**Stanford Ombuds Office**

The Ombuds Office is a confidential resource serving faculty, staff, students and postdocs at SLAC and all schools, institutes and programs at Stanford other than the School of Medicine (which is served by a different Ombuds). The Office was founded in 1970 with the following purpose and charge:

*The Ombudsman's task is to protect the interests and rights of members of the Stanford community from injustices or abuses of discretion, from gross inefficiency, from unnecessary delay and complication in administration of university rules and regulations, and from inconsistency, unfairness, unresponsiveness, and prejudice in the individual's experience with university activities. The Ombudsman exists to receive, examine, and channel the complaints and grievances of members of the Stanford community, and to secure expeditious and impartial redress.*

A meeting with the Ombuds is an opportunity for a visitor to have a confidential “off the record” conversation about a problem or concern that is interfering with their academic or work life and consider courses of action toward resolution. In individual meetings, the Ombuds listens without judgment and helps generate options for addressing the visitor’s concerns, including providing information on relevant Stanford policies and processes. The Ombuds may also informally assist to resolve disputes by facilitating communication between two or more people in conflict through mediation or shuttle diplomacy. The Ombuds is impartial and does not take sides in a dispute, conduct formal investigations, participate in formal grievance procedures, or accept legal “notice” of a concern for Stanford. However, the office can be a place for people to seek guidance on these formal processes and get information on how to report actual or potential violations of Stanford policies or law. In some instances, the Ombuds can also serve as a confidential conduit for communicating visitors’ concerns in a way that protects anonymity.

The Stanford Ombuds Office adheres to the code of ethics and standards of practice of the International Ombudsman Association. These guidelines are described on the Ombuds website.
Visitor Demographics

In FY 2020 (September 1, 2019-August 31, 2020) the Ombuds met with **367 visitors** (some multiple times). This averages to **31 visitors/month**, but as the chart below shows, month to month numbers varied -- from a low of 24 to a high of 45. Visitors also skewed female, with **67% identifying as female and 37% as male**.

Visitor racial identification data was self-reported as follows:
Most of the visitors to the Ombuds office were staff (40%), followed by students (37%) and faculty (9%). As compared to FY 2019, the total number of visitors stayed very consistent (371 in FY 2019) although the percentages changed. In FY 2019 there were more staff visitors (52%), but less graduate students (19%), faculty (6%) and post docs (2%).

The chart below shows the breakdown of visitors by Stanford status:

![Chart showing Stanford status breakdown]

**Visitor Issues:**

**Staff:** The primary issue for staff who visited the Ombuds office was navigating conflict in the workplace. More than a third of staff visitors came to discuss conflicts with supervisors (34%), specifically concerns regarding challenging managers and perceptions of unfair or hostile treatment. About 9% of staff members visited the office because of conflicts with colleagues.

Other common staff issues were: questions about Stanford policies (15%); conflicts and stress caused by department reorganization and restructuring (10%); concerns regarding harassment and discrimination (9%); involuntary termination from employment, including layoffs (8%); and concerns regarding unethical or unsafe behavior in the workplace (5%).
In addition, staff discussed concerns regarding performance appraisals; lack of opportunity for career advancement; and for general guidance from the Ombuds regarding how to have “difficult” conversations with coworkers and supervisors.

**Graduate students:** The main issues for graduate students visiting the Ombuds were conflicts with or poor treatment by the students’ PhD advisors (23%); questions about Stanford policies (18%); concerns regarding their progress toward graduation, including potential program dismissal (10%); concerns regarding discrimination and harassment (9%); and questions regarding Stanford’s Title IX process (7%). Students also came to discuss conflicts with other students; concerns about research misconduct and authorship issues; worries regarding continued educational funding; and housing issues.

**Undergraduate students:** The main concerns raised by undergraduates related to grading policies; the academic grievance process; and general questions regarding Stanford policies and procedures (chiefly the Title IX and the OCS investigation and discipline processes, but also about student records; disability accommodations; and COVID-19 policy changes). Some students also came to the Ombuds raising concerns related to housing, especially as shelter-in-place went into effect.

**Overall, most visitors came to the Ombuds Office due to conflict they were experiencing in their work or academic environment. A breakdown of visitors’ issues is below:**
First time visitors to the Ombuds Office mostly learned of the service through word of mouth referrals (31%). Approximately 22% of visitors to the Ombuds Office had used its services previously. Others found the office because they were referred by staff elsewhere at Stanford (mostly the Faculty Staff Help Center, CAPS, GLO, Residence Deans and HR); by friends and family outside of the university; or because they were searching the university website or the internet for services consistent with those offered by the Ombuds.

**Services:**

**Individual Meetings:** The majority of visitor meetings are for 1-hour, but ranged in length from 50-100 minutes. Prior to shelter in place, most meetings were in-person, but since shelter in place, meetings have been held almost exclusively via Zoom.

- **Coaching:** For most visitors, the main service during individual meetings was listening to the visitors’ concerns and goals; discussing options for resolution; and brainstorming and evaluating paths forward. As mentioned previously, since most issues related to conflicts with supervisors, advisors or colleagues, the Ombuds often shared strategies and helped the visitors plan for having “difficult conversations” addressing their concerns.

- **Information on Policies & Procedures:** Visitors often had questions regarding Stanford policies and processes. The most frequent questions concerned the staff grievance and the academic grievance processes, but questions also related to policies on research misconduct; authorship; discrimination and harassment; Title IX; OCS; COVID-19; and the University Code of Conduct.

- **Follow up:** Sometimes additional research or follow-up conversations with individuals in other departments at Stanford were conducted to confidentially obtain additional information for visitors to enable them to evaluate the best options for addressing their concerns.

**Informal Dispute Resolution:** The Ombuds helped mediate several disputes using shuttle diplomacy and mediation. These included disputes between students and faculty; between faculty colleagues; and between staff.

**Consultation:** The Ombuds consulted with faculty, department chairs and teaching assistants on how to manage conflicts occurring in their departments and classes.

**Confidential Feedback:** The Ombuds served as a safe conduit between students and staff to provide important feedback to department leadership while also protecting confidentiality. This included student feedback to questions posed by faculty as part of a department self-study and concerns by students to faculty regarding their experiences of harassment and discrimination.
Community Trainings & Presentations:

The Ombuds conducted a variety of trainings on conflict resolution, conflict styles, “managing up” and navigating conflict in academia. The Ombuds also did a variety of presentations to departments and student and staff groups on the office and its services.

Feedback:

The Ombuds Office collects feedback through a Qualtrics survey on the website and embedded in the Ombuds’ email signature. However, most feedback received comes directly from visitors after their visit. Below is a representative sample of comments this past year about the Ombuds service:

Thanks for all you insights and advice over the past few months. In some moments where it was difficult you truly were the only person that I felt was even wanting to listen. Your work was truly meaningful and I thank you again for it. (Staff)

Thank you very much for your help and support. I very much appreciate the time and effort you put into helping students with their circumstances. (Graduate Student)

Thank you so much for our meeting last week. Your perspective has been incredibly helpful in coming up with appropriate responses to … [my situation]. Most importantly, I feel like my feet are on solid ground again, thanks to you…. Again, I can’t thank you enough. I’m not good with conflict, and have few tools. I feel much better equipped after our conversation, and am grateful for your time, especially during this stressful and chaotic pandemic. (Faculty)

You are an amazing resource. I just knew if we talked that you would again point me in the right direction. Your role is so important for the University. Thank you so much. (Faculty)

I really felt heard and understood and felt comfortable sharing my narrative, as embarrassing and challenging as it was to talk about. Brenda gave me very helpful guidance on how to move forward. Regardless of how things turn out for me, it was really nice to know someone listened, understood and validated my concerns. (unknown)