The goals of the Ombuds Office is to resolve disputes, discuss and mediate concerns and help participants create options and develop action plans to implement in order to create a healthy, happy, effective, productive, efficient and competent workplace. The Ombuds Office works to help design a place where people want to come to work, where they trust their leaders, colleagues, direct reports, and university administration; a place that is not stressful or anxiety producing. Everyone should feel valued and be paid fairly. Diversity should be respected, and inclusion encouraged. All these important workplace values are discussed and encouraged. The Ombuds Office follows fours tenets:

<p style="text-align:center">Neutrality   Informality   Independence   Confidentiality</p>

These help employees resolve conflicts in a non-threatening and unbiased atmosphere and gives each participant new insights and tools to make their workplace the best it can be for the present and the future.

With the multitude of problems brought about by the COVID-19 virus, all meetings with all employees have been done on the phone or over Microsoft Teams. In addition, more departments, colleges and schools have asked and participated in a variety of trainings such as E-communication, emotional intelligence, communicating across generations, civility, etc. With the virus having more people working from home, others furloughed and the stress of teaching and working in a limited face-to-face environment, new challenges have surfaced for U. of L. employees over the course of the last six months.

Between July 2019-July 2020 the Ombuds Office saw approximately 107 faculty, administration and staff members. The majority of people were from the Belknap Campus with roughly 35 participants from the Health Sciences Campus (HSC). Ten of the thirteen schools and colleges were represented and over the course of the year along with several offices and departments not associated with a college or school. Over this time, eight trends emerged. They are the following and are ranked in order of most represented to least:

I. Respect and empathy for colleagues:
   a. Fear of retribution
   b. Isolation factors in work related challenges
   c. Poor listening behaviors when on an electronic meeting
   d. Lack of civility and courtesy when answering emails
   e. Lack of accountability because of total dependence on electronic communication
II. Communication Issues:
   a. Poor skills-
      i. Active listening
      ii. Appropriate wording
      iii. Controlling emotions while speaking
      iv. Understanding barriers
      v. Recognizing different perspectives, cultures, genders
      vi. Willingness to encourage communication even in difficult situations
   b. Work style differences more pronounced and fear of favoritism

III. Budgetary Issues
   a. Temporary decrease in pay and lack of raises
   b. Dwindling resources for teaching and/or research
   c. Lack of professional opportunities because of limited travel, online conferences, and number of opportunities
IV. Hierarchical/Power Issues
   a. Power discrepancies between senior-junior faculty, faculty-staff, supervisor-staff, administration-faculty and staff, and all configurations of these groups oftentimes create inappropriate and rude behaviors
   b. Fear of retaliation for expressing concerns and conflicts
   c. Gender and other diversity situations Bullying
V. Policy and Procedure Issues:
   a. Lack of knowledge, this has become pronounced because of COVID-19
   b. No or little orientation or explanation of policies and procedures for new hires particularly in individual departments
   c. Lack of consistency (especially in some evaluation procedures)
VI. Poorly trained supervisors
   a. Training needed over a long period of time (perhaps first year in supervisory role)-many people are promoted to supervisor and go from colleague to boss. Without training on how to transition from colleague to supervisor, the department can become chaotic and may lose valuable workers. This is particularly true for annual evaluations.
   b. Need accountability for supervisors/managers/leaders
   c. This is particularly difficult during the pandemic since people leave and new supervisors are put in place but are isolated from their direct reports
VII. Toxic Work Environment
   a. Civility an issue
   b. Negative, discounting and/or aggressive interactions which are more obvious online but harder to deal with when it becomes an issue
VIII. Lack of Positive Recognition
   a. Encouragement of professional development and advancement
   b. Recognition within department
   c. Receiving input from all faculty & staff on ways to show appreciation for excellent work
   d. Lack of money to hire and retain talented new staff/faculty

All these concerns and issues, if not addressed, create more severe conflicts. Most of the above concerns are addressed in the new strategic plan. They certainly are addressed in the Cardinal Principles. Many of these issues are continuing from last year, but with a "new normal" at the university, employees are facing different challenges which require different solutions. The Ombuds Office is working to resolve all issues to help make the on and off campus work environment as positive and productive as possible.