice, and early informal engagement may strengthen workplace functioning.

Billy Struemke, JD, LLM

CO-OP Certified Ombuds

Ombuds Services

The Montgomery College Ombuds Office is an independent, impartial, informal, and confidential resource for employees. The office provides a voluntary space for employees to raise concerns, identify options, prepare for conversations, and navigate workplace conflict without initiating a formal complaint process.

Independent

Operates outside ordinary management and formal complaint channels.

Impartial

Does not advocate for a person, office, or outcome; supports fair process.

Informal

Does not investigate, make findings, issue decisions, or accept notice for the College.

Confidential

Protects visitor privacy consistent with the Ombuds role and applicable limits.

Common ways the office supported employees during FY25 included:

- Confidential consultation and listening
- Conflict coaching and preparation for difficult conversations
- Policy and process navigation
- Facilitated conversations, mediation-style support, or shuttle diplomacy when appropriate
- Supervisor or leadership consultation on communication and conflict management
- Referrals to formal channels when a visitor needed a process outside the Ombuds role
- Document, email, or meeting-preparation support
- Well-being and psychological-safety support through option exploration and resource connection

Important boundary: The Ombuds Office does not replace HRSTM, Compliance, Employee and Labor Relations, unions, supervisors, or formal grievance processes. The office helps visitors understand and consider their options, including whether and how to use those formal pathways.

FY25 Dashboard Facts

117

UNIQUE VISITORS
employees used office

138

ISSUE
instances coded

3.2%

FY25 UTILIZATION
of workforce

23%

INCREASE
over FY24

18%

REPEAT
2+ consultations

3,668

WORKFORCE
Q2 snapshot

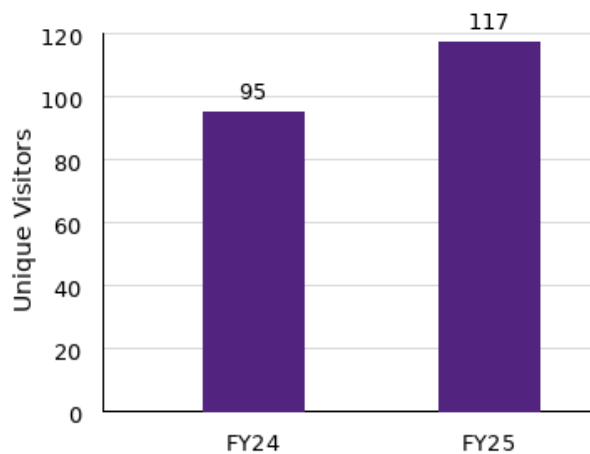
1-5%

BENCHMARK
higher ed range

2.7%

FY24 UTILIZATION
approx. workforce use

Unique Visitor Use Increased Year Over Year



How to read the increase

The increase from FY24 to FY25 indicates higher use of the resource. Using MC's public 2024 workforce count, FY24 utilization was approximately 2.7%, compared with 3.2% in FY25 - an increase of about 0.5 percentage points. Both years remain within the commonly referenced higher-education ombuds usage range.

The strongest public-facing message is not simply that 117 unique visitors used the office. The stronger message is that 117 unique visitors used a confidential, informal resource early enough for the College to observe aggregate patterns, support individual option exploration, and better understand where workplace friction is emerging.

Note: Unless otherwise stated, "visitors" refers to **unique visitors**. FY24 utilization uses MC's public 2024 workforce count of 3,538. FY25 utilization uses the FY25 Q2 workforce snapshot of 3,668.

Use of the Ombuds Office

FY25 visitor volume increased by 23 percent over FY24. The office served 117 visitors in FY25 compared with 95 visitors in FY24. Using MC's public 2024 workforce count and the FY25 Q2 workforce snapshot, utilization increased from approximately 2.7 percent to 3.2 percent.

Utilization increased by about 0.5 percentage points, while remaining within the commonly referenced higher-education ombuds usage range.

Metric	FY24	FY25	Change
Visitors	95	117	+23%
Utilization	2.7%	3.2%	+0.5 percentage points
Dominant issue area	Evaluative relationships	Evaluative relationships	Continued

Continuity

Evaluative relationship concerns remained the leading theme across the two reporting years.

Change

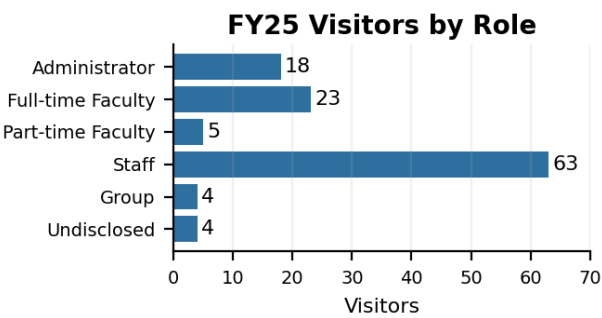
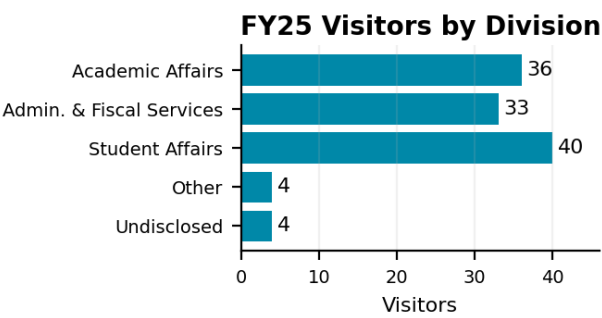
FY25 use increased, and concerns became more visible around communication, role clarity, process navigation, and fear of retaliation.

The Ombuds Office remains a voluntary resource. Visitor use should therefore be interpreted as a window into the concerns employees chose to bring forward, not as a complete measurement of all workplace concerns at the College.

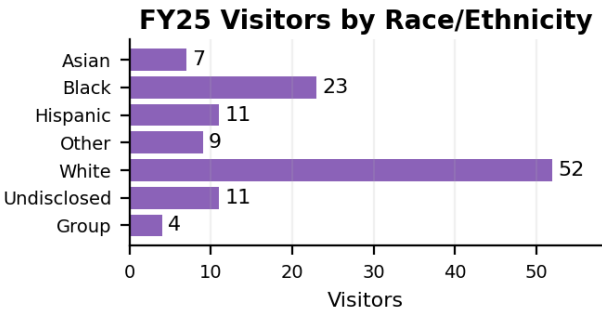
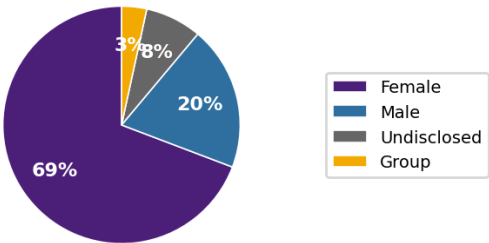
FY24 utilization uses MC's public 2024 workforce count of 3,538. FY25 utilization uses the FY25 Q2 workforce snapshot of 3,668.

Visitor Distribution

FY25 visitors came from across the College. Student Affairs accounted for the largest share of Ombuds visitors, followed by Academic Affairs and Administrative and Fiscal Services. Staff were the largest visitor group by role.



FY25 Visitors by Gender

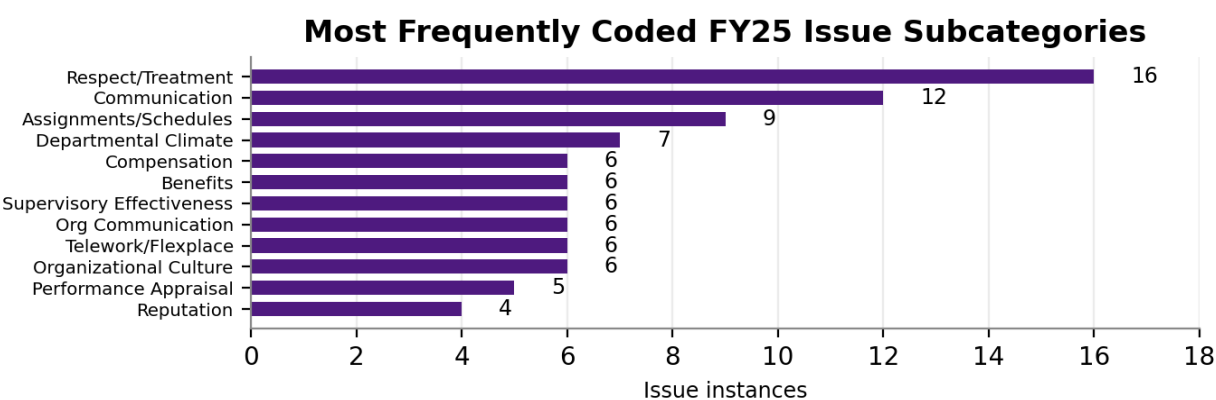
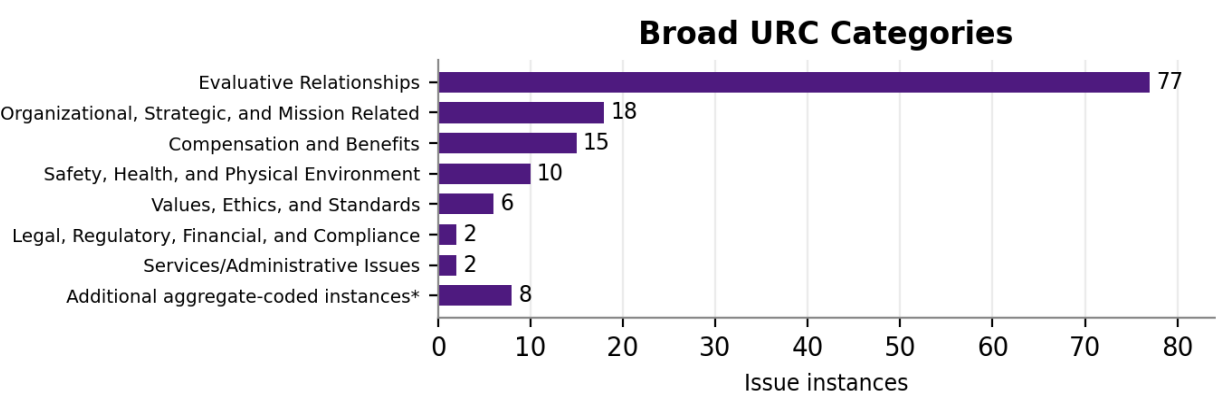


The visitor profile should be read together with workforce composition. Staff represented 54 percent of Ombuds visitors while full-time and part-time faculty together represented 24 percent. Division, role, race/ethnicity, and gender data are presented in aggregate and are not used to identify individual visitors.

Uniform Reporting Categories

The International Ombuds Association Uniform Reporting Categories provide a standardized way to describe issues brought to organizational ombuds offices. The categories are not findings or determinations. They are an analytical tool for identifying aggregate themes over time.

This page is read in two parts: broad URC categories appear first, followed by the most frequently coded subcategories. The second chart shows the more specific issue labels beneath those broad categories.



16

RESPECT / TREATMENT

12

COMMUNICATION

9

ASSIGN. / SCHEDULES

7

DEPT. CLIMATE

The most frequently coded subcategories point toward relationship quality, communication clarity, workload or scheduling expectations, departmental climate, supervisory effectiveness, telework, benefits, compensation, and organizational culture. These categories also align with the major themes described elsewhere in this report.

Note: The official FY25 report states 138 issue instances. The broad-category chart maps reported issue instances into broad URC categories and includes a separate aggregate-coded line to preserve consistency with the official total. The subcategory chart displays the most frequently coded subcategories from the reported distribution and should be read as an aggregate, non-identifying summary.

FY25 Ombuds Observations Emerging from the Data

Note: The themes on this page are Ombuds observations drawn from aggregate FY25 activity records and professional review of recurring concerns. They are not IOA Uniform Reporting Categories and should not be read as one-to-one matches with URC codes. These observations are presented in aggregate and are not findings of misconduct or evaluations of individual performance.

Communication and process clarity

Visitors described uncertainty about who to contact, what steps apply, how decisions are communicated, and what to expect next.

Evaluative relationship strain

Employees and supervisors sought support around expectations, tone, respect, feedback, performance management, and chair/dean/supervisor dynamics.

Values / culture / trust / morale

Visitors described concerns about trust, morale, institutional values, and whether workplace practices felt consistent with the College's stated commitments.

Formal process uncertainty

Visitors frequently sought assistance navigating the College's formal processes, including understanding which office or process was appropriate and how resources offered by, for example, HRSTM, ELR, Compliance, unions, and supervisory channels, interacted

Reorganization / role instability

Employees described uncertainty from organizational changes, interim roles, reporting-line shifts, new responsibilities, and changing expectations.

Peer / colleague conflict

Visitors raised concerns involving communication, trust, respect, boundaries, and unresolved conflict with peers or colleagues.

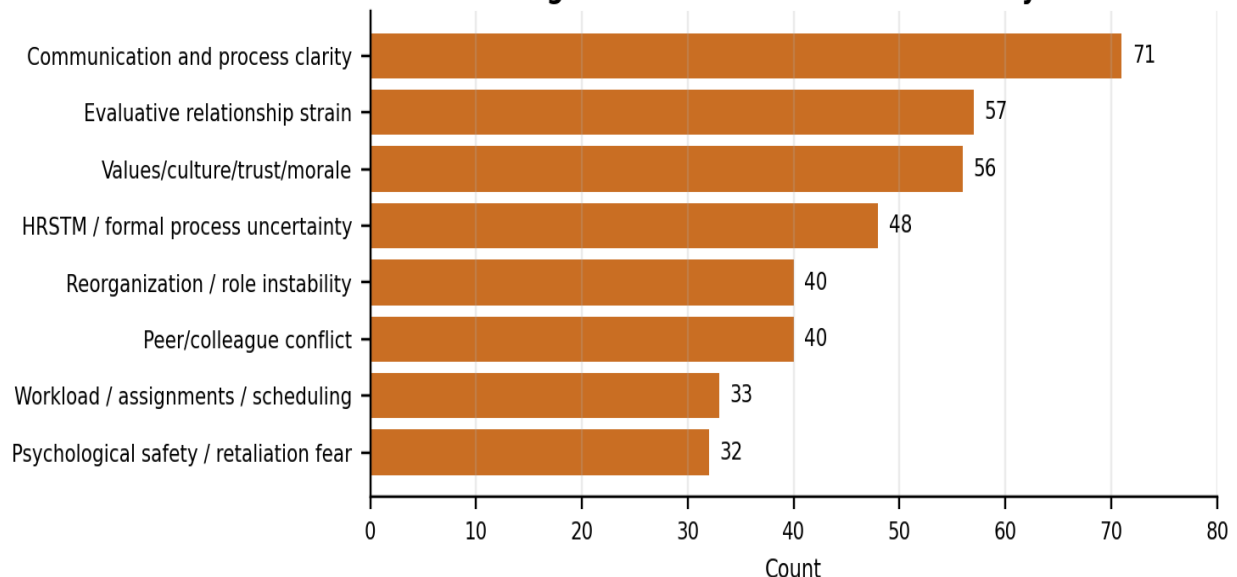
Workload / assignments / scheduling

Employees described concerns about workload, task distribution, scheduling expectations, telework consistency, and fairness in assignments.

Psychological safety / retaliation fear

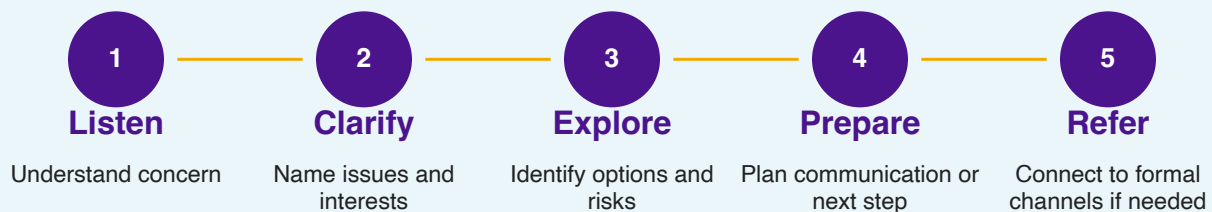
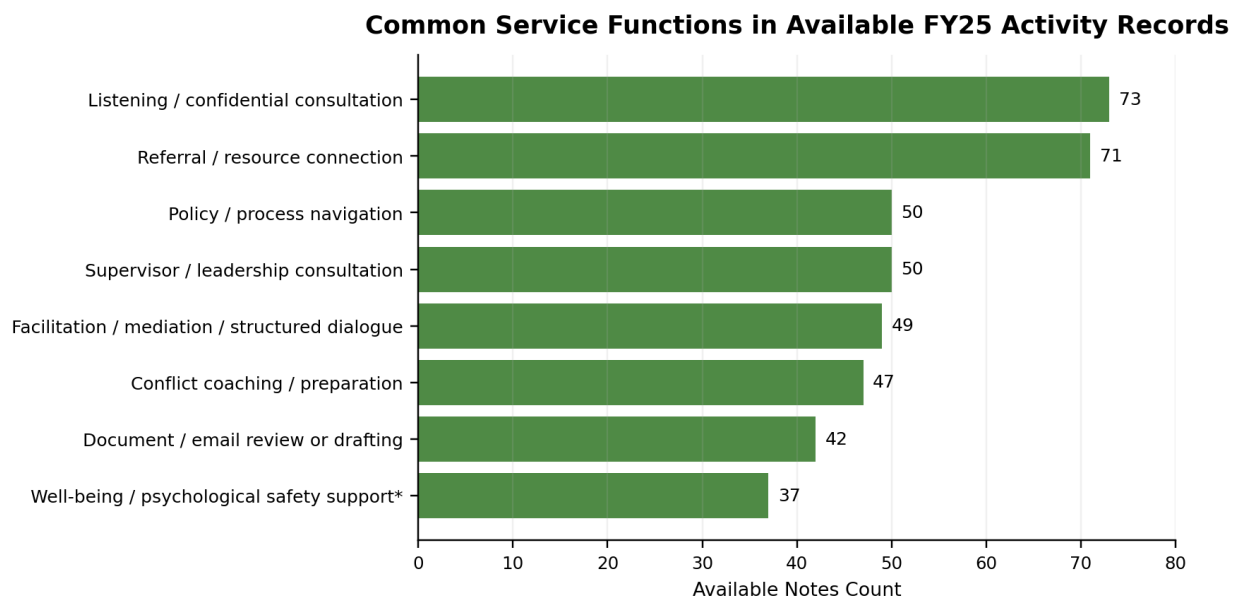
Some employees expressed hesitation to ask questions, seek clarification, raise concerns, or contact the Ombuds Office because they feared negative consequences.

Recurring Themes in Available FY25 Activity Records



How the Ombuds Office Supports Informal Resolution

The Ombuds Office supports informal resolution primarily by helping visitors slow down, clarify interests, understand options, and prepare for constructive engagement. In many matters, the office helped visitors consider informal options before moving to a formal process.



Note on well-being support: The Ombuds Office does not provide counseling, therapy, or clinical services. In this context, well-being support means providing a confidential place for employees to talk through concerns, be heard, clarify options, and consider possible next steps. For many visitors, having a safe place to express concerns and think through choices is an important first step before deciding whether to continue informally, seek another resource, or use a formal process. Just having a place to express their concerns and know that someone is listening and noting the problem is often enough.

Training, Outreach, and Professional Engagement

In addition to confidential consultations, the Ombuds Office provided training, outreach, and professional engagement designed to strengthen communication, support collegial relationships, and equip employees and teams with tools to navigate conflict constructively.

Workshops and skill-building

Apology, Forgiveness, and Reconciliation; Leadership, Followership, and Communication; Experiential Learning and Teambuilding; Active Listening and Positive Communication Skills.

Institution-wide engagement

Participation in Staff Enrichment Day, Compliance and Ethics Week, and the Part-time Faculty Conference increased visibility and awareness of the Ombuds function.

Team and supervisor support

The office supported groups and supervisors through coaching, preparation for difficult conversations, facilitated discussions, and practical communication strategies.

Professional development

The Ombuds maintained professional engagement through IOA-related training, continuing education, and CO-OP credentialing.

CO-OP credentialing

In FY25, the Ombuds Office achieved Certified Organizational Ombuds Practitioner (CO-OP) credentialing through the International Ombuds Association. This credential reflects professional training, demonstrated ombuds experience, successful examination, adherence to IOA principles, and ongoing continuing education. For Montgomery College, this signals that the office is operating in line with nationally recognized organizational ombuds standards and strengthens confidence that employees have access to a professional, independent, impartial, informal, and confidential resource.

Closing Reflection

The FY25 data shows continued use of the Ombuds Office as a confidential, informal resource for employees navigating workplace concerns. The themes identified in this report are presented in aggregate to help the College better understand where employees are experiencing friction, uncertainty, or strain.

The Ombuds Office will continue to support employees through confidential consultation, conflict coaching, option exploration, facilitated conversations when appropriate, and referrals to formal resources when needed.

As Montgomery College continues to evolve, the Ombuds Office remains available as an independent, impartial, informal, and confidential resource for employees seeking to think through concerns, understand options, and engage constructively.

Contact the Ombuds Office

Billy Struemke, JD, LLM

CO-OP Certified Ombuds

Montgomery College - Rockville Campus

Office of the Ombuds | MK 315G

51 Mannakee Street

Rockville, MD 20850

Office: 240-567-4104

Mobile: 240-595-0924

Email: ombuds@montgomerycollege.edu

Email: Billy.Struemke@montgomerycollege.edu

Independent

Impartial

Informal

Confidential

Appendix: Reporting Notes and How to Read the URC Data

Reporting period:

FY25 covers July 1, 2024 through June 30, 2025. The employee headcount used for context is the Fiscal Year 2025 Quarter 2 workforce snapshot of 3,668 employees as of December 31, 2024.

Confidentiality:

Data is aggregated and non-identifying. No individual visitor, department, or matter is identified in this report.

Interpretation:

Ombuds reporting categories do not constitute findings, determinations, or conclusions. They are used to describe the general nature of issues brought forward and to identify patterns that may warrant attention.

How to read the URC data

The Uniform Reporting Categories are used to organize concerns brought to the Ombuds Office in a consistent, non-identifying way. Unless otherwise stated, “visitors” refers to unique visitors. A single visitor may raise more than one issue, so the number of issue instances is higher than the number of visitors.

URC data should not be read as findings, verified complaints, or conclusions about any person, department, or division. The categories describe the general nature of concerns discussed with the Ombuds Office and help identify aggregate patterns over time.

The full International Ombudsman Association Uniform Reporting Categories desk reference follows this page.



INTERNATIONAL OMBUDSMAN ASSOCIATION

Uniform Reporting Categories

VERSION 2
October 2007

1. Compensation & Benefits

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

- 1.a **Compensation** (rate of pay, salary amount, job salary classification/level)
- 1.b **Payroll** (administration of pay, check wrong or delayed)
- 1.c **Benefits** (decisions related to medical, dental, life, vacation/sick leave, education, worker's compensation insurance, etc.)
- 1.d **Retirement, Pension** (eligibility, calculation of amount, retirement pension benefits)
- 1.e **Other** (any other employee compensation or benefit not described by the above sub-categories)

2. Evaluative Relationships

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

- 2.a **Priorities, Values, Beliefs** (differences about what should be considered important – or most important – often rooted in ethical or moral beliefs)
- 2.b **Respect/Treatment** (demonstrations of inappropriate regard for people, not listening, rudeness, crudeness, etc.)
- 2.c **Trust/Integrity** (suspicion that others are not being honest, whether or to what extent one wishes to be honest, etc.)
- 2.d **Reputation** (possible impact of rumors and/or gossip about professional or personal matters)
- 2.e **Communication** (quality and/or quantity of communication)
- 2.f **Bullying, Mobbing** (abusive, threatening, and/or coercive behaviors)
- 2.g **Diversity-Related** (comments or behaviors perceived to be insensitive, offensive, or intolerant on the basis of an identity-related difference such as race, gender, nationality, sexual orientation)
- 2.h **Retaliation** (punitive behaviors for previous actions or comments, whistleblower)
- 2.i **Physical Violence** (actual or threats of bodily harm to another)
- 2.j **Assignments/Schedules** (appropriateness or fairness of tasks, expected volume of work)
- 2.k **Feedback** (feedback or recognition given, or responses to feedback received)
- 2.l **Consultation** (requests for help in dealing with issues between two or more individuals they supervise/teach or with other unusual situations in evaluative relationships)

2.m Performance Appraisal/Grading

(job/academic performance in formal or informal evaluation)

- 2.n **Departmental Climate** (prevailing behaviors, norms, or attitudes within a department for which supervisors or faculty have responsibility.)
- 2.o **Supervisory Effectiveness** (management of department or classroom, failure to address issues)
- 2.p **Insubordination** (refusal to do what is asked)
- 2.q **Discipline** (appropriateness, timeliness, requirements, alternatives, or options for responding)
- 2.r **Equity of Treatment** (favoritism, one or more individuals receive preferential treatment)
- 2.s **Other** (any other evaluative relationship not described by the above sub-categories)

3. Peer and Colleague Relationships

Questions, concerns, issues or inquiries involving peers or colleagues who do not have a supervisory-employee or student-professor relationship (e.g., two staff members within the same department or conflict involving members of a student organization.)

- 3.a **Priorities, Values, Beliefs** (differences about what should be considered important – or most important – often rooted in ethical or moral beliefs)
- 3.b **Respect/Treatment** (demonstrations of inappropriate regard for people, not listening, rudeness, crudeness, etc.)
- 3.c **Trust/Integrity** (suspicion that others are not being honest, whether or to what extent one wishes to be honest, etc.)
- 3.d **Reputation** (possible impact of rumors and/or gossip about professional or personal matters)
- 3.e **Communication** (quality and/or quantity of communication)
- 3.f **Bullying, Mobbing** (abusive, threatening, and/or coercive behaviors)
- 3.g **Diversity-Related** (comments or behaviors perceived to be insensitive, offensive, or intolerant on the basis of an identity-related difference such as race, gender, nationality, sexual orientation)
- 3.h **Retaliation** (punitive behaviors for previous actions or comments, whistleblower)
- 3.i **Physical Violence** (actual or threats of bodily harm to another)
- 3.j **Other** (any peer or colleague relationship not described by the above sub-categories)

4. Career Progression and Development

Questions, concerns, issues or inquiries about administrative processes and decisions regarding entering and leaving a job, what it entails, (i.e., recruitment, nature and place of assignment, job security, and separation.)

- 4.a **Job Application/Selection and Recruitment Processes** (recruitment and selection processes, facilitation of job applications, short-listing and criteria for selection, disputed decisions linked to recruitment and selection)
- 4.b **Job Classification and Description** (changes or disagreements over requirements of assignment, appropriate tasks)
- 4.c **Involuntary Transfer/Change of Assignment** (notice, selection and special dislocation rights/benefits, removal from prior duties, unrequested change of work tasks)
- 4.d **Tenure/Position Security/Ambiguity** (security of position or contract, provision of secure contractual categories)
- 4.e **Career Progression** (promotion, reappointment, or tenure)
- 4.f **Rotation and Duration of Assignment** (non-completion or over-extension of assignments in specific settings/countries, lack of access or involuntary transfer to specific roles/assignments, requests for transfer to other places/duties/roles)
- 4.g **Resignation** (concerns about whether or how to voluntarily terminate employment or how such a decision might be communicated appropriately)
- 4.h **Termination/Non-Renewal** (end of contract, non-renewal of contract, disputed permanent separation from organization)
- 4.i **Re-employment of Former or Retired Staff** (loss of competitive advantages associated with re-hiring retired staff, favoritism)
- 4.j **Position Elimination** (elimination or abolition of an individual's position)
- 4.k **Career Development, Coaching, Mentoring** (classroom, on-the-job, and varied assignments as training and developmental opportunities)
- 4.l **Other** (any other issues linked to recruitment, assignment, job security or separation not described by the above sub-categories)

Categories 5-9

5. Legal, Regulatory, Financial and Compliance

Questions, concerns, issues or inquiries that may create a legal risk (financial, sanction etc.) for the organization or its members if not addressed, including issues related to waste, fraud or abuse.

- 5.a **Criminal Activity** (threats or crimes planned, observed, or experienced, fraud)
- 5.b **Business and Financial Practices** (inappropriate actions that abuse or waste organizational finances, facilities or equipment)
- 5.c **Harassment** (unwelcome physical, verbal, written, e-mail, audio, video psychological or sexual conduct that creates a hostile or intimidating environment)
- 5.d **Discrimination** (different treatment compared with others or exclusion from some benefit on the basis of, for example, gender, race, age, national origin, religion, etc.[being part of an Equal Employment Opportunity protected category – applies in the U.S.])
- 5.e **Disability, Temporary or Permanent, Reasonable Accommodation** (extra time on exams, provision of assistive technology, interpreters, or Braille materials including questions on policies, etc. for people with disabilities)
- 5.f **Accessibility** (removal of physical barriers, providing ramps, elevators, etc.)
- 5.g **Intellectual Property Rights** (e.g., copyright and patent infringement)
- 5.h **Privacy and Security of Information** (release or access to individual or organizational private or confidential information)
- 5.i **Property Damage** (personal property damage, liabilities)
- 5.j **Other** (any other legal, financial and compliance issue not described by the above sub-categories)

6. Safety, Health, and Physical Environment

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

- 6.a **Safety** (physical safety, injury, medical evacuation, meeting federal and state requirements for training and equipment)
- 6.b **Physical Working/Living Conditions** (temperature, odors, noise, available space, lighting, etc)
- 6.c **Ergonomics** (proper set-up of workstation affecting physical functioning)
- 6.d **Cleanliness** (sanitary conditions and facilities to prevent the spread of disease)
- 6.e **Security** (adequate lighting in parking lots, metal detectors, guards, limited access to building by outsiders, anti-terrorists measures (not for classifying “compromise of classified or top secret” information)

- 6.f **Telework/Flexplace** (ability to work from home or other location because of business or personal need, e.g., in case of man-made or natural emergency)
- 6.g **Safety Equipment** (access to/use of safety equipment as well as access to or use of safety equipment, e.g., fire extinguisher)
- 6.h **Environmental Policies** (policies not being followed, being unfair ineffective, cumbersome)
- 6.i **Work Related Stress and Work-Life Balance** (Post-Traumatic Stress, Critical Incident Response, internal/external stress, e.g. divorce, shooting, caring for sick, injured)
- 6.j **Other** (any safety, health, or physical environment issue not described by the above sub-categories)

7. Services/Administrative Issues

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

- 7.a **Quality of Services** (how well services were provided, accuracy or thoroughness of information, competence, etc.)
- 7.b **Responsiveness/Timeliness** (time involved in getting a response or return call or about the time for a complete response to be provided)
- 7.c **Administrative Decisions and Interpretation/Application of Rules** (impact of non-disciplinary decisions, decisions about requests for administrative and academic services, e.g., exceptions to policy deadlines or limits, refund requests, appeals of library or parking fines, application for financial aid, etc.)
- 7.d **Behavior of Service Provider(s)** (how an administrator or staff member spoke to or dealt with a constituent, customer, or client, e.g., rude, inattentive, or impatient)
- 7.e **Other** (any services or administrative issue not described by the above sub-categories)

8. Organizational, Strategic, and Mission Related

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

- 8.a **Strategic and Mission-Related/ Strategic and Technical Management** (principles, decisions and actions related to where and how the organization is moving)
- 8.b **Leadership and Management** (quality/capacity of management and/or management/leadership decisions, suggested training, reassignments and reorganizations)

- 8.c **Use of Positional Power/Authority** (lack or abuse of power provided by individual's position)
- 8.d **Communication** (content, style, timing, effects and amount of organizational and leader's communication, quality of communication about strategic issues)
- 8.e **Restructuring and Relocation** (issues related to broad scope planned or actual restructuring and/or relocation affecting the whole or major divisions of an organization, e.g. downsizing, off shoring, outsourcing)
- 8.f **Organizational Climate** (issues related to organizational morale and/or capacity for functioning)
- 8.g **Change Management** (making, responding or adapting to organizational changes, quality of leadership in facilitating organizational change)
- 8.h **Priority Setting and/or Funding** (disputes about setting organizational/departmental priorities and/or allocation of funding within programs)
- 8.i **Data, Methodology, Interpretation of Results** (scientific disputes about the conduct, outcomes and interpretation of studies and resulting data for policy)
- 8.j **Interdepartment/Interorganization Work/Territory** (disputes about which department/organization should be doing what/taking the lead)
- 8.k **Other** (any organizational issue not described by the above sub-categories)

9. Values, Ethics, and Standards

Questions, concerns, issues or inquiries about the fairness of organizational values, ethics, and/or standards, the application of related policies and/or procedures, or the need for creation or revision of policies, and/or standards.

- 9.a **Standards of Conduct** (fairness, applicability or lack of behavioral guidelines and/or Codes of Conduct, e.g., Academic Honesty, plagiarism, Code of Conduct, conflict of interest)
- 9.b **Values and Culture** (questions, concerns or issues about the values or culture of the organization)
- 9.c **Scientific Conduct/Integrity** (scientific or research misconduct or misdemeanors, e.g., authorship; falsification of results)
- 9.d **Policies and Procedures NOT Covered in Broad Categories 1 thru 8** (fairness or lack of policy or the application of the policy, policy not followed, or needs revision, e.g., appropriate dress, use of internet or cell phones)
- 9.e **Other** (Other policy, procedure, ethics or standards issues not described in the above sub-categories)

