



*USF St. Petersburg campus*

USF Ombuds Office  
**ANNUAL REPORT**  
2022-2023



UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH  
FLORIDA

Dear USF Faculty, Staff and Administrators,

We are pleased to present the *USF Ombuds Office 2022-2023 Annual Report*. The Ombuds Office directly supports faculty, staff and administrators across all campus locations. Specifically, the Ombuds Office provides an established professional and trusted resource dedicated to facilitating prompt resolution of workplace conflicts and concerns. We provide innovative and collaborative ways to translate workplace conflict into opportunities for your success at USF.

Over the fiscal year, we handled over 528 total matters including 312 new visitors. We enjoyed successfully resolving a wide variety of issues and concerns. We encourage you to use the professional services of the Ombuds Office to constructively engage workplace conflicts, openly discuss your concerns, and develop strategies to resolve challenges. Ombuds services are provided on a 100% voluntary basis and can help you align your talents and interests with our USF mission to advance excellence in teaching, research and service. Virtually every AAU university has an ombuds operation, of some type, intended to help the people who comprise the organization. Sustained success is no accident and we are proud to help those who help USF thrive!

The USF Ombuds is fully credentialed as a Certified Organizational Ombudsman Practitioner (CO-OP<sup>®</sup>) the highest level of certification as approved by the *International Ombudsman Association* (IOA). We follow the IOA Code of Ethics: **independence, impartiality, informality and confidentiality**, as detailed further in the Ombuds Office Charter.

To our many faculty, staff and administrators who have worked with the USF Ombuds Office, we thank you for utilizing this helpful resource to advance essential USF goals. To members of our USF community who have not yet worked with the Ombuds Office, we assure you that this resource remains available and accessible whenever the need arises. So, when you have questions about what processes are available for handling a workplace problem or conflict, need some assistance in working collaboratively with colleagues or supervisors, or you could simply use some confidential help to promote your continued success, please reach out to the USF Ombuds Office via TEAMS, OMB@usf.edu or (813) 974-7777.

Let us help you translate workplace conflict into opportunities for your success at USF.

—*Go Bulls!*

Sincerely,

Steven D. Prevaux, J.D.  
Ombuds Officer, CO-OP<sup>®</sup>

Cheryl L. Lesko, CRA/USF  
Ombuds Office Administrator

The University of South Florida established an Organizational Ombuds Office on January 4, 2016. The USF Ombuds Office was founded to provide independent, impartial, informal, and confidential professional ombuds resources to faculty, staff and administrators in Sarasota-Manatee, St. Petersburg, and Tampa. The Ombuds Office facilitates resolution of workplace conflicts and concerns in alignment with USF's Strategic Mission and Values, fostering employee engagement and adding value. On many occasions, the value of our services comes through avoiding unnecessary costs to the economy, wellness, and reputation of both the employee and the University. Services provided by the USF Ombuds Office are voluntary in nature, tailored to fit the unique nature of individual situations, and always provided with informed consent. The Ombuds is not authorized to receive formal or legal notice on behalf of USF and does not render management decisions. The Ombuds provides a variety of services including:

- Conflict analysis and facilitation of resolution
- Active listening to questions and concerns
- Developing strategies to resolve and prevent disputes
- Identifying options and available resources
- Outreach and Training
- Informal facilitated mediation
- Facilitated communication
- Coaching and reflective practice
- Referrals to appropriate resources
- Annual reporting and consultation
- Making recommendations for institutional improvements
- Information resourcing for Regulations, Policies, and procedures

As a university-designated impartial resource, the USF Ombuds Office does not take sides, participate in formal processes or advocate on behalf of any individual. Based on general observations from its caseload experience, the USF Ombuds Office provides regular feedback to university officials and various members of the campus community.



- **Steven D. Prevaux, Ombuds Officer**, is a Certified Organizational Ombudsman Practitioner® and a Certified Trainer in Workplace Conflict Resolution. Steven recently concluded his term of service on the Board of Directors of the International Ombudsman Association (IOA) as Vice President.



- **Cheryl Lesko, Ombuds Office Administrator**, experienced paralegal, Certified Trainer in Workplace Conflict Resolution and a bonded Notary Public. Cheryl was honored to receive the 2022 Outstanding Staff Award.

The **Mission** of the Ombuds Office, within our ethics, is to: *“Empower employee success by independently facilitating the impartial, confidential and informal resolution of workplace conflicts and concerns.”*

We accomplish our mission in alignment with the **USF CORE VALUES** of:

1. **Inquiry:** Facilitating collegial achievement through constructive collaboration.
2. **Innovation:** Connecting individual discovery with opportunities for greater success.
3. **Integrity:** Transparently committed to highest standards and sustainable outcomes.
4. **Inclusion:** Entrusted to respectfully foster fairness.

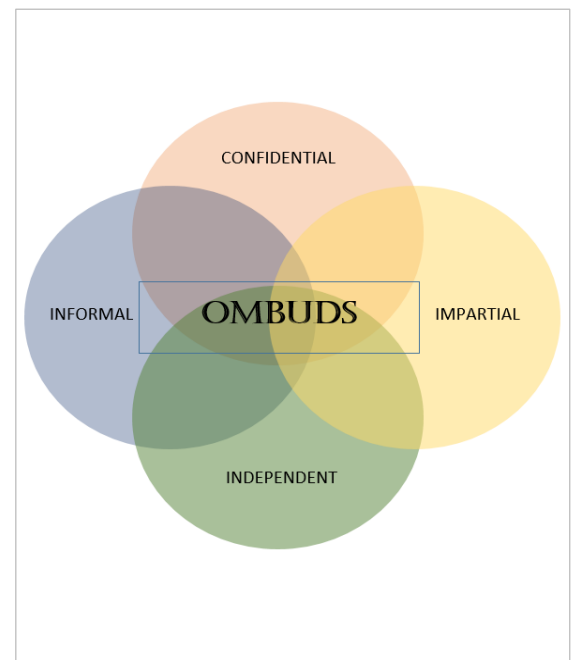
The USF Ombuds Office abides by the IOA’s [Ethics](#) and [Standards of Practice](#) as follows:

**CONFIDENTIALITY** The USF Ombuds Office holds all communications with those seeking assistance in strict confidence unless there is an imminent risk of serious harm. Communications made to the Ombuds do not place the University on notice.

**IMPARTIALITY** The Ombuds, is neutral, impartial, and unaligned in the handling of staff, faculty and administrator conflicts, disputes, or issues.

**INDEPENDENCE** The USF Ombuds Office is independent in structure, function, and appearance to the highest degree possible.

**INFORMALITY** The USF Ombuds Office is an “off the record” resource and does not receive notice on behalf of USF. While the Ombuds Office may refer individuals to formal grievance resources, it cannot decide or participate in any internal or external investigative or adjudicative procedures.



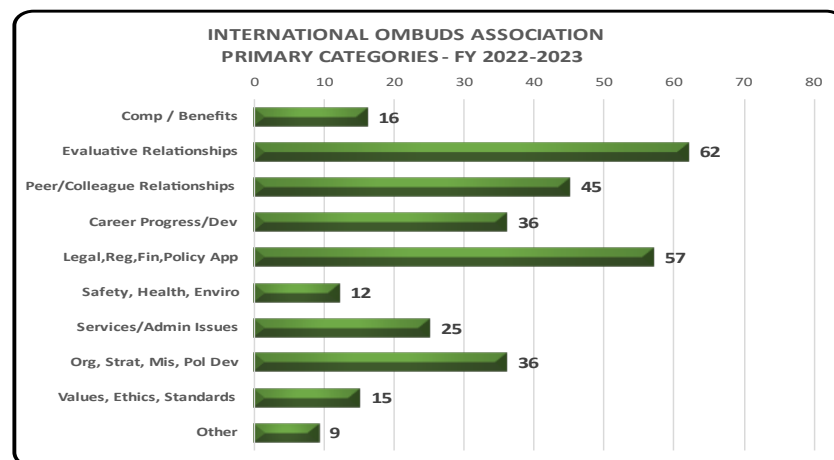
These ethics, as applied at the organizational ombuds table, provide a safe and engaging place for all employees to confide, share, reflect, learn, and pursue transformation. Ombuds services are unique in both design and the intention. We act as a cultural catalyst promoting individual empowerment, fairness and collaboration.

From inception, we have followed the established IOA best practice of “anonymized aggregation” when reporting data. The established nine general IOA Uniform Reporting Categories are:

- 1) Compensation and benefits
- 2) Evaluative relationships
- 3) Peer and colleague relationships
- 4) Career progress and development
- 5) Legal, regulatory, financial and compliance
- 6) Safety, health, and environment
- 7) Services and administrative issues
- 8) Organizational, strategic and mission related
- 9) Values, ethics, and standards

In FY 2022-2023, the USF Ombuds Office engaged in a combined total of **528** matters including:

- **312** new matters, and
- **216** on-going matters

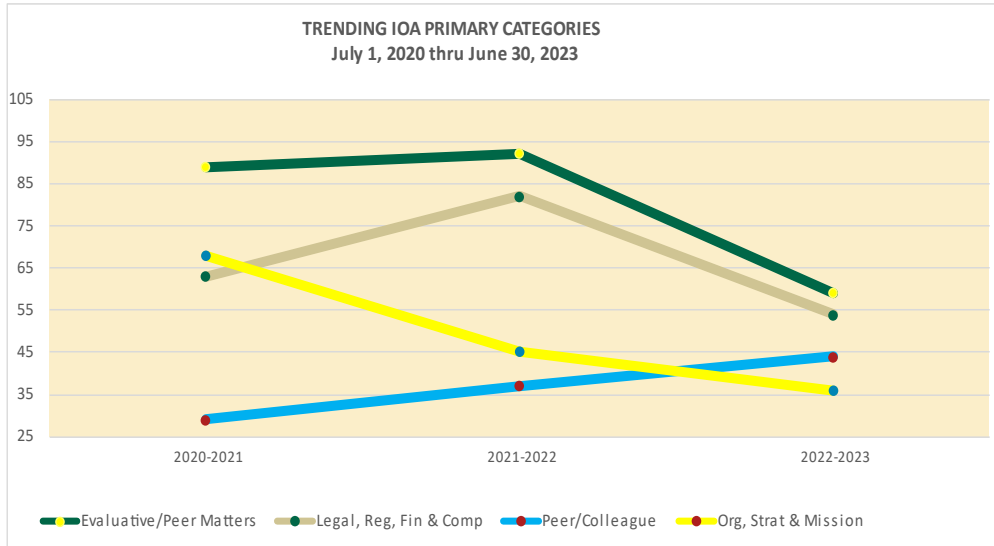


As illustrated in the chart above, the three most frequently expressed *primary* concerns in FY 2022-2023 were as follows:

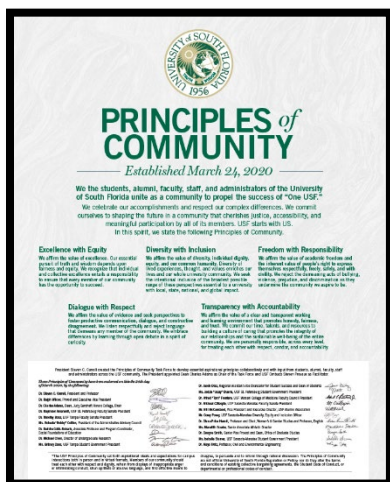
- 1) **Evaluative Relationships** (n=60) + **Peer and Colleague Relationships** (n=44) relates to unresolved interpersonal conflict and concerns among supervisors and their direct reports. These top concerns combined for total of **104** new matters presenting unresolved interpersonal conflicts. In response, we bolstered intercultural communication and listening skills through various Ombuds Workshops. We provided

resources, training and group exercises to advance psychological safety and clarification of team purpose within academic and admirative units. We timely shared trending concerns ethically and resulting in voluntary constructive resolutions.

- 2) **Legal, Regulatory, Financial, and Compliance** (n=57) relates to 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.
- 3) **Organizational, Strategic and Mission:** (primary issue n=36) includes issues that relate to responsiveness, change management, restructuring of work teams and workflow, unclear communications, and concerns or inquiries that relate to the whole or some part of our university as an organization.



The top three trending IOA primary categories are depicted in this summary chart covering July 1, 2020 through June 30, 2023. Organizational and strategic matters declined slightly as general “return to work” concerns have settled into a more stable operating rhythm. At the same time, greater face-to-face interactions may account for an increasing expression of Peer-to-Peer conflict and concerns. Opportunities for improvement are increasing in areas such as talent retention and fostering of psychological safety for high-performing teams.



The [Principles of Community](#) continue to provide powerful and consistent guideposts for enhancing positive university culture as we reach for the next level of success. The Principles of Community serve as a ready point of reference. We encourage their use as “ground rules” to guide impactful meetings and dialogues.

We continue to provide individual Conflict Dynamics Assessments (CDP-I) to faculty and staff. To date, we have implemented and scored CDP assessments for **283** individuals. The CDP is an established assessment instrument that simply and effectively measures individual conflict behaviors thus increasing self-awareness and improving conflict management skills. Each employee received a custom printed report revealing their individual “Constructive” and “Destructive” responses to conflict in the USF workplace. Participants were also provided an individual profile of their unique conflict “hot buttons” that initiate their natural destructive conflict tendencies. In addition, we met with each participant to review their results and provide conflict engagement strategies tailored to meet their unique needs.

We understand that competing ideas and conflicting approaches are essential components of task-based conflict that can accelerate productive outcomes when managed constructively. Enhancing this awareness and strengthening one’s “conflict intelligence” and conflict management skills also helps protect against problems spiraling into relational inter-personal conflict and costly disputes. To date, our efforts in this regard have received highly positive post-participation evaluations. We have learned that **how** you engage conflict on your team is as important as determining the root cause.

*The CDP is an assessment instrument that simply and effectively measures individual conflict behaviors*

We encourage all faculty, staff, and administrators to contact the Ombuds Office directly if they are interested in learning more about how the CDP assessment and other tools can enrich professional self-awareness and develop high-performance teams.

Using CDP tools provided by the Ombuds Office, you can be empowered with data-driven solutions that equip teams and leaders with a shared understanding of the conflict dynamics in the workplace. We take great care to use anonymous and aggregated data to protect your confidentiality.

#### Constructive Responses:

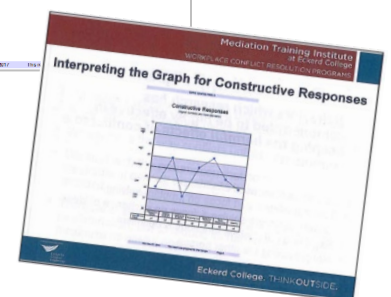
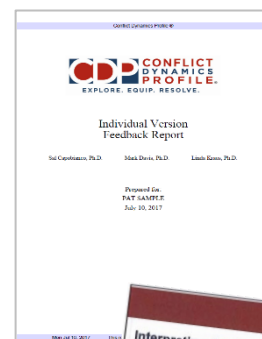
Perspective Taking  
Creating Solutions  
Expressing Emotions  
Delay Responding

Reflective Thinking  
Reaching Out  
Adapting

#### Destructive Responses

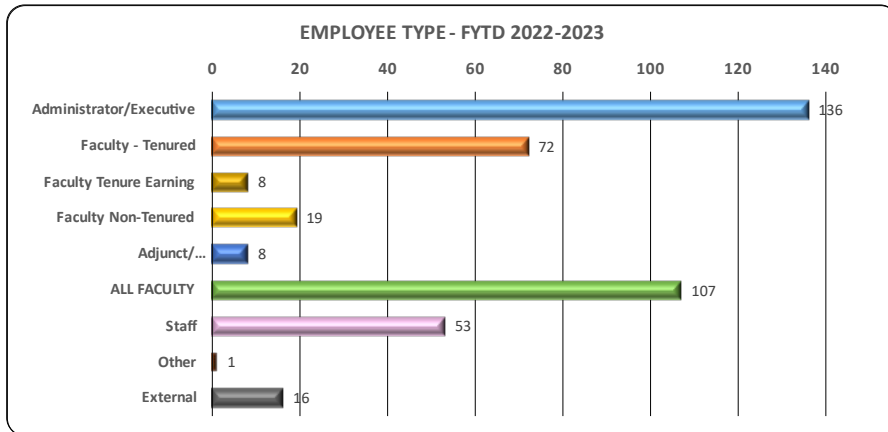
Winning at All Costs  
Displaying Anger  
Demeaning Others  
Retaliating

Avoiding  
Yielding  
Hiding Emotions  
Self-Criticizing



EMPLOYEE TYPE

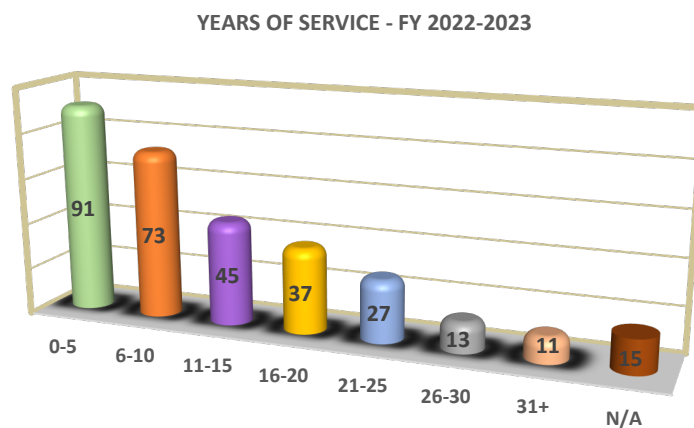
For the FY 2022-2023, we served 43.5% Administrators\*, 17% Staff and 34% Faculty (67% of which hold tenure at USF). We frequently receive referrals from those who used our services and reported satisfaction to their colleagues.



\*Faculty Administrators presenting administrative matters are counted as "Administrators."

LENGTH OF SERVICE

The Ombuds Office continues to reach employees across the length of service continuum. Those with fewer years of service were more likely to visit our office again this year with 3 out of 10 Visitors in their first five (5) years of employment. We were pleased to see that our active participation in outreach initiatives, such as the renewed employee orientation, has been effective in reaching all cohorts.

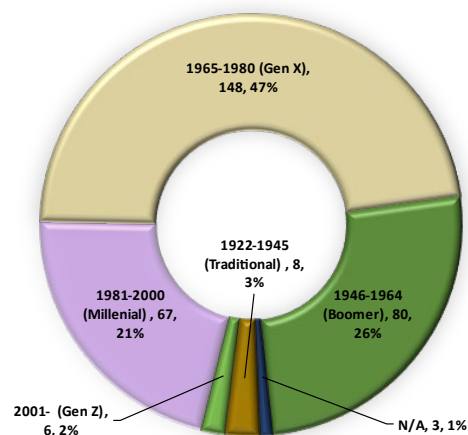




## SERVICES AVAILABLE TO ALL

Availability remains an essential priority in delivery of all ombuds services. Consistent with past years, our visitors included a wide range of individuals across our USF workforce and all campus locations. We enjoyed serving visitors with differing abilities, demographics and roles. Similarly, we served faculty and staff from all age groups and generations and noted a continued increase in Millennials this year.

GENERATIONAL GROUPS- FY 2022-2023



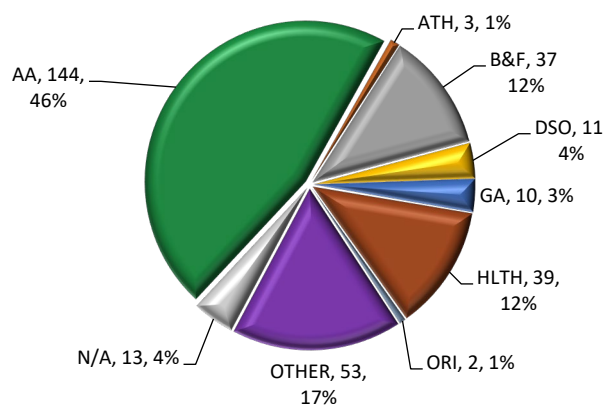
## UNITS REPRESENTED

As in years past, we served faculty, staff and administrators across all major organizational units and campus locations.

As in prior years, Academic Affairs continues to generate our largest relative portion of matters (48%) across “One USF.”<sup>†</sup>

- AA - Academic Affairs*
- ATH - Athletics*
- B&F - Business & Finance*
- DSO – Direct Support Organization*
- GA – Global Affairs*
- HLTH - Health*
- ORI - Office of Research & Innovation*
- OTHER-Executive Services, External, Misc. Departments*

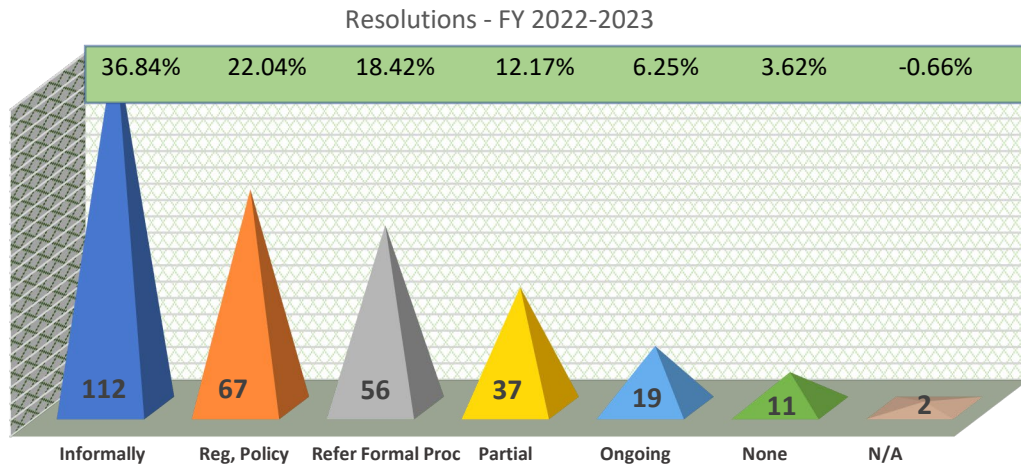
UNITS REPRESENTED - FY 2022-2023



<sup>†</sup>The Florida Excellence in Higher Education Act of 2018 required “the University of South Florida System – composed of USF Tampa, USF St. Petersburg and USF Sarasota-Manatee – to consolidate accreditations under one umbrella.”  
Source: <https://www.usf.edu/news/2020/usf-consolidation-takes-effect.aspx>

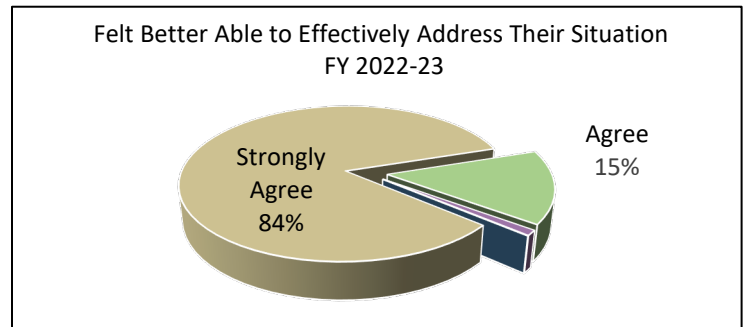
EMPOWERING RESOLUTIONS

Successfully facilitated resolution of **77%** of matters presented informally through collaborative development of voluntary and achievable options and/or referrals.



BETTER EQUIPPED TO ADDRESS THE CONFLICT

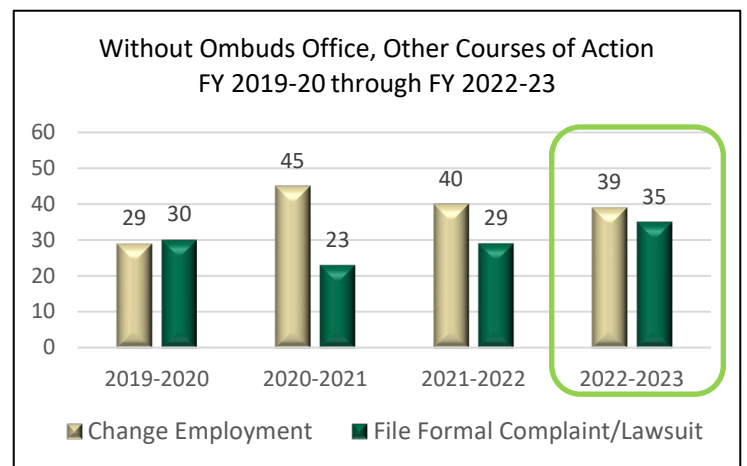
**99%** agreed that they were better able to effectively address their USF workplace concerns after working with the Ombuds Office.



OMBUDS: COST EFFECTIVE ALTERNATIVE

**35** employees reported, without the Ombuds Office, they would have filed a formal complaint or lawsuit, an increase of 20%.

**39** expressly stated that, if not for the Ombuds, they simply would have resigned from their USF position.



## OUTREACH

This year brought another record number of USF Bulls to our office for help. This entailed several matters of consequence that resulted in win-win resolutions avoiding unnecessary loss and preserving reputations alike for both the University and the individuals who comprise it. We will continue to reach out to academic and administrative units across One USF to ensure awareness and service.



### Looking beyond the horizon into the future

Major waves of change continue to ripple through higher education. Emerging technologies, artificial intelligence and changes to the hybrid workplace will continue to impact faculty and staff in the foreseeable future. Positive organizational outcomes are fueled and accelerated by trust, psychological safety and collaborative communication.

*“Great companies don’t hire skilled people and motivate them, they hire already motivated people and inspire them ... When people are financially invested, they want a return. When people are emotionally invested, they want to contribute.”*

Simon Sinek “Start with Why”

### TRAINING & PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

We continue to create unique content and present our findings in engaging professional development opportunities for faculty, staff, and administrators at all USF campus locations, including:

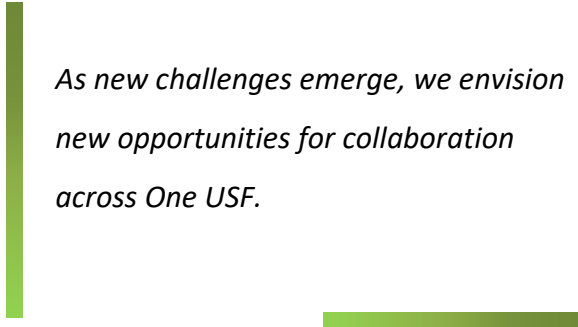
- *“Understanding YOUR Conflict Style”*
- *“Your Conflict Dynamics at Work”*
- *“High Performance Teams”*
- *“Trust and Psychological Safety”*
- *“Understanding Team Purpose”*



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The University of South Florida continues to ascend and accelerate. Periodic and clearly stated USF leadership communications have provided timely information and guidance along this trajectory.

As new challenges emerge, we envision new opportunities for collaboration across One USF. Confidential and impartial ombuds resources add value at critical junctures when individuals are seeking help to navigate the best path forward.



*As new challenges emerge, we envision  
new opportunities for collaboration  
across One USF.*

An organization, including a complex public research university, depends upon the people it employs to actively accomplish great things for the communities we serve. We know that the continued success of USF begins with “US” moving forward together to advance best interests.

The USF Ombuds Office directly supports all faculty, staff, and administrators throughout the USF community. We are dedicated to advancing USF's mission through *your* continued and unbounded success.

Whenever you are ready to visit the USF Ombuds Office, we will arrange a convenient and confidential meeting either in-person or virtually on MS Teams. It is helpful if you call ahead to make an appointment. We believe we can be most effective if we meet with you face-to-face, but if necessary we can work with you by phone.



[Click for a map to Patel Center for Global Solutions \(CGS\)](#)

**FACULTY • STAFF • ADMINISTRATORS**

**(813) 974-7777**

**Email: [omb@usf.edu](mailto:omb@usf.edu)**

**Website: [usf.edu/ombuds](http://usf.edu/ombuds)**

**Note:** E-mail communications in public universities in Florida, including USF, are generally of public record and because we maintain strict confidentiality, our office does not provide professional Ombuds services via electronic messaging.

## What Our Visitors Have Said About Us This Year

“

*The level of professionalism, integrity and support is amazing. Steven listens to you with patience objectivity and honesty helps you. I've seen a positive side of USF as an institution that I have never seen before. THANK YOU for having these services.*

”

“

*I want to say to you that I will never forget all the amazing insights you gave me. You are the best coach I ever had!!! You made my USF experience very special. Thank you, they are so lucky to have your brain around ... I want the universe to give all the good things back to you.*

”

“

*Listened carefully to details, had a strong understanding of organizational dynamics, and offered excellent alternatives that will help me improve my team's mutual trust and thus our capacity for high performance.*

”

“

*Cheryl was wonderful, please tell Cheryl how much I appreciate her consideration. Explaining resources and options and putting my mind at ease, the anxiety level has been reduced. Yours efforts are appreciated and effective.*

”

“

*The Ombudsman was extraordinarily helpful and provided a safe space in which to share concerns and issues. He also provided tools that could be used for conflict resolution. He was compassionate, an excellent listener and allowed for plenty of time for discussion. I would recommend the Ombudsman to anyone at USF. I feel deeply grateful that USF has such an important office on campus that allows for authentic and confidential dialogue.*

”

“

*The ombuds was quick to grasp the issues and understand the players. He thought broadly of solutions and communicated them well. It was also a pleasure to speak with him. Cheryl was also really great when I originally called to make the appointment. She was helpful and knowledgeable.*

”

“

*Steve was so helpful in helping me navigate my workplace concern. He helped me with strategy, provided many options to consider, and empowered me to take control of the situation. I am impressed with how thorough this session was and I will always recommend USF Ombuds to anyone looking for guidance.*

”

“

*Following up on our conversation, I wanted you to know that the techniques you suggested were incredible and worked VERY well – Spot On!! I'm giving you a 5-star Yelp review!!!*

”

*USF Tampa campus*



*USF Ombuds Office* ☞ **813.974.7777**

*USF Sarasota-Manatee campus*

