

# **SHSU Faculty and Staff Ombudsperson Office 2025-2026 Annual Report**

***Prepared and submitted by:***

Falguni Mukherjee, PhD.  
SHSU Faculty & Staff Ombuds  
September 2026

Falguni Mukherjee  
Faculty/Staff Ombuds  
[ombuds@shsu.edu](mailto:ombuds@shsu.edu)

White Hall, Suite C106  
2100 Avenue I, Huntsville, TX 77340  
936-294-2222

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## Message from the SHSU Faculty and Staff Ombuds

Dear Bearkat Community,

I am pleased to share the 2025–2026 Annual Report of the Ombuds Office. Each year, this report provides an opportunity to reflect on the work of the office, the concerns and experiences shared, and the ways in which the Ombuds Office continues to foster an ongoing commitment to a respectful and supportive university environment.

The Ombuds Office assists faculty, and staff navigate concerns, resolve conflicts, and better understand university processes and resources. At the heart of this work is a commitment to providing a safe and confidential place where members of our community can seek guidance, ask questions, and explore options for addressing challenging situations.

This past year, the Ombuds Office continued to listen, connect, and promote constructive resolutions. Every conversation brought an opportunity to better understand the experiences of our university community and, where appropriate, identify opportunities to improve communication, clarify processes, and identify constructive paths forward. Sometimes the most important part of that work is simply listening.

The past year more than 100 faculty and staff members visited the Ombuds Office to seek guidance, talk through concerns, explore options, or simply have a confidential place to be heard. I am deeply grateful to everyone who chose to reach out and trusted me with their concerns. Reaching out for assistance can take courage, and I recognize the importance of meeting each person with respect, empathy, and impartiality. For many office visitors<sup>1</sup> the Ombuds Office serves as their first stop to discuss issues, identify resources, seek information, and can lead to contact with other university offices and resources. I am equally grateful to the campus partners whose collaboration helps the ombuds office connect individuals with the information, resources, and support they need.

Looking ahead, I remain committed to making the Ombuds Office a trusted and accessible resource for our faculty and staff. My hope is that members of our university community know they do not have to navigate a difficult workplace situation alone. The Ombuds Office is here to provide a confidential space to talk, reflect, and explore options.

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

Respectfully Submitted,

Falguni Mukherjee, Ph.D.  
SHSU Faculty and Staff Ombudsperson

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

## 2025-2026 Academic year in a glance

### Office infrastructure

- Maintained Ombuds Office in its new location
- Maintained and oversaw website update, ensuring all policies are adhered to
- Updated and maintained secure, anonymous database
- Maintained curated informational and training material available for the campus on ombuds website
- Kept updated with IOA Standards of Practice and Code of Ethics for the office

### Professional Development

- Attended IOA conference
- Attended IOA's Regional Advisory Committee events
- Attended IOA symposiums, webinars, workshops
- Formed IOA community connections
- Expanded internal and external networks
- Performed Ombuds mentoring

### Outreach and synergistic activities

- Presented at New Faculty Investment
- Served as DOSO and BIT College liaison
- Presented at Academic Affairs Council meeting on Having Difficult Conversations
- Presented a webinar, *Neutral Ground: The Ombuds Role in Conflict Resolution* during Conflict Resolution Month
- Presented to the faculty senate about the Ombuds Office
- Prepared Ombuds Office annual report for 2024-2025
- Conducted team building workshop for campus partner

### Visitors

- Completed 108 appointments in 2025-2026: faculty and staff

## **About the office**

The SHSU faculty and staff Ombuds Office helps SHSU faculty and staff members to manage and resolve workplace related issues and concerns in a confidential, informal, neutral, and independent manner.

### **Location:**

White Hall, Suite C106  
Huntsville, TX 77340  
Phone: (936) 294-2222  
Email: [ombuds@shsu.edu](mailto:ombuds@shsu.edu)

### **Constituents served:**

All SHSU faculty and staff members across all campuses are welcome to reach out to the Ombuds Office. Appointments can be made in-person, online via Zoom or Teams and by phone.

The Ombuds Office is a voluntary resource, and all faculty and staff members may consult with the university ombuds without fear of retaliation.

## Mission

The SHSU Ombuds Office provides a safe place where faculty and staff members can discuss workplace conflicts, or concerns in a neutral and confidential environment, without fear of retaliation. 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., People Operations, The Office of Employee Engagement, 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).

SHSU faculty and staff ombuds 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 Office provides following services to faculty and staff:

- 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 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](#) of the SHSU Ombuds Office webpage.

## **Activities**

### **Ombuds Office infrastructure**

- The Ombuds Office moved to a new location last year in White Hall in suite C106. Following the move, unexpected water damage required repairs to the office, resulting in a temporary period during which the space could not be used. During the repair period, alternative arrangements were used to maintain access to Ombuds services and protect the privacy and confidentiality of visitors.
- Maintained Ombuds Office website and kept it updated to adhere to all SHSU and TSUS policies
- Maintained Ombuds Office secure database and kept the secured database updated with anonymized data
- Maintained training materials on topics related to conflict management on the ombuds webpage

### **Outreach and synergistic activities**

The past year I continued efforts to increase awareness and integrate Ombuds Office services among faculty and staff on campus. This was done in different ways

- Presented at New Faculty Investment
- Served as DOSO and BIT College liaison
- Presented at Academic Affairs Council meeting on Having Difficult Conversations
- Collaborated with Student Legal and Mediation Services to present a webinar, Neutral Ground: The Ombuds Role in Conflict Resolution, during Conflict Resolution Month
- Prepared Ombuds Office annual report for 2024-2025 academic year
- Presented to the faculty senate about the Ombuds Office
- Conducted a workshop on Team Building for a campus partner

### **Professional Development**

Over the past year, I have pursued educational and professional development opportunities to deepen the knowledge and skills essential for effective ombuds practice. These activities have also helped me strengthen both internal and external networks, enhancing my ability to serve in the ombuds role.

- Participated in IOA's Regional Advisory Committee events

- Participated in IOA symposiums, webinars, workshops
- Participated in IOA community connections meetings, a series of meetings featuring topical discussions facilitated by members of the IOA Board of Directors
- Maintained relations with internal and external networks
- Attended IOA annual conference
- Attended mentoring meetings with my ombuds mentor
- Continued to strengthen my knowledge of the ombuds profession through self-learning, engaging in virtual meetings and discussion boards hosted by the IOA

### **Assisting visitors**

Over the past year, one of my primary priorities has been providing ombuds services to SHSU faculty and staff. As an ombuds, my central responsibility is to support individuals who voluntarily seek assistance in navigating concerns or conflicts. To fulfill this role effectively, I have dedicated significant effort to developing the knowledge and skills necessary to serve visitors in alignment with the International Ombuds Association (IOA) Standards of Practice and Code of Ethics.

Use of the Ombuds Office is entirely voluntary, and all faculty and staff have the right to consult with the university ombuds confidentially and without fear of retaliation.

The data presented in this report is aggregated to ensure the confidentiality of all visitors.

Visitor Summary: A total of 108 visitors (faculty and staff) sought the services of the Ombuds Office. Some sought services for first time while there were some who sought Ombuds Office services a second time for ongoing concerns or for new issues.

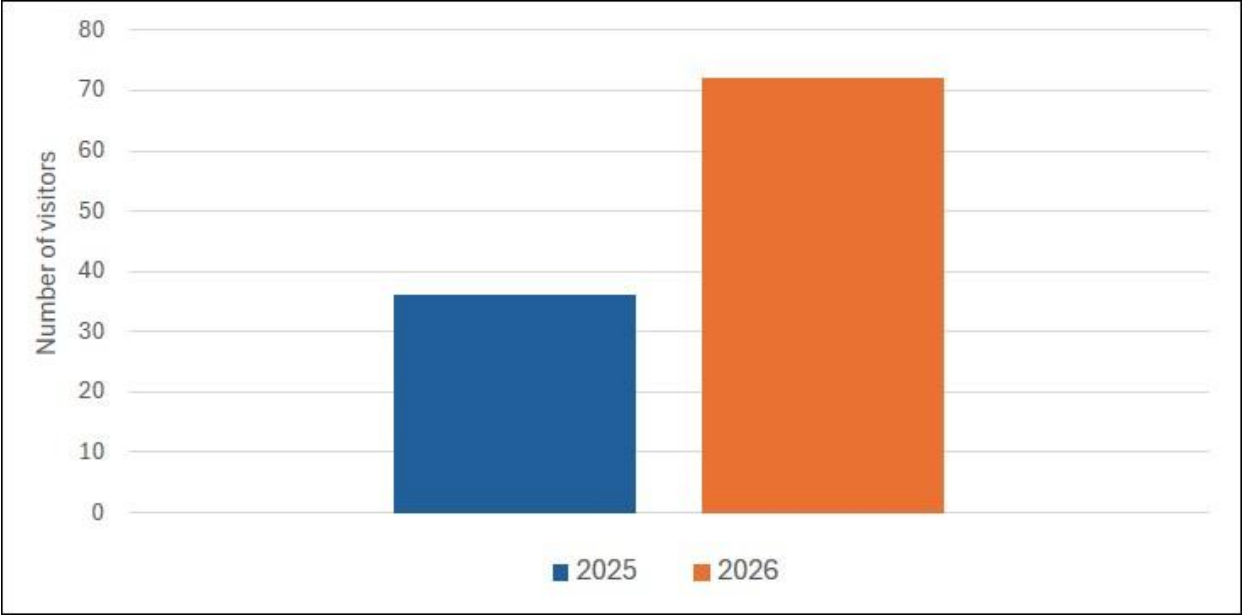
In 106 cases a single visitor was involved. One case involved a pair of visitors, and another case involved four visitors.

81 cases involved staff, and 27 cases involved faculty.

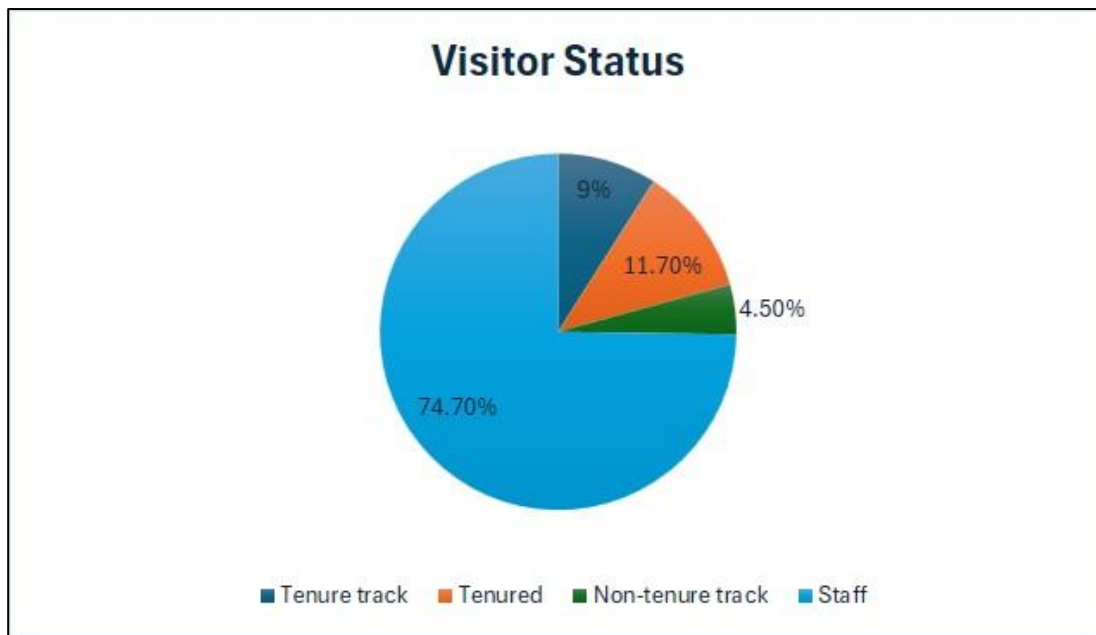
No two appointments were identical in nature. The duration of individual appointments varied significantly, ranging from 45 minutes to 150 minutes. This variation was influenced by several factors, including the complexity of the issues presented, the context in which they arose, and the need to ensure that each visitor had adequate time to express their concerns and be heard.

An analysis of 108 appointments indicates that the average duration was approximately 84 minutes.

Number of appointments varied by month as shown in the charts below



Visitor classification: Visitors who sought the services of the Ombuds Office represented a mix of staff and tenured, tenure track and non-tenure track faculty members.



## **Referrals**

Visitors learn about and are referred to the Ombuds Office through a variety of sources. Many reported being encouraged to visit by colleagues, peers, faculty or staff mentors, supervisors, or other university personnel. Others were referred by campus offices, including People Operations, the Division of Employee Engagement, the Office of Title IX and Discrimination Resolution, department chairs, and other university offices.

Some visitors discovered the Ombuds Office independently through the office brochure or by visiting the Ombuds Office webpage. These varied referral pathways highlight the growing awareness of the Ombuds Office as a resource available to faculty and staff across the university.

Visitors bring a wide range of issues, concerns, and questions to the Ombuds Office. Based on the nature and context of each matter, the Ombuds Office may provide information about or refer visitors to appropriate university resources and offices. These may include the Office of Title IX and Discrimination Resolution, Academic Deans' offices, the Teaching and Learning Center (TLC), the Office of Research and Sponsored Programs (ORSP), People Operations, the Office of Internal Audit, and other campus resources.

These referrals help connect visitors with the appropriate offices and resources while supporting them in identifying potential pathways for addressing their concerns.

Visitors to the Ombuds Office consistently described their experiences as positive and meaningful. Many expressed appreciation for the university's commitment to providing a confidential and supportive resource for faculty and staff. Visitors shared comments such as, "Thank you for listening to me", "it feels good to be heard", "I am so glad that the university has this office", "I feel so much better".

These reflections highlight the value visitors place in having a trusted space to be heard, reflect, and explore their concerns. The word cloud below captures the common themes and sentiments expressed by visitors throughout the year.

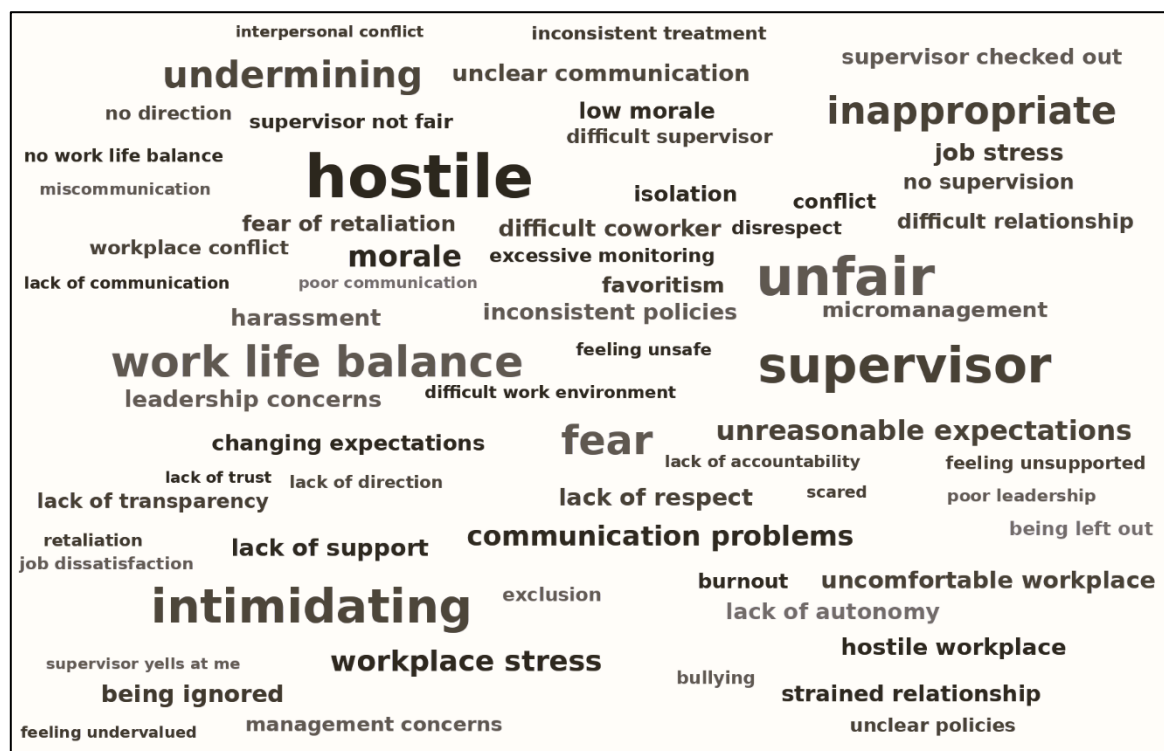
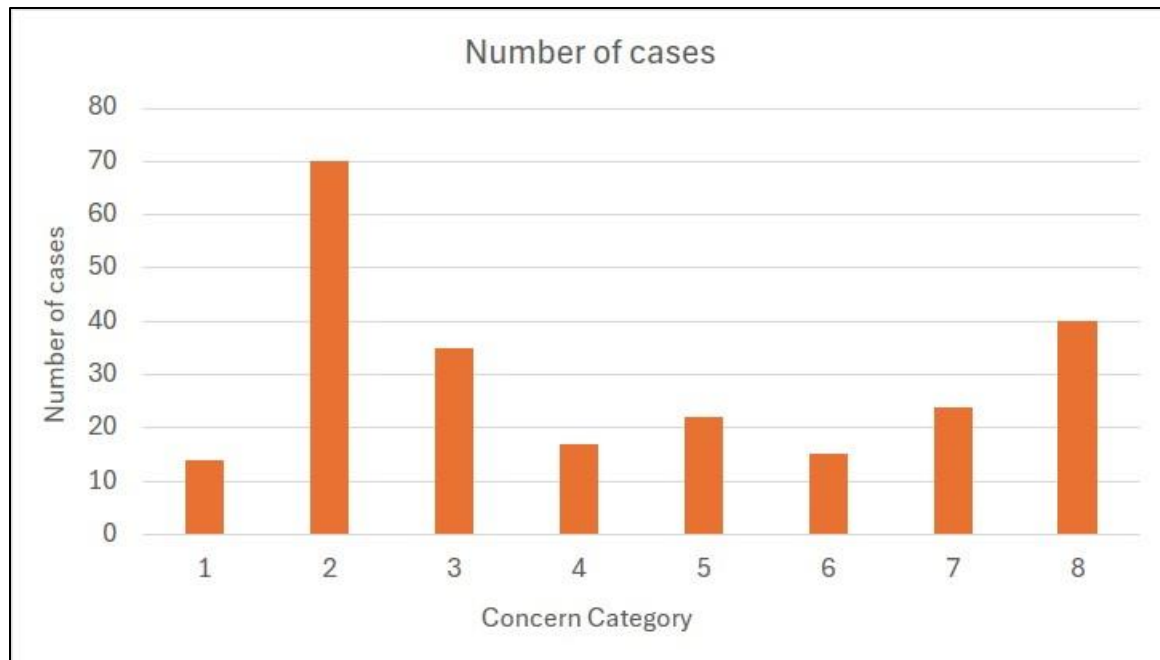


### Summary of concerns

Faculty and staff at SHSU may contact the Ombuds Office with questions, concerns, or challenges related to their work experience. Conversations often reveal additional or underlying concerns, allowing visitors to explore related issues and consider potential options for addressing them.

Over the past year, concerns brought to the Ombuds Office were organized into eight categories based on the International Ombuds Association (IOA) Uniform Reporting Categories.

The chart below illustrates the frequency of concerns raised within each category followed by a visual representation of the key discussion points, shown as a word cloud. A summary table following the word cloud provides further details of the issues and concerns raised, reflecting the perspectives of the faculty and staff who utilized the Ombuds Office services.



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

|    |                                             |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        |
|----|---------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 4. | Career Progression and Development          | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ 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>)</li> <li>○ Job Classification and Description (<i>changes or disagreements over requirements of assignment, appropriate tasks</i>)</li> <li>○ Involuntary Transfer/Change of Assignment (<i>notice, selection and special dislocation rights/benefits, removal from prior duties, unrequested change of work tasks</i>)</li> <li>○ Tenure/Position, Security/Ambiguity (<i>security of position or contract, provision of secure contractual categories</i>)</li> <li>○ Career Progression (<i>promotion, reappointment, or tenure</i>)</li> <li>○ 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>)</li> <li>○ Termination/Non-Renewal (<i>end of contract, non-renewal of contract</i>)</li> <li>○ Position Elimination</li> <li>○ Career Development, Coaching, Mentoring</li> </ul> |
| 5. | Legal, regulatory, and financial compliance | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Lack of or insufficient due process</li> <li>○ Harassment</li> <li>○ Discrimination</li> <li>○ Violation reporting</li> </ul>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 |
| 6. | Safety, Health and Physical Environment     | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Work related stress</li> <li>○ Work life balance</li> </ul>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   |
| 7. | Administrative Issues                       | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Quality of services</li> <li>○ Administrative decision</li> <li>○ Policy clarity</li> <li>○ Policy implementation</li> <li>○ Behavior of administrative staff</li> </ul>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      |
| 8. | Values, ethics, and standards               | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Standards of conduct – fairness, applicability, or lack of behavioral guidelines</li> <li>○ Values and culture</li> </ul>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     |