



UNIVERSITY OF OREGON

Ombuds Program

ANNUAL REPORT FY21

PREPARED BY

BRETT HARRIS, UNIVERSITY OMBUDS
KEEGAN CARY, OMBUDS CASE ASSISTANT
SARA ASH, ASSISTANT OMBUDS

Ombuds Program Staff

Brett Hathaway Harris joined the University of Oregon as the university ombuds in 2016. Brett holds a J.D. from the University of Idaho College of Law with a degree emphasis in Native American law. She previously served as the ombuds at the University of Mississippi, worked as a contract ombuds and provided dispute resolution services through private practice, directed court mediation programs, and worked in employment law. Brett is a member of the International Ombuds Association (IOA) and currently serves as the elected co-chair of the IOA's DEIB Task Force.

The ombuds program welcomes Sara Ash as its new assistant ombuds. Sara joined the University of Oregon in July 2021, and looks forward to working with students, faculty, and staff in her new role. Sara has over seven years of director-level experience in student affairs and is focused on the service aspect of ombuds work. She holds a M.A. in Adult and Higher Education and has completed training in mediation and ombudsing through the International Ombuds Association.

Keegan Cary joined the ombuds program as a case assistant in 2020 while pursuing her M.S. in Conflict and Dispute Resolution. Keegan has completed the Ombuds Foundations Course training through the International Ombuds Association as well as mediation training. In the past year, Keegan has assisted visitors and has been a key contributor to data management and compiling our annual report. In the upcoming year, Keegan will serve in the ombuds department as the Interim Director of Student Conflict Resolution Services.



**BRETT HATHAWAY
HARRIS**
University Ombuds



SARA ASH
Assistant Ombuds



KEEGAN CARY
Ombuds Case Assistant

Thank You to the Ombuds Program Student Interns

Each year, the ombuds program selects graduate students from the University of Oregon's Conflict and Dispute Resolution Program to train in ombuds theory and practice. These interns make a valuable contribution to the program by assisting with case intakes, conducting outreach to students, and completing special projects. The ombuds program extends a thank you to this year's interns, Langston Mayo ('21 M.S. Conflict and Dispute Resolution), Kyra Duffy ('22 M.S. Conflict and Dispute Resolution, MBA), and Agnieszka Alboszta ('22 M.S. Conflict and Dispute Resolution).

Farewell and Thank You to Becky Couch, Program Administrator

Becky Couch retired from the University of Oregon at the end of December 2020 after twenty-three years with the university. Her contributions to the ombuds program were fundamental to the success of ombuds services. Becky was known as a steady and caring person in both providing assistance to ombuds visitors and in our office environment. We wish her well in her new adventures!

About the Ombuds Program

The Ombuds Program (OP) provides comprehensive conflict resolution services for individuals and groups. Additionally, the OP provides upward feedback for systemic concern resolution.

The OP offers a distinct service in that it is the only campus resource providing confidential, independent, impartial, and informal services for students and employees.

The OP adheres to the International Ombuds Association (IOA) standards of practice, code of ethics, and best practices. The OP also upholds and promotes the vision, mission, and core values of the University of Oregon.

Single-Party Services

- Conflict coaching
- Management coaching
- Policy guidance
- Information and referral to other resources
- Strategizing and preparing for next steps

Multi-Party Services

- Mediation
- Group facilitation
- Shuttle diplomacy
- Conflict diagnosis/analysis
- Informal climate assessment
- Group conflict resolution processes
- Upward feedback

What to expect when contacting the Ombuds Program

1 Intake

When visitors reach out to the OP, staff conducts a brief intake which serves to designate the appropriate ombuds for the case and prepare the ombuds to provide services.



2 Consultation

During appointments, ombuds explain services and visitors share information about their university-related concern. Ombuds then begin the process of identifying options for handling the concern, which may include guidance on policies or processes, information about other resources, recommending dispute resolution options, and/or communication and conflict coaching, as well as strategizing about next steps.

3 Action Steps

After an action plan is developed, visitors take steps to resolve their concern. When appropriate, other participants are invited into the resolution process for mediation or other multi-party processes. The ombuds program aims to empower visitors to take steps toward resolution, but does not force any steps or outcome.

4 Evaluation

Visitors are welcome to revisit the OP for further consultation and advice as they proceed with steps to resolve their concern and/or work with the OP through multi-party dispute resolution processes.



COVID-19 and Racial Injustice Impacts on Case Data

With COVID-19 taking hold in early 2020, the impacts on employees and students were already discernible in the FY20 data; in quarter four there was a sudden rise in concerns about workplace safety, telework options, and job security. These trends continued in FY21.

Incidents of racial discrimination and injustice in the nation and world were reflected in increased cases relating to safety, belonging, climate, and equity. These trends from FY20 continued throughout FY21.

YEAR IN REVIEW

Operations and Staffing

The ombuds program remained fully operational and offered the full range of consultation and dispute resolution services throughout FY21. These services were shifted to a remote model with meetings, mediations, and facilitations all taking place via Teams, Zoom, and telephone. Ombuds staff completed training early in the year to ensure effective use of web-based services for confidential meetings and dispute resolution processes.

The most significant impact to operations this year was reduced staffing due to position vacancy. The assistant/associate ombuds position was vacant for the entirety of FY21 following the departure of the associate ombuds. The program manager's December 2020 retirement left that position vacant, as well. Although all services were maintained, outreach efforts were reduced in FY21 and caseload was lower than previous years. The assistant ombuds position has been filled for FY22.

Total Cases

Decreased outreach efforts in FY21 were likely responsible for decreased overall case numbers. Despite this reduction in cases, the ombuds dedicated more hours to case work than in previous years to meet the steady demand for services.

FY21

BASIC CASE DATA

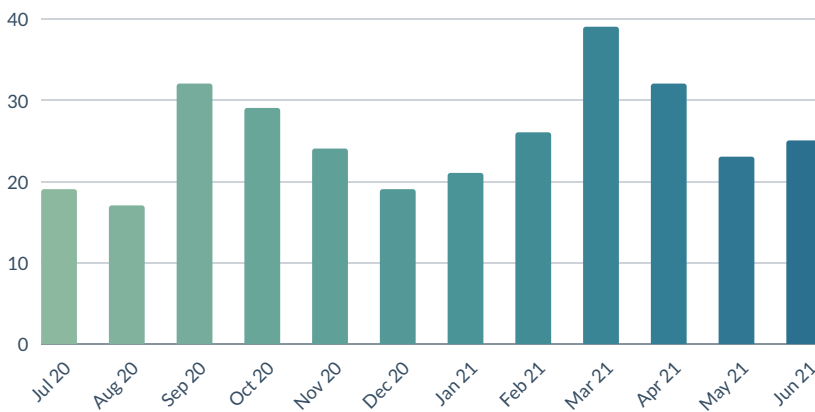
In FY21, the OP handled **306** total cases consisting of 735 separate concerns/issues. 414 visitors sought out program services and over 800 members of the campus community participated in cases and dispute resolution processes.

306 Cases

414 Visitors

735 Concerns

NEW CASES BY MONTH

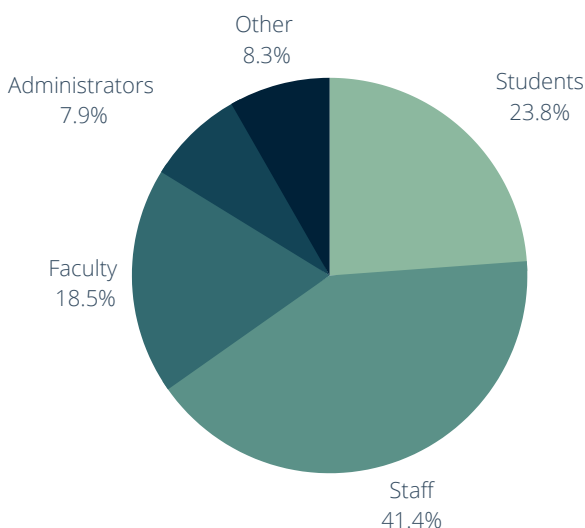


A case is described by this office as a distinct matter brought for the purpose of consultation, coaching, dispute resolution assistance, and/or systemic complaint tracking. A case may contain one or many concerns/issues, and may include one visitor or numerous visitors who share the same concern(s).

VISITORS

One way the OP identifies trends in concerns is by tracking the constituency/affiliation of visitors.

A visitor is anyone who initiates contact with the OP for purposes of seeking services. Many ombuds use the term visitor rather than complainant or client so as to distinguish the nature of ombuds services from counseling and legal services.



PARTICIPANTS

As a voluntary service, the OP engages in dispute resolution services on appropriate cases with willing participants. This year the OP provided **multi-party services in 98 cases**, engaging with over 800 campus participants.

A participant is anyone who engages in the resolution process of a case including visitors, third parties, and campus partners invited to participate in the case process.

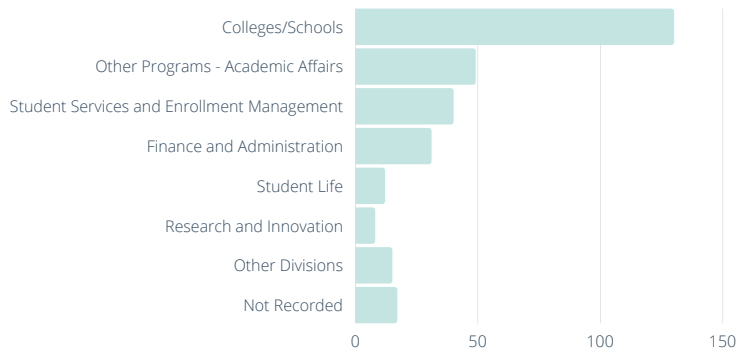
- 5** multi-party dispute resolution processes involving 50 or more participants
- 8** multi-party dispute resolution processes involving 30-49 participants
- 22** multi-party dispute resolution processes involving 11-29 participants
- 63** multi-party dispute processes involving 2-10 participants

FY21

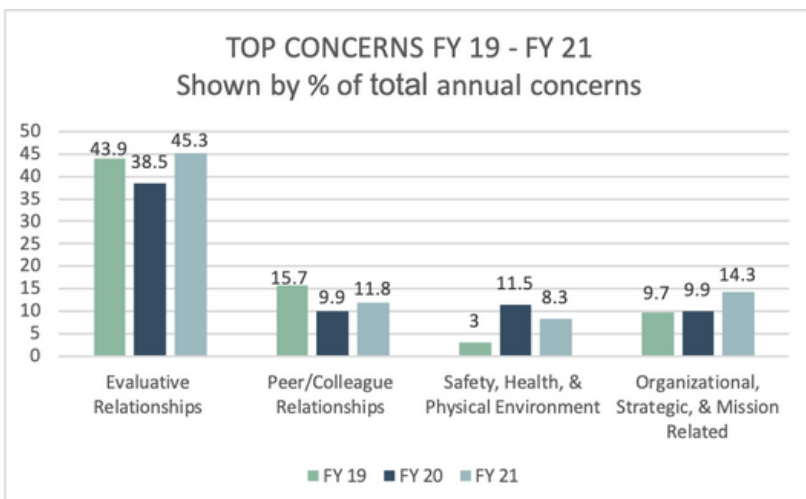
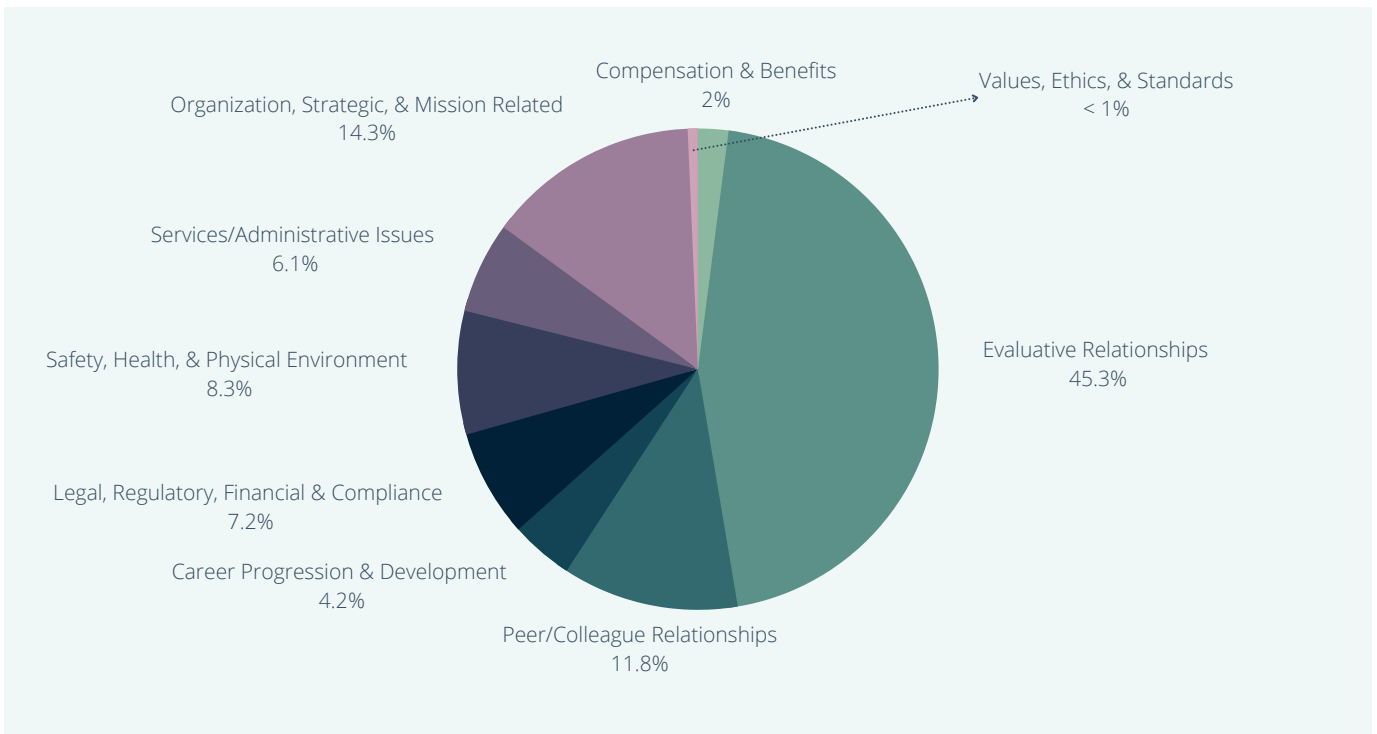
CONCERNS BY BROAD CATEGORY

735 CONCERNS

The OP utilizes the International Ombuds Association (IOA) categories to track concerns and identify localized and systemic trends. The IOA categories consist of nine broad categories containing over 80 subcategories. The chart below displays the total concerns by broad IOA category.



The above chart shows the division associated with the case concerns in each case. Unsurprisingly, the majority of cases came from schools and colleges, where the majority of university employees work and where students engage in learning.



TOP CONCERN CATEGORIES YEAR BY YEAR

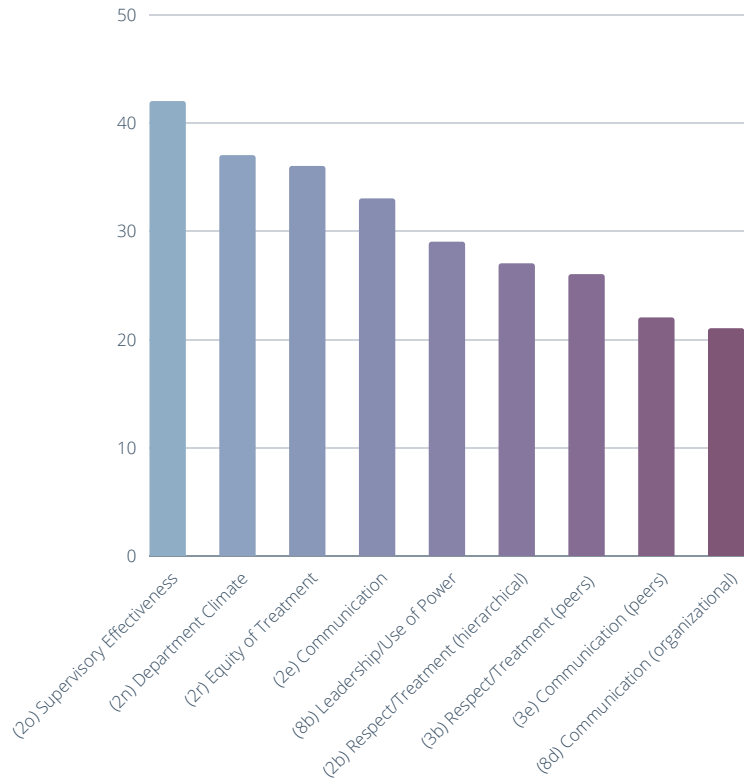
Leading concerns in FY21 reflected the impact of COVID in the workplace with concerns similar to FY20 in the 'Safety, Health, and Physical Environment' category. 'Evaluative Relationships' and 'Peer/Colleague Relationships' concerns rose slightly, returning to pre-pandemic numbers, and concerns in the 'Organizational' category continued to trend upwards.

FY21

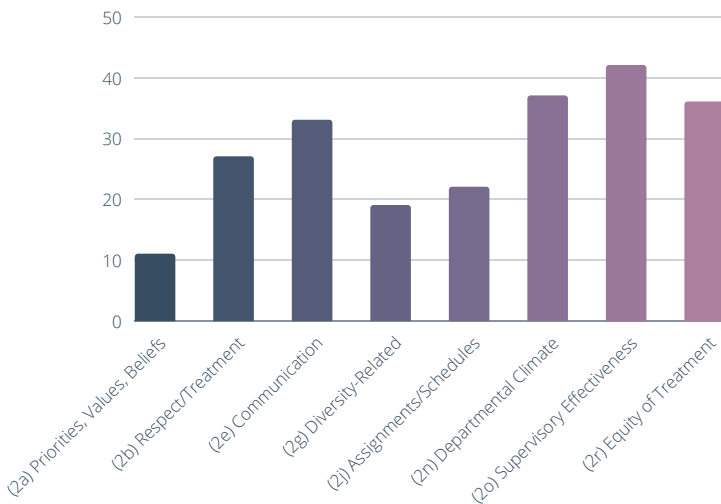
PREDOMINATE CONCERNS BY SUBCATEGORY

Whereas broad categories indicate the general type of complaint, subcategories provide more detailed information about the nature of concerns. The series of charts below show IOA subcategories with the greatest number of concerns in the 2021 fiscal year, grouped into charts based on broad categories (noted above each chart).

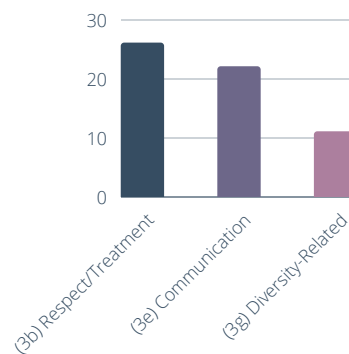
The adjacent graph provides an **Across the Board** overview of the university-wide leading concerns for FY21. Significant changes include an increase in concerns related to organizational operations, and more specifically, organization-wide communication and leadership/use of power.



(2) EVALUATIVE RELATIONSHIPS



(3) PEER & COLLEAGUE RELATIONSHIPS

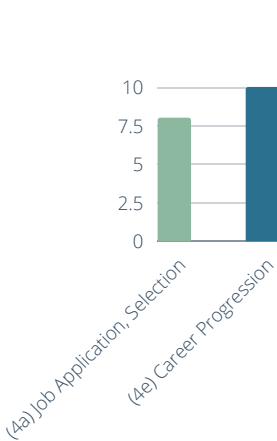


Year by year, around half of all concerns handled in the OP are interpersonal concerns. Interpersonal concerns include those relating to communication, behaviors and other interpersonal interactions that have an impact on the learning and working environment. IOA categories 2 & 3 (above) represent evaluative relationships and peer/colleague relationships, respectively. The graphs provide detailed information about the nature of such concerns the OP categorize as **interpersonal**.

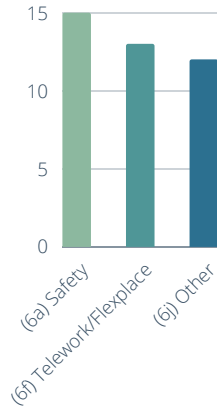
FY21

PREDOMINATE CONCERNS BY SUBCATEGORY

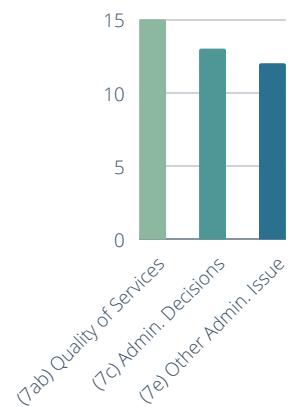
(4) CAREER PROGRESSION



(6) HEALTH, SAFETY, & PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT

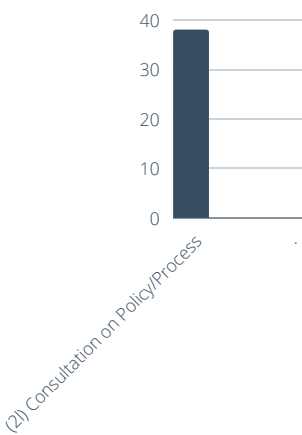


(7) SERVICES/ADMINISTRATIVE ISSUES

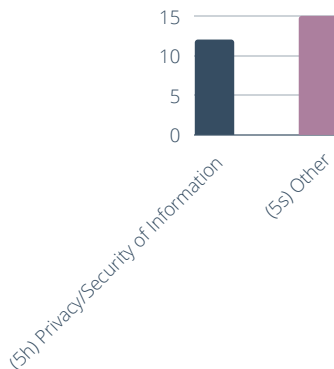


IOA categories 4, 6, & 7 (above) make up the majority of concerns the OP classifies as **employee/workplace-related**. Workplace concerns are those related to physical work environment, workplace safety, schedules, compensation, benefits, and job duties.

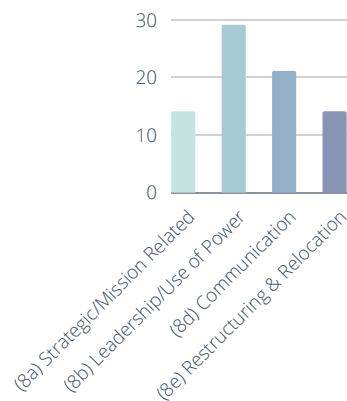
(2) EVALUATIVE / POLICY GUIDANCE



(5) LEGAL, REGULATORY, FINANCIAL, & COMPLIANCE



(8) ORGANIZATION, STRATEGIC, & MISSION-RELATED



The subcategories above provide detailed information about the nature of concerns the OP categorizes as **policy and procedure**. IOA category 5 (above, center) depicts the legal and compliance concerns. Whereas, (2) *consultation* captures how the OP provides guidance to supervisors/managers on policy issues.



IOA category 8 (above, right) provides insight into the **organization-related** concerns. Concerns in this category relate to work territory, structure and reorganization, and organizational values and priorities.

FY21: SPECIAL CASE TRENDS

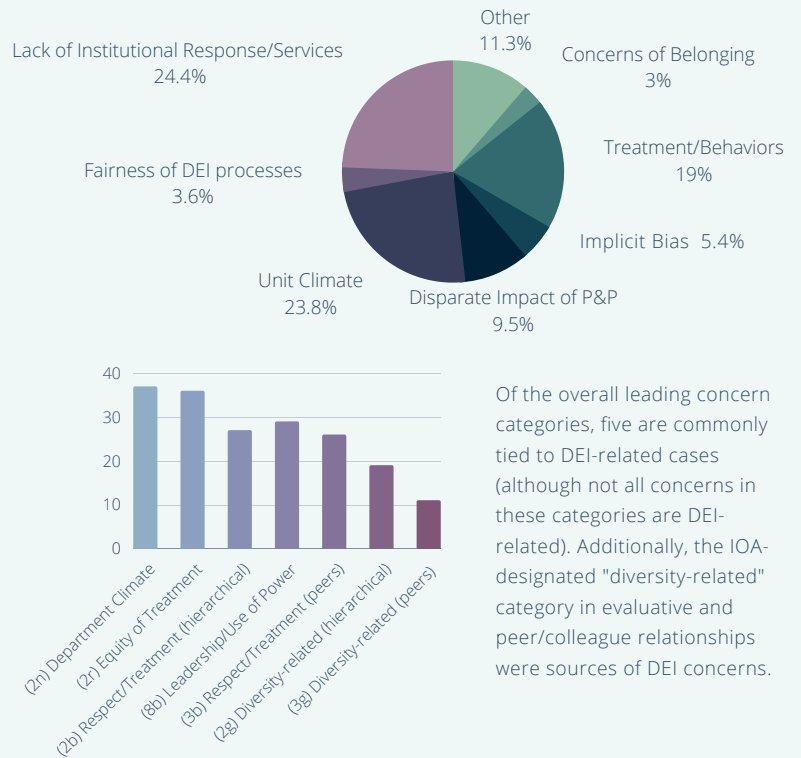
DIVERSITY-RELATED

DEI-related concerns trended up in FY20 and FY21. These concerns exist within other concern categories; they were prevalent in both individual cases related to behaviors and treatment (interpersonal) and impact of policies/decisions, as well as group cases related to climate.

Many of these cases carried a secondary concern related to institutional response and/or need for DEI-related services and support.

Few DEI-related cases in FY21 related to fairness in administrative decisions and policies, indicating a downward trend from past years' concerns related to handling and outcome of DEI-related cases.

In FY21, 168 concerns of 735 (22.86%) were categorized as "DEI-related"



COVID-RELATED

COVID-related concerns were prevalent in FY21; roughly one-third of total concerns, or **229 concerns, were related to or impacted by COVID.**

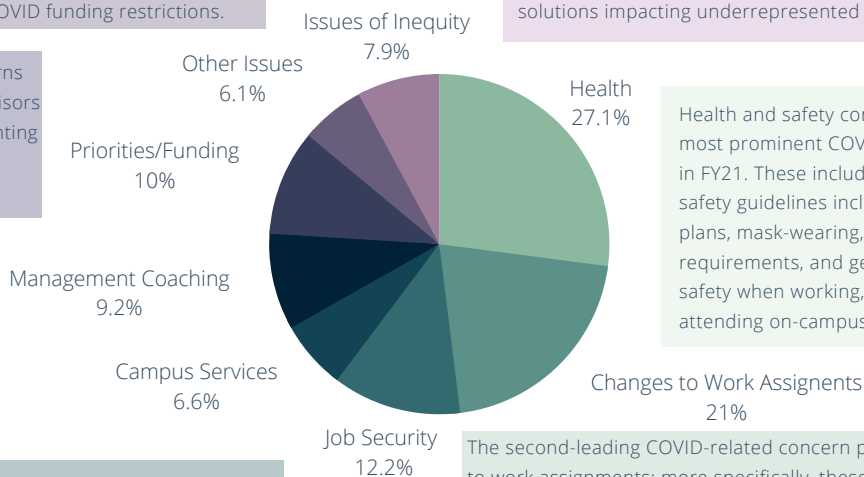
Priorities/Funding counted for 10% of COVID-related concerns and were largely tied to decision-making by administrators regarding organizational changes, policies, and responses to COVID funding restrictions.

Almost 10% of COVID concerns were from managers/supervisors seeking assistance implementing policies and managing employees remotely.

Campus Service concerns included needs for in-person services, needs for remote services, and concerns over shuttered services.

Around 12% of COVID-related concerns pertained to job security. Most commonly, these concerns related to changing needs due to COVID in student-facing roles.

COVID-related Issues of inequity included concerns over disparate impact of changes to work and education, as well as COVID-related needs for services, accommodations, and solutions impacting underrepresented groups.



Health and safety concerns were the most prominent COVID-related concerns in FY21. These included concerns over safety guidelines including resumption plans, mask-wearing, vaccination requirements, and general feelings of safety when working, learning, or attending on-campus events.

The second-leading COVID-related concern pertained to changes to work assignments; more specifically, these included concerns regarding reorganizations, changes to FTE, and telework or lack of telework options related to COVID's impact on university operations.

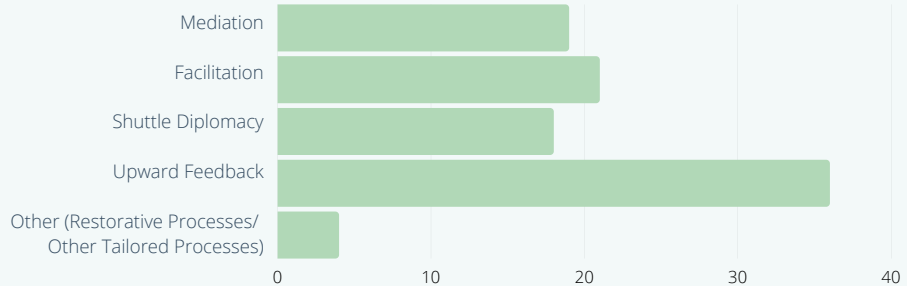
FY21

SERVICES AND OUTCOMES

98

Multi-Party Dispute Resolution

The OP provided multi-party dispute resolution services in 98 cases.

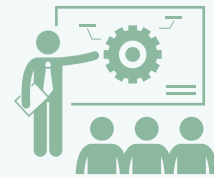


198



The OP provided conflict coaching in 198 cases. This is single-party assistance for navigating conflict. It is often-times used in conjunction with other processes, such as multi-party dispute resolution.

11



The OP provided 11 training sessions to the campus community on conflict and communication-related topics in the 2021 fiscal year.



The OP participated as a meeting moderator/facilitator and/or neutral party for 27 large group meetings.

27

CASE OUTCOMES

Case outcomes/resolutions are recorded based on visitor report at the conclusion of case services. Single-party cases are recorded as resolved when the OP has successfully helped the visitor reach resolution and/or the visitor indicates they have received the assistance needed to resolve their concern on their own. Multi-party services are recorded as resolved when a negotiated resolution is reached.

