

July 1, 2002 – May 31, 2003 Report University Ombuds Office

(Condensed Version)

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I. Introduction

The University Ombuds Office, in its 33rd year of operation, serves to provide the university community with confidential and informal assistance in resolving campus conflicts, disputes, and grievances and to promote fair and equitable treatment within the university. The Office of the Ombuds is staffed by Elizabeth Graham, University Ombuds and Katherine Ziff, Assistant Ombuds. The 2002-03 year marks Elizabeth's first year as Ombuds and Katherine's second year as Assistant Ombuds. Both positions are half time.

This report details the activities of the Ohio University Ombuds office for the 2002-2003 fiscal year. In addition, this report describes the people and the concerns they brought to our office, noticeable trends, recommendations for consideration, and future plans. This report is crafted around the theme "Organizing for Learning" and features educational outreach, innovations, office improvements, and continuous learning in the Ombuds Office.

1. **Educational Outreach**, including seminars, workshops and department/unit visits.
2. **Innovations** that inform and serve the university community.
3. **Office Improvements** that provide a more informal, comfortable/comforting, and professional environment.
4. **Continuous Learning**, including staff attendance at conferences and seminars designed to help the Ombuds staff better serve constituents.

These functions helped us deal effectively with a wide variety of cases, issues and situations included in the data summary at the end of the report. The outreach informed constituents of services and policies, the innovations (including an expanded Web Site) improved access and disseminated more information, and office improvements created an inviting setting for dialogue. These functions, in and of themselves, are important; but combined with continuous learning (mediation, harassment, and GLBT training, etc.), helped empower visitors to seek resolutions -- often independent of our office's intervention.

The Ombuds Office seeks to participate in the University's mission by applying the core tenets proposed by Provost Kopp, specifically:

- Develop and Encourage a Deepened Sense of a Community Dedicated to Learning.* The Office of the Ombuds plays a central role in facilitating a deepened sense of community in as much as it informs, serves, invites, and engages visitors so that they contribute to

• See "Organizing for Learning," <http://www.ohiou.edu/provost/OrganizingforLearning.html>.

the learning process. That process can occur in the classroom, of course; but often it happens in staff, faculty, and even student quarters. The learning component is interpersonal: How do people from diverse backgrounds or differing viewpoints learn to find common bonds instead of fault in each other? How do they empower themselves via policy or information to address situations? How do their attitudes change after or between visits so that they can return to the community empowered or enlightened?

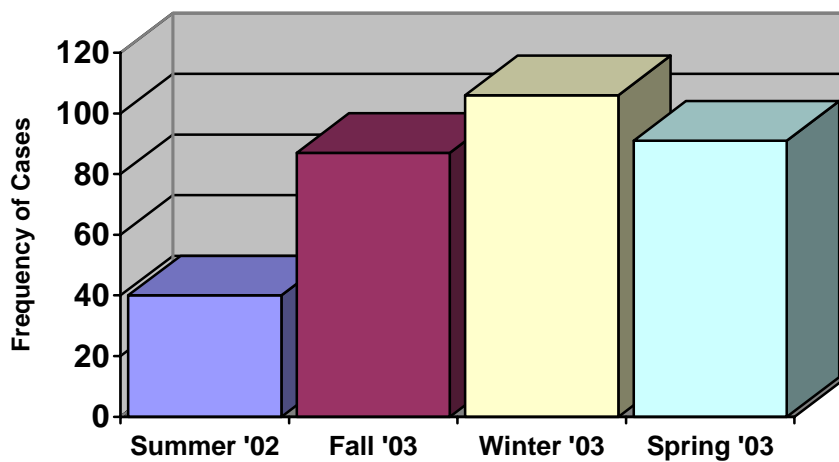
- Engage the University Community in the "Organizing for Learning" Process through Active Leadership. Active leadership not only involves continuous learning—in and beyond the university—but also empowerment, for contributions are made only when individuals feel valued. That is the primary focus of the Ombuds Office. When constituents feel valued, they can participate more fully in learning initiatives. Feeling empowered to resolve their own issues or situations, they are less distracted by problems and more willing to be engaged.
- Recognize the Barriers to Success and Develop Strategies to Surmount Them. This defines the purpose of the Office of the Ombuds. It is what we do on a daily basis, whether the activity involves outreach (identifying barriers), innovation (expanding viewpoints), office improvements (enhancing environments) or continuous learning (conceiving effective strategies).

II. Profile of Office Visitors

Number of Cases

The University Ombuds Office processed 324 cases during the fiscal year 2002-2003. This figure does not reflect the more than 50 telephone calls or casual conversations on the street that required quick and easy answers.

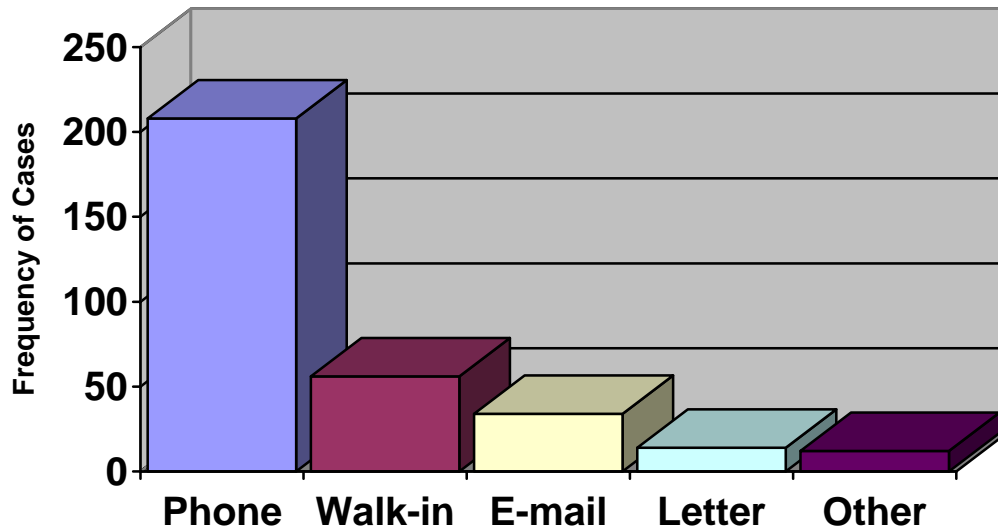
Total Number of Cases (Fig. 1)



Initial Means of Contact

The Ombuds Office is contacted most often by telephone, with walk-ins about equal to e-mail, letter and other means indicating to some degree an inviting atmosphere at 200 Crewson.

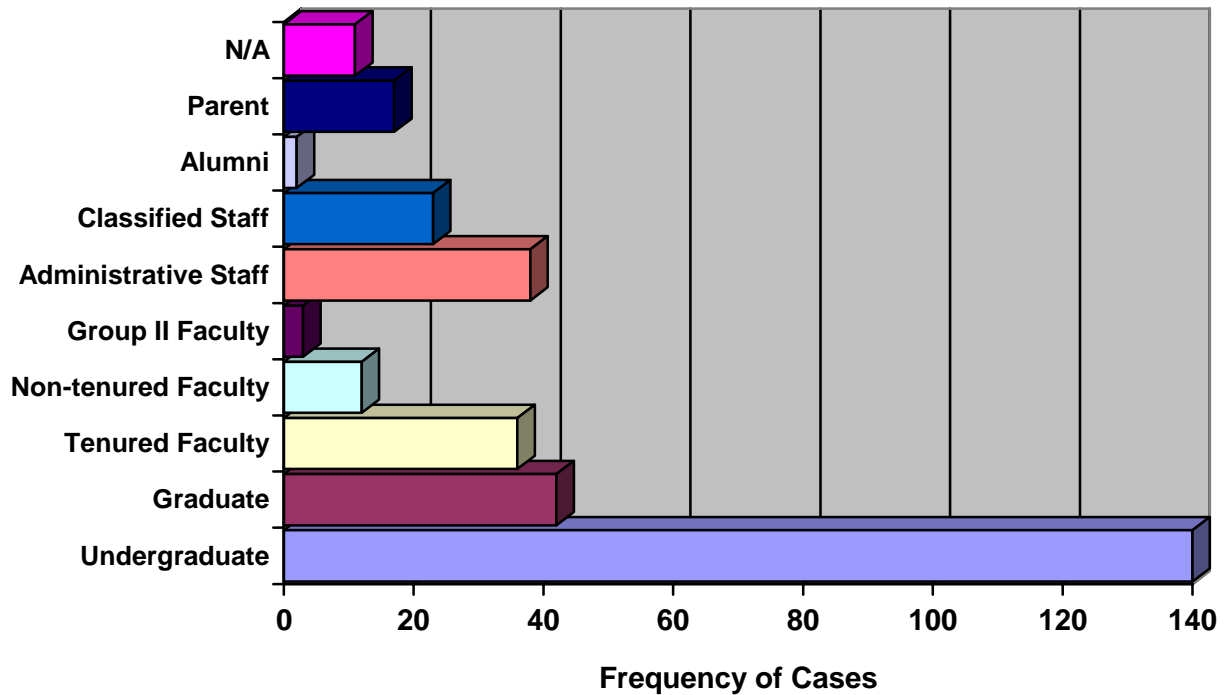
Initial Means of Contact (Fig. 2)



Status of the Visitor

The most frequent group of visitors were undergraduate students, followed by graduate students, faculty (tenured and untenured), and administrative, and classified staff as indicated in Figure 3. The undergraduate student category exceeded 43% with graduate students at about 12% for a total of 55% of all visitors across 10 categories.

Status of Visitor (Fig. 3)



Distribution of Office Visitors by OU Population Group

Although Figure 3 indicates that the majority of our visitors are students, Table 1 is a more accurate reflection of the distribution of visitors as the status of visitors is examined in light of their total population. These figures can indicate where preventive measures and outreach may be focused in the future.

Table 1

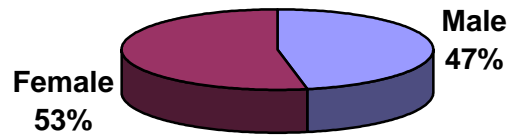
Position	Faculty	Administrative	Classified	Students
Population	1790	1497	1632	28992
Number	52	38	23	182
% of Population	2.90%	2.53%	1.40%	.62%

*These figures reflect all members of the OU academic community (Athens and regional campus, OUCOM, continuing education and off-campus programs).

Sex of Visitor

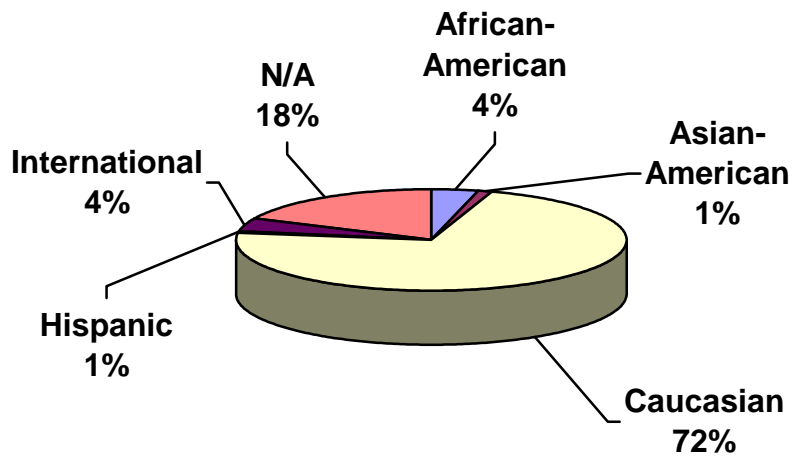
These figures are generally reflective of the university profile as women comprise 56% of the university population and men represent 44%.

Sex of Visitor (Fig. 4)



Ethnicity of Visitor

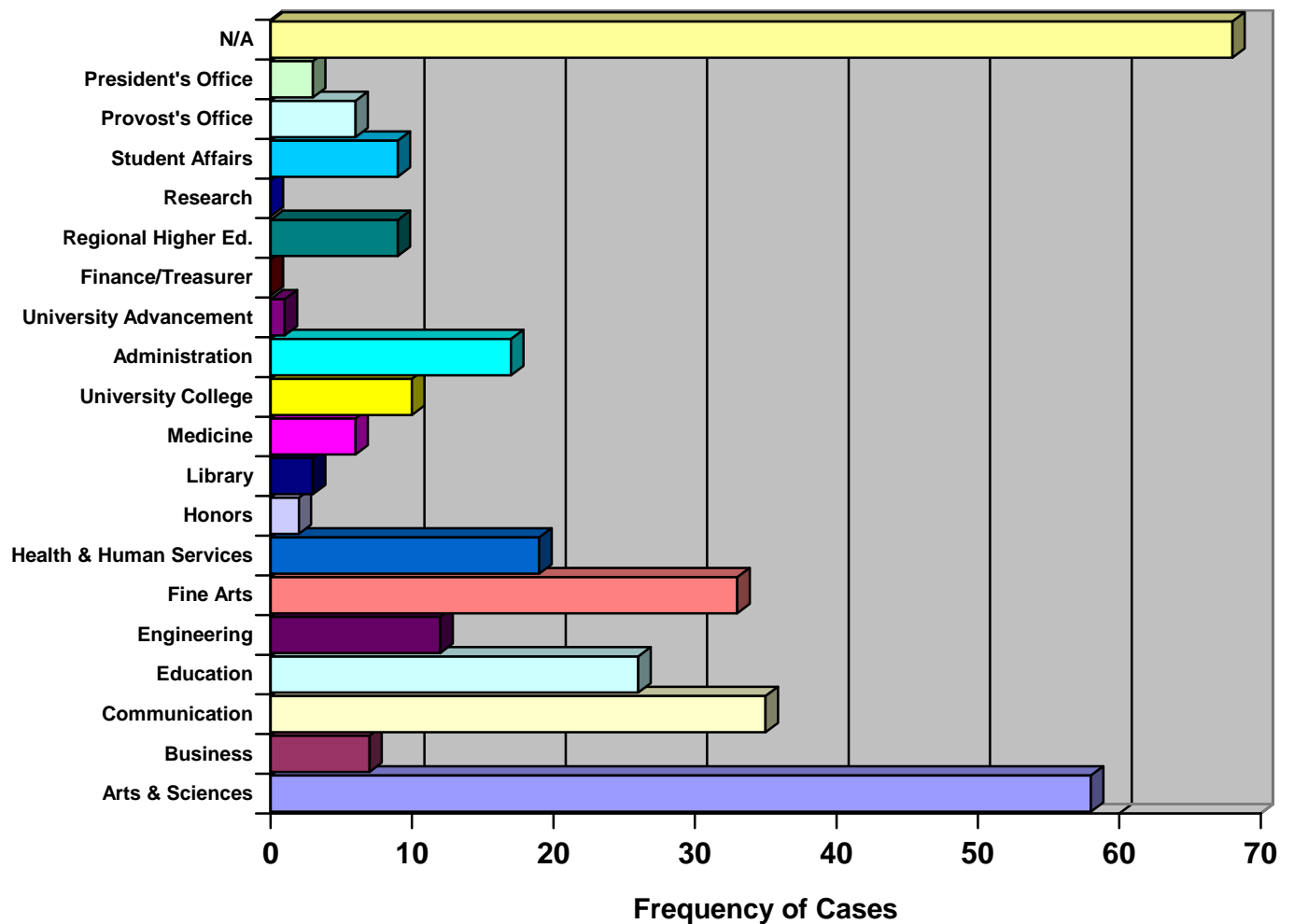
Ethnicity of Visitor (Fig. 5)



Visitor's Unit

The largest category (N/A = not available) concerns issues outside of particular units (residence halls, off-campus quarters, etc...). Units making significant contact with the Ombuds Office include Arts & Sciences, Communication, and Fine Arts, as shown in Figure 6. In some cases, these numbers reflect size of unit.

Visitor's Unit (Fig. 6)

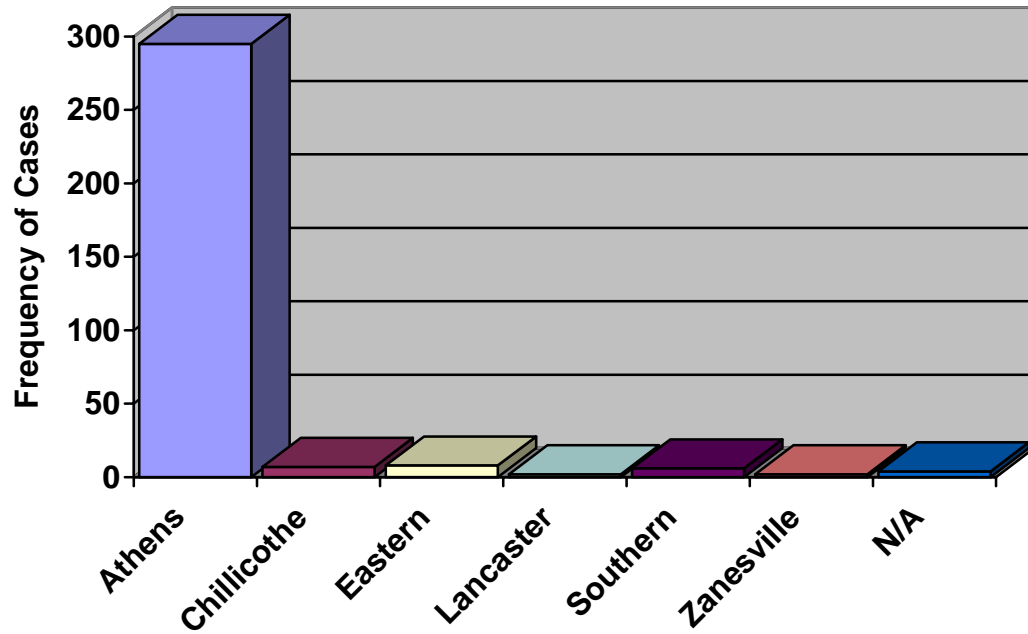


*See Appendix A for University Governance flowchart for detailed information concerning composition of categories

Campus Location

As Figure 7 illustrates, most visits involved Athens campus constituents. In the future we will track cases that originate in *virtual* programs.

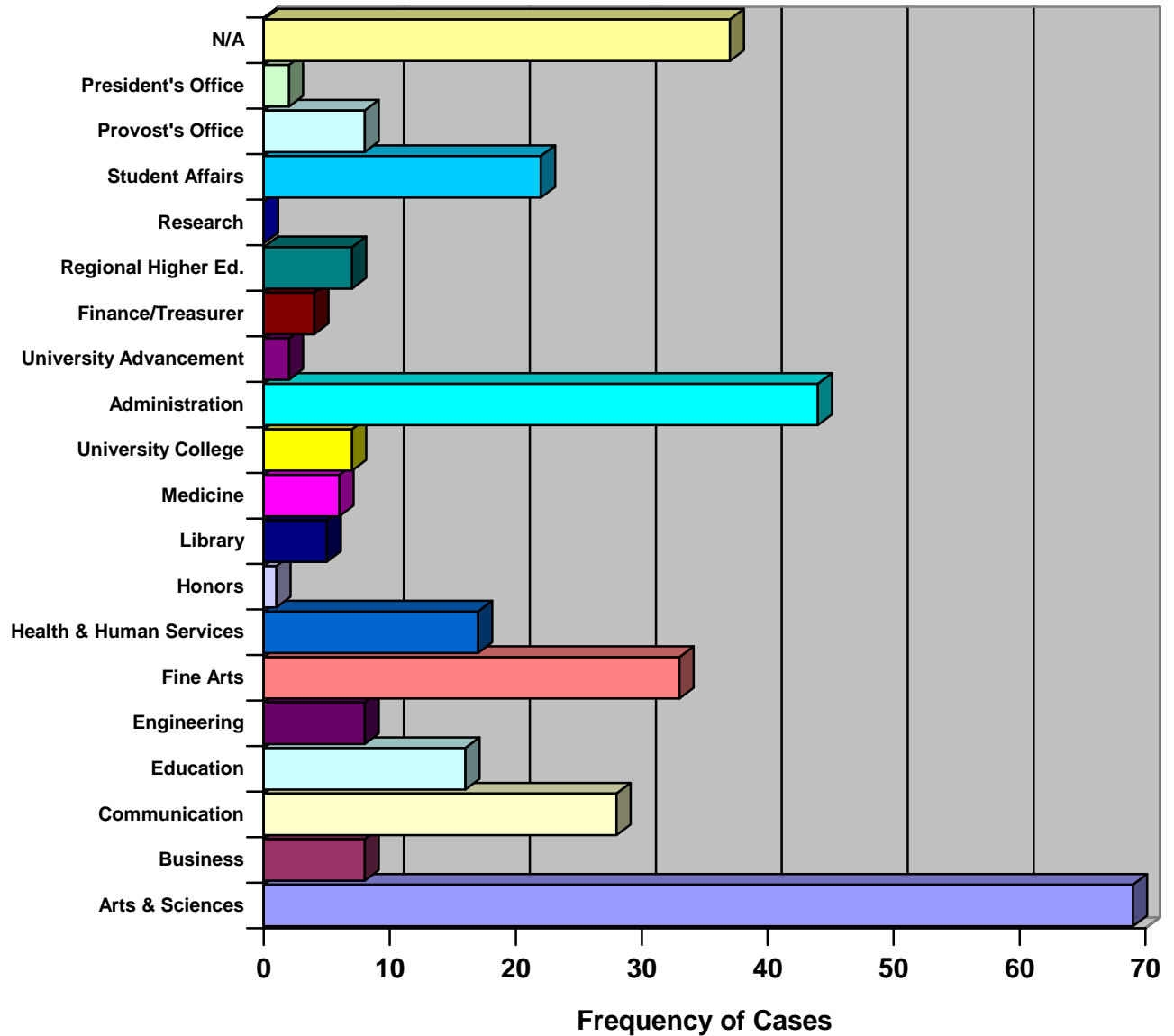
Campus Location (Fig. 7)



Area/Person of Concern's Unit

This figure indicates where issues of concern/problem-areas originated before resolution.

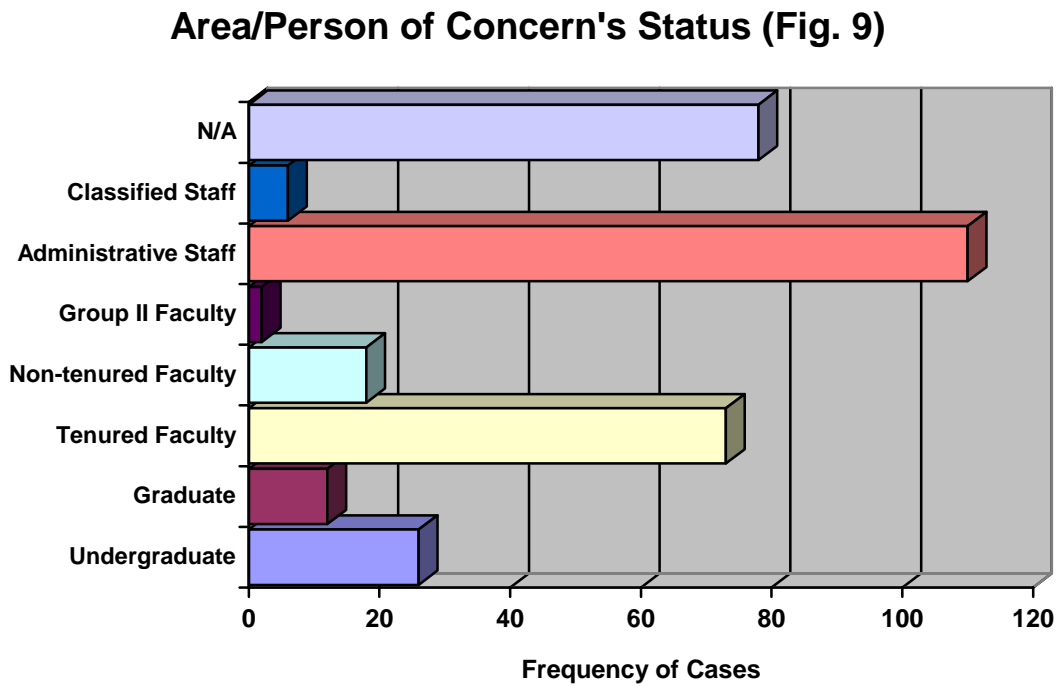
Area/Person of Concern's Unit (Fig. 8)



*See Appendix A for University Governance flowchart for detailed information concerning composition of categories

Area/Person of Concern's Status

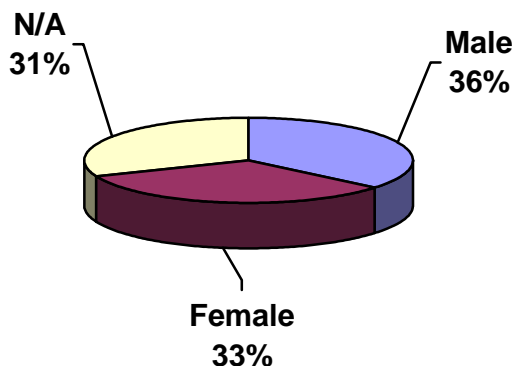
Figure 9 shows status, rank, and/or classification of persons cited by complainant. The two prominent categories -- administration and tenured faculty -- indicate supervisor/employee issues and naturally would be higher in number.



Area/Person of Concern's Sex

Figure 10 shows sex of persons cited by complainants.

**Area/Person of Concern's Sex
(Fig. 10)**

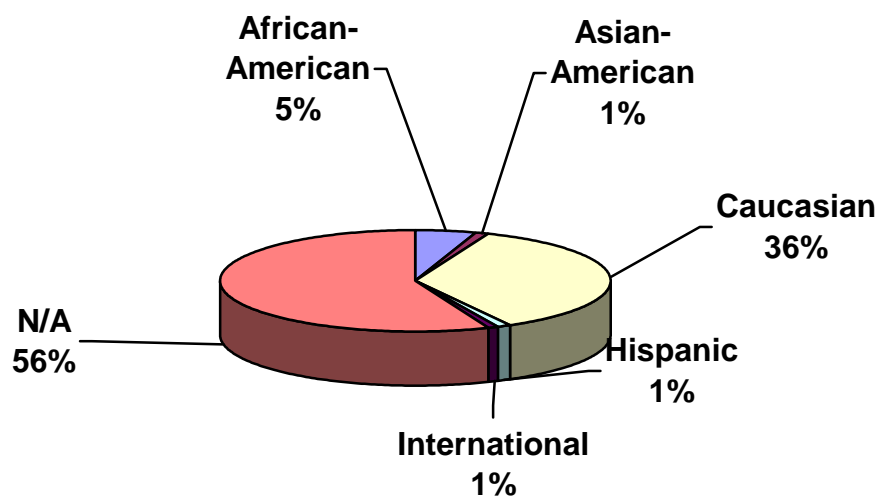


* N/A = Not applicable

Area/Person of Concern's Ethnicity

Figure 11 illustrates ethnicity of persons cited by complainant.

Area/Person of Concern's Ethnicity (Fig. 11)

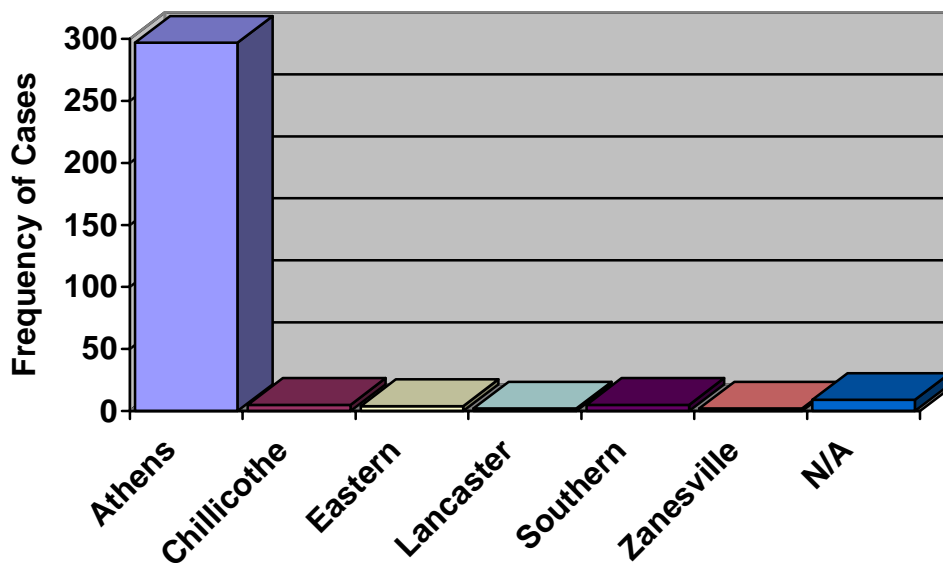


*N/A = Not applicable and Not Available

Area/Person of Concern's Campus Location

Figure 12 shows campus location of persons cited by complainant.

**Area/Person of Concern's Campus Location
(Fig. 12)**



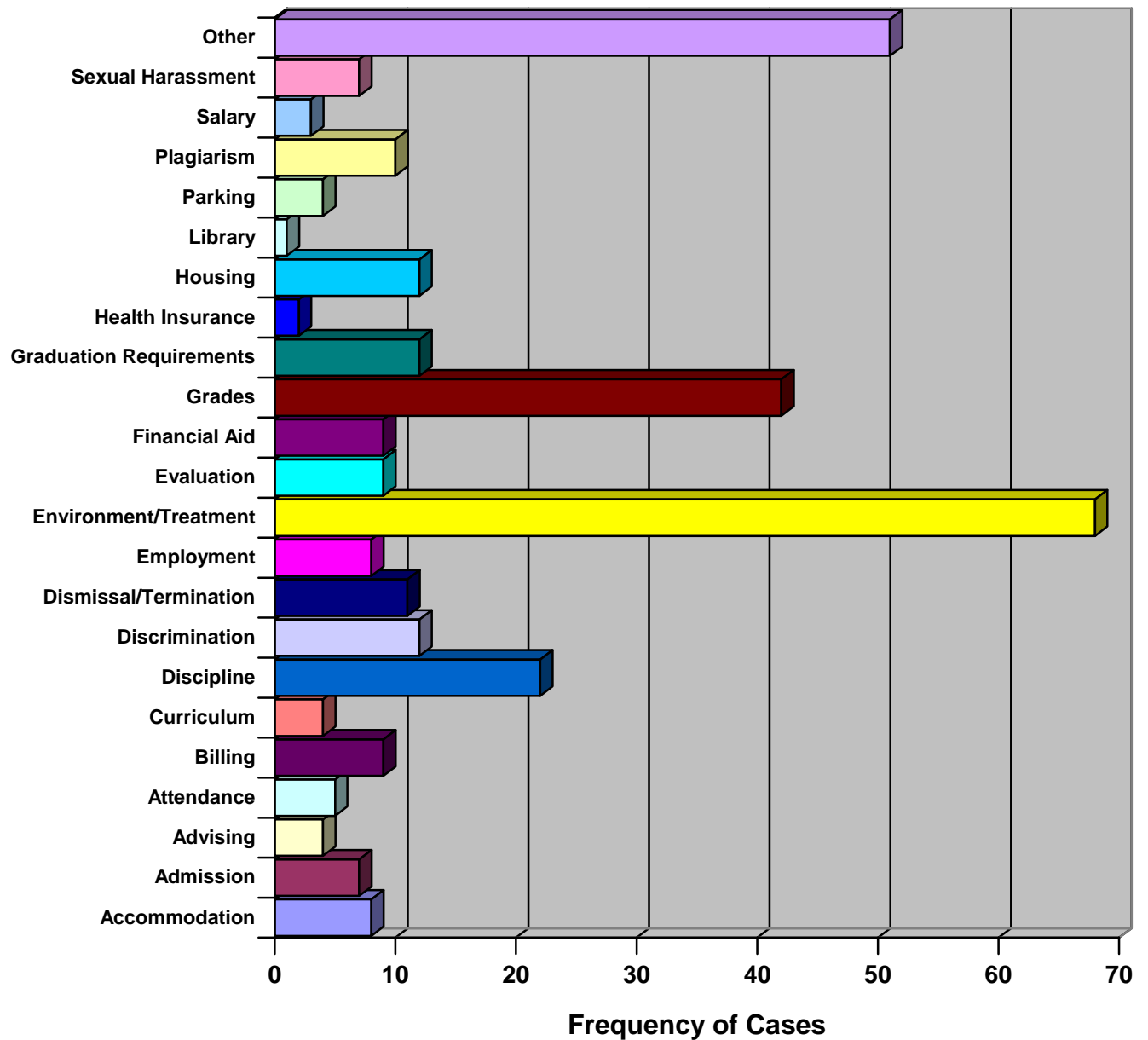
Nature of Concern

Figure 13 illustrates the nature of the issue brought to the Ombuds Office with *environment/treatment* by far the largest category, indicating again the importance of mediation to create a model learning community.

It is important to note, however, that the disproportionate number of cases identified as *problems with environment and treatment* (see Figure 13) is reflective of the applicability of these concerns to all members of the university community. It is evident that incivility on campus is quite prevalent and experienced by all constituents in the community.

The *other* category is comprised of a plethora of concerns that range from fighting over a lectern to freedom to practice a particular religious ritual (e.g., burning incense).

Nature of Concern (Fig. 13)



*See Appendix B for detailed definition of categories

III. Issues of Concern and Recommendations

1. Much of the incivility on campus appears to be rooted in the perceived misuse of power. However, some problems are factual, such as: faculty embarrassing students in class, making inappropriate requests, neglecting to show up for all class periods, and using grades as a weapon. Conversely, students take academic shortcuts, including plagiarism (a significant issue). Problems in departments and schools also involve perceived misuse or misapplication of process, power, and/or authority at the administrative level. Faculty do not always value each other, contributing to an unpleasant work environment. It might be helpful (when appropriate) to schedule outside presentations on such issues as crisis management, crisis avoidance, personnel relations and other associated concerns. Classified staff perceive that they receive the brunt of abuses of power as they feel they often have no recourse to poor treatment from their supervisor—they can quit, transfer, or continue to endure a hostile work environment. The hiring freeze has only intensified these concerns.
2. The Ombuds Office continues to see visitors each year for whom mental-health matters are a concern. Inevitably, we have visitors (usually students) each quarter who are contemplating harm to self or others, and we also receive inquiries from faculty and staff about how to respond to students who are in distress. Our sense is that the number of such students is increasing, and national trends would support this. The university should work to inform all members of the university community about resources and processes for advising students in distress. University College produces a *Faculty Advising Reference Manual* that features an excellent discussion of student problems and situations. This would be a useful resource for many university personnel to have access to.
3. There has been a noticeable increase in the number of electronically based programs at Ohio University, yet no attention to incorporating/socializing this group to take advantage of university resources (e.g., Ombuds Office). This virtual group of students suffers from the *out of sight out of mind* phenomenon, thus hampering student engagement efforts. Units conducting or considering developing virtual programs must make provisions for these students to have access to, and invited to be, active members of the university community. University College produces a *Faculty Advising Reference Manual* that features an excellent discussion of student problems and situations. This would be a useful resource for many university personnel to have access to.
4. Student plagiarism and cheating are increasing, perhaps due to the ready and easy access of information via the Internet. We need a program to educate students about the proper use of information – digital and standard print. Simply put, we need character education for students. Perhaps a unit could be developed and taught in freshman English, emphasized more as part of University College 115, or resurrect PATH (**P**ersonal **A**ccountability, **T**rust, **H**onor) via student affairs. In addition, faculty could craft assignments so that papers and assignments are less likely to be serialized.

5. Equally problematic are the community disturbances associated with block parties such as PalmerFest, OakFest, and HighFest. These activities and the associated arrests, instances of violence and underage drinking are detrimental to students and to the image and reputation of Ohio University. In preparation for Halloween and the time change event, Cutler Hall is very proactive and has taken the lead by posting warning statements in the Post and airing radio public service announcements alerting students of the dangers associated with these activities. However, possibly due to the newness of these events, the university is mostly silent on the “fest” parties that are gaining momentum in size and arrests. Disturbances such as these undermine our student engagement initiatives.
6. Due to large numbers of retirements, Ohio University is increasingly becoming a very young campus. While this is neither a positive or negative change in and of itself, there are implications resulting from this turnover in personnel that require attention. While there are positive aspects to the gradual reculturalization of the university, on the heels of change comes uncertainty and conflict. For example, new faculty members are focused on being granted promotion and tenure and thus might not be able or willing to contribute their time to university service activities or departmental and school governance committees and initiatives.
7. Regional campuses continue to remain a peripheral part of the university community. Perhaps qualified individuals on staff at each regional campus can receive Ombuds training and serve as a liaison to the Athens office, furthering outreach initiatives.