



Medical College of Wisconsin Office of the Ombuds

Annual Report to Faculty and Staff
January 1, 2015–December 31, 2015

The Ombuds Office
414-266-8776 (Confidential line)
mcw.edu/Ombuds




**MEDICAL
COLLEGE
OF WISCONSIN**
A Healthier Future
Starts Here

Message from the Ombuds

It is a pleasure to share the fourth Annual Report from the Medical College of Wisconsin (MCW) Ombuds Office. We are excited to announce that in 2015, new Ombuds Natalie C. Fleury, JD, and Michelle Shasha, PhD, joined founding Ombuds Peter Layde, MD, to provide services to faculty, staff and post-doctoral students. Additionally in 2015, Jenny Her, our inaugural Ombuds Program Coordinator, accepted a promotion within another department at MCW – and we recently welcomed Donna Baker as our new Program Coordinator. These new additions to the Ombuds Office reflect expanded opportunities for us to serve as an important and valued resource for MCW.

The Ombuds Office also has increased outreach efforts, including developing new materials for promoting our services and providing additional information regarding operations. One such example is the brief video regarding our Office, which can be accessed through our homepage, <http://www.mcw.edu/Ombuds.htm>.

Sincerely,

Natalie C. Fleury, JD
Ombuds

Michelle Shasha, PhD
Ombuds

It is a distinct privilege to serve as a confidential resource for employee and organizational concerns. We wish to express our appreciation for the support of the MCW community and for those visitors who have placed their trust in our Office. We recognize that our success is due largely to the individuals who voluntarily contact our office and participate in efforts to address the issues brought to our attention. Our annual feedback to the MCW community is intended to inform members of the campus community about the various concerns and priorities that staff, faculty and post-doctoral students have discussed with us in the past year. The Annual Report also may help potential visitors become familiar with the diverse issues that colleagues share *in confidence* with our Ombuds Office.

We welcome comments and suggestions for improving the Annual Report, and for ensuring that the services of the Ombuds Office are as beneficial as possible to MCW staff, faculty and post-doctoral students.

Peter M. Layde, MD, MSc
Ombuds

Donna Baker
Assistant to the Ombuds

The Ombuds Office was established in the fall of 2011 by John R. Raymond, Sr., MD, MCW's President and CEO, as a resource for faculty, staff and post-doctoral students who wish to discuss concerns, conflicts or grievances in a confidential space. This fourth Annual Report of the Ombuds Office provides data on the volume and characteristics of the visitors who have utilized the Office, as well as detailed information on the types of issues raised by those visitors. The issues are categorized according to the International Ombudsman Association's standard reporting practices. This Report also describes systemic issues and patterns which were shared by multiple visitors to the Ombuds Office in calendar year 2015, and includes trend data for the years 2011-2015.

Our Core Principles:

We are confidential

We will not identify you or discuss your concerns with anyone without your permission. The only exceptions to this pledge of confidentiality are when the Ombuds determines that there is an imminent threat of harm or if the Ombuds is legally compelled to report the situation.

We are independent

We are independent of central administrative offices and are not aligned with any campus department or group.

We are informal

Any communication with us is "off the record" and does not put MCW on formal notice.

We are neutral

We do not take sides. We consider the rights and interests of all parties. We are advocates for good communication and fair process.

The Ombuds Office DOES:

- Listen and discuss workplace questions, concerns and complaints
- Offer a SAFE place to discuss your concerns
- Informally investigate complaints
- Explain MCW policies and procedures
- Facilitate communication among people
- Advise individuals about steps to resolve problems informally
- Assist with problems that have not been resolved by other offices
- Make appropriate referrals when informal options don't work

The Ombuds Office DOES NOT:

- Participate in formal grievance processes
- Conduct formal investigations
- Make administrative decisions for MCW
- Determine "guilt" or "innocence" of those accused of wrong-doing
- Assign sanctions to individuals
- Serve as a witness in administrative or legal proceedings, unless compelled to do so
- Receive official "notice" for MCW
- Maintain records that identify visitors to the office

Consulting the Ombuds

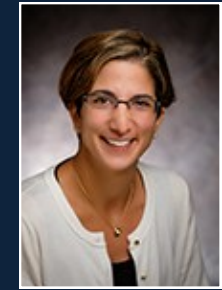
Individual MCW faculty, staff members, post-doctoral students or groups of employees wishing to consult the Ombuds typically contact the Office by confidential telephone line (414-266-8776) or by email (ombuds@mcw.edu) to schedule an in-person visit. While in-person meetings are preferred, on occasion – particularly for straightforward factual questions – a phone consultation with the Ombuds can be arranged.



Natalie C. Fleury, JD



Peter M. Layde, MD, MSc



Michelle Shasha, PhD

Visitors to the Ombuds Office usually raise one or more issues or concerns, some of which can be resolved quickly during a single session. Visitors often raise more complicated issues which will prompt the Ombuds to seek additional information while also protecting the confidentiality of the individual or group.

Before others are contacted during any informal “fact-finding,” the Ombuds and visitor always agree upon exactly what information will be discussed and with whom. For example, determining how a specific policy is interpreted might require contact with the Offices of Human Resources, Faculty Affairs, General Counsel or Corporate Compliance.

Accordingly, the Ombuds and visitor would agree at the initial session which offices would be consulted and whether information such as the relevant department or name of the visitor would be shared. In most cases, these types of inquiries would not require any reference to the visitor or his/her department, so preserving anonymity is relatively straightforward.

Ombuds offices at institutions across the country utilize varying methods to report activities. These may include the total number of visitors to a particular office, the number of groups of visitors to the office, or the total number of individuals with whom the office has had contact (including both visitors to the office and individuals contacted to seek additional information or guidance).

The International Ombudsman Association (IOA) (<http://www.ombudsassociation.org/>) recommends tracking and reporting the number of issues discussed with the Ombuds rather than the number of visitors, groups of visitors or total individuals contacted, citing greater reliability in categorizing and reporting issues. To that end, this Annual Report provides a detailed tally of the issues discussed with the MCW Ombuds Office according to the recommended reporting categories established by the IOA.

Visitor Information

From January 1, 2015 – December 31, 2015, the MCW Ombuds Office logged 157 initial visits by single individuals or groups of individuals. Repeat visits by individuals/groups for the same issues are not counted in the number reported above, and the numbers do not include individuals or offices consulted by the Ombuds as a result of discussions with visitors to the Office.

Of the 157 initial visits, 82 (52.2%) were by faculty, 68 (43.5%) were by staff, and seven (4.5%) were by “other” or unknown. Visitors/visitor groups to the Ombuds were employed in MCW clinical departments (69.2%), centers/institutes (9.0%), administrative units (12.8%) and basic science departments (3.8%).

In addition, 5.1% worked in “other” or unknown departments. The visits noted above also include 33 exit interviews with faculty. Exit interviews are offered to faculty who are retiring, have elected to leave for career advancement or personal reasons, or have not had their MCW contracts extended. Most visitors to the Ombuds Office reported having benefited from our services.

The issues and/or concerns raised by visitors to the MCW Ombuds Office are detailed in **Table 1**. The most common reasons people visited the Office related to concerns about their “evaluative relationships” – that is, relationships with either supervisors or



supervisees. The second most common category of issues concerned “career progression and development,” which include issues regarding employee advancement and career progression, termination, nonrenewal and resignation. “Organizational, strategic, and mission-related” concerns were the third most frequent issue cited among visitors. The majority of these concerns related to organizational climate and to leadership decision-making.

An important role of the Ombuds Office is to identify patterns, trends or systemic issues to bring to the attention of institutional leadership. These are issues of concern, usually raised by multiple visitors on multiple occasions, which could influence the MCW environment for staff and/or faculty.

On page 8, **Table 2** provides a brief description of these systemic issues which have been, or will be, addressed with MCW leadership. In addition to the issues noted in **Table 2**, as in past years, the MCW Ombuds have discussed a number of department-specific issues with MCW leadership while preserving the confidentiality required by our Office.

Abrasive Behavior as a Common Theme

As noted in **Table 2**, rude or abrasive treatment among colleagues at MCW was a common theme identified in visits to the Ombuds. The great majority of these concerns occurred between supervisors, (including Department Chairs, Division Chiefs and front-line supervisors) and individuals they supervise.

Such behavior rarely occurred as a single event; rather, the effects of such behavior accumulated over time. Office gossip, mean comments, angry outbursts, public or private humiliation and insults are examples of reported behaviors. Mistreatment by those in authority often is believed to have additional consequences, and is perceived to interfere with salary increases, job transfers or promotions.

Although hurtful, morally wrong or inappropriate, this type of abrasive behavior generally does not meet the legal definition of harassment or discrimination. Nevertheless, intentionally hurtful behavior in the workplace is unacceptable.

Because subtle and indirect mistreatment is not easily identified or controlled by policy, organizations depend on their leaders and



Rough waters?

- * **Confidential**
- * **Independent**
- * **Informal**
- * **Neutral**

We provide a **SAFE** place to discuss and address workplace concerns. Contact us as a first step or anywhere along the way. Use of our services is voluntary and **FREE**.

employees to hold one another accountable for maintaining a respectful, collaborative and ethical culture. Barriers to speaking out against such behaviors include fear of retaliation, fear of losing relationships and uncertainty about the adequacy of “evidence.”

As a common theme reported across multiple departments by multiple visitors, abrasive behavior has risen to the level of a systemic issue reported to the highest levels of MCW leadership; the Ombuds Office will continue to monitor the frequency of this issue over time.

Table 1

Systemic Issues and Concerns Identified by the MCW Ombuds Office

January 1, 2015 – December 31, 2015

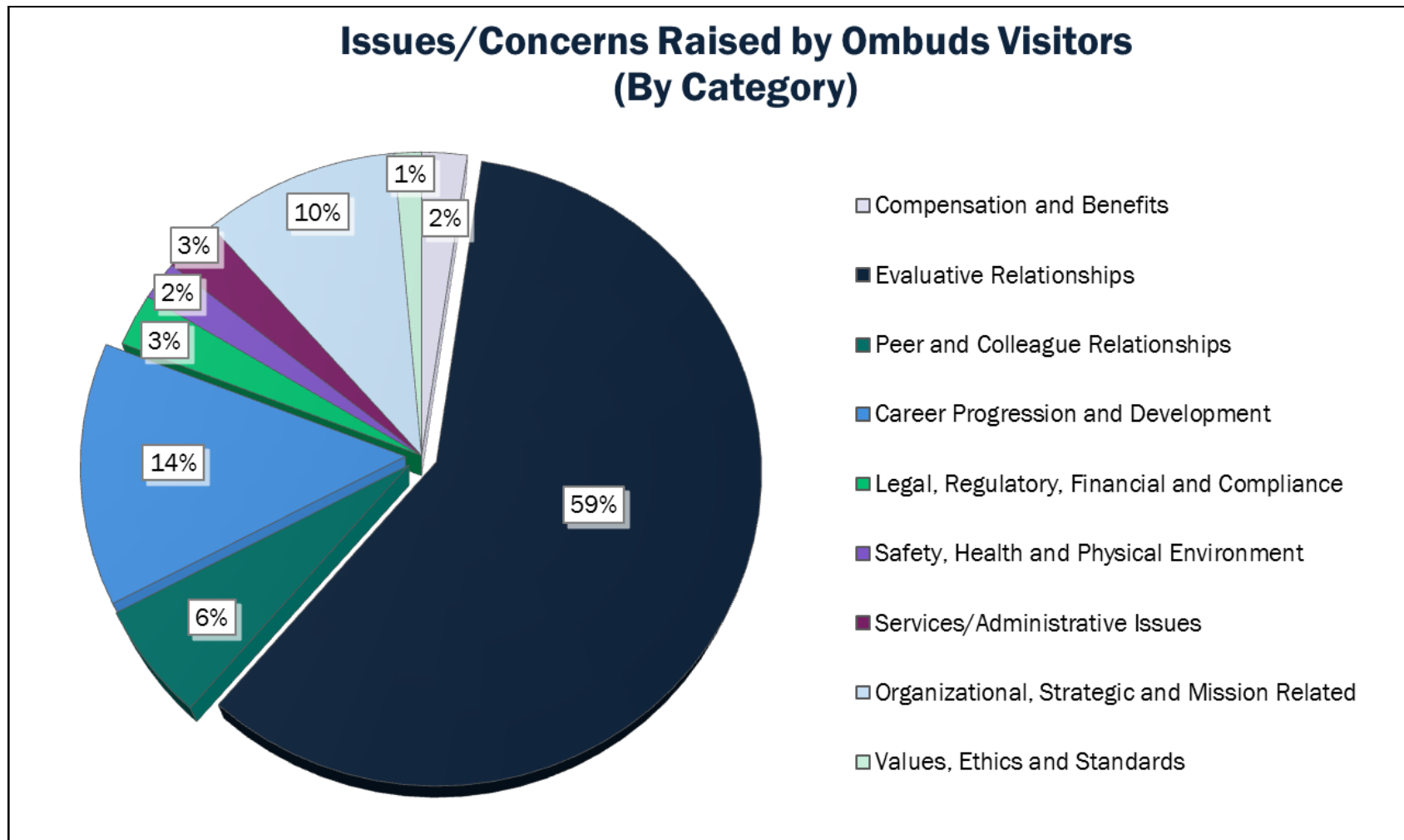


Table 2

Systemic Issues and Concerns Identified by the MCW Ombuds Office

January 1, 2015 – December 31, 2015

Workplace Culture

- Mistreatment of subordinates by colleagues who are in a position of authority.
- Disrespect, intimidation, hostility and threats of retaliation that do not violate legal or institutional policy but harm morale, engagement, productivity and health.
- A sense of a pervasive “gossip” culture in many departments.
- Clinical coverage limitations in some departments contributing to low morale, intimidation, infighting and disrespect.

Administration

- Insufficient input from staff and faculty regarding performance of their supervisors and leaders which allows problematic behaviors to continue.
- Inconsistency in performance improvement and employment non-renewal processes, particularly related to transparent, respectful and direct communication. These inconsistencies impact both staff and faculty, though the Ombuds Office has heard about this issue more often from faculty than from staff.
- Morale, communication and trust vary widely across departments.

Finance-related

- Progressive and substantial cuts to benefits that are viewed as excessive in light of perceived institutional financial stability and organizational expansion.
- Emphasis on generating revenues through clinical departments undermines research.

Feedback from Exit Interviews

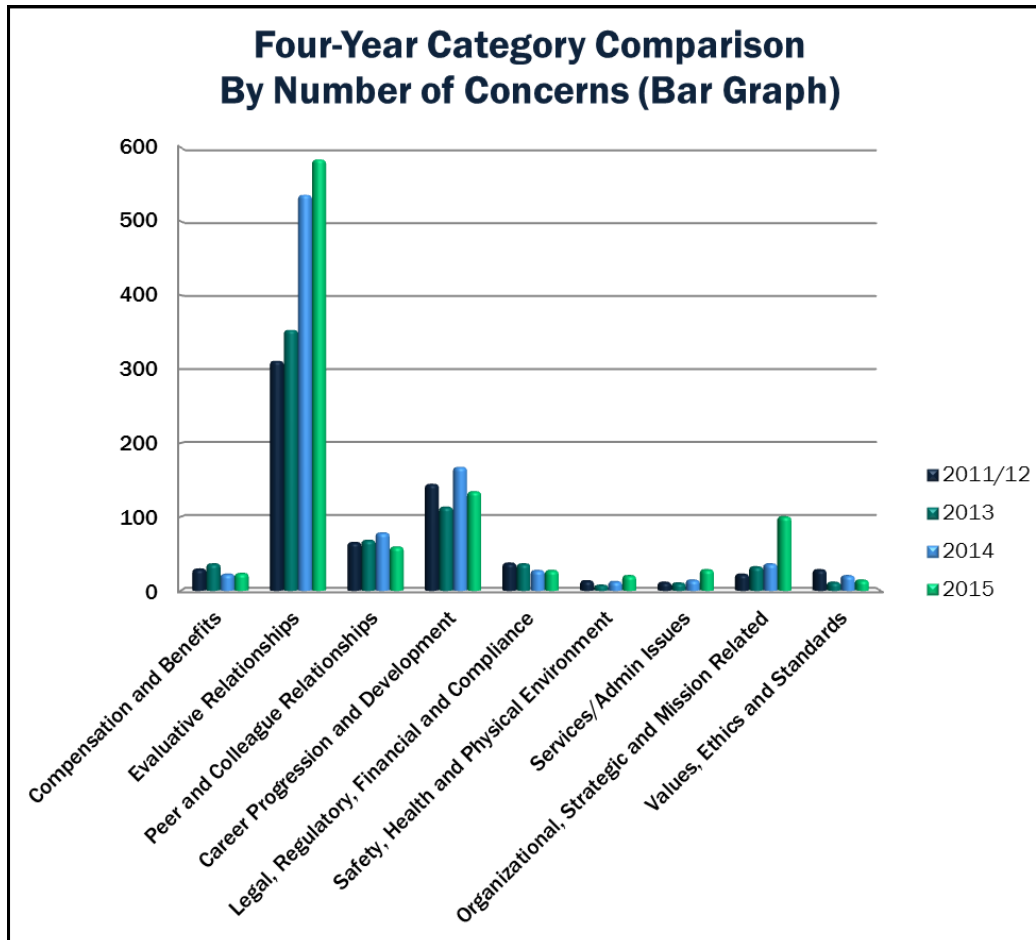
- Limited retention of long-term, dedicated and hardworking employees who find themselves in difficult work situations due to circumstances beyond their control. Institutional mobility for these employees can be limited by organizational transfer policies, communication lapses and retaliation fears.
- The institution is increasingly seen as one that prioritizes a business model at the expense of a service-focused mission.



Four-Year Trends

The Ombuds Office has collected data on the nature of concerns discussed since the Office was created in November 2011. Tracking these concerns over multiple years provides additional insights about important shifts in the organizational climate over time. A review of these trends shows that the most significant change occurred in evaluative relationship concerns (concerns about relationships with either supervisors or supervisees).

These concerns have nearly doubled over a four-year timeframe, with the most notable increase occurring between 2013 and 2014, followed by a continued increase in 2015. Possible explanations for this increase include the implementation of EMERGE as a standardized employee evaluation system, a generalized shift toward an increasingly abrasive culture at MCW*, and/or heightened awareness of the Ombuds Office as a resource for employees experiencing difficulties in this area.



An increase in organizational, strategic and mission-related concerns shared with the Ombuds Office in 2015 also is of note. As mentioned earlier, the majority of these concerns relate to organizational climate and leadership decisions.

This increase may reflect the significant organizational changes taking place at MCW, including regional campus expansion and the addition of the School of Pharmacy. Change is difficult for any organization, and the fact that these changes have raised concern among employees indicates that this trend continues to be worth monitoring through the Ombuds Office.

*This issue is not unique to MCW; [surveys](#) indicate increased reports of abrasive behavior in the workplace nationwide.



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Location and Directions to the Ombuds Office

Curative Care Network, Room 2512
1000 N. 92nd Street
Milwaukee, WI 53226

The MCW Ombuds Office is located on the second floor of Curative Care Network.

We recommend that you park in the West Visitor Parking Lot and enter the building via the West (Main) Entrance.

- Take the right set of elevators to the 2nd floor and turn left upon exiting
- Turn right, past the Injury Research Center, then turn left and proceed down the hallway
- The Ombuds Office (Room 2512) is on your right

[Map](#)

[Directions](#)