

**University Ombuds Annual Report**  
**July 1, 2003 – May 31, 2004 Report**  
(Condensed Version)  
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## **I. Introduction**

The University Ombuds Office, in its 34<sup>th</sup> 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 2003-04 year marks Elizabeth's second year as Ombuds and Katherine's third year as Assistant Ombuds. Both positions are half time.

This report details the activities of the Ohio University Ombuds office for the 2003-2004 fiscal year. In addition, this report describes the people and the concerns they brought to our office, noticeable trends, recommendations for consideration, and plans. This report features the commitments we have to 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 stable and professional environment through personnel training and development.
4. **Continuous Learning**, including staff attendance at conferences and seminars designed to help the Ombuds staff better serve constituents.

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 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?

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

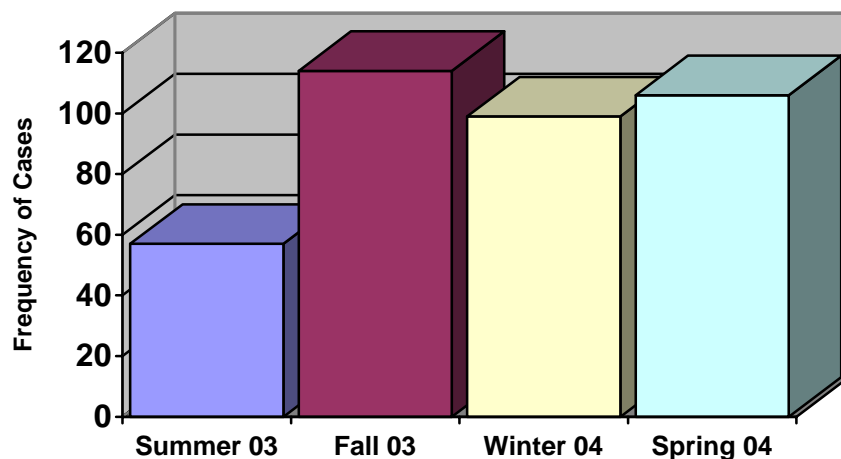
- Engage the University Community in the "Organizing for Learning" Process through Active Leadership. Active leadership not only involves continuous learning—in and beyond the university—but also empowerment, for contributions are made only when individuals feel valued. That is the primary focus of the 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 376 cases during the fiscal year 2003-2004. This figure does not reflect the more than 50 telephone calls or casual conversations on the street that required quick and easy answers. A comparison of the number of visitors from 02-03 to 03-04 represents an increase of approximately 50 cases.

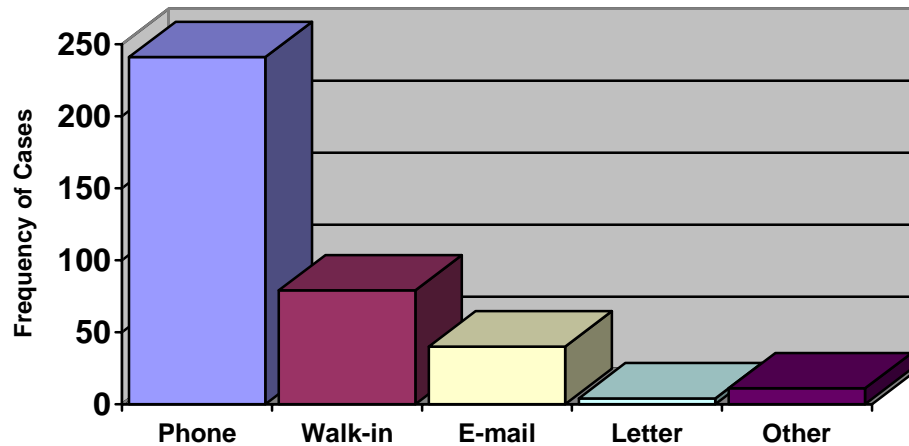
**Total Number of Cases (Fig. 1)**



## Initial Means of Contact

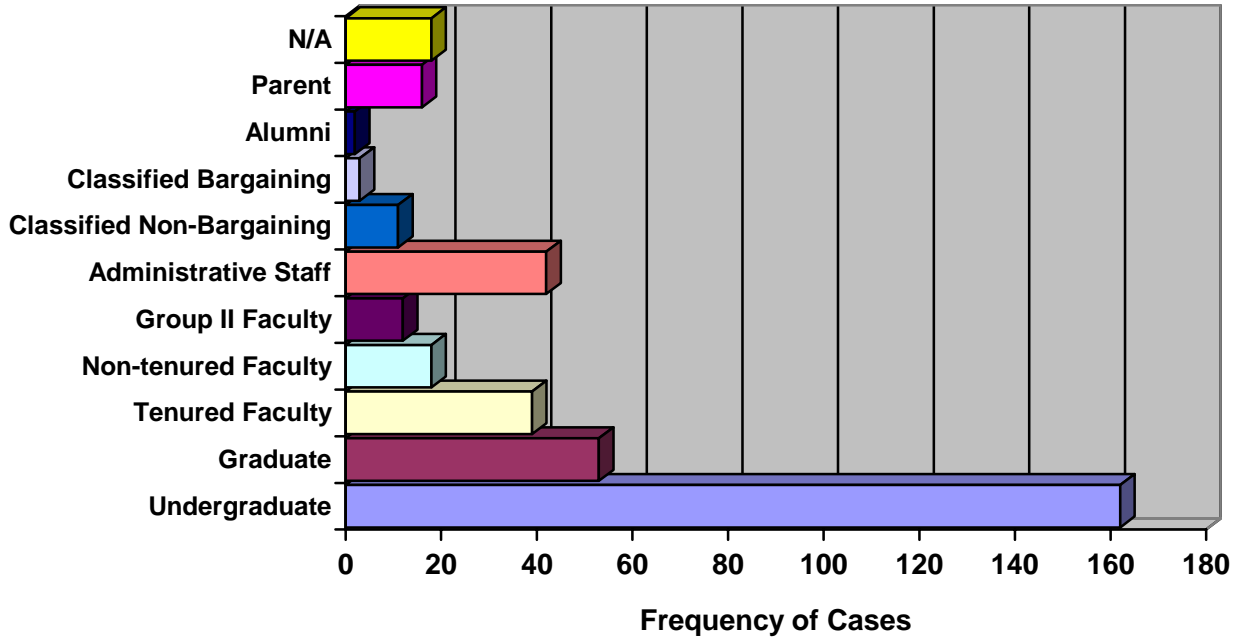
The Ombuds Office is contacted most often by telephone, followed by walk-ins, e-mail, letter and other means, indicating to some degree an inviting atmosphere at 200 Crewson House.

**Initial Means of Contact (Fig. 2)**



The most frequent group of visitors were undergraduate students, followed by graduate students, faculty (tenured and untenured), and administrative, classified, and other staff as indicated in Figure 3

### 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, Figure 4 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.

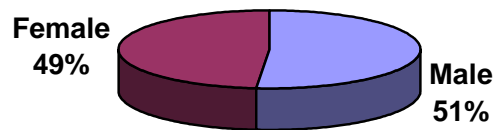
Position	Faculty	Administrative	Classified	Undergrad Students	Graduate Students
<b>Population Number</b>	1819	1517	1441	24,407	3,020
<b>% of Population</b>	3.79%	2.76%	.97%	.66%	2.08%

\*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 somewhat reflective of the university profile as women comprise 56% of the university population and men represent 44%.

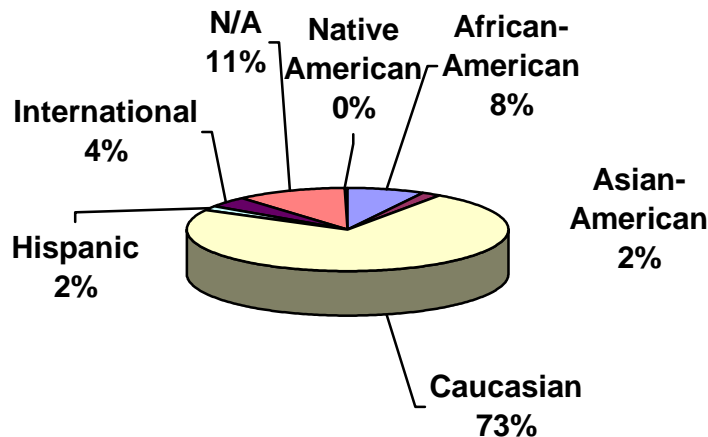
**Sex of Visitor (Fig. 4)**



## Ethnicity of Visitor

Eight percent of our visitors this year were African American. This is a substantial increase from the number of visits this group made to our office last year (4%). This increase could be indicative of our outreach efforts that targeted this group specifically and included presentations to the King-Chevez-Parks Program. Conversely, it might be that African Americans are experiencing more problems on campus that prompted a visit to the Ombuds Office. We will continue to monitor this trend.

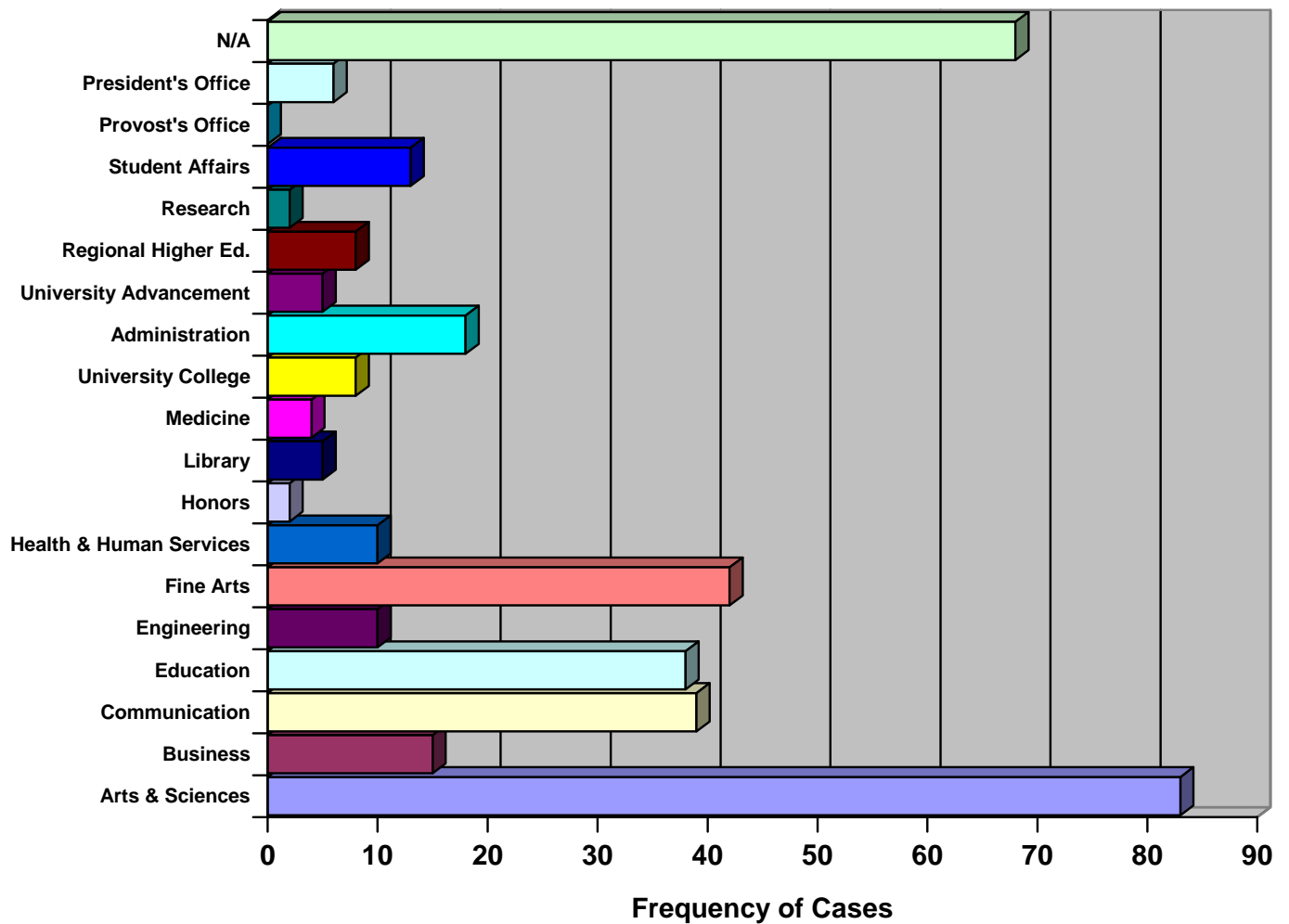
**Ethnicity of Visitor (Fig. 5)**



## Visitor's Unit

Units making significant contact with the Ombuds Office include Arts & Sciences, Communication, Education, and Fine Arts, as shown in Figure 6. Please note that the size of the unit is often reflected in the number of visitors the Ombuds Office receives.

**Visitor's Unit (Fig. 6)**

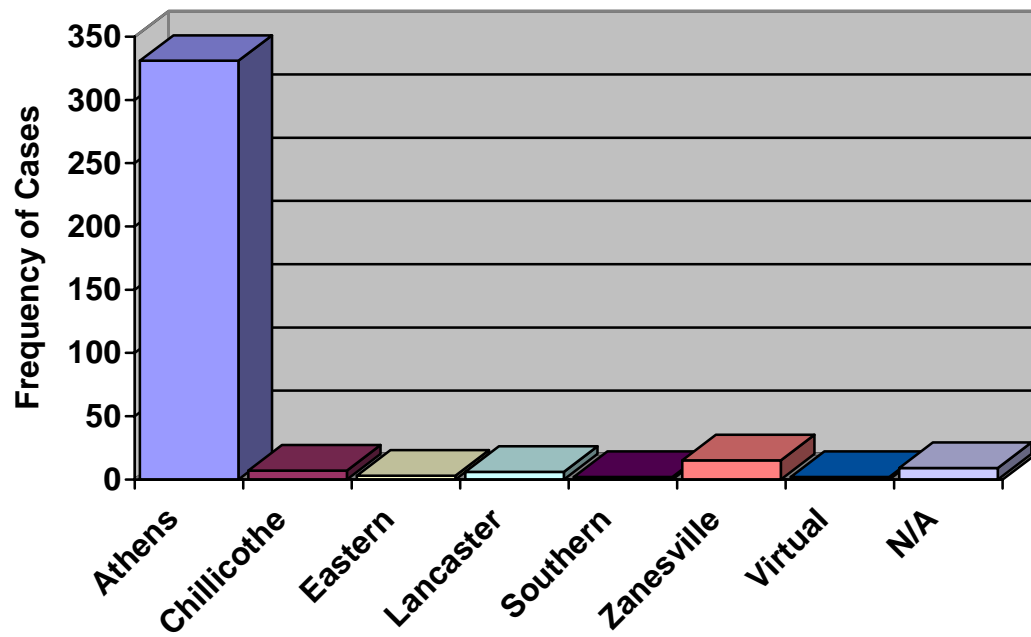


\*See Appendix A for University Governance flowchart for detailed information concerning composition of categories

## Campus Location

As Figure 7 illustrates, most visits involved Athens campus constituents.

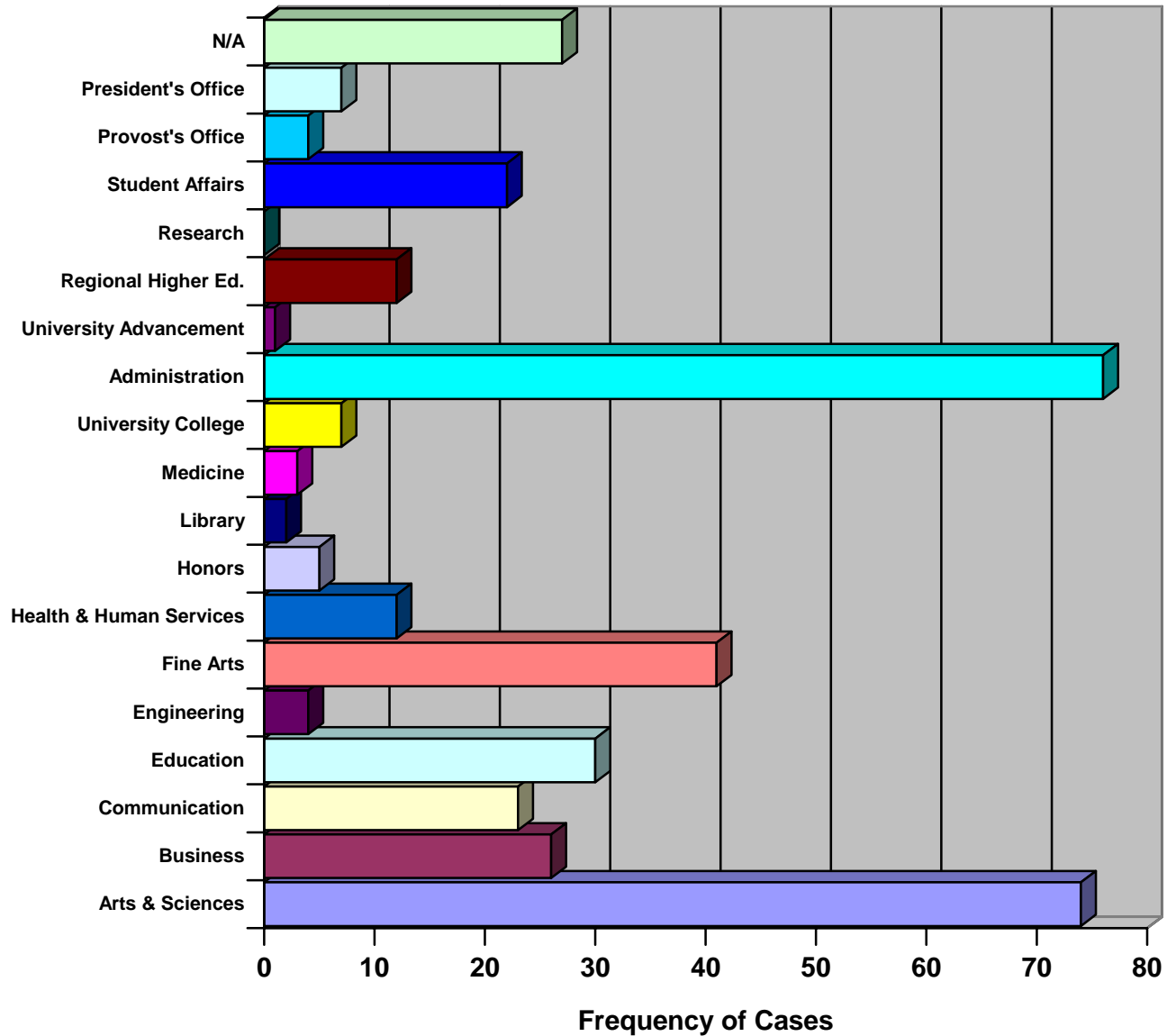
**Campus Location (Fig. 7)**



## Area/Person of Concern's Unit

This figure indicates where reported problem-areas originated before resolution.

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



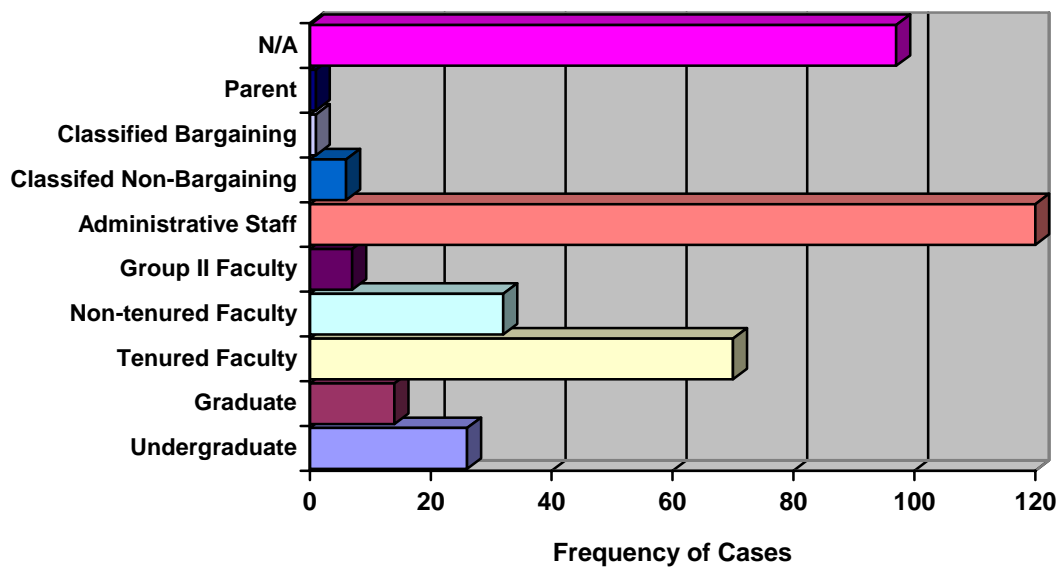
\*See Appendix A for University Governance flowchart for detailed information concerning composition of categories



## 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 -- are influenced by supervisor/employee issues and perhaps would be higher in number.

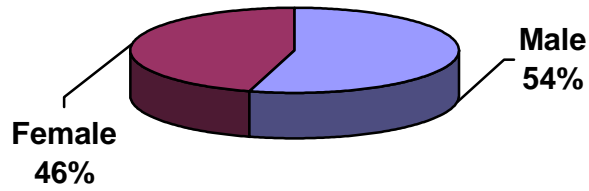
**Area/Person of Concern's Status (Fig. 9)**



### Area/Person of Concern's Sex

Figure 10 shows sex of persons cited by complainants.

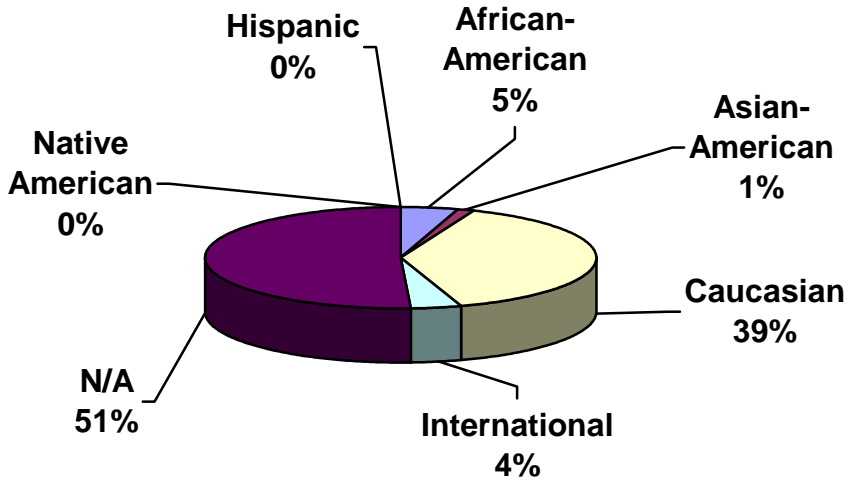
**Area/Person of Concern's Sex (Fig. 10)**



### Area/Person of Concern's Ethnicity

Figure 11 illustrates ethnicity of persons cited by complainant.

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

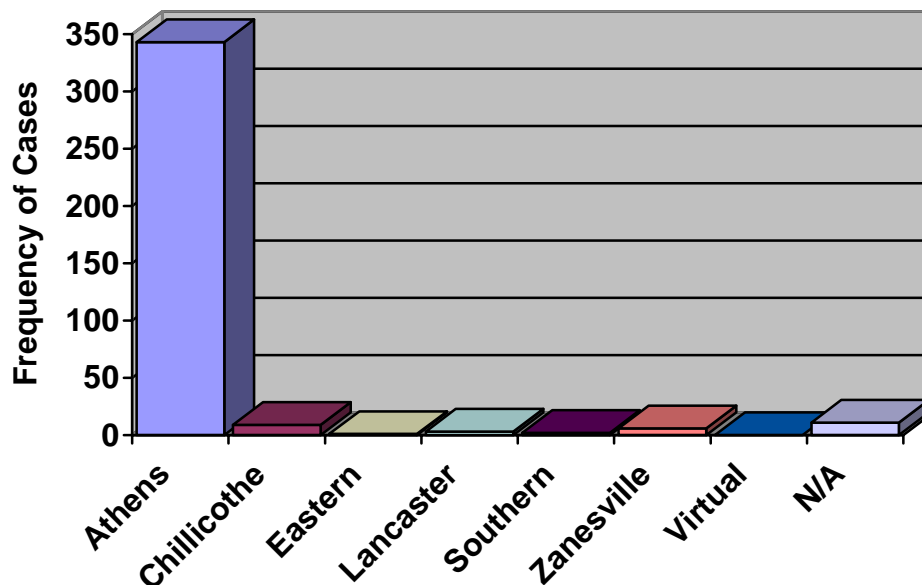


\*N/A = Not applicable and Not Available

## 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)**



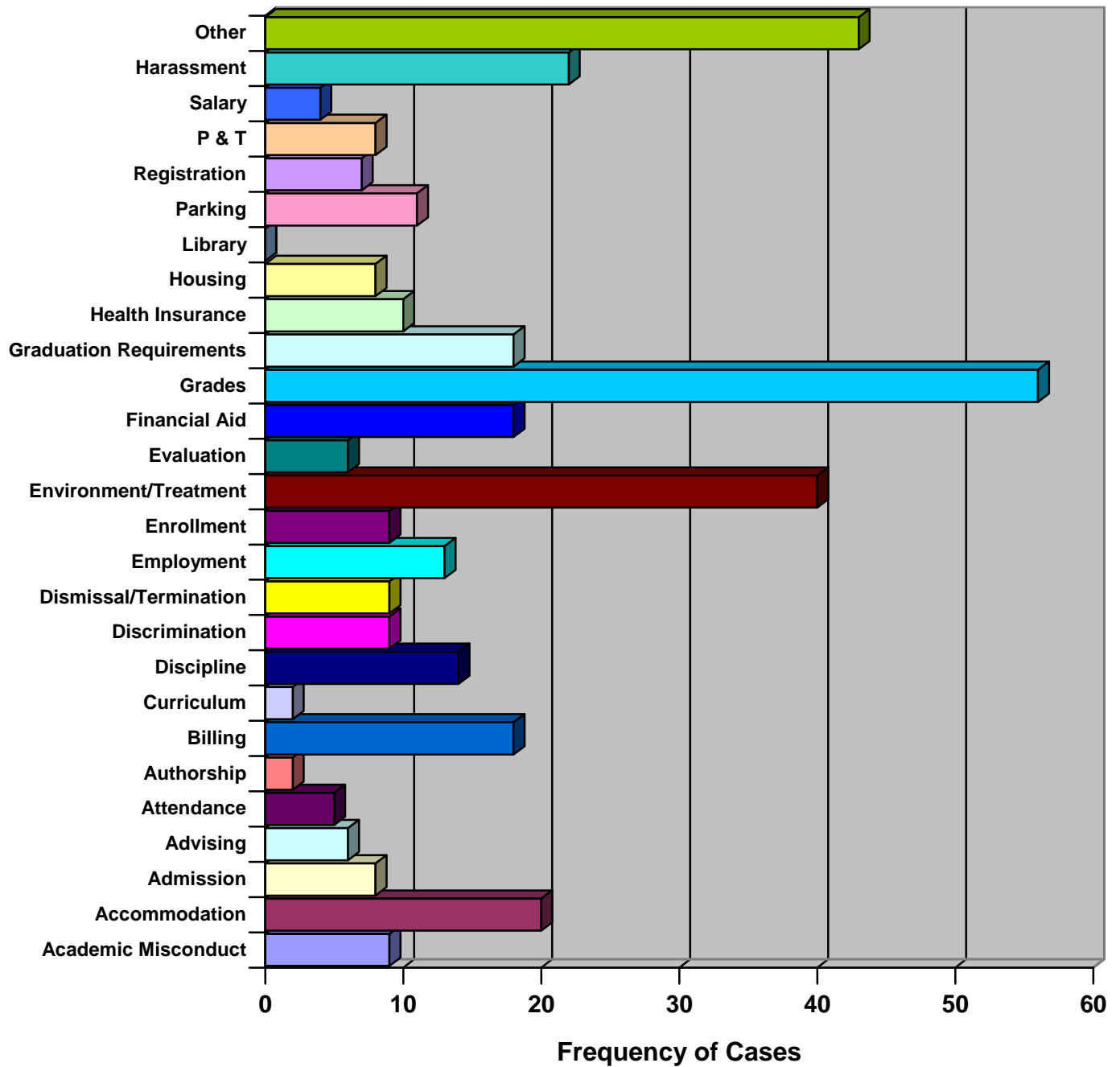
## Nature of Concern

Figure 13 illustrates the nature of the issue brought to the Ombuds Office with *grading* complaints and *environment/treatment* concerns by far the largest category.

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 prevalent and experienced by all constituents in the community.

The *other* category is comprised of a plethora of concerns that range from a student complaining because his father accessed his grades on blackboard to questions about when can I start carrying my gun to class to a student seeking assistance with a take-home exam. Finally, more than one person has called wondering what to do about co-workers viewing pornography on the web while at work. This is, indeed, an interesting job.

### Nature of Concern (Fig. 13)



\*See Appendix B for detailed definition of categories

### III. Concerns and Recommendations

1. There is the perception on campus that many voices are being silenced. Some who hold this perception believe that free and open dialogue is not encouraged, appreciated, or sought out. They maintain that decisions are reached with very little input from all stakeholders. The perception may be flawed, of course; perhaps the real problem concerns organizational communication—how we go about communicating decisions. In any case, it will do no good to debate whether the perception is valid. Something is amiss, and because of it, resentment will only continue to build unless this perception is proven wrong.
2. Privacy of student records needs to be maintained. There are two issues at stake here. First, confidentiality of student information is protected under FERPA. Students' class work with grades and identifiers contained therein are routinely left outside faculty offices for students to retrieve without regard for privacy laws. Second, the use of personal identification numbers encourages security failures, identity theft, and renders student information vulnerable to exposure. Faculty senate will be focusing on this concern in the near future and will undoubtedly provide us with much-needed guidance and direction.
3. The Ombuds Office continues to see visitors each year for which mental-health matters are a concern. Inevitably, we have visitors (usually students) each quarter who are contemplating harm to self or others, and we receive inquiries from faculty and staff about how to respond to those in distress. Our sense is that these types of cases are increasing, and national trends would support this as well. The university should work to inform all members of the university community about resources and processes for advising and assisting those in distress. Currently, the university community generally receives no training on how to handle a mentally ill co-worker or student.
4. We seem to be sending contradictory messages to students and the community at large. For example, we strongly suggest that students refrain from high-risk behaviors, and yet we finance the very same activities by spending \$85,000 (\$25,000 provided by the university) on a block party. These funds are considered a necessary expenditure that serves as a preventative mechanism. Maybe so. Have we analyzed the seeming double messages that we send? As we are using taxpayer funds, we might have an ethical obligation to ascertain outcomes. In essence, we provide more police protection, resulting in more arrests – however the problems remain. We can't arrest our way out of this problem. We need to ask and answer a central question: How can we cultivate a prevention climate on campus rather than a reactionary one?
5. Professionals, practitioners, and some new hires brought in to teach with little or no instructional training is problematic. We owe our instructors more than the assumption that *they will figure it out as they go*. Instructional training and development are necessary for those new to teaching. Mentoring programs are useful in socializing new

members into the profession. Moreover, utilizing our Center for Teaching Excellence also might prove helpful.

6. International students experience numerous problems related to insurance and residency requirements. Perhaps some of these challenges are the result of the confusion surrounding International Student and Faculty Services, which is housed in Student Affairs, and The Center for International Studies, which is located in Arts and Sciences. This uncertainty is problematic for many faculty and students but it is particularly troublesome for international students who might be unsure about which office to contact for a particular service. We should publicize collaborations where they exist and make new collaborations where they do not, to serve these students who enhance our diversity.
7. There are indications that the university is unresponsive to women's issues. For example, participants in the annual *Take Back the Night March* were subject to hostile treatment by onlookers. Verbal assaults are commonplace and there were a few reported incidents involving physical violence. Our female students (and current research) report a link between drinking, harassment, and assault. Perhaps investigating the viability of a Women's Center might be called for. The Center could be dedicated to assisting female students with health, safety, and wellness related information and support. College campuses across the country have reported that centers such as these have been very beneficial to attending to women's issues. We support diversity enthusiastically at Ohio University and within the Ombuds Office; and it behooves us to recognize that climate—a humane and dignified one—enhances the campus for all groups.
8. We should be more responsive and accommodating to university members who may wish to observe a religious holiday in lieu of work or classroom obligations.
9. Due to large numbers of retirements, Ohio University is increasingly becoming a very young campus. While this is neither a positive nor a 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. Individual units might assess these factors in planning sessions with deans or with their individual faculties in meetings.
10. The university needs to further operationalize the policy and procedures for amorous relationships involving students and faculty. Although the Faculty Handbook addresses this situation, the current directives are inadequate. We need to clarify the implications of these relationships for faculty and students to prevent potential vulnerability of either or both parties.
11. When we speak of campus initiatives and long-term planning, we need to make a concerted effort to include classified staff in the decisions-making process. Whether we are speaking about instruction concerning FERPA guidelines, or training in new

harassment procedures, it is imperative that the classified staff, who serve as the *front door* to the university, not be neglected.

12. We in the Ombuds Office are struggling with the need to ensure visitors confidentiality but at the same time inform them that we are also obligated to act on information that they might share. This dilemma is currently being discussed by Ombuds professionals across the country.

Certainly, these concerns are not unique to Ohio University. In addition, for every problematic situation, we can recount dozens of helpful ones. Many students, faculty, and staff are gifted—exceptionally so. Some academic environments are model, some university documents are open and inviting, and some administrators are nurturing and good advocates for faculty, staff, and students. Our intent is to resolve issues so that more incidents can be cited in creating an inclusive, welcoming environment at Ohio University.