

ANNUAL REPORT

STEVEN D. PREVAUX, J.D., CO-OP®

OMBUDS OFFICE

FACULTY
&
STAFF



REVIEW
OF
FY 2023-2024



Dear USF Faculty, Staff and Administrators,

We are pleased to present the *USF Ombuds Office 2023-2024 Annual Report*. Our Ombuds Office directly supports faculty, staff and administrators across all campus locations. Specifically, the Ombuds Office provides an established professional and trusted resource dedicated to facilitating prompt resolution of workplace conflicts and concerns. We provide innovative and collaborative ways to translate workplace conflict into opportunities for your success at USF.

Over this fiscal year, we handled over 521 total matters including 280 new visitors. We enjoyed successfully resolving a wide variety of issues and concerns. We encourage you to use the professional services of the Ombuds Office to constructively engage workplace conflicts, openly discuss your concerns, and develop strategies to resolve challenges. Ombuds services are provided on a 100% voluntary basis and can help you align your talents and interests with our USF mission to advance excellence in teaching, research and service. Virtually every AAU university has an ombuds operation of some type, intended to help the people who comprise the organization. Sustained success is no accident, and we are proud to help those who help USF thrive!

The USF Ombuds is fully credentialed as a Certified Organizational Ombudsman Practitioner (CO-OP®) the highest level of certification as approved by the *International Ombudsman Association* (IOA). We follow the IOA Code of Ethics: **independence, impartiality, informality and confidentiality**, as detailed further in the Ombuds Office Charter.

To our many faculty, staff and administrators who have worked with the USF Ombuds Office, we thank you for utilizing this helpful resource to advance essential USF goals. To members of our USF community who have not yet worked with the Ombuds Office, we assure you that this resource remains available and accessible whenever the need arises. So, when you have questions about what processes are available for handling a workplace problem or conflict, need some assistance in working collaboratively with colleagues or supervisors, or you could simply use some confidential help to promote your continued success, please reach out to the USF Ombuds Office via TEAMS, OMB@usf.edu or (813) 974-7777.

Let us help you translate workplace conflict into opportunities for your success at USF.
—*Go Bulls!*

Sincerely,

Steve

Steven D. Prevaux, J.D.
Ombuds for Faculty and Staff, CO-OP®

Cheryl

Cheryl L. Lesko, CRA/USF
Ombuds Office Administrator

The University of South Florida established an Organizational Ombuds Office on January 4, 2016. The USF Ombuds Office was founded to provide independent, impartial, informal, and confidential professional ombuds resources to faculty, staff and administrators in Sarasota-Manatee, St. Petersburg, and Tampa. The Ombuds Office facilitates resolution of workplace conflicts and concerns in alignment with USF's Strategic Mission and Values, fostering employee engagement and adding value. On many occasions, the value of our services comes through avoiding unnecessary costs to the economy, wellness, and reputation of both the employee and the University. Services provided by the USF Ombuds Office are voluntary in nature, tailored to fit the unique nature of individual situations, and always provided with informed consent. The Ombuds is not authorized to receive formal or legal notice on behalf of USF and does not render management decisions. The Ombuds provides a variety of services including:

- Conflict analysis and facilitation of resolution
- Active listening to questions and concerns
- Developing strategies to resolve and prevent disputes
- Identifying options and available resources
- Outreach and Training
- Informal facilitated mediation
- Facilitated communication
- Coaching and reflective practice
- Referrals to appropriate resources
- Annual reporting and consultation
- Making recommendations for institutional improvements
- Information resourcing for Regulations, Policies, and procedures

As a university-designated impartial resource, the USF Ombuds Office does not take sides, participate in formal processes or advocate on behalf of any individual. Based on general observations from its caseload experience, the USF Ombuds Office provides regular feedback to university officials and various members of the campus community.



- **Steven D. Prevaux, Ombuds for Faculty and Staff**, is a Certified Organizational Ombudsman Practitioner® and a Certified Trainer in Workplace Conflict Resolution. Steven recently concluded his term of service on the Board of Directors of the International Ombudsman Association (IOA) as Vice President.



- **Cheryl Lesko, Ombuds Office Administrator**, experienced paralegal, Certified Trainer in Workplace Conflict Resolution and a bonded Notary Public. Cheryl was honored to receive the 2022 Outstanding Staff Award.

The **Mission** of the Ombuds Office, within our ethics, is to: *“Empower employee success by independently facilitating the impartial, confidential and informal resolution of workplace conflicts and concerns.”*

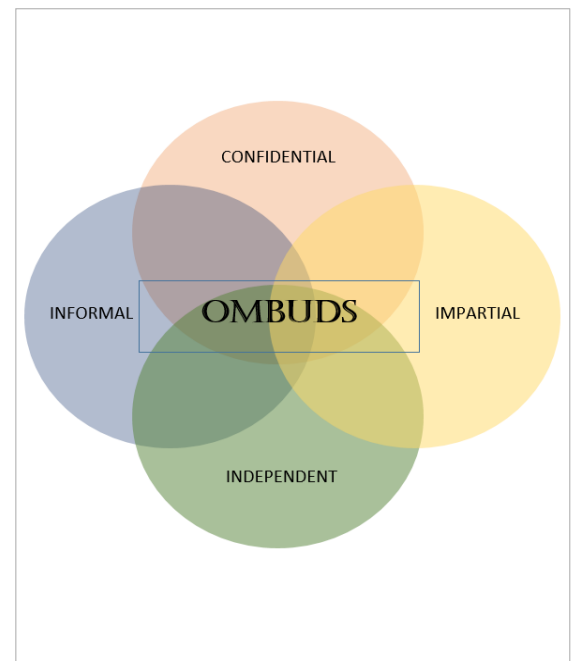
The USF Ombuds Office abides by the IOA’s [Ethics](#) and [Standards of Practice](#) as follows:

CONFIDENTIALITY The USF Ombuds Office holds all communications with those seeking assistance in strict confidence unless there is an imminent risk of serious harm. Communications made to the Ombuds do not place the University on notice.

IMPARTIALITY The Ombuds, is neutral, impartial, and unaligned in the handling of staff, faculty and administrator conflicts, disputes, or issues.

INDEPENDENCE The USF Ombuds Office is independent in structure, function, and appearance to the highest degree possible.

INFORMALITY The USF Ombuds Office is an “off the record” resource and does not receive notice on behalf of USF. While the Ombuds Office may refer individuals to formal grievance resources, it cannot decide or participate in any internal or external investigative or adjudicative procedures.



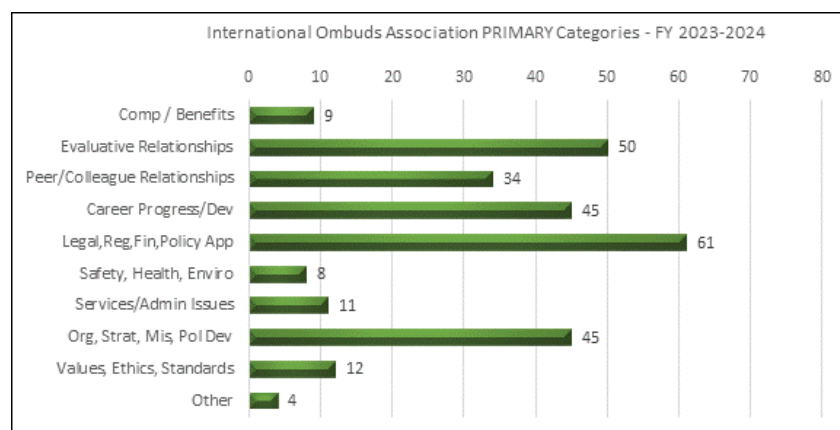
These ethics, as applied at the organizational ombuds table, provide a safe and engaging place for all employees to confide, share, reflect, learn, and pursue transformation. Ombuds services are unique in both design and the intention. We act as a cultural catalyst promoting individual empowerment, fairness and collaboration.

From inception, we have followed the established IOA best practice of “anonymized aggregation” when reporting data. The established nine general IOA Uniform Reporting Categories are:

- 1) Compensation and benefits
- 2) Evaluative relationships
- 3) Peer and colleague relationships
- 4) Career progress and development
- 5) Legal, regulatory, financial and compliance
- 6) Safety, health, and environment
- 7) Services and administrative issues
- 8) Organizational, strategic and mission related
- 9) Values, ethics, and standards

In FY 2023-2024, the USF Ombuds Office engaged in a combined total of **528** matters including:

- **280** new matters, and
- **241** on-going matters
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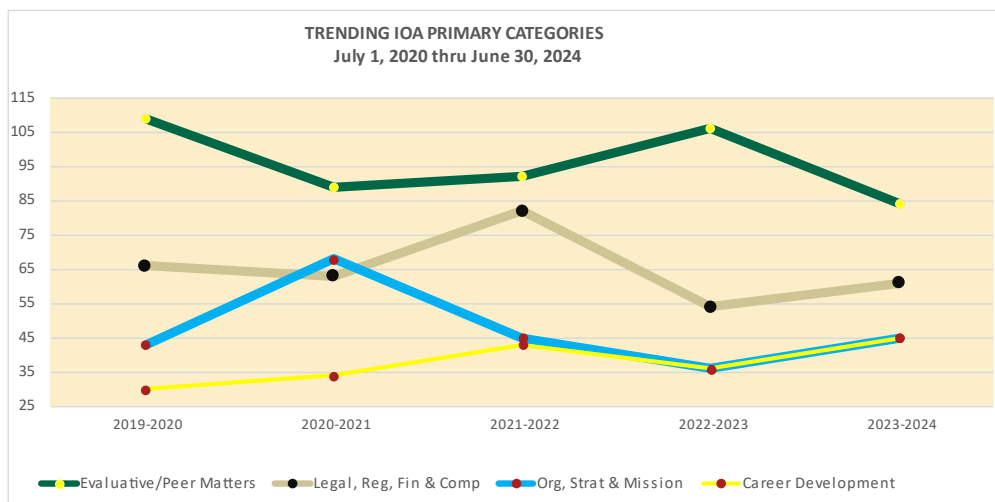


As illustrated in the chart above, the three most frequently expressed *primary* concerns in FY 2023-2024 were as follows:

1. **Legal, Regulatory, Financial, and Compliance (IOA Category #5, n=61):** matters remain elevated moving up from the #2 position. In general, Legal/Regulatory concerns remain ubiquitous in large complex and public organizations. This broad category includes financial, legal, compliance and policy application issues. Examples of concerns raised in this area included faculty tenure and promotions issues; separations

from employment; discrimination issues; retaliation concerns; access to formal resolution processes; regulatory compliance questions (including ADA/FMLA et al.); and matters incident to formal complaints and grievances.

2. **Evaluative Relationship** (IOA Category #2, n=50): Questions, concerns, issues or inquiries arising between people in evaluative relationships (i.e., supervisor-employee, director-associate, dean-chair, chair-faculty, faculty-student.) In response, we continued to bolster active listening skills through various Ombuds Workshops. We also ethically and timely shared trending concerns and generated voluntary constructive resolution options.
3. **Organizational, Strategic and Mission:** (primary issue n=36) includes issues that relate to responsiveness, change management, restructuring of work teams and workflow, unclear communications, and concerns or inquiries that relate to the whole or some part of our university as an organization.



The top three trending IOA primary categories are depicted in this summary chart covering July 1, 2020 through June 30, 2024. Legal, Regulatory, Financial and Compliance concerns have level-out a bit while strategic and carer concerns have shown a moderate uptick. Overall, the data shows a fairly consistent organizational rhythm over the past three years. Opportunities for improvement are increasing in areas such as talent retention and fostering collaboration for high-performing teams.

We advance the USF Mission in alignment with our Ethics.

USF Mission: Led by outstanding faculty and professional staff, the University of South Florida conducts innovative scholarship, creative activity, and basic and translational research, and delivers a world-class educational experience promoting the success of our talented and diverse undergraduate, graduate, and professional students. As a public metropolitan research university, USF, in partnership with our communities, serves the people of Florida, the nation, and the world by fostering intellectual inquiry and outcomes that positively shape the future—regionally, nationally, and globally.

We continue to provide individual Conflict Dynamics Assessments (CDP-I) to faculty and staff. To date, we have implemented and scored CDP assessments for **283** individuals. The CDP is an established assessment instrument that simply and effectively measures individual conflict behaviors thus increasing self-awareness and improving conflict management skills. Each employee received a custom printed report revealing their individual “Constructive” and “Destructive” responses to conflict in the USF workplace. Participants were also provided an individual profile of their unique conflict “hot buttons” that initiate their natural destructive conflict tendencies. In addition, we met with each participant to review their results and provide conflict engagement strategies tailored to meet their unique needs.

We understand that competing ideas and conflicting approaches are essential components of task-based conflict that can accelerate productive outcomes when managed constructively. Enhancing this awareness and strengthening one’s “conflict intelligence” and conflict management skills also helps protect against problems spiraling into relational inter-personal conflict and costly disputes. To date, our efforts in this regard have received highly positive post-participation evaluations. We have learned that **how** you engage conflict on your team is as important as determining the root cause.

The CDP is an assessment instrument that simply and effectively measures individual conflict behaviors.

We encourage all faculty, staff, and administrators to contact the Ombuds Office directly if they are interested in learning more about how the CDP assessment and other tools can enrich professional self-awareness and develop high-performance teams.

Using CDP tools provided by the Ombuds Office, you can be empowered with data-driven solutions that equip teams and leaders with a shared understanding of the conflict dynamics in the workplace. We take great care to use anonymous and aggregated data to protect your confidentiality.

Constructive Responses:

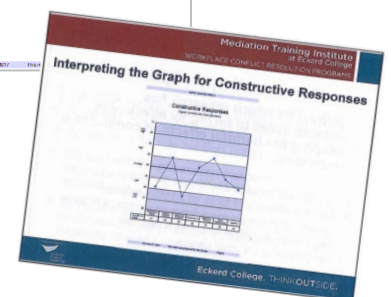
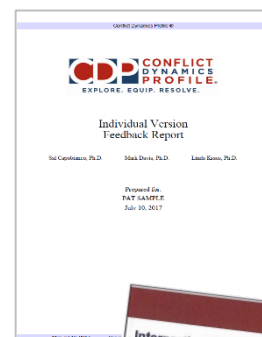
Perspective Taking
Creating Solutions
Expressing Emotions
Delay Responding

Reflective Thinking
Reaching Out
Adapting

Destructive Responses

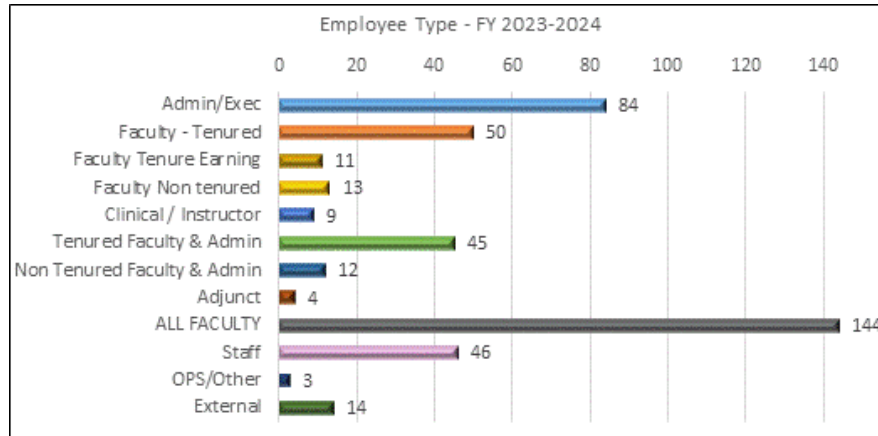
Winning at All Costs
Displaying Anger
Demeaning Others
Retaliating

Avoiding
Yielding
Hiding Emotions
Self-Criticizing



EMPLOYEE TYPE

We served faculty (49%) up from 33% last year, staff (16%) faculty/staff administrators (29%) and external visitors (5%) and OPS/other (1%). Early identification and resolution of concerns promotes a healthier organization in the best interests of our visitors and USF alike.

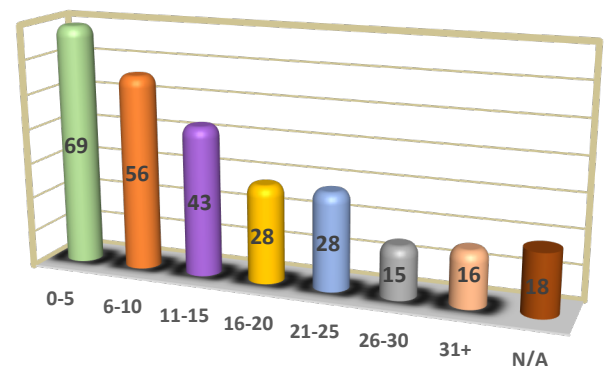


*Faculty Administrators presenting administrative matters are counted as "Administrators."

LENGTH OF SERVICE

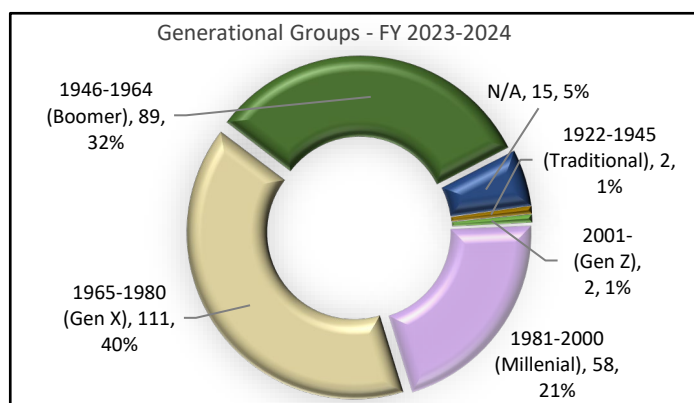
The Ombuds Office continues to reach employees across the length of service continuum. Those with fewer years of service were more likely to visit our office again this year. In fact, 25% of our Visitors were in their first five (5) years of employment. We were pleased to see that our active participation in outreach initiatives, such as the renewed employee orientation, has been effective in reaching all cohorts.

YEARS OF SERVICE - FY 2022-2023



SERVICES AVAILABLE TO ALL

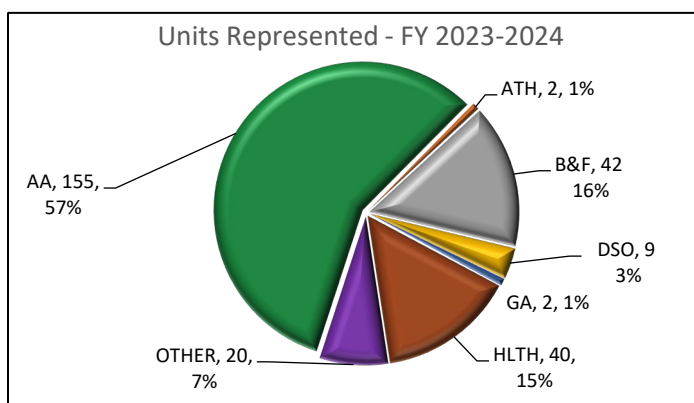
Availability remains an essential priority in the timely delivery of all ombuds services. Consistent with past years, our visitors included a wide range of individuals across our USF workforce and all campus locations. We enjoyed serving visitors with differing abilities, demographics and roles. Similarly, we served faculty and staff from all age groups and generations and noted a continued increase in Millennials this year.



UNITS REPRESENTED

As in years past, we served faculty, staff and administrators across all major organizational units and campus locations.

As in prior years, Academic Affairs continues to generate our largest relative portion of matters (55%) across “One USF.”[†]



AA - Academic Affairs

ATH - Athletics

B&F - Business & Finance

DSO - Direct Support Organization

GA - Global Affairs

HLTH - Health

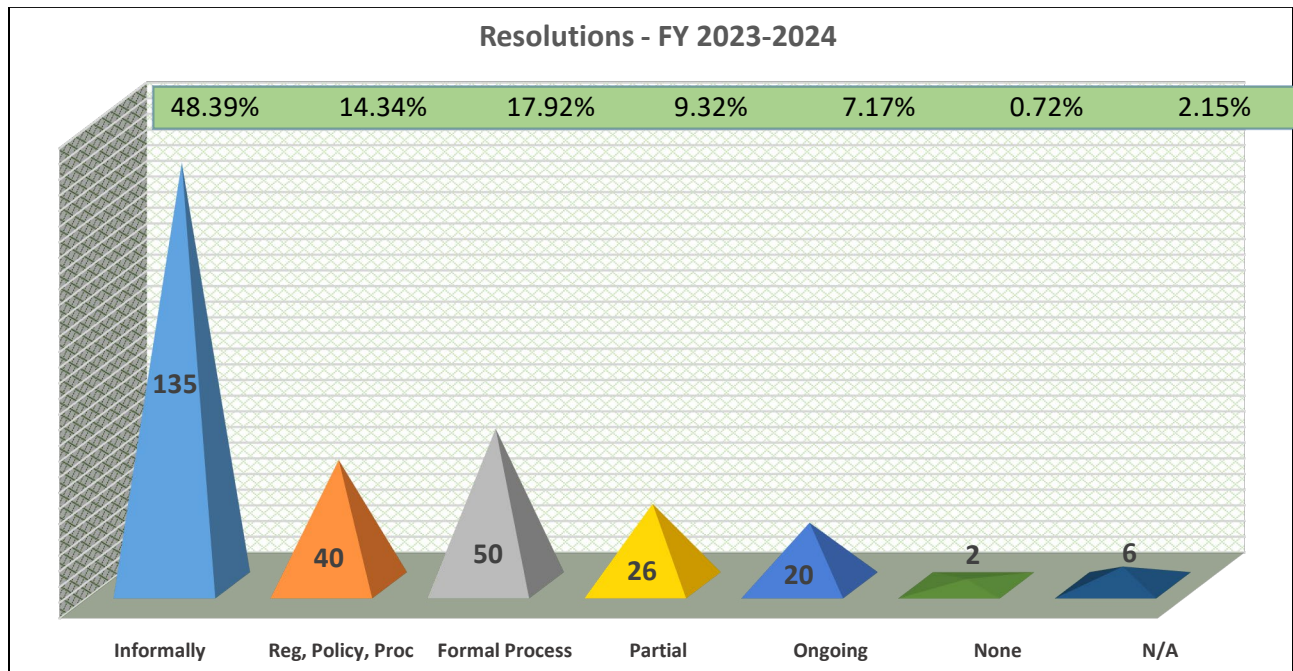
OTHER-Executive Services, External, Misc. Departments

[†]The Florida Excellence in Higher Education Act of 2018 required “the University of South Florida System – composed of USF Tampa, USF St. Petersburg and USF Sarasota-Manatee – to consolidate accreditations under one umbrella.”

Source: <https://www.usf.edu/news/2020/usf-consolidation-takes-effect.aspx>

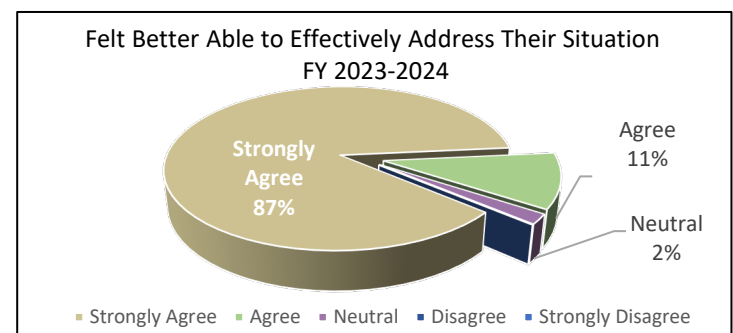
EMPOWERING RESOLUTIONS

Successfully facilitated resolution of **81%** of matters presented informally through collaborative development of voluntary and achievable options and/or referrals. These resolutions were achieved without incremental costs to the University.



BETTER EQUIPPED TO ADDRESS THE CONFLICT

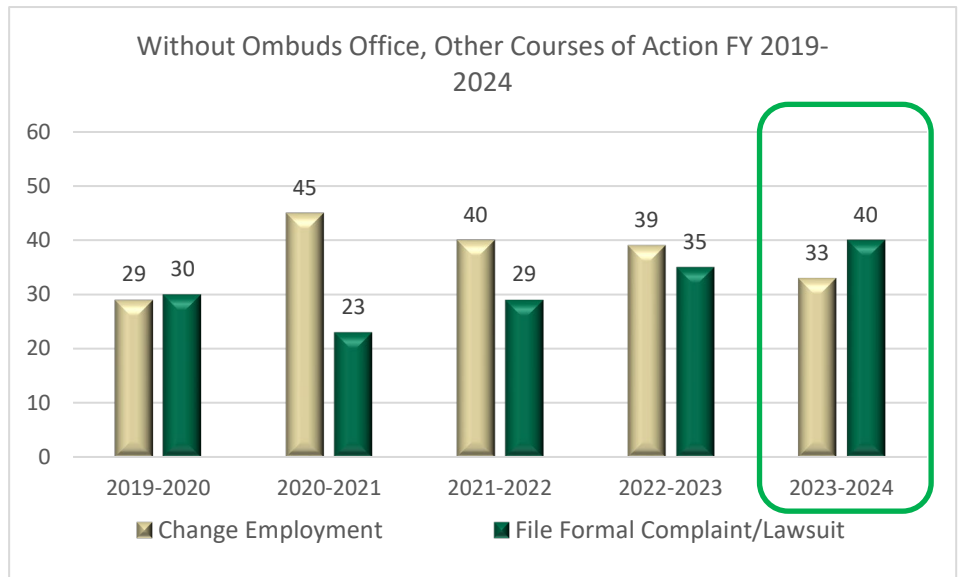
98% agreed that they were better able to effectively address their USF workplace concerns after working with the Ombuds Office.



OMBUDS: COST EFFECTIVE ALTERNATIVE

40 employees reported, that without the Ombuds Office, they would have filed a formal complaint or lawsuit.

33 expressly stated that, if not for the Ombuds, they simply would have resigned from their USF employment.



OUTREACH

This year brought a record number of tenured faculty administrators to our office for help. This entailed several matters of consequence that resulted in win-win resolutions avoiding unnecessary loss and preserving reputations alike for both the University and the individuals who comprise it. We will continue to reach out to academic and administrative units across One USF to ensure awareness and service.



Managing Conflict- Shared Responsibility

Managers increasingly report responsibility for managing team conflicts to resolution. Ombuds on-demand conflict resolution services provide essential support to faculty, staff and administrators. These concerns also remain top-of-mind for leaders focused on unlocking capabilities to meet mission-driven strategic goals. We are rising together to meet this need providing workshops and initiatives.

“Managers who can effectively navigate and manage interpersonal conflict among employees will have an outsize positive impact on their organizations — the question is how many really feel trained and prepared to do so? Organizations that have tried to keep contentious topics out of the workplace may start this process behind the curve, particularly as conflict resolution is not an intuitive skill.”

Harvard Business Review

<https://hbr.org/2024/01/9-trends-that-will-shape-work-in-2024-and-beyond>

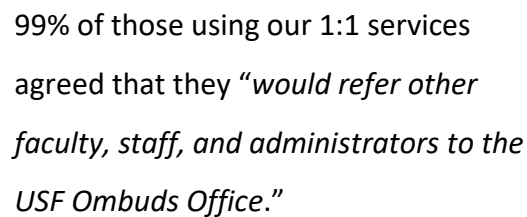
TRAINING & PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

We continue to create unique content and present our findings in engaging professional development opportunities for faculty, staff, and administrators at all USF campus locations, including:

- *“Understanding YOUR Conflict Style”*
- *“Your Conflict Dynamics at Work”*
- *“High Performance Teams”*
- *“Trust and Psychological Safety”*
- *“Understanding Team Purpose”*



The Ombuds Office continues to serve a wide array of faculty, staff, and administrators. Survey responses indicated that 99% of those using our 1:1 services agreed that they “would refer other faculty, staff, and administrators to the USF Ombuds Office.” We directly support and advance organizational cohesiveness and the dynamic community of communities that comprise “One USF.” Achieving membership in the AAU has provided a new “basecamp” as USF Bulls continue the ascent to new heights. We look forward to facilitating future success—one individual at a time—through collaboration by design.



99% of those using our 1:1 services
agreed that they “*would refer other
faculty, staff, and administrators to the
USF Ombuds Office.*”

Confidential and impartial ombuds resources add value at critical junctures when individuals are seeking guidance to navigate the best path forward on their USF journey. We look forward to moving forward with great velocity and bold trajectory.

The USF Ombuds Office directly supports all faculty, staff, and administrators throughout the USF community. We are dedicated to advancing USF's mission through *your* continued and unbounded success.

Whenever you are ready to visit the USF Ombuds Office, we will arrange a convenient and confidential meeting either in-person or virtually on MS Teams. It is helpful if you call ahead to make an appointment. We believe we can be most effective if we meet with you face-to-face, but if necessary we can work with you by phone.



[Click for a map to Patel Center for Global Solutions \(CGS\)](#)

FACULTY • STAFF • ADMINISTRATORS

(813) 974-7777

Email: omb@usf.edu

Website: usf.edu/ombuds

Note: E-mail communications in public universities in Florida, including USF, are generally of public record and because we maintain strict confidentiality, our office does not provide professional Ombuds services via electronic messaging.

What Our Visitors Have Said About Us This Year

Helped me think through issues objectively and reduce them into digestible buckets so I can more clearly articulate the issues to others.

Both Cheryl and Steve made me feel comfortable to express my concern. I now feel empowered in my next steps.

Went above and beyond to give me the space and time to share my concerns. He provided extensive knowledge, strategies, and recommendations to help me navigate this very complex issue. Cheryl was kind and patient to ensure that I was able to engage with the Ombuds Office in a timely, safe, and confidential manner.

Steve is an engaged listener who provides exceptional feedback, strategies, and solutions. ... respects my voice and ideas while also offering counterpoints to strengthen the strategies and solutions.

Connected with me quickly (same day I asked to meet), listened and offered alternatives. It was a fishing class instead of offering me a fish for today!

Steve is an empathetic listener, an exemplar ethical conduct, capable of ascertaining critical points versus needless detail, and supportive of USF's mission as a research one university.

Steve and Cheryl provided me a safe and reflective space to share my challenges and excellent tools to use to address them.

This is a superlative service that more people should be aware of. As always, with amazing services, I seek not to overwhelm them. But I can see so many situations which could be improved through this type of mediation.

Breaking down a problem into smaller bits; identifying the root of the issue; helping me articulate some of my own strengths.

USF is very lucky to have Cheryl and Steve. It is hard to hire strong faculty, and they help us get and keep talent.



Tampa



Sarasota-Manatee



St. Petersburg



USF Health

