

# Annual Report Office of the Ombudsperson 2022 -2023



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## I. INTRODUCTION

The number of first-time office visitors to the Office of the Ombudsperson rose to a record level of 342 during the ombuds' academic year beginning Fall Semester of 2022 and ending Summer Semester 2023. With the growth in office visitors and increasing interest in ombuds educational seminars, a decision to add an associate ombudsperson to the office was made.

This report will include a section on the expansion of the ombuds office, a statistical report of demographic and issue information, and a listing of educational presentations and selected activities performed by the ombuds throughout the year.

## II. EXPANSION OF THE OFFICE OF THE OMBUDSPERSON

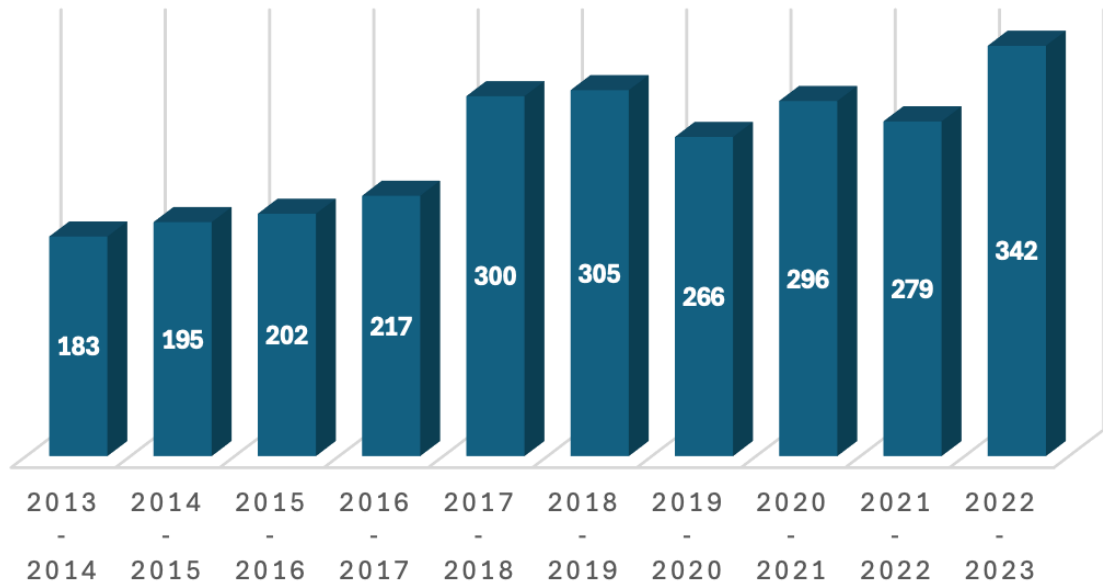
In the spring of 2023, due to increased demand for services from the Ombuds Office, Auburn University administration authorized the expansion of the office through the hiring of the university's first associate ombudsperson. Although office visitor numbers were slightly down during the years university members grappled with covid pandemic issues, the ombuds office was nevertheless far busier than in preceding years during that time. This past academic year the ombudsperson saw a record 342 new office visitors<sup>1</sup>, as well as previous, repeating visitors who are not statistically counted as "new office visitors."

During the present ombudsperson's time at Auburn University, new visitors have increased from 183 in 2013 – 2014 to the aforementioned 342 visitors for 2022 - 2023. The mean number of new office visitors annually for that ten-year period was 255.

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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.

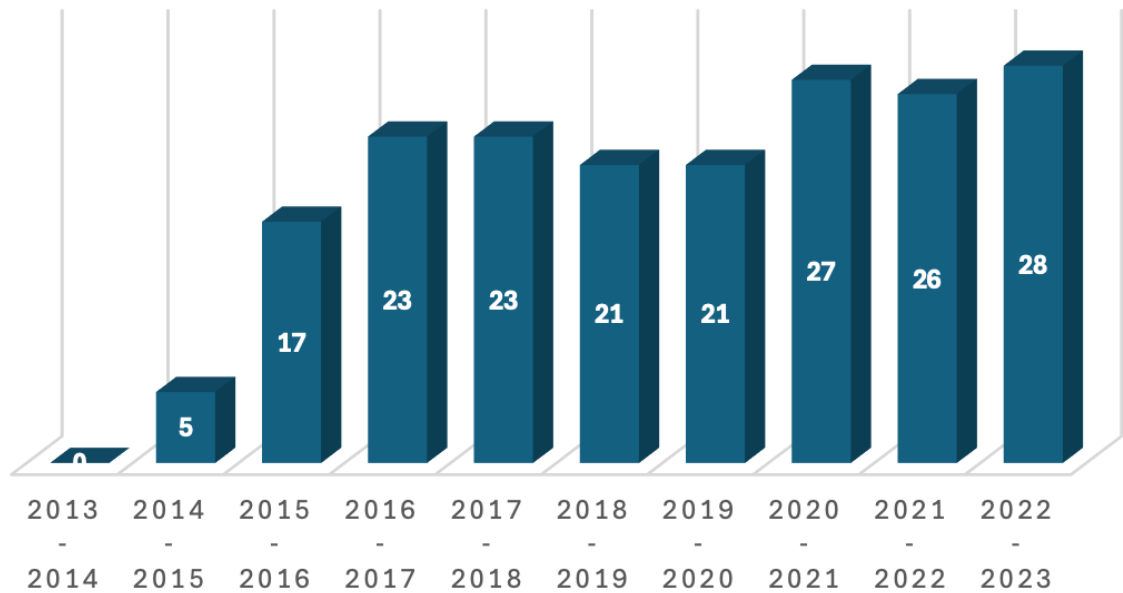
## NEW OFFICE VISITORS, ANNUALLY



Although the bulk of the ombuds work consists of meeting and working with office visitors on a confidential basis to solve problems, the job also entails an educational component that has increased exponentially since the present ombuds began work at Auburn in September of 2013. The focus of much of the ombuds work is to help community members understand, respect, and work productively together. The ombuds accomplishes this by working face-to-face with office visitors and by giving educational classes to groups across campus.

These seminars include presentations on conflict management techniques, productive teamwork, working with high conflict persons, understanding bullying and mobbing, and listening actively, so that faculty, employees, and students can learn to better understand and work with each other. Several of these seminars are presented at Auburn University's Human Resources Development department, and the others are given via invitation to groups at departmental retreats and other meetings. The present ombuds presented 0 and 5 seminars during his first two years at Auburn, and 26 and 28 seminars during the latter two years, respectively.

## EDUCATIONAL SEMINARS, ANNUALLY



The one-person ombuds office at Auburn served a community comprised of 43,300 faculty, staff, and students during 2022 – 2023. The Auburn University Ombudsperson is a member of and subscribes to the Ethics and Standards of Practice of the International Ombuds Association (“IOA”). Those ethics, centered on principles of independence, impartiality, confidentiality, and informality, provide for consistent practices to be used by organizational ombuds offices throughout the globe. A review of IOA member university ombuds offices in the United States, with similar constituencies as Auburn University, revealed that a great number were functioning with larger numbers of personnel than we have been at Auburn. The following table documents some of those disparities and demonstrates that 2 to 4 ombudspersons are commonplace in ombuds offices in other universities of comparable size to Auburn University.

Ombuds Office	University Population	Number of Ombudspersons	Support Staff
Auburn University	43300	1	
Columbia University	56405	2	1

Cornell University	36421	2	
Harvard University	43326	3	3
Kennesaw State University	44185	2	
Michigan State University	62877	2	1
MIT	23879	3	
Oregon State University	42498	2	1
Stanford University	34839	2	
University of California, Berkeley	70431	6	
University of California, Davis	63650	5	
University of California, Irvine	49022	3	1
University of California, Santa Barbara	33928	4	
University of Colorado, Boulder	47146	4	1
University of Tennessee, Knoxville	58383	2	1

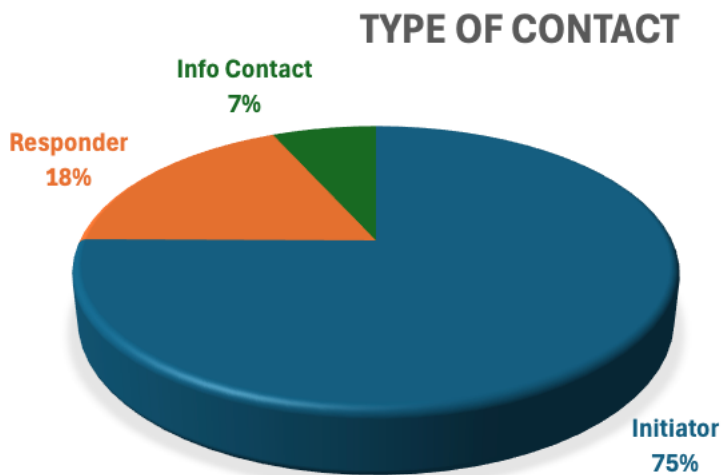
Based on the factors and statistics listed in this section, a national search was commenced for the first Associate Ombudsperson at Auburn University, which search was fully underway at the end of the 2022 – 2023 year. The number of university constituents served by the Office of the Ombudsperson has grown substantially over the past ten years and the

addition of another ombuds will enable us to continue to assist our office visitors effectively and fully.

### III. STATISTICAL REPORT

This section of the report provides data concerning the types of folks communicating with the Ombuds – whether they initiated the contact, responded to an authorized communication from the Ombuds, or provided information at the Ombuds’ request. The report continues with both general and specific categories of office visitors, a demographic breakdown of those individuals based on gender and race/ethnicity, as well as general and specific information about the types of issues brought to the Ombuds and the Ombuds’ response in handling those matters.

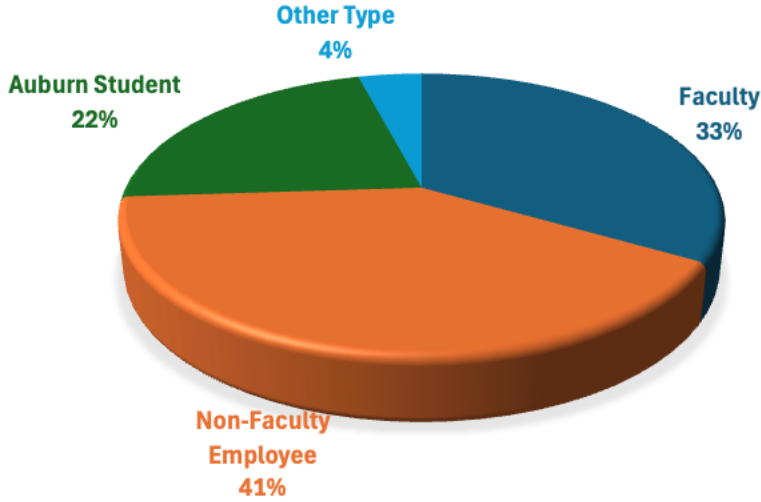
#### TYPE OF CONTACT



Initiators	257
Responders	62
Information	23
Total	342

#### OFFICE VISITORS

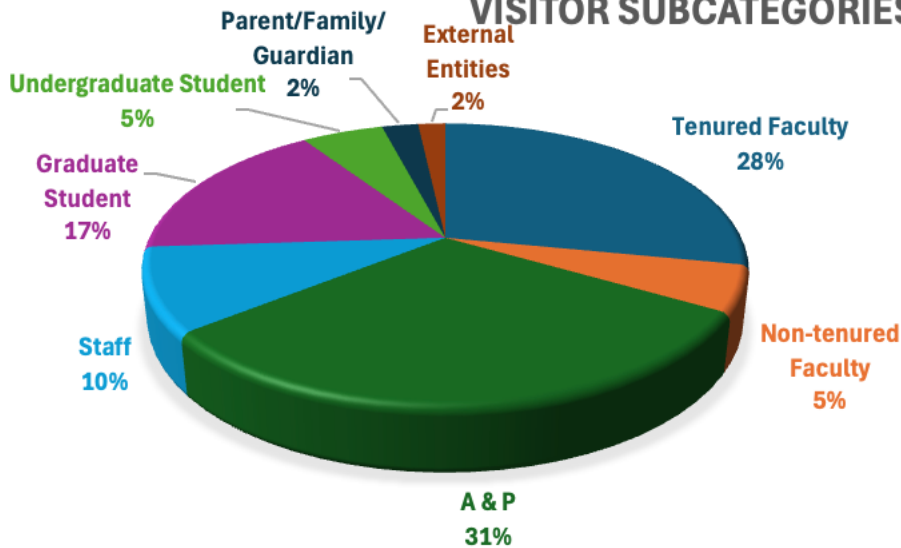
## TYPE OF VISITOR



Non-Faculty Employee	139	41%
Faculty Employee	114	33%
Auburn Student	75	22%
Other	14	4%
Total	342	100%

## VISITOR TYPE

### VISITOR SUBCATEGORIES

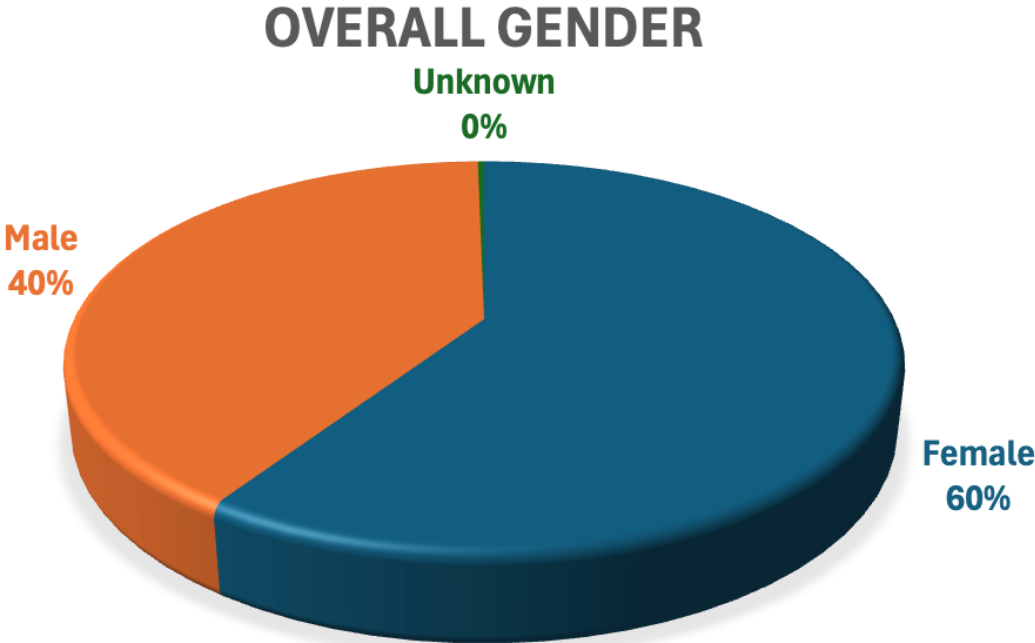


A&P	106	31%
Tenured	96	28%
Graduate Student	57	17%
Staff	33	10%



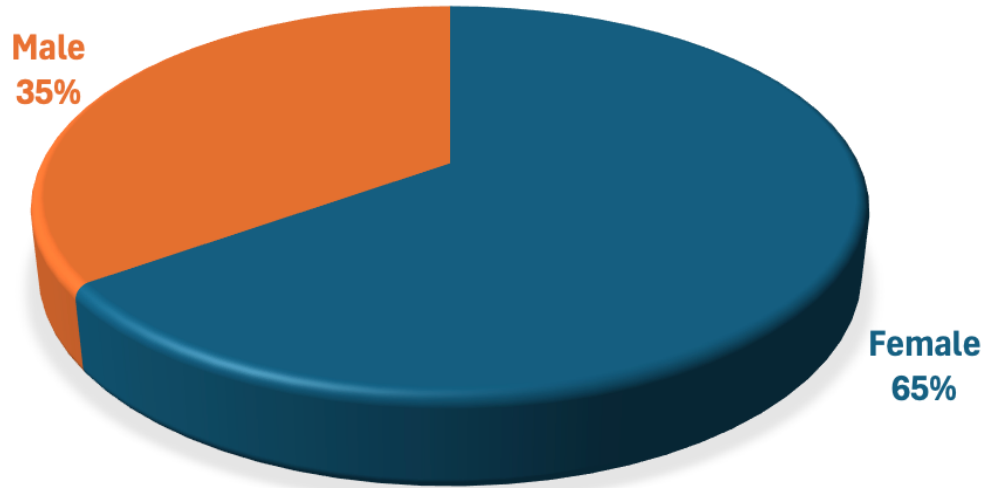
Non-tenured	18	5%
Undergraduate Student	18	5%
Parent/Guardian/Family	8	2%
External Entity	6	2%
Total:	342	100%

**DEMOGRAPHICS  
GENDER**



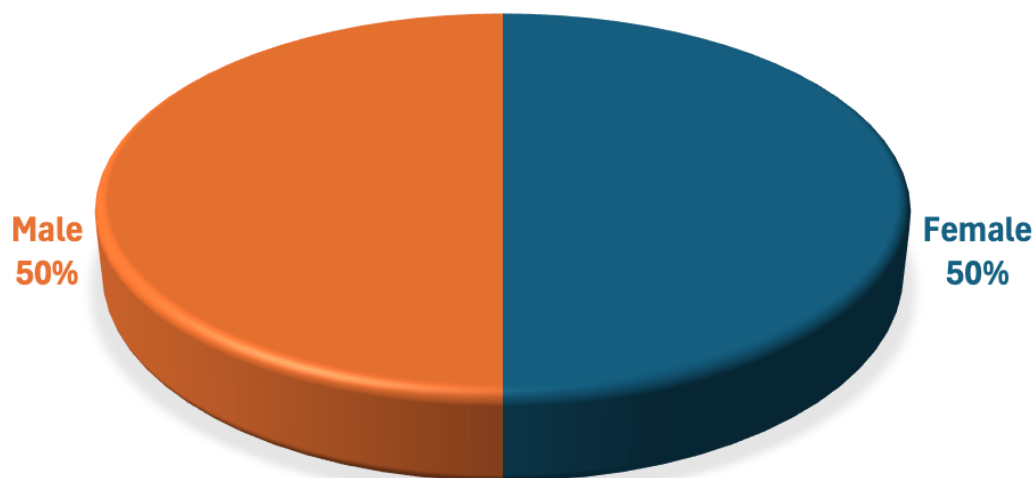
Female	203	60%
Male	138	40%
Unknown	1	0%
Total	342	100%

## A&P GENDER



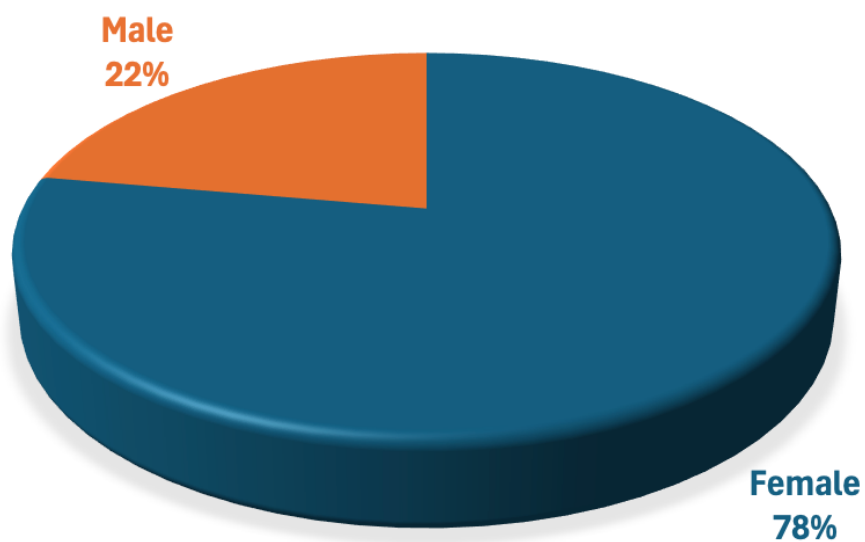
Female	69	65%
Male	37	35%
Total	106	100%

## TENURED FACULTY GENDER



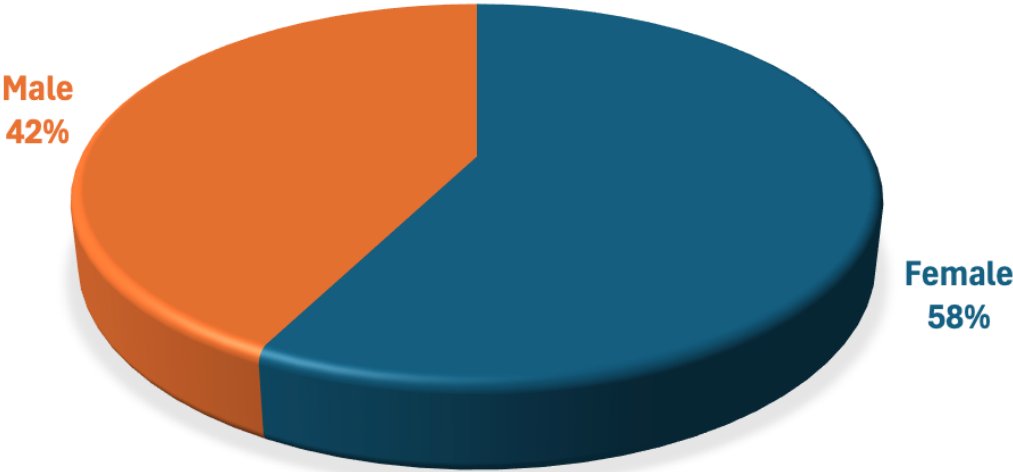
Male	48	50%
Female	48	50%
Total	96	100%

## NON-TENURED FACULTY GENDER



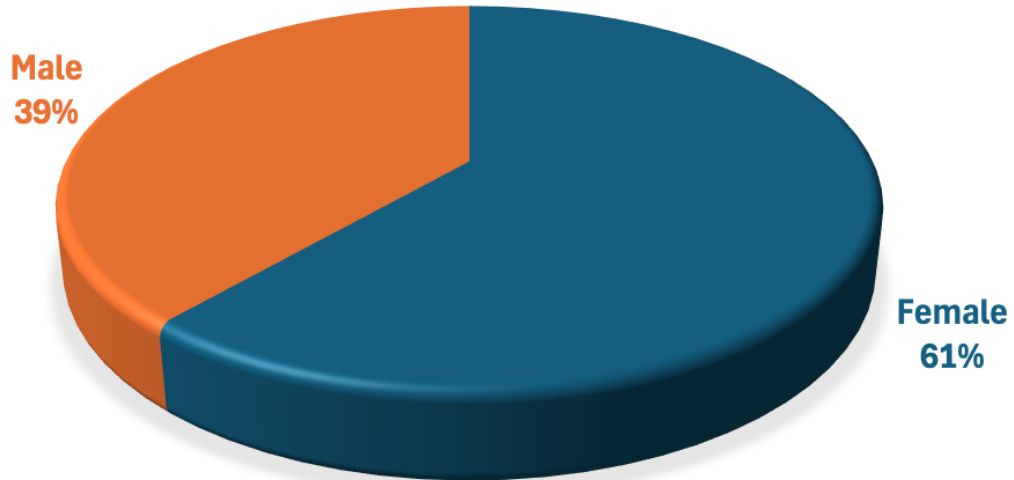
Female	14	74%
Male	4	26%
Total	18	100%

### STAFF GENDER



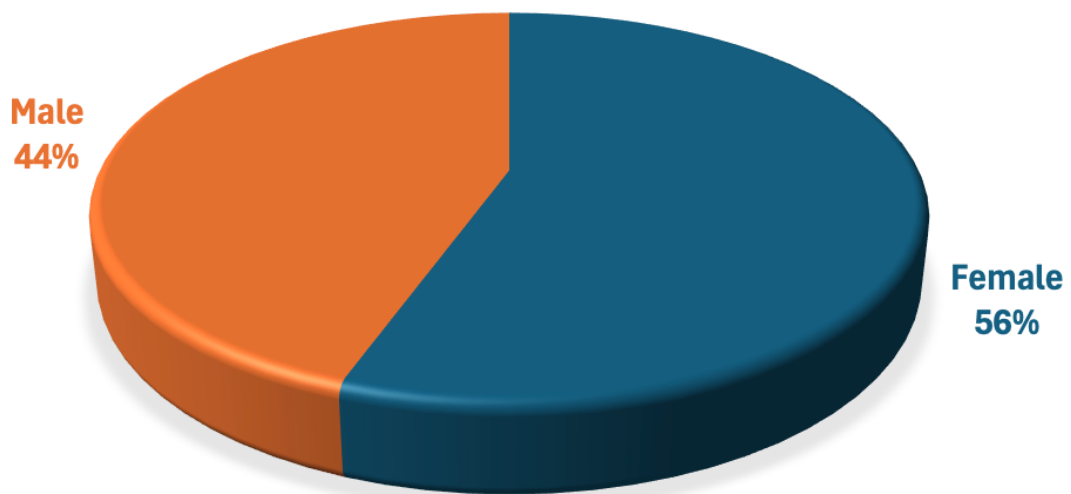
Female	19	58%
Male	14	42%
Total	33	100%

## GRADUATE STUDENT GENDER



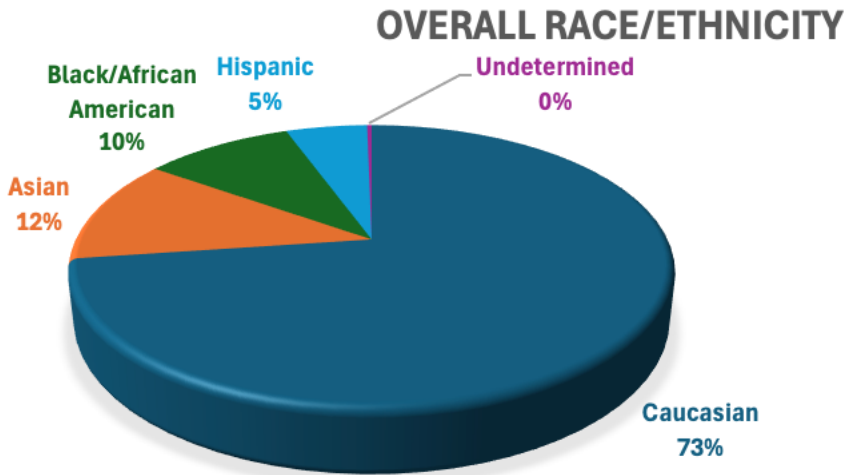
Female	35	61%
Male	22	39%
Total	57	100%

## UNDERGRADUATE STUDENT GENDER



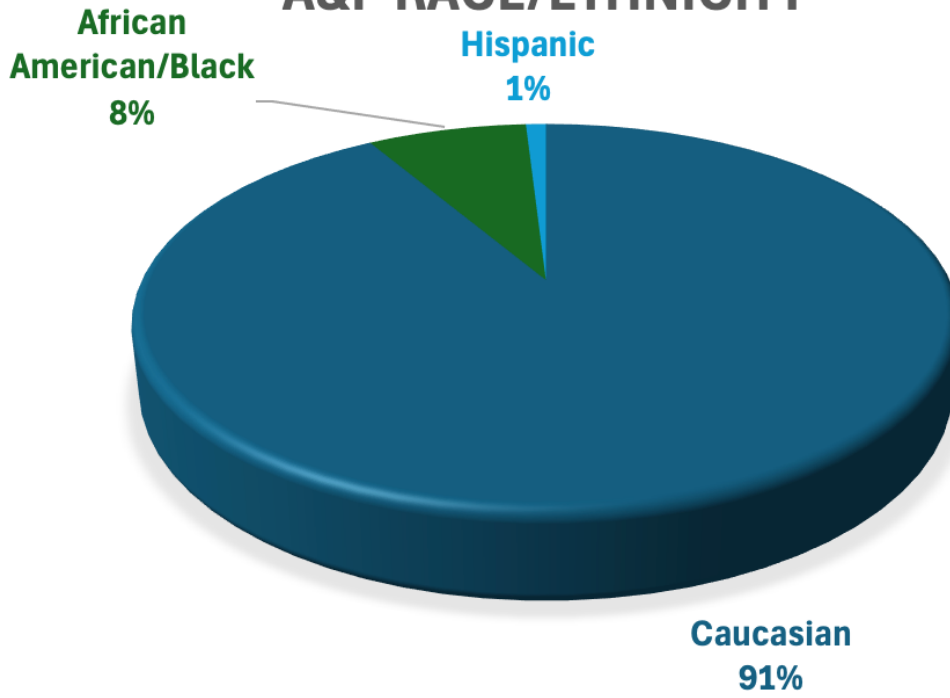
Female	10	56%
Male	8	44%
Total	18	100%

## RACE/ETHNICITY



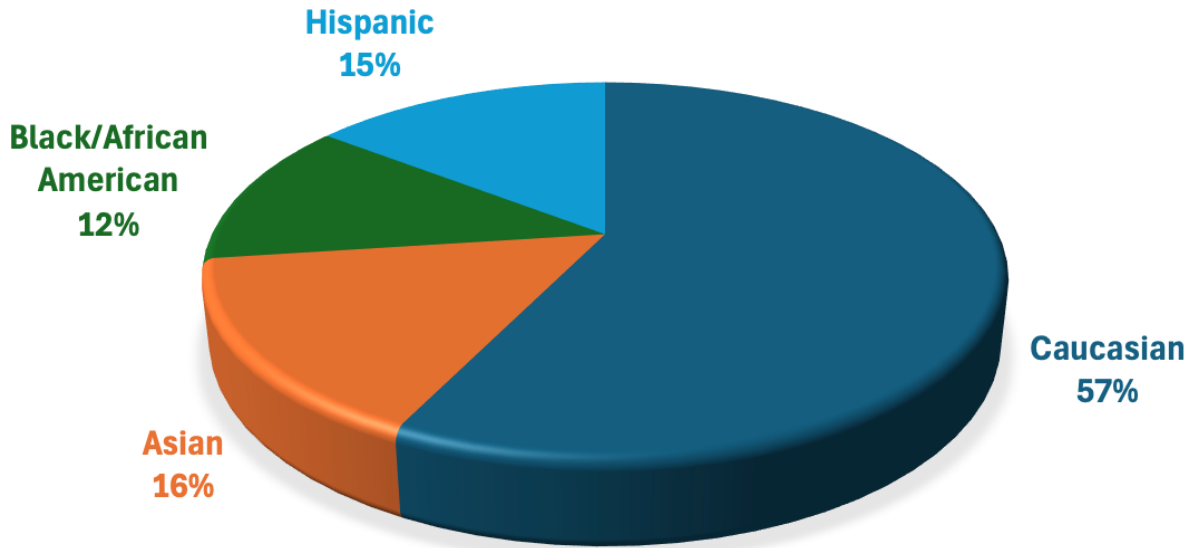
Caucasian	249	73%
Asian	40	12%
Black/African American	33	10%
Hispanic	19	5%
Undetermined	1	0%
Total	342	100%

## A&P RACE/ETHNICITY



Caucasian	97	91%
Black/African American	8	8%
Hispanic	1	1%
<b>Total</b>	<b>106</b>	<b>100%</b>

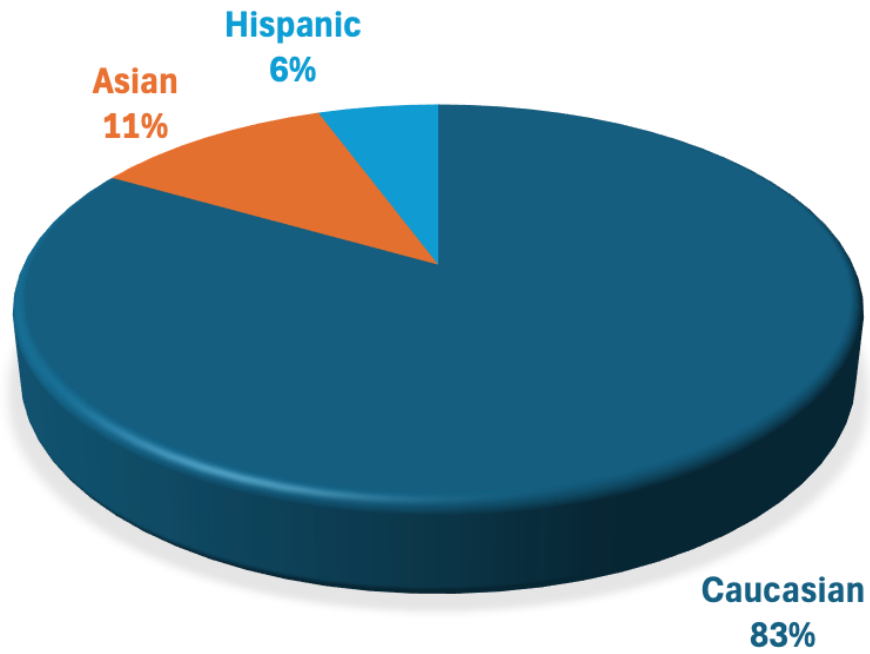
## TENURED RACE/ETHNICITY



Caucasian	55	57%
Asian	15	16%
Hispanic	14	15%
Black/African American	12	12%
Total	96	100%

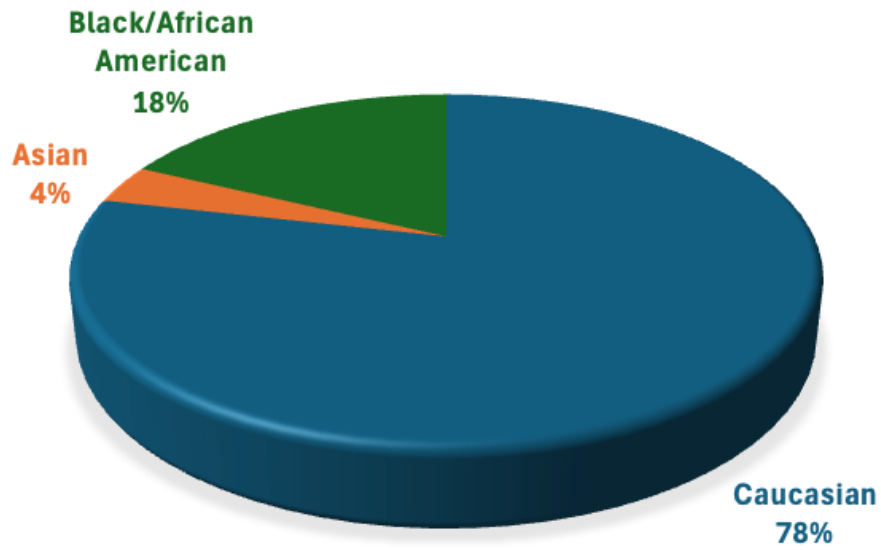


# NON-TENURED FACULTY RACE/ETHNICITY



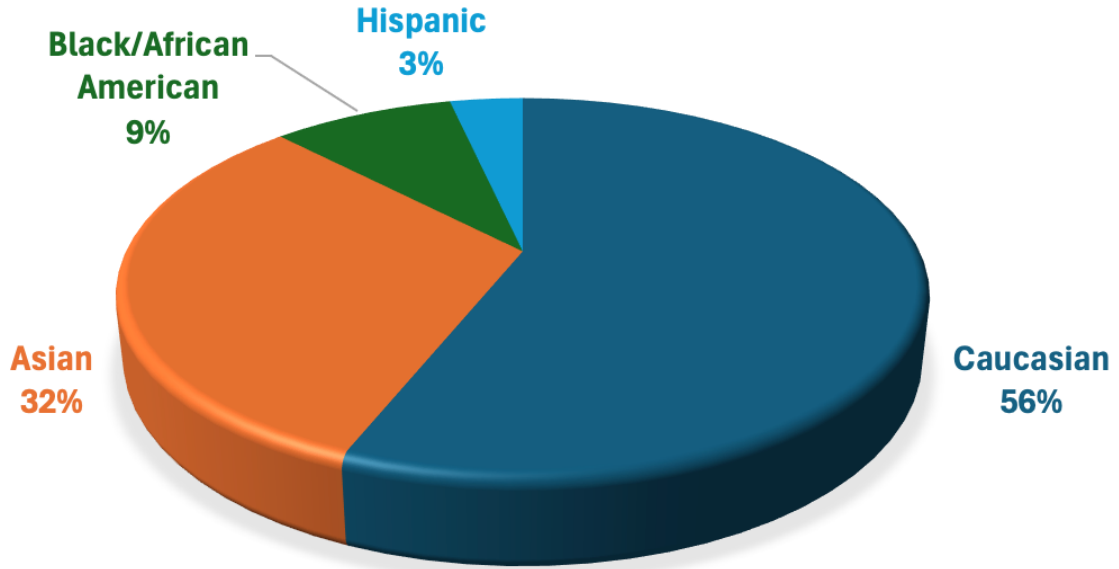
Caucasian	15	83%
Asian	2	11%
Hispanic	1	6%
Total	18	100%

## STAFF RACE/ETHNICITY



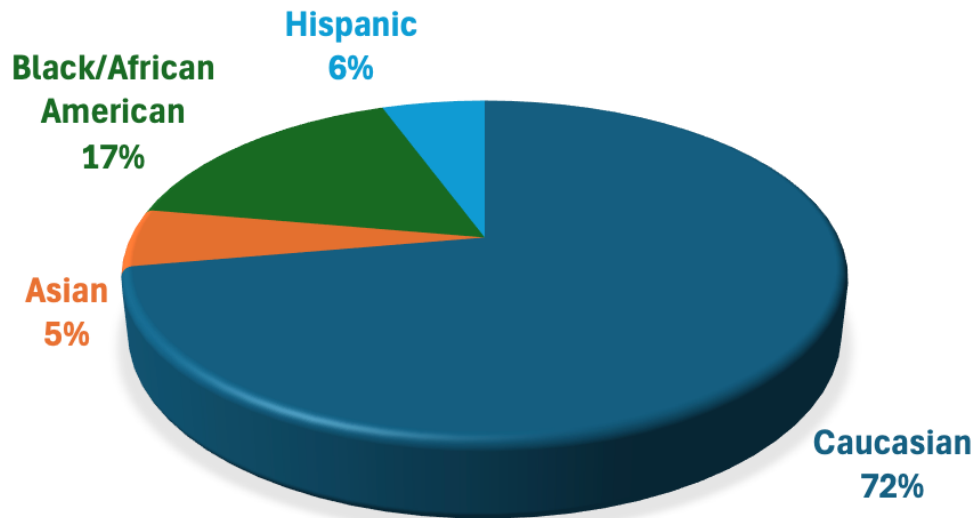
Caucasian	28	78%
Black/African American	4	18%
Asian	1	4%
<b>Total</b>	<b>33</b>	<b>100%</b>

## GRADUATE STUDENT RACE/ETHNICITY



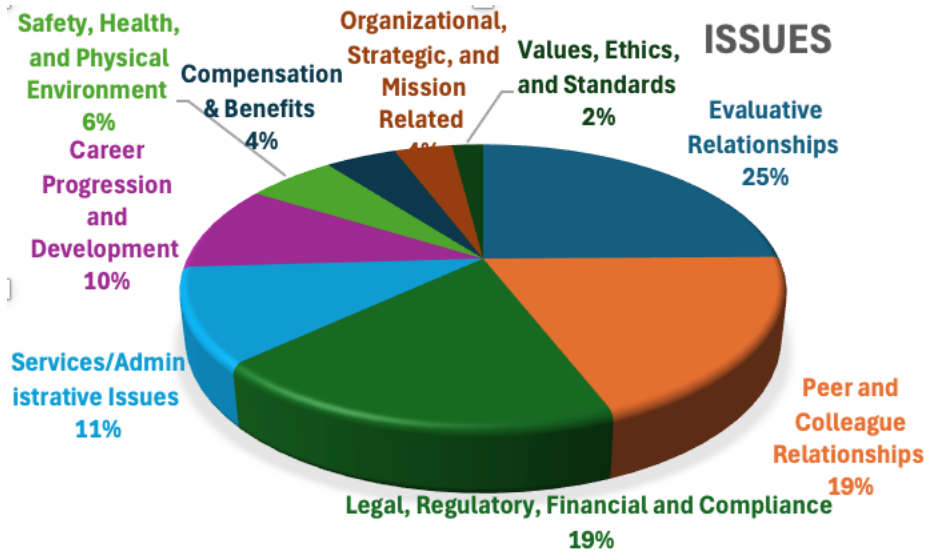
Caucasian	32	56%
Asian	18	32%
Black/African American	5	9%
Hispanic	2	3%
Total	57	100%

## UNDERGRADUATE STUDENT RACE/ETHNICITY

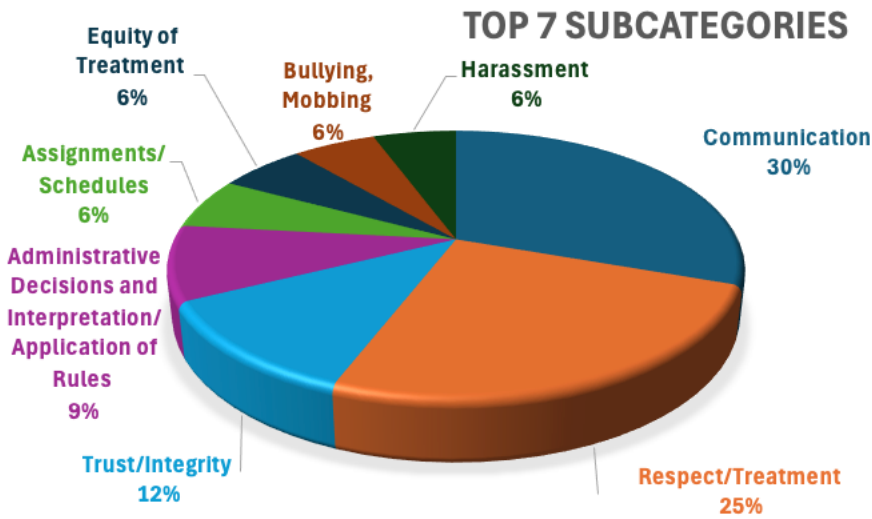


Caucasian	13	72%
Black/African American	3	17%
Hispanic	1	6%
Asian	1	5%
Total	18	100%

## GENERAL ISSUE CATEGORIES



Evaluative Relationships	86
Peer and Colleague Relationships	67
Legal, Regulatory, Financial, and Compliance	66
Services/Administrative Issues	38
Career Progression and Development	34
Safety, Health, and Physical Environment	20
Compensation and Benefits	16
Organizational, Strategic, and Mission Related	13
Values, Ethics, and Standards	7



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

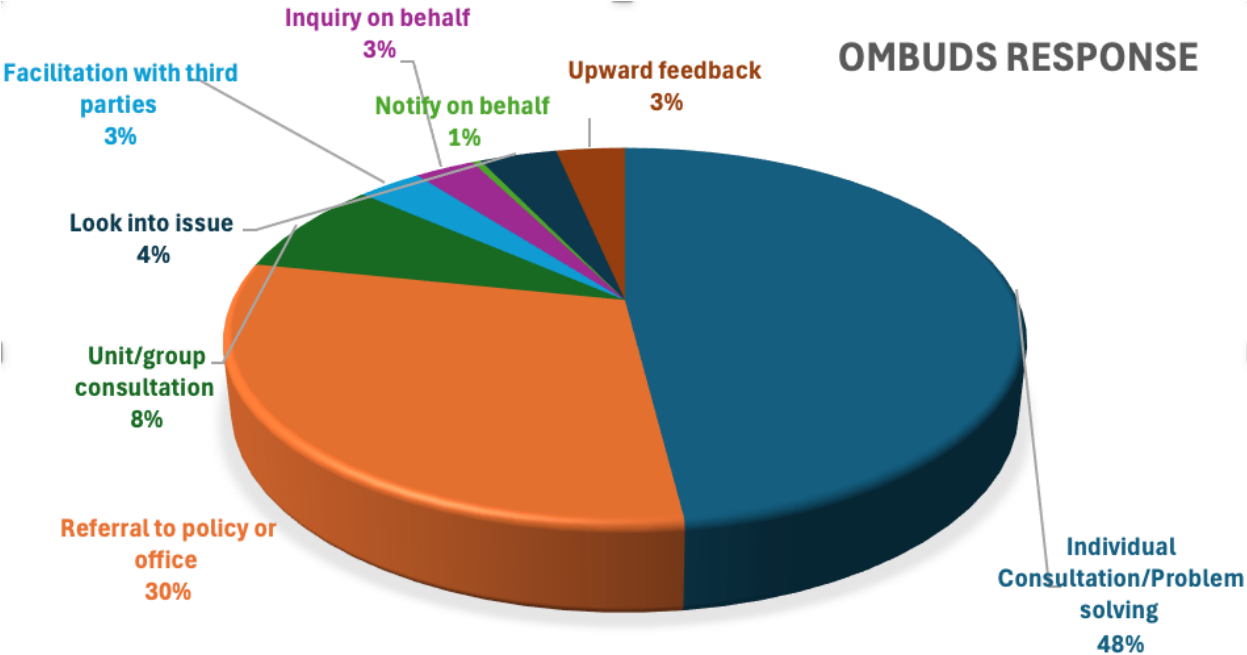
Communication	124	30%
Respect/Treatment	104	25%
Trust/Integrity	48	12%
Administrative Decisions and Interpretation/Application of Rules	37	9%
Equity of Treatment	24	6%
Bullying, Mobbing	23	6%
Harassment	23	6%

## OTHER SUBCATEGORIES

Priorities, Values, Beliefs	18
Feedback	17
Supervisory Effectiveness	17
Business and Financial Practices	15
Performance Appraisal/Grading	14
Safety	14
Compensation	13
Departmental Climate	12
Retaliation	11
Career Progression	10
Leadership and Management	10
Criminal Activity	9
Discrimination	9
Career Development, Coaching, Mentoring	8
Disability, Temporary or Permanent, Reasonable Accommodation	7
Termination/Non-Renewal	7
Student Conduct	5
Values and Culture	5
Change Management	4
Job Application/Selection and Recruitment	4
Physical Working/Living Conditions	4
Tenure/Position Security/Ambiguity	4
Use of Positional Power/Authority	4
Work-Related Stress and Work-Life Balance	4

Behavior of Service Providers	3
Benefits	3
Discipline	3
Diversity Related	3
Job Classification and Description	3
Organizational Climate	3
Reputation	3
Security	3

**OMBUDS RESPONSE**



Individual Consultation/Problem Solving	230	48%
Referral to policy or office	145	30%
Unit/Group consultation	39	8%
Look into issue	18	4%

Facilitation with third parties	15	3%
Upward feedback	16	3%
Inquiry on behalf	14	3%
Notify on behalf	2	1%

**IV. SELECTED ACCOMPLISHMENTS**

- Participated in the SACSCOC 10-year accreditation process
- Justified addition of associate ombuds to the Office of the Ombudsperson, and organized, trained, and chaired a broadly representative search committee
- Sat in on and gave input to the Subcommittee For a Black, Education, Health and Technology Research Institute, for the President’s Task Force on Equity and Opportunity
- Speaker, Office of Inclusion and Diversity
  - Annual retreat luncheon, *Understanding our Colleagues Through Effective Communication*
- Speaker, Auburn University AAUP Chapter
  - *Challenges to Academic Freedom, and Culture Change*
- Speaker, EagleCast Webinar, Office of Professional & Continuing Education
  - *Bullying in the Workplace: An Overview for Supervisors and Employees*
- Engaged in confidential listening sessions for an unnamed Auburn University unit regarding safety and workplace environment issues.

**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**

- *Basic Conflict Management Techniques*
  - School of Veterinary Medicine, *Clinical Concepts and Professional Development* class
  - Anonymous departmental group at Ombuds Office
  - Department of Crops, Soil & Environmental Sciences
  - University Advising
  - Video recorded seminar for Graduate School Mentoring website
  - Center for Educational Outreach and Engagement, Outreach Programs
- *Teamwork: Building Results Collaboratively and Amicably*
  - Department of Campus Security and Safety
  - Early Learning Center
  - University Advising
  - School of Veterinary Medicine Faculty
- Guest Lecturer, Communications 3300, Professor Robert Agne
  - Performed mock mediations with undergraduate students as mediation parties

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

- International Ombuds Association
  - Mentor Ombuds for ombuds at two universities
  - Attended 18<sup>th</sup> annual International Ombudsman Association Conference in Seattle, Washington
- California Caucus of College and University Ombuds
  - Attended 49<sup>th</sup> annual conference in Pacific Grove, California

## **VII. VOLUNTEER COMMUNITY SERVICE**

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

## **VIII. CONCLUSION**

2022 – 2023 was a seminal year for the Auburn University Office of the Ombudsperson. Not only were a record number of new office visitors seen, but the process for expanding the office by the addition of an associate ombuds was begun. This report has reflected those significant items and provided a statistical review of the types of cases seen, categories of constituents heard, and listed various accomplishments of the ombudsperson made during the year.

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