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## **University Ombuds Annual Report June 1, 2005– May 31, 2006 Report**

**Elizabeth Graham, Ph.D., University Ombuds  
Katherine Ziff, Ph.D., Associate Ombuds**

### **I. Introduction**

This year the Ohio University Ombuds Office marked its 35<sup>th</sup> year of operation. The office was established in the fall of 1970 following the campus riots and school closing in the spring of that year. The University Ombuds is an appointed position and is always a tenured member of the faculty. Following are the faculty members who have served as University Ombuds.

#### **Ohio University Ombuds 1970-present**

1970-1974: *Dr. Lester Marks*, Associate Professor, English

1974-1976: *Dr. Carol Harter*, Assistant Professor, English

1977-1982: *Dr. Lester Marks*, Associate Professor, English

1982-1991: *Dr. David Heaton*, Associate Professor, English

1991-1997: *Dr. Nancy Bain*, Professor, Geography

1997-2002: *Dr. Butch Hill*, Professor, Engineering

2002-present: *Dr. Elizabeth Graham*, Professor, Communication Studies

At this time the Ohio University Ombuds Office is staffed by the University Ombuds and the Associate Ombuds, an administrative position. Both positions are part-time.

Since 1970, the office title has evolved from Ombudsman to Ombuds as reflected by the name changes adopted by the Ombuds professional associations. The Ombudsing field continues to evolve and is moving in the direction of becoming a profession with training standards, standards of practice, and a growing body of research and literature. The move toward a profession coupled with changing and increasingly intricate case law on the role of an academic Ombuds office in regard to matters such as confidentiality, duty to warn, harassment and notice are shifting the academic Ombuds model even further. The emerging model is one that obliges

continuous professional development as well as a commitment to the position as a job rather than as a rotating appointment.

The University Ombuds Office 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, Associate Ombuds. This report details the activities of the Ohio University Ombuds Office for the 2005-2006 fiscal year. In addition, this report describes the people and the concerns they brought to our office, noticeable trends, recommendations for consideration, and plans for the future.

## II. Educational Outreach Activities

### Affirming Diversity Initiative

This year our office has continued to organize the series of public conversations with Ohio University faculty and staff highlighting diversity at Ohio University. This work resulted in Katherine Ziff's awarding of the first President's Award for Excellence in Diversity.

The last two panels, in the series of six, focused on Living with Disability and Appalachian Roots at Ohio University. The panels provided an opportunity for people to gather and hear first-hand what the experiences of different diverse groups on campus bring to Ohio University and to our community. They featured personal narratives as well as suggestions for making Ohio University a more inclusive and diverse place. All panels were open to the university community. All six panels are available in the Alden Library Video/DVD Collection as well as in the University Archives.

Attendance for the two panels, which included a real-time electronic component, was estimated at 250-300 persons. The following Ohio University faculty and staff participated as members or conveners for the panels:

Charlie Ray Atkins	Dan Evans	Mick Harris	Mary Gibbons Mize
Rosemary Butcher	Katherine Fahey	Kathy Krendl	Margaret Quinlan
Carolyn Cardenas	Milt Greek	Carolyn Bailey Lewis	J. W. Smith
Sharon Ann Denham	Rich Greenlee	President McDavis	

A variety of themes were expressed by panelists. Misunderstandings, fears, racism, obstacles and challenges were described along with gratitude for support from others and strategies for dismantling discrimination in the workplace. Members of the audience were invited to provide feedback, which included expressions of welcome and appreciation for the opportunity to share and learn. We plan to continue in our effort to enhance diversity at Ohio University.

## **Presentations**

During the past year, we have engaged in the following outreach activities to introduce ourselves and familiarize the university community with our services.

- First Annual Educational Program on Addressing Employment Issues at Ohio University (December, 2005)
- WOUB “Live From Studio B” radio interview (January, 2006)
- Interview with Speakeasy on-line magazine (January 2006)
- Mastering the Maze (July 2005)
- Management Development Program (May, 2005)
- King-Chavez-Parks Award Program (May 2006)
- Global Learning Community (October, 2005)
- The All Ohio Counselors Conference (Katherine Ziff) (November, 2005)

## **Participation in Campus Initiatives and Special Events**

- Planning Committee for the First Annual Educational Program on Addressing Employment Issues at Ohio University (January - December, 2005)
- Speaker at the 21<sup>st</sup> Annual Ohio University Human Resource Institute (May, 2006)
- VISION OHIO (Environment Team) (2005, 2006)
- Ad hoc Task Force on International Graduate Students (2005, 2006)
- Health Fair (April, 2006)
- Residence Life Resource Fair (August, 2005)
- Center for Teaching Excellence Graduate Student Service Fair (August, 2005)
- GLBT Reception (May, 2005)
- Green Jacket Crew (Halloween, October 2005)
- University College Advisor

## **Service to the Ombuds Profession**

- Katherine Ziff assumed the duties of co-editor of *The Journal of the California Caucus of College and University Ombuds* (July, 2005)
- Katherine Ziff and Elizabeth Graham, presentation at the California Caucus of College and University Ombuds Association. *Linking Knowledge and Practice* (November 2005)
- Journal article co-written by Elizabeth Graham titled *The Ombuds Profession as a Storied Profession*. Published in *The Journal of the California Caucus of College and University Ombuds* (January 2006)
- Journal article co-written by Katherine Ziff titled *Speaking Ourselves into Existence: The Trickster Metaphor as a Means to Reflective Ombuds Practice*. Published in *The Journal of the California Caucus of College and University Ombuds* (January 2006)
- Consultation with various Universities on establishment and operation of an Ombuds Office

## **III. New Initiatives and Office Improvements**

- Katherine Ziff was awarded the 1<sup>st</sup> Presidents Award for Excellence in Diversity
- Katherine Ziff was promoted to Associate Ombuds
- Refined Web site for the Ombuds Office (see: [www.ohio.edu/Ombuds](http://www.ohio.edu/Ombuds))
- Developed and distributed print materials to advertise the Ombuds Office services (posters, bookmarks, flyers, pens etc...)

#### **IV. Continuous Learning**

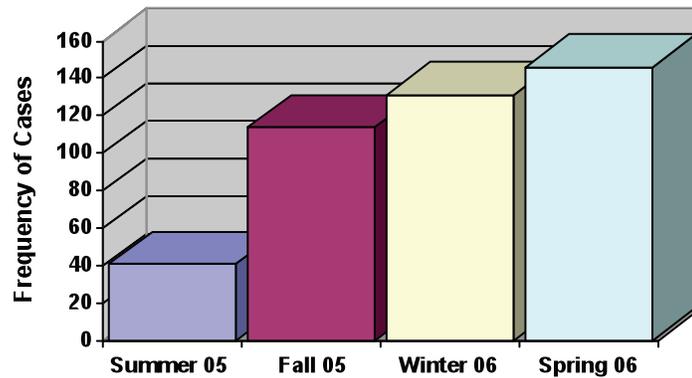
- Attended the California Caucus of the College and University Ombuds, Asilomar, CA November 2005
- Membership in the International Ombuds Association

## V. Profile of Office Visitors

### Number of Cases

The University Ombuds Office processed 432 cases during the fiscal year 2005-2006. 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 04-05 to 05-06 represents an increase of approximately 26 cases.

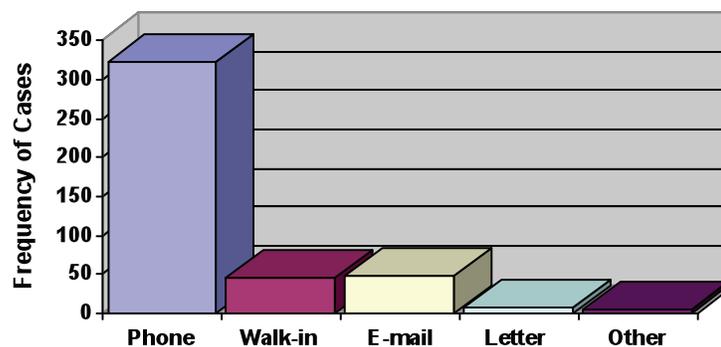
**Fig. 1 - Total Number of Cases**



### 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.

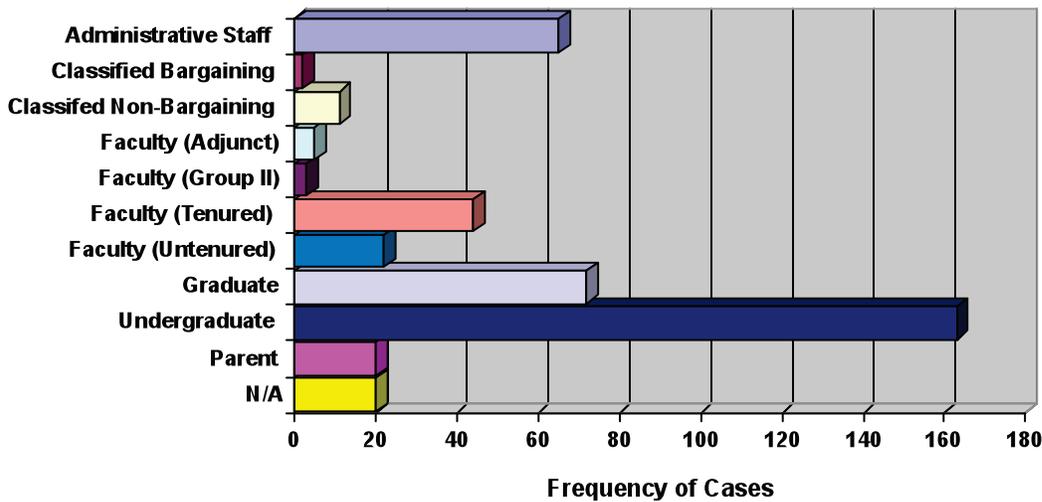
**Fig. 2 - Initial Means of Contact**



## Visitor's Status

The most frequent group of visitors were undergraduate students, followed by graduate students, faculty (tenured, untenured, group II, and adjunct), administrative staff, parents, classified, and other staff as indicated in Figure 3. Of special note are the increasing number of contacts initiated by parents.

**Fig. 3 - Visitor's Status**



## 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 - Distribution of Office Visitors by OU Population Group**

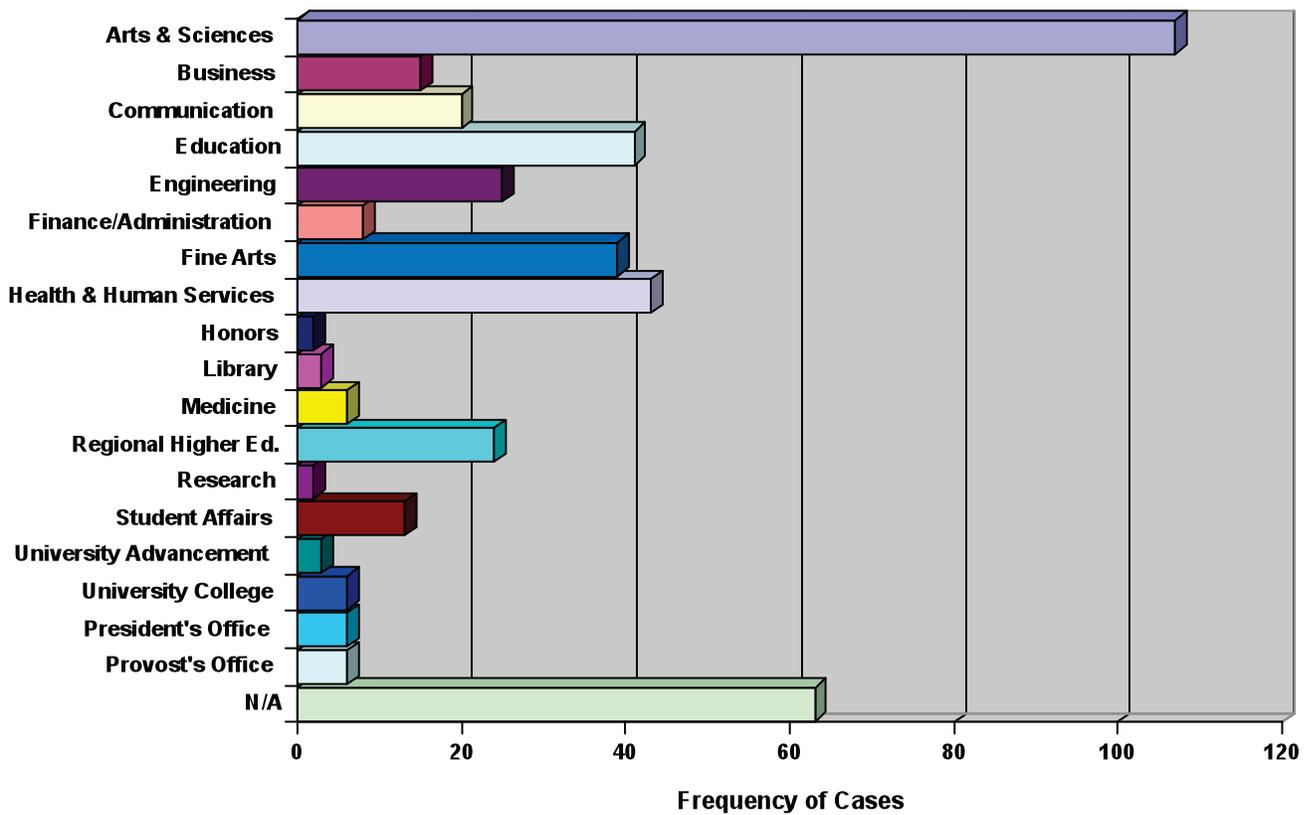
Position	Faculty	Administrative	Classified Bargaining	Classified Non-bargaining	Undergrad Students	Graduate Students
<b>Population Number</b>	1,940	1,537	716	713	23,885	3,651
<b>% of Population</b>	74	65	2	11	163	72
	3.81%	4.23%	0.28%	1.54%	0.68%	1.97%

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

## Visitor's Unit

Units making significant contact with the Ombuds Office include Arts & Sciences, Health and Human Services, Education, and Fine Arts, as shown in Figure 4. Please note that the size of the unit is often reflected in the number of visitors the Ombuds Office receives.

**Fig. 4 - Visitor's Unit**

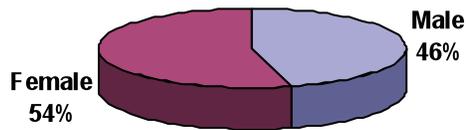


\*See Appendix A for University Governance flowchart for information concerning composition of categories

## Visitor's Sex

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

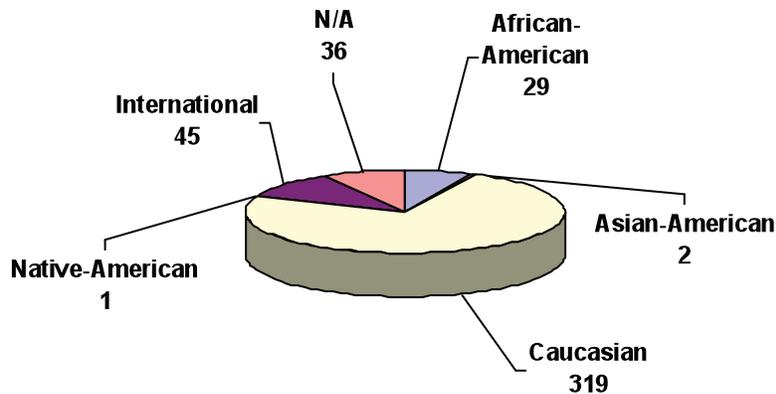
**Fig. 5 - Visitor's Sex**



## Visitor's Ethnicity

The prevalence of Caucasian visitors to our office is reflective of the racial composition of the university.

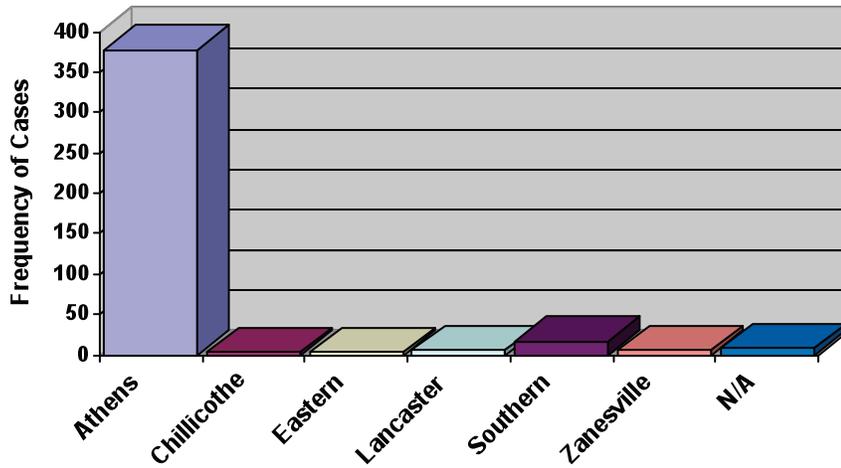
**Fig. 6 - Visitor's Ethnicity**



\*N/A = Not applicable/Not Available

## Visitor's Campus Location

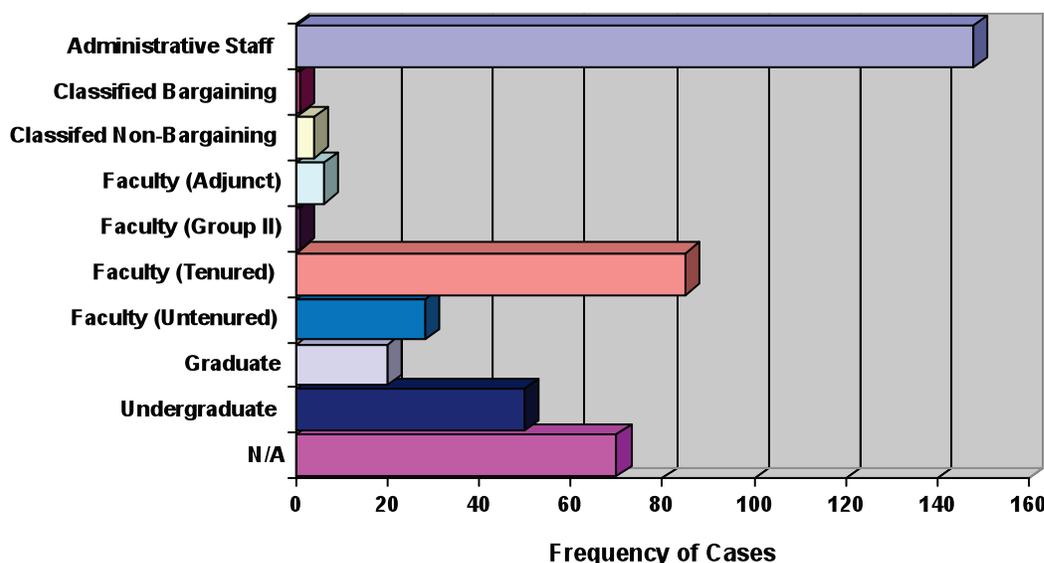
**Fig. 7 - Visitor's Campus Location**



## Area/Person of Concern's Status

Figure 8 shows status, rank, and/or classification of persons cited by complainant. The two prominent categories – administrative staff and tenured faculty – are influenced by supervisor/employee issues and perhaps would be higher in number.

**Fig. 8 - Area/Person of Concern's Status**



## Distribution of Area/Person of Concern by OU Population Group

Figure 8 indicates that the majority of our visitor's concerns reference issues with tenured faculty and administrative staff. In an effort to better represent the data in Figure 8, Table 2 compares the data against the total population of each unit/group. These figures can indicate where preventive measures and outreach may be focused in the future.

**Table 2 - Distribution of Area/Person of Concern by OU Population Group**

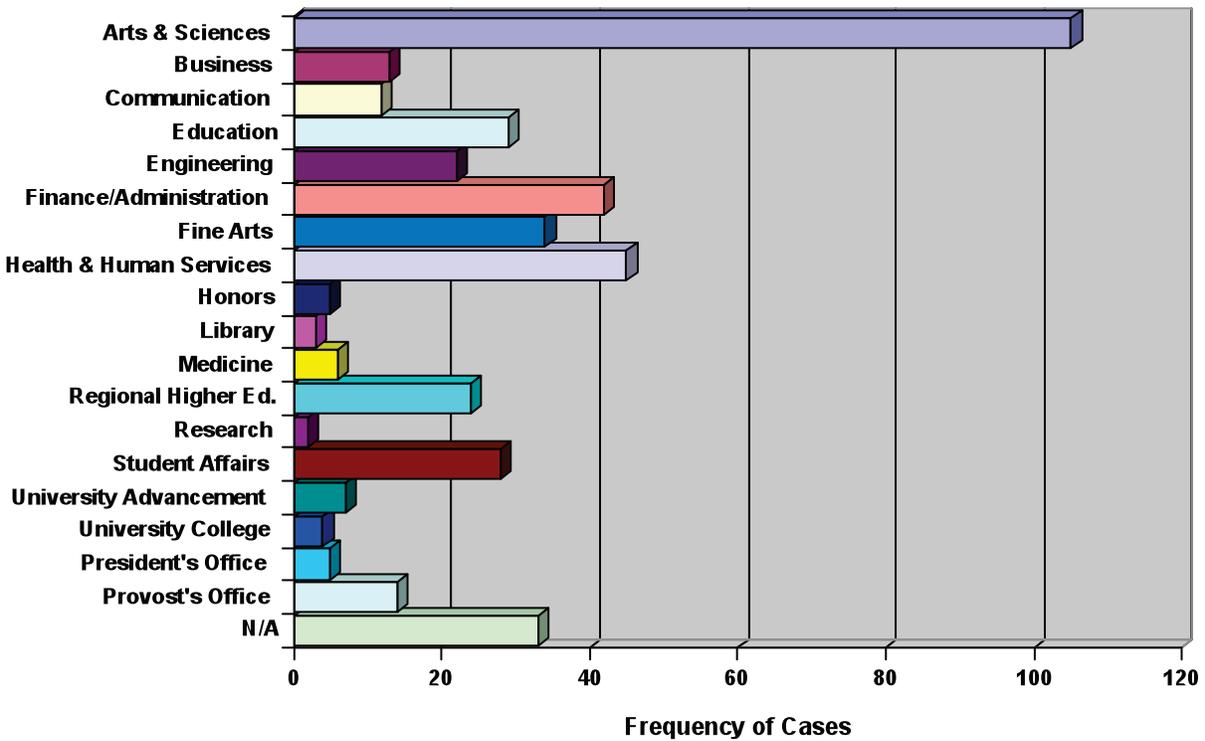
Position	Faculty	Administrative	Classified Bargaining	Classified Non-bargaining	Undergrad Students	Graduate Students
<b>Population Number</b>	1,940	1,537	716	713	23,885	3,651
<b>% of Population</b>	6.19%	9.63%	0.14%	0.56%	0.21%	0.55%

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

## Area/Person of Concern's Unit

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

**Fig. 9 - Area/Person of Concern's Unit**

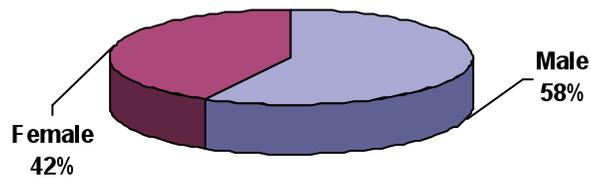


\*See Appendix A for University Governance flowchart for information concerning composition of categories

## Area/Person of Concern's Sex

Figure 10 shows sex of persons cited by complainants.

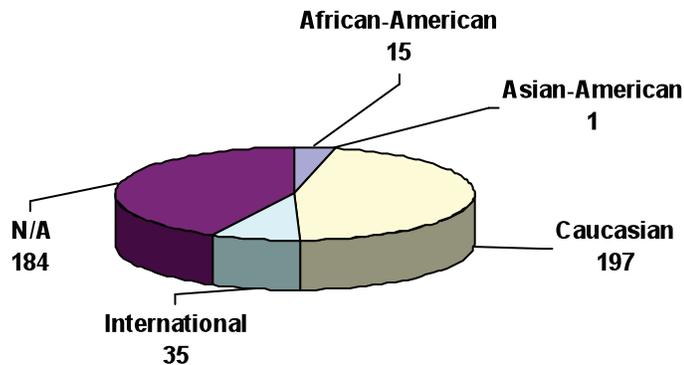
**Fig. 10 - Area/Person of Concern's Sex**



## Area/Person of Concern's Ethnicity

Figure 11 illustrates ethnicity of persons cited by complainant. The high number (n = 184) associated with not applicable/not available reflects that the visitor was not having issue with an individual but rather was experiencing difficulty with an office or a policy/procedure.

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

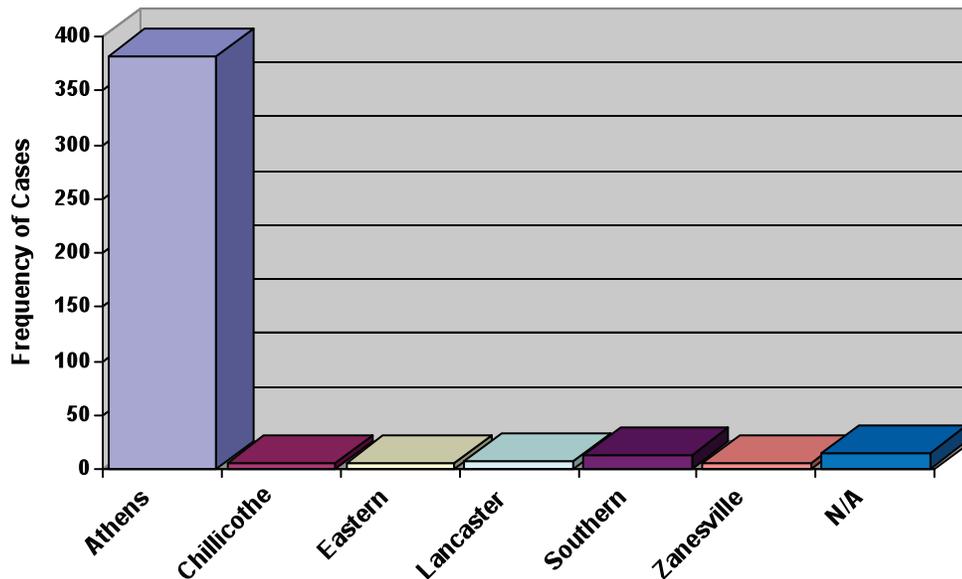


\*N/A = Not applicable/Not Available

## Area/Person of Concern's Campus Location

Figure 12 shows campus location of persons cited by complainant.

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

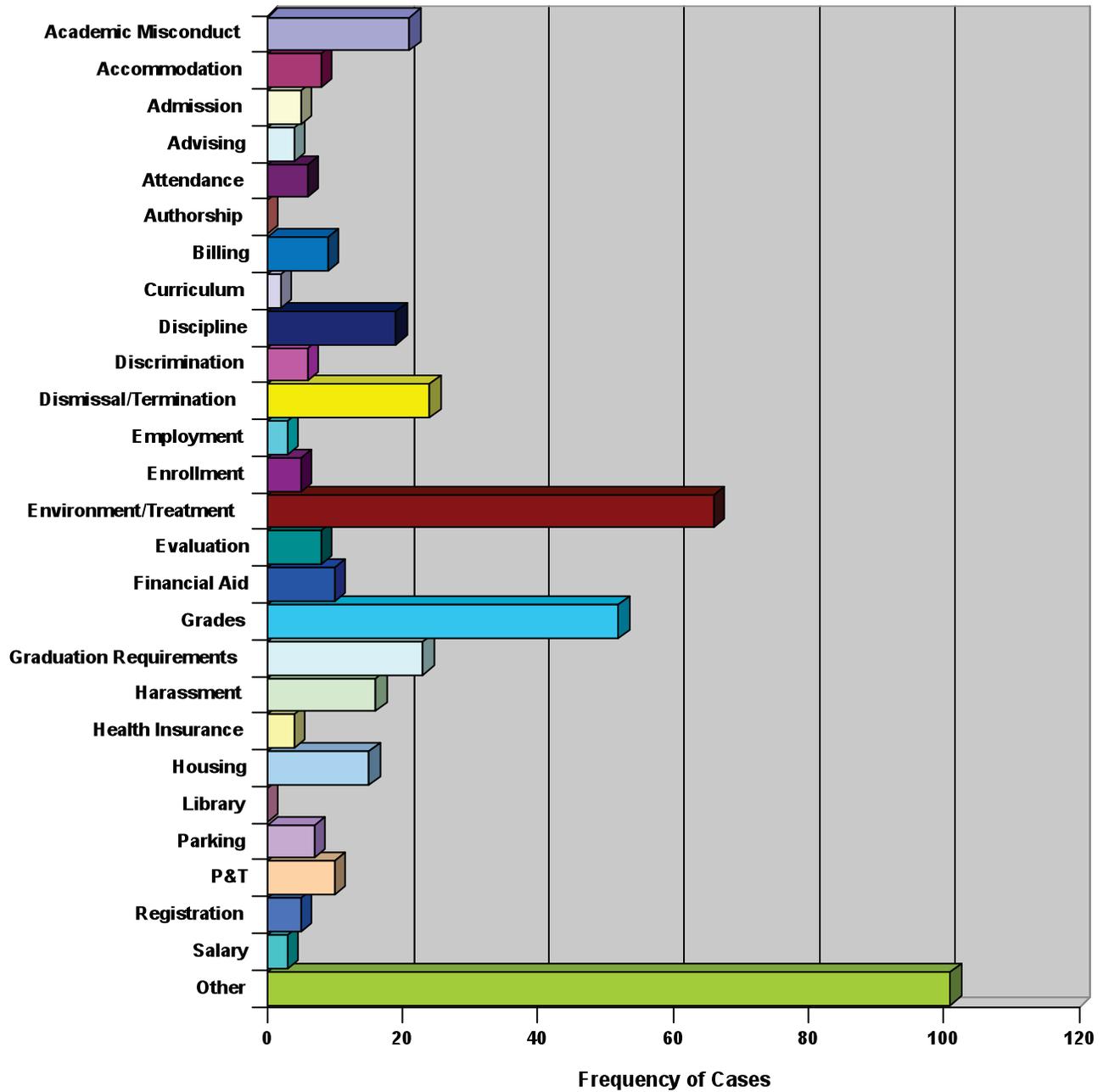


## Nature of Concern

Figure 13 illustrates the nature of the issue brought to the Ombuds Office with *other* (detailed below), *environment/treatment*, *grading*, *dismissals/termination*, *graduation requirements*, and academic misconduct concerns by far the largest categories.

It is important to note, however, that the number of cases identified as *problems with environment and treatment* (see Figure 13) are 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.

**Fig. 13 - Nature of Concern**



\*See Appendix B for detailed definition of categories

The “**Other**” category seemed to be an especially eclectic category this year. Here are some prevalent themes.

**Insurance**, including questions about the minimum number of credit hours necessary to be able to access student health insurance as well as complaints about insurance requirements for international graduate students.

**Complaints about poor teaching**, including faculty not showing up for class, coming to class unprepared, difficulty understanding foreign born instructors, and general non-responsiveness to students.

**Complaints about poor/unmotivated students**

**Religion**, including concerns about freedom “from” religion on campus.

**Job stress**, including worries about job security and increased job requirements.

**Legal services**, including access to Student Legal Services.

**LGBT issues**, including calls from the Athens area community about resources.

**Mental health concerns**, including faculty concerns about student mental health, faculty concerns about the mental health of colleagues, student concerns about mental health of other students, and parent concern about child’s mental illness.

**Drugs and alcohol**, such as parent concerns about alcohol consumption in residence halls and student concerns about student alcohol consumption and OU alcohol policies.

**Abuse/assault/threats**, including sexual assault, student to student and student to professor physical and verbal altercations.

**Miscellaneous payment matters**, such as release from meal plans, refunds for poorly taught classes.

**Miscellaneous class questions** such as change of exam time, “pink slipping” questions, lost tests, class section enrollment confusion, make-up tests, and excuses from Hudson Health Center.

**Other academic matters**, including the elimination of academic programs, readmission, “expunging” of grades, how to get a new dissertation chair, and unsatisfactory classroom facilities.

**Privacy concerns** including dissatisfaction with having to pay the fees associated with ensuring personal records are free from future misuse and identity theft, grades posted by social security numbers and student work left outside faculty office containing personal information (ss#, grades etc...)

## VI. 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. Perhaps additional formal and informal means of seeking input and communicating decisions would serve as an initial step in starting a dialogue aimed at improving relations between all university community members.
2. University leadership could encourage employee wellness in the face of stress through subsidizing employee membership in wellness facilities such as the Ping Center, Wellworks, and the Athens Community Center.
3. As the university continues to streamline budgets through non-renewal of contracts, outplacement services for displaced employees would be both beneficial and humane. In addition, a set of procedures for how best to enact employee transitions are necessary.
4. On several occasions this year the police have been called to settle classroom disputes between faculty and students. For this reason, we need to articulate and codify a code of conduct that applies to student and faculty classroom behavior. Mutual respect and civility toward one another would be the core component of this initiative.
5. The security breach has heightened our concern for the security of student records. Although the university plans to examine and shore-up the security of computerized information, and the attendant university infrastructure, smaller measures can also be taken to secure students' personal information. For example, class work with grades and identifiers contained therein are routinely left outside faculty offices for students to retrieve without regard for privacy laws. These practices lead to security failures, identity theft, and renders student information vulnerable to exposure.
6. The Ombuds Office has experienced an increase in the number of contacts from parents of OU students. Invariably they request information about their son or daughter that we are not in a position to share (according to FERPA regulations). Parents need to be informed about FERPA guidelines to avoid subsequent unproductive requests for information from university officials. New student orientation would be an ideal time to share these guidelines with parents.
7. 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 First Annual Educational Program Addressing Employment Issues at Ohio University served as an excellent vehicle for sharing with the university community resources and processes for advising and assisting those in distress. These training efforts should continue. Counseling and

Psychological Services, as campus experts in student mental health, should play a lead role in this initiative.

8. We have noted an alarming increase in complaints from students and their parents about teaching at Ohio University such as professors not showing up for class, instructors not knowing how to teach, professors' difficulty with language, teachers' inability to manage their classrooms, and rude and belittling behavior towards students. The university has responded to some of these student complaints by refunding tuition to students and their families, in effect "settling" through financial compensation. While this is perhaps a necessary response by the university, the problem that prompted the initial complaint is sometimes left unaddressed. Academic units should be required to intervene so that faculty remediation can be undertaken.
9. It is evident that professionals, practitioners, and some new hires are brought in to teach with little or no instructional training. 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.
10. While we have noticed that the University has been more responsive and accommodating to university members who may wish to observe a religious holiday in lieu of work or classroom obligations, we have also recorded instances in which university members are not afforded the right to experience *freedom from religion*. Religious tag lines on emails and the invoking of prayer at University sponsored events are problematic for those who wish to keep religion separate from state institutions and events.
11. 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.
12. 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 Staffs, who serve as the *front door* to the university, not be neglected.
13. 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.
14. The University registration system (TRIPS) is not able to prohibit students from oversubscribing courses for the purpose of saving seats for others. This is particularly

problematic for those who enjoy priority registration. This practice sabotages the system and renders the registration process vulnerable and inequitable.

15. Students continue to engage in high risk activities that range from academic misconduct to binge drinking. The university could better serve students by providing a consistent holistic educational experience that seeks to integrate social and academic life. This would require that the academic side of the university and the Student Affairs component interface more directly. One manifestation of this would be the implementation of an honor code which would serve to articulate university expectations to students and serve to instruct them about responsible and appropriate behavior.
16. As the University moves to implement Vision Ohio, it would be expedient for the various administrative offices to follow the lead of the academic units and perform basic self-reviews and evaluations to assure that we have the capacity to move forward. The various administrative units should perform check-list kinds of self evaluations of operations using external standards of practice or best practice models, supplemented with a scan of the national university environment to identify critical issues for consideration.

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.

## **VII. Future Plans and Needs of the Ombuds Office**

In the broadest of terms, we hope to cultivate a humane and dignified environment in which members empower themselves through dialogue with others to seek resolutions to issues of concern.

1. We plan to continue meeting with key personnel and units on campus to acquaint them with our office. In addition, we plan to visit each regional campus in the coming academic year, as part of our mission is educational.
2. Office staffing continues to be a challenge. Currently our office is staffed by 3 work study students. While they are stellar office personnel, they remain students and therefore have different priorities and availability when compared to a permanent employee. It is our hope that we receive support for a permanent half-time office staff member.
3. To be a fully effective Ombuds Office, we also need to be proactive rather than reactive to problems on campus. With two half-time professional staff (Ombuds and Associate Ombuds), we are not likely to see this goal come to fruition. Despite our best intentions, our office simply receives too many visitors to enable us to *get out* of the office and engage in interventions and training sessions with target audiences in need of our

services. We see a small investment in staffing yielding a modicum of workplace satisfaction for the university community.

4. It is important that we encourage feedback from visitors through our Visitor Satisfaction Survey posted on our website.

## **Appendix A: University Governance Flowchart**

Placeholder  
University Organizational Chart goes here

**Appendix B: Descriptions of Case Categories**

**Academic Misconduct:** Issues related to cheating and misappropriation of referenced material.

**Accommodation:** These include ADA cases and special consideration for an individual's circumstances.

**Admissions:** Admissions issues often related to initial enrollment or transfer processes and procedures.

**Advising:** Problems associated with academic advising and/or advisor issues.

**Attendance:** These situations involve class attendance policies.

**Authorship:** These involve questions such as who should be listed as first author, authorship protocol, and perceived "unfairness" in regard to their research, thesis data, publications, and conference presentations.

**Billing:** Anything to do with addressing billing charges, refunds, or general money concerns fall into this category.

**Curriculum:** In general, these cases concern departmental requirements, changes in requirements, students being closed out of courses or dropped from class rosters, or cases of students meeting graduation requirements.

**Discipline:** These include cases brought before Judiciaries.

**Discrimination:** These include instances whereby people feel as though they are not given equal access to opportunities because of race, ideology, status or gender.

**Dismissals/Terminations:** These include dismissals or terminations with faculty, staff or instructors in terms of employment.

**Employment:** Job postings before a person is hired, non-academic promotions, elimination of positions, and personnel policies are included here.

**Enrollment:** Problems gaining access to a course.

**Evaluation:** Problems associated with evaluation, usually referring to work related evaluations.

**Environmental/Treatment:** These cases include hostile environments and instances of incivility..

**Financial Aid/Scholarship:** These include all issues involving the process for receiving financial aid or scholarships.

**Grades:** These include grade appeal issues, most frequently beginning with our explaining the policies and procedures.

**Graduation Requirements:** Situations that involve insufficient credit hour, outstanding fees, failure to register

**Harassment:** All cases involving harassment are in this category.

**Health Insurance:** Problems associated with processing or qualifying for health insurance.

**Housing, Roommate Conflicts:** housing/meal contracts, or off-campus housing issues are in this category.

**Library:** Generally related to fines or loss of privileges.

**Parking:** Tickets, towing, troubles.

**Promotion and Tenure:** These include clarification or procedures and assisting in appeals for promotion and tenure.

**Registration:** Problems with registration such as forgetting to add or drop a course.

**Salary:** This area includes cases of individuals seeking information or equities.

**Other:** This is the catchall "other" category

## **Appendix C: Affirming Diversity Series Announcements**

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Affirming Diversity Appalachian Roots Announcement goes here