

2022-2023 Ombudsperson Report

August 31, 2023

To: Faculty Senate

From: University Ombudspersons (*Tara Coleman, Anne Phillips, Jared Meitler*)

Re: 2022-2023 Annual Reports

This report represents the activities of the K-State Ombudspersons from mid-August 2022 to late July 2023. The information provided comes from three ombudspersons. Our activities have been combined to provide an aggregate view of our work, to protect confidentiality, and to maintain the anonymity of those with whom we work. All conversations, actions, and outcomes are privileged information. No specific information about any individual(s) or their status is provided.

There is little doubt University Ombuds are an essential resource to employees as they seek out information, raise concerns, and work toward mutually satisfactory solutions in the workplace. The consultee numbers have increased slightly over the last year, but the hours expended by the Ombuds have increased exponentially. Once seen as the last resort, an Ombuds consultation is often considered the first step for many individuals looking to address workplace issues, interpersonal conflict, policy questions, and various other concerns.

There were 58 consultees who visited an ombudsperson within the 2022-2023 timeframe. Together, the three of us spent 57 hours providing consultative services. A summary of consultees who sought assistance is provided below. Consultees tended to be self-referrals or found us via suggestions from colleagues.

Ombudspersons	# of Consultees	Consultation Hours*
All	9/29/20	19/40/18

*does not include time spent conducting research and communicating with consultees via email, Teams, etc.

Nature of Consultee Concerns

*For some consultees, multiple complaints were discussed.

**Full definitions may be found at the end of this report.

Consultee Concern *For some consultees, multiple complaints were discussed	Number	Consultee Concern *For some consultees, multiple complaints were discussed	Number
ADA		HCS-Organizational Development	
Appeal	1	HCS-Payroll	1
Attendance		HCS-Talent Acquisition	
Change	1	Interpersonal Conflict	28
COVID-19		Nonrenewal	1
Discipline		Performance	6
Discrimination/Harassment		Policy	1
Evaluation	11	PRC	
Furlough		Promotion and Tenure	13
Hearing and/or Grievance	2	Unfair Treatment	9
HCS-Benefits		Work Environment	30
HCS-Compensation	4	Workload	2

Ombuds empathetically listen to concerns, clarify, and identify pertinent policies and resources, and offer communication strategies to individuals to resolve issues that might otherwise escalate into adversarial and time-consuming formal processes. This “insider” knowledge allows the Ombuds to make recommendations for systemic change to promote transparency, clarity, and fairness across the University.

Below are the recommendations for the 2022-2023 reporting year:

1. Continued support for enhanced training for Ombudspersons, perhaps including some external resources from relevant professional organizations for Ombudspersons.
2. Mentorship of all University Ombudspersons through IOA (International Ombuds Association):
<https://www.ombudsassociation.org/>
3. Ongoing support by HR for contribution to a manual that future Ombudspersons can consult as needed. Content creation has begun by current ombudspersons.
4. Continue meeting monthly as faculty/staff and student ombudspersons during the year.
5. More and frequent communication with members of the University Community about what an Ombudsperson is and how to work with one. (This should be a component of new faculty and staff orientation, for example, and it could be an annual feature in *_K-State Today_*, among other strategies.)
6. Clear communication to support staff on how to get help through University systems and resources.
7. Additional efforts to implement Ombuds recommendations from previous years:
 - a. Renewed focus on the University’s Principles of Community, as unprofessional actions and speech continue to contribute to interpersonal conflict.
 - b. Training about microaggressions and bullying – and how to respond to such behavior.
 - c. More training on the performance evaluation process.

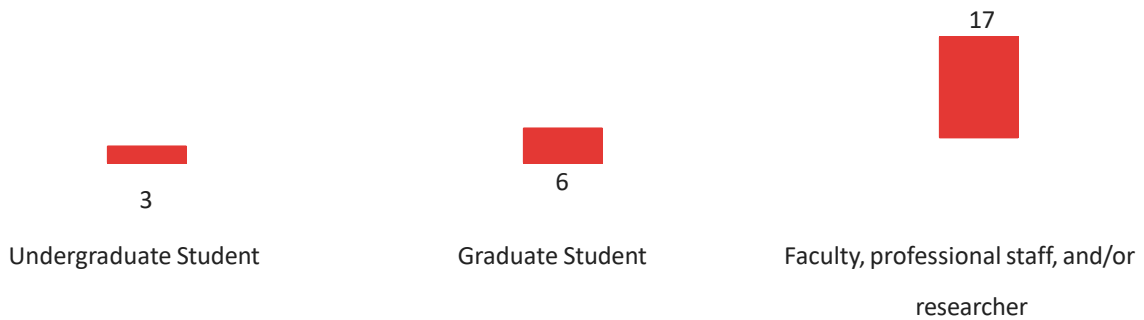
*Continued delay in fully and holistically addressing the aforementioned recommendations may prolong concerns that can often be addressed at the personal, interpersonal, or unit level.
8. Enhanced training for Dept./Unit Heads regarding University handbook compliance and interpretation.
9. Review of Tenure and Promotion documents across each department/unit to ensure consistency and understanding at the individual, departmental, and Provost levels, per Provost Office requirement up to date within the five-year review cycle.
10. Additional informational outreach regarding mental health resources, economic assistance.
11. Create a full-time, professional Ombudsperson position and/or office on campus.
12. Continue use of the Ombuds Feedback Survey, implemented in spring 2023 (results below).
13. Standing annual meeting with Ombudspersons and University Provost to communicate themes, needs, etc.

2023 Ombuds Feedback Survey

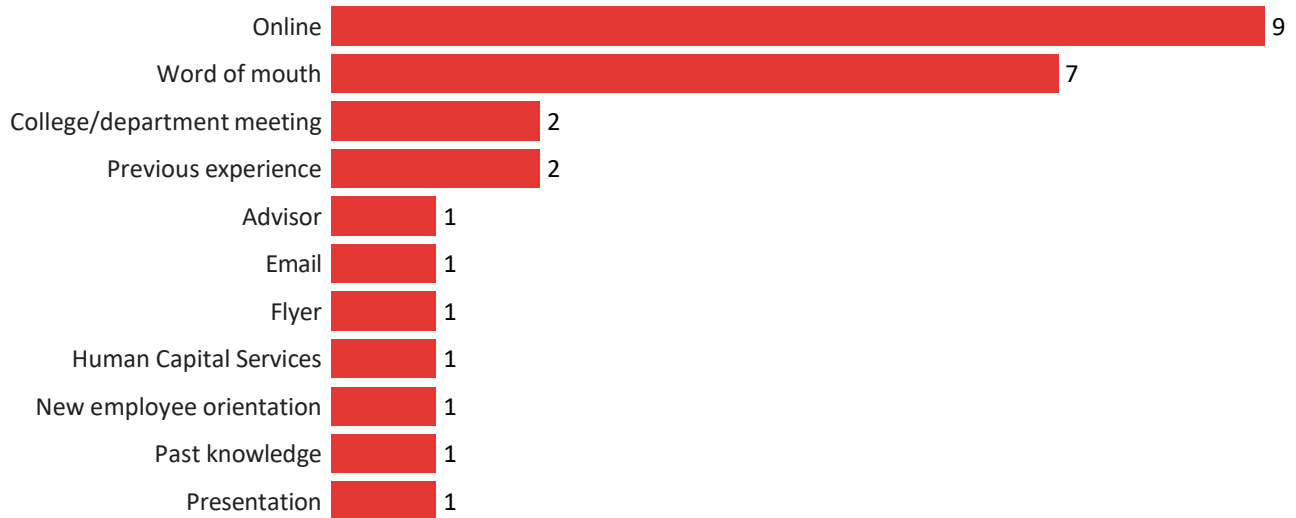
The faculty/staff ombudspersons, Anne Phillips, Jared Meitler, and Tara Coleman, and the student ombudsperson, Kimathi Choma, reached out to the undergraduate students, graduate students, professional staff, and faculty they consulted within the 2022/2023 academic year.

The survey was sent to 64 people and 25 people completed the survey. Below is their anonymous feedback and suggestions on how to improve the ombuds services.

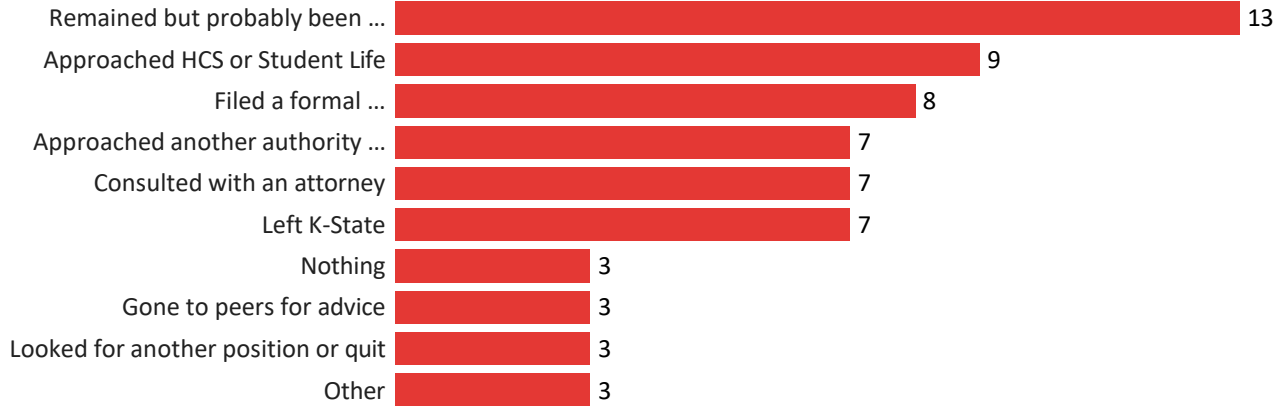
What is your K-State classification?



How did you learn about the K-State ombuds?



If you had not worked with an ombud, what would you have done?



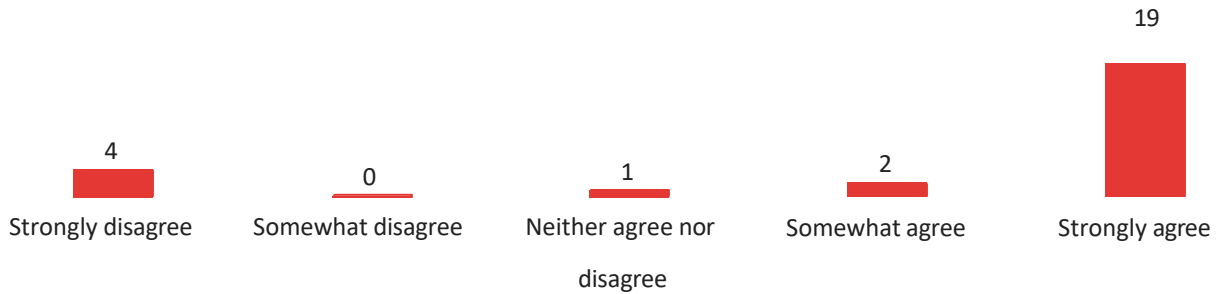
If you had not worked with an ombud, what would you have done? (Other comments)

Needed advice about racist professor.

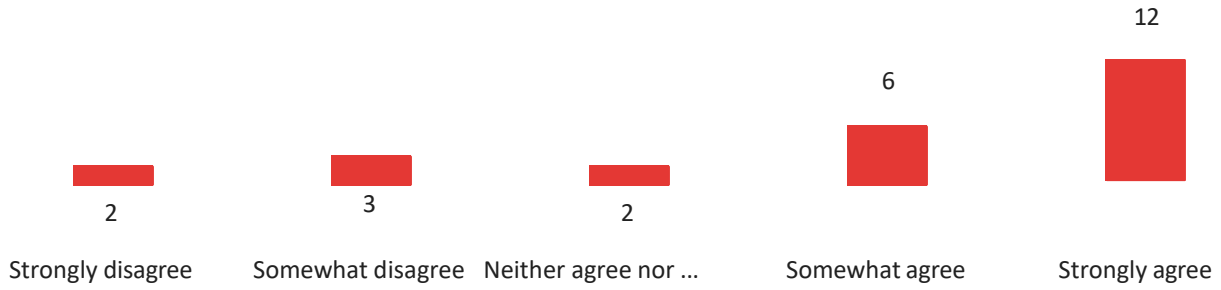
Ombuds not helpful AT ALL

Ombuds was useless, I was helped by fellow faculty

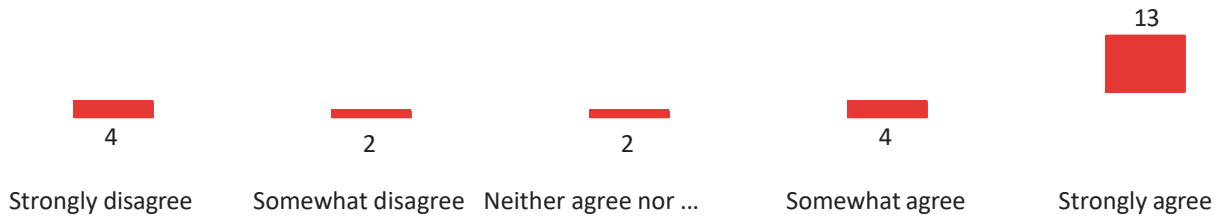
I was treated in a manner that made me feel respected and heard.



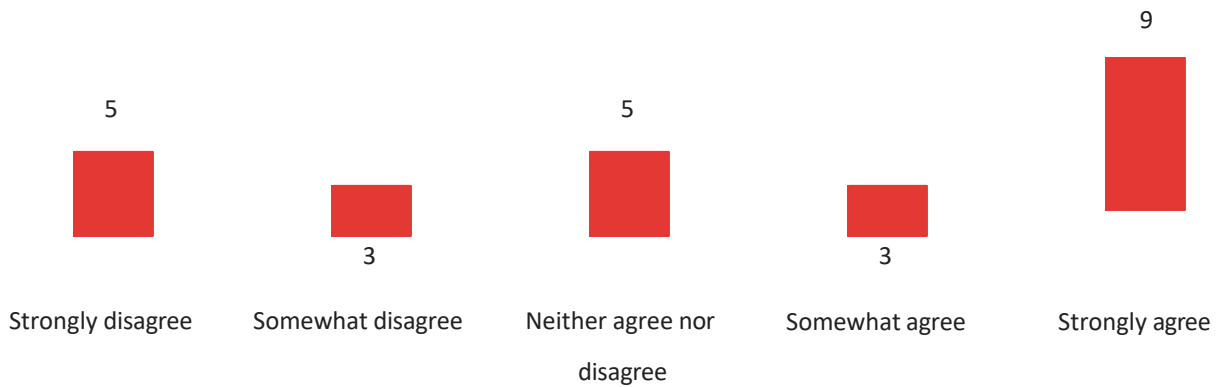
The ombud did all they could to facilitate a fair process for the resolution of my dispute, conflict or complaint.



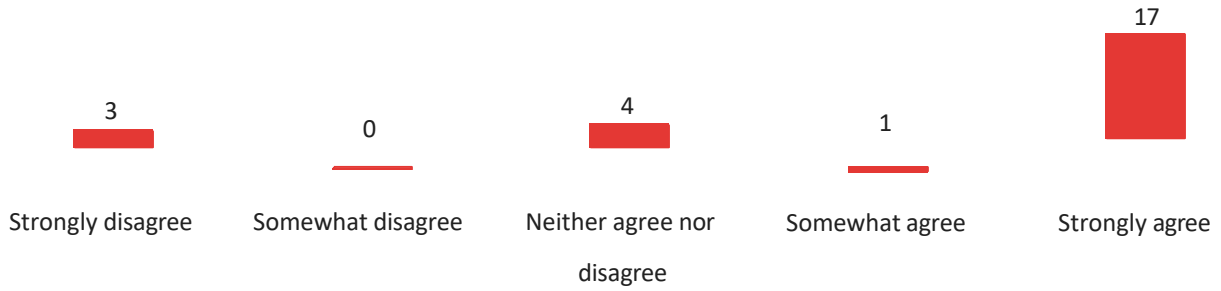
The ombud helped me identify and evaluate the options to address my concerns.



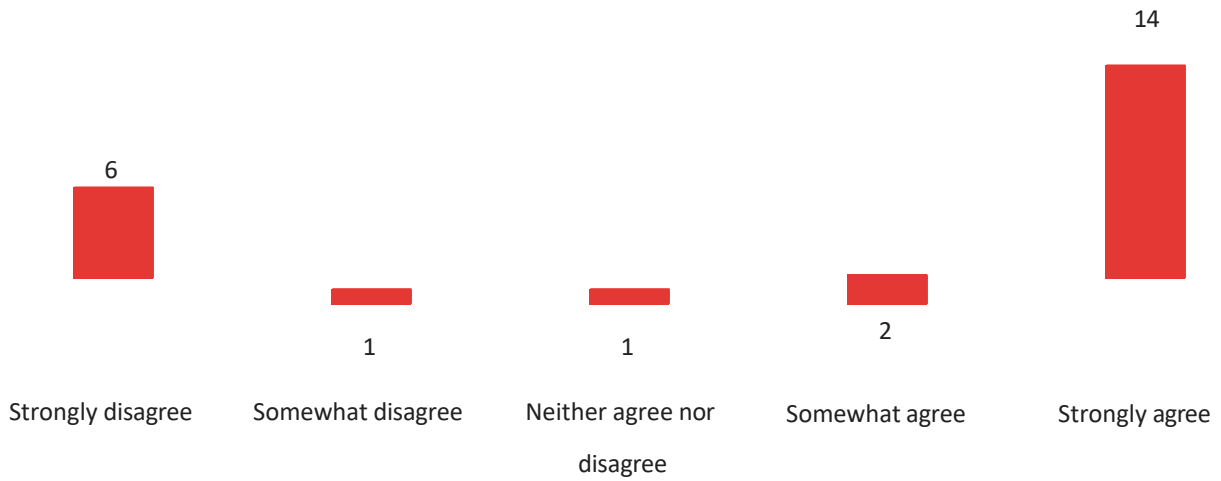
Through my interactions with the ombuds, I developed skills or learned approaches that might help me resolve future problems.



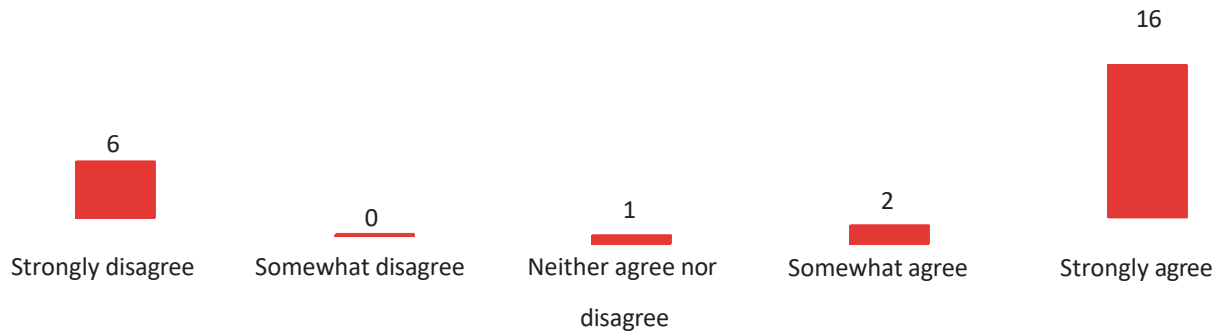
I found the ombud conversant and knowledgeable about relevant institutional policies and procedures.



The ombuds provided coaching on difficult issues.



Regardless of the outcome of my situation, my overall experience with the ombuds was helpful.



Would you refer a colleague to an ombud? Please explain.



Yes, I would refer a colleague to an ombud.

Some participants shared that working with an ombud helped them resolve their issues and gave them peace of mind.

- “Yes, if I would definitely refer a colleague to the ombud. I felt like the ombud was a great way to resolve my conflict with an academic advisor, since it was confidential, and we developed solutions to the situation at hand.”
- “Yes, my ombud made me feel safe and heard and that I wasn't crazy. Sometimes, there are times where we need to speak to a third party who will be there to listen and help us solve our conflicts. My conflict was kept anonymous so that helped ease my mind, as well. Resolving the conflict turned out better than I had imagined in my head and I feel so relieved it's solved. I would refer a colleague to an ombud so he or she could resolve a conflict and get back to peace of mind at work.”

I might refer a colleague to an ombud.

- Some participants shared that they would refer a colleague to an ombud if the colleague approached them and the situation was a clear violation of the law or if there was a way for third- party reporting.

No, I would not refer a colleague to an ombud.

- Some participants reported that they did not think the ombuds did a good job and did not trust the university to address their concerns because they believed the university did not care about faculty/staff.

What suggestions do you have for improving the ombuds services at K-State?

Culture change

It was suggested by participants that for ombud services to be successful, a cultural change must happen on campus.

- “Not much to be done if the organization doesn’t care about all employees.”
- “[I would recommend an ombuds]...if the situation was a clear violation of the law, then yes, definitely. However, some things are wrong without being illegal, and I think the culture is that you just have to keep quiet and take it, or things will get worse.

Training

Provide more and better training.

- Ombuds should recuse themselves when they have a personal relationship with one or more parties.
- Better communication about what can and cannot be accomplished with their involvement is needed.
- Knowledgeable members should be found in the areas being contested.

Evaluation and supervision

Hold ombuds accountable by supervising and evaluating them.

- Ombuds should be supervised, evaluated, and trained to know policy. They should be accountable for their time and response time, and report to a supervisor.
- Ombuds should be evaluated specifically and separately, and required to log hours, write reports, and share feedback forms after each consultation.
- Some participants said ombuds should only serve a one-year term while others suggested that the university should be a dedicated position.

Promote the service

Introduce the ombuds at student orientation and annual department/unit meetings.

- “It took me 4 years to understand that there was something I could do about the HORRIBLE situation that I was in.”
- “Educating more people on what these services are, as I am sure that more students and staff could certainly benefit if they knew about ombuds services.”
- Department heads need more training on the ombuds system so they can view it as a positive resource for faculty.

Concern Definitions

ADA – individuals seeking information about an accommodation

Appeal – USS employees requesting a hearing through one of the hearing bodies

Attendance – concerns about employees not attending work as expected (tardiness, excessive absences)

Change – concerns about changes to work hours, job duties, structure

Discipline – concerns about disciplinary actions and either imposing or receiving an action

Discrimination/Harassment – concerns about being treated differently based on PPM 3010 (referred to OIE)

Evaluation – concerns about how to conduct an evaluation or from an individual who has questions about an evaluation they have received.

Hearing and/or Grievance: Unclassified employees requesting information about an administrative appeal and/or grievance hearing.

HCS – Benefits – concerns about different kinds of leave, tuition assistance or other benefits

HCS – Compensation – concerns about pay

HCS – Organizational Development – concerns about changes in organizational structure, working out of one's classification

HCS – Payroll – concerns about paychecks and/or deductions from paychecks

HCS – Talent Acquisition – concerns about recruitments or applications

Interpersonal Conflict – concerns about getting along with another person or group

Nonrenewal – concerns about a notice of nonrenewal

Performance – concerns about performance coaching and feedback and consequences of poor performance

Policy – questions about policies i.e. is there a policy, where is it located, what is the appropriate interpretation and application

PRC – USS employees appeal disciplinary actions to this body

Promotion & Tenure – concerns about the tenure clock, denial of promotion and/or tenure

Unfair Treatment – concerns about being treated differently or unfairly based on something not covered in PPM 3010

Work Environment – concerns about the work environment being uncomfortable either physically or emotionally

Workload – concerns about level of workload based on contract