



Sam Houston State University

MEMBER THE TEXAS STATE UNIVERSITY SYSTEM

SHSU Faculty and Staff Ombudsperson Office 2022 Annual Report

Prepared and submitted by:
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A message from the SHSU Faculty and Staff Ombuds

It is my honor to share with you the SHSU Faculty and Staff Ombuds Office Annual Report for 2022. This is the first annual report from the ombuds office. I am Falguni Mukherjee, and I was appointed to serve as the SHSU faculty and staff ombuds in the inaugural year of the Ombuds Office. I am also a Professor in the Department of Environmental and Geosciences in the College of Science and Engineering Technology.

One of my key tasks this year was to establish the Ombuds Office on campus, an endeavor which was challenging as well as rewarding. In the process I have had the privilege of meeting and getting to know some incredible people on campus, and I have learned much in this one year. I built the Ombuds Office from the ground up and it involved writing the SHSU Faculty and Staff Ombuds Office Charter, establishing the principles of practice for the Office, building the Ombuds Office webpage, establishing the physical office space in AB-3 to create a welcoming environment for my visitors¹, undergoing extensive professional development and training and making appropriate preparations to begin meeting with visitors to the Office. I officially started meeting with visitors in August 2022.

I invite you to visit the [SHSU Ombuds Office webpage](#) for additional information available on the website, viz. the Ombuds Office Charter, the mission of the Office, guiding principles of the Office, FAQ etc.

I appreciate the support, assistance, and encouragement that I have received from multiple offices on campus and the incredible members of the SHSU community. It is my hope that our faculty, staff, and all members of the SHSU community see the value the Faculty and Staff Ombuds Office adds to SHSU.

I look forward to continuing to serve as your faculty and staff ombuds.

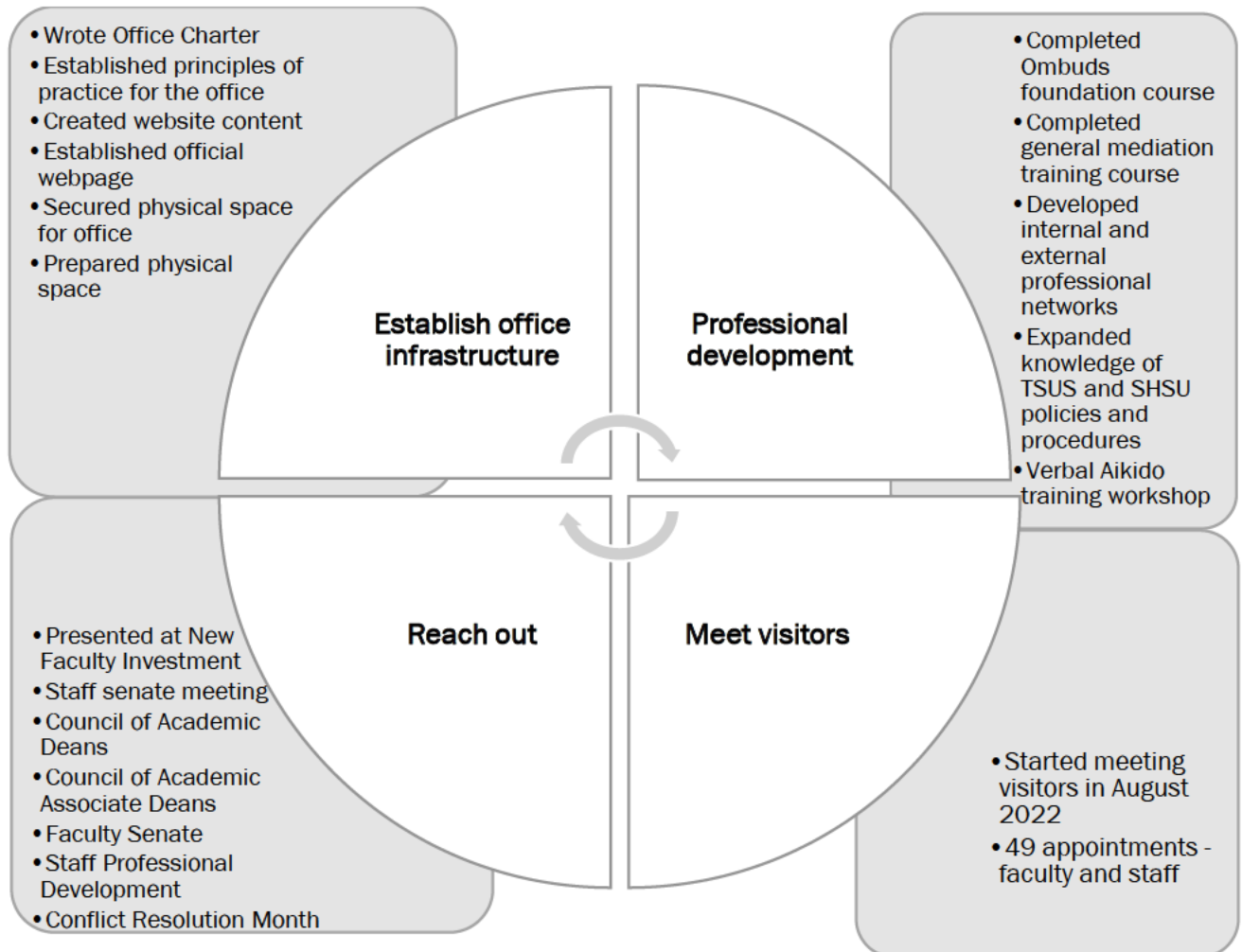
Respectfully Submitted,

Falguni Mukherjee, Ph.D.
Faculty and Staff Ombudsperson
Sam Houston State University

¹ The International Ombudsman Association (IOA) refers to people who seek assistance from an ombudsperson as “visitors.”

2022 in a Glance

Primary duties that I performed in 2022 are outlined below



About the office

The SHSU faculty and staff Ombuds Office was established in January 2022 to provide assistance to faculty and staff members of the SHSU community to manage and resolve workplace related issues and concerns in a confidential, informal, neutral, and independent manner. The office was established upon recommendation of the SHSU Impact Planning Committee, and the Office of the Provost, with endorsement by the Office of the President.

Location:

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I also have collateral duties and serve as professor in the department of Environmental and Geosciences. I strive to keep my two roles separate. The ombuds office has a dedicated office, email address and phone line.

Constituents served

All SHSU faculty and staff members across all campuses are welcome to seek the services of this office. Constituents can make an appointment to seek services in-person, online via Zoom and by phone.

Mission

The SHSU Ombuds Office provides a safe place where faculty and staff members can reach out to talk about workplace conflicts, or concerns in a neutral and confidential environment, without fear of retaliation. The office promotes accountability and fair treatment of all members of the University community with a goal of creating a safe and equitable campus environment. The Ombuds Office is an avenue for constructive problem solving and conflict resolution. The Ombuds Office operates independently and supplements existing University resources for conflict resolution and fair treatment (e.g., Human Resources, Office of Equity & Title IX, Office of Compliance and Insurance, etc.). It provides an alternative to formal conflict resolution channels. The SHSU Ombuds Office operates as per the [Standards of Practice](#) (SOP) and [Code of Ethics](#) (COE) of the [International Ombuds Association](#) (IOA).

The mission of the Ombuds Office is to help foster and create a respectful, equitable, and ethical campus environment. The SHSU Ombuds Office is an organizational ombuds. The ombuds therefore, does not advocate for faculty or staff members or for the University. The ombuds is a neutral resource providing its services on an informal and off-the-record basis. The ombuds strives for an equitable resolution of issues or concerns presented. The Ombuds Office provides following services to the faculty and staff community:

- Provide a neutral and confidential channel of communication
- Explain or clarify University policies and procedures
- Listen actively to faculty and staff concerns
- Provide information and explore options to address concerns and constructively resolve/manage conflicts
- Assist in identifying short-term and long-term goals and steps to achieve those goals
- Coach visitors to address their concerns
- Identify existing resources and refer faculty and staff to appropriate resources/processes
- Provide information about the appropriate SHSU office for formal reporting and official channels for grievance procedures
- Facilitate conversations, upon agreement, between members of the University community to resolve issues

- Collect anonymized data on emerging trends and patterns while maintaining confidentiality and provide upward feedback

The strategies adopted by the ombuds will depend on the issues presented, the context of the situation, the dynamics of the division, short-term and long-term goals of the faculty or staff, and discretion of the ombuds.

Principles of practice

The SHSU Ombuds Office operates as per the Standards of Practice (SOP) and Code of Ethics (COE) of the International Ombuds Association (IOA). Therefore, the SHSU Ombuds Office's services are **confidential, independent, informal, and neutral**.

A comprehensive description of the principles of practice of the Ombuds Office is located on the following [page](#) on the SHSU Ombuds Office webpage.

Activities

Professional development: I engaged in many professional development activities in 2022 that were invaluable. These activities helped to strengthen my skills and knowledge needed to establish and operate the Ombuds Office.

- Completed Foundations of Ombuds course offered by the International Ombuds Association (IOA).
- Completed a 40-hour general mediation training
- Completed a course on establishing an ombuds office offered by the International Ombuds Association (IOA).
- Attended the International Ombuds Association (IOA) virtual annual meeting (3 days)
- Participated in IOA webinars
- Attended mentoring meetings with an ombuds mentor provided by IOA every three weeks
- Built my professional network of ombuds from other universities and professions
- Developed an internal network by meeting with SHSU administrators, staff, and colleagues
- Continued to strengthen my knowledge of the ombuds profession through self-learning, engaging in virtual meetings and discussion boards hosted by the IOA and discussion with other ombuds
- Expanded my knowledge of TSUS and SHSU policies, procedures, and structures by conducting extensive research, and study of documents and meetings with administrators and staff from Human Resources, Equity and Title IX, General Counsel, Internal Audit, Office of the Provost, and other SHSU offices.
- Attended a two-day training workshop on Verbal Aikido

Outreach: A key element of the tasks that I undertook included outreach activities to spread the word and raise awareness about the presence of the ombuds office on campus and the availability of its services to faculty and staff. This was done in different ways.

- Create the Ombuds Office webpage
- Present about the ombuds profession, SHSU Ombuds Office, my role, operations of the office to,

- New Faculty Investment (NFI)
- Staff senate meeting
- Staff professional development
- Council of Academic Deans
- Faculty senate
- Council of Academic Associate Deans
- Conflict Resolution Month

Building the Ombuds Office: Establishing the Ombuds Office required building the infrastructure from the ground up. And it involved the following key endeavors,

- Write the Office Charter and obtain support and approval from necessary offices
- Design, and write the content to launch the Ombuds Office webpage
- Procure a physical office space appropriate for an Ombuds Office
- Prepare the physical office space with furniture, technology, telephone service, etc. to establish a working space and create a welcoming environment for my visitors
- Work to keep my ombuds and faculty positions separate, with separate offices, email addresses, and telephone numbers.

Assisting visitors: I officially started meeting with visitors in August 2022. By then the physical office space was established where I was able to welcome visitors. Use of the Ombuds Office is completely voluntary and as an ombuds my role is to assist every faculty and staff member who seek the services of the office. All faculty and staff members of the University community have the right to consult with the University Ombuds without fear of retaliation. My efforts to build requisite knowledge and skills were very important in providing the necessary services to our faculty and staff. These efforts further prepared me to serve them in accordance with the IOA Standards of Practice and Code of Ethics (i.e., independence, confidentiality, informality, neutrality).

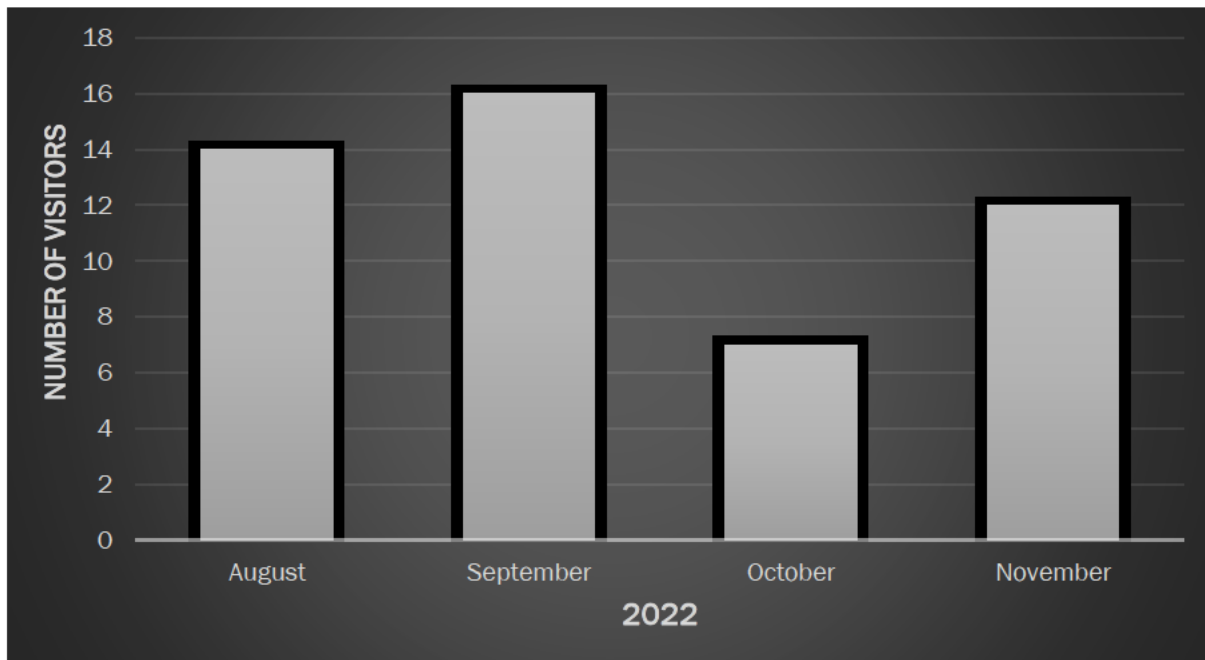
Data in this report is presented in aggregate form to protect confidentiality.

Visitor Summary

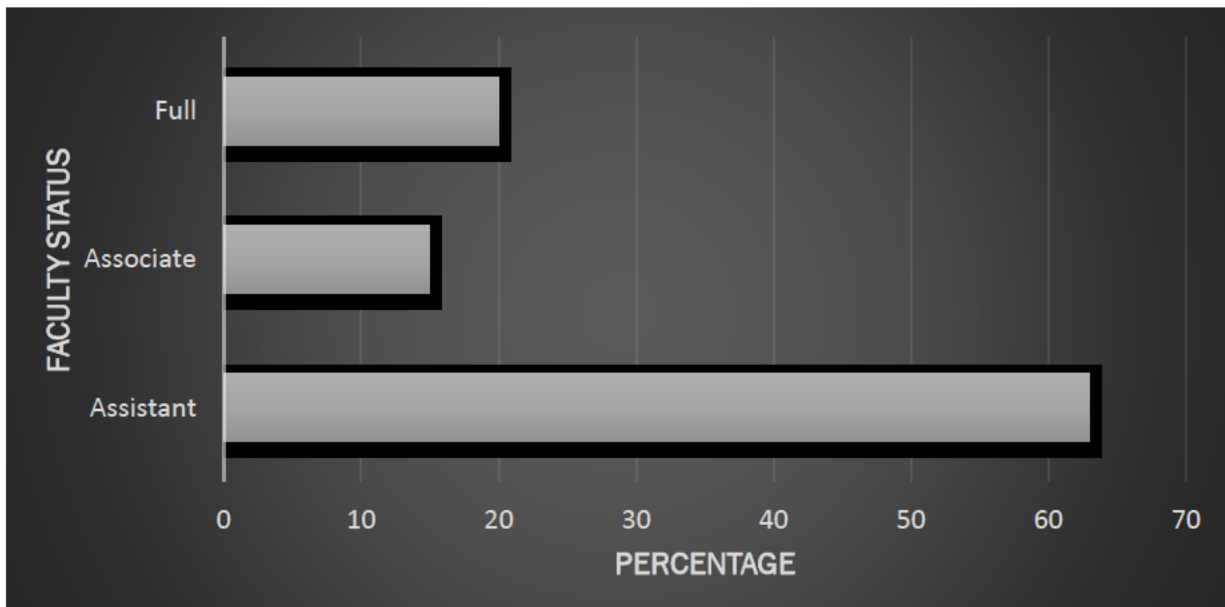
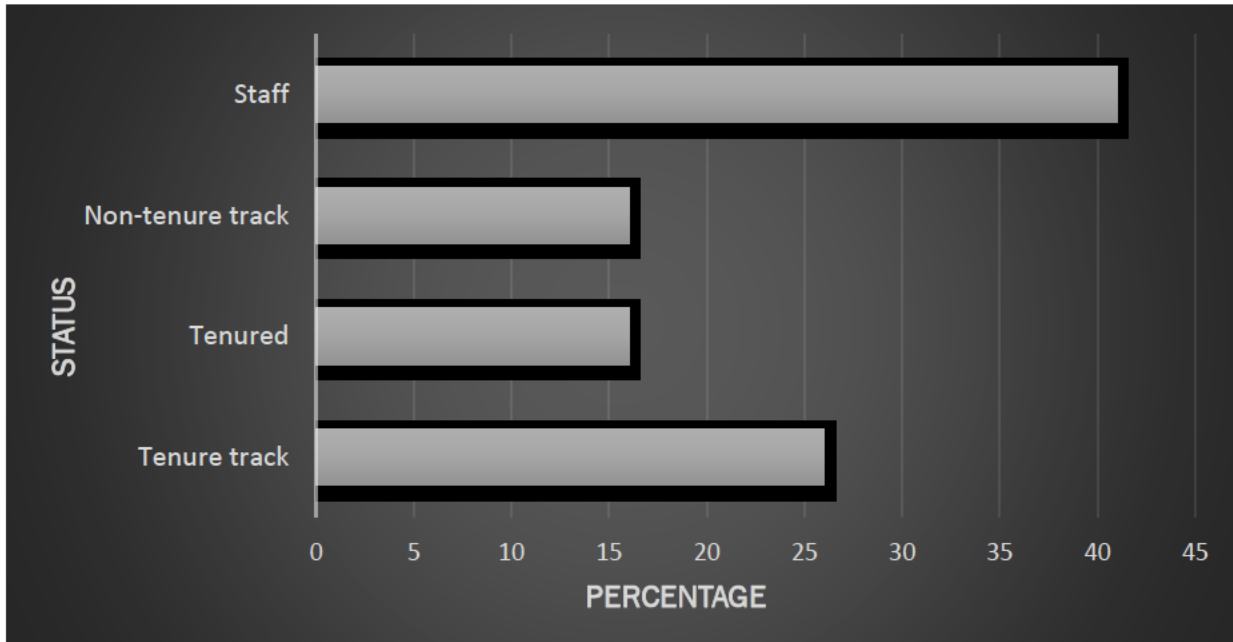
Number of visitors: 49 faculty and staff members have sought services of the Ombuds Office from August to November 2022. Many faculty and staff members sought services a second time for ongoing concerns or for new issues. In 47 cases a single visitor was involved. In two cases a pair of two visitors were involved. 29 of the cases involved faculty and the remaining 20 cases involved staff.

No two appointments are the same. Appointments lasted anywhere from an hour to three hours. Appointments lasted for varying duration depending on the issues and concerns being raised, the complexity of the situation, context, and to ensure that a visitor had the opportunity to be heard. The average of the total appointment time of the 49 appointments is approximately an hour and fifteen minutes.

The number of appointments varied by month as shown in the chart below.

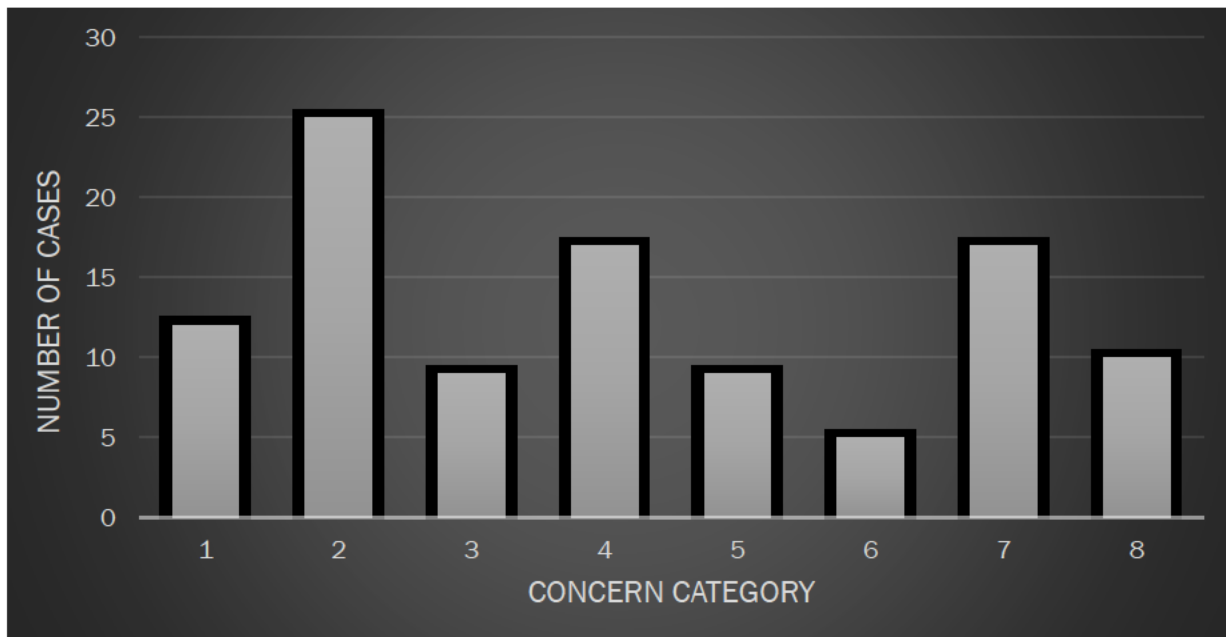


Visitor status: Visitors who sought the services of the Ombuds Office represent a mix of tenured, and tenure track faculty members at assistant, associate, and full professor ranks, non-tenure track faculty members as well as staff members.



Summary of concerns raised

Faculty and staff members may reach out to the Ombuds Office with any questions or concerns related to their work life at SHSU. During the appointment visitors have disclosed other related problems and underlying concerns and issues. The table following the chart below provides a summary of issues and concerns raised by faculty and staff members who sought the services of the Ombuds Office. All issues and concerns that were raised have been grouped into eight categories based on the [IOA's Uniform Reporting Categories](#). Issues and concerns have been categorized in the table based on the perspectives of the faculty and staff who sought the services of the Ombuds Office. The chart below depicts the frequency with which concerns were raised in eight categories.



	<u>Concerns</u>	<u>Issues raised</u>
1.	Compensation and Benefits	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Workload ○ Compensation ○ Benefits
2.	Evaluative Relationship (<i>Department chair, assistant/associate chair, Dean, and unit managed, Director, supervisor, and employee relations</i>)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Inequity of treatment, ○ A lack of trust and integrity, ○ Beliefs, values, priorities, ○ Standards or norms in unit, ○ Lack of guidance, ○ Lack of direction, ○ Unable or unwilling to assist, ○ Policy implementation, ○ Fear of retaliation, ○ Effectiveness of supervisor, ○ Lack of respect, ○ Bullying, verbal abuse, ○ Intimidation ○ Damage to department, College, unit, or program, ○ Policy missing, ○ Policy in need of revision, ○ Retaliatory behavior, ○ Disciplinary action ○ Communication ○ Diversity related ○ Departmental climate ○ Equity of treatment – favoritism, preferential treatment ○ Voice/participation in unit governance ○ Performance evaluation ○ Fairness of assignments, appropriateness of schedules, expected volume of work ○ Use of positional power or authority
3.	Peer and Colleague Relationships	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Respect and treatment ○ Trust and integrity ○ Reputation – impact of rumors about professional or personal matters ○ Communication ○ Bullying, verbal abuse and /or coercive behavior ○ Diversity related comments or behavior ○ Retaliation for previous actions, behaviors, whistleblower

4.	Career Progression and Development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Job Application/Selection and Recruitment Processes (<i>recruitment and selection processes, facilitation of job applications, short-listing and criteria for selection, disputed decisions linked to recruitment and selection</i>) ○ Job Classification and Description (<i>changes or disagreements over requirements of assignment, appropriate tasks</i>) ○ Involuntary Transfer/Change of Assignment (<i>notice, selection and special dislocation rights/benefits, removal from prior duties, unrequested change of work tasks</i>) ○ Tenure/Position, Security/Ambiguity (<i>security of position or contract, provision of secure contractual categories</i>) ○ Career Progression (<i>promotion, reappointment, or tenure</i>) ○ Rotation and Duration of Assignment (<i>noncompletion or over-extension of assignments involuntary transfer to specific roles/assignments, requests for transfer to other places/duties/roles</i>) ○ Termination/Non-Renewal (<i>end of contract, non-renewal of contract</i>) ○ Position Elimination ○ Career Development, Coaching, Mentoring
5.	Legal, regulatory, and financial compliance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Lack of or insufficient due process ○ Harassment ○ Discrimination ○ Violation reporting
6.	Safety, Health and Physical Environment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Work related stress ○ Work life balance
7.	Administrative Issues	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Quality of services ○ Administrative decision ○ Policy clarity ○ Policy implementation ○ Behavior of administrative staff
8.	Values, ethics, and standards	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Standards of conduct – fairness, applicability, or lack of behavioral guidelines ○ Values and culture