

OFFICE OF THE OMBUDSPERSON

2016/2017 ANNUAL REPORT



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



I. INTRODUCTION

Visitor use of the Office of the Ombudsperson increased markedly during the 2016/2017 academic year. The steady rise in new visitors during this author's first three years as ombudsperson grew to a gain of 34% over the previous academic year. The ombuds continuously attempts to build trust with his constituents and confidence in the work of the office throughout the university community. The growth in office use reflects success in those critical goals, as well as in greater knowledge in the existence of the ombuds services at Auburn University.

Trends reflected in this year's report are again highlighted by office visitor needs for respectful communications and emotional security and well-being. Concerns in job status increased from prior years as "career progression and development" increased to 18% of complaints, compared to the prior two years at 13% each. Additionally, usership of the office by Black/African American and Asian constituents has increased significantly since the first year of this ombuds' presence on campus.

The Auburn University Office of the Ombudsperson helps all members of the community work through troubles and obstacles. Through confidential discussions, the ombuds helps his office visitors strategize ways with which to proceed constructively. As part of his practice, the ombuds provides coaching and mediation services, guidance on university policies, and relates non-confidential trend information to appropriate administrators that may assist in creating systemic change. Additionally, the ombuds provides educational workshops designed to help community members work and relate with each other productively and respectfully.

Each annual report features an educational component of the practice of ombudsing. The Office of the Ombudsperson operates under four interrelated principles: 1) Independence; 2) Neutrality; 3) Confidentiality; and 4) Informality. This report will speak to the first of these principles, Independence.

Set forth afterwards is a non-confidential statistical report of issues and demographics heard and seen by the ombuds. Concluding the report will be lists of accomplishments, involvement with professional organizations, and educational outreach designed to help our university members work together more amicably and cohesively.

II. INDEPENDENCE

The purpose of ombuds independence is to ensure that any person within the organization -- student, staff, or faculty -- will have a safe place to discuss a problem confidentially, without fear of external political influence or another unit's or individual's agenda being imposed upon them.

The ombuds office is a voluntary resource designed to help university constituents navigate through troubled situations. In that process, the ombuds' work covers the spectrum of all people associated with the university, and the matters presented often involve people from different sectors. For example, issues brought to the ombuds office

can involve disagreements or differing viewpoints between supervisors and supervisees, students and professors, students and other students, faculty and colleagues, as well as the gamut of all university members, including administrators.

Those parties in conflict usually have different interests and opposing viewpoints, and sometimes contrasting values. For this reason, it is helpful to have the assistance of an independent, neutral third party, unconstrained by self-interest or other individuals' influence, to help them work through problems honestly and in accordance with their own principles and interests.

The intertwining relationship between independence and neutrality fosters objectivity within the ombudsperson. With this objectivity, the ombuds can have the ability to identify and acknowledge those interests that are important to office visitors, which interests opposing parties have in common, and to then encourage the parties to resolve divergent interests in a manner that favors them both. Central to this process is focus on the parties' particular interests, without interjecting the desires and preferences of others into the conflict.

Of course, university policy, mores, and custom can factor into the parties' decisions, as they consider and balance the potential benefits and consequences of their possible plans of action. The independent guidance of the ombudsperson can help his or her office visitors weigh the impact of their plan against those external factors; as well as to understand the impact on others within the university community and hierarchy, and their possible reactions. In simpler terms, the ombuds assists office visitors make knowing decisions that they believe are best for them but does not attempt to shape those decisions in accordance with his or her own, or others' preferences.

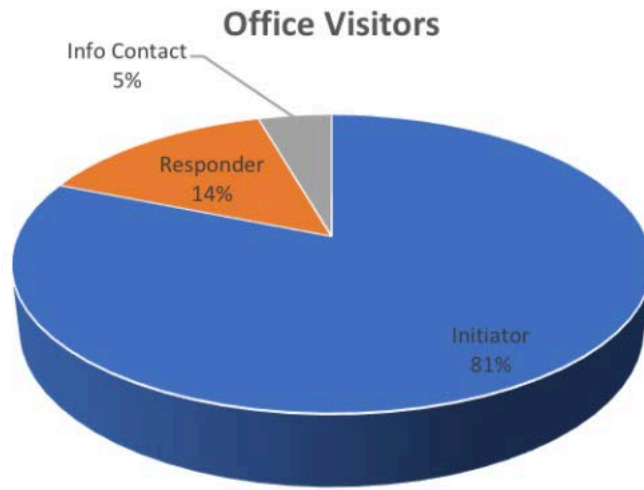
The ombuds office is not an administrative arm of the university. Since the ombuds is not an administrator, he or she has no authority to make decisions or give directives to any person or entity within the organization. That would be anathema to the independence, neutrality and informality of the role. The Auburn University Office of the Ombudsperson subscribes to the Standards and Practices and Code of Ethics of the International Ombudsman Association. Pursuant to the Code of Ethics, "The [Organizational] Ombudsman is independent in structure, function, and appearance to the highest degree possible within the organization." Per the Standards of Practice, "The Ombudsman Office and the Ombudsman are independent from other organizational entities."

To be sure, the ombuds is paid by Auburn University and is subject to termination just like any other organizational member. As an independent help resource, however, the ombuds avoids becoming entangled in situations where another individual can direct ombuds work or have influence over him. In this way, the ombuds maintains an egalitarian outlook toward all office visitors that provides the foundation upon which he or she fulfills the ombuds mission of treating all visitors with respect, dignity, and honor.

III. REPORT

The following report consists of charts and statistical 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

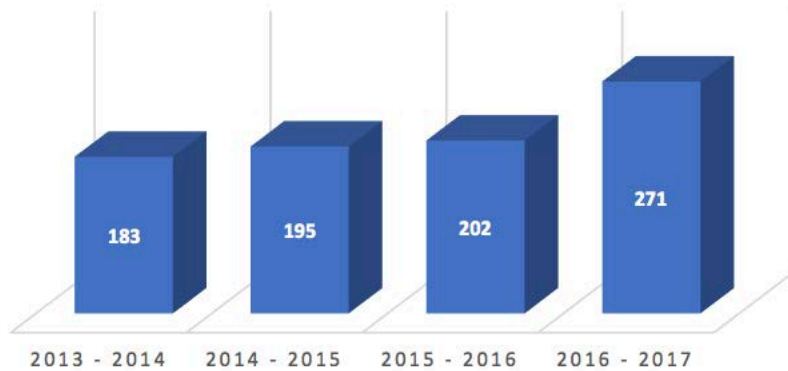


Types of Visitors	Number	Percentage
Initiators	220	81%
Responders	39	14%
Information Contact	12	5%
Total	271	100%

Four Year Retrospective of Office Visitors

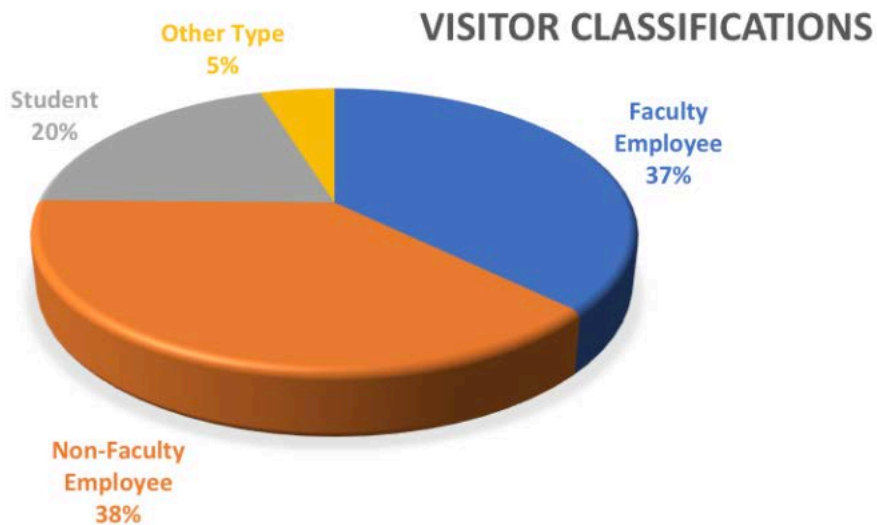
As stated above, the ombuds office enjoyed a 34% increase in new office visitors over the previous academic year. “New office visitors” are defined as visitors who bring a new matter to the ombuds. The office visitor can be a repeat visitor, but does not appear statistically in this report unless the subject matter of the subsequent visit arose from a new set of facts and circumstances. For purposes of this report, multiple appointments regarding the same facts and circumstances are not counted.

FOUR YEAR RETROSPECTIVE - OFFICE VISITORS



4-year retrospective of visitors	Number
2013 - 2014	183
2014 - 2015	195
2015 - 2016	202
2016 - 2017	271

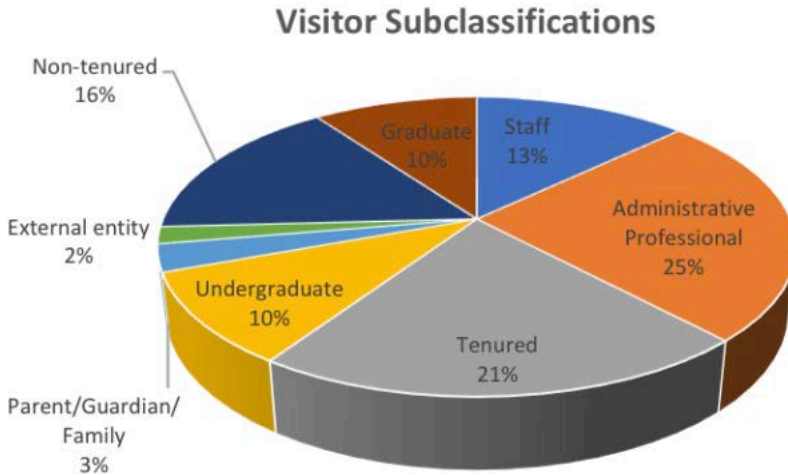
2016 – 2017 Office Visitor Statistics



Visitor Classification	Number	Percentage
Non-Faculty Employee	103	38%
Faculty	101	37%
Students	54	20%

Visitor Classification	Number	Percentage
Other	13	5%
Total	271	100%

There were increases in all categories of visitor during the 2016/2017 year. This is marked by a 35% increase in A & P and Staff first-time visits, and a 50% increase in Faculty visitors from the previous year.

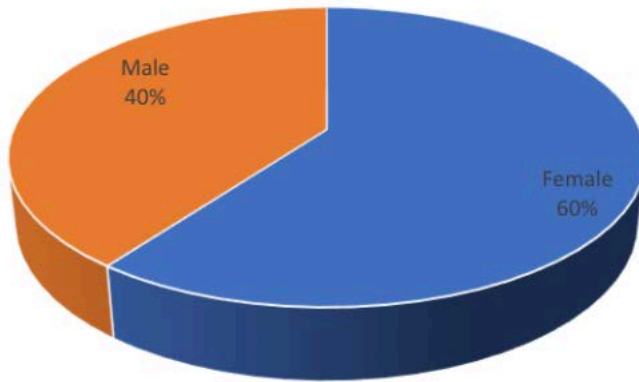


Office Visitors Expanded	Number	Percentage
Administrative & Professional	68	25%
Tenured Faculty	58	21%
Non-tenured Faculty	43	16%
Staff	35	13%
Graduate Students	27	10%
Undergraduates	27	10%
Parent/Guardian/Family	8	3%
External entity	5	2%
Total	271	100%

DEMOGRAPHICS

GENDER

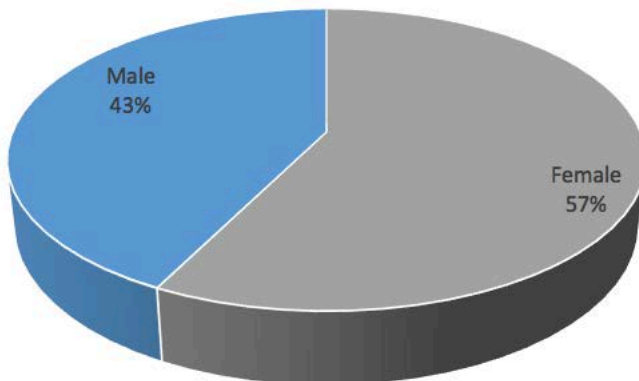
Overall Gender



Gender - All visitors	Number	Percentage
Female	163	60%
Male	108	40%
Total	271	100%

Faculty Gender

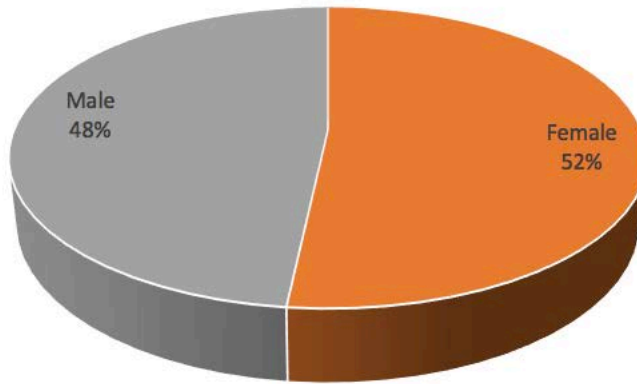
Faculty Gender



Gender - Faculty	Number	Percentage
Female	58	57%
Male	43	43%
Total	101	100%

Tenured Faculty Gender

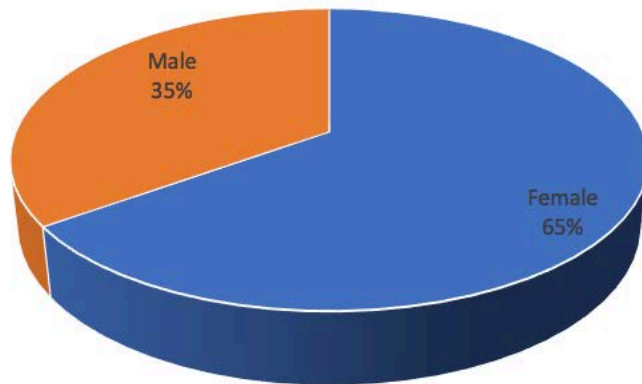
Tenured Faculty



Gender - Tenured Faculty	Number	Percentage
Female	30	52%
Male	28	48%
Total	58	100%

Non-Tenured Faculty Gender

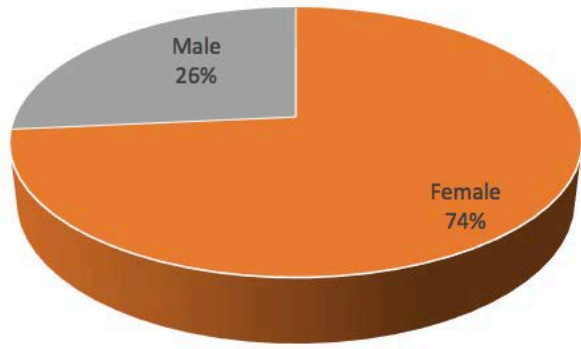
Non-Tenured Faculty



Gender – Non-Tenured Faculty	Number	Percentage
Female	28	65%
Male	15	35%
Total	43	100%

Administrative & Professional Gender

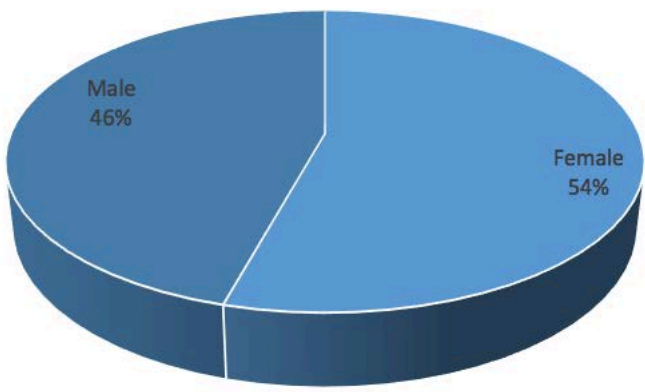
Administrative & Professional Gender



Gender – A & P	Number	Percentage
Female	50	74%
Male	18	26%
Total	68	100%

Staff Gender

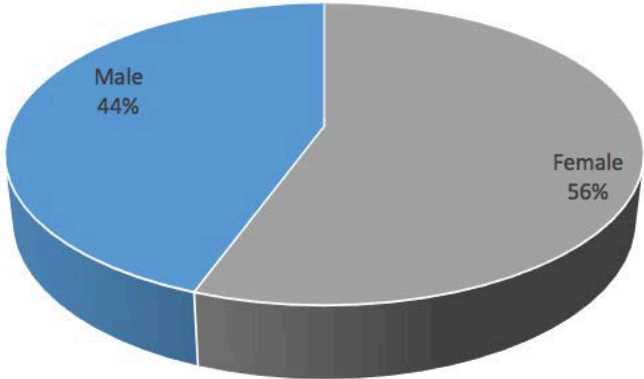
Staff Gender



Gender - Staff	Number	Percentage
Female	19	54%
Male	16	46%
Total	35	100%

Student Gender

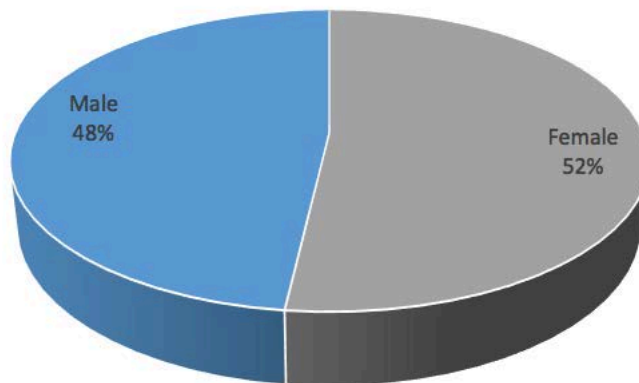
Students



Gender - Students	Number	Percentage
Female	30	56%
Male	24	44%
Total	54	100%

Graduate Student Gender

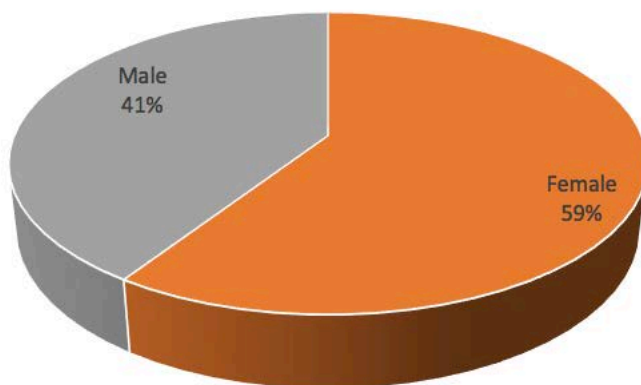
Graduate Students



Gender - Graduate Students	Number	Percentage
Female	14	52%
Male	13	48%
Total	27	100%

Undergraduate Student Gender

Undergraduate Students

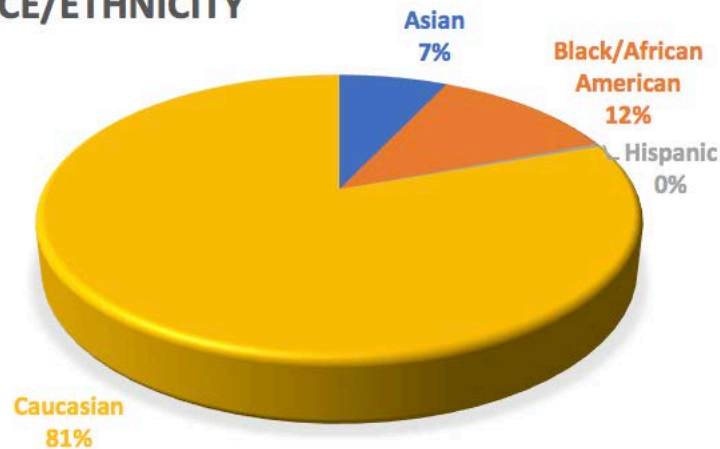


Gender - Undergraduate Students	Number	Percentage
Female	16	59%

Gender – Undergraduate Students	Number	Percentage
Male	11	41%
Total	27	100%

RACE/ETHNICITY

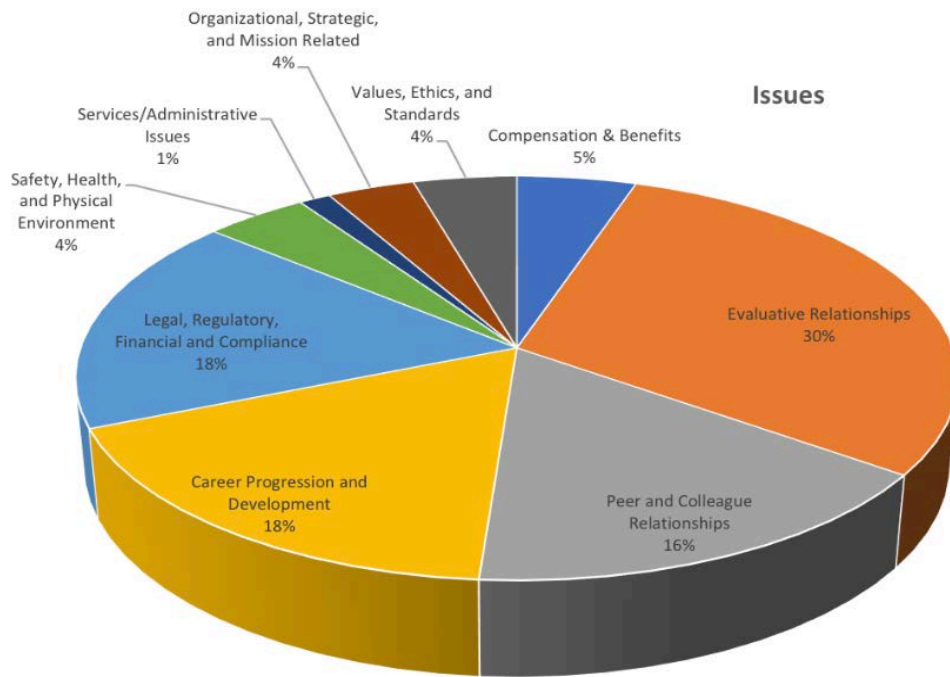
RACE/ETHNICITY



Race/Ethnicity	Number	Percentage
Caucasian	218	81%
Black/African American	33	12%
Asian	19	7%
Hispanic	1	0%
Total	271	100%

GENERAL ISSUE CATEGORIES

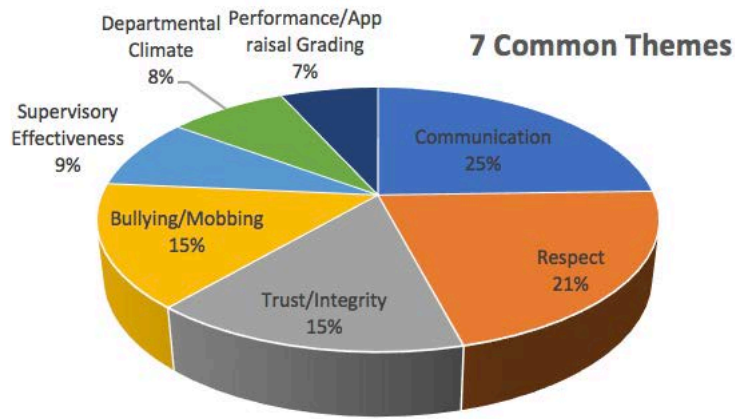
This report provides statistics on the types of broad concerns brought to the ombuds, such as evaluative relationships in the employment and classroom context, career challenges and progression through school, as well as legal, safety and ethical issues.



Issue	Number	Percentage
Evaluative Relationships	89	30%
Career Progression and Development	52	18%
Legal, Regulatory, Financial and Compliance	52	18%
Peer and Colleague Relationships	48	16%
Compensation and Benefits	15	5%
Values, Ethics, and Standards	13	4%
Safety, Health, and Physical Environment	13	4%
Organizational, Strategic, and Mission Related	11	4%
Services/Administrative Issues	4	1%
Total Discussions of General Themes	297	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 human interests, such as need for respect, fairness, integrity, dignity, trust, and safety.



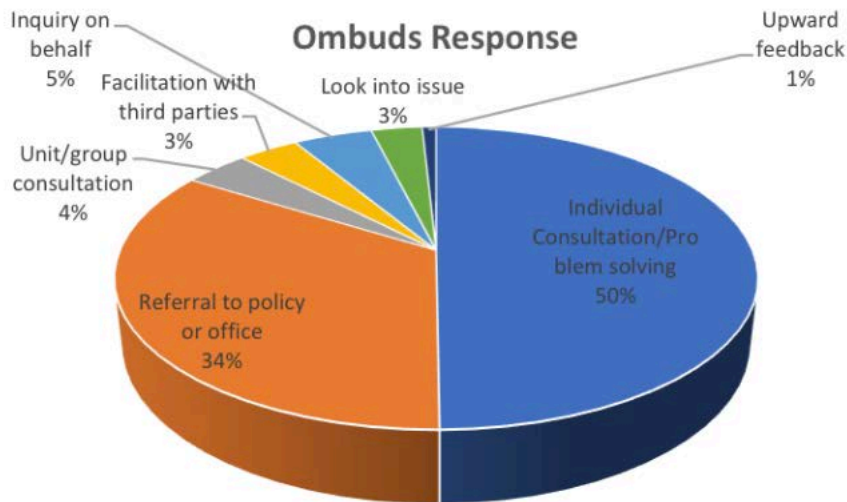
Top 7 Subcategories	Number	Percentage
Communication	102	25%
Respect	89	21%
Trust/Integrity	64	15%
Bullying/Mobbing	63	15%
Supervisory Effectiveness	36	9%
Departmental Climate	34	8%
Performance/Appraisal/Grading	28	7%
Total Discussions of Top 7 Common Themes	416	100%

OTHER SUBCATEGORIES

Other Subcategories	Number
Equity of Treatment	25
Diversity Related	24
Retaliation	24
Reputation	23
Business and Financial Practices	18
Assignments, Schedules	17
Feedback	17
Priorities, Values, Beliefs	16
Career Progression	15
Career Development, Coaching, Mentoring	15
Discrimination	14

Other Subcategories	Number
Tenure/Position Security/Ambiguity	12
Property Damage	11
Termination/Non-renewal	10
Standards of Conduct	9
Values and Culture	9
Compensation	9
Harassment	8
Job Application/Selection and Recruitment	7
Leadership and Management	7
Job Classification and Description	6
Involuntary Transfer/Change of Assignment	5
Safety	5
Resignation	5
Organizational Climate	5
Change Management	5
Use of Positional Power/Authority	5
Benefits	4
Criminal Activity	4
Administrative Decisions and Interpretation/Application of Rules	4

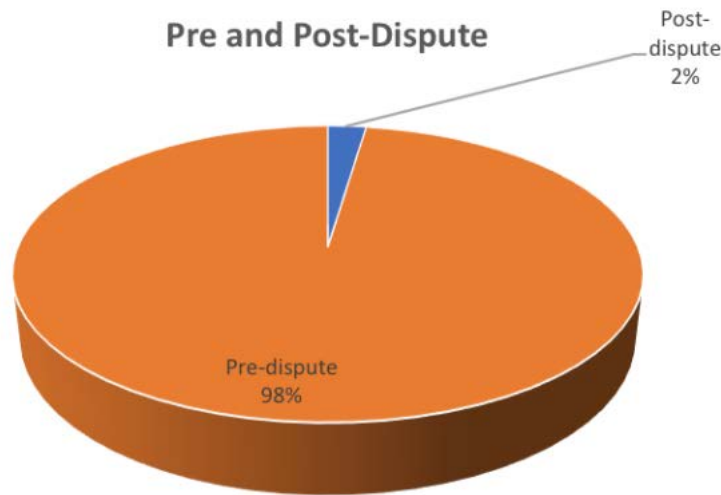
OMBUDS RESPONSE



Ombuds Response	Number	Percentage
Individual Consultation/Problem solving	179	50%

Ombuds Response	Number	Percentage
Referral to policy or office	122	34%
Inquiry on Behalf	17	4%
Unit/Group Consultation	14	5%
Facilitation with third parties	13	3%
Look into issue	11	3%
Upward feedback	3	1%
Total response	359	100%

PRE AND POST-DISPUTE



Pre and Post-Dispute	Number	Percentage
Pre-dispute matters	267	98%
Post-dispute matters	4	2%
Total	271	100%

Almost all matters brought to the Ombuds were in an informal state and not in a formal process such as a grievance or lawsuit. As an informal resource, the Ombuds does not participate in formal processes. The office is available to help individuals resolve matters on their own, without having to seek a resolution imposed upon them through a formal procedure. With the parties' consent and collaboration, the ombuds can help disputants heal and work toward a positive future relationship after a decision in a formal process has been made and the formal matter concluded. There were four post-formal matters attended to this year by the ombuds, which was a significant gain from previous years.

IV. ACCOMPLISHMENTS

- Developed an educational package on teamwork, consisting of a stand-and-deliver presentation, teambuilding exercises, one-on-one meetings with individuals, and facilitation of intermittent group meetings

- Presented *Working with High Conflict Persons* at Auburn University's Truman Pierce 7th International Anti-Bullying Summit, Peachtree City, Georgia
- Presented *Bullies, Jerks, and Empathy* to AU Department Heads and Chairs
- Luncheon speaker, *Navigating Toward Your PhD, The Important Role Good Communication Skills Play in Doctoral Success*, NSF Alliance for Graduate Education & Professoriate Retreat, a Tuskegee University, Alabama State University, and Auburn University STEM Education partnership, at Callaway Gardens, Georgia

V. PROFESSIONAL ORGANIZATIONS, AND SELECTED CONFERENCES ATTENDED

- Member, International Ombudsman Association
 - Co-chair for 12th Annual IOA Conference in Minneapolis, Minnesota, with 384 attendees
 - Certified Organizational Ombudsman Practitioner
- Member, California Caucus of College and University Ombuds
 - Attended 42nd Annual Conference in Pacific Grove, California
 - Member, CCCUO Board of Directors
- Member, Colloquium on Abrasive Conduct in Higher Education
- 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 2016/2017 academic year were:

- Teamwork: Building Results Collaboratively and Amicably
- 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 offers university community members a safe and unique haven to confidentially discuss any issue of concern to them. Because of the ombuds' independence and neutrality, he or she does not have a stake in the matter. This enables the ombuds to work productively with the office visitor, as well as others involved, in an effort to resolve the matter in accordance with their particular needs. In turn, confidence and trust in the office is engendered, leading to greater use of the ombuds' services.