

Annual Report Office of the Ombudsperson 2023 – 2024



What's an Ombuds?



AUBURN
UNIVERSITY

Ombuds Office

Discover

how we can assist you with your
work or school issue.



**Every visitor is
treated with
respect, dignity,
and honor.**



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aumbuds@auburn.edu

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Your Ombuds

Kevin Coonrod, JD
University Ombuds

Dona Yarbrough, PhD
Associate University Ombuds

The Ombuds Office is NOT an Agent of Notice for Auburn University. At your request, the Ombuds can direct you to an appropriate office for giving notice to the university.

We don't judge!

Whatever the situation, we don't judge you or have a stake in what you decide. You are always in the driver's seat.

I. INTRODUCTION

The number of “new” ombuds office visitors¹ reached another record high during the 2023 – 2024 year, as measured from Fall Semester 2023 through the day before Fall Semester, 2024. During that year, we worked with 360 new office visitors, in addition to numerous additional meetings with office visitors on matters already initiated and counted in our statistics.

This was an exciting and important year for the Office of the Ombudsperson as we welcomed our first Associate Ombudsperson, Dr. Dona Yarbrough. This report will contain a section celebrating Dona’s hire, a statistical section concerning the work we did during the year, and a summary of significant accomplishments by the two ombuds.

II. INTRODUCING ASSOCIATE OMBUDS DR. DONA YARBROUGH

Dona Yarbrough became a member of the Auburn family in January 2024 when she commenced service as the first Associate Ombudsperson since the inception of the office, in 2008. She brings extensive experience in and understanding of academic culture, student ombudsing, student affairs administration, and compliance, as well as the important attributes of heart and empathy necessary for the role.

Dona grew up in the South with her parents, both of whom were dedicated teachers in the educational systems of Mississippi and Florida. She received her Bachelor of Arts from the University of West Florida, Pensacola, and then both a Master of Arts and her PhD in English from the University of Virginia, Charlottesville.

Dr. Yarbrough began her professional academic career at the University of Virginia, where she was an instructor in Women’s Studies. She spent several years in Boston at Tufts University, where she was a faculty member in the Women’s Studies Program and Director of the school’s LGBT Center. Prior

¹ 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 visitor appointments regarding the same facts and circumstances are not counted.

to coming to Auburn, Dona served for fifteen years at Emory University in various administrative capacities in Academic and Student Affairs, a compliance officer/investigator for Title IX and discrimination complaints, and in a separate and independent role as Emory’s Student Ombudsperson.

Ombuds Yarbrough has training and experience in conflict management techniques and is a registered mediator with the State of Georgia. Moreover, she is a member of the International Ombuds Association, the United States Ombudsman Association, and the California Caucus of College and University Ombuds. Since arriving at Auburn University, she has embarked upon an informal mediation practicum with University Ombuds Kevin Coonrod as mentor and has participated in several facilitative mediations.

Dona has quickly become a respected ombuds during her first year at Auburn. She has reached out to stakeholders across campus and works easily and effectively with her office visitors: students, faculty, and staff and A&P members who are undergoing challenges at the university. Of particular note, Dona spearheaded an ombuds office marketing campaign directed at our undergraduate student body. Her efforts are detailed later in this report, under Section IV, “Significant Accomplishments.”

In her short time at Auburn University, Dona Yarbrough has become an integral part of the ombuds office and the university community as a whole. She is welcomed for the experience, professionalism, and sense of humor that she brings to Auburn University.

III. STATISTICAL REPORT

This section of the report begins with an eleven-year statistical review of the number of “new” office visitors annually since Ombuds Coonrod became associated with Auburn University in 2013. The section then 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.

Examples of Why People Contact the Ombuds Office

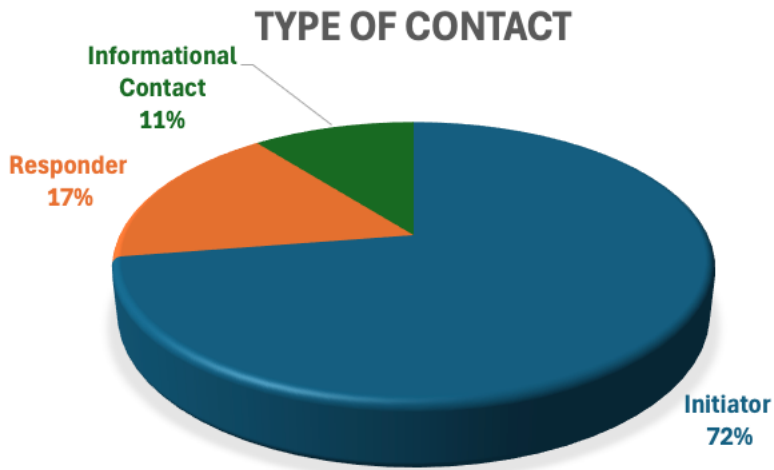
- Conflict with a professor, supervisor, or team member
- Conflicts within a department or student org
- Preparing for a difficult conversation
- Policy violations
- Harassment or discrimination
- Bureaucratic frustrations
- Academic freedom & integrity
- Ethical dilemmas
- Health & safety concerns
- Unprofessional conduct

ELEVEN YEAR REVIEW OF “NEW” OFFICE VISITORS



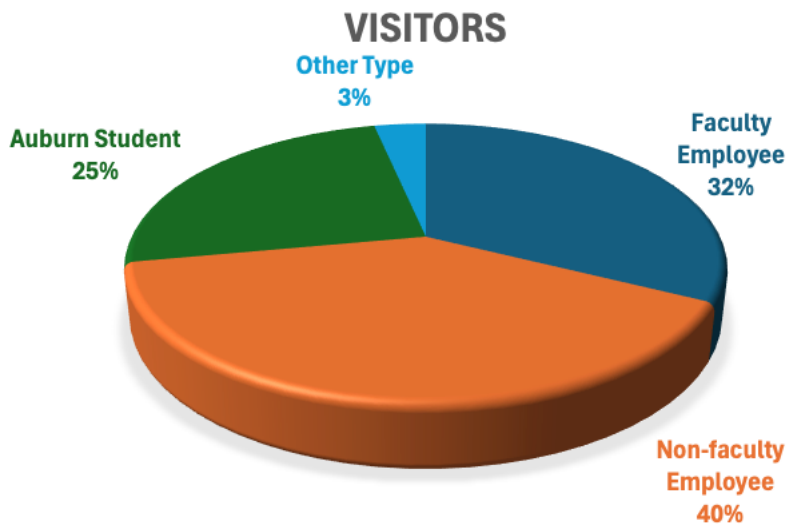
As noted in the Introduction, the number of new office visitors increased to 360 in 2023 – 2024, the most ever recorded in an academic year. The number nearly equates to a 100% increase since the first year of the present Ombudsperson’s employment in 2013. The graph above chronicles the numbers of new, first-time office visitors each year since that date.

TYPE OF CONTACT



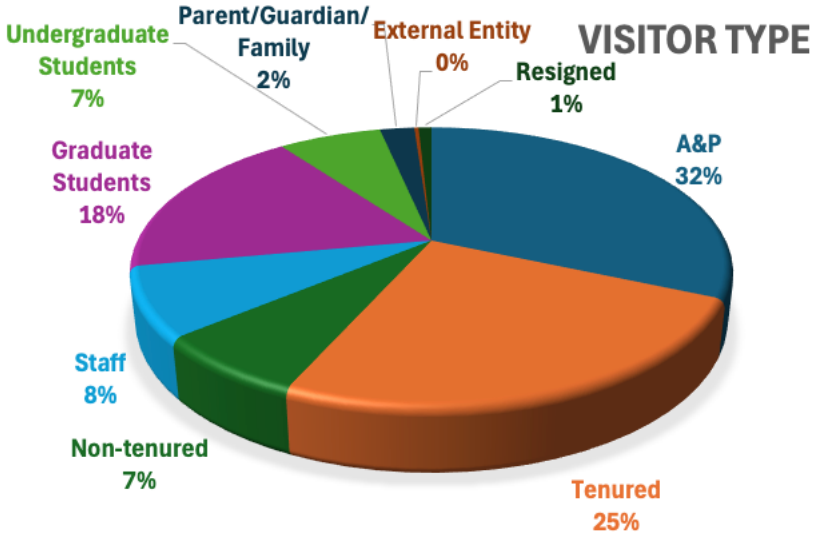
Initiators	261	72%
Responders	61	17%
Information	38	11%
Total	360	100%

OFFICE VISITORS



Non-Faculty Employee	142	40%
Faculty Employee	116	32%
Auburn Student	90	25%
Other	12	3%
Total	360	100%

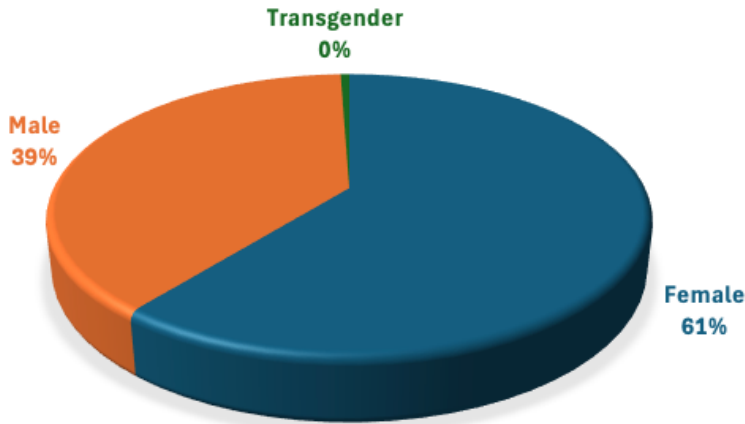
VISITOR SUBCATEGORIES



A&P	113	32%
Tenured Faculty	90	25%
Graduate Student	66	18%
Staff	29	8%
Non-tenured Faculty	26	7%
Undergraduate Student	24	7%
Parent/Guardian/Family	8	2%
Resigned	3	1%
External Entity	1	0%
Total:	360	100%

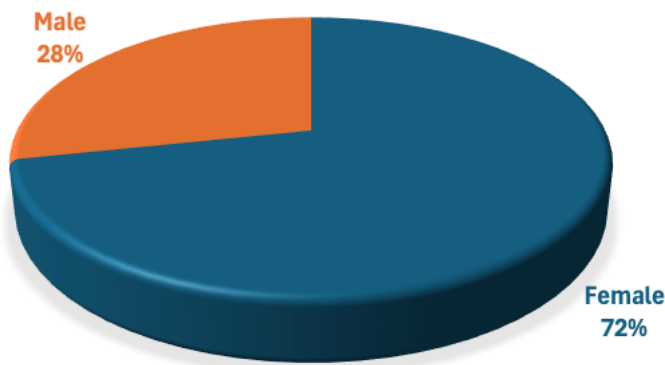
**DEMOGRAPHICS
GENDER**

OVERALL GENDER



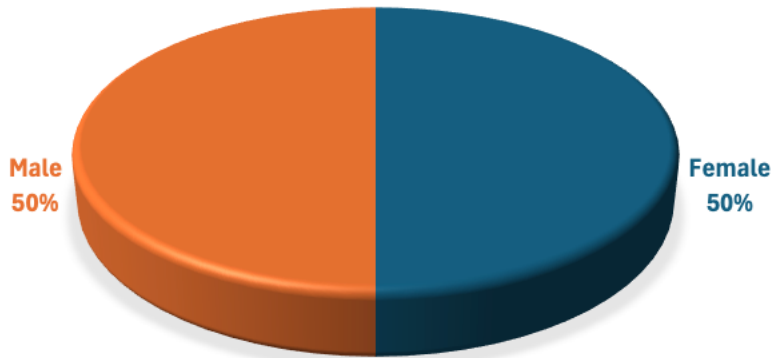
Female	219	61%
Male	139	39%
Transgender	2	0%
Total	360	100%

A&P GENDER



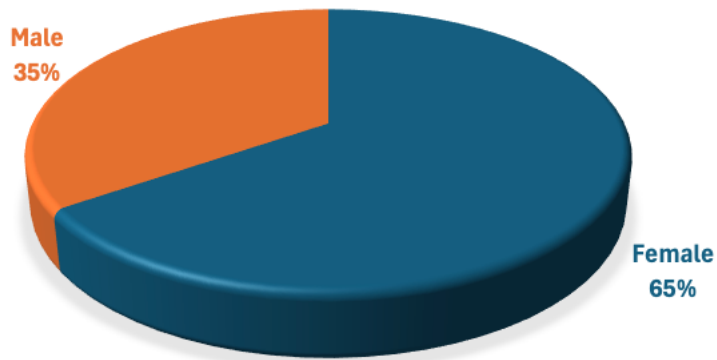
Female	81	72%
Male	32	28%
Total	113	100%

TENURED FACULTY GENDER



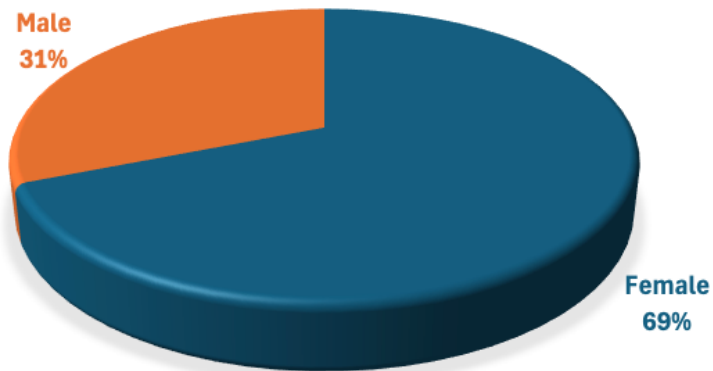
Male	45	50%
Female	45	50%
Total	90	100%

NON-TENURED FACULTY GENDER



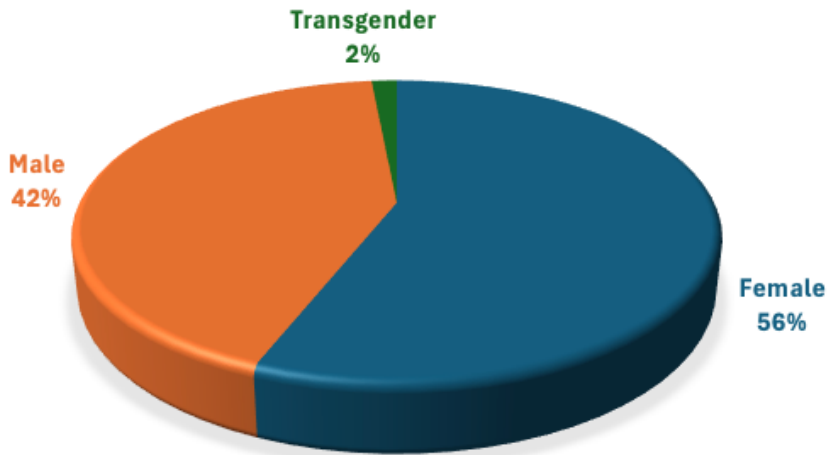
Female	17	65%
Male	9	35%
Total	26	100%

STAFF GENDER



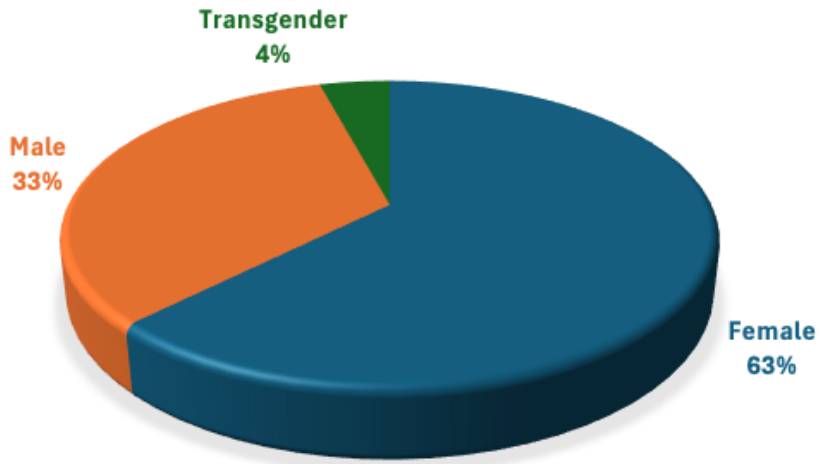
Female	20	69%
Male	9	31%
Total	29	100%

GRADUATE STUDENT GENDER



Female	37	56%
Male	28	42%
Transgender	1	2%
Total	66	100%

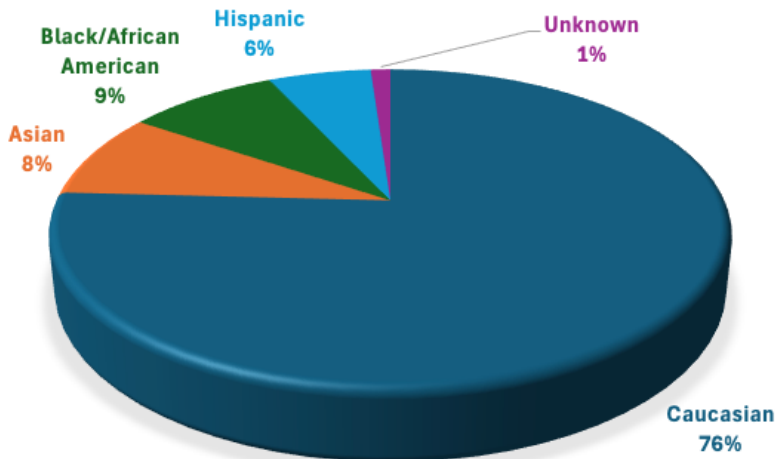
UNDERGRADUATE STUDENT GENDER



Female	15	63%
Male	8	33%
Transgender	1	4%
Total	24	100%

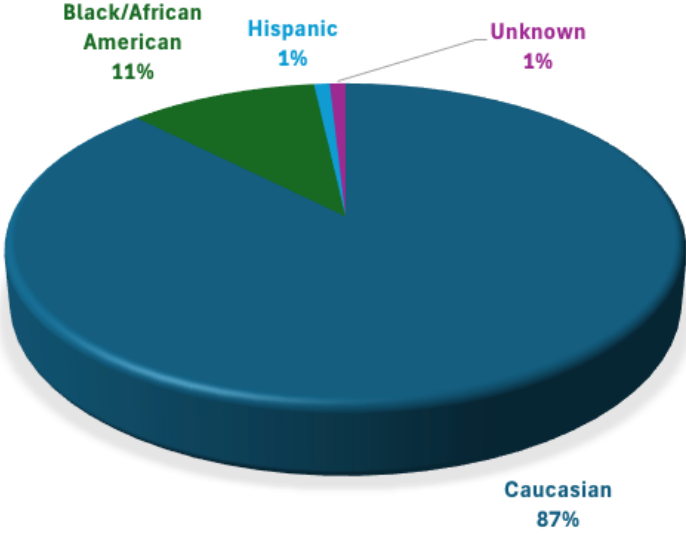
RACE/ETHNICITY

OVERALL RACE/ETHNICITY



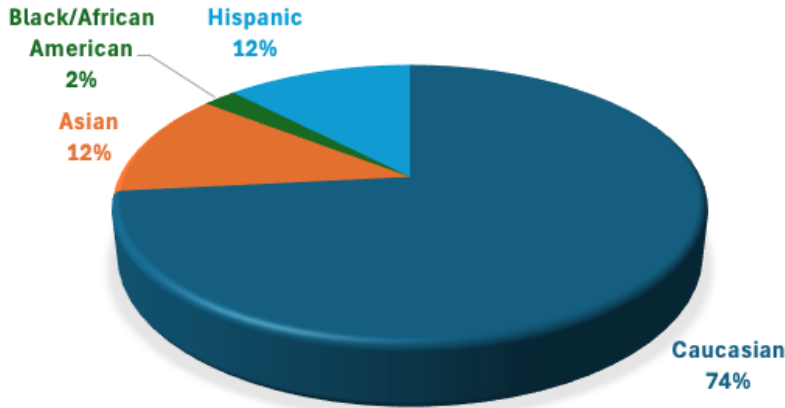
Caucasian	273	76%
Black/African American	31	9%
Asian	31	8%
Hispanic	21	6%
Undetermined	4	1%
Total	360	100%

A&P RACE/ETHNICITY



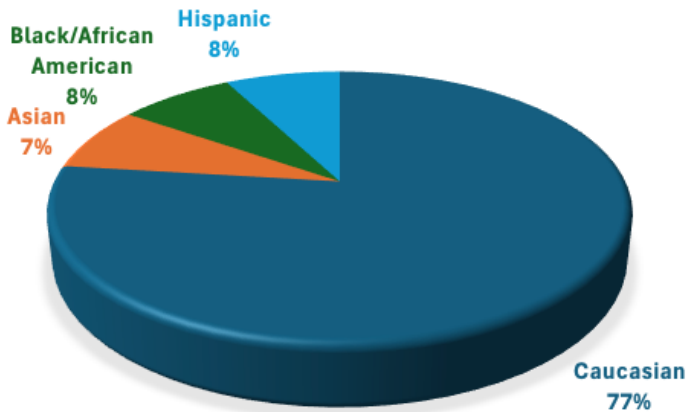
Caucasian	99	87%
Black/African American	12	11%
Hispanic	1	1%
Unknown	1	1%
Total	113	100%

TENURED RACE/ETHNICITY



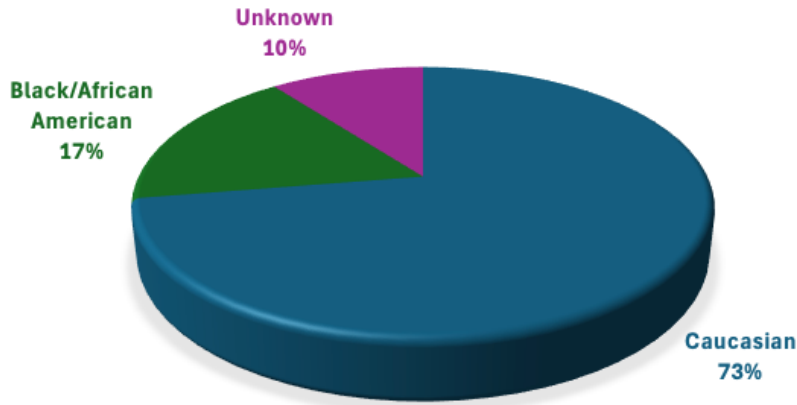
Caucasian	66	74%
Asian	11	12%
Hispanic	11	12%
Black/African American	2	2%
Total	90	100%

NON-TENURED RACE/ETHNICITY



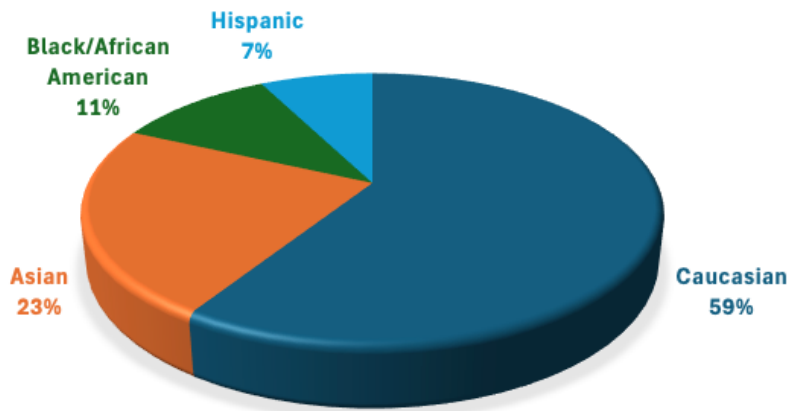
Caucasian	20	77%
Black/African American	2	8%
Asian	2	7%
Hispanic	2	8%
Total	26	100%

STAFF RACE/ETHNICITY



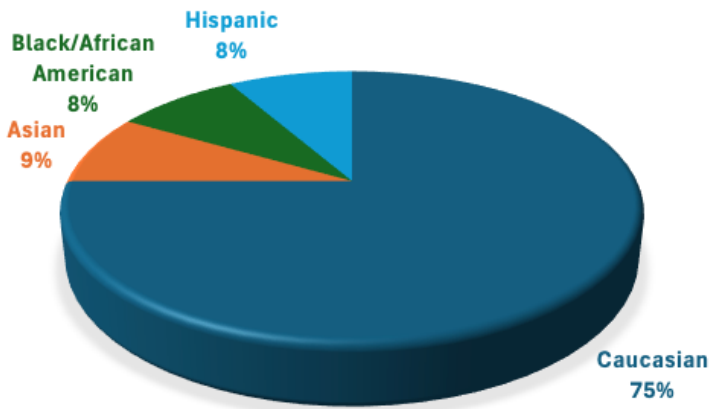
Caucasian	21	73%
Black/African American	5	17%
Unknown	3	10%
Total	29	100%

GRADUATE STUDENT RACE/ETHNICITY



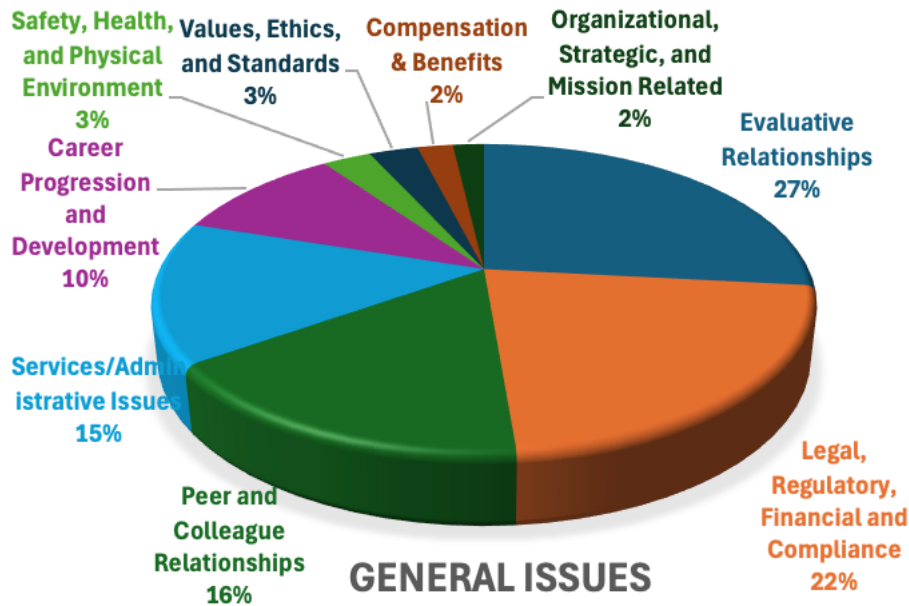
Caucasian	39	59%
Asian	15	23%
Black/African American	7	11%
Hispanic	5	7%
Total	66	100%

UNDERGRADUATE RACE/ETHNICITY



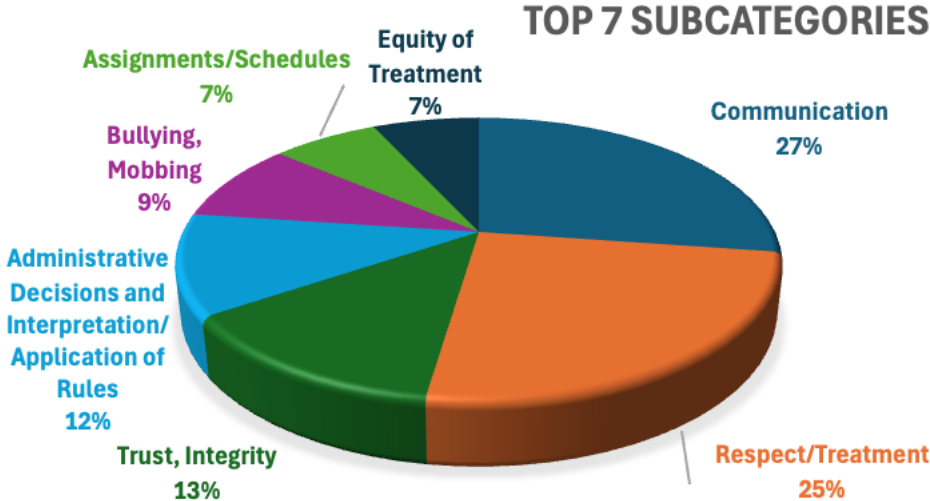
Caucasian	18	75%
Asian	2	9%
Black/African American	2	8%
Hispanic	2	8%
Total	24	100%

GENERAL ISSUE CATEGORIES



Evaluative Relationships	102	27%
Legal, Regulatory, Financial and Compliance	84	22%
Peer and Colleague Relationships	63	16%
Services/Administrative Issues	57	15%
Career Progression and Development	39	10%
Safety, Health, and Physical Environment	11	3%
Values, Ethics, and Standards	11	3%
Compensation and Benefits	8	2%
Organizational, Strategic, and Mission Related	7	2%

SPECIFIC ISSUE SUBCATEGORIES



TOP 7 SUBCATEGORY ISSUES (COMMON THEMES)

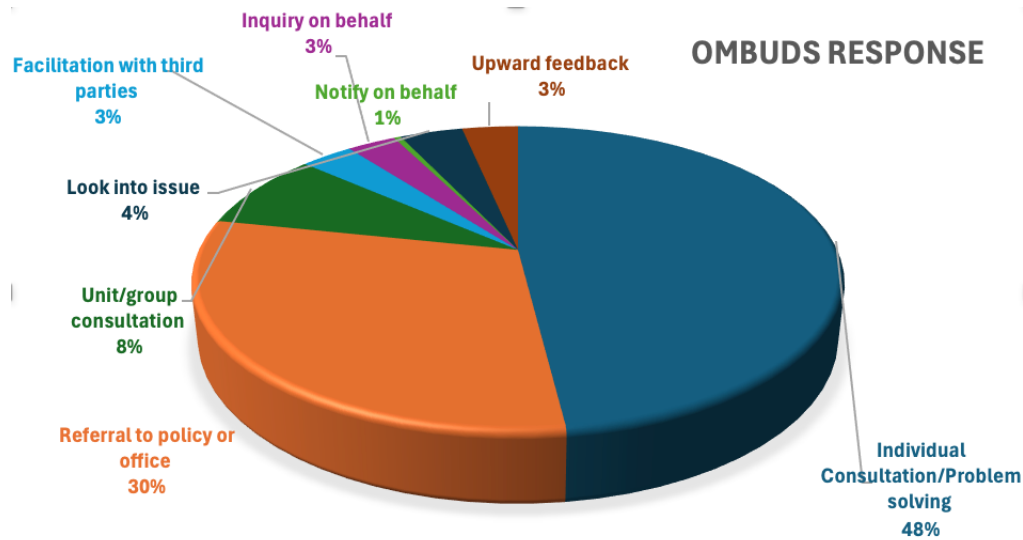
Communication	99	27%
Respect/Treatment	91	25%
Trust/Integrity	48	13%
Administrative Decisions and Interpretation/Application of Rules	42	12%
Bullying, Mobbing	33	9%
Equity of Treatment	25	7%
Assignments/Schedules	25	7%

OTHER SUBCATEGORIES

Supervisory Effectiveness	23
Discrimination	21
Business and Financial Practices	20
Performance Appraisal/Grading	20
Priorities, Values, Beliefs	19
Departmental Climate	18
Feedback	14
Harassment	13
Termination/Nonrenewal	13
Retaliation	12
Diversity Related	11
Behavior of Service Provider(s)	10
Insubordination	8
Responsiveness/Timeliness	8
Career Development, Coaching, Mentoring	7
Career Progression	7
Quality of Services	7
Reputation	7
Standards of Conduct	7
Student Conduct	7
Work Related Stress and Work-Life Balance	7
Tenure/Position Security/Ambiguity	6

Accessibility	5
Compensation	5
Disability, Temporary or Permanent, Reasonable Accommodation	5
Resignation	5
Grade Dispute	4
Intellectual Property Rights	4
Physical Violence	4
Values and Culture	4
Change Management	3
Discipline	3
Leadership and Management	3
Privacy and Security of Information	3
Retirement, Pension	3

OMBUDS RESPONSE



Individual Consultation/Problem Solving	230
Referral to policy or office	145
Unit/Group consultation	39
Look into issue	18
Facilitation with third parties	15
Upward feedback	16
Inquiry on behalf	14
Notify on behalf	2

IV. SELECTED ACCOMPLISHMENTS

- University Ombuds chaired Associate Ombudsperson Search Committee, resulting in the selection and hiring of Dr. Dona Yarbrough
- Associate Ombuds Dona Yarbrough spearheaded an ombuds office marketing campaign directed toward Auburn University undergraduate students:
 - Created new brochure for office and hand-delivered to offices across campus.
 - Updated tabling materials, including creation of office tablecloth, new giveaways (stickers)
 - Completed phase 1 redesign of office website, including redesigning and editing/creating new content for each page. New features include FAQs and tagline, “Come with a problem. Leave with a plan.”
 - Worked with OCM to create a special “Talk to your buds” marketing campaign for undergraduate students, who access the Ombuds less frequently (by percentage) than other campus constituencies. To be implemented in AY 2024-25, “Talk to your buds” includes the following products:
 - Flyers
 - Digital signage
 - Banner
 - Instagram/Facebook digital flyers
 - Auburn transit posters (in Tiger Transit buses)
 - “Dear Ombuds” monthly column in “This Week @ Auburn,” student email digest, September - April

- Feature story, “Ask your bud: The Auburn University Ombuds Office wants to help you,” an interview with the Associate Ombuds, published in “This Week @ Auburn” and “Auburn News,” for Auburn employees. Published August 15.
- Associate Ombuds Yarbrough began an informal mediation practicum with the University Ombuds as mentor. The practicum includes completing 6 co-facilitated mediations and 1 solo mediation, including pre-mediation meetings and post-mediation debriefs.
- Speaker, Associate Ombuds Dona Yarbrough, *Ombuds Stories*
 - International Ombuds Association 19th Annual Conference
 - Indianapolis, Indiana
- Speaker, Ombuds Kevin Coonrod, *Working with High Conflict Persons*
 - Alabama Association of Regional Councils
 - Perdido Beach Resort, Orange Beach, Alabama
- Speaker, Kevin Coonrod, *Restorative Justice -- An Overview – For Higher Educational Institutions*
 - Gulf-South Summit
 - Dixon Conference Center
 - Auburn University Department of Outreach
- Speaker, Kevin Coonrod, *Teamwork, Conflict Management, and Collaborative Problem Solving*, via invitation from Auburn University Government & Economic Development Institute
 - Alabama Local Government Training Institute’s “Effective Collaboration Across County Entities Conference”
 - Montgomery Marriott Prattville Hotel & Conference Center
 - Alabama City/Council Management Association
 - Auburn Center for Developing Industries
- Ombuds Coonrod sat in on and gave input during organizational meetings for the Aspire Auburn leadership development program
- Ombuds Yarbrough sat in on and gave input during Auburn and multi-institutional meetings of a working group focused on Title IX respondent education and sanctions.

V. EDUCATIONAL OUTREACH AT AUBURN UNIVERSITY

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 from Auburn University entities

- *Basic Conflict Management Techniques*
 - School of Veterinary Medicine, *Clinical Concepts and Professional Development* class
 - Anonymous individuals at Ombuds Office
 - School of Agriculture Graduate Student Class
- *Teamwork: Building Results Collaboratively and Amicably*
 - Facilities Management, Human Resources Development
 - School of Agriculture Graduate Student Class
 - Department of Psychological Sciences Retreat
- *The Art and Productive Capacity of Active Listening*
 - School of Agriculture Graduate Student Class
- *Bullying in the Workplace*
 - Facilities Management, Human Resources Development
- 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
 - Both ombuds attended 19th annual International Ombudsman Association Conference in Seattle, Washington
 - University Ombuds Coonrod mentored two external university ombuds
- California Caucus of College and University Ombuds
 - Both ombuds attended 50th annual conference in Pacific Grove, California

VII. CONCLUSION

After a national search, Auburn University was pleased to appoint Dr. Dona Yarbrough as the institution's first Associate Ombudsperson. Dr. Yarbrough commenced work as of January 1, 2024, and quickly made an impression as a competent, professional, caring ombuds for the members of the university community.

During her first year, Dona directed the creation of a marketing campaign designed to inform AU undergraduate students of the many types of assistance offered to them by the Office of the Ombudsperson. Images from her new office brochure are interspersed in this report. She contributed to a record number of individuals seeking ombuds services this year, as reflected by the statistics provided in this report. We proudly and enthusiastically welcome Dona into the family.

<h3>About Us</h3> <p>The Auburn University Ombuds Office offers confidential and independent assistance to anyone in the Auburn community with concerns relating to or affecting school or work. We provide an informal and impartial resource for students, parents, employees, and faculty to brainstorm ways to address issues and conflicts, improve interpersonal relationships, and express concerns.</p>	<h3>Examples of What Ombuds Do</h3> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Discuss your concerns & clarify issues in a safe environment.• Help identify & strategize a range of options to resolve your problem.• Facilitate communication indirectly or, with permission, via shuttle diplomacy.• Mediate conflicts if all parties agree.• Assist you in collaborative negotiation.• Provide information about university policies, procedures, & programs.	<h3>Awareness & Education</h3> <p>We would love to come to your organization to tell you more about what we do or provide workshops on a variety of ombuds-related topics. Examples:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">Conflict MangementTeamworkBullying & MobbingWorking with High-Conflict People
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