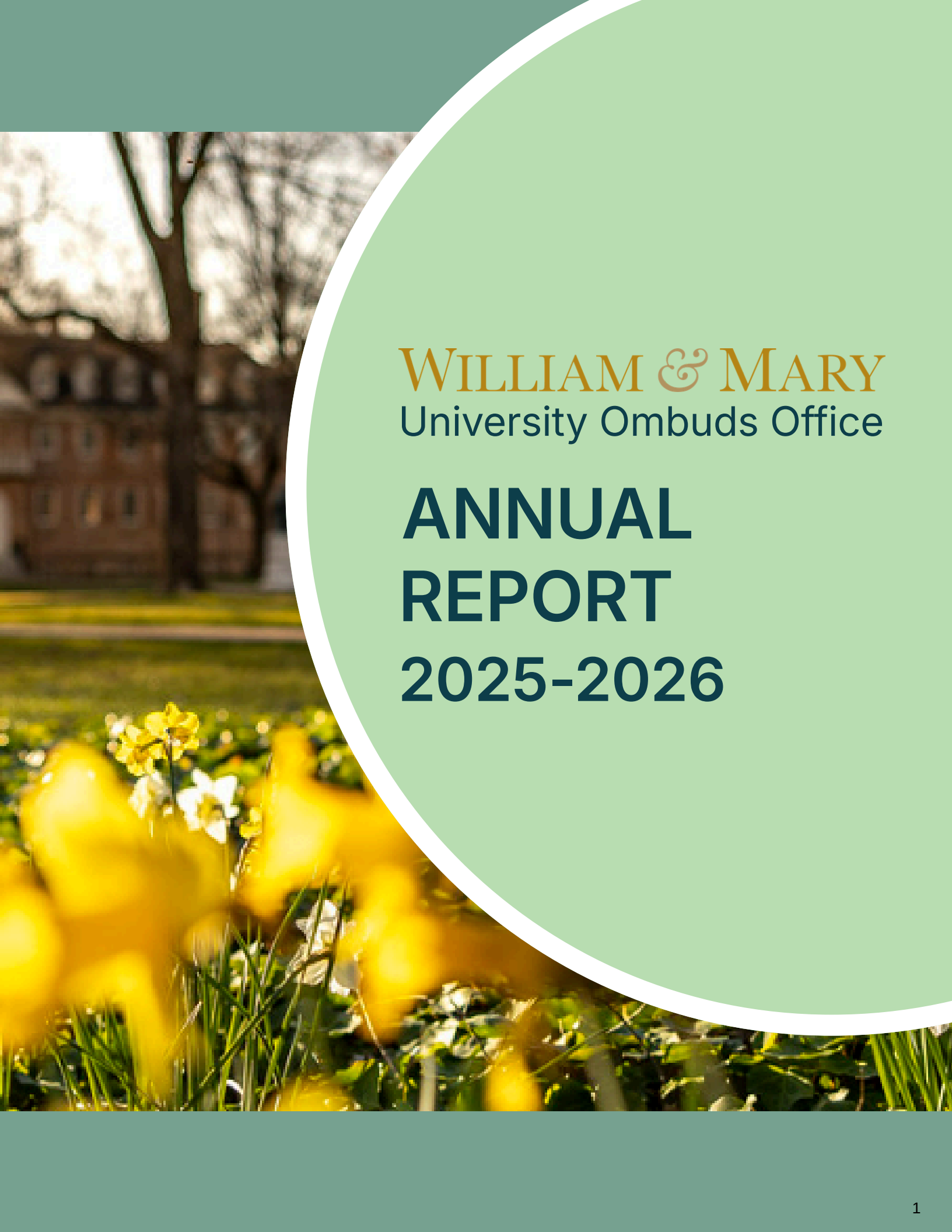


The background of the cover is a photograph of a university campus. In the foreground, there are yellow and white daffodils in bloom. In the background, there is a large, multi-story brick building with many windows, partially obscured by trees. A large, light green circle with a white border is overlaid on the right side of the image, containing the text.

WILLIAM & MARY
University Ombuds Office

**ANNUAL
REPORT
2025-2026**

Letter from the Ombuds Office

Dear William & Mary Community,

This report outlines the activities of the William & Mary Ombuds Office from July 1, 2025 to June 30, 2026. This year featured a dramatic increase in visitors to the Ombuds Office (an over fifty percent increase when compared with last year). We believe this increase can be traced, at least in part, to the promotion of the Ombuds Office during the University Professional Development Day in August 2025. The program, called *Conflict as Catalyst for Growth*, highlighted several aspects of our work and increased awareness about the power and value of addressing, rather than ignoring, conflict.

The increased use of the Ombuds Office is welcome—our goal has always been to expand the reach of the office. We do not believe the rise in visitors indicates an increase in conflict on campus. On the contrary, we think that more faculty and staff choosing to engage constructively and thoughtfully with conflict improves the workplace environment overall at William & Mary.

To that end, this year the Ombuds Office began exploring a tool known as “dispute system design” as a framework for understanding conflict across the university. Dispute system design is built on a simple but powerful idea: instead of looking only at one conflict at a time, it asks how an organization’s structures, policies, communication habits, and informal norms shape the way conflict arises and is addressed. By identifying common pressure points and recurring themes, dispute system design can help the university think more intentionally about how conflict is managed across departments, offices, and roles. Over time, we believe this work can support a more proactive approach to conflict resolution at William & Mary by building conflict resolution skills among faculty and staff, strengthening communication practices, and helping leaders address concerns earlier—creating pathways for constructive problem-solving before disputes escalate. We hope to be part of a cross-campus effort to begin a dispute system design undertaking in the coming years.

We remain dedicated to the International Ombuds Association’s core commitments to strict confidentiality, independence, neutrality, and impartiality in all we do. As always, the Ombuds Office welcomes your feedback and suggestions on how we can improve our services and better assist members of the William & Mary community. We look forward to continuing this work and doing our part to improve the experience and satisfaction of all members of the William & Mary community.

Liz, Rick & Rebecca

University Ombuds Office

Who are the Ombuds?

The duties of the University Ombuds Office at William & Mary are fulfilled by three employees who serve as collateral duty ombuds. Combined, the Ombuds have broad expertise and diverse work experiences within W&M.



Rebecca Green

Ombuds, Office of the University Ombuds

An expert in alternative dispute resolution and election law, Rebecca serves as a Professor of Law at W&M Law School and co-directs the Election Law Program. She earned her J.D. from Harvard Law School.



Charles (Rick) Gressard

Ombuds, Office of the University Ombuds

Rick is Chancellor Professor Emeritus from the W&M School of Education. He is an expert in counseling and has served in a wide array of faculty leadership roles. He earned his Ph.D. from the University of Iowa.



Liz Cascone

Ombuds, Office of the University Ombuds

Liz is the Director of The Haven in the Division of Student Affairs. Liz has extensive experience in sexual and intimate partner violence prevention, advocacy, and counseling and is training in restorative practices. She holds an MSW from Virginia Commonwealth University.

Our Core Principles

International Ombuds Association (IOA) Standards

INDEPENDENCE: The ombuds is independent in structure, function, appearance, and decision-making. The ombuds reports to the highest possible level within the organization.

IMPARTIALITY: The ombuds is a designated neutral and impartial resource who does not take sides or serve as an advocate for any person or entity.

INFORMALITY: The ombuds does not participate in any evaluative, disciplinary, legal, or administrative proceedings related to concerns brought to their attention.

CONFIDENTIALITY: Confidentiality is the defining characteristic of ombuds practice. All communications are confidential to the maximum extent permitted by law.

Ombuds Overview

The Office of the University Ombuds at William & Mary serves as an independent and neutral resource where all categories of employees and faculty can seek confidential assistance with workplace concerns.

The Ombuds Office offers a unique mix of skills and tools to help you navigate work-related conflict. We ensure that all employees have access to a resource for informally addressing workplace concerns in a fair and equitable manner. The Ombuds Office is not affiliated with any W&M compliance function.

We provide consultations and serve as a neutral party in resolving workplace conflict. The University Ombuds supplements rather than replaces formal resources for grievances such as those of Compliance & Equity, Human Resources, and the Office of University Counsel. As an independent office, we do not serve as an agent of notice for William & Mary.

The Office of the University Ombuds was restructured in 2021. Instead of a single Ombudsperson, W&M adopted a team-based collateral duty model consisting of a three-person University Ombuds Office.

The restructuring of the Office of the University Ombuds provides faculty and staff with a centralized place to consult on options with an aim to ensure that conflict is resolved in a swift and fair manner.

“Advancing equity and wellness for faculty and staff is one of the goals I committed William & Mary to under the pandemic. Building a team of ombuds professionals at William & Mary is an important step toward these goals.”

**Katherine A. Rowe, Ph.D.
President**

In a 2021 Statement about the Ombuds

Our Principles

At William & Mary, our office is dedicated to serving as an independent, confidential, neutral, and centralized resource for faculty and staff. We are an independent office and do not align ourselves with any organizational entity or any W&M compliance unit.

Confidentiality

Any person who seeks the services of the Ombuds Office has the right to consult **CONFIDENTIALLY** with an ombuds without reprisal.

Ombuds at William & Mary are members of the International Ombuds Association (IOA). The IOA principles are outlined on page 4.

Protection from Retaliation

William & Mary strictly prohibits retaliation against any administrator, faculty, or employee, for using the services provided by the University Ombuds.

Our Practice Statement

Consistent with IOA Standards of Practice, the William & Mary Ombuds Office serves as a confidential, independent, and neutral resource for faculty and staff members at William & Mary.

William & Mary Ombuds do not serve as advocates for individual visitors, nor for university leadership. We remain avowedly neutral; we are here as a resource for talking problems through, helping visitors gather information, and exploring potential options. Our office helps you understand and navigate University procedures and policies.

The William & Mary Ombuds Office operates within the ethical standards set forth by IOA. This means that William & Mary Ombuds will act in accordance with the principles mandated by the IOA: independence, neutrality, impartiality, confidentiality, and informality.

“

“The Ombuds function does not replace existing organizational systems - it enhances them. By offering a proactive, confidential, and impartial approach to culture change, conflict resolution and change management, the Ombuds Office increases efficiency, strengthens decision-making, and fosters a culture of trust.”

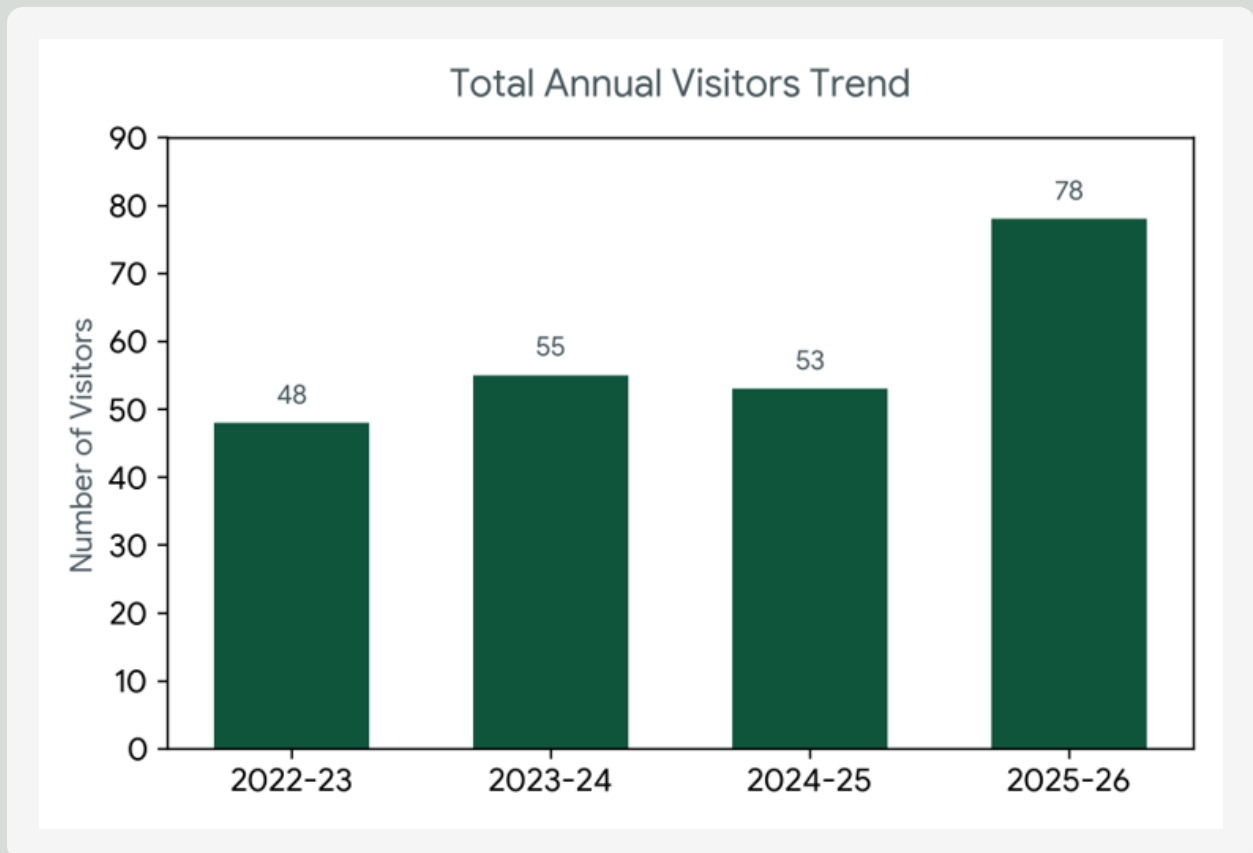
— International Ombuds Association | For More Information go to:
<https://www.ombudsassociation.org/why-should-my-organization-have-an-ombuds>

Data Analysis

Overview

To protect confidentiality of visitors, this Ombuds Office does not retain any records that would identify a specific individual. The Office collects some de-identified demographics and data and analyzes them in the aggregate to identify trends and systemic issues and to assess the effectiveness of our services. This section summarizes key trends observed in Ombuds Office activity during the reporting period and highlights what the data suggests about community needs and engagement patterns.

During the 2025-2026 Academic Year, the Ombuds Office saw a substantial increase in volume, serving a total of 78 visitors compared to 53 in the previous year. This represents a 47.1% increase in utilization, reflecting successful outreach strategies such as the University Professional Development Day.

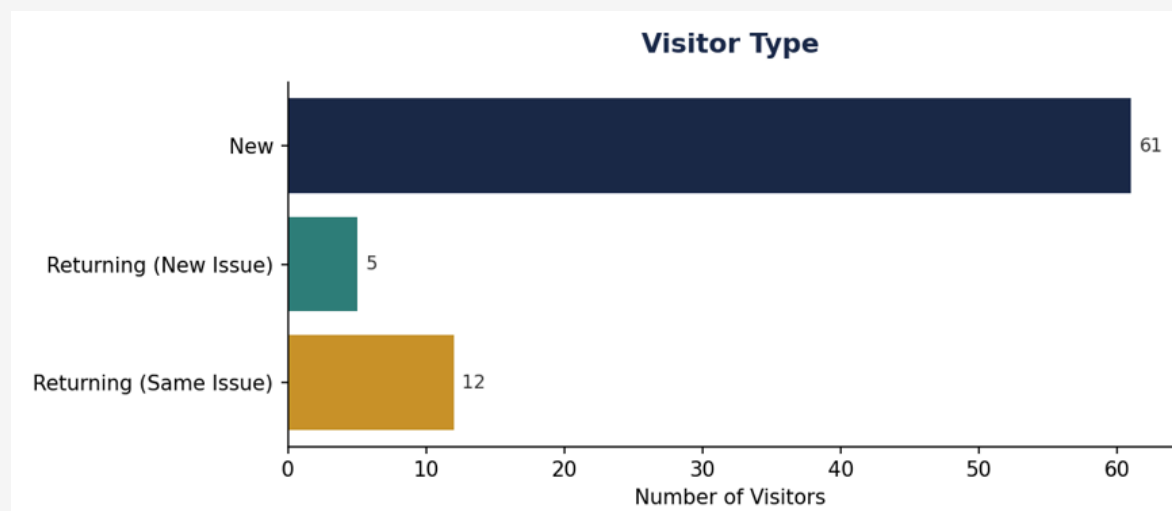


The visitor base skewed heavily toward staff employees, was majority female, and was overwhelmingly concentrated in peer/colleague and evaluative relationship concerns — together accounting for two-thirds of all primary issues raised. The sections below break

out each dimension of the intake data with narrative interpretation alongside the visualizations.

78	78%	73%	67%
TOTAL VISITORS	FIRST-TIME VISITORS	STAFF	RELATIONSHIP-DRIVEN ISSUES

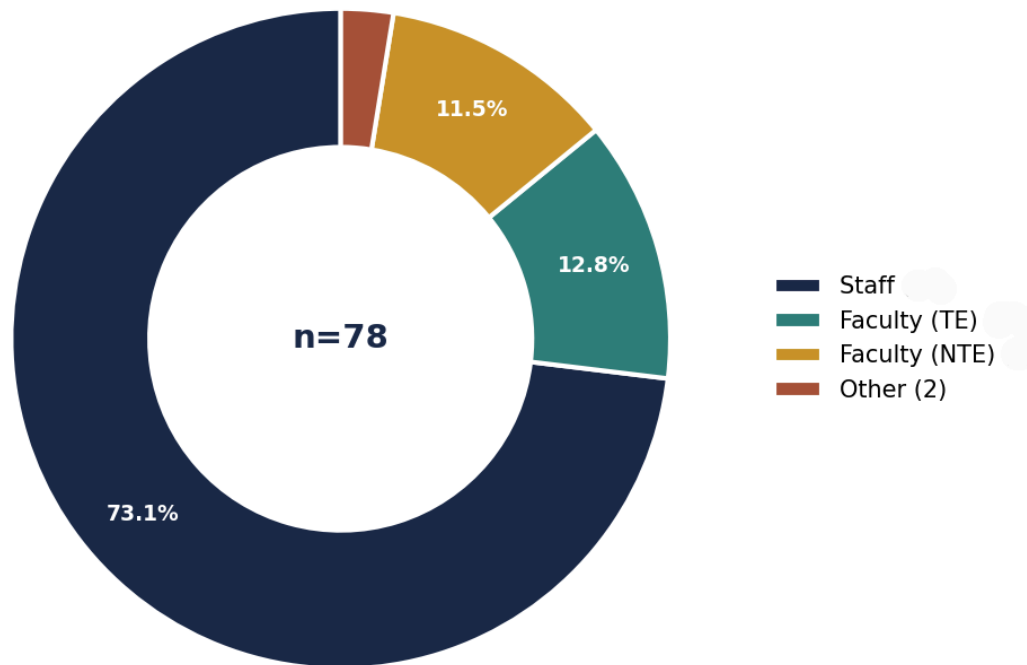
Visitor Type



The large majority of contacts — 61 visitors (78.2%) — were new to the office this period. A smaller group returned specifically with a new issue (5 visitors, 6.4%), while 12 visitors (15.4%) returned regarding the same issue as a prior visit. That “returning, same issue” segment is worth watching: it suggests roughly one in six matters required more than a single round of visits to work toward resolution, which may reflect either the complexity of those cases or a need for continued follow-up support.

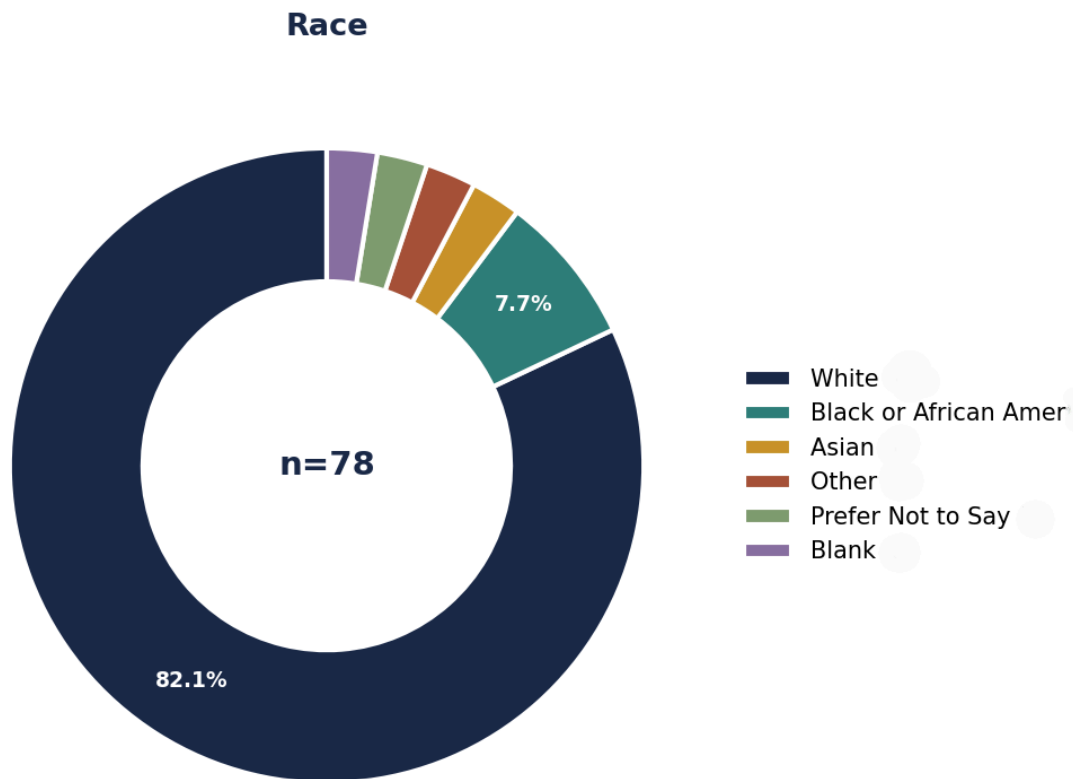
Employee Classification

Employee Classification



Staff members made up nearly three-quarters of all visitors (57 of 78). Faculty — split between tenure-eligible and non-tenure-eligible — together accounted for about a quarter of visits, in roughly even proportion to one another. This distribution suggests the office's caseload this period was driven predominantly by staff-level workplace concerns rather than faculty governance or academic-track issues.

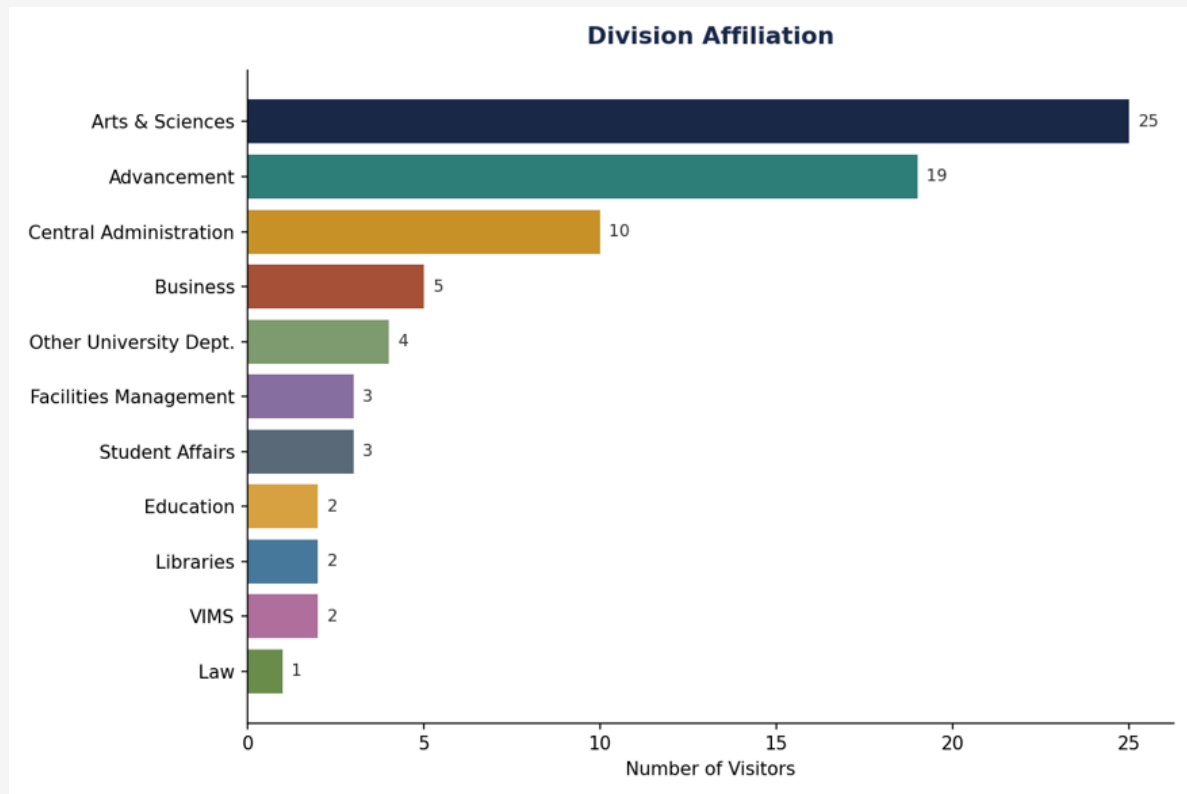
Race



Visitors identifying as White made up 82.1% of contacts, with the remaining visitors spread thinly across Black/African American (7.7%), Asian, Other, Prefer Not to Say, and Blank/unreported responses (2.6% each). The concentration in one category, alongside a small non-response rate, is a useful benchmark for the office to compare against the broader institutional workforce composition when assessing whether visitor demographics are representative of the population it serves.

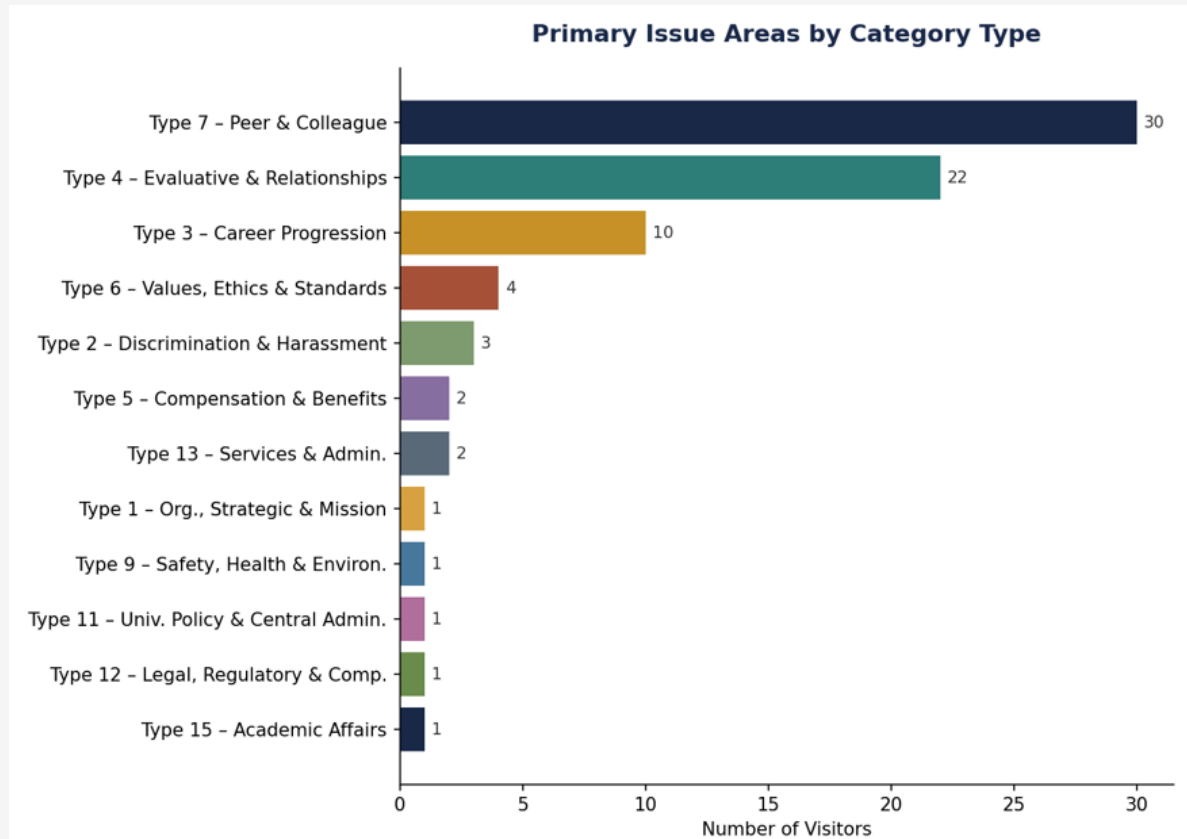
With regards to gender, female visitors represented 56.4% (44) of contacts, with male visitors at 43.6% (34). No other gender identity categories were recorded in this reporting period. The gender split is moderately balanced, tilted toward female visitors – a pattern common across many university ombuds offices and worth tracking over multiple years to see whether it holds steady.

Division Affiliation



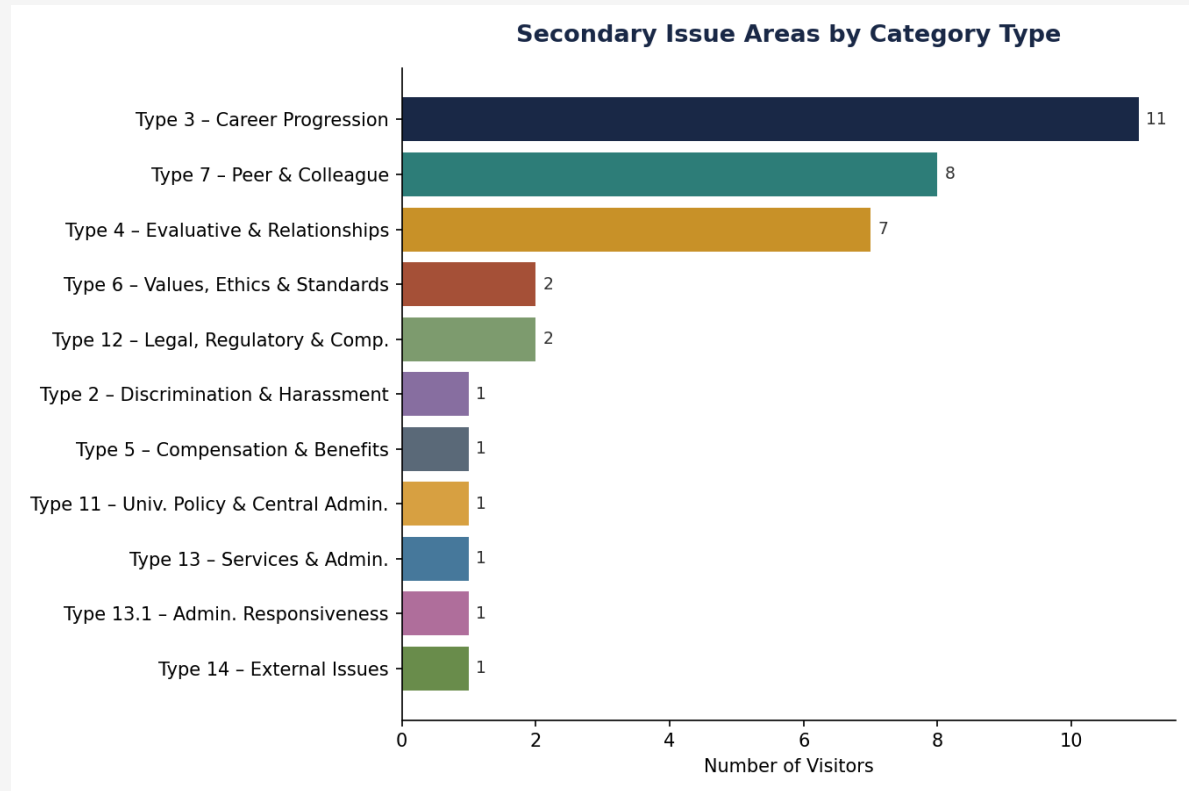
Arts & Sciences (32.1%) and Advancement (24.4%) together accounted for over half of all visitors — a notable concentration given that many other divisions (Business, Facilities Management, Student Affairs, Education, Libraries, VIMS, and Law) each contributed only a handful of visits. Central Administration was the third-largest source at 12.8%. The heavy representation from Arts & Sciences and Advancement may reflect their larger relative headcounts, specific organizational dynamics within those units, or simply greater awareness of the ombuds resource among their staff — any of which would be worth exploring with those divisions directly.

Primary Issue Areas



The intake data is dominated by two categories: **Type 7 – Peer & Colleague Relationships (38.5%, 30 visits)** and **Type 4 – Evaluative & Relationships (28.2%, 22 visits)**. Combined, these two categories account for **66.7%** – two out of every three primary issues brought to the office. Type 3 – Career Progression & Development was a distant third at 12.8%. All remaining categories – including discrimination & harassment, compensation & benefits, values/ethics, and policy or legal matters – each made up 5% or less of primary issues individually. This strongly suggests the office's core function this period centered on interpersonal workplace dynamics and supervisory/evaluative relationships, rather than formal policy, compliance, or legal disputes.

Secondary Issue Areas



Where a secondary issue was recorded, Career Progression & Development (14.1%) was the most common — nearly matching the frequency of Peer & Colleague Relationships (10.3%) and Evaluative & Relationships (9.0%) as secondary concerns. This pattern is notable: while peer/colleague and evaluative issues dominate as the primary reason visitors come in, career progression concerns frequently ride alongside other issues as a secondary factor. In practice, this suggests that many workplace relationship conflicts are entangled with visitors' concerns about their own advancement or development — a pattern that may inform how the office frames coaching conversations and referrals.

Percentages reflect values as reported in the source document (some category totals may not sum to exactly 100% due to rounding in the original report).

Key Insights

- **Demand correlates with outreach** - Engagement rises after outreach and training efforts. Notable this year was the increase in visitors after the professional development days in August 2025.
- **Volume & repeat contact** - 78 total visitors, with 1 in 6 returning about an already-reported issue - a signal for tracking case duration and resolution timelines.
- **Who visits** - Staff (73%) visit far more often than faculty; visitors are majority female (56%) and majority White (82%), a demographic profile worth comparing to institutional workforce data.
- **Where they come from** - Arts & Sciences and Advancement together account for over half of all visits, disproportionate to most other divisions.
- **What they're dealing with** - Peer/colleague relationships and evaluative/supervisory relationships dominate primary concerns (67% combined), while career progression is the leading secondary theme — pointing to interpersonal and performance-management dynamics as the office's central workload.
- **Lower-frequency but notable categories** - Discrimination & harassment (3.9% primary) and compensation & benefits (2.6% primary) were present but not dominant this period.
- **Data can guide proactive prevention** — Recurring themes point to opportunities for training, resource development, and partnership with campus units to reduce repeat patterns over time.

Looking Forward

As ombuds, we remain impartial and independent, serving with the utmost confidentiality as a centralized resource for all categories of faculty and staff at the University. As William & Mary grows, we will continue to serve the community and assist in navigating workplace conflict and issues.

In Gratitude

We are listening with open ears and look forward to feedback and suggestions from faculty, staff, and members of the administration on ways we can improve our services. We remain excited to serve and assist all levels of faculty and staff here at William & Mary.

Rebecca, Rick, & Liz
University Ombuds

The Office of the University Ombuds at William & Mary is enormously grateful for the continued support by the Office of the Provost, W&M administration, and members of faculty and staff. With our collateral duty ombuds model, we look forward to continuing to serve the university community and enhance the workplace experience of the University.

We thank all members of the university community who have entrusted us to confidentially meet with them to assist in and navigate through conflict. It is our privilege to serve as a confidential and independent part of William & Mary's workplace resources.

Contact Information

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