

**Annual Report  
Office of the Ombudsperson  
2021 – 2022**



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## I. INTRODUCTION

There were slightly fewer new office visitors<sup>1</sup> this year than the previous one, 2020 – 2021. We had 278 office visitors this year and 296 the one before. Campus returned to business as usual, and no employees were furloughed or laid off because of covid-related cutbacks. This report will include a section on Self-Empowerment of Office Visitors, a statistical report of demographic and issue information, and a listing of selected activities performed by the ombuds.

Types of matters in which the ombuds assists office visitors annually include employee and student complaints of mistreatment or bullying by supervisors, professors, or colleagues; faculty disagreements with other faculty members; student academic issues with instructors; parent and student complaints regarding university policies and decisions; assisting students negotiate issues with landlords on their own; assisting students work through issues with other students; helping students and employees understand affirmative action, equal employment, and Title IX complaints and processes; assisting international students work through student immigration issues and acclimation to American culture; and helping students understand academic honesty violation processes, student conduct code allegations, and student grievances against professors.

## II. OFFICE VISITOR SELF-EMPOWERMENT

Office visitors come to the Office of the Ombudsperson for a variety of reasons, but most often they need assistance navigating an obstacle. Frequently, they walk through the door without a notion of how to handle their situation. Some are in crisis, and almost all are in some form of conflict.

The confidential ombuds process allows these community members to unveil the facts surrounding their issue and to articulate the impact it has upon them. Through deep and skillful listening, the empathic ombuds supports the office visitor as they relate their circumstances and helps them

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<sup>1</sup> New office visitors” are defined as visitors who bring an initial new matter to the ombuds office. 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 succeeding appointments regarding the same facts and circumstances are not counted.

reveal important but sensitive details about the problem. When the office visitors leave their session the burden of conflict has usually become much less weighty, and they have settled upon a pathway towards resolution. Commonly the office visitor has empowered themselves by engaging in a constructive session in which their needs are the focus, and they have received beneficial tools and knowledge to address their situation.

No person ever empowered themselves by being told what to do. Our office visitors come to the ombuds office because they are in a difficulty or crisis and don't know how to go forward. Our goal is to assist the office visitor make the best decision possible for themselves under the circumstances. We seek to help that person empower themselves to meet their needs and resolve their issue. When he or she confronts and overcomes their challenge, they grow. They have a greater sense of self-worth and stronger control over their own autonomy.

In addition to listening actively and exercising true empathy, the ombuds offers a number of tools to help their office visitor gain confidence and competence to positively address their problem. As an impartial support resource, the ombuds can help the visitor open their minds and visualize different sides or perspectives on the issue. Through understanding the other person's interests and positions, creative remedies can often be fashioned that will meet the needs and requirements of both individuals.

The ombuds coaches the office visitor to respond to another with appropriate conflict resolution and management techniques. The Auburn University ombuds has a catalogue of seminars which help people understand each other and give tools to relate to others respectfully and successfully. The topics include active listening, understanding and identifying the other's and one's own underlying interests, productive teamwork concepts, and fundamental conflict resolution techniques. These seminars are given to large audiences, as well as one-on-one to office visitors in the confidential privacy of the ombuds office.

The ombuds also educates and gives guidance on university policies and processes. Office visitors often seek counsel when they have been reprimanded or evaluated unfairly, wish to file a grievance or are defending

one, have had a student conduct or academic dishonesty allegation filed against them, or would like to know pros and cons of particular actions they are considering taking. The ombuds will give guidance on the relevant policy(ies) and help the visitor problem-solve different ways in which they may choose to go forward.

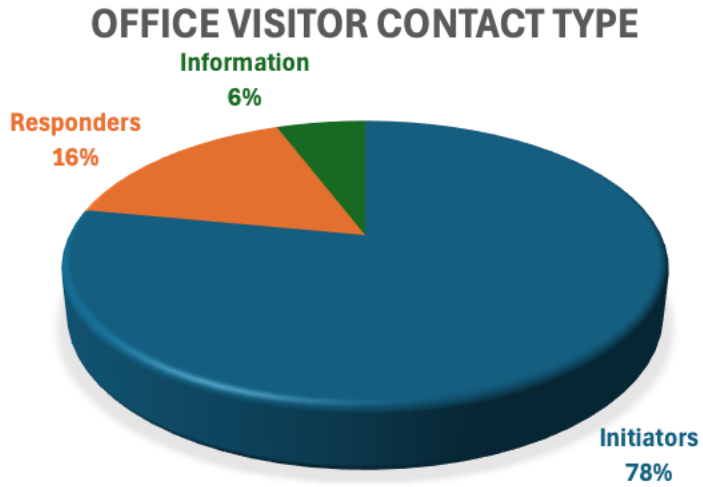
The ombuds is an informal resource and, as such, is restrained from participating in formal processes. The ombuds can explain those processes to the office visitor in the confidential auspices of the ombuds office and help them prepare to present themselves effectively during a formal hearing. The ombuds will not accompany the visitor to the hearing, but he or she can assist the office visitor find a support person who can.

In all situations, the ombuds helps the office visitor brainstorm alternatives and strategize ways of going forward. Often, we teach communication techniques and role play different scenarios with our office visitor to help them engage a person with whom they are in conflict. Additionally, with all parties' consent, the ombuds can mediate conversations to assist them arrive at a mutually beneficial resolution.

Through this process the office visitor overcomes uncertainty and fear and gains necessary tools to constructively confront their difficulty. What was once an insurmountable obstacle has become an attainable pathway to a friendlier tomorrow. Success in their endeavor leads to greater confidence, competence, and resilience when dealing with future problems. The office visitor has empowered themselves not only to handle their present problem, but to address future difficulties as they arise. They have become stronger and more successful teammates and community members.

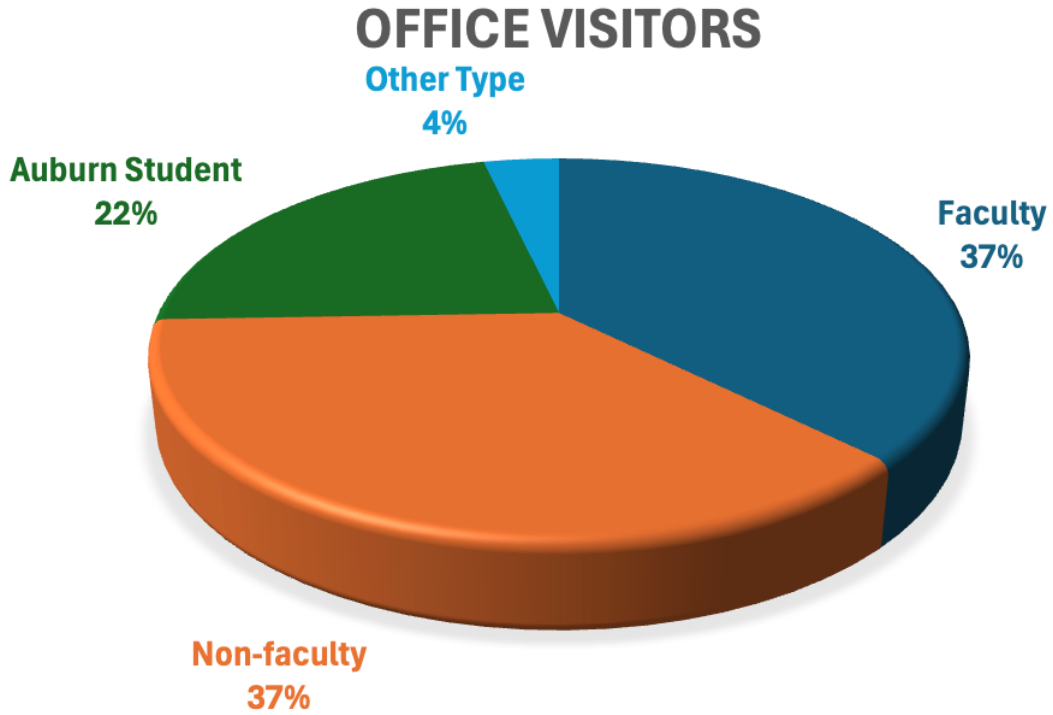
### III. STATISTICAL REPORT

#### TYPE OF CONTACT



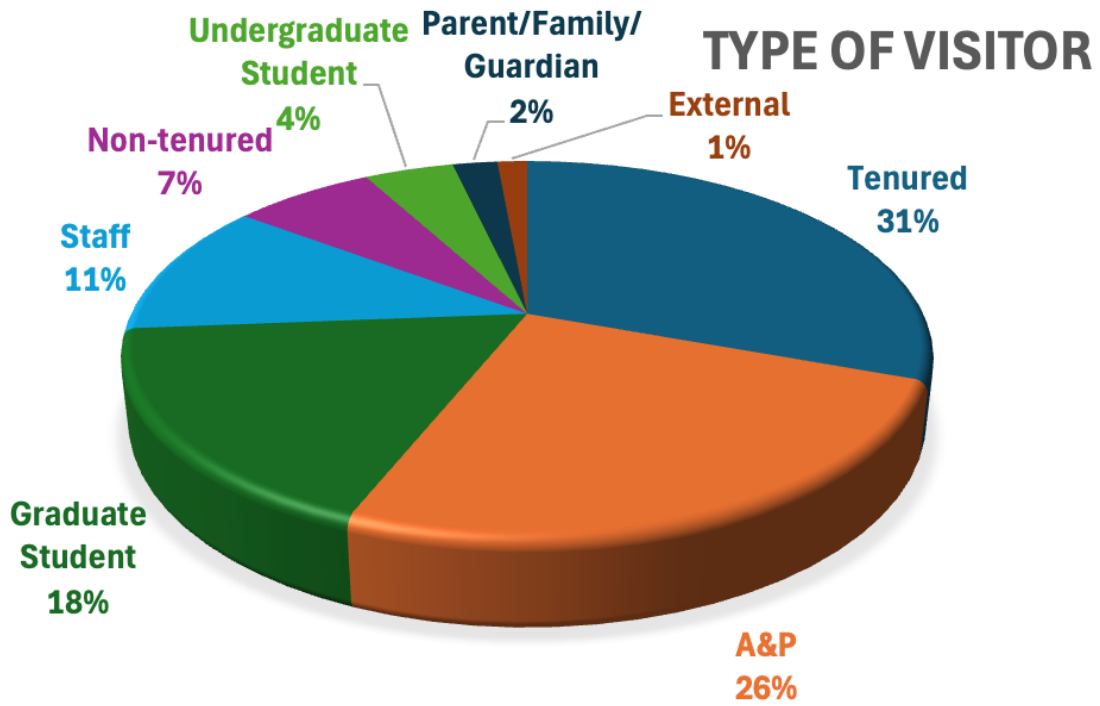
|             |     |
|-------------|-----|
| Initiators  | 217 |
| Responders  | 53  |
| Information | 8   |
| Total       | 278 |

**OFFICE VISITORS**



|                      |            |             |
|----------------------|------------|-------------|
| Faculty Employee     | 104        | 37%         |
| Non-Faculty Employee | 103        | 37%         |
| Auburn Student       | 61         | 22%         |
| Other                | 10         | 4%          |
| <b>Total</b>         | <b>278</b> | <b>100%</b> |

**VISITOR TYPE**

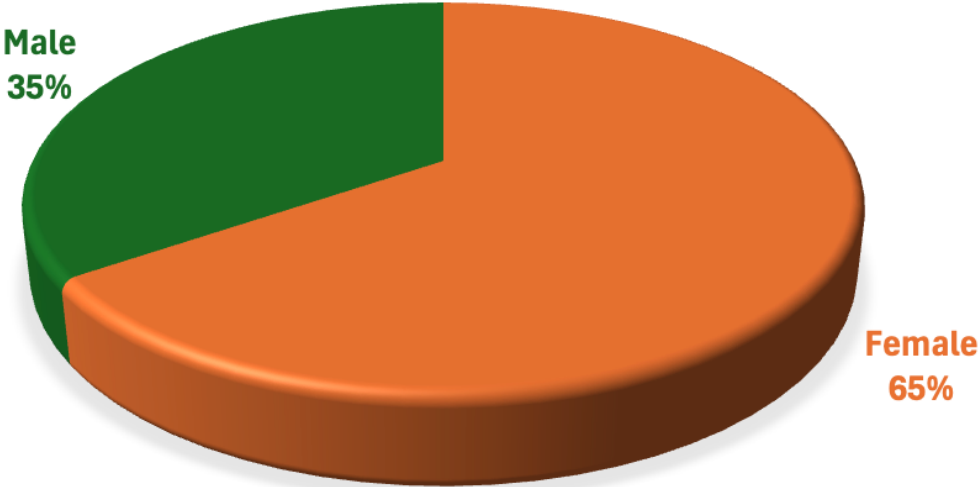


|                        |     |      |
|------------------------|-----|------|
| Tenured                | 85  | 31%  |
| A&P                    | 71  | 26%  |
| Graduate               | 49  | 18%  |
| Staff                  | 32  | 11%  |
| Non-tenured            | 19  | 7%   |
| Undergraduate          | 12  | 4%   |
| Parent/Guardian/Family | 6   | 2%   |
| External Entity        | 4   | 1%   |
| Total:                 | 278 | 100% |



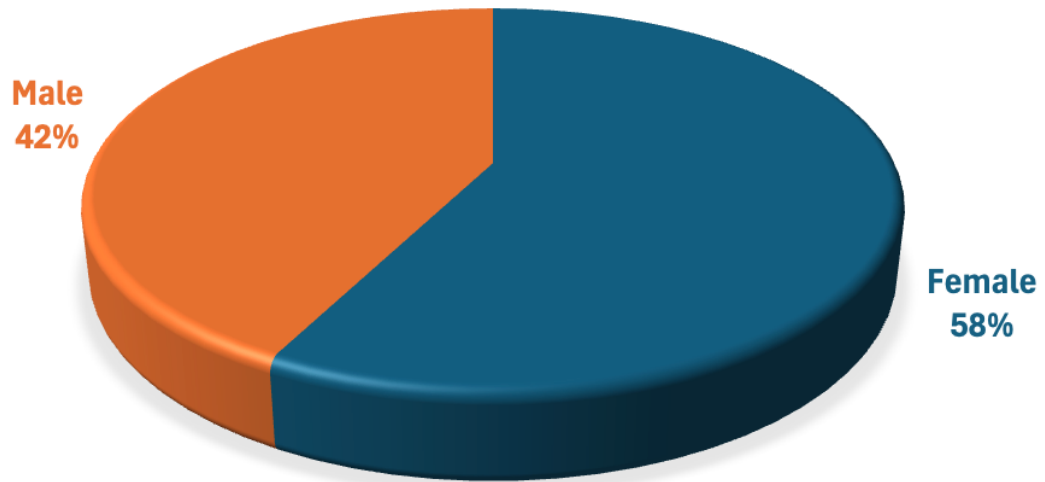
**DEMOGRAPHICS  
GENDER**

**OVERALL GENDER**



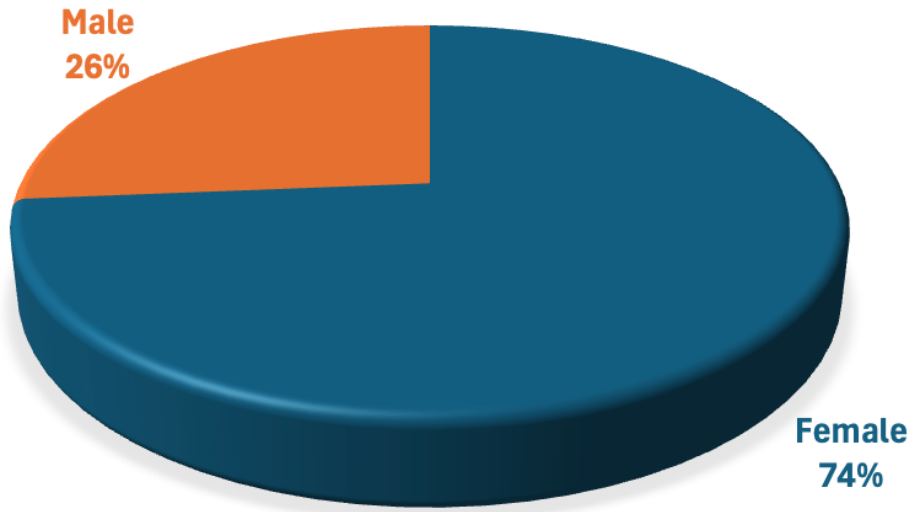
|        |     |      |
|--------|-----|------|
| Female | 182 | 65%  |
| Male   | 96  | 35   |
| Total  | 278 | 100% |

## TENURED FACULTY GENDER



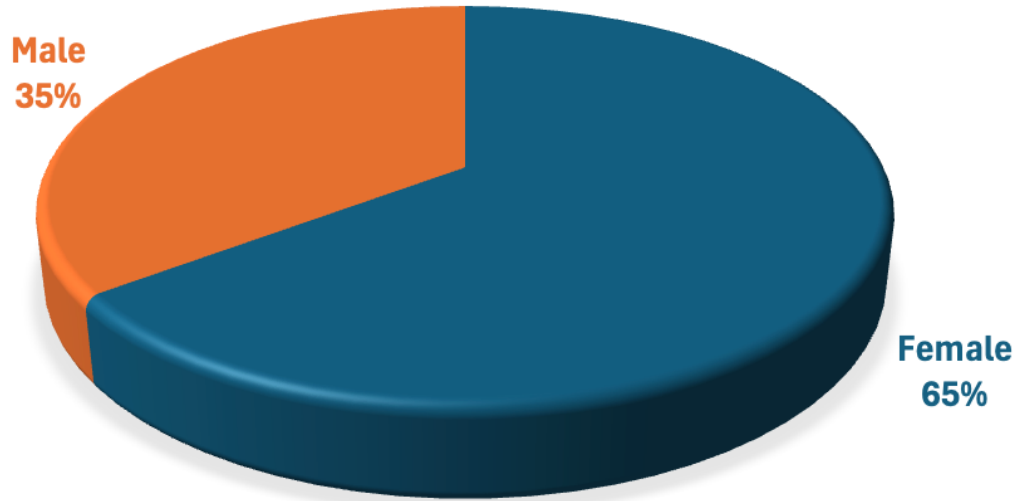
|        |    |      |
|--------|----|------|
| Male   | 49 | 58%  |
| Female | 36 | 42%  |
| Total  | 85 | 100% |

## NON-TENURED FACULTY GENDER



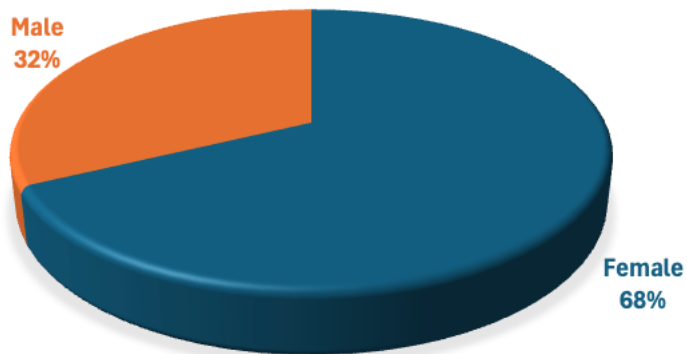
|        |    |      |
|--------|----|------|
| Female | 14 | 74%  |
| Male   | 5  | 26%  |
| Total  | 19 | 100% |

## A&P GENDER



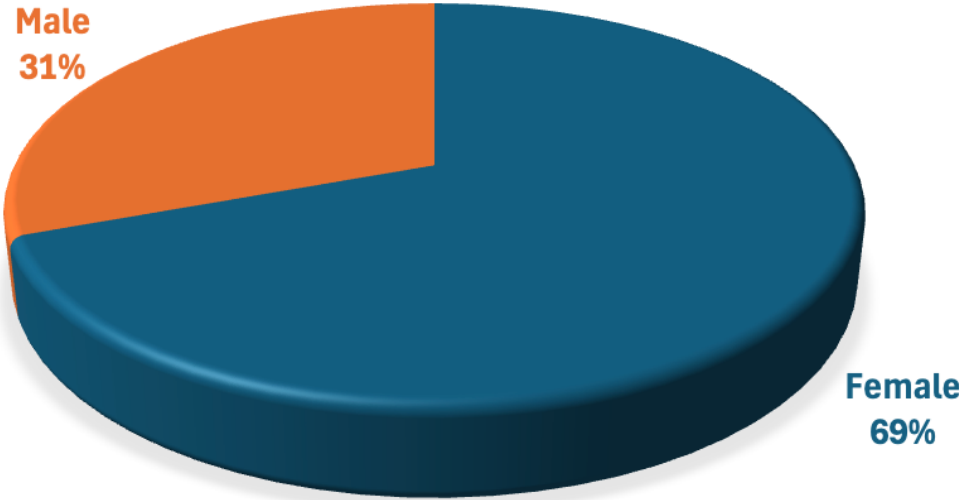
|        |    |      |
|--------|----|------|
| Female | 46 | 65%  |
| Male   | 25 | 35%  |
| Total  | 71 | 100% |

## STAFF GENDER



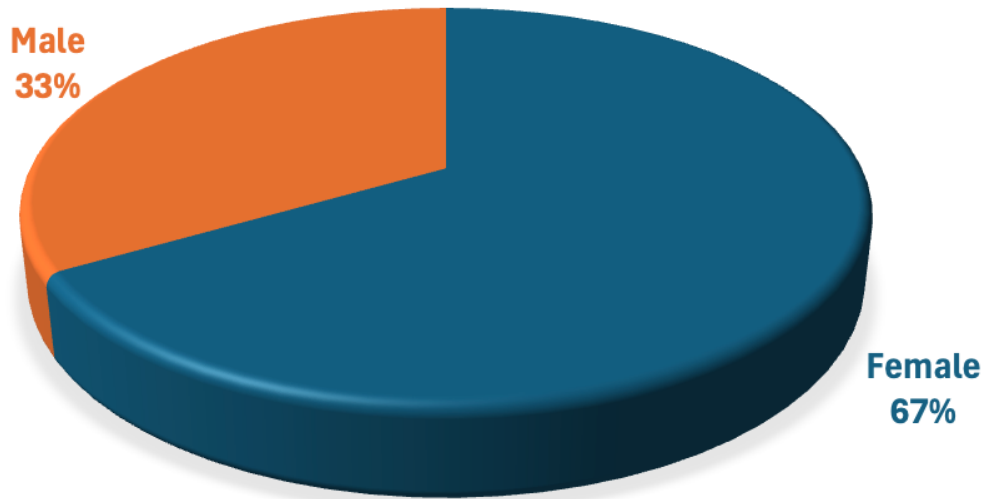
|        |    |      |
|--------|----|------|
| Female | 24 | 68%  |
| Male   | 8  | 32%  |
| Total  | 32 | 100% |

# GRADUATE STUDENT GENDER



|        |    |      |
|--------|----|------|
| Female | 34 | 69%  |
| Male   | 15 | 31%  |
| Total  | 49 | 100% |

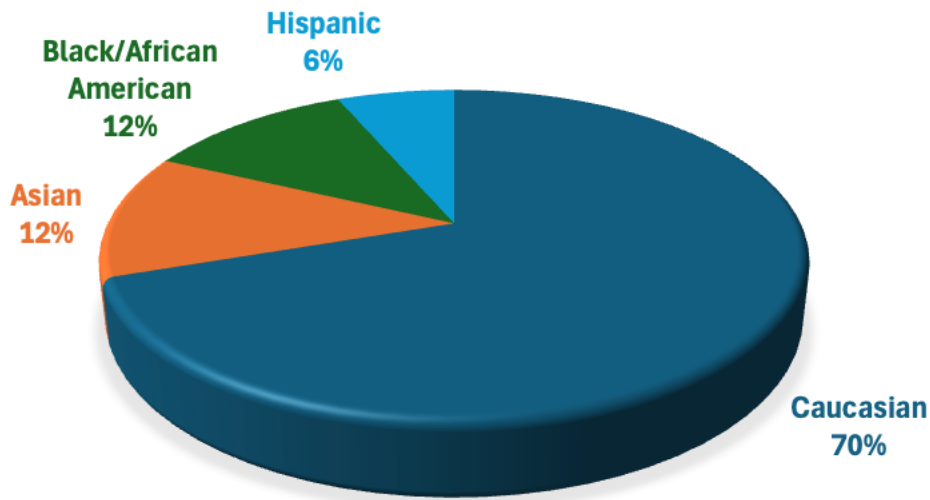
## UNDERGRADUATE GENDER



|        |    |      |
|--------|----|------|
| Female | 8  | 67%  |
| Male   | 4  | 33%  |
| Total  | 12 | 100% |

## RACE/ETHNICITY

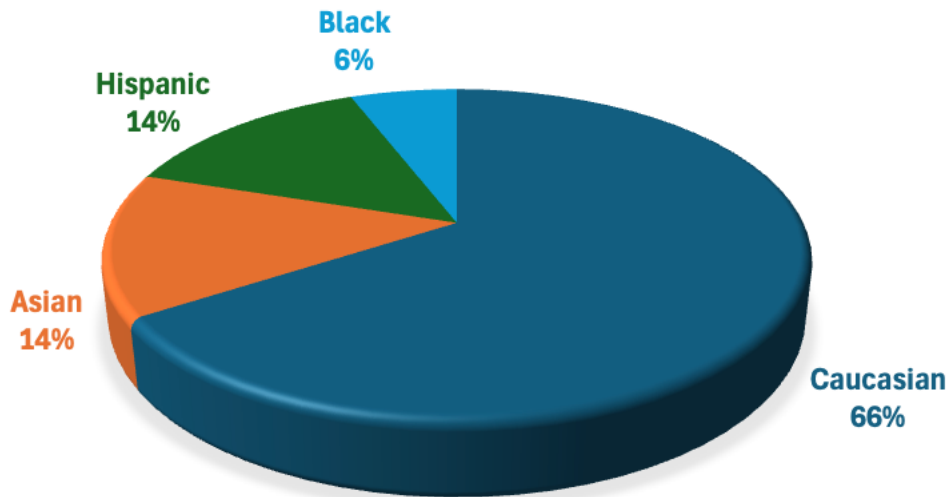
### RACE/ETHNICITY OVERALL



done

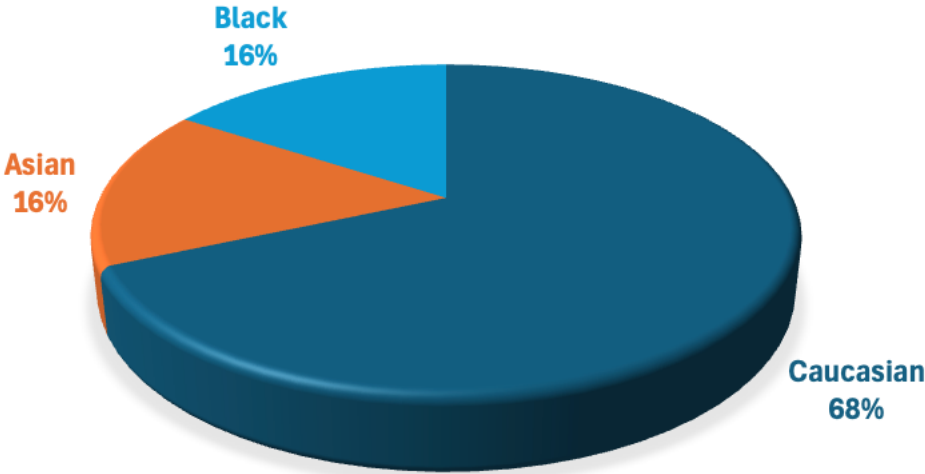
|                        |     |      |
|------------------------|-----|------|
| Caucasian              | 194 | 70%  |
| Asian                  | 34  | 12%  |
| Black/African American | 32  | 12%  |
| Hispanic               | 18  | 6%   |
| Total                  | 278 | 100% |

### TENURED RACE/ETHNICITY



|                        |    |      |
|------------------------|----|------|
| Caucasian              | 56 | 66%  |
| Asian                  | 12 | 14%  |
| Hispanic               | 12 | 14%  |
| Black/African American | 5  | 6%   |
| Total                  | 85 | 100% |

**NON-TENURED FACULTY**

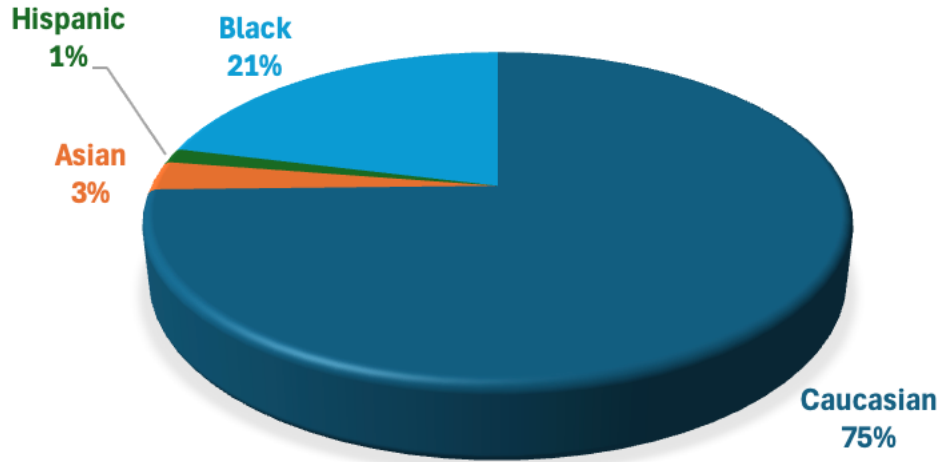


**DONE**

|                        |    |      |
|------------------------|----|------|
| Caucasian              | 13 | 68%  |
| Asian                  | 3  | 16%  |
| Black/African American | 3  | 16%  |
| Total                  | 16 | 100% |



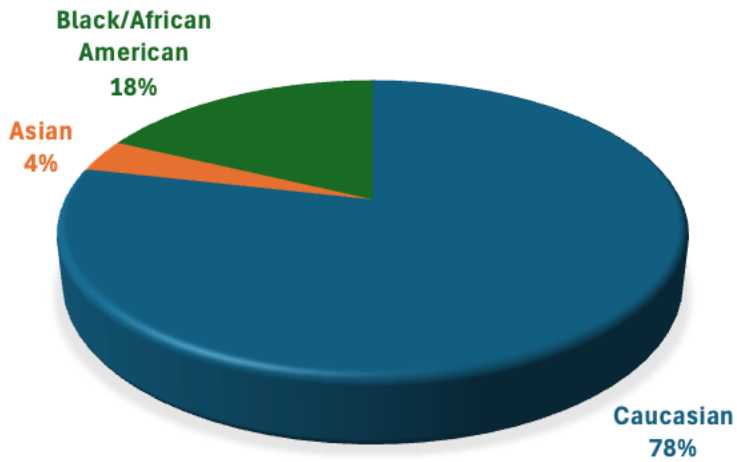
## A&P



## DONE

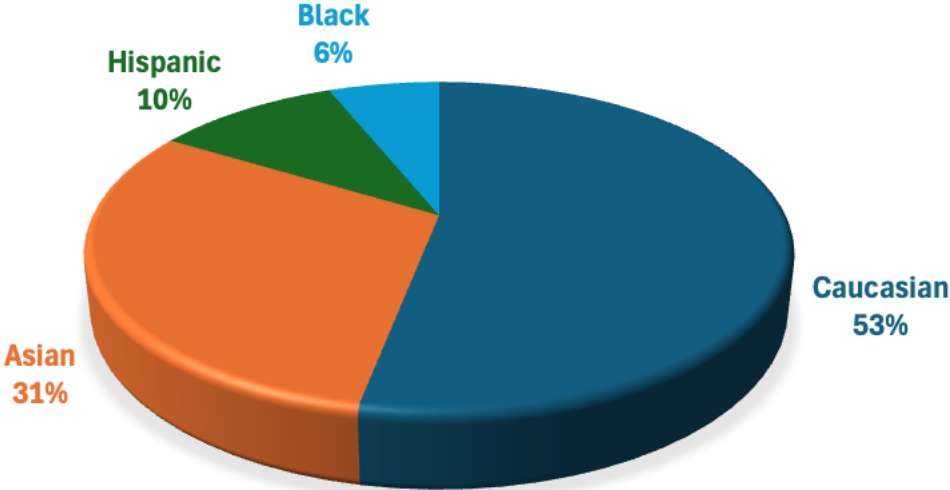
|                        |    |      |
|------------------------|----|------|
| Caucasian              | 53 | 75%  |
| Black/African American | 15 | 21%  |
| Asian                  | 2  | 3%   |
| Hispanic               | 2  | 1%   |
| Total                  | 71 | 100% |

## STAFF RACE/ETHNICITY



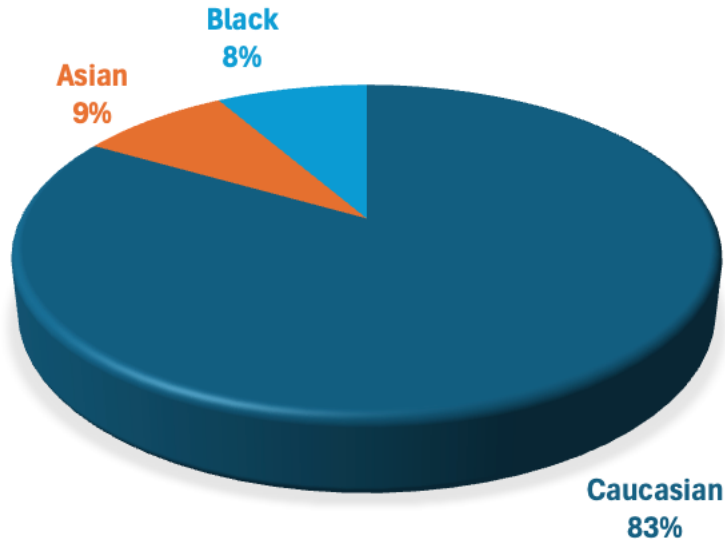
|                        |    |      |
|------------------------|----|------|
| Caucasian              | 27 | 78%  |
| Black/African American | 4  | 18%  |
| Asian                  | 1  | 4%   |
| Total                  | 32 | 100% |

**GRADUATE STUDENTS**



|                        |    |      |
|------------------------|----|------|
| Caucasian              | 26 | 53%  |
| Asian                  | 15 | 31%  |
| Hispanic               | 5  | 10%  |
| Black/African American | 3  | 6%   |
| Total                  | 49 | 100% |

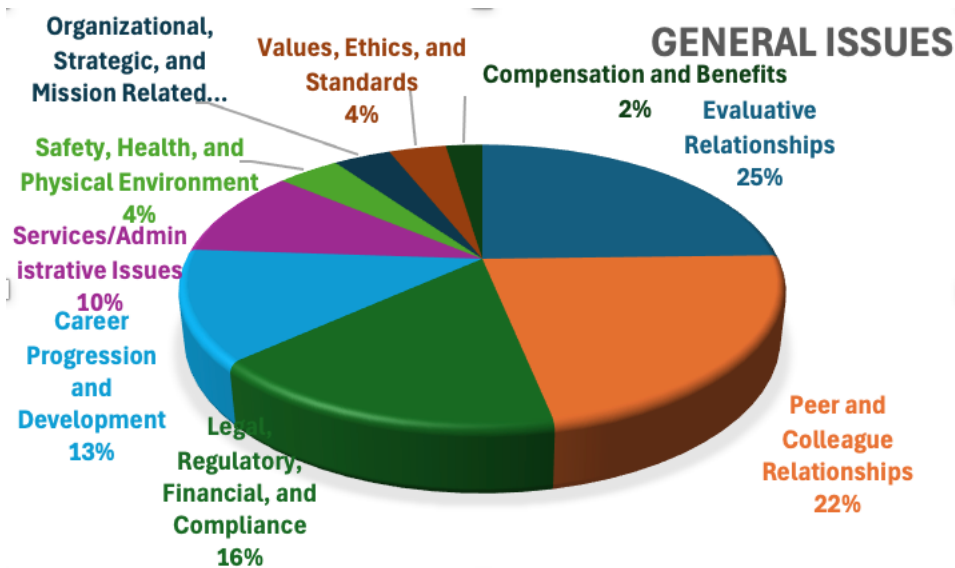
## UNDERGRADUATE STUDENTS



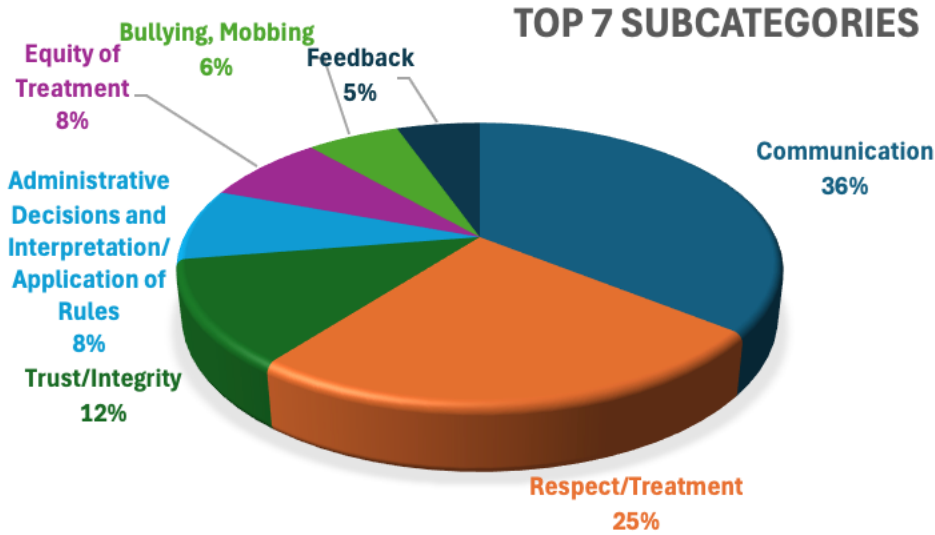
DONE

|                        |    |      |
|------------------------|----|------|
| Caucasian              | 10 | 83%  |
| Asian                  | 1  | 9%   |
| Black/African American | 1  | 8%   |
| Total                  | 12 | 100% |

## GENERAL ISSUE CATEGORIES



|  |    |
|--|----|
| Evaluative Relationships                       | 73 |
| Peer and Colleague Relationships               | 66 |
| Legal, Regulatory, Financial, and Compliance   | 49 |
| Career Progression and Development             | 38 |
| Services/Administrative Issues                 | 30 |
| Safety, Health, and Physical Environment       | 12 |
| Organizational, Strategic, and Mission Related | 11 |
| Values, Ethics, and Standards                  | 11 |
| Compensation and Benefits                      | 7  |



**TOP 7 SUBCATEGORY ISSUES (COMMON THEMES)**

|  |     |
|--|-----|
| Communication  | 113 |
| Respect/Treatment  | 78  |
| Trust/Integrity  | 38  |
| Administrative Decisions and Interpretation/Application of Rules | 26  |
| Equity of Treatment  | 25  |
| Bullying, Mobbing  | 19  |
| Feedback   | 17  |

## OTHER SUBCATEGORIES

|   |    |
|---|----|
| Assignments/Schedules                     | 15 |
| Performance Appraisal/Grading             | 13 |
| Supervisory effectiveness                 | 12 |
| Harassment                                | 12 |
| Business and Financial Practices          | 11 |
| Career Development, Coaching, Mentoring   | 11 |
| Student Conduct                           | 10 |
| Career Progression                        | 9  |
| Termination/Non-renewal                   | 8  |
| Diversity Related                         | 7  |
| Compensation and Benefits                 | 7  |
| Safety                                    | 7  |
| Work Related Stress and Work-Life Balance | 7  |
| Reputation                                | 7  |
| Resignation                               | 6  |
| Priorities, Values, Beliefs               | 6  |
| Discrimination                            | 6  |
| Physical Working/Living Conditions        | 6  |
| Tenure/Position/Security/Ambiguity        | 6  |
| Scientific Conduct/Integrity              | 6  |
| Retaliation                               | 6  |
| Leadership and Management                 | 5  |
| Values and Culture                        | 5  |
| Departmental Climate                      | 5  |

|   |   |
|---|---|
| Standards of Conduct                      | 4 |
| Priorities, Values, Beliefs               | 4 |
| Discipline                                | 3 |
| Job Application/Selection and Recruitment | 3 |
| Intellectual Property Rights              | 3 |
| Privacy and Security of Information       | 3 |
| Use of Positional Power/Authority         | 3 |
| Organizational Climate                    | 3 |
| Change Management                         | 3 |

**OMBUDS RESPONSE**

|   |     |
|---|-----|
| Individual Consultation/Problem Solving | 192 |
| Referral to policy or office            | 112 |
| Unit/Group consultation                 | 24  |
| Facilitation with third parties         | 14  |
| Inquiry on behalf                       | 10  |
| Upward feedback                         | 10  |
| Look into issue                         | 8   |
| Notify on behalf                        | 3   |

**IV. SELECTED ACCOMPLISHMENTS**

Keynote Speaker, *Conflict Management in an Evolving Covid Era*

- 8<sup>th</sup> Annual National Conflict Resolution Week, Virginia Commonwealth University, October 21, 2021

**V. EDUCATIONAL OUTREACH**

**Seminars presented at Human Resources Development**

- Working with High Conflict Persons
- Bullying and Mobbing in the Workplace
- The Art and Productive Capacity of Active Listening

- Identifying Underlying Interests: Tips from Nature, History, and the Cinema
- Problem Solving Using Cooperative Negotiation Strategy, co-presented with Dr. Stefan Eisen, former Dean, Air Force War College, Maxwell Air Force Base

### **Seminars presented by invitation**

Speaker, College of Business Office of Professional and Career Development Retreat.

- Basic Conflict Management Techniques
- Teamwork: Building Results Collaboratively and Amicably
- The Art and Productive Capacity of Active Listening

Speaker, Teamwork: Building Results Collaboratively and Amicably

- Student Counseling and Psychological Services
- Library Staff
- Northeast Alabama Small Extension Team meeting at the Sand Mountain Research and Extension Center in Crossville Alabama

Speaker, Basic Conflict Management Techniques

- School of Veterinary Medicine's Student Leaders Luncheon
- School of Education, Department of Curriculum & Teaching faculty and staff
- School of Veterinary Medicine Class, Clinical Concepts and Professional Development
- Department of Entomology and Plant Pathology Lab, School of Agriculture

**Guest lecturer:** Mediated mock mediations with students of the Comm 3300 Communication and Conflict class

## **VI. PROFESSIONAL ORGANIZATIONS AND CONFERENCES ATTENDED**

- International Ombudsman Association
  - Mentor Ombuds for ombuds at three universities

- Attended 17<sup>th</sup> annual International Ombudsman Association Conference virtually
- California Caucus of College and University Ombuds
  - Attended 48<sup>th</sup> annual conference

## **VII. VOLUNTEER COMMUNITY SERVICE**

- Coach at JAG mediation training program, War College, Maxwell Airforce Base

## **VIII. CONCLUSION**

In addition to the annual statistical data, this report contained a snapshot description of one of the Ombuds main goals, assisting in the self-empowerment of office visitors. When facing challenges or obstacles, sometimes we can work through things on our own and, in the process, improve our confidence and abilities. Other times, help in the form of coaching or mentoring can be effective. Ombuds assistance in helping office visitors empower themselves is a substantially impactful area in which the people who make up our Auburn University community are served.