

NC STATE UNIVERSITY



NC State Faculty & Staff Ombuds Office

Annual Report for 2019

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Message from the NC State Faculty & Staff Ombuds Roy Baroff:

Welcome to the Annual Report of the NC State Faculty & Staff Ombuds Office!

As we enter a new decade in 2020, ombuds services for faculty and staff at NC State are on a firm foundation. While the faculty and staff ombuds office is still relatively new at NC State, it has built a solid foundation across the University by providing independent, confidential, informal and impartial conflict engagement services. The ombuds serves as a navigator, supports empowerment, connects people with resources, and serves as a conflict coach.

This past year (calendar 2019) included efforts to further integrate and connect ombuds services with the campus. Educational outreach also continued with the ombuds completing visits to 60 departmental faculty meetings, almost all departments, (since office inception) and many other staff unit meetings to introduce ombuds services.

The office supplements existing conflict engagement services and fits within NC State's conflict resolution system as an alternate communications channel. People can speak with the ombuds confidentially, off-the-record, and obtain assistance to address a wide range of issues. For many visitors to the office, the ombuds serves as a first stop for support, information and resource identification and can lead to contact with other university services.

Operationally, 2019 saw an increase in case numbers for both faculty and staff over 2018. The office opened a total of 223 cases (a combined 7% increase over 2018). Cases again ranged across topics and numbers of contacts with some themes and observations noted below.

As the office looks to the future it is important to appreciate the range of support offered from across the university. This includes ongoing connections with the NC State Faculty Senate, Staff Senate and special thanks to Chancellor Woodson and Provost Arden for their continued support.

With warm regards and best wishes,

Roy Baroff

Roy Baroff, MA, JD, CO-OP

NC State Faculty & Staff Ombuds



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Summary

Office Development and Operations

Faculty services began February 2015 with Staff services added January 2017. The office serves all with a faculty appointment (about 2400 in number) along with all other university staff (about 6900 in number) and use of the office is on a voluntary basis. The ombuds routinely attends Faculty Senate, Staff Senate and University Council meetings. The ombuds provides multiple departmental and unit presentations to provide updates and introduce the office along with regular administrative meetings with senior university leaders.

Case and Post Contact Survey Data

The office opened 223 cases in 2019 including Faculty 95 (9% increase over 2018) and Staff 128 (5% increase over 2018). (See case information below and Data Summary - Appendix A.) A post contact survey is provided to ombuds office visitors for office improvement and to gauge impact. Results indicate high visitor satisfaction with services and demonstrate a range of impacts. (See Post Contact Survey Results below and summary - Appendix B, page 12.)

General Considerations / System Issues / Observations

Based on the day-to-day work of the office along with Case Data and Post Contact Survey results, a number of general themes surfaced (some carry over from 2018) for review and consideration.

For 2019 these include:

1. Management and supervision – people seeking more autonomy to do their work / want to provide input toward collaboration / want team building both within and across units
2. Career advancement – staff want defined paths to advance / want equitable pay / want to be rewarded for expanded scope of work
3. Faculty review / career issues – want clarity of expectations / make post tenure review more “friendly”

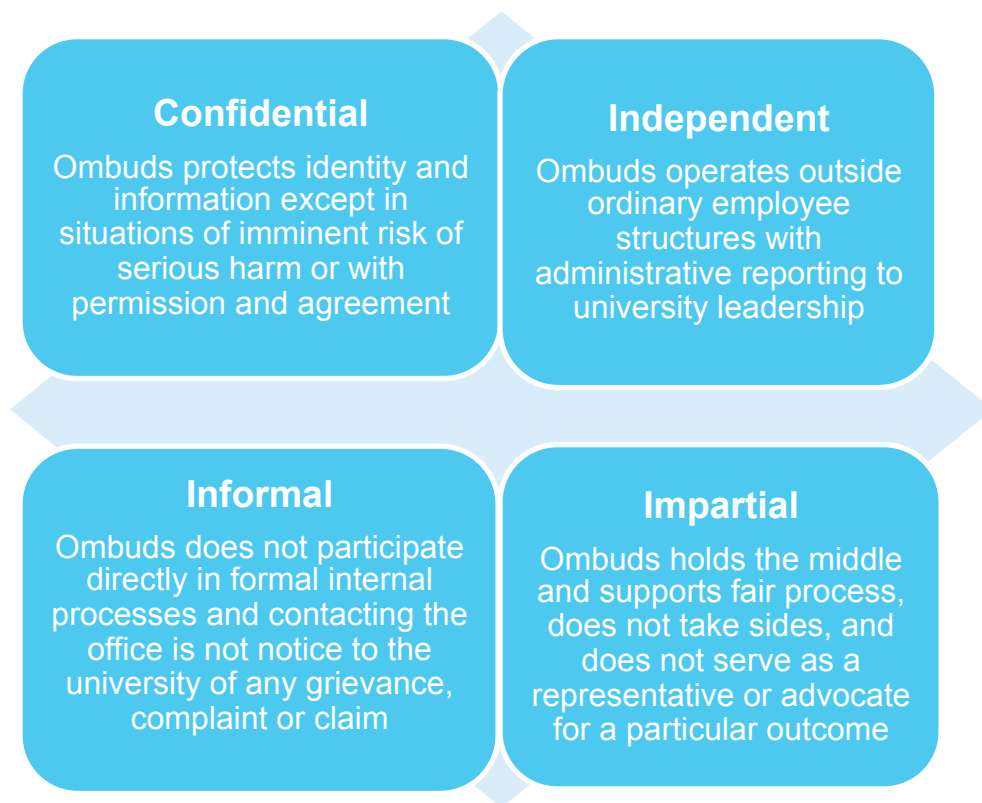


Overview of Organizational Ombuds Role and Services

An organizational ombuds has two primary roles –

- 1) direct services to individuals and groups
- 2) surface trends and share information to support conflict engagement / resolution across campus while protecting the confidentiality of sources

The faculty and staff ombuds role at NC State follows the Standards of Practice and Code of Ethics of the International Ombuds Association (IOA).

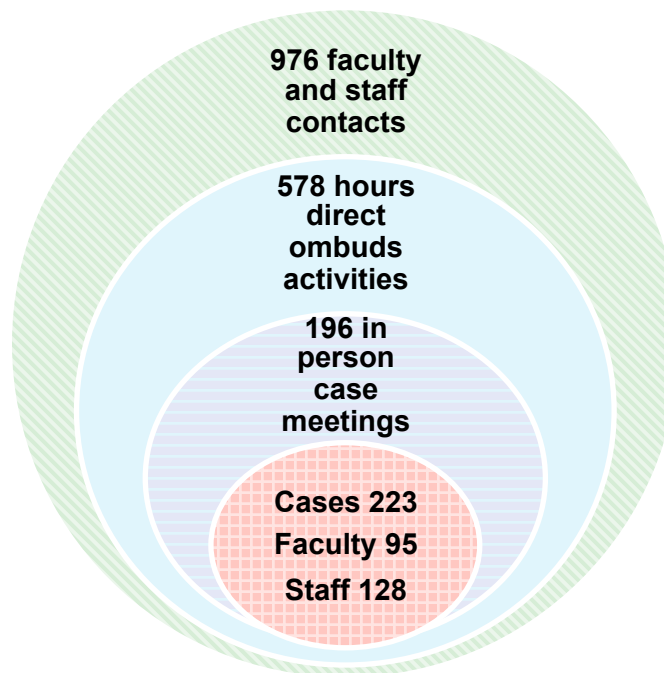


Program Operations

The office is located at 112 Cox Ave., Ste. 212 / 213 near campus with parking available, confidential access and comfortable meeting and office space. Directions to the office are provided as part of intake and scheduling and information including a map and photo of the building are on the office website.

The office has an online presence (facultyombuds.ncsu.edu and staffombuds.ncsu.edu) that provides general ombuds information, office reports, conflict resolution resources, and contact information. It also includes a monthly blog post sharing information about the office and issues in the ombuds and conflict resolution field.

The ombuds attends a range of faculty and staff meetings across campus to provide an introduction and updates to the office. The office also provides various conflict resolution related trainings / workshops to groups across campus including Lunch & Learn programs (Conflict Leadership with the Faculty & Staff Ombuds). The “Meet the Faculty & Staff Ombuds” program continues to raise awareness of services offered.



Direct ombuds services are primarily in-person individual meetings. (See Appendix A.) Ombuds activities also include conflict coaching, making confidential inquiries, providing information, reviewing and discussing policies, regulations, and rules, and identifying NC State resources that may be helpful.

Office Information – Case Data and Post Contact Survey

The office collects a range of data to inform the ombuds work including logistics of contact and meetings with the ombuds, types of issues brought to the office, and demographics of those using the office when available.

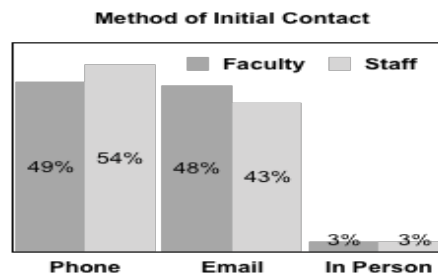
58 = 0	85 = 0	62 ¹⁰⁷ =	87 ¹²² =	95 ¹²⁸ =
2015	2016	2017	2018	2019
- Faculty			Staff	

Case Data (See Appendix A)

Case data for 2019 is based on information from 212 cases and includes the method of initial office contact, first meeting type, referral source and case categories (IOA Reporting Categories). Initial contact is fairly close between phone and email (see chart). First meetings were primarily in-person – Faculty 69% / Staff 65%.

The direct ombuds activity for faculty and staff (combined) was consultation / coaching (44%), followed by resource identification (38%), and confidential contact (8%).

A visitor meeting typically lasts an hour or more where a visitor shares any concerns. The



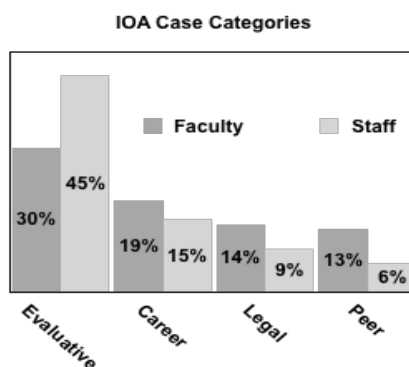
ombuds listens, helps the visitor clarify and then works with the person to develop and consider options for how to proceed. One option unique to the ombuds office is an ability to make a “confidential contact” - this is where the ombuds office contacts another university office and makes an inquiry on a particular topic without disclosing the specifics of the visitor contact. This information is then shared with the visitor who can then decide how to proceed.

Case Categories

The office uses the IOA Uniform Reporting Categories and each case is assigned a primary and secondary category. The top four primary case categories for both faculty and staff include:

Evaluative Relationships
 Career Progression & Development
 Legal, Regulatory & Financial
 Peer & Colleague Relationships

These categories are to be expected as employees bring issues focused on their department or unit management, their jobs and future as well as policy, regulation or rule related considerations.

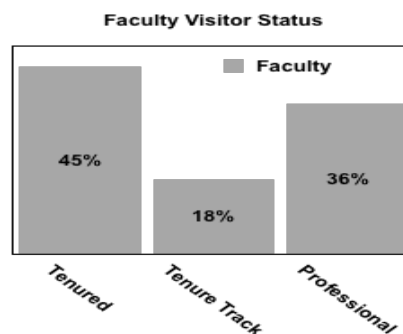


Much of the ombuds’ work is to help visitors develop informal options for how to address a situation. Sometimes it also includes identifying and helping a visitor connect with existing university services. The goal is for the visitor to consider as many options as possible from which to develop an action plan.

Visitor Demographics

Who seeks help from the faculty and staff ombuds? In this regard, a range of data is collected including status, role, gender, length of service, ethnicity and age. (See Appendix A.)

A few items to note. The primary faculty status is tenured while gender was 48% female / 52% male. For length of service, 59% of faculty members contacting the office served for 10 years or less.



With respect to staff, 54% were SHRA and 40% EHRA non-faculty. Gender was 78% female to 22% male and most (65%) were employees with no supervisory duties. For length of service, 71% who contacted the office served for 10 years or less.

Post Contact Survey Data (See Appendix B)

In an effort to gain feedback on operations and to learn about the impact of the ombuds services, the office provides a Post Contact Survey to those served by the office. The survey is provided in written form along with directions to an online survey link. Participation in the survey is voluntary and anonymous.

As an overview, the survey seeks information on the following topics: Office materials / Contact and visiting the office / Physical location and space / Contact with the Ombuds / Actions taken if the Ombuds Office not contacted / Actual actions taken post ombuds contact

Overall, the survey results are very positive towards the office materials, ability to contact and visit, the office location, and the physical space. Setting up the office near, but not on campus and with plenty of parking has made visiting the office relatively easy. Similarly, contact with the ombuds was also very positive although several responses highlight limitations in terms of perceived impact on the issue / concern presented. This is not unexpected as the ombuds role, particularly, its role as impartial, means the office is supportive, but not an advocate for specific outcomes and situations are not always resolved.

At the same time, in terms of office impact, multiple responses indicate that visitors found contacting the ombuds to be helpful. Question 4 asked (among other queries) if “the ombuds helped identify and consider options to address concerns” with 93% Strongly Agree and 5% Agree. Additionally, 79% Strongly Agree and 13% Agree that “I was better able to handle my situation following discussion with the Ombuds.”

Finally, two direct impact questions provide interesting data. Question 5 - “If you had not contacted the Faculty / Staff Ombuds Office, what do you think you would have done?” Question 6 – “After contacting the Faculty / Staff Ombuds Office, what did you actually do?” These questions, even with small numbers, highlight that contact with the office had a range of significant impacts (see partial results below).

Action	Q5 – if not contacted ombuds office	Q6 – after contacting ombuds office
Contacted other university resources	10	3
Filed grievance or other administrative action	5	0
Consulted private attorney to consider a lawsuit	6	1
Left the university	9	0

General Considerations / System Issues / Observations

Based on the day-to-day work with faculty and staff, a review of the categories of cases and other case data, various observations can be developed. At the same time, it should be noted that the number of cases present a small “slice” of the university so all observations should be considered with that in mind.

Overall, people bring a significant number of concerns about their direct reports that sometimes reaches to the unit or department leadership. This is not a new issue as it was also reflected in the 2018 report and, to some degree, it is not unexpected as many concerns in the workplace revolve around direct reports and/or unit leadership.

The observed themes on this aspect for 2019 include:

1. Management and supervision – people seeking more autonomy to do their work / want to provide input toward collaboration / want team building both within and across units

On the topic of management and supervision concerns, here’s a three-pronged approach to address the “how people manage” concern that includes training, accountability, and coaching.

NC State has developed some excellent managerial training programs and could these be more directive as to its management culture, i.e., this is how we manage at NC State. Developing a consistent managerial culture will provide employees a solid foundation from which to be productive.

Further, to transform training into action, there is a need for accountability and, thus, the idea to build managerial actions into performance evaluation that includes 360 feedback to provide additional information channels.

The third prong focuses on providing ongoing support for managers in the form of coaching. Creating an intentional culture with accountability and supporting its ongoing development with resources provides a path toward creating an extraordinary university workplace.

2. Career advancement – staff want defined paths to advance / want equitable pay / want to be rewarded for expanded scope of work

Career path concerns can be a challenge within the State, the UNC system and the university structures. At the same time, in some instances, there are clear paths; however, the issues that come to ombuds office are where the visitor describes a situation where they do not see promotion opportunities. Thus, units are encouraged to determine if promotion paths exist within the unit, and, if so, communicate these to staff and support staff development.

3. Faculty review / career issues – want clarity of expectations / make post tenure review more “friendly”

With respect to faculty issues related to career, promotion and evaluation, as noted above re managerial concerns, it is not unexpected that faculty evaluation issues show up at the ombuds office. The university has well developed processes in place to review reappointment, tenure and promotion and a somewhat newer process for post tenure review.

There are ongoing information sessions and trainings available that do an outstanding job to disseminate information. And, at the same time, are there opportunities to build greater early support for new faculty around expectations? This same consideration showed up for faculty seeking tenure and advancement to full professor. Further attention to managing faculty transitions at the local departmental level may be warranted.

Finally, some faculty working through post tenure review felt it was more of a punitive process than a developmental tool. While this was the faculty member under review perspective, since the same “complaint” was raised by faculty in different departments, this suggests the need for further attention on how the somewhat newer post tenure review process is being implemented.

Conclusion

For the faculty and staff ombuds office, 2019 was about building additional connections and further visibility as a university resource. With continued growth in cases and continued outreach it is hoped that 2020 will see additional ombuds office utilization. For 2020, the office will continue to serve as a zero-barrier resource for university employees to bring concerns and receive confidential, independent, informal and impartial support to navigate and seek solutions.