MC OFFICE OF THE OMBUDS
FY19 OMBUDS REPORT

MC Office of the Ombuds Overview

Established in 2013, the Montgomery College Office of the Ombuds is an independent department that provides informal conflict resolution, referrals, and problem-solving services for all employees at Montgomery College. The Office of the Ombuds is confidential and a safe place to voice and discuss concerns, complaints, and questions, understand conflict situations, and find effective ways to respond.

Services include providing:

- A listening ear
- Resource referrals
- Strategies to resolve and prevent disputes
- Identification of options and information
- Effective communication coaching
- Facilitated conversations/mediations
- Shuttle diplomacy
- Group facilitation
- Tailored trainings in conflict resolution
- Conflict analysis and coaching

Visitors bring a wide variety of concerns to the Office of the Ombuds, ranging from straightforward questions about College policy and procedures to more complex issues, concerning fairness of and communication about decisions, and challenging dynamics with colleagues and/or supervisors/supervisees. While the majority of the ombuds' services focus on providing consultations for individual employees, the ombuds also regularly engages in mediation with two or more employees or group facilitations and trainings.

The Office of the Ombuds abides by the International Ombudsman Association (IOA) Standards of Practice including:

INTERNATIONAL OMBUDSMAN ASSOCIATION

Confidentiality. The Office of the Ombuds holds all communications with those seeking assistance in strict confidence unless there is an imminent risk of serious harm. Communications made to the ombuds person do not place the College on legal notice.

Impartiality. The ombuds is neutral, impartial, and unaligned in the handling of conflicts, disputes, or issues. As a designated neutral, the ombuds helps identify perspectives and options of all parties but does not take sides or advocate on behalf of any individual or group. The Office of the Ombuds is, however, an advocate for fair and equitable processes.

Independence. The Office of the Ombuds is independent from other college entities or authorities. The Office of the Ombuds reports to the Chief of Staff/Chief Strategy Office for administrative purposes only and does not report on the substance of individual cases or concerns. Only aggregate statistics are reported to the College for the protection of confidentiality.

Informality. The Office of the Ombuds assists individuals in resolving conflicts at informal levels. While the Office of the Ombuds may refer individuals to formal grievance resources, it does not carry out official investigations, it has no decision-making authority, and it does not keep records of conversations with visitors.
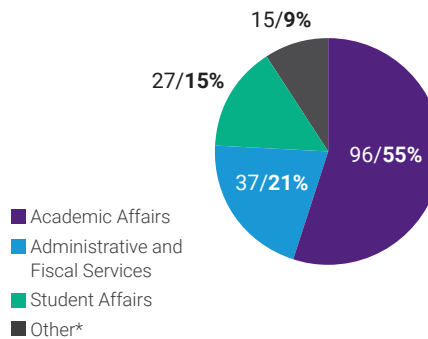
Office Activity—Visitors

Visitors for FY19

- Total Visitors: 175
- Repeat Visitors: 52 (prior visitors returning with a new concern)
- Percentage of Employee Population Who Visited the Ombuds: 6%

Generally, the visitor data from FY19 is similar to data from the previous year. Six percent of College employees visited the ombuds this year, as compared to seven percent in 2018. These numbers compare with a 4 percent visit rate in 2017 and 2016. Six percent exceeds the benchmarks of a well-established ombuds program, which serves between 3 percent to 5 percent of the employee population.
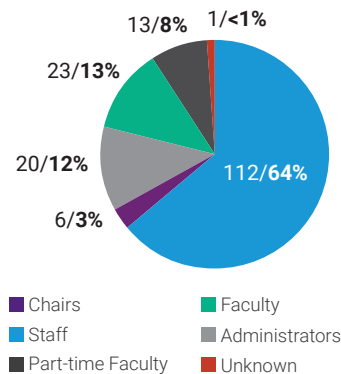
Visitors by Division
(Number and percentage of 175)

15/**9%**
27/**15%**
37/**21%**
96/**55%**

- ■ Academic Affairs
- ■ Administrative and Fiscal Services
- ■ Student Affairs
- ■ Other*

Like last year, the majority of the visitors were from the Academic Affairs Division (the largest division), the second largest group of visitors was from the Administrative and Fiscal Services Division (the second largest division), and the third largest group was from the Student Affairs Division (the third largest division).

* The "Other" category includes the combined number of visitors (and related percentage of the whole) from Office of the President , Advancement and Community Engagement, and a division that was not identified by one visitor who sought ombuds services in FY19.

Visitors by Role
(Number and percentage of 175)

13/**8%**   1/**<1%**
23/**13%**
20/**12%**
6/**3%**
112/**64%**

- ■ Chairs
- ■ Staff
- ■ Part-time Faculty
- ■ Faculty
- ■ Administrators
- ■ Unknown

Similar to last year, staff accessed ombuds services in the greatest numbers, while full-time faculty were the second most common users of the ombuds services. Meanwhile, more than 25 percent of administrators continued to seek out ombuds services, and 1% more part-time faculty sought out services than in all prior years.

Note: The Office of the Ombuds is currently not reporting race/ethnicity or gender data due to concerns that asking for this information is invasive, and relying on the ombuds' determination of these attributes is not reliable. However, retrieving this data can be important to developing a deeper understanding of the contributing factors to or the causes of employee conflict. To that end, further research is needed to determine a method to retrieve this data that is confidential, reliable, and non-invasive.

For more information about the Office of the Ombuds and reports from prior years, visit montgomerycollege.edu/ombuds

Recommendation for Positive Change

Commit to ensuring all employees are aware of the College's ethical expectations as articulated in the Code of Ethics and Employee Conduct, and take ownership of their adherence to these expectations by completing a self-assessment as part of participating in an upcoming Ethics Focus Group.

With substantial reporting of uncivil, unprofessional, and unfair behavior by visitors to the Office of the Ombuds, the FY19 case data continues to support a need for an effective ethics program and further integration of the ethical expectations into employee daily work and activities, and the MC culture, generally. To date, the College has made great progress in adopting an ethical policy and procedure, building a robust ethical compliance program, and most recently, creating a practical user guide to help employees better understand the College's ethical expectations. (See Ethical Expectations: A Practical Guide to Fostering an Ethical Culture at MC at: info.montgomerycollege.edu/resources/code-of-ethics-and-employee-conduct/ethical-expectations.html).

To build on these efforts and successes, it is recommended that a uniform self-assessment be created to be administered to all employees at every level and utilized in the context of participation in an upcoming ethics focus group. The Office of Compliance, Risk, and Ethics will be overseeing these focus groups for each and every department in the College over the next two years, starting in the spring.

This self-assessment will serve multiple purposes, including:
- Building each employee's awareness of expected as well as problematic behaviors under the Code of Ethics and Employee Conduct (Code)
- Helping each employee evaluate his/her strengths and weaknesses under the Code
- Providing a spring board for discussion within the Ethics Focus Groups
- Providing a possible meaningful topic for professional development conversations between an employee and his/her supervisor, based on any areas that need to be improved, and alternatively, based on areas of excellence

Ombuds Satisfaction Survey Data

Visitors to the Office of the Ombuds continue to report positive experiences with the office via the online anonymous satisfaction survey.

Total Surveys Returned: 54

- 96% of the visitors would refer others to the ombuds (4% had "no opinion")
- 98% of the visitors "strongly agreed" or "agreed" that they trust the ombuds to maintain confidentiality (2% had "no opinion")
- 98% of the visitors "strongly agreed" or "agreed" that they would use the ombuds services again to help with workplace conflict (2% had "no opinion")
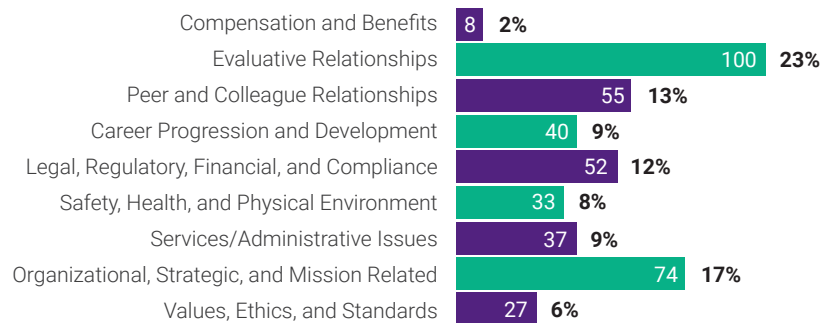
Office Activity—Concerns

Concerns for FY19

- Total Concerns: 426
- Most Prevalent Concerns:
  - Evaluative Relationships (concerns arising amidst supervisor-supervisee relationships)
    - 25%/brought by supervisors and 75%/brought by supervisees
  - Organizational, Strategic, and Mission-Related (concerns arising from whole or part of the organization, including from management/leadership practices/capacities and power dynamics)
  - Peer and Colleague Relationships (concerns arising within peer to peer relationships)

Overall, the FY19 issue data is very similar to the FY18 issue data. Two of the top three most prevalent categories—Evaluative Relationships and Organizational, Strategic, and Mission-Related issues—have been leading categories since the inception of the Office of the Ombuds in 2013. The third most commonly discussed category—Peer and Colleague Relationships—was also a top-three issue last year.

Visitor Concerns by Category* (Visitor can have multiple concerns, total 426)

Category	Concerns	Percent
Compensation and Benefits	8	2%
Evaluative Relationships	100	23%
Peer and Colleague Relationships	55	13%
Career Progression and Development	40	9%
Legal, Regulatory, Financial, and Compliance	52	12%
Safety, Health, and Physical Environment	33	8%
Services/Administrative Issues	37	9%
Organizational, Strategic, and Mission Related	74	17%
Values, Ethics, and Standards	27	6%

Concerns are categorized using the IOA's Uniform Reporting Guidelines. To find guidelines and subcategory definitions, see here: montgomerycollege.edu/_documents/offices/ombuds/ioa-uniform-reporting-categories.pdf

In addition, subcategories of concerns (related to the top three main categories) that were predominant last year arose again in great numbers this year. These concerns included poor quality or quantity of communication, a lack of trust/integrity, and overt and covert disrespectful treatment. Visitors who shared these concerns were supervisors and/or supervisees discussing their counterparts, peers discussing other peers, and those holding formal leadership positions and those who do not, talking about leaders (not their supervisors/supervisees). The majority of visitors who discussed these concerns also reported experiencing low morale and declining engagement and productivity.

More specifically, a number of visitors spoke about unfair processes and treatment, favoritism, harassment, inequitable workload, lack of transparency or extreme delays in communications or decision-making, and a refusal of employees to resolve conflict. Additionally, a number of visitors discussed their perception that leaders did not have the skills and/or the desire to help address team conflict, give constructive feedback, or manage change effectively.

Common Subcategories (Number of concerns)

Subcategory	Number
Communication	203
Respect/Treatment	123
Trust/Integrity	119
Leadership and management capabilities	70
Use of Positional Power	51

| | 50 | 100 | 150 | 200 | 250 |