

OFFICE OF THE OMBUDSPERSON

2015/2016 ANNUAL REPORT



C. KEVIN COONROD
OMBUDSPERSON
AUBURN UNIVERSITY
ombuds@auburn.edu
(334) 844-7170
Quad Center, Suite 005



I. INTRODUCTION

The 2015/2016 academic year brought another increase in overall utilization of the Office of the Ombudsperson. As in previous years, visitor concerns articulated to the ombudsperson were dominated by needs for better, respectful communication and individual validation, intertwined with underlying human interests such as the need for trust, dignity, fairness, and emotional and psychological safety.

The ombuds works to identify the visitor's underlying interests, and helps the visitor strategize ways to address the conflict that has arisen because those interests have either been encroached upon or otherwise not met. This work is typically performed through one-on-one interactions, mediations or facilitated conversations, or small group meetings. A repertoire of educational presentations concentrating on human relations and conflict resolution has been developed by the ombuds and is continuously expanding.

These seminars and workshops are listed later in this report, and include education on bullying and mobbing, working with high conflict persons, listening actively, and identifying the underlying interest(s) that are central to the conflict at hand. The purpose of this educational outreach is to help Auburn community members better understand conflict, advocate for themselves or others, and adapt or modify their own behavior in a productive manner.

The Office of the Ombudsperson operates independently, neutrally, confidentially and informally. The Ombuds offers guidance on University policy, provides conflict resolution services and education, and gives upward trend information that may assist administrators in effecting systemic change. As such, the Ombuds is a neutral third party who helps community members resolve disputes on their own, without the authority or philosophical inclination to impose a settlement.

Each annual report will contain a short educational description of an aspect of organizational ombudsing. This report begins with a section on the different forms of ombuds practice, followed by a report of the issues and demographics seen by the Ombuds in the 2015/2016 academic year. A list of accomplishments and educational outreach efforts will then conclude this annual edition of the ombuds report.

II. DIFFERENT TYPES OF OMBUDSING

The Auburn University Office of the Ombudsperson is established as an "organizational ombuds" office. Under principles of independence, neutrality, confidentiality, and informality, the ombuds works within the university for the benefit of the individuals comprising our community, as well as for the betterment of the university itself. The organizational ombuds should be distinguished from other models of ombuds, many of which are described below.

The terms "Ombud", "Ombuds", "Ombudsperson", and "Ombudsman" are unknown to or mysterious to many. The words are a derivation of the old Norse *umboðsmaðr*, which

means “agent of the people” and has no gender attribution. The descendants of the name “*umboðsmaðr*” are phonetic outgrowths of the original term.

King Charles XII of Sweden appointed the first *umboðsmaðr* in the 18th century. King Charles had been defeated by Peter the Great in the Great Northern War, and was forced into exile in Turkey. After a decade-long absence from Sweden, the king heard via messengers that members of the Swedish government were imposing power wrongfully against citizens. In response, from beyond the borders of Sweden, Charles appointed an *umboðsmaðr* to check governmental abuses against Swedish citizens.

The closest ancestor to the *umboðsmaðr* is the classical ombudsman. There are many other offshoots in America, including the organizational ombudsperson (the model employed at Auburn University), the media ombuds, and the advocate ombudsperson. This section will provide a brief, and general, overview of each type of ombudsperson.

- Classical ombuds. Classical ombudspersons are typically government employees charged with receiving and investigating citizen complaints against governmental activity, and making reports and recommendations. The classical ombuds usually has subpoena power, but does not have authority to either bring charges or enter binding judgments. The ombuds can bring reports and recommendations to the governing authority, such as a county council, a state legislature, or the governing executive, depending on to whom the ombuds reports. If the ombuds’ recommendations are not followed, the ombuds normally has authority to disclose his or her report and recommendations to the press, other media, or individuals.
- Organizational ombuds. The organizational ombudsperson works behind the scenes within a specific institution. The ombuds operates informally to assist organizational members work through their problems and resolve issues with solutions of their own creation. To this end, the ombudsperson actively listens, coaches, brainstorms, offers policy guidance, and mediates appropriate matters with willing parties. So as not to be influenced in any matters, the ombudsperson is independent, and works with office visitors on a confidential basis. Trend information that can be relayed to pertinent administrators without violating confidences is given in the event it may assist in bringing systemic change. As a neutral resource, the organizational ombudsperson does not represent any person. However, the ombuds may advocate for fairness when appropriate. The majority of ombuds employed at American colleges and universities are organizational ombuds, and are also known as academic ombuds. In contrast to the classical ombuds, the organizational ombudsperson is not an agent of the institution.
- Media ombuds. Media ombuds are employed for the purpose of publicly criticizing their employer. As such, a media ombudsman operates as an advocate for the reader, viewer, and listener of the particular organization, as well as a proponent for the ethical search for truth. The media ombuds is a watchdog whose efforts help improve the output of the organization, and enhances the credibility of the media outlet.
- Advocate ombuds. Advocate ombudspersons normally work in favor of a very limited constituency. Examples are ombuds who investigate practices at long-term care institutions, ombuds who assist injured workers of self-insured businesses,

ombuds who assist consumers who have been targeted by improper banking practices, and ombuds for patients in medical institutions. These ombuds are not neutral and work as advocates to assert the rights of their constituents.

III. REPORT

The following report consists of pie charts and numerical information regarding the different types of visitors and issues presented to the Ombudsperson office. The information contained in this report is purposely general so as to maintain the confidentiality of statements made by office visitors to the Ombuds. The issue categories are derived from the International Ombudsman Association’s Uniform Reporting Categories, a copy of which is attached to this report.

VISITORS TO THE OFFICE

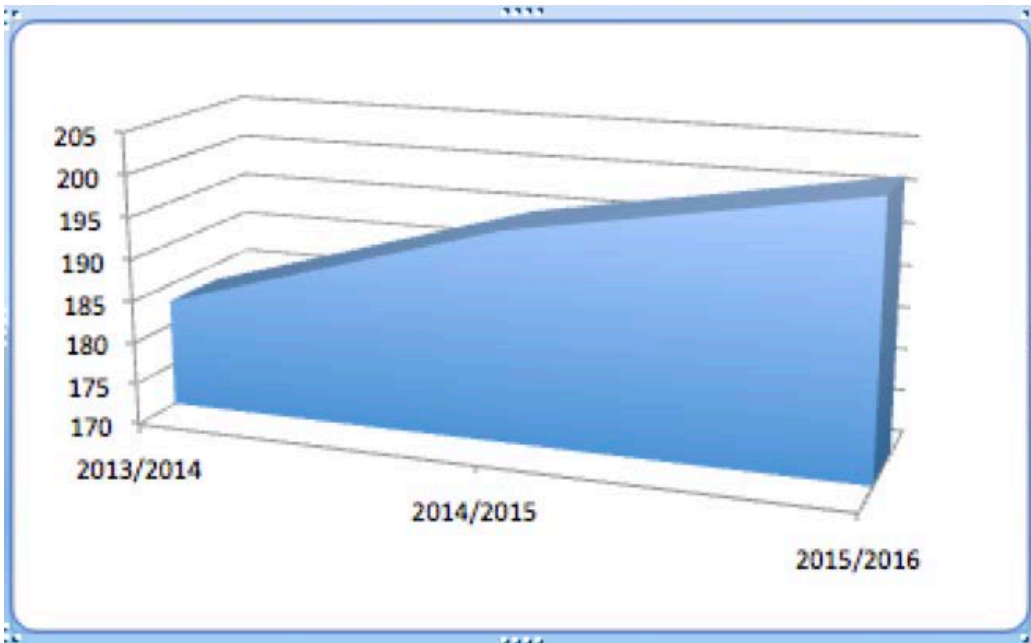


Types of Visitors	Number	Percentage
Initiators	156	77%
Responders	39	19%
Information Contact	7	4%
Total	202	100%

Three Year Retrospective of Office Visitors

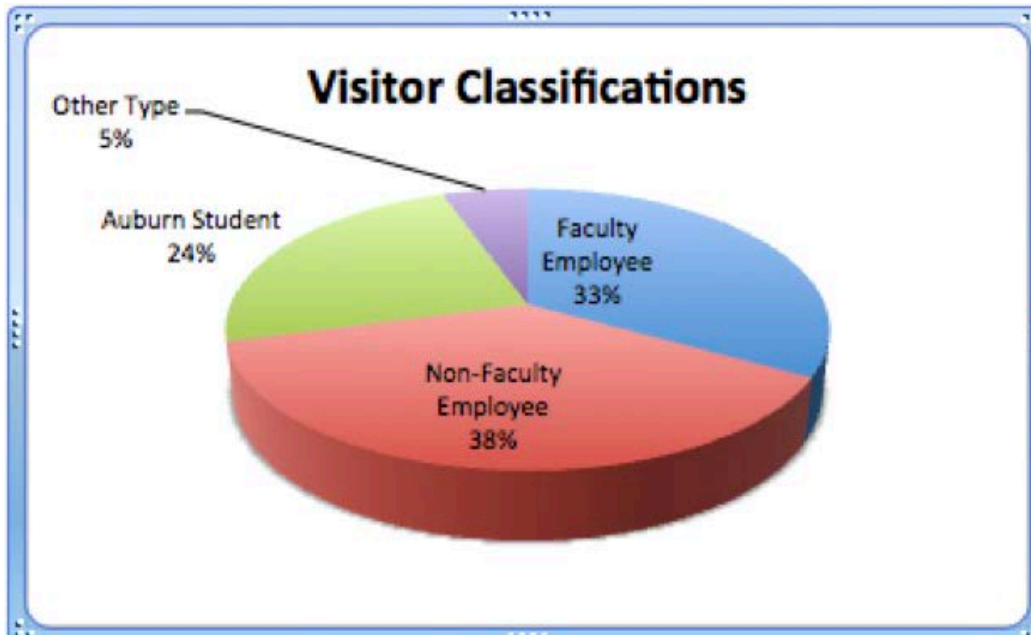
New office visitors have increased steadily each of the three years in which the present ombuds has been employed. “New office visitors” are defined as visitors who bring a new matter to the ombuds. The office visitor can be a repeat visitor, but does not appear statistically in this report unless the subject matter of the visit arose from a new set of

facts and circumstances. For purposes of this report, multiple visits regarding the same matter are not counted.



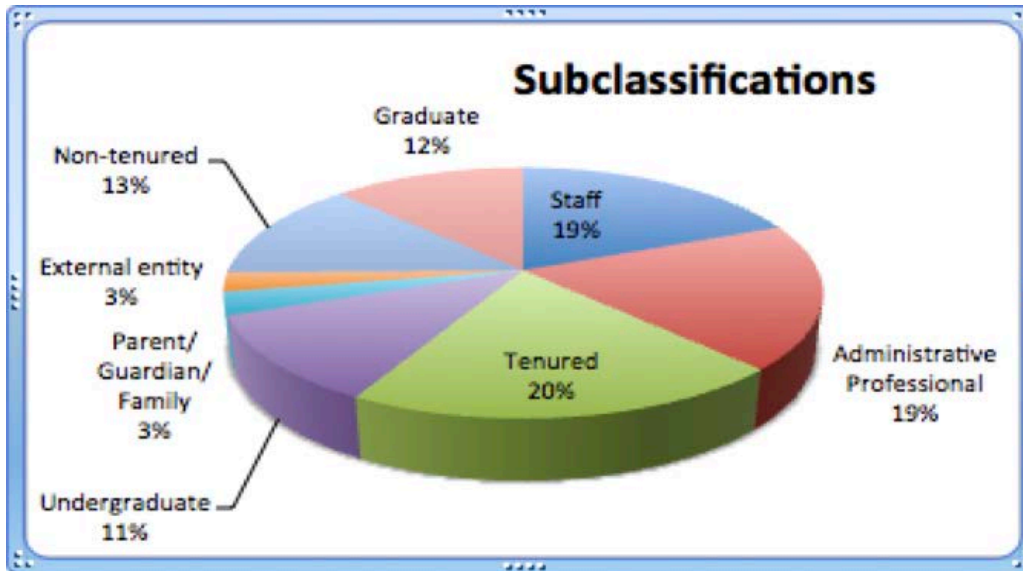
3-year retrospective of visitors	Number
2013 - 2014	183
2014 - 2015	195
2015 - 2016	202

2015 – 2016 Office Visitor Statistics



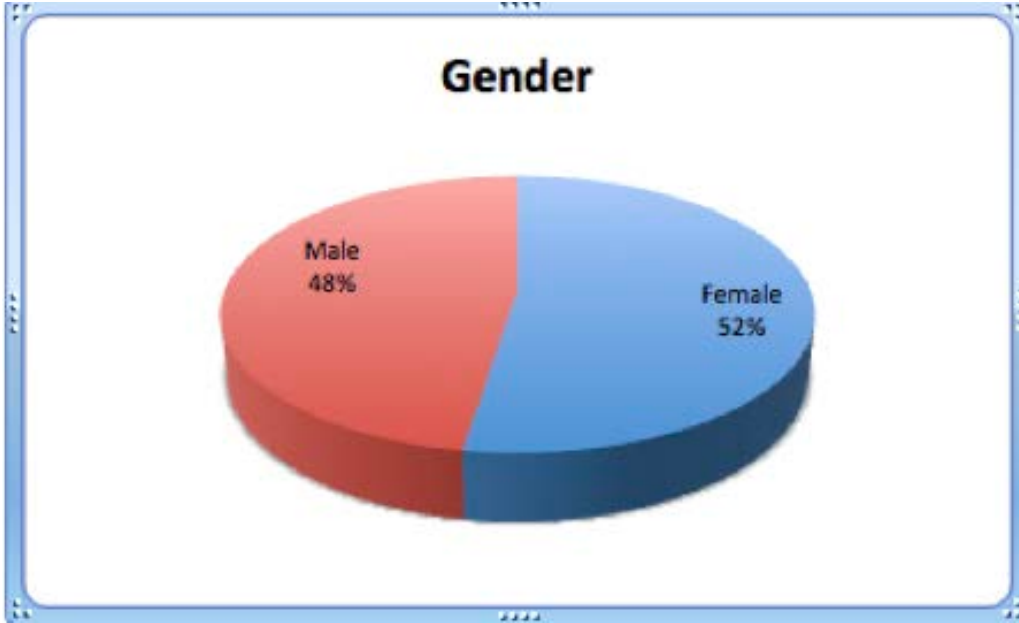
Visitor Classification	Number	Percentage
Non-Faculty Employee	76	38%
Faculty	67	33%
Students	48	24%
Other	11	5%
Total	202	100%

There were increases in all categories of visitor during the 2015 – 2016 year, but the Ombuds continues to emphasize the goal of marketing the office to a broader portion of the student community.

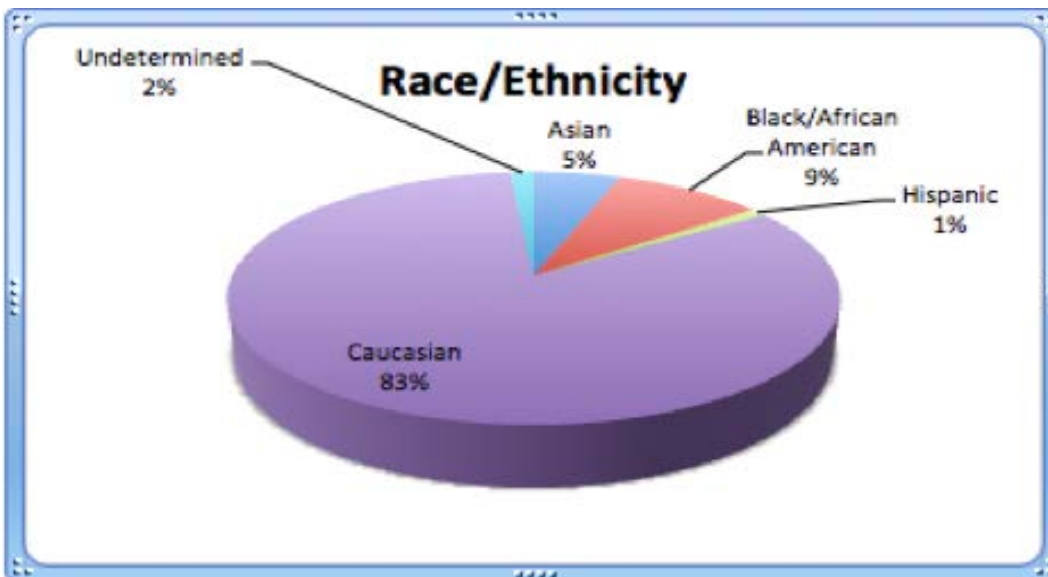


Office Visitors Expanded	Number	Percentage
Tenured Faculty	41	20%
Administrative & Professional	38	19%
Staff	38	19%
Non-tenured Faculty	26	13%
Graduate Students	25	12%
Undergraduates	23	11%
Parent/Guardian/Family	6	3%
External entity	5	3%
Total	202	100%

DEMOGRAPHICS



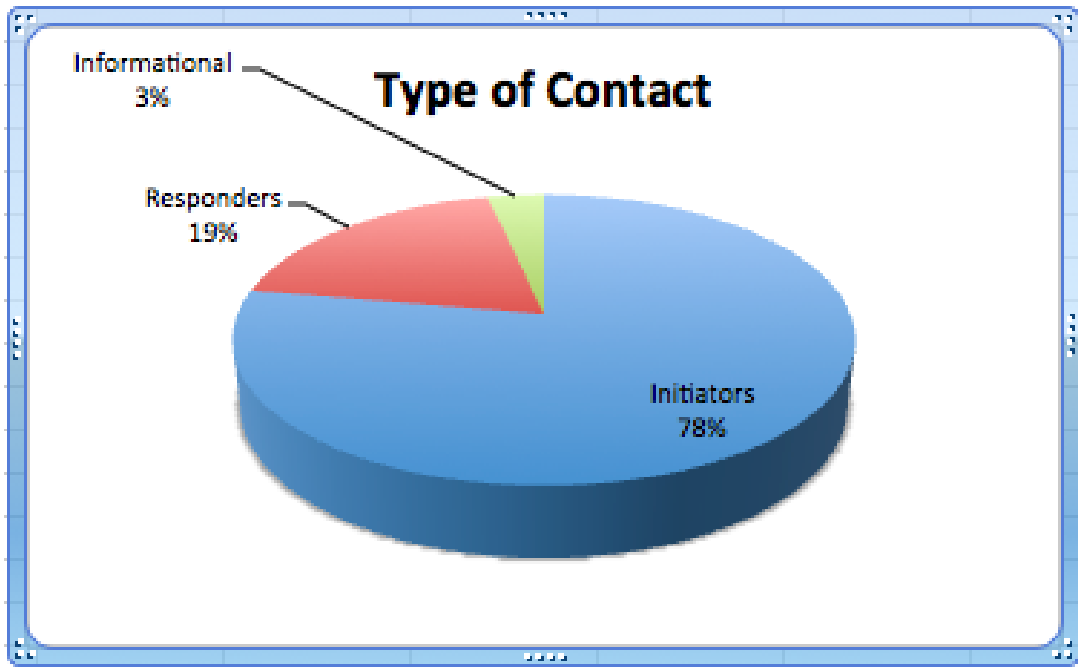
Gender - All visitors	Number	Percentage
Female	105	52%
Male	97	48%



Race/Ethnicity	Number	Percentage
Caucasian	167	83%
African American	19	9%
Asian	11	5%

Race/Ethnicity	Number	Percentage
Undetermined	3	2%
Hispanic	2	1%

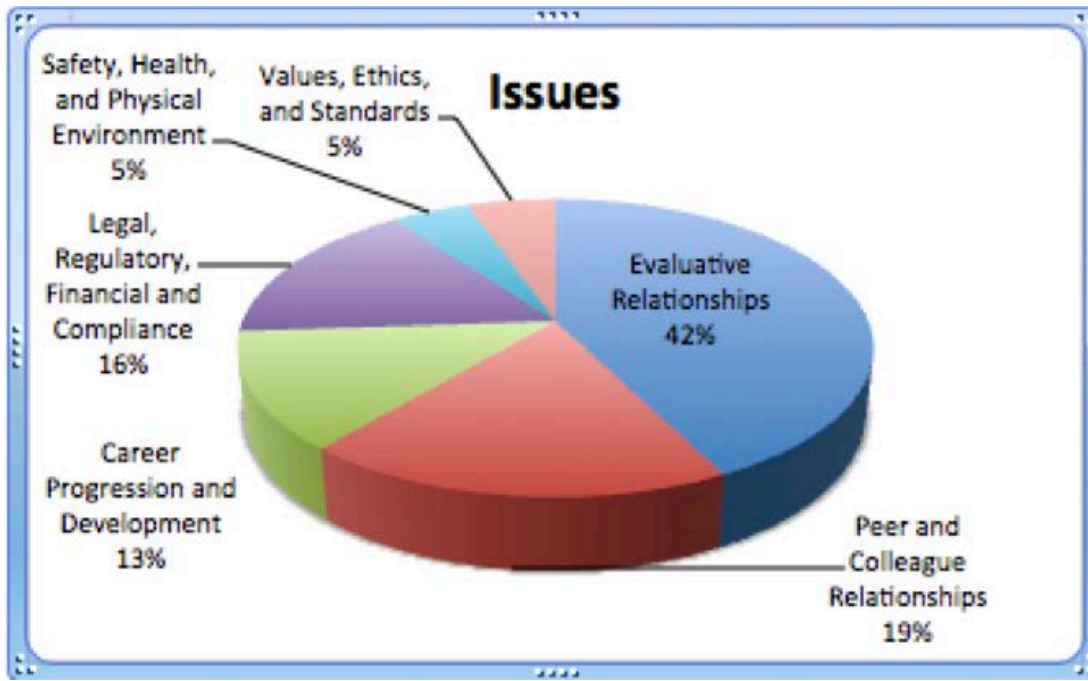
CONTACT AND ISSUE CATEGORIES



Type of Contact	Number	Percentage
Initiators	157	78%
Responders	38	19%
Informational	7	3%
Total	202	100%

GENERAL ISSUE CATEGORIES

This report provides statistics on the types of broad concerns brought to the ombuds, such as evaluative relationships in the employment and classroom context, career challenges and progression through school, as well as legal, safety and ethical issues.



Issue	Number	Percentage
Evaluative Relationships	80	42%
Peer and Colleague Relationships	35	19%
Legal, Regulatory, Financial, and Compliance	30	16%
Career Progression and Development	24	13%
Compensation and Benefits	11	5%
Safety, Health, and Physical Environment	9	5%
Total Discussions of General Themes	189	100%

TOP 7 SUBCATEGORY ISSUES (COMMON THEMES)

This entry highlights common themes on the more specific complaints heard by the ombudsperson. These entries reflect many underlying interests, such as need for respect, fairness, integrity, dignity, trust, and safety.



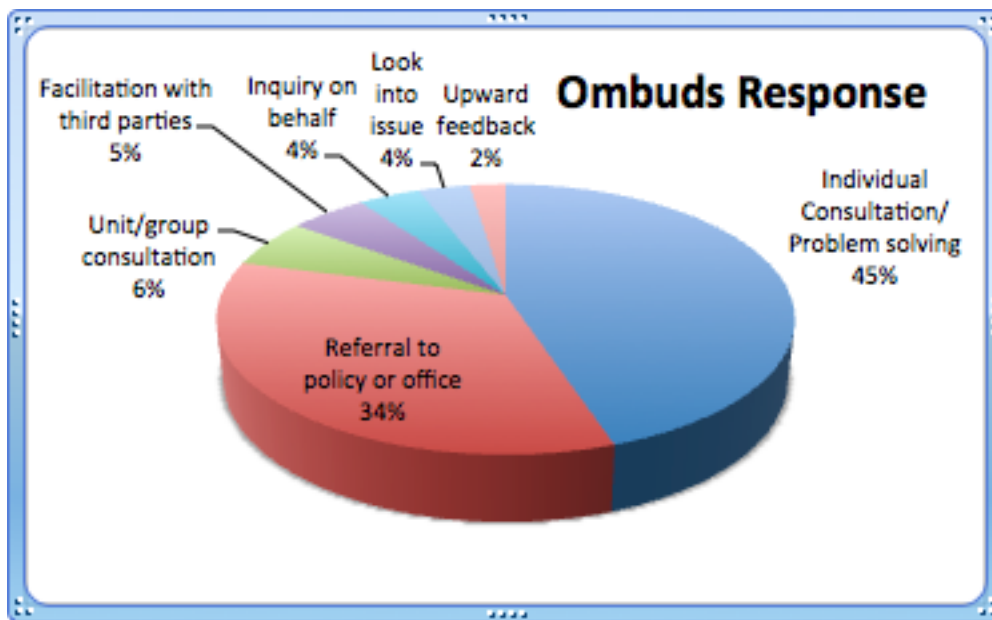
Top 7 Subcategories	Number	Percentage
Respect/Treatment	83	25%
Communication	67	20%
Bullying/Mobbing	49	14%
Trust/Integrity	41	12%
Supervisory effectiveness	37	11%
Equity of treatment	30	9%
Departmental climate	27	9%
Total Discussions of Top 7 Common Themes	334	100%

OTHER SUBCATEGORIES

Other Subcategories	Number
Assignments/Schedules	24
Communication	23
Performance Appraisal/Grading	22
Feedback	21
Reputation	19
Retaliation	16
Diversity-related	13
Business and financial practices	12
Priorities, values, beliefs	11

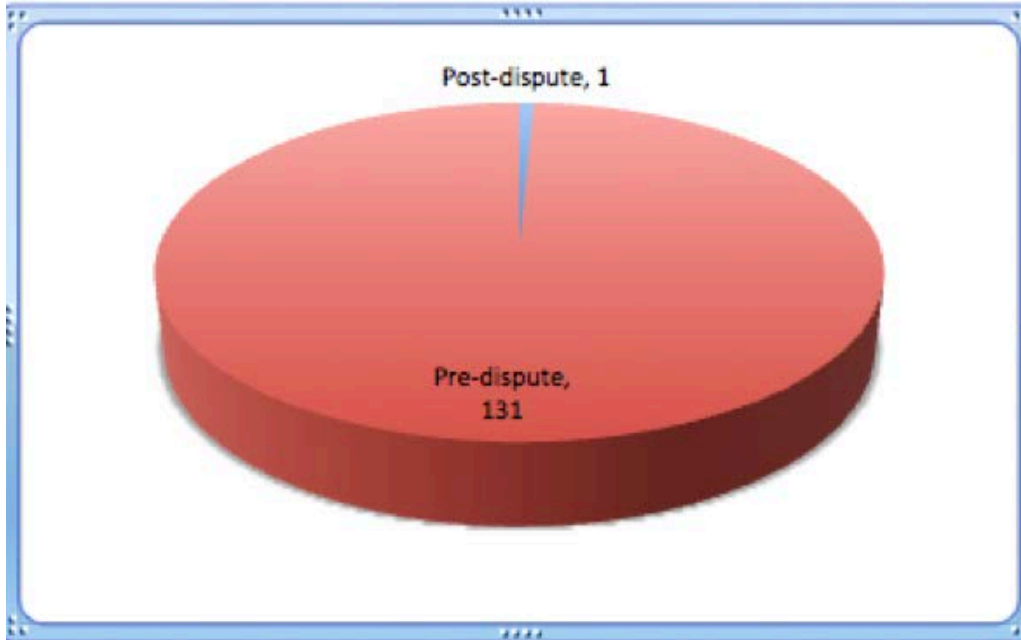
Other Subcategories	Number
Termination/Non-renewal	9
Career development, coaching, mentoring	9
Work related stress and work-life balance	6
Insubordination	6
Property damage	5
Criminal activity	5
Organizational climate	5
Values and culture	5
Strategic and mission-related	4
Leadership and management	4
Standards and conduct	4
Tenure/Position security/Job ambiguity	4
Career progression	4

OMBUDS RESPONSE



Ombuds Response	Number	Percentage
Individual Consultation/Problem solving	131	45%
Referral to policy or office	100	34%
Unit/Group consultation	17	6%
Facilitation with third parties	15	5%
Inquiry on behalf	12	4%
Look into issue	10	4%
Upward feedback	7	2%
Notify on behalf	1	0%
Total response	283	100%

PRE AND POST-DISPUTE



Pre and Post-Dispute	Number	Percentage
Pre-dispute matters	131	99%
Post-dispute matters	1	1%
Total	132	100%

Almost all matters brought to the Ombuds are not in a formal posture, such as in a grievance or lawsuit. The Ombuds does not participate in formal processes. The office is available to help individuals resolve things on their own, without having to seek a decision through a formal procedure; to help them understand University policy regarding formal processes; or to help them work through complications after a formal dispute process has ended.

IV. ACCOMPLISHMENTS

- Developed and presented new conflict resolution seminars on active listening, identifying underlying interests, and teenage bullying behavior.
- Panelist on conflict resolution topics at the Conference of Southern Graduate Schools 45th Annual Meeting in Charlotte, North Carolina.
- Presented *Understanding Bullying and Mobbing in the Workplace and Academe* at the 6th Annual Auburn University Anti-Bullying Summit in Peachtree City, Georgia.

V. PROFESSIONAL ORGANIZATIONS AND SELECTED CONFERENCES ATTENDED

- Member, International Ombudsman Association. Co-chair for 11th Annual IOA Conference in Seattle, Washington, with 404 attendees.
- Member, California Caucus of College and University Ombuds. Attended 43rd Annual California Caucus Conference in Pacific Grove, California. Member, CCCUO Board of Directors.
- Member, Colloquium on Abrasive Conduct in Higher Education. Attended 4th Annual CACHE Conference in San Francisco, California.
- Member, Alabama State Court Mediator Roster

VI. EDUCATIONAL OUTREACH

The Ombudsperson speaks to numerous groups throughout the year to inform them of the services offered by the Ombuds office, and to provide educational seminars and workshops. The Ombuds is available for, and solicits invitations from all groups to appear as a speaker or to present conflict resolution seminars. Seminars and workshops presented in the 2015 – 2016 academic year were:

- Understanding Bullying and Mobbing in the Workplace and Academe
- Working with High Conflict Persons
- The Art and Productive Capacity of Active Listening
- Identifying Underlying Interests: Tips from Nature, History and the Cinema
- NBZ – The No Bullying Zone (for AU camp counselors)
- Cooperative Negotiation Strategy, with Dr. Stefan Eisen of the Maxwell AFB War College

VII. CONCLUSION

The Office of the Ombudsperson provides a safe, confidential refuge with which to voice and discuss issues related to one's experiences at Auburn University. As an office committed to the organizational ombudsperson format, help is provided in a non-judgmental and confidential environment. Through listening, coaching, mediating and educating, the ombuds' ideal goal is to assist each community member empower her or himself to resolve issues amicably, and in the most productive manner possible.