# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>LETTER FROM THE UNIVERSITY OMBUDS AND DIRECTOR, OMBUDS PROGRAMS</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BUILDING DATA INFRASTRUCTURE OF THE OMBUDS OFFICE</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>THE OMBUDS OFFICE TEAM</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>STANDARDS OF PRACTICE AND CODE OF ETHICS</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WHAT WE DO AND WHAT HAPPENS IN THE OFFICE?</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>YOU MEET WITH EVERYBODY?</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WHO IS OUR FACULTY AND STAFF?</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HOW MANY ARE THE BOSSES?</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WHO ARE OUR STUDENT VISITORS?</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WHAT ARE THEIR BACKGROUNDS?</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WHAT ARE THE TOP CONCERNS?</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SO WHAT DO THE TOP THREE CONCERNS TELL US?</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HOW DID THEY FIND US?</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HOW LONG HAVE OUR VISITORS WORKED AT GALLAUDET?</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SO WHAT DID THE OMBUDS DO?</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WHAT HAPPENS IF CASES DON’T GET RESOLVED?</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WHAT ELSE HAVE THE OMBUDS DONE?</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WHAT IS OUR IMPACT AND WHAT IS NEXT?</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>APPENDIX</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
As Ombuds, we are uniquely situated at Gallaudet University and Clerc Center with opportunities to meet the people who make up this place of learning and teaching: students, teachers, faculty, staff, alumni, families of students, and community members. These meetings often begin from a place of curiosity, as a refuge to get out of feeling stuck, or as a chance to shift strategy. These initial conversations quickly transform as visitors reveal more challenging aspects of their academic, campus or professional lives. It is often in those moments that the Ombuds Office creates impact on visitors and by extension, on the community leading them towards positive, tangible solutions for conflict resolution.

During COVID-19 pandemic, the university quickly adapted to enormous shifts in working, teaching, learning, interacting, and research. The Ombuds Office continued to provide uninterrupted services alongside these significant transitions, including doing facilitations, mediations, and restorative circles virtually. Our campus also experienced important reckonings with racism, audism, abelism, antisemitism, sexism, and transphobia. During the same period, we had momentous but tumultuous national movements: Black Lives Matter, Asian Hate, #MeToo, and the January 6th attack on the Capitol.

The Ombuds Office has served as a safe haven for the visitors as they navigated through these divisive times. Our services took the form of 1:1 conversations, conflict consultation and coaching, and small group facilitations and listening circles. We collaborated with other departments and units to conduct connection circles to focus on building relationships and creating meaningful links with one another despite social or political disagreements.

In 2021, the Ombuds Office expanded from a one-person office to a team of three in order to better serve and support the community. The office now consists of the University Ombuds, an Associate Ombuds, and an Ombuds Facilitator. They have participated in the Foundational Ombuds training with the International Ombuds Association (IOA) in Fall 2021. The additional staff promote a sense of belonging and equity throughout our entire campus and signing ecosystem.

Continued...
We leverage many innovative ways to engage our visitors, and weave the Gallaudet University Promise imperatives into our work. In addition to the standard 1:1 conflict consultations, we have:

- Implemented community-based approach of two-facilitator team for group facilitations
- Conducted intentional restorative practices with the goals of relationship and community rebuilding and program restoration
- Provided culturally appropriate services for visitors of various identities and racial backgrounds by matching them with facilitators of their choice and when needed, being intentional with interpreter assignments

In addition to our three staff, the Ombuds Office continues to cultivate a larger team of skilled and culturally competent signing facilitators to manage complex conflict situations. We accomplish this via thoughtful recruitment, campus-wide restorative justice training sessions, and low stakes practice circles and facilitations.

We have also focused on scaling up our impact by making our knowledge and resources more available on a self-serve basis to the community. We increased our digital presence through regular postings on the MyGU intranet, inviting other departments and individuals to our virtual weekly department meetings for added collaboration, and attending Gallaudet-sponsored in-person and virtual meetings and training programs. The Ombuds Office recently deployed a new cloud-based data infrastructure to track and identify important trends in our caseload--which will be hugely invaluable for community leaders--while also strictly safeguarding confidentiality.

To better communicate our purpose and the type of work we do for the community, the Ombuds Office began a branding update process. We started with a refreshed Mission statement.
We also launched a new ASL name for the Ombuds which is the “O” letter tapped twice on the center of the chest. In Spring 2021, this sign—and the story behind it—was presented at the International Ombuds Association with more than 1,000 people in attendance. A video will be shared in the next academic year for the Gallaudet community re-introducing the sign and the origin story.

Our first annual report covers three academic years 2019-2022 where we handled 422 cases covering a wide array of identified concerns. Typically, each case directly involves between one to five visitors. In addition to our cases, our services and outreach efforts touched thousands of community members through 1:1 meetings, group meetings, dialogues, presentations, shuttle diplomacy, webinars, training sessions, and mediations. This annual report presents a meaningful snapshot of the nuances and complexities of the situations the community faced over the last three years. We intend to issue future annual reports over the summer following each academic year, sharing highlights and findings about the year. We have taken the greatest care to discuss these findings without breaking confidentiality or revealing individual identities and programs. Instead, we focus on big-picture trends and themes while demonstrating the value of our office and services we provide.

Continued...
We continue to foster close collaboration with departments throughout the campus. One of the best indicators of the quality and success of our services is referrals. Our visitors are often referred by their professors, campus units, colleagues or classmates. We believe our close collaboration with university departments is effective especially for when people aren’t sure where to go when their concerns don’t fit squarely within the purview of a specific department or program. **We have many exciting projects in the pipeline for 2022-2023:**

- Establishing a secure and confidential online scheduling system linked to our database to enable quicker booking experiences for visitors and unlock automated data collection capabilities,
- Delivering new high-level semester reports for campus leaders surfacing important trends we observe through our interactions and data,
- Developing and delivering student-centered conflict management training to provide students foundational conflict resolution skills,
- Creating conflict management resources: ASL videos for the community and training sessions for future conflict management facilitators,
- Revising the Ombuds website to more efficiently direct visitors to the information and resources they’re looking for
- Launching a new logo,
- And many more.

We are grateful to the Office of the President for the support of the recent office expansion and of our long-time commitment to better serving all of our community members. This expansion was featured in the September 2021 issue of Gallaudet Today, a university publication: *Office of the Ombuds Expands: Navigating Conflict Resolution Through a Diverse Cultural Lens.*

To conclude, the Ombuds Office renews today—as we do every day—our commitment to creating connections for all of our visitors. Visitors often express having been “finally understood” and their concerns validated. We see the transformative power this has on the visitors when they are given an impartial, informal, and confidential space to express and share. We are committed to giving that experience to every one of our visitors.

Respectfully Submitted,

**Elizabeth Stone** - University Ombuds and Director, Ombuds Programs
BUILDING DATA INFRASTRUCTURE OF THE OMBUDS OFFICE

WHEN THE CURRENT OMBUDS BEGAN IN 2015, existing technology and database software created high barriers to capturing and storing visitor information and concerns. Due to the complex setup of the existing infrastructure and the reliance on migrated data from older software, much of the data was unfortunately corrupted and inaccessible.

We contracted with a Deaf-owned business to build a new infrastructure with a focus on data retention and resilience:

1. Maintaining a simple, secure cloud-based system to prevent data loss and allow smooth data transfer

2. Allowing visitors to provide their own demographic information when booking first-time appointments, which saves data entry time for the Office staff

3. Creating automated quarterly and yearly reports for campus leaders and community showing trends in visitor demographics, concerns raised, resolution approaches, and outcomes
In the past, the office has operated with one staff with occasional facilitators on contract. To meet the increasing demand of our services, the Ombuds Office expanded to include two full-time Ombuds and one part-time staff. This expansion allows the University to embed dedicated conflict resolution practitioners within all divisions that are fluent in ASL and English.
The Ombuds adheres to the Code of Ethics, the Standards of Practice, and the Best Practices of the International Ombudsman Association (IOA) in providing services to visitors. In sum, the four key principles governing the practice of the Ombuds are:

**CONFIDENTIALITY:** The Ombuds can not disclose the identity of her visitors except when there is an imminent risk of serious harm.

**INFORMALITY:** The Ombuds does not replace or duplicate any available formal process on campus. The Ombuds can only provide informal advice and assistance.

**INDEPENDENCE:** The Ombuds is independent of any University structure, and contacting the Ombuds does not constitute notice to the University.

**IMPARTIALITY:** The Ombuds ensures fairness in the procedures, not for the person.
WHAT WE DO AND WHAT HAPPENS IN THE OFFICE?

The Ombuds provides visitors with a confidential, informal, neutral and independent place to:

- Develop options
- Obtain referrals
- Clarify University policies and procedures
- Identify tools to achieve academic, professional, and personal success

Our services are confidential so we do not disclose any information without the permission of our visitor/s. We also do not retain any written records. We are informal which means that we try to resolve issues early and at the lowest level. We remain independent from the University’s formal channels. We are impartial which means we do not take sides or make decisions on the outcomes. We strive to be fair and support the interests of all parties and the institution as a whole.

DURING THE VISIT AT THE OMBUDS OFFICE

WE WILL:

- Focus on the issues, not people or personalities
- Work collaboratively to address problems
- Identify and discuss creative solutions and resources
- Save or repair important relationships during conflict
- Redirect attention to work and studies
Yes, we meet with everybody who is a member of Gallaudet University community! The breakdown of the visitors shows the majority is employees. A further role breakdown of the employee group reveals that 78% is staff and 22% is faculty. While students make up the largest population of the University, the percentage of them visiting the Ombuds Office is smaller compared to employees. This means there are more resources and support available for students especially undergraduates. Majority of the student visitors that uses the Ombuds Office services are graduate students due to the complexity of their graduate studies and limited resources available specifically for them.

*The subcategory of “Others” consists of other University community members who wanted to remain unidentified.
WHO IS OUR FACULTY AND STAFF?

Gallaudet University and Clerc Center has over 800 employees and over 175 faculty members. The graphs reflect the proportions of the employee population we serve.

STAFF AND FACULTY

- 78% Staff
- 22% Faculty

TYPE OF FACULTY

- 54% Tenured
- 16% TT
- 3% FTT
- 1% NTT
- 1% Adjunct

TYPE OF STAFF

- Full Time: 95%
- Part Time: 1%
- Contractor: 2%
- Temporary: 1%
- Other: 1%
42% of our visitors are in a management/supervisory role, and the remaining 57% is in a non-supervisory role. Despite the status difference, concerns are similar in terms of evaluative relationships, navigating through policies/processes and values/services.
WHO ARE OUR STUDENT VISITORS?

- Freshman: 8%
- Sophomore: 5%
- Junior: 8%
- Senior: 17%
- Graduate: 54%
- ELI: 1%
- Other: 8%
WHAT ARE THEIR BACKGROUNDS?

The charts apply for all the visitor populations we serve.

**ETHNICITY**

- White: 61%
- Asian: 10%
- Black/African American: 14%
- Hispanic/Latino: 5%
- Native American: 4%
- Other: 6%

**GENDER IDENTITY**

- Female: 41%
- Male: 58%
- Other: 1%

**HEARING STATUS**

- Deaf: 21%
- Hard of Hearing: 2%
- Hearing: 77%
Based on 422 cases, more than 4,879 concerns have been shared with the Ombuds Office. A breakdown of the concerns is reflected in the chart below and is identified in nine categories.

**OBSERVATIONS OF VISITOR CONCERNS**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Compensation &amp; Benefits</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Safety Health &amp; Physical Environment</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Career Progression &amp; Development</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Legal, Regulatory, Financial &amp; Compliance</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organization, Strategic &amp; Mission Related</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peer Relationships</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Service/Administrative Issues</td>
<td>16%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Values, Ethics &amp; Standards</td>
<td>18%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evaluative Relationships</td>
<td>24%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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These are from the Uniform Reporting Categories used by our professional association, the International Ombuds Association. The nine categories promote uniformity and protect anonymity of our visitor concerns. They also assist the Ombuds Office in reviewing the types of issues, identifying trends in requests or services, and noting opportunities for policy development, clarification, and conflict management. **The detailed definitions are attached in an appendix.**
SO WHAT DO THE TOP THREE CONCERNS TELL US?

Based on the concerns as observed by visitors, 57% of campus issues is workplace and classroom-related (conflicts, communication challenges, cultural views, and so forth). This section examines the concerns and sub-issues of the workplace as experienced by our University community members.

**Evaluative Relationships** which consist of questions, concerns, issues or inquiries arising between people in evaluative relationships (e.g. supervisor-employee, faculty-student, committee-applicant). The sub categories of evaluative relationships relate to 1) priorities, values, beliefs (differences about what should be considered important often rooted in ethical or moral beliefs), 2) respect/treatment (demonstrations of inappropriate regard for people, not listening, rudeness, crueness, etc.), and 3) trust/integrity (suspicion that others are not being honest, whether or to what extent one wishes to be honest, etc.). For faculty, this includes tenure/promotion/research, bias, bullying, and racial tension, bilingualism, and other concerns. For staff, this includes working with supervisors and colleagues, and administration. For graduate students, this includes academic programs and instructor interactions which impact their successful progression through academics or work.

**Values, Ethics, and Standards** which touch on 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. The sub categories of values relate to standards of conduct (fairness, applicability or lack of behavioral guidelines and/or Codes of Conduct, e.g., Academic Honesty, plagiarism, Code of Conduct, conflict of interest) and Values and Culture (questions, concerns or issues about the values or culture of the organization). For staff and students, this includes experience with multiple processes/policies, treatments, and administration.

**Service/Administrative** issues which focus on services or administrative offices including from external parties. The sub categories are administrative decisions and interpretation/application of rules (impact of non-disciplinary decisions, decisions about requests for administrative and academic services, e.g., exceptions to policy deadlines or limits, refund requests, appeals of library or parking fines, application for financial aid, etc.) and behavior of service provider(s) (how an administrator or staff member spoke to or dealt with a constituent, customer, or client, e.g., rude, inattentive, or impatient).
As shown by the graph, 2 out of 3 visits were by repeat visitors, which indicates many visitors have high confidence in the Ombuds Office's ability to help them. As a result of the pandemic, the primary initial contact method is through email. The Other method consists of informal referrals of colleagues/friends to the Ombuds Office, social media, and Zoom.
HOW LONG HAVE OUR VISITORS WORKED AT GALLAUDET AND CLERC CENTER?

Our faculty and staff have been serving the university and Clerc Center from less than a year to over 20 years.

LENGTH OF SERVICE

- >20 years: 17%
- 11-20 years: 19%
- 6-10 years: 22%
- Less than 5 years: 24%
- Less than 1 years: 17%
- N/A: 1%
SO WHAT DID THE OMBUDS DO?

For the duration of a case, the Ombuds Office offers the visitor a variety of services. Top actions are listening and conflict coaching to guide visitors through their issues and evaluate options that could include mediations, healing/repair circles, intervening with the leadership to mitigate risks or make informed referrals for conflict resolution.

OMBUDS ACTIONS

- Listening/Information Only: 30%
- Active Coaching/Evaluating Options: 27%
- Group Coach/Counsel: 11%
- Restorative Justice: 4%
- Intervention: 6%
- Meditation/Negotiation: 5%
- Action within the System/Administration: 14%
- Referral: 1%
- Issue Not Amendable: 3%
WHAT HAPPENS IF CASES DON’T GET RESOLVED?

Through our activities, we have reduced the risk of adverse outcomes for the University including internal/external grievances (29% of cases), negative publicity (12%), and litigation potential (6%).

POTENTIAL RISK FROM OBSERVED UNADDRESSED ISSUES

- Potential impact on degree completion due to conflict: 6%
- High risk safety issues: 8%
- Litigation potential: 6%
- Potential for external/internal grievances: 29%
- Significant violation of policy/code of conduct: 5%
- Negative publicity: 12%
- Unwarranted attrition/transfer: 4%
- Loss of specific job duties/responsibilities: 11%
- Loss of productivity due to pervasive conflict: 20%
Aside from direct services and giving training, the Ombuds team is highly trained which requires them to take regular professional development to continue provide advanced conflict resolution work and networking with other organizational ombuds in colleges/universities, federal government, and corporations.

**NETWORKING AND INTERNATIONAL OMBUDS ASSOCIATION ACTIVITIES:**

- Ombuds of Small Liberal Arts Colleges Sessions
- East Coast Ombuds Group Sessions
- Mid-Atlantic Ombuds Networking Sessions
- International Ombuds Association committees (conference, program planning, DEIB, etc)
- Emerging Ombuds Network
- Executive Coaching Network with Coach Diversity Institute
- 1:1 Meetings with other organizational ombuds, subject matter experts and potential facilitators
- Annual International Ombuds Association conferences
- And more...

**INTERNAL OFFICE ACTIVITIES:**

- Program development for Ombuds activities/services
- Research for content development
- Workshops, training, and webinars for professional development

*Continued...*
Ombuds Office has developed and provided these presentations for the University community members to increase their conflict competence.

**CULTIVATING A SENSE OF BELONGING AND PSYCHOLOGICAL SAFETY**

*Building Conflict Literacy: Toolkit for Leaders*

**OMBUDS OFFICE 101**

*The Art of Giving and Receiving Feedback*

**NAVIGATING DIFFICULT CONVERSATIONS**

*Conflict Management for Supervisors*

**PEER COACHING FUNDAMENTALS**

*Understanding Six Stages of Grief When Experiencing Change*

**NAVIGATING THE WORLD WITH HELPFUL STRATEGIES**

*Building Your “E” Power: Understanding Empathy in Leadership*
THROUGH OUR DAILY PRACTICE, THE OMBUDS OFFICE HAS:

- Uncovered cases of mismanagement, fiscal mismanagement, ambiguous policies and procedures
- Brought to leadership information (with permission from visitors) regarding violations of policy and abrasive conduct
- Continued to address conflict among groups, including faculty, teachers, staff, and students.
- Served as a sounding board for University and Clerc Center leaders as they grapple with complex issues
- Continued to bring concerns regarding campus climate to key decision-makers, especially around racism, audism, sexism, ableism and discrimination based on sexual orientation, religion, pregnancy, and class

TO IMPROVE ON THOSE, THE OMBUDS OFFICE HAS TWO TOP RECOMMENDATIONS:

1. Define the reporting mechanisms available for visitors experiencing audism to bring this -ism to parity with other -isms on campus. Due to the lack of anti-audist statements and bilingual policies, the University lacks clarity to help guide visitors when there are instances of audism.

2. Prioritize training for employees and faculty on building healthy workplace environments and classroom/learning environments. Due to program restructuring and reallocation of resources, job security is a very high concern among visitors, and cultivating healthier environments would help alleviate some of these concerns.

Thank you for your support of the Ombuds Office. If you have any questions or concerns, please contact the Office of the Ombuds by emailing us at ombuds@gallaudet.edu.
APPENDIX: IOA Uniform Reporting Category Definitions

INTERNATIONAL OMBUDSMAN ASSOCIATION
Uniform Reporting Categories

| VERSION 2 | October 2007 |

1. Compensation & Benefits
   - 1.1 Compensation Rate of pay, salary amount, etc.
   - 1.2 Payroll (administration of pay, check wrong or delayed)
   - 1.3 Benefits (wages, vacation, insurance, retirement, etc.)
   - 1.4 Retirement, Pension (eligibility, calculation of amount, retirement pension benefits)
   - 1.5 Other (any other employee benefits or benefit not described by the above sub-categories)

2. Evaluative Relationships
   - 2.1 Priorities, Values, Beliefs (information about the organization's priorities)
   - 2.2 Respect/Treatment (respect and treatment)
   - 2.3 Trust/Integrity (trustworthiness)
   - 2.4 Power (power and influence)
   - 2.5 Communication (communication)

3. Peer and Colleague Relationships
   - 3.1 Priorities, Values, Beliefs (information about the organization's priorities)
   - 3.2 Respect/Treatment (respect and treatment)
   - 3.3 Trust/Integrity (trustworthiness)
   - 3.4 Power (power and influence)
   - 3.5 Communication (communication)

4. Career Progression and Development
   - 4.1 Performance Appraisal/Grading (appraisal and grading)
   - 4.2 Departmental Climate (climate within the department)
   - 4.3 Recruitment Processes (processes for recruits)
   - 4.4 Job Classification and Description (job classification and description)
   - 4.5 Equity of Treatment (equal treatment)
   - 4.6 Other (any other evaluative relationship not described by the above sub-categories)

5. Legal, Regulatory, Financial, and Compliance
   - 5.1 Legal Affairs (legal affairs)
   - 5.2 Financial Management (financial management)
   - 5.3 Compliance (compliance)

6. Safety, Health, and Physical Environment
   - 6.1 Safety (safety)
   - 6.2 Health (health)
   - 6.3 Environment (environment)

7. Services/Administrative Issues
   - 7.1 Services (services)
   - 7.2 Administrative Issues (administration)

8. Organizational, Strategic, and Mission Related
   - 8.1 Strategic and Mission-Related/Strategic and Technical Management (strategy and technical management)
   - 8.2 Leadership (leadership)

9. Use of Positional Power/Authority (use of power)

10. Communication (communication)

11. Restructuring and Demobilization (restructuring and demobilization)

12. Policy, Strategic, and Mission Related (policies and strategy)

13. Other (any other issue or complaint not described by the above sub-categories)

14. Values, Ethics, and Standards
   - 14.1 Values (values)
   - 14.2 Ethics (ethics)
   - 14.3 Standards (standards)

15. Use of Positional Power/Authority (use of power)

16. Communication (communication)

17. Restructuring and Demobilization (restructuring and demobilization)

18. Policy, Strategic, and Mission Related (policies and strategy)

19. Other (any other issue or complaint not described by the above sub-categories)

20. Use of Positional Power/Authority (use of power)

21. Communication (communication)

22. Restructuring and Demobilization (restructuring and demobilization)

23. Policy, Strategic, and Mission Related (policies and strategy)

24. Other (any other issue or complaint not described by the above sub-categories)

25. Use of Positional Power/Authority (use of power)

26. Communication (communication)

27. Restructuring and Demobilization (restructuring and demobilization)

28. Policy, Strategic, and Mission Related (policies and strategy)

29. Other (any other issue or complaint not described by the above sub-categories)