

OFFICE OF THE OMBUDSPERSON

2014 – 2015 ANNUAL REPORT



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I. INTRODUCTION

The 2014/2015 academic year saw a seven percent increase in visitorship to the Office of the Ombudsperson, including a significant increase within two important constituent groups: students and staff. The number of visitors from the student body increased by 105%, from 21 visitors in 2013/2014, to 43 students in 2014/2015. Staff visits increased by 95%, with 41 visitors in the 2014/2015 academic year, compared to 21 the previous year.

Marketing the office to those two particular groups was a goal of the Ombuds and led to a balanced distribution of visitors between the Ombuds' four main constituencies, consisting of faculty, staff, A & P and the student body. The Ombuds' present goal is to continue to raise awareness of the office to all members of the Auburn University community.

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 bent 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 intangible benefits to an organization of an ombuds office, followed by a report of the issues and demographics seen by the Ombuds in the 2014/2015 academic year. A list of accomplishments and educational outreach efforts will then conclude this document.

II. INTANGIBLE BENEFITS OF OFFICE

The organizational ombudsperson office is a voluntary help resource that brings both apparent and unseen benefits to an institution. By helping members of the community work with greater understanding and respect for each other, the ombuds' efforts contribute to the efficiency and productivity of the organizational workforce and academic constituency. Moreover, by helping members resolve disputes on their own, expensive grievance processes and litigation are avoided.

Lawsuits or judgments are not only costly, but they are public and can affect the reputation of the organization. Conflicts that are dealt with in the early stages do not escalate past the point of reasonable discussion into expensive and time-consuming battles. Just as importantly, conflicts that are resolved by the participants themselves contribute to a greater sense of community well-being and peace. An all-or-nothing decision by a grievance committee, judge or jury leaves at

least one party angry and bitter over a perceived injustice, and sometimes both parties to the conflict are not satisfied with the result.

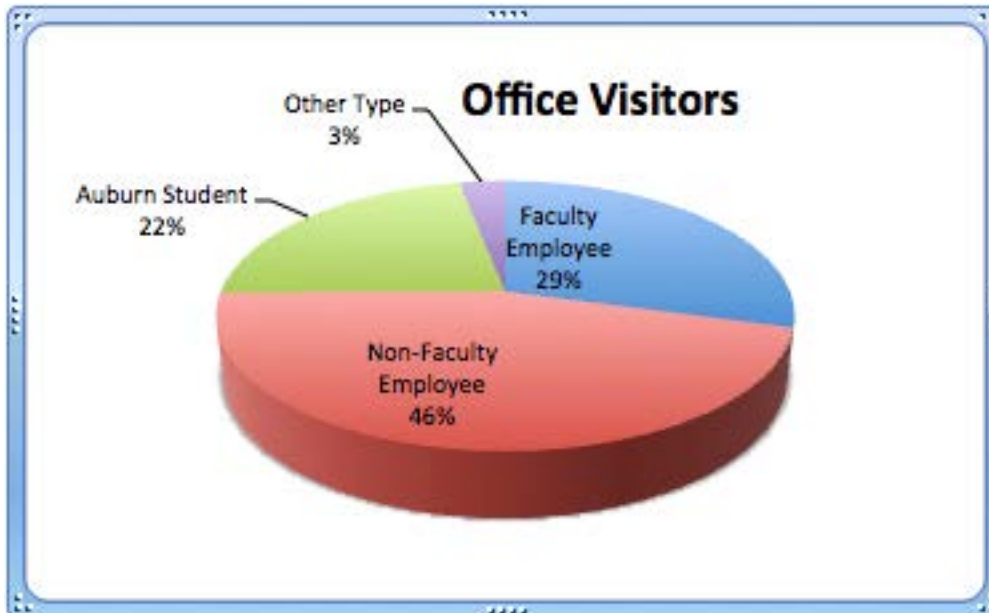
In contrast, the ombuds can help people come to their own resolutions – and, when the parties craft their own solutions using their personal values and creativity, they become invested in both the result and their future relationship. Often, individuals working through their conflict will face and resolve fundamental issues revolving around needs for fairness, respect, trust, integrity, dignity or autonomy. Those persons are far more likely to abide by their agreement than a decision that is beyond their control, and made by a stranger to the dispute.

Studies have concluded that every dollar invested in an ombuds program can bring a return of anywhere from twelve to twenty dollars in saved resources, employee morale and organizational productivity. Any outflow or reduction of organizational resources due to absenteeism, presenteeism, unnecessary insurance premiums, legal costs, administrator time, sabotage, theft or low morale represents a loss to the institution. Curtailing those losses is thus an asset, and one of the many unseen benefits brought to an organization by an ombuds office. As Benjamin Franklin wisely articulated, “a penny saved is a penny earned.”

III. REPORT

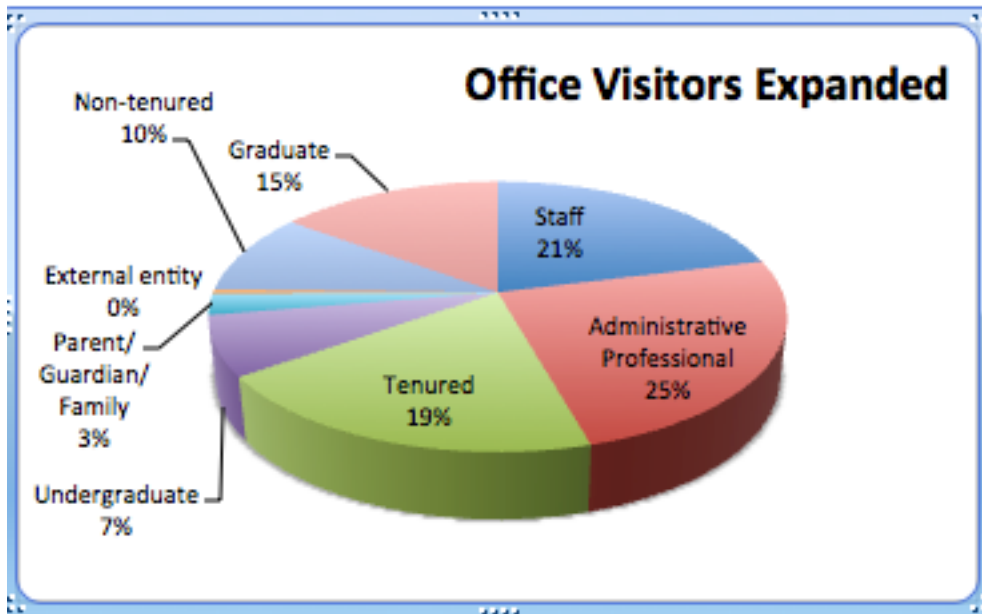
The following report consists of pie charts and numerical information regarding the different types of visitors and issues presented to the Ombudsperson office. The information contained in this report is purposely general so as to maintain the confidentiality of statements made by office visitors to 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



Office Visitors	Number	Percentage
A & P and Staff	89	46%
Faculty	57	29%
Students	43	22%
Other	6	3%
Total	195	100%

This year's statistics reflect a greater balance among the four main campus constituent groups: Faculty (57), A & P (48), Students (43), and Staff (41).

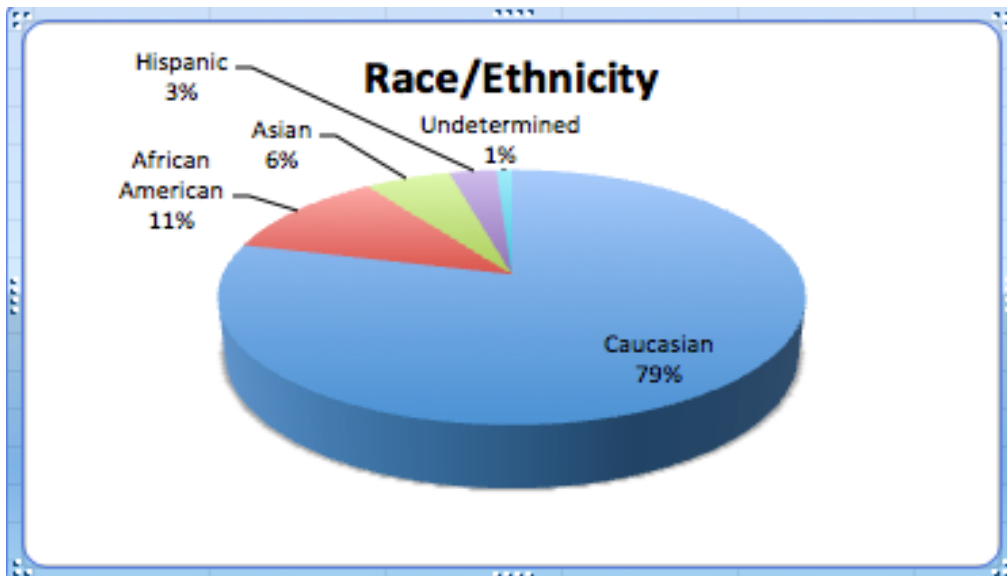


Office Visitors Expanded	Number	Percentage
Administrative & Professional	48	25%
Staff	41	21%
Tenured Faculty	38	19%
Non-tenured Faculty	19	10%
Graduate Students	29	15%
Undergraduates	14	7%
Parent/Guardian/Family	5	3%
External entity	1	0%
Total	195	100%

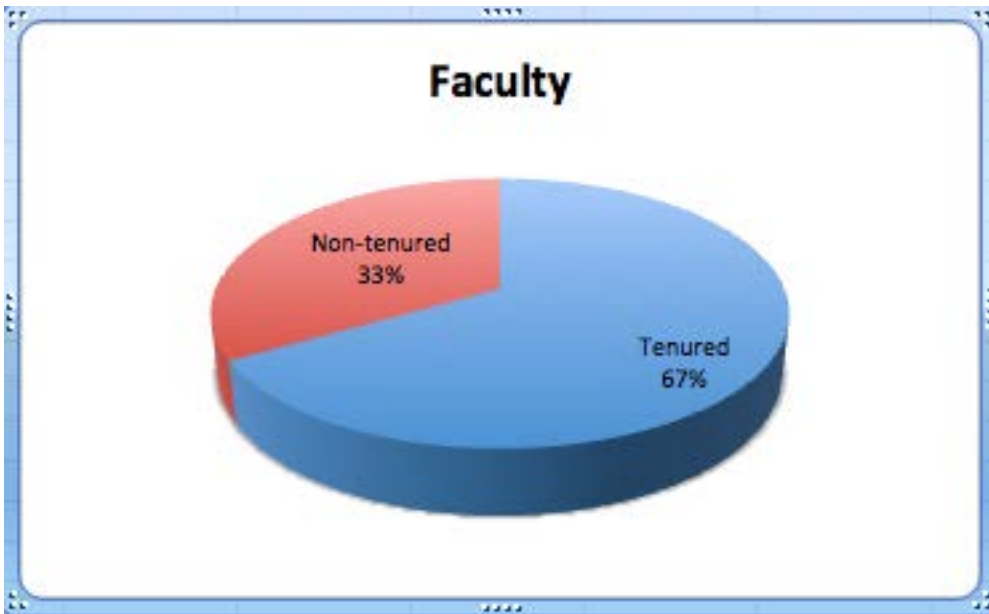
DEMOGRAPHICS



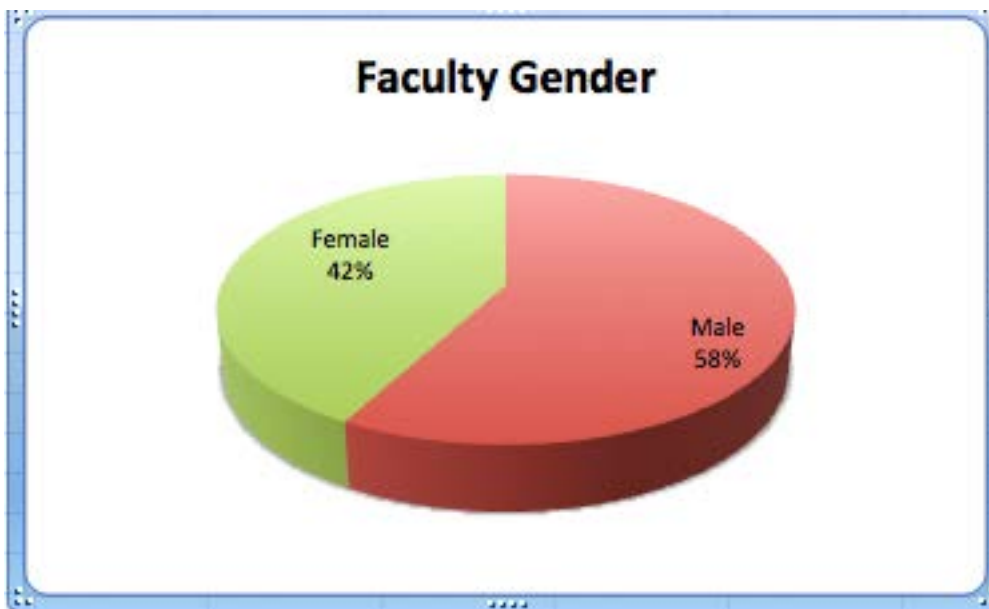
Gender - All visitors	Number	Percentage
Female	104	53%
Male	91	47%



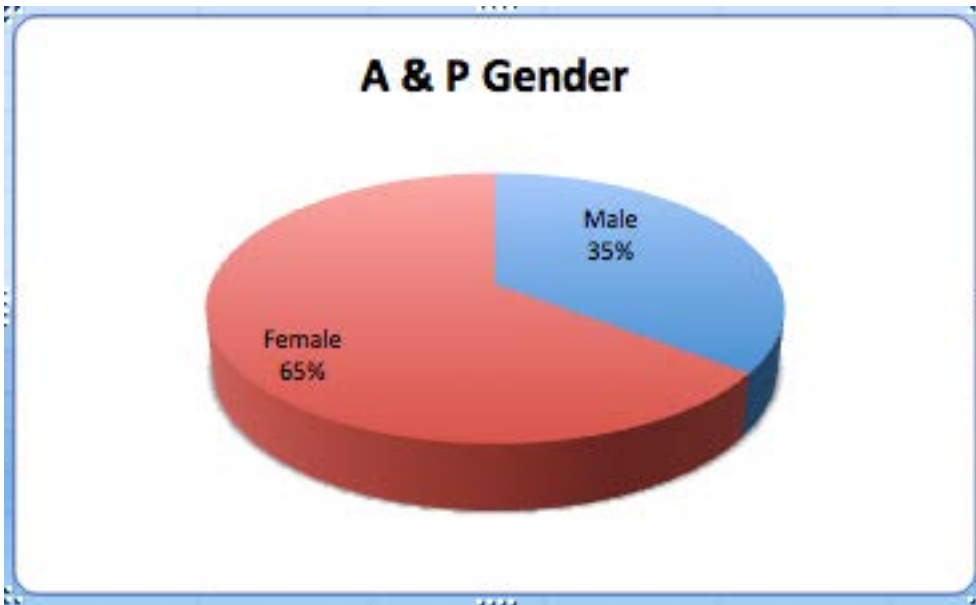
Race/Ethnicity	Number	Percentage
Caucasian	154	79%
African American	22	11%
Asian	11	6%
Hispanic	6	3%
Undetermined	2	1%



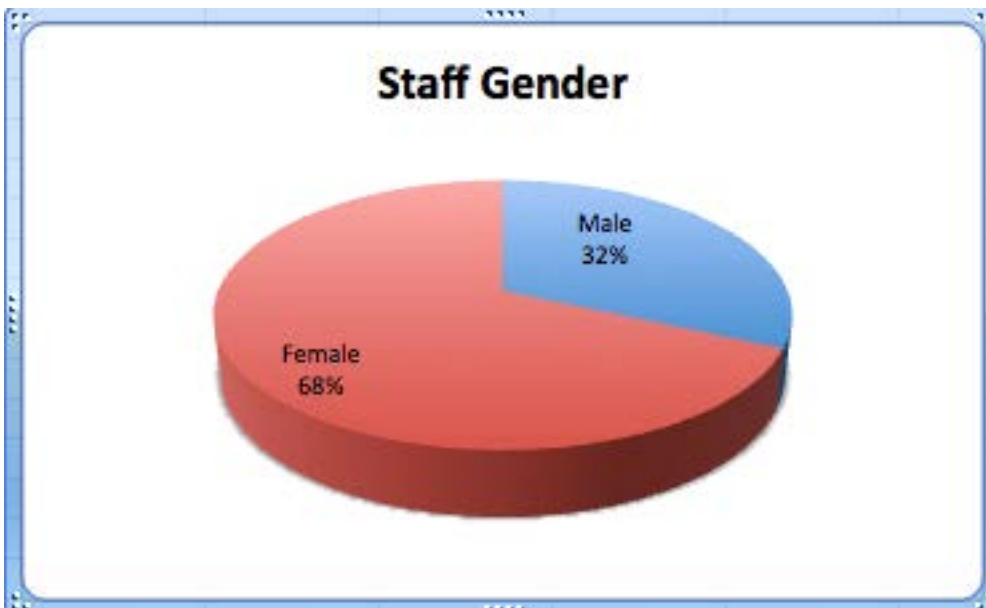
Faculty	Number	Percentage
Tenured	38	67%
Non-tenured	19	33%
Total	57	100%



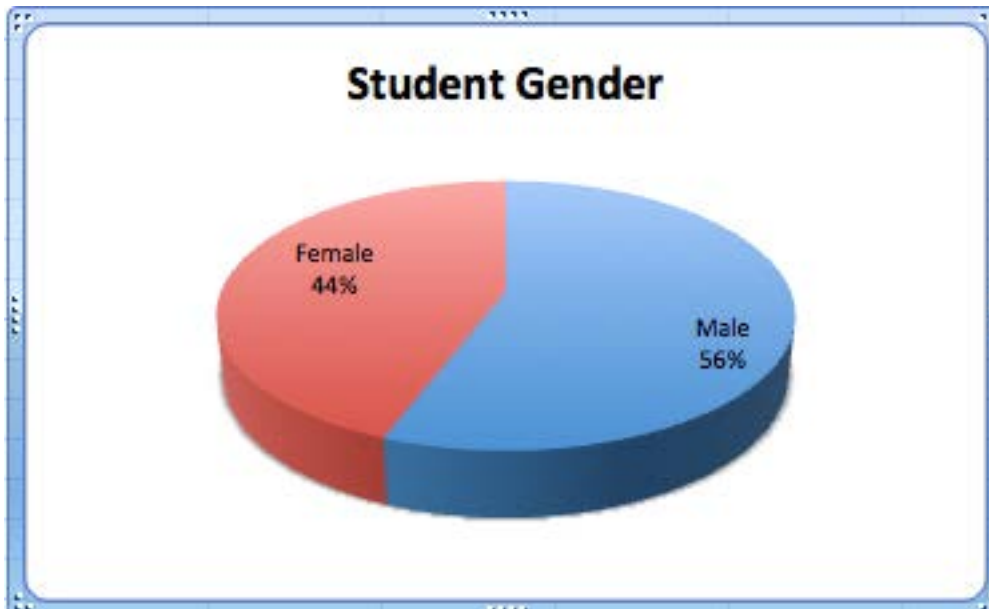
Faculty Gender	Number	Percentage
Male	33	58%
Female	24	42%
Total	57	100%



A & P Gender	Number	Percentage
Female	31	65%
Male	17	35%
Total	48	100%

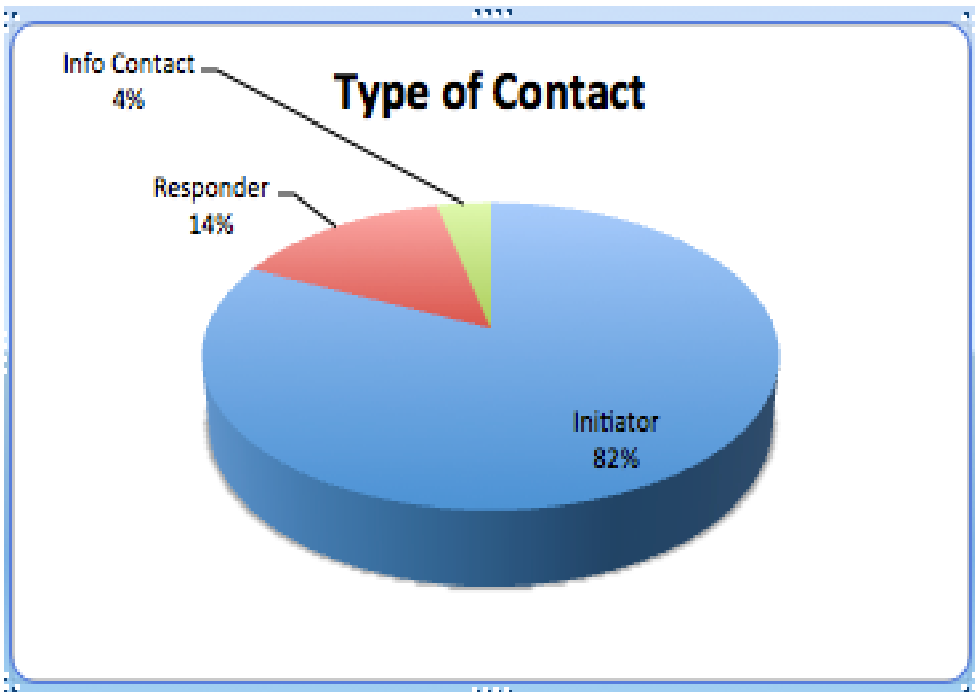


Staff Gender	Number	Percentage
Female	28	68%
Male	13	32%
Total	41	100%



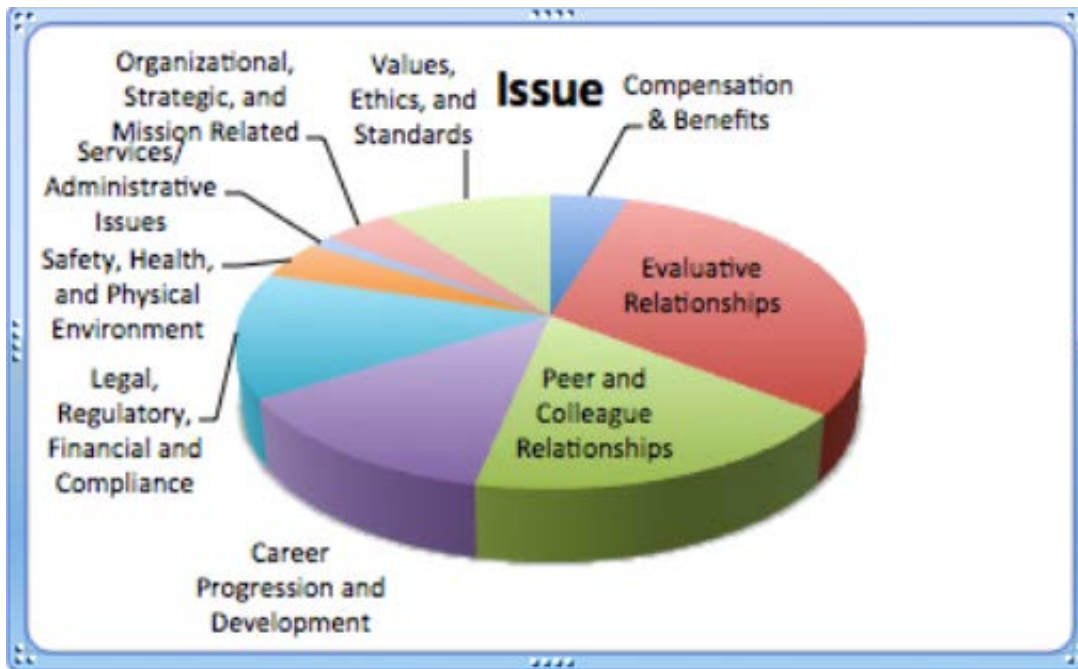
Student Gender	Number	Percentage
Male	24	56%
Female	19	44%
Total	43	100%

CONTACT AND ISSUE CATEGORIES



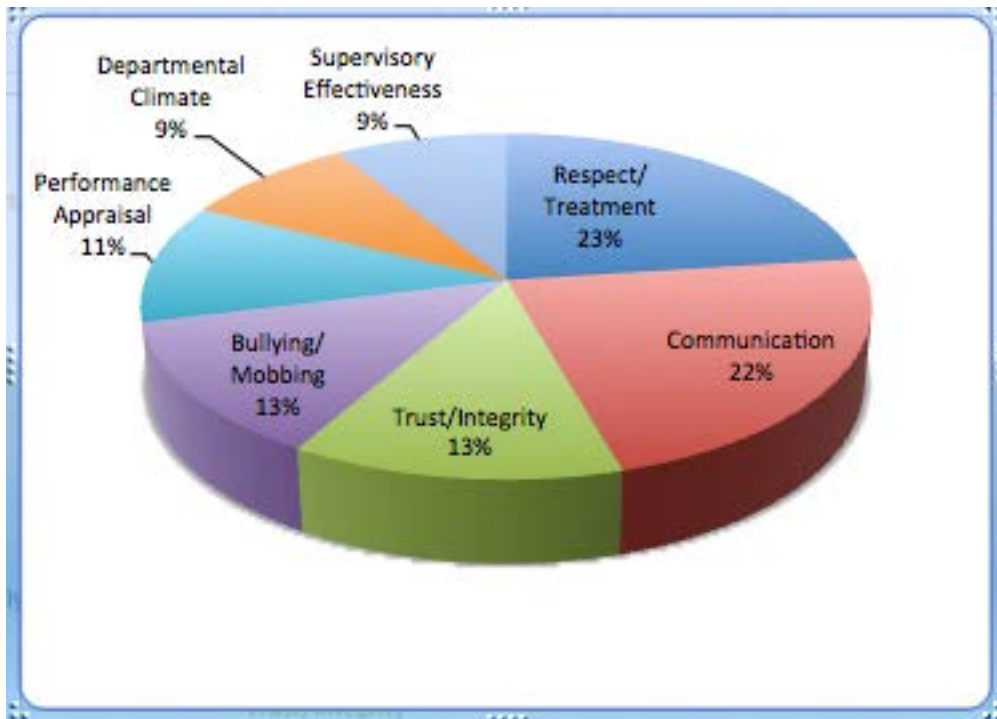
Type of Contact	Number	Percentage
Initiators	160	82%
Responders	28	14%
Informational	7	4%
Total	195	100%

GENERAL ISSUE CATEGORIES



Issue	Number	Percentage
Evaluative Relationships	72	31%
Peer and Colleague Relationships	41	18%
Legal, Regulatory, Financial, and Compliance	32	14%
Career Progression and Development	30	13%
Values, Ethics, and Standards	24	10%
Compensation and Benefits	11	5%
Safety, Health, and Physical Environment	10	4%
Organizational, Strategic, and Mission Related	10	4%
Services/Administrative Issues	3	1%
Total Discussions of General Themes	233	100%

TOP 7 SUBCATEGORY ISSUES (COMMON THEMES)



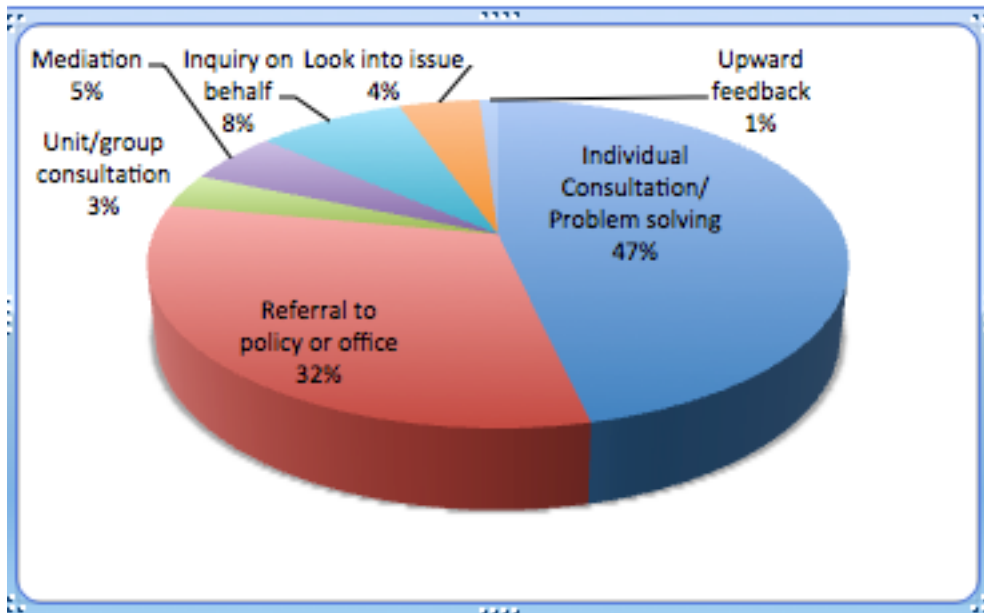
Top 7 Subcategories	Number	Percentage
Respect/Treatment	70	23%
Communication	69	22%
Trust/Integrity	39	13%
Bullying/Mobbing	39	13%
Performance Appraisal	34	11%
Departmental Climate	27	9%
Supervisory Effectiveness	27	9%
Total Discussions of Top 7 Common Themes	305	100%

OTHER SUBCATEGORIES

Other Subcategories	Number
Assignments/Schedules	25
Career Progression	23
Equity of Treatment	22
Diversity Related	22
Values, Beliefs, Culture	17
Reputation	15
Standards of Conduct	13

Other Subcategories	Number
Priorities, Values, Beliefs	13
Retaliation	13
Compensation/Benefits/Retirement	12
Business & Financial Practices	12
Discrimination	9
Position Termination	8
Organizational Climate	7
Leadership & Management	7
Use of Positional Power/Authority	6
Involuntary Transfer	6
Harassment	6
Safety	5
Criminal Activity	5
Physical Violence	5
Job Classification	4
Discipline	4
Scientific Conduct/Integrity	4

OMBUDS RESPONSE



Ombuds Response	Number
Individual Consultation/Problem solving	137
Referral to policy or office	93
Inquiry on behalf	24
Mediation	15
Look into issue	13
Unit/Group consultation	10
Upward feedback	3

Ombuds Response	Number
Total response	295

PRE AND POST-DISPUTE



Pre and Post-Dispute	Number	Percentage
Pre-dispute matters	187	96%
Post-dispute matters	8	4%
Total	195	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

- The Charter of the Office of the Ombudsperson was executed on May 14, 2015 by President Jay Gogue and Ombuds Kevin Coonrod. This Charter established the functions and parameters of the office as University policy, solidifying the Ombudsperson’s role as an independent, neutral, confidential, and informal resource. The Charter additionally provides that no member of the Auburn University community can be retaliated against for visiting the Ombudsperson’s office, and no person can be retaliated against for declining to visit the office.
- Ombudsperson Kevin Coonrod became a Certified Organizational Ombudsman Practitioner through the International Ombudsman Association.

- Ombuds Coonrod became a member of the Alabama State Court Mediator Roster.

V. PROFESSIONAL ORGANIZATIONS AND SELECTED CONFERENCES ATTENDED

- Member, International Ombudsman Association. Attended 10th Annual IOA Conference in Atlanta, Georgia. Presented *Working With High Conflict Persons* seminar.
- Member, California Caucus of College and University Ombuds. Attended 42nd Annual California Caucus Conference in Pacific Grove, California. Member, California Caucus Board of Directors.
- Attended Auburn University's 5th Annual Anti-Bullying Summit in Peachtree City, Georgia.

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 2014/2015 academic year were:

- Bullying and Mobbing in the Workplace and Academe
- Working with High Conflict Persons
- Cooperative Negotiation Strategy, with Dr. Stefan Eisen of the Maxwell AFB War College
- Identifying Underlying Interests: Tips from Nature, History and the Cinema

VII. CONCLUSION

In addition to providing guidance on University policy and watching for trend information, the Ombudsperson offers the opportunity for a person to be truly heard. As seen from the issue categories and subcategories in this report, the human need for respect, trust, integrity and peaceful communication is of great importance to the members or our community. The Ombuds office can fulfill these needs by listening, identifying them as interests underlying the conflict, and assisting the individuals to address them in an amicable manner.