

# ANNUAL REPORT

2021-2022



Office of the Ombuds  
*University of Colorado Boulder*

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# A MESSAGE FROM THE DIRECTOR

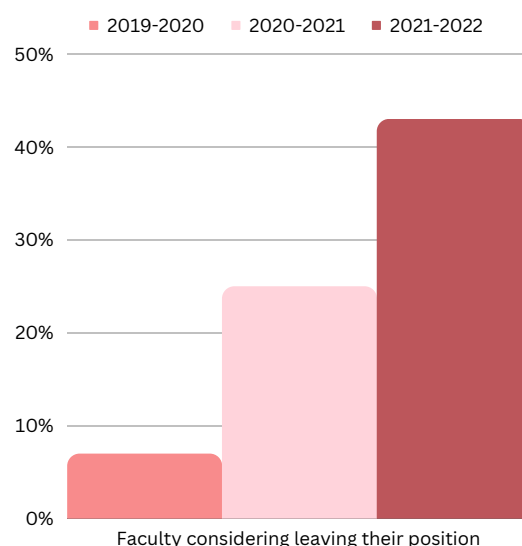
*The University of Colorado Boulder Ombuds Office is a team of skilled professionals dedicated to promoting the highest standard of university governance; furthering the university's commitment to the principles of equality of opportunity; and providing confidential and anonymous mechanisms for people to seek guidance on how to report violations of the law and policies. The Ombuds Office is trained to help people identify options to resolve conflicts and disputes and, without breaching confidentiality, to identify policies, practices, and emerging trends for the university where systemic change may be appropriate.*

Fiscal year 2021-22 was the third year our campus experienced a major transition due to the COVID-19 pandemic. During this year, vaccines became available, undergraduate student enrollment started increasing, budgets were stabilized, and the campus moved to make hybrid working and learning more permanent. Both students and employees are showing signs of fatigue and burn-out from the constant change and adjustments necessary to deal with the pandemic.

We are observing an alarming trend among faculty who consult with us. In the last three years, the number of faculty who have told us that they are considering leaving their positions has risen from a low of 7% in 2019-20 to 43% in 2021-22. While this steep increase mirrors national trends for faculty, we are still concerned.

The number of people seeking consultations has held steady this year at 477. Our online presence has also continued strong. We continue to follow trends regarding historically marginalized or vulnerable groups on campus. This year, 28% of our visitors self-identify as having a historically marginalized racial or sexual identity or being disabled.

Twenty-six percent of our cases dealt with abrasive conduct which is one percent lower than the previous year. From our perspective, this means that the rate of abrasive conduct is holding steady. We are pleased that the rate has not increased to the 32% number we saw in Fiscal Year 2017-18. We believe that this indicates the many efforts to address abrasive conduct by campus leaders and departments like OED and OIEC are continuing to work.





We partner with many departments across the campus. We received 169 referrals from other campus departments and referred 209 people to resources and services in other departments. We collaborated with many departments to offer trainings for the campus community. Our work helps to knit together campus resources so that community members can more readily find the help that is available.

Respectfully Submitted,

Kirsi Ahmavaara Aulin, LMFT, CO-OP®

Director





# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY 2021–2022

## About the Ombuds Office

The University of Colorado Boulder Ombuds Office is an organizational Ombuds program designated as a confidential, informal, impartial, and independent resource available to all members of the CU Boulder Community and adheres to the International Ombudsman Association's Standards of Practice and Code of Conduct.

## Top Five Values: 2021–2022

### Healthy Conflict Engagement

- Communication Coaching
- Conflict Coaching
- Model constructive approaches
- Mediation
- Restore relationships and build trust

### Reputational Awareness

- Help the university and individuals avoid unnecessary reputational harm
- Help visitors report misconduct

### Liability Mitigation

- Elevate whistle blower concerns and mitigate lawsuits
- Share timely information with leadership
- Detect and illuminate compliance gaps and glitches

### Identify and Surface Trends and Systemic Issues

- Spotlight organizational disconnects
- Provide credible insights

### Organizational Strategist

- Help individuals navigate university systems, processes, and procedures
- Identify and refer to campus resources

# VISITORS

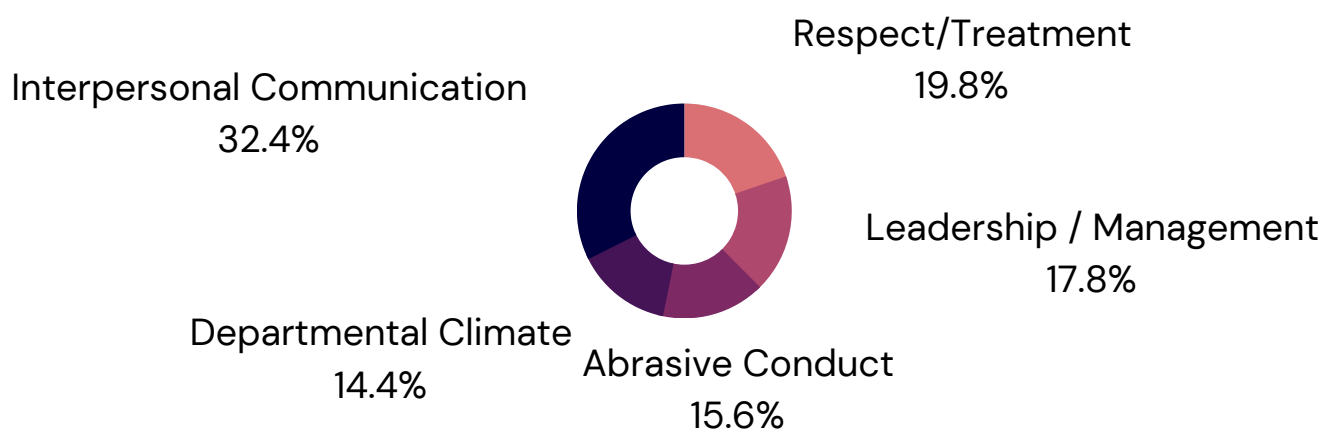


**477** visitor consultations

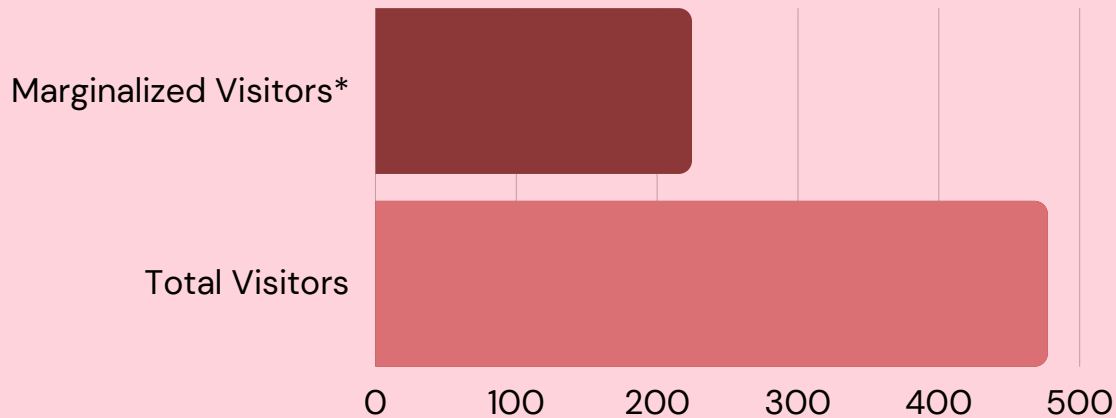
**1,935** people directly impacted

**103,614** people indirectly impacted

## Top Five Issues for All Visitors:



# HISTORICALLY MARGINALIZED VISITORS



\*Marginalized visitors are the number of visitors who self reported as belonging to a marginalized group, including: person of color, LGBTQ+, gender diverse, or disabled.

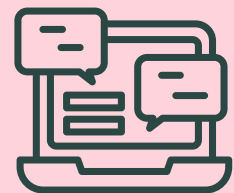
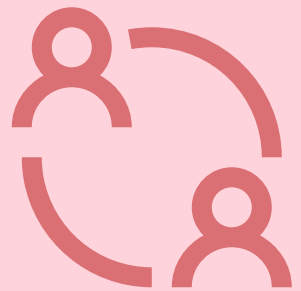
## OUTREACH

Numbers represent the number of attendees and blog visitors

**10** stakeholder engagements

**1,508** presentations, workshops, and webinars

**13,067** Ombuzz Blog visitors and viewers



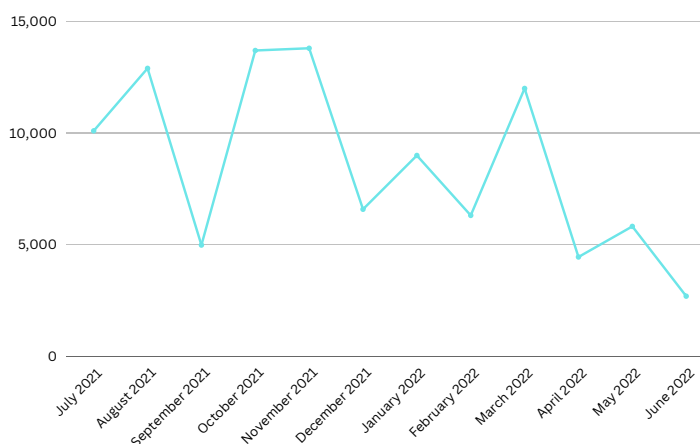


# TWITTER



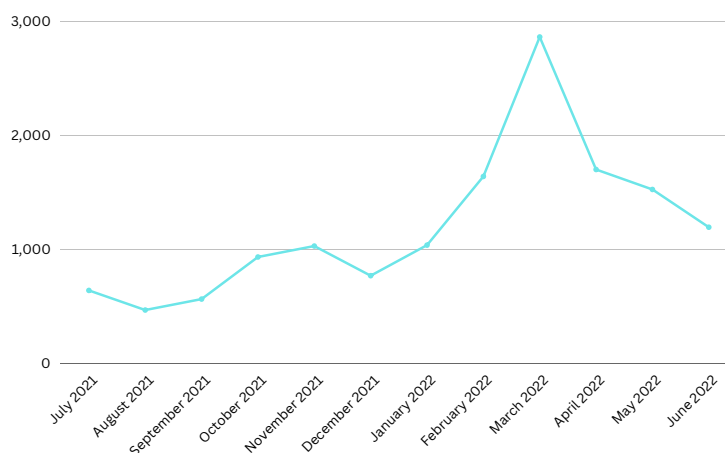
The Ombuds Office is on Twitter at @CUBoulderOmbuds. We use the platform to share resources including articles on the Ombuzz blog, publicize Lunch and Learn events and other information about the activities of the Ombuds Office.

In FY 2021-22, the CUBoulderOmbuds Twitter account had 102,162 impressions. This number refers to the number of times tweets by the Ombuds Office's Twitter account have appeared in users' feeds. Twitter impressions are a good way of measuring the success of tweets and the statistic is an indicator of the reach and impact of the CUBoulderOmbuds account.



Twitter impressions across the fiscal year 2021-22.

In FY 2021-22, the below graph shows how many times someone visited the CUBoulderOmbuds Twitter profile by clicking on the account name, username or profile picture.



# DEMOGRAPHICS AND DATA SUMMARY

In FY 2021-22, 477 people from the following groups requested assistance from the Ombuds Office:

- Staff: 36%
- Grad Students: 21%
- Faculty: 17%
- Undergrad Students: 9%
- Researchers: 6%
- Other: 4% (20)
- Academic Administrator: 2% (10)



The self-identified gender of individuals consulting with our office has remained consistent over the last four years:

- Female: 57%
- Male: 36%
- Gender Diverse: 3%

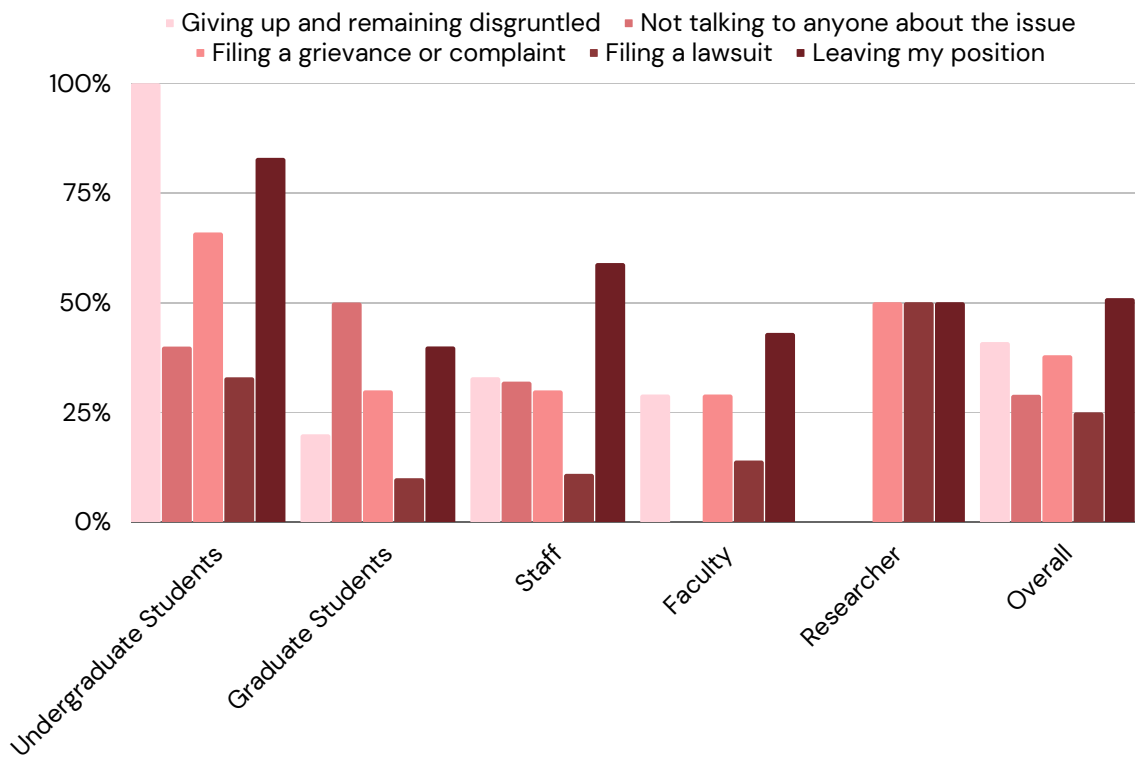
The self-identified racial and ethnic identity of our visitors is also consistent compared to last year:

- White, Caucasian, European American: 62%
- Unknown: 9%
- Asian, Asian American, Native American, Pacific Islander: 5%
- Latino, Hispanic, Spanish American: 2%
- African American/Black: 3%
- Biracial: 1%
- Mexican, Mexican American, Chicano: 1%
- Middle Eastern, North African, Arab, Arab American: 2%
- Multiracial: 2%
- International: 3%

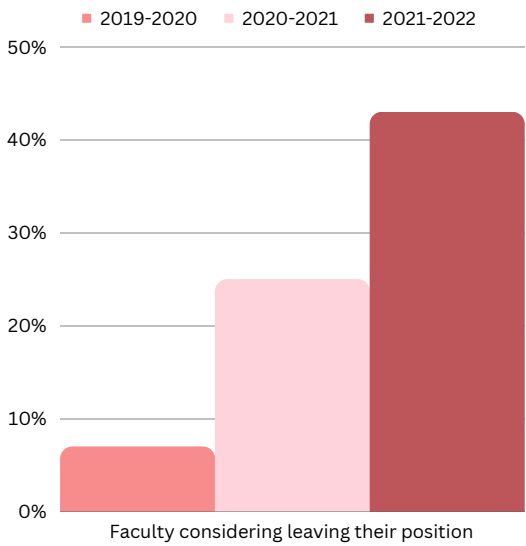
Of the 477 cases, we were able to capture 90% of visitor's self-identified racial and ethnic identities. Only 10% went uncaptured as it was either unknown or the visitor declined to state.

# ASSESSING AND MITIGATING RISK

At the end of a consultation, we ask visitors to fill out a questionnaire identifying what they were planning to do about their concern before coming to the Ombuds Office. This year, our questionnaire response rate was 14%, which is an increase from last year. Although 10 administrators visited our office, they did not complete the questionnaire and therefore not included in the results.



Among those consulting us, the number of faculty considering leaving their positions has increased in the last three years from 7% to 25% to 43%. This is an alarmingly high number for faculty.

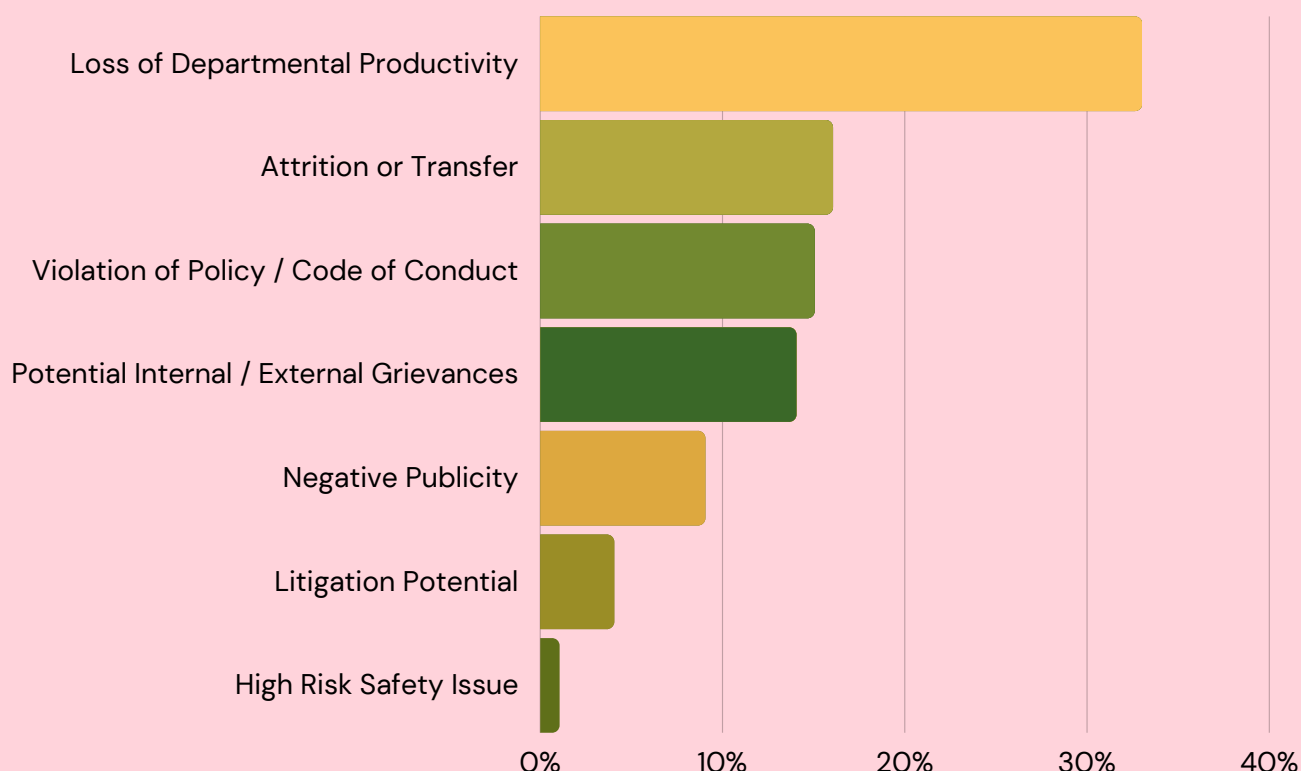




# Ombuds Assessment of Risk

## Percentage of Cases by Type of Risk

Once a case is closed, the Ombuds handling the case assesses the potential risks the case represents for CU Boulder as well as for the visitor. Over the past four years, *loss of departmental productivity* and *attrition or transfer* have been the risk categories most often noted, and this holds true again this year.



## Observations

This year we have worked with academic departments, student groups, and campus wide constituent groups to help resolve problems.

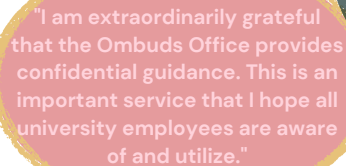
After each visitor consult, we capture the fundamental areas of concern presented. *Interpersonal communication* is the top concern for every constituent group. 53% of our visitors needed assistance with *interpersonal communication*. For all groups except undergraduate students, *abrasive conduct* is a top concern.

# STAFF

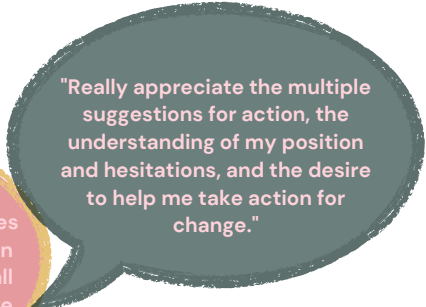
This year, 171 staff sought assistance from our office. 33% of them self-identify as part of a historically marginalized racial or sexual identity, as gender diverse, or as disabled; this was an increase from 26% in the previous fiscal year.

The top five staff concerns were:

- Interpersonal communication
- Leadership & Management
- Respect/treatment
- Departmental climate
- Incivility



"I am extraordinarily grateful that the Ombuds Office provides confidential guidance. This is an important service that I hope all university employees are aware of and utilize."



"Really appreciate the multiple suggestions for action, the understanding of my position and hesitations, and the desire to help me take action for change."

As the campus gradually welcomed constituents back to campus during 2021-2022, we saw a nine percent increase in staff members seeking Ombuds services compared to the prior fiscal year. The top five concerns shifted slightly. Respect/treatment replaced department climate as the third most common issue, moving department climate to fourth on the list. Incivility replaced abrasive conduct as the fifth most common issue and included more subtle experiences such as being deliberately ignored or excluded and not receiving responses to emails. This is also consistent with the findings of the 2021 Campus Culture Survey (CCS).

One trend that stood out among many issues was the perceived failure of leadership to follow through on commitments. Numerous staff were led to believe there would be a promotion or career progression of some sort as units restructured and adapted to less staff and tighter budgets. However, after months of preparing and, in some cases, training to assume a new role, the assurances did not come to fruition. According to the 2021 CCS, only 48% of staff agree/strongly agree that they receive adequate support/mentoring to advance in their career and 42% feel that they are provided opportunities to advance.

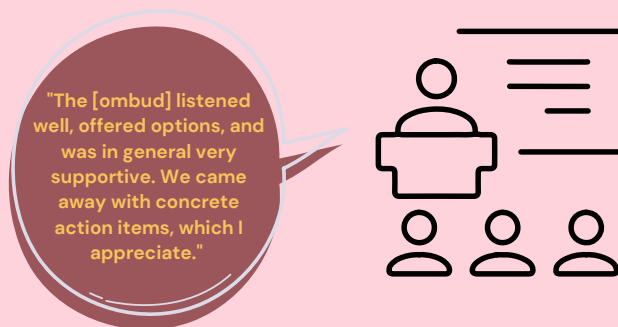
Another trend we observed this year was a surprising reluctance by some staff to engage in a conversation about problems. Results of the 2021 CCS indicate that more than 30% of staff do not feel comfortable bringing up issues of concern without fear it will affect how they are treated by their supervisor. As ombuds we listened to the stories unfold, asked clarifying questions, helped staff members consider a wide range of perspectives and possibilities. We helped them obtain clarity on the situation, mutual understanding, and hopefully a path forward. We also prepared visitors to consider alternate paths.

# FACULTY

Of the 82 faculty visitors, 15% self-identify as part of a historically marginalized racial or sexual identity, as gender diverse or as disabled.

The most common issues faculty raised were:

- Interpersonal Communication
- Abrasive Conduct
- Incivility
- Respect/ Treatment
- Administrative Decisions and Interpretation of Rules
- Department Climate



"The [ombud] listened well, offered options, and was in general very supportive. We came away with concrete action items, which I appreciate."

Interpersonal communication issues arose in a variety of contexts: face-to-face interactions between graduate students or researchers and faculty, between colleagues, between administrators and faculty, and between staff and faculty. In short, those areas where faculty and others in the CU community interact are places where interpersonal interactions can take a wrong turn. These breakdowns are consequential for their negative impact on other areas that are important to the University's mission: a productive work environment and a supportive departmental climate. According to the 2021 Campus Culture Survey (CCS), 49% of faculty report experiencing workplace incivility in the past 12 months. Within this group, more than half report that incivility affected their mental health, and caused them to be less productive in their work and less committed to the university. When faculty members are subjected to (or subject others to) incivilities and abrasive conduct, it erodes trust and creates perceptions of being treated disrespectfully. Equally, when administrators act in ways that lack transparency, it undermines faculty confidence that they are being even handed and have the faculty member's best interests in mind.

Specific concerns that received repeated mention by faculty visitors included:

- Lack of trust between colleagues
- A feeling of disrespect caused by incivilities and administrator inaction
- Administrator lack of transparency and even misrepresentation of University policy
- Administrator violations of confidentiality
- Disrespectful interactions between graduate students that destabilized laboratory environments, or the department's graduate ranks



- Inappropriate communication, such as yelling in faculty meetings, vituperative emails to colleagues and administrators, dismissal as irrelevant of junior faculty comments perceived as veiled threats for not aligning with senior faculty views
- Legacy issues that have colleagues constantly at swords' points involving disrespect, abrasive behavior, or incivilities
- Failure of the chair to halt behavior that falls below expected faculty standards of conduct and violate the PRR
- Unwanted romantic advances by colleagues with positional power
- Perceptions of biases experienced by female, LGBTQ+, or other colleagues
- Gossip targeting colleagues, including defamatory comments.

“It's great to now know about this office and what their purview is. I'll be reaching out again in the future if there are other issues that arise.”

As in the past, these concerns frequently are reported as forms of abrasive behavior by one party or the other. A common theme points to these behaviors as arising from legacy issues, and by a colleague alleged to have a history of abrasive conduct. Faculty visitors commonly reported that when these concerns were brought to the unit administrator's attention, no action was taken. An underlying dynamic in these reported behaviors is an imbalance of power. Untoward behavior accompanied by power differentials of rank or position can be read to reflect a sense of entitlement. Failure of the chair to rein these problems in can be read as an endorsement of sensed entitlement to continue inappropriate behavior. Further, when the chair does not treat violations of the PRR as actionable, faculty members interpret unwillingness to use their positional power to address issues as a lack of respect. These two concerns—abrasive behavior and the chair's failure to use positional power to address it—are regarded by faculty visitors as creating untenable work situations. Again, according to the 2021 CCS, only 40% of faculty perceive their senior faculty as able to effectively address problematic behaviors that undermine the work environment. When department leaders are unable to address these issues, this is associated with a more negative workplace experience as measured by virtually every survey item. For instance, 77% faculty who perceive their department leaders as unskilled at addressing behavior problems report having experienced incivility in the past 12 months (compared to just 32% of faculty who perceive department leaders as skilled). Further, when faculty perceive their department leaders as lacking these key skills, two-thirds report having seriously considered leaving CU in the past 12 months.

Rising attention to issues of race, gender, and social inequalities reported in the 2020–21 Ombuds Report was again evident in the types of issues raised by Department of Graduate Studies and principle investigators (PI) visitors. Current graduate students are especially sensitive to DEI issues. They push back when they perceive insensitivity to these issues in their departments or by their faculty, all of which contribute to interpersonal breakdowns. As we noted last year, faculty often appear unaware of how their words are interpreted. For example, faculty may make gendered comments and evaluative observations that to student perceptions seem to perpetuate a system of privilege and to support the status quo. To faculty, students’ strong response to this appears disrespectful. It is encouraging that the Ombuds Office received several inquiries from department administrators and faculty members seeking advice on how to create a dialogue to address this divide. In these cases, it is important to underscore that perceived insensitivity to issues and concerns related to identity and ability undermine trust when left unaddressed. Creating dialogue is an essential means to prevent trust from eroding.

The foregoing concerns over department climate, perceived insensitivity to matters of race, gender, and ability, and abrasive behavior that intimate a sense of entitlement carried a common theme. Faculty visitors complained that they could not count on their chair to insist on adherence to the Professional Rights and Responsibilities policy or for there to be consequences for violations of the PRR. We note, however, based on other evidence provided by visitors, that administrators seemed more likely to reference the revised PRR than in previous years and to communicate more generally acceptable behavioral norms, in keeping with the PRR policy.

Faculty members continue to express concern over lack of transparency. These expressions tended to focus on decisions by the dean or chair that raise questions of procedural fairness, and administrator decisions with opaque grounds for decisions that gave rise to perceptions of bias. In fact, according to the 2021 Climate Survey results, only 42% of faculty agree/strongly agree that departmental resources are allocated transparently. This concern is often voiced by instructors with regard to contract issues, appointment and promotion practices and decisions, and administrative actions that appeared to violate procedural norms for personnel actions, or failure to adhere to standards and processes set by the Office of Faculty Affairs and college or school norms.


“I really appreciated being able to speak with a neutral party who had deep knowledge of the system and graduate education.”

# GRADUATE STUDENTS

The Ombuds Office saw a 15% increase in graduate student visitors for a total of 102. Of that number, 42% self-identified as being part of a historically marginalized group, as gender diverse, or as disabled.

The top concerns for graduate students:

- Interpersonal communication
- Advisor/Advising
- Career Development
- Use of positional power
- Abrasive conduct
- Respect/treatment



"My meeting was very helpful, in both allowing me to be heard and my concerns validated, and in providing me resources for moving forward and skills for dealing with my current and future conflicts."

The two top concerns interpersonal communication and advisor/advising remain consistent with trends in past years. The top concerns played out in a number of contexts that ranged from challenging departmental culture to unprofessional faculty behavior.

Interpersonal communication issues frequently arose out of difficulties with advisors. These problems affected career development in the view of the graduate students who visited our office. As they described their experiences it appeared that issues of power dynamics occurred, sometimes in conjunction with unprofessional, dismissive or angry behavior from the advisor/PI. For example, PIs would assign research projects that may have been in the graduate student's area of interest to postdocs or new colleagues, while keeping the grad student on a project that was less directly related to their area of focus but of interest to the PI.

Students in conflict, especially if they were unable to have productive dialogues with advisors or PIs, frequently felt disrespected and poorly treated. According to the 2021 Campus Culture Survey (CCS) results, among graduate students, the three most commonly reported incivility behaviors were non-responsiveness to emails/requests, condescension or dismissive remarks, and demands of excessive sacrifices of the students, time, health, or social life; department faculty were most often the offenders (57%).



Further, the survey found that more than one-quarter of graduate students reported that they weren't comfortable bringing up issues of concern with their advisor without fear it would affect how they would be treated. In some instances, graduate students reported that advisors minimized the seriousness of medical considerations that affected their academic progress. 2021 CCS demographics indicate that one-third of graduate students have a disability and 11% preferred not to answer the disability question. Several students indicated that the environment in the department or in the lab was not inclusive. CCS results show that more than one-third of grad students have heard people in their department express stereotypes based on identity. Students who spoke out or tried to advocate for changes via DEI committees often felt push back and reported that they were viewed as problem students.

Issues cited included:

- Advisors/PIs were not responsive or not available
- Advisors/PIs would agree with the student then disregard the earlier agreement
- Students felt they were not being heard or that their concerns were dismissed
- Students would be kept on research projects that were of interest to the PI even though the research did not contribute to the student's research topic or goals
- Students were advised to master out of a program in lieu of receiving the support and guidance needed to proceed towards a PhD
- Students felt roadblocks were being placed in their way
- Students experienced unconscious or implicit bias
- Students reported disagreements over authorship.

As in past years, students also report that advisors delay progress or "move the goal posts", such as not helping the student with comprehensive exam requirements or dissertation review, making it difficult and costly to graduate according to the originally planned timeline. According to the 2021 CCS, only 55% of graduate students agree/strongly agree that evaluation criteria are clear and 61% indicate that they receive adequate mentoring to advance in their professional development. In some instances, students were not given notice of poor performance with sufficient time to turn the situation around. The lack of mentoring or disagreement with their advisors about research direction led to several students citing either a desire to "master out" or a push by the advisor or department for them to graduate with their master's and leave the program. Our office worked with these students to identify workable solutions so that they could stay in their program and make real progress toward their PhD.

Graduate student visitors continue to cite a heightened awareness of racial and social justice concerns in a variety of settings. Several graduate visitors reported frustrations working with departments on changing departmental culture. They noted that at times the comments and actions of faculty on committees exemplified a lack of understanding and perspective about lived experiences of non-majority individuals.

While mental health concerns did not rise to the top, issues around mental stress and work/life balance continued to surface. In several instances graduate students reported being in therapy or taking time out due to mental and physical stress. Among the nearly half of graduate students who reported experiencing incivility in the 2021 CCS, 60% indicated that it had affected their mental health, and over half reported that it had caused them to be less productive in their work and eroded confidence in their abilities. In some of these cases, graduate students had major conflicts with co-authors, both PIs and fellow students. Disagreements over ownership of research and writing, giving appropriate credit, and difficulty having conversations around authorship led to multiple meetings with our office.



# UNDERGRADUATE STUDENTS

This fiscal year, 74 undergraduate students consulted with us, which is about the same as last year. 41% of these students who filled out our questionnaire self-identified as part of a historically marginalized racial or sexual identity, as gender diverse or as disabled.

The top five concerns for undergraduate students this year were:

- Interpersonal Communication
- Grading
- Honor Code/Academic Dishonesty
- Administrative Decisions and Interpretation/Application of Rules
- Classroom Management

"The Ombuds office provided much needed contacts within the university to listen and attend to our needs. [The Ombud] was respectful, efficient, and actually listened to our needs. This office is highly needed."

For the past five years, interpersonal communication, grading, and administrative decisions and interpretation/application of rules remain in the top five issues of concern. This year, classroom management concerns were added to the list. According to the 2021 Campus Culture Survey (CCS) results, only slightly more than half of undergraduate students feel comfortable expressing ideas or opinions in class without fear it will affect how people in the class treat them. A similar proportion (58%) perceive that course instructors challenge offensive comments during class discussions. Finally, undergraduates who perceive most of their instructors as either only somewhat skilled or not at all skilled at successfully managing discussions about difficult or sensitive topics (26% of students) also report having a far more negative experience at CU.

As in past years, undergraduate students concerns center on academics. This year, students were particularly concerned with aspects of distance learning ranging from how online courses are taught to how to prove they did not commit academic dishonesty when they had no witnesses to their actions working from home. We heard from undergraduate students who had difficulty navigating the university bureaucracy to resolve their concerns.

We also heard concerns that not all programs espouse or support the university's values of diversity and inclusion. For example, criteria and program requirements intended to attract and retain underrepresented students, created unintended barriers to admission, reduced retention and ultimately thwarted the community it was designed to foster.


"[The Ombud] was very helpful and acted as an in between person to help me remain anonymous."

# RESEARCHERS

The number of researchers who visited the Ombuds Office was 29. This includes individuals with the titles of Research Professor, Research Associate, Professional Research Assistant and Postdoctoral Fellow and Scholar (<https://www.colorado.edu/hr/research-faculty>). The Ombuds Office recognizes there are power differentials that result in very different concerns held by the various ranks in the university's Research Group series. For reporting purposes, however, the Ombuds Office uses the general term "researchers," to capture overall trends and issues. 10% of researchers self-identified as part of a historically marginalized racial or sexual identity, as gender diverse, or as disabled.

The top 5 concerns:

- Interpersonal communication
- Abrasive conduct
- Respect/treatment
- Leadership and management
- Use of positional power



**"Thank you for taking the time to meet and discuss options. I appreciate the feedback and guidance."**

Interpersonal communication concerns were cited as miscommunication, breakdown in communication, missing communication, and instances of demeaning or abrasive communication that resulted in conflicts. These instances were noted most often between postdocs and principal investigators (PIs). For example, postdocs reported lack of transparency around the terms of a grant which led to perceptions of manipulative negotiations around continued participation in a grant.

Issues cited included:

- Concerns around professional reputation
- Organizational climate of the lab or unit as not supportive or positive
- Intellectual property, not being given proper credit
- Lack of or missing leadership in day-to-day operations
- Mismanagement of research

Some PIs were reported as "missing in action" (out of contact or out of the country) and postdocs were left to manage projects without appropriate guidance leading to concerns over research protocols and even safety issues. In some instances, postdocs reported abrasive conduct by PIs towards postdocs and other students in the lab in terms of task assignments, as well as the inability to voice concerns or to be heard by the PI. PIs also raised concerns about unprofessional behavior of postdocs hired on their grants. This included reports of postdocs not meeting deadlines and expectations for grant timelines.



To some extent, the concerns brought by researchers pointed to organizational climates that were lacking in strong leadership and management. Concerns over the safety of labs and equipment use, for example, were noted. These concerns were echoed by some female PIs who reported feeling not heard and respected by supervising administrators when issues were brought to their attention.

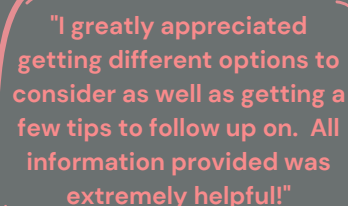
The use of positional power was noted in cases concerning intellectual property and collaborative work where it was felt that a researcher was not given appropriate credit in the project or research paper. The inappropriate use of positional power was also experienced by postdocs who felt that the responsibilities they were expected to perform were unreasonable and negatively impacted their career trajectory.

## ADMINISTRATORS

Administrators, in most cases, visit the Ombuds Office to consult about communication issues in their units, with eight of the total ten raising this as a significant problem they were trying to address. These ranged from interpersonal issues with a specific faculty member or departmental administrator to group issues, such as those between graduate students and faculty on DEI issues or among those responsible for delivering a program. These issues occasionally involved perceptions of incivility or abrasive communication that were taken as a sign of disrespect by a faculty colleague or staff member and that was having a negative impact on others within the unit.

The top five concerns for administrators were:

- Interpersonal Communication
- Incivility
- Respect/Treatment
- Abrasive conduct
- Consultation about Others
- Leadership and Management



"I greatly appreciated getting different options to consider as well as getting a few tips to follow up on. All information provided was extremely helpful!"

Administrators at the department level expressed concerns that grew from untoward faculty behavior that had a deleterious impact on departmental climate and sought advice on how to address it. The campus has urged chairs to take the expectations set forth in the Professional Rights & Responsibilities (PRR) policy seriously to rein in faculty members who act in abusive ways toward their colleagues, students, and staff.

Recipients of abrasive communication feel bullied and unsafe. Often these cases involved faculty members who have had a history of acting independently, and whose actions reflect a sense of entitlement. Administrators facing these situations sought advice and coaching for difficult conversations with colleagues with whom they had strained relations to address unmet expectations and arrive at an agreement on acceptable behavior going forward.

Administrators also sought advice on how to deal with members of their unit who had a history of poor relations with colleagues. Inappropriate and unprofessional behavior by faculty in the unit was also a concern by some administrators.

Typically the offending party does not see their behavior as problematic and, in such cases, we offer coaching to the administrator on how to have a difficult conversation, should they desire it. In this same vein, this past year we visited with department chairs to discuss the behavior of faculty members whose conduct, across time, has been reported to us as a source of concern, so that the chair will be alert to a potential problem and can take action before it escalates.

The use of email to address complaints continues to be a problem. Emotionally charged emails between colleagues can quickly get out of hand and require prompt attention by the unit leader to move the discussion to a less charged, more productive medium. The use of electronic media for personal attack extends to social media. We received several complaints about targeting of faculty by department members (faculty and students) on social media, including defaming comments about chairs.

Chairs contact the Ombuds Office to gain clarification on University policies and mandatory reporting. Usually these reflect an abundance of caution, especially when a faculty member has reported to the chair an incident about which they have uncertainty over whether it is reportable behavior. Our advice is consistently that they should contact OIEC, which will provide a clear answer.

Finally, we had several departments contact us to discuss problems with rumors, gossip, and a gulf between graduate students and faculty over student perceived insensitivity by the faculty to DEI and social justice issues where these intersected with the curriculum, research, departmental climate, and the profession.



# OTHER

The other category captures visitors who are connected to the university but are not part of any on-campus constituency including parents, alumni, spouses, former students, and community members. 14 of the 18 visitors in this category were parents. Three were referred to us by other campus departments.

"Thank you for your  
help. Much  
appreciated."



# CONCLUDING REMARKS

The Ombuds Office continues to serve as an active, informal, and confidential resource for alternative dispute resolution and mediation for the CU community. This year we have continued to productively serve the campus as the university moved to greater in-person instruction and hybrid work arrangements. We have adapted to hybrid work arrangements by continuing to offer Zoom and in person appointments.

We are pleased that the number of visitors to our Office remains consistent with the previous year. Of the visitors who completed a feedback survey, 96% said that they would use the Ombuds Office again or would refer others to the office. Visitor numbers, along with feedback surveys and referrals from other offices, indicate that we are seen as a secure place to discuss difficult conversations.

Our office identified several troubling trends, which align with the results of the Campus Culture Survey (CCS). All constituent groups (faculty, staff, students, researchers, and administrators) expressed concerns about incivility on campus, lack of respect, and abrasive behavior. Several departments contacted the Office to seek assistance with problems involving departmental culture as well as concerns about unprofessional behavior. The most frequent issues centered on managing difficult conversations, sometimes due to positional power and other times due to demeaning and abrasive behavior. Problematic interactions ranged from unclear and unexpressed expectations to gender, disability, and racial insensitivities. The Ombuds Office facilitated 47 mediations this year, which was a 20% increase from last year.

In the spirit of creating connections and contributing towards the community at CU Boulder, we provided workshops, presentations and Lunch & Learn webinars to 1,508 attendees. Many gained valuable skills that will shape their future leadership. The CCS informs us that a sense of belonging helps community members feel their presence makes a difference. We believe that our efforts help to foster a greater sense of belonging. We look forward to working with old and new partners across campus this coming year in person and online.



# APPENDICES

## Appendix A: Definition of an Ombuds

### What is an Ombudsman (Ombuds)?

The name “ombudsman” (om-budz-man) comes from Swedish and literally means “representative.” At the most fundamental level, an ombudsman is one who assists individuals and groups in the resolution of conflicts or concerns. At CU Boulder, the Ombuds Office is affiliated with the professional association International Ombudsman Association (IOA), and Certified Organizational Ombuds Practitioners® (CO-OP®) which is the certifying body for Organizational Ombuds, and it adheres to IOA’s standards of practice and code of conduct. The IOA defines an Organizational Ombuds as: “a designated neutral who is appointed or employed by an organization to facilitate the informal resolution of concerns of employees, managers, students and, sometimes, external clients of the organization.” At CU Boulder, the Ombuds Office has been designated to serve this function as a confidential, informal, impartial, and independent resource available to all members of the CU Boulder community.

## Appendix B: Standards of Practice and Code of Ethics

We adhere to the [International Ombudsman Association’s Standards of Practice and Code of Ethics](#)

## Appendix C: Ombuzz Blog

<https://ombuzz.blog/>

## Appendix D: Small Bites, Big Impact Lunch and Learn

<https://www.colorado.edu/ombuds/lunch-and-learn-presentations-small-bites-big-impact>

