



**Orange  
County  
Schools**

**NORTH CAROLINA**

# **Employee Ombuds**

## **Annual Report**

**School Year 2024 - 2025**

Mr. Franklin McCune

Employee Ombuds & Board Specialist



ENGAGE. CHALLENGE. INSPIRE.

June 30, 2025

Dear Colleagues,

As your Employee Ombuds, I want to take a moment to sincerely thank you for the opportunity to serve in this unique and meaningful role. It is a privilege to support such a dedicated and diverse community of professionals.

The Ombuds Office exists as a confidential, independent, and impartial resource for all employees. Whether you're navigating a workplace concern, seeking clarity on a policy, or simply need someone to listen without judgment, I'm here to help you explore your options and move forward constructively.

Connecting with the Ombuds offers several benefits:

- **Confidentiality:** Your concerns are handled with the utmost discretion.
- **Impartiality:** I do not take sides, but instead strive to ensure fairness and mutual understanding.
- **Informality:** You can speak freely and off the record, without triggering any formal process.
- **Independence:** Together, we can explore paths to resolutions that align with your values and goals while knowing the conversations we have are private.

Thank you again for your trust and willingness to engage. I look forward to continuing to support you and fostering a respectful, inclusive, and healthy workplace for all.

Warm regards,

A handwritten signature in red ink, appearing to read "FM".

**Franklin McCune**  
Employee Ombuds & Board Specialist

## Office Overview

The Orange County Schools Employee Ombuds operates following the International Ombuds Association (IOA) Code of Ethics and adheres to the following principles:

**Confidentiality**  
**Impartiality**  
**Independence**  
**Informality**

The Employee Ombuds seeks to empower those who contact me to resolve issues on their own if possible. Depending on the situation, the Ombuds may utilize different methods/techniques to help the visitor. Some of the common methods/techniques used include:

- Listens and helps clarify visitor concerns
- Provides information and explores available options
- Identifies underlying issues and interests
- Facilitates discussions to resolve issues

While the Ombuds can assist most individuals, there are some actions the Ombuds CANNOT take, such as:

- Act as an individual's advocate
- Serve as a formal office of legal notice for OCS
- Conduct formal investigations
- Maintain records

To learn more about my role and how I can support you, please visit the Ombuds website [here](#). Due to the confidential nature of the office, visitors are seen by appointment either in person, virtually, or over the phone. To schedule an appointment directly, you can contact me in the following ways:

- Email: [franklin.mccune@orange.k12.nc.us](mailto:franklin.mccune@orange.k12.nc.us) or
- Phone: 919-245-4022
- My office is located at 200 East King Street, Hillsborough, NC 27278, in the Board of Education Office.

I can also come to your school, place of work, or location you feel comfortable at.

## Employee Ombuds Guiding Principles

The Employee Ombuds at Orange County Schools operates with unwavering commitment to the core values set forth by the International Ombuds Association (IOA). I prioritize active listening to communicate an accurate understanding and promote individual empowerment, self-determination, and collaborative problem-solving.

**Orange County Schools  
Employee Ombuds**

**CORE VALUES**

- Confidential**  
All communication with the office is held in the strictest of confidence
- Impartial**  
Does not advocate for one side or another but for a fair and equal process for all
- Independent**  
Sits outside any chain of command to serve as an early warning system
- Informal**  
A voluntary resource where discussions are considered off-the-record

The Employee Ombuds is not affiliated with any compliance function of Orange County Schools and does NOT serve as an agent of notice for the school district. The result of this work, guided by these core values, is represented in this report. This presents data and observations that reflect the experiences of 43 visitors from our staff over a relatively short span of nine months.

As I continue in the role and expand its outreach, these insights provide a high-level overview of the concerns brought forward during this formative period. The observations detailed in this report represent a foundational step in our ongoing commitment to continuous improvement within Orange County Schools.

# WORKING WITH THE OMBUDS

WHEN AN INDIVIDUAL OR GROUP CONTACTS THE OFFICE, THE FOLLOWING STEPS ARE ADDRESSED DURING THE INITIAL MEETING OR OVER SEVERAL MEETINGS.

1

## INITIAL CONVERSATION

Set up a time to meet privately and confidentially either in person, virtually, or over the phone.

2

## CLARIFY ROLES

Review the standards of practice and answer any questions about the office, role, and how the office works.

3

## UNDERSTAND THE SITUATION

Listen and ask questions to understand the situation from the visitor's perspective, not to decide who is right or wrong.

4

## ANALYSIS

Work with the visitor to look at the issue in a different way by thinking about other parties, issues, relationships, and causation.

5

## EXPLORE OPTIONS

Identify potential options which may help to address the situation.

6

## NEXT STEPS

As the visitor determines their way forward, the office may be involved as long as it is with the scope of the office.

Year in Review

The Employee Ombuds for Orange County Schools began its operations in August 2024. It was formally launched on the first teacher workday of the 2024-2025 school year on Tuesday, August 19, 2024. It started slowly with only 11 visitors through the end of 2024. 2025 has seen that increase to 49 visitors.

To better understand this growth, we have divided the data into the four quarters of the year, which align with the reporting requirements of Board Policy 7960, Employee Ombuds.



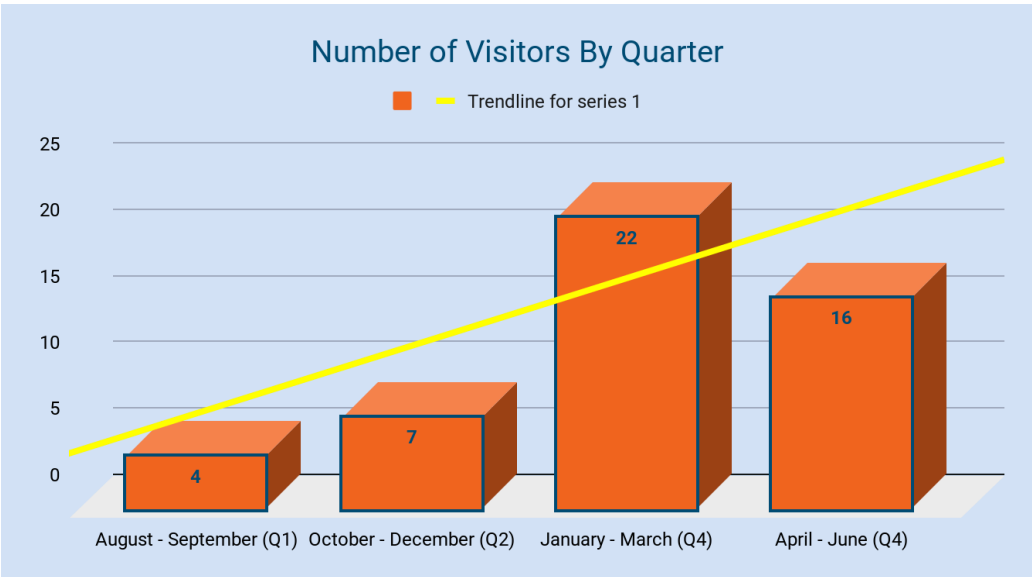
In the first quarter (August through September), I saw 4 visitors. The initial quarter was foundational, as I was still establishing my presence among all school & district employees. This is also why the first presentation to the Board was at the end of quarter two (October through December), and by that time, the amount had almost doubled, putting the total for 2024 at 11. There was not enough data to present in quarter one. I was also able to attend Foundations Training from the International Ombuds Association in October of 2024.

Moving into quarter three, the number of visitors increased to 33. This growth can be attributed to enhanced awareness through both formal marketing efforts (tri-fold brochures) and the spread of information by word of mouth.

Quarter four added 16 visitors, putting the total for all four quarters at 49. You will notice a spike in quarter 3. This is attributed to a group of returning visitors.

It is important to note that this data does not represent a full calendar year, as the office opened in August and therefore covers a shorter period. Additionally, there was a notable decrease in visitors during June,

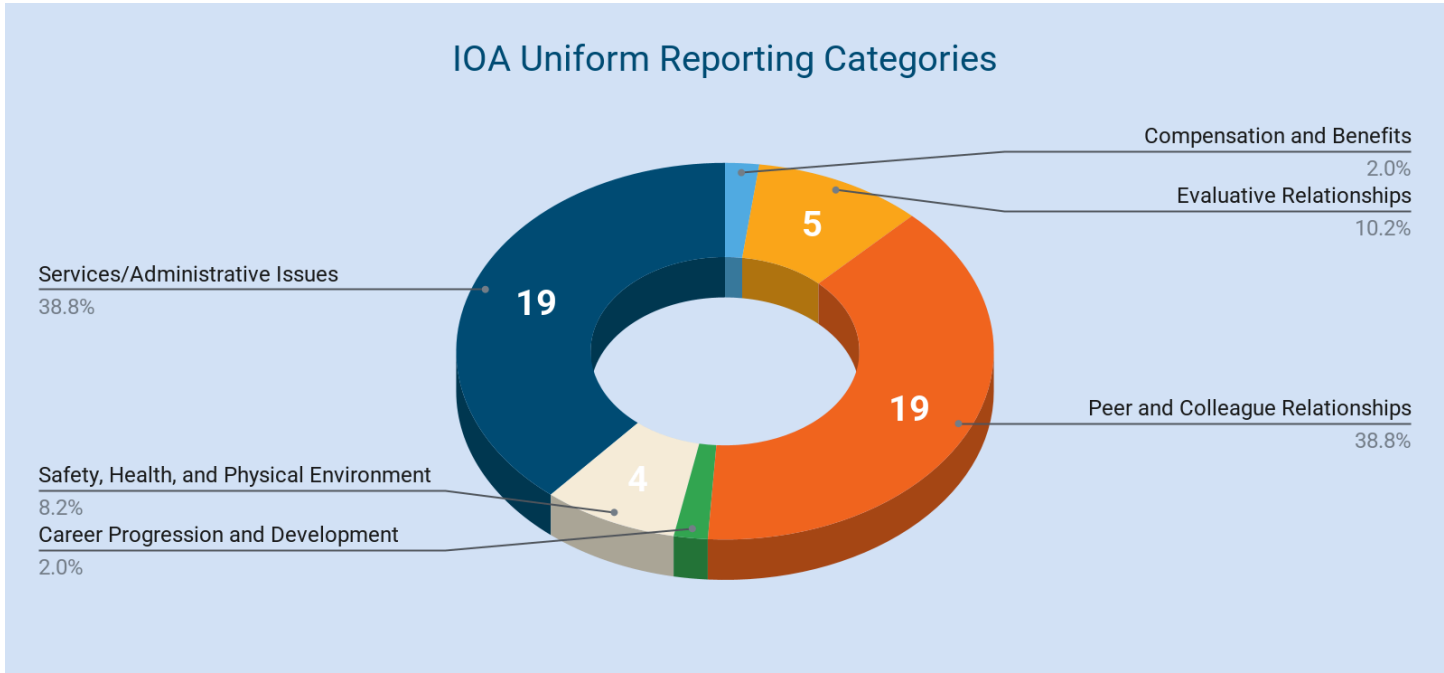
following the close of the school year, as many school employees were less engaged with school-related matters during the summer break, as teachers are 10-month employees. The ebbs and flows in visitors across the quarters demonstrate the positive impact this role has for employees, even though there is not a consistent use as of now. Efforts to connect with all employees reinforce the value of the Ombuds' role in supporting the diverse needs of our employees.



Year in Review

Continued

Part of the data tracking I collected during the 2024-2025 school year was on the rate of return visitors. 13 of 44 were return visits, representing 27% of the total visitors. As well as the breakdown of classified vs certified staff members shown on the chart. The nearly 76% certified makes sense as the total certified staff in the District outnumbers the classified staff.




All visitor interactions are coded based on the nature and needs of the visitor, based on the International Ombuds Association’s Uniform Reporting Categories (as seen later in this report). For school year 2024-2025, I saw visitors whose interactions with me fell into 6 of the 9 categories, with Services/Administrative Issues and Peer and Colleague Relationships being tied for the most. This aligns with my later observations of the importance of timely communication and the need for opportunities for open dialogue and feedback. It should also be noted that in the Services/Administrative Issues there were group discussions, which increased the total number of visitors seen.



# Outreach and Professional Growth

## Employee Ombuds

**Franklin McCune**  
Employee Ombuds & Board Specialist



Contact me as a first step, or as a last resort, or anywhere along the way. Come and share your concerns, evaluate your situation, and plan your next step—if you want to take the next step.

franklin.mccune@orange.k12.fl.us  
(919) 245-4023 ext. 15501

My name is Franklin McCune, I serve as the Employee Ombuds and Board Specialist at Orange County Schools.

In this role, I am a confidential, impartial, and independent resource for employees, offering guidance, conflict resolution, and a safe space to voice concerns.

As an Ombuds, I help navigate workplace challenges, foster open communication, and ensure fair processes while maintaining neutrality. I am committed to supporting a positive and productive work environment for all.

Any staff member can contact the Ombuds for help. The Ombuds is not part of the Human Resources Department (HR), and you do not need to go through HR to speak with Franklin.

I am excited to be this trusted resource for all employees!

### What is an Ombudsman?

The word ombudsman (OH-bud-man) is a Swedish term meaning "representative of the people." I use the shorter term "Ombuds."

Here at Orange County Schools, the Ombuds helps staff solve workplace problems and give generic feedback on matters of general concern.

The purpose of the Ombuds position is to provide employees with access to an independent, impartial individual who can help facilitate a confidential and informal resolution of concerns, conflicts, and issues arising within Orange County Schools (OCS), and who is authorized to bring systemic and organizational concerns to the attention of the Superintendent and Board.

### What I Do

My responses are tailored to the individual's situation and informed consent, so I...

- Listen, which may be all you want
- Discuss your concerns and help clarify the most important issues
- Help identify and evaluate your options
- Gather information, explain policies, and offer referrals to other resources
- Serve as a neutral party to solve problems and resolve conflicts and work to achieve fair outcomes for all parties using mediation and other conflict resolution strategies
- Offer coaching, for example, to help you prepare for a difficult conversation
- Consult with District officials about broad issues and trends
- Make recommendations for District change when appropriate
- Operate under the code of ethics and standards of practice of the [International Ombuds Association](#)
- Operate within [Policy 7040 Employee Ombuds](#)

### What I Don't Do

- Make decisions for anyone
- Offer legal advice
- Offer psychological counseling
- Participate in the District's grievance process or any other formal process
- Testify in any judicial or administrative proceeding unless required by law after reasonable efforts have been made
- Address issues involving staff not at OCS
- I do not have the power to establish, change, or set aside any District policy or procedures

### The Four Guiding Principles of the Ombuds

#### Independent

Independent in appearance, purpose, and practice and separate from other District departments.

#### Impartial

Does not take sides. Understands all sides and works collaboratively with all parties.

#### Informal

A voluntary, supplemental resource. Does not participate in formal processes, investigations, or complaints.

#### Confidential

Communications are confidential to the maximum extent permitted by law.

### Learn More!



### Staff Intranet

For more information and resources, view the Employee Ombuds page on the Staff Intranet!

[CLICK HERE TO ACCESS THE STAFF INTRANET](#)

Throughout the year, I actively engaged in outreach efforts to educate the OCS staff community about my Ombuds position and its role within the organization. These efforts are crucial in building awareness and understanding of how the office can serve as a resource for staff.

In collaboration with the Communications Department, a dedicated website for my Ombuds was developed. This website was carefully organized to ensure easy navigation, making it simple for visitors to access information and the support it offers. Additionally, a video introducing the newly formed office and the role of the Ombuds was created at the beginning of the year and shared with staff.

I am an active member of the International Ombudsman Association (IOA), participating in the IOA's K-12 Ombuds group and the North Carolina Regional Ombuds Group. These have all contributed to professional growth and networking, ensuring that I am connected, informed, and effective in my role.

I am also a regular participant in Human Resources' new Employee Orientation events. This provides me with an opportunity to meet new staff and continue to educate staff about the role.



## Ombuds Observations

### Observation 1

When respectful and trusting relationships and open lines of communication are established, our OCS staff feel empowered to address concerns and explore options for resolution with greater ease and confidence. Clear, effective, and timely communication, along with ensuring enough time is dedicated to hearing concerns, fosters a mutual understanding and a sense of value, respect, and belonging within our district.

### Observation 2

Visitors have expressed to me that they appreciate the creation of this role and my new position here to help them. There continue to be opportunities to market/promote the role, however, word of mouth is spreading. The opportunity to be at New Employee Orientation is also a great way to ensure all new staff know about how my Ombuds role can support them from the moment they begin their career in OCS.

### Observation 3

When visitors are able to see tangible connections to Board Policy and pathways they can take to resolve their conflicts, they feel more empowered and see a greater sense of calm and control. This provides them clarity while I strive to demystify systems and structures so staff feel supported. This does come in contrast with also making sure staff know proper chains of command and processes for bringing their concerns forward.

### Observation 4

Leadership matters in OCS. It directly shapes the culture, effectiveness, and equity of a school. Strong leaders set the vision, make informed decisions, and ensure that resources and support reach both students and staff. It is especially important to have leaders who listen, truly hearing the voices of teachers, students, and families, because this builds trust and responsiveness. Equally vital is holding people accountable, which fosters a culture of responsibility, high expectations, and continuous improvement. When leaders lead with clarity, compassion, and courage, schools become places where everyone can thrive. OCS has very strong leaders; they bring that excellence to work each day, and that provides staff a standard of excellence we all aspire to maintain.

### 1. Compensation & Benefits

Questions, concerns, issues or inquiries about the equity, appropriateness and competitiveness of employee compensation, benefits and other benefit programs.

- 1.a **Compensation** (rate of pay, salary amount, job salary classification/level)
- 1.b **Payroll** (administration of pay, check wrong or delayed)
- 1.c **Benefits** (decisions related to medical, dental, life, vacation/sick leave, education, worker's compensation insurance, etc.)
- 1.d **Retirement, Pension** (eligibility, calculation of amount, retirement pension benefits)
- 1.e **Other** (any other employee compensation or benefit not described by the above sub-categories)

### 2. Evaluative Relationships

Questions, concerns, issues or inquiries arising between people in evaluative relationships (i.e. supervisor-employee, faculty-student.)

- 2.a **Priorities, Values, Beliefs** (differences about what should be considered important – or most important – often rooted in ethical or moral beliefs)
- 2.b **Respect/Treatment** (demonstrations of inappropriate regard for people, not listening, rudeness, crudeness, etc.)
- 2.c **Trust/Integrity** (suspicion that others are not being honest, whether or to what extent one wishes to be honest, etc.)
- 2.d **Reputation** (possible impact of rumors and/or gossip about professional or personal matters)
- 2.e **Communication** (quality and/or quantity of communication)
- 2.f **Bullying, Mobbing** (abusive, threatening, and/or coercive behaviors)
- 2.g **Diversity-Related** (comments or behaviors perceived to be insensitive, offensive, or intolerant on the basis of an identity-related difference such as race, gender, nationality, sexual orientation)
- 2.h **Retaliation** (punitive behaviors for previous actions or comments, whistleblower)
- 2.i **Physical Violence** (actual or threats of bodily harm to another)
- 2.j **Assignments/Schedules** (appropriateness or fairness of tasks, expected volume of work)
- 2.k **Feedback** (feedback or recognition given, or responses to feedback received)
- 2.l **Consultation** (requests for help in dealing with issues between two or more individuals they supervise/teach or with other unusual situations in evaluative relationships)

### 2.m Performance Appraisal/Grading

(job/academic performance in formal or informal evaluation)

- 2.n **Departmental Climate** (prevailing behaviors, norms, or attitudes within a department for which supervisors or faculty have responsibility.)
- 2.o **Supervisory Effectiveness** (management of department or classroom, failure to address issues)
- 2.p **Insubordination** (refusal to do what is asked)
- 2.q **Discipline** (appropriateness, timeliness, requirements, alternatives, or options for responding)
- 2.r **Equity of Treatment** (favoritism, one or more individuals receive preferential treatment)
- 2.s **Other** (any other evaluative relationship not described by the above sub-categories)

### 3. Peer and Colleague Relationships

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.)

- 3.a **Priorities, Values, Beliefs** (differences about what should be considered important – or most important – often rooted in ethical or moral beliefs)
- 3.b **Respect/Treatment** (demonstrations of inappropriate regard for people, not listening, rudeness, crudeness, etc.)
- 3.c **Trust/Integrity** (suspicion that others are not being honest, whether or to what extent one wishes to be honest, etc.)
- 3.d **Reputation** (possible impact of rumors and/or gossip about professional or personal matters)
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- 3.h **Retaliation** (punitive behaviors for previous actions or comments, whistleblower)
- 3.i **Physical Violence** (actual or threats of bodily harm to another)
- 3.j **Other** (any peer or colleague relationship not described by the above sub-categories)

### 4. Career Progression and Development

Questions, concerns, issues or inquiries about administrative processes and decisions regarding entering and leaving a job, what it entails, (i.e., recruitment, nature and place of assignment, job security, and separation.)

- 4.a **Job Application/Selection and Recruitment Processes** (recruitment and selection processes, facilitation of job applications, short-listing and criteria for selection, disputed decisions linked to recruitment and selection)
- 4.b **Job Classification and Description** (changes or disagreements over requirements of assignment, appropriate tasks)
- 4.c **Involuntary Transfer/Change of Assignment** (notice, selection and special dislocation rights/benefits, removal from prior duties, unrequested change of work tasks)
- 4.d **Tenure/Position Security/Ambiguity** (security of position or contract, provision of secure contractual categories)
- 4.e **Career Progression** (promotion, reappointment, or tenure)
- 4.f **Rotation and Duration of Assignment** (non-completion or over-extension of assignments in specific settings/countries, lack of access or involuntary transfer to specific roles/assignments, requests for transfer to other places/duties/roles)
- 4.g **Resignation** (concerns about whether or how to voluntarily terminate employment or how such a decision might be communicated appropriately)
- 4.h **Termination/Non-Renewal** (end of contract, non-renewal of contract, disputed permanent separation from organization)
- 4.i **Re-employment of Former or Retired Staff** (loss of competitive advantages associated with re-hiring retired staff, favoritism)
- 4.j **Position Elimination** (elimination or abolition of an individual's position)
- 4.k **Career Development, Coaching, Mentoring** (classroom, on-the-job, and varied assignments as training and developmental opportunities)
- 4.l **Other** (any other issues linked to recruitment, assignment, job security or separation not described by the above sub-categories)

## 5. Legal, Regulatory, Financial and Compliance

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.

- 5.a **Criminal Activity** (threats or crimes planned, observed, or experienced, fraud)
- 5.b **Business and Financial Practices** (inappropriate actions that abuse or waste organizational finances, facilities or equipment)
- 5.c **Harassment** (unwelcome physical, verbal, written, e-mail, audio, video psychological or sexual conduct that creates a hostile or intimidating environment)
- 5.d **Discrimination** (different treatment compared with others or exclusion from some benefit on the basis of, for example, gender, race, age, national origin, religion, etc.[being part of an Equal Employment Opportunity protected category – applies in the U.S.] )
- 5.e **Disability, Temporary or Permanent, Reasonable Accommodation** (extra time on exams, provision of assistive technology, interpreters, or Braille materials including questions on policies, etc. for people with disabilities)
- 5.f **Accessibility** (removal of physical barriers, providing ramps, elevators, etc.)
- 5.g **Intellectual Property Rights** (e.g., copyright and patent infringement)
- 5.h **Privacy and Security of Information** (release or access to individual or organizational private or confidential information)
- 5.i **Property Damage** (personal property damage, liabilities)
- 5.j **Other** (any other legal, financial and compliance issue not described by the above sub-categories)  
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## 6. Safety, Health, and Physical Environment

Questions, concerns, issues or inquiries about Safety, Health and Infrastructure-related issues.

- 6.a **Safety** (physical safety, injury, medical evacuation, meeting federal and state requirements for training and equipment)
- 6.b **Physical Working/Living Conditions** (temperature, odors, noise, available space, lighting, etc)
- 6.c **Ergonomics** (proper set-up of workstation affecting physical functioning)
- 6.d **Cleanliness** (sanitary conditions and facilities to prevent the spread of disease)
- 6.e **Security** (adequate lighting in parking lots, metal detectors, guards, limited access to building by outsiders, anti-terrorists measures (not for classifying “compromise of classified or top secret” information)

- 6.f **Telework/Flexplace** (ability to work from home or other location because of business or personal need, e.g., in case of man-made or natural emergency)
- 6.g **Safety Equipment** (access to/use of safety equipment as well as access to or use of safety equipment, e.g., fire extinguisher)
- 6.h **Environmental Policies** (policies not being followed, being unfair ineffective, cumbersome)
- 6.i **Work Related Stress and Work-Life Balance** (Post-Traumatic Stress, Critical Incident Response, internal/external stress, e.g. divorce, shooting, caring for sick, injured)
- 6.j **Other** (any safety, health, or physical environment issue not described by the above sub-categories)  
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## 7. Services/Administrative Issues

Questions, concerns, issues or inquiries about services or administrative offices including from external parties.

- 7.a **Quality of Services** (how well services were provided, accuracy or thoroughness of information, competence, etc.)
- 7.b **Responsiveness/Timeliness** (time involved in getting a response or return call or about the time for a complete response to be provided)
- 7.c **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.)
- 7.d **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)
- 7.e **Other** (any services or administrative issue not described by the above sub-categories)  
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## 8. Organizational, Strategic, and Mission Related

Questions, concerns, issues or inquiries that relate to the whole or some part of an organization.

- 8.a **Strategic and Mission-Related/ Strategic and Technical Management** (principles, decisions and actions related to where and how the organization is moving)
- 8.b **Leadership and Management** (quality/capacity of management and/or management/leadership decisions, suggested training, reassignments and reorganizations)

- 8.c **Use of Positional Power/Authority** (lack or abuse of power provided by individual's position)
- 8.d **Communication** (content, style, timing, effects and amount of organizational and leader's communication, quality of communication about strategic issues)
- 8.e **Restructuring and Relocation** (issues related to broad scope planned or actual restructuring and/or relocation affecting the whole or major divisions of an organization, e.g. downsizing, off shoring, outsourcing)
- 8.f **Organizational Climate** (issues related to organizational morale and/or capacity for functioning)
- 8.g **Change Management** (making, responding or adapting to organizational changes, quality of leadership in facilitating organizational change)
- 8.h **Priority Setting and/or Funding** (disputes about setting organizational/departamental priorities and/or allocation of funding within programs)
- 8.i **Data, Methodology, Interpretation of Results** (scientific disputes about the conduct, outcomes and interpretation of studies and resulting data for policy)
- 8.j **Interdepartment/Interorganization Work/Territory** (disputes about which department/organization should be doing what/taking the lead)
- 8.k **Other** (any organizational issue not described by the above sub-categories)  
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## 9. Values, Ethics, and Standards

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.

- 9.a **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)
- 9.b **Values and Culture** (questions, concerns or issues about the values or culture of the organization)
- 9.c **Scientific Conduct/Integrity** (scientific or research misconduct or misdemeanors, e.g., authorship; falsification of results)
- 9.d **Policies and Procedures NOT Covered in Broad Categories 1 thru 8** (fairness or lack of policy or the application of the policy, policy not followed, or needs revision, e.g., appropriate dress, use of internet or cell phones)
- 9.e **Other** (Other policy, procedure, ethics or standards issues not described in the above sub-categories)  
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