

**UConn Ombuds Office Report  
July 1, 2023 – June 30, 2025**

Mirroring the response of institutions in academia, private industry, and government, the University of Connecticut established the Ombuds Office in 2013 to assist employees and graduate students pursuing informal resolution of campus concerns or problems. The Ombuds Office is located on the 2<sup>nd</sup> level of the Homer Babbidge Library and maintains a campus webpage at [ombuds.uconn.edu](https://ombuds.uconn.edu). The UConn Ombuds is intended to serve as an *organizational ombuds*. There are a variety of ombuds models, each emphasizing that the incumbent has no command authority in the organization, functions independently of normal reporting channels, does not serve in other roles that could jeopardize neutrality, and is committed to confidentiality of communications to the extent allowed by law. The distinction of an *organizational ombudsperson* is the absence of the intention and ability to conduct formal investigations, be a finder of facts, publish findings, and render judgments on grievances whereas *statutory* or *classical ombuds* are vested with some or all of these powers. The UConn Ombuds Office Charter describing the office and the Standards of Practice and Code of Ethics of the IOA can be found at [ombuds.uconn.edu](https://ombuds.uconn.edu).

Background to 2023-2025 Annual Report

This two-year report reflects the 11th and 12th years of operation of the UConn Ombuds Office and captures both continuity in service and important developments in staffing during this period. A key transition occurred in Fall 2023, when Cinnamon Adams joined the Ombuds Office. While her initial focus was supporting graduate students and postdoctoral scholars, Cinnamon now serves faculty, staff, and graduate students across the Storrs and regional campuses.

Jim Wohl continues in his role providing Ombuds services to the Storrs and regional campuses and, through the 2025 calendar year, devotes one day per week to serving the UConn Health campus, ensuring continued access to confidential and neutral Ombuds support across the University system.

Many members of the UConn community are familiar with Cinnamon from her long-standing work in The Graduate School, where she served as Director of Graduate Student and Postdoctoral Support beginning in 2016. Her expanding problem-solving work in that role, combined with her experience navigating complex academic and organizational environments, made her transition to the Ombuds Office a natural progression. Cinnamon holds the Certified Organizational Ombuds Practitioner (CO-OP®) credential and

practices fully in alignment with the Ombuds Office's principles of confidentiality, informality, independence, and impartiality as outlined in the [Office Charter](#).

Since joining UConn in 2002, Cinnamon has served in a range of roles, including Residence Hall Director, Assistant Director of Community Standards, and Director of Graduate Student and Postdoctoral Support. Across these positions, she has consistently supported students, faculty, and staff through conflict resolution, mediation, coaching, and advising. Her professional training includes completion of the mediation program at Quinnipiac Law's Center for Dispute Resolution, coursework in communication and restorative practices, and multiple trainings through the International Ombuds Association. She holds a BA in Psychology from Western New England University and an MS in College Student Personnel from Miami University (Ohio).

This is a two-year report. Issues or concerns raised by visitors are tabulated based on the International Ombudsman Association (IOA) uniform reporting categories (a copy of the IOA categories is located at [ombuds.uconn.edu](http://ombuds.uconn.edu)). In some places, data are further subdivided according to graduate student, non-faculty, or faculty employee status. In some instances, data regarding issues raised and Ombuds responses are presented collectively without distinguishing campus location, though UConn Health visitor population data are presented separately.

When reviewing the data, it is important to interpret the information in the context of how an ombuds comes in contact with visitors and how issues are tabulated. Visitors voluntarily contact the office; no one is compelled to interact with the UConn Ombuds. The ombuds serves as a neutral party and does not attempt to investigate the veracity of any statements by visitors or determine the facts of what is being described. The issues raised are derived from what visitors report and then translated into the IOA categories. Thus, there are no verbatim quotes from visitors nor is there information that might reveal the source of a reported issue.

### Regarding Visitors

The visitor data presented can only be interpreted as *the number (or percentage) of employees, trainees, or graduate students experiencing a campus concern who have chosen to contact the Ombuds Office as a neutral and confidential means to explore options towards resolving an issue*. The data presented **do not** represent the percentage of all employees or graduate students experiencing conflict nor the extent to which employees, trainees, and graduate students seek other methods of resolving conflict.

During the 2023-2025 period, the employee usage rate of the UConn Ombuds Office at the Storrs and regional campuses was ~2.5%. The graduate student usage rate was ~1%. The employee usage rate at UConn Health was ~1.6%.

### Issues or concerns raised by visitors to the Ombuds Office

Issues raised range across several categories for any given visitor. Often, a visitor will have in mind one or a few main concern(s) but several other issues will be revealed during the course of an interaction. The Ombuds makes no attempt to assess what a visitor's *major concern* or *most important concern* may be when recording issues. Despite this limitation, the data may be helpful in discerning the types and frequencies of issues on the minds of people choosing to explore informal approaches to problems affecting their work. As is the case with usage rate, the types of issues raised are very much in line with reports from ombuds offices at other universities.

The largest IOA categories of concern raised by visitors continues to be those of *Evaluative Relationships*, issues arising amidst supervisor-supervisee relationships (44% of all visitors), Organizational, Strategic, and Mission related issues (18% of all visitors), Career Progression (12% of all visitors) and peer relationships 12% of all visitors), and Services/Administrative decisions (6% of all visitors). Though evaluative relationships related issues have been the most common issue at the UConn Ombuds Office, Organizational, Strategic, and Mission related issues and Administrative Decisions were more prevalent in 2023/2024 than in years past. This report's commentary section speaks to this trend. Of the 2024-2025 visitors, 62% of visitors wished to discuss an issue involving supervision (Table 4).

Respectfully submitted,



Jim Wohl, DVM, MPA  
UConn Ombuds, Director



Cinnamon Adams, MA  
UConn Ombuds

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**Estimated Ombuds Office Service Population:** The Ombuds Office service population includes faculty and non-faculty employees and graduate students at the Storrs and regional campuses and all members of the UConn Health Center. These estimated numbers and percentages of employee and graduate student populations are unofficial numbers tabulated in 2023 solely for the purpose of interpreting the visitor data for this report.

**Table 1.** Total Estimated Employees: ~ 5314 (Storrs and regional campuses, 2023)

<b>Classification</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>% total</b>
Full time Faculty *	~1659	~31%
Full Time Nonfaculty / Non- GA	~3464	~65%
Part Time Total	~191	~4%

\* tenure track and non tenure track

**Table 1a.** Total Estimated Employees by Union Membership (Storrs and regional campuses, 2023)

<b>Classification</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>% total employees</b>
AAUP	~2008	~37.7%
UCPEA	~2125	~40.0%
NP-2 (CEUI)	~375	~7.0%
NP-3 (AFSCME)	~68	~1.3%
NP-5 (CPFU)	~155	~2.9%
<b>Total</b>	<b>~ 4731</b>	<b>(89%)</b>

**Table 1c.** 2023 UConn Health Estimated Employees by Union Membership (Total Employees ~ 5295)

<b>Classification</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>% total employees</b>
AAUP	~648	~12.2%
UHP	~3139	~59.2%
NP-2 (CEUI)	~210	~4.0%
NP-3 (AFSCME)	~283	~5.3%
1199 (NP-6)	~388	~7.3%
<b>Total</b>	<b>~ 4668</b>	<b>(88%)</b>

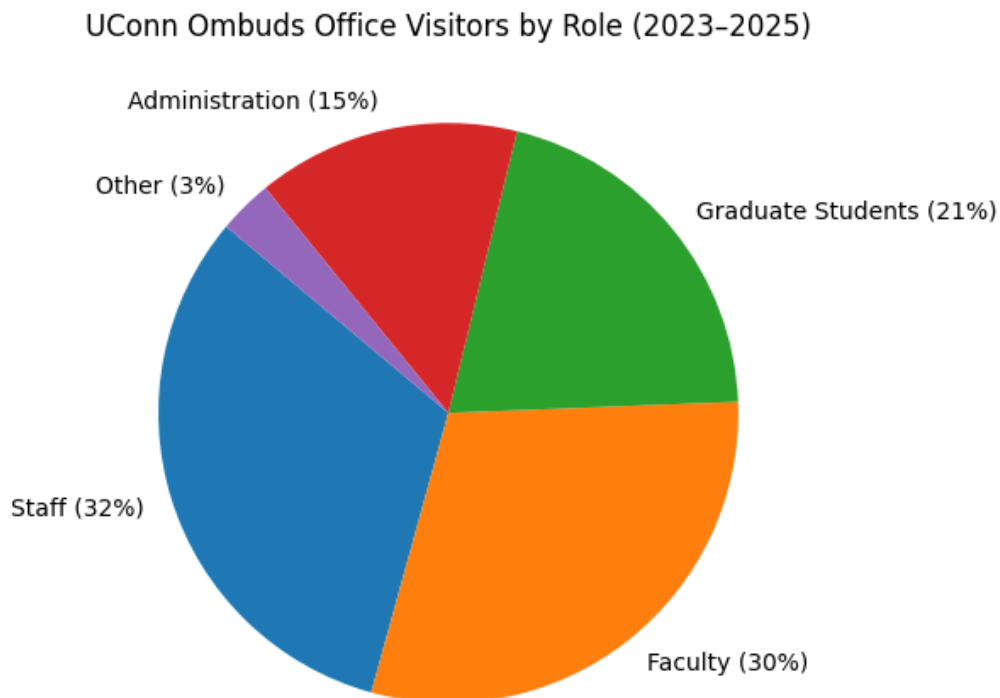
**Table 1d.** Total Graduate/Professional Students and Post Docs in Ombuds Office Service Population (Storrs and regional campuses, 2023)

<b>Total Graduate &amp; Professional Students</b>	<b>~ 7976</b>
<b>Total Post Docs</b>	<b>~154</b>

### UConn Ombuds Office Visitor Data

Each Ombuds Office “visit” represents a single, voluntary contact initiated by an individual. Each visit could represent a single interaction or a more involved series of meetings including meetings with other individuals or groups.

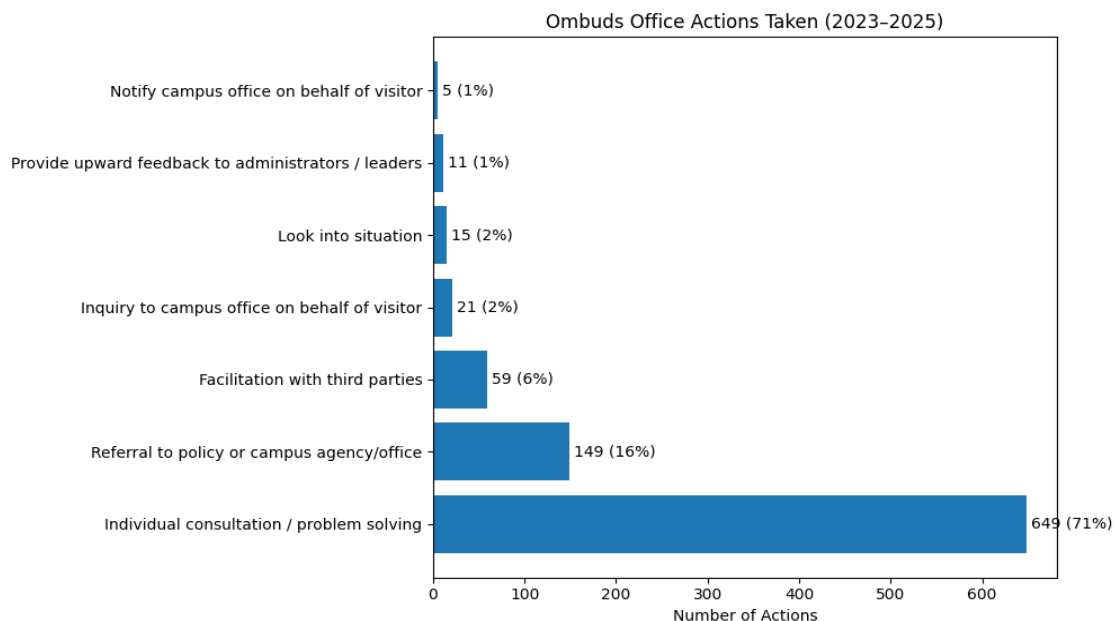
**Figure 1.** Distribution of Ombuds Office visitors by role across the 2023–2025 reporting period. Staff (32%) and faculty (30%) comprise the largest share of visitors, followed by graduate students (21%) and senior administrators (15%), reflecting broad engagement with the Ombuds Office across employee and academic roles.



**Table 2.** Ombuds Office Visitor Demographics & Employee Classification 2023-2025  
{Total visitors = 729; % of visitors}

Classification	Storrs/Regional		UConn Health		Total
	2023-24	2024-25	2023-24	2024-25	
<b>Total</b>	<b>294</b>	<b>262</b>	<b>89</b>	<b>84</b>	<b>729</b>
Faculty	85 (29%)	92 (35%)	20 (22%)	21 (25%)	218 (30%)
Staff	70 (24%)	72 (27%)	47 (53%)	35 (42%)	232 (32%)
SMG	-	-	-	-	1
UCPEA	60	49	-	1	109
UHP	-	4	40	33	77
NP-2	2	1	1	-	4
AFSCME	-	2	5	-	7
NP-5	2	-	-	-	2
Administration	40 (14%)	30 (11%)	16 (18%)	21 (25%)	107 (15%)
Grad	87 (30%)	59 (23%)	3 (3%)	1 (1%)	150 (21%)
GEU	61	37	-	-	98
Other	4 (1%)	9 (3%)	3 (3%)	6 (7%)	22 (3%)

**Figure 2** summarizes the actions taken by the Ombuds Office in response to visitor concerns during the 2023–2025 reporting period. Because Ombuds work is individualized, multiple actions may occur within a single case; totals therefore reflect actions taken rather than the number of visitors served. Descriptions of actions follow Figure 2. (See Appendix for tabulated data in Table 3)



**Individual consultation / problem solving:** Listening, providing and receiving information, reframing issues, discussing options for addressing a visitor's concern rather than choosing for a visitor how to respond. Many visitors to an ombuds office are seeking an impartial listener to assist them in verbally expressing a concern. No further action may be desired or needed.

**Referral to policy or campus agency/office:** Ombuds are in a position to respond to confidential inquiries for referral to appropriate offices or services that are available on campus. The ombuds must be well versed in university complaint and notification procedures and have a working knowledge of the appropriate offices responsible for regulatory and compliance functions of the university. This information resource function compliments the ombuds practice of remaining up to date and knowledgeable of current university policies.

**Facilitation with third parties:** A visitor may seek the ombuds assistance in finding an intermediary in speaking with another party privately in resolving a conflict – sometimes shuttling between disputants and other times through a facilitated discussion similar to mediation. The intermediary may be the ombuds or another appropriate person (e.g. a supervisor). The ombuds may serve as a facilitator with groups when requested and appropriate or refer multiparty conflicts to facilitation services elsewhere on or off campus. The ombuds only serves in this role with the permission of the involved parties.

**Notify campus office on behalf of visitor:** Under certain circumstances, the ombuds may notify a campus office of information on behalf of a visitor in order to surface allegations while protecting the observer's identity or safety.

**Inquiry to campus office on behalf of visitor:** A visitor may wish to confidentially seek clarification regarding the meaning of a specific university policy or procedure.

**Look into situation:** The ombuds does not perform formal fact finding investigations. On rare occasions, the informal practice of looking into or following up on an issue at the request of a visitor wishing to remain anonymous may be undertaken with the understanding that the information may be used in advancing an informal resolution. When looking into a situation uncovers that a more formal investigation is warranted, the ombuds will inform the visitor of the appropriate office of responsibility.

**Provide upward feedback to administrators / leaders:** Throughout the year, the ombuds may report observations or serial related concerns that are tied to systemic conditions, ambiguities, or absence of policy. Such feedback is made while preserving visitor confidentiality.

**Table 4. Issues Involving Supervisory Relationships 2024-25**

Table 4 highlights the prevalence and nature of concerns involving supervisory relationships during the 2024–2025 year. The table reflects whether issues involved supervisors, supervisees, or non-supervisory dynamics. (Data collected only in 2024-25)

Issues involve...	Faculty	Staff	Administrators	Grad	other	Total
Supervisor and Supervisees	3	1	1	0	0	<b>5 (1%)</b>
Supervisees	24	16	23	0	1	<b>64 (19%)</b>
Supervisor	31	58	18	34	3	<b>144 (42%)</b>
Nonsupervisory	54	29	9	26	10	<b>128 (38%)</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>112</b>	<b>104</b>	<b>51</b>	<b>60</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>341</b>

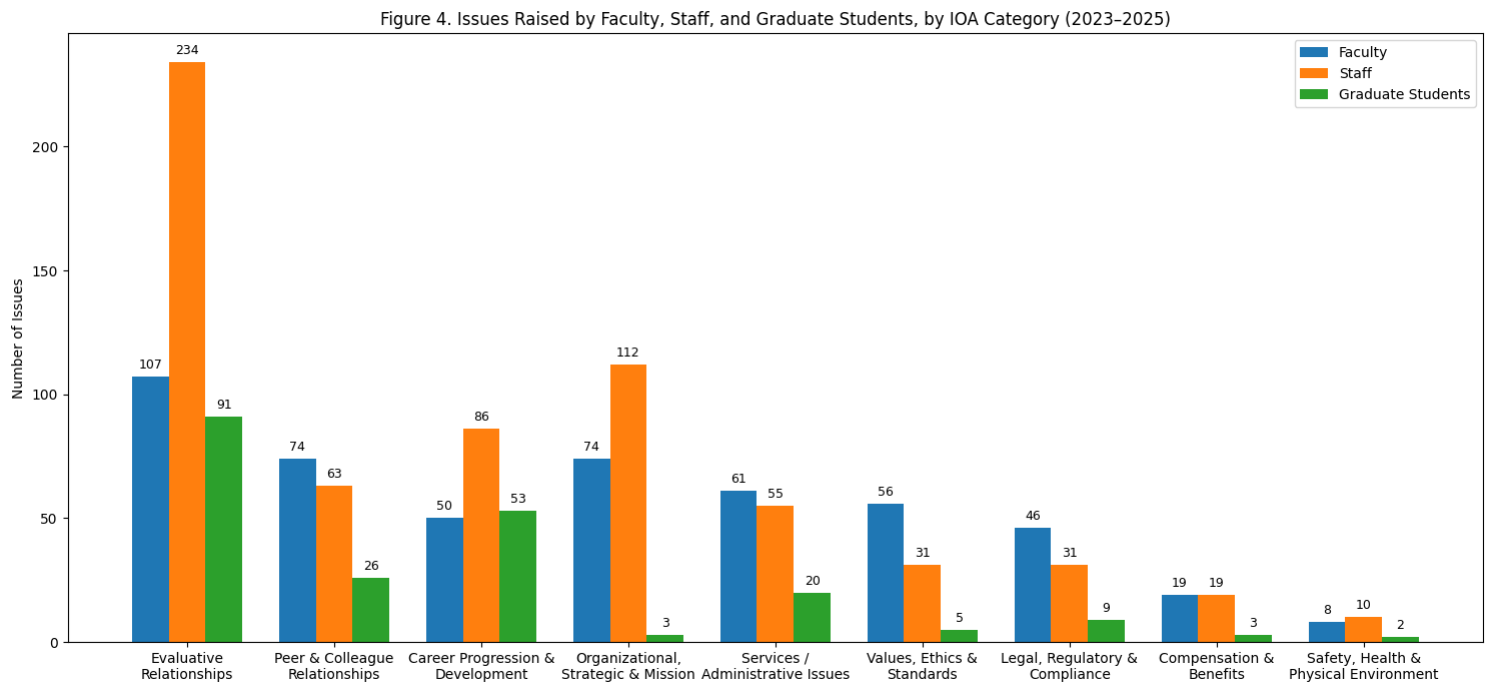
**Table 5. Issues Raised by Visitors – IOA Categories 2023-2025**

N= 4178 issues raised by 729 visitors (~ 6 issues per visitor) Visitors are subdivided as Faculty, Staff, and Graduate Students. Issues raised by visitors are categorized using the International Ombuds Association (IOA) uniform reporting framework. Because visitors often raise multiple, distinct concerns within a single case, issue totals exceed the number of visitors and reflect the full scope and complexity of issues discussed.

IOA Issues Category	% of total concerns	Faculty (220)	Staff (333)	GRAD (150)
<u>Compensation &amp; Benefits:</u> Questions, concerns, issues or inquiries about the equity, appropriateness and competitiveness of employee compensation, benefits and other benefit programs.	48 (1%)	19 (9%)	19 (6%)	3 (2%)
<u>Evaluative Relationships:</u> Questions, concerns, issues or inquiries arising between people in evaluative relationships (i.e. supervisor-employee, faculty-student.)	1848 (44%)	107 (49%)	234 (70%)	91 (61%)
<u>Peer &amp; Colleague Relationships:</u> Questions, concerns, issues or inquiries involving peers or colleagues who do not have a supervisory–employee or student–professor relationship (e.g., two staff members within the same department or conflict involving members of a student organization.)	521 (12%)	74 (34%)	63 (19%)	26 (17%)
<u>Career Profession and Development:</u> Questions, concerns, issues or inquiries about administrative processes and decisions regarding entering and leaving a job, what it	397 (10%)	50 (23%)	86 (26%)	53 (35%)

entails, (i.e., recruitment, nature and place of assignment, job security, and separation.)				
<u>Legal, Regulatory, Financial, and Compliance</u> : Questions, concerns, issues or inquiries that may create a legal risk (financial, sanction etc.) for the organization or its members if not addressed, including issues related to waste, fraud or abuse.	147 (4%)	46 (21%)	31 (9%)	9 (6%)
<u>Safety, Health, and Physical Environment</u> : Questions, concerns, issues or inquiries about Safety, Health and Infrastructure-related issues.	31 (1%)	8 (4%)	10 (3%)	2 (1%)
<u>Services/Administration Issues</u> : Questions, concerns, issues or inquiries about services or administrative offices including from external parties.	258 (6%)	61 (28%)	55 (17%)	20 (13%)
<u>Organizational, Strategic, and Mission Related</u> : Questions, concerns, issues or inquiries that relate to the whole or some part of an organization.	771 (18%)	74 (34%)	112 (34%)	3 (2%)
<u>Values, Ethics, and Standards</u> : Questions, concerns, issues or inquiries about the fairness of organizational values, ethics, and/or standards, the application of related policies and/or procedures, or the need for creation or revision of policies, and/or standards.	157 (4%)	56 (25%)	31 (9%)	5 (3%)
<b>Total</b>	<b>4178 (100%)</b>	<b>495</b>	<b>641</b>	<b>212</b>

**Figure 4.** Comparison of issues raised by faculty, staff, and graduate students during the 2023–2025 reporting period, categorized using the International Ombuds Association (IOA) framework. Counts represent the number of issues raised within each category; totals exceed the number of visitors because individuals may raise multiple distinct concerns. (Cumulative data presented in Figure 3 of Appendix)



## Commentary

This report documents continued use of the Ombuds Office as a component of UConn’s conflict management system. Other components of UConn’s system include supervisory and management authority to address problems in their purview, Human Resources (most commonly Labor Relations and Office of Staff Development), the Office of Institutional Equity (OIE), the Office of University Compliance, the Office of Diversity and Inclusion (ODI), the Office of the General Counsel (OGC), and The Graduate School. The unions also play a role in the conflict management system though they exist outside UConn’s administration. Similarly, state agencies such as the Commission on Human Rights and Opportunities (CHRO) serve as an option outside the UConn administration. People routinely execute conflict management by working out solutions to work related conflicts without any assistance at all. This competency or skill set among staff and graduate students can also be thought of as a component of UConn’s conflict management system. What many visitors find appealing when choosing the Ombuds Office among the choices for conflict management is the confidentiality and the clarity visitors have that they are not triggering an institutional response by conferring with the Ombuds. Most visitors often express that they wish to address a concern themselves rather than involving other administrative offices or that they wish to explore the different options (many of those listed above) available to remedy a situation. The investment UConn makes in staffing

and supporting an Ombuds Office demonstrates an institutional commitment to self directed action as part of its strategy to resolve workplace conflicts. While many offices in the conflict management system are required to be in place by various state and federal law, maintaining an Ombuds Office is optional – a choice UConn makes to enhance problem solving. It is among the myriad choices all types of institutions in all types of industries make when defining its priorities and strategies towards resolving internal disputes.

Lipsky, Seeber, and Fincher in their book Emerging Systems for Managing Workplace Conflict (Jossy-Bass, 2003) analyzed over 40 corporations and observed three strategies those institutions chose to adopt for their workplace conflict management strategies. The first approach they labelled a *Contend* strategy. Organizations choosing a *Contend* strategy prefer litigation for resolving disputes. Within the organization there are few, if any, informal mechanisms such as mediation or any other problem-solving infrastructure outside of the positional authority of the management hierarchy. Institutions with a *Settle* predisposition often turn to negotiation, mediation, and arbitration as a matter of policy once conflicts have ripened or garnered the attention of decision makers. Institutions employing a *Prevent* strategy use informal mechanisms throughout the organization as a frontline mechanism of resolving disputes. *Prevent* organizations develop what appear as conflict management systems rather than relying on a one or two techniques as a matter of practice when conflicts arise. *Prevent* organizations also have a greater number of written policies related to internal conflict than *Contend* or *Settle* institutions.

According to the authors, the choice of conflict management strategy reflects decision makers' philosophy or disposition towards conflict. For example, decision makers of *Contend* institutions can view conflict as a zero-sum competition where the resolution of disputes usually concludes with a loser and a winner. Thus, whoever gains in a conflict does so at the expense of their counterpart in the dispute. Such attitudes, though perhaps appropriate in select environments, leaves little appetite for informal mechanisms such as mediation or negotiation. Informal conflict resolution is perceived as an invitation to compromises and concessions, encouraging a greater number of claims and complaints. *Contend* strategists litigate nearly every conflict they confront.

*Prevent* institutions, and to a lesser degree *Settle* institutions, view conflict more as a variable sum game. Decision makers with a variable sum posture attach less value to winning or losing and are less likely to pursue reputations of toughness. Such decision makers seek resolutions that can either satisfy the participants in a conflict or uncover advantages for the parties. This disposition does not necessarily reflect solely an altruistic motive; many decision makers value expediency - the time and monetary savings realized from avoiding competitive solutions such as litigation.

The authors studied corporations and missions of the institutions and the environments in which they operated appeared to correspond to the conflict management style they adopted. Medium to large companies operating in moderate to high market pressure environments tended to adopt *Settle* and *Prevent* strategies. *Contend* oriented conflict

management systems were more likely to be present in small companies with less market pressure from competitors (and likely less competition for employees).

The organizational ombuds function, with its commitment to confidentiality, self-directed resolutions, and variable sum approach is clearly a mechanism suited to institutions with a *Prevent* strategy toward workplace conflict. Industries in which organizational ombuds offices are most prominent include higher education, healthcare, the United Nations and US federal government, and large, often multinational corporations in highly competitive markets such as financial services, trade, and manufacturing. Institutions in these industries compete for employees by pursuing a reputation for being good places to work. Their missions (e.g. higher education, U.N.) often align with a variable sum approach to conflict and problem solving. These institutions also have multiple units devoted to responding to issues raised by employees and multiple policies in place for addressing internal conflicts.

UConn was an early adopter of the organizational ombuds function. The late Dr. Charles Oliver served as the first UConn Ombuds from 1971 until his retirement in 1993. The UConn Ombuds office was reinstated in 2013 and, as the data in this report demonstrate, has become an important component of the UConn conflict management system for the past 12 years. During the period of this report, UConn Human Resources has established the Organizational & Staff Development Office (OSD). OSD is available to managers and employees to assist in aligning individual work environments with UConn's mission, practices, and policies prior to the escalation of intractable problems. OSD is the latest feature of a *Prevent* conflict management system at UConn.

Equally important to the actual services provided in any conflict management system is the belief system among leaders, managers, and conflict responders towards conflict. An institution featuring the components of a *Prevent* strategy is incoherent if populated with managers and decision makers with a zero-sum philosophy towards conflict. UConn, like most institutions in highly competitive markets, has a dynamic workforce where new supervisors, managers, and senior leaders routinely join our ranks. Change of any kind in an institution, including the onboarding of new leaders, invites the opportunity to recommit to our values and stance on resolving workplace conflict. With our conflict management system components in place, it is ultimately the commitment of the decision makers who work here that will animate a preventative strategy towards workplace conflict.

### Appendix

**Table 3.** Ombuds Actions in Response to visitors 2023-2025 (multiple actions may be taken with any given visitor).

Action	2023-24	2024-25	2023-25
Individual consultation / problem solving	342	307	649 (71%)
Referral to policy or campus agency/office (could be more than one referral)	66	83	149 (16%)
Facilitation with third parties	27	32	59 (6%)
Notify campus office on behalf of visitor	3	2	5 (1%)
Inquiry to campus office on behalf of visitor	11	10	21 (2%)
Look into situation	12	3	15 (2%)
Provide upward feedback to administrators / leaders	8	3	11 (1%)

**Figure 3.** Distribution of issues raised by visitors to the UConn Ombuds Office during the 2023–2025 reporting period, categorized using the International Ombuds Association (IOA) uniform reporting framework. Percentages represent the proportion of total issues raised (n = 4,178); totals exceed the number of visitors because individuals often raise multiple distinct concerns. (See Table 5 for descriptions of issues)

