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University Ombuds Annual Report June 1, 2006– May 31, 2007 Report

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I. Introduction

This year the Ohio University Ombuds Office marked its 36th 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 Ombuds provides the university community with confidential and informal assistance in resolving campus conflicts, disputes, and grievances. In addition, the office is charged with promoting fair and equitable treatment within the university. We spend a large percentage of our time assisting visitors with problem-solving, simply listening, and regularly providing visitors with information about applicable OU policies and procedures. An appointed tenured faculty member and an Associate Ombuds staff the office. Both positions are halftime. In an effort to detail the duties of the Ombuds, a visual depiction of who we are, what we do, and whom we serve is featured in Appendix A (p. 20).

This report details the activities of the Ohio University Ombuds Office for the 2006-2007 fiscal year. In addition, this report describes the people and the concerns they brought to our office, noticeable trends, recommendations for consideration, and plans.

Following is a brief history of the etiology of the word ombuds and the profession.

Origins of Ombuds *

The term ombuds arose from its use in Sweden, where it is a common word meaning the people's representative or agent. The origin of the word is found in the Old Norse words *umbuds man*, meaning representative. The term is also found in Norwegian (*ombudsman*) and Danish (*ombudsmand*) languages.

King Charles XII of Sweden appointed the first ombudsman in 1713. The Ombuds concept spread throughout the Scandinavian nations and eventually became an international concept. The United Nations views Ombudsing as a tool to help protect and promote international human rights. In the United States and Canada, Ombuds have been established to assist those with concerns about administrative matters. Ombuds exist in state and local governments, nursing homes, universities and colleges, private industries, and most recently in agencies of the federal government.

* University and College Ombuds Association
[www.http://encyclopedia.thefreedictionary.com](http://encyclopedia.thefreedictionary.com)
Hatton, R.H. (1969). Charles XII of Sweden. New York: Weybright and Talley

Eastern Montana University (now Montana State University – Billings) was the first educational institution in the United States to appoint an Ombuds (1966). In 1967, Michigan State University became the first U.S. University to establish an Ombuds office. During the nationwide campus unrest in the late 1960's and early 1970's, many universities established Ombuds offices to respond to demands for a neutral and confidential place to discuss concerns and complaints. More than 200 colleges and universities in the U.S. and Canada now staff Ombuds offices.

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 academic Ombuds model is shifting even further as a result of changing and increasingly intricate case law on the role of an academic Ombuds in regard to matters such as confidentiality, duty to warn, harassment and notice. 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

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

II. Educational Outreach Activities

Affirming Humanity Initiative

This year our office has continued to organize the series of public conversations with Ohio University faculty and staff. The current theme, featured in the first two panels in the series of three, focuses on *affirming humanity* through service and outreach to others. The panels provide an opportunity for people to gather and hear first-hand how others contribute to Ohio University and the Athens community through their ethics and actions of service, goodwill, and respect for others. They feature personal narratives as well as suggestions for making Ohio University a more inclusive and responsive environment. All panels are open to the university

community. The panel series is available in the Alden Library Video/DVD Collection as well as in the University Archives.

The following Ohio University faculty and staff participated as members or conveners for the panels:

President McDavis	Lynn Harter	Renee Middleton	Jane Palmer
Provost Krendl	Charlene Kopchick	Schuyler Cone	Dale Tampke
Kent Smith	Thomas Walker	Akil Houston	Arthur Trese
Frans Doppen	Winsome Chunnu	Jaylynn Hutchinson	William Smith

Panelists expressed varieties of themes. Challenges, joys, misunderstandings, fears, and obstacles were described along with gratitude for support from others and personal satisfaction that comes from serving others. Members of the audience provided feedback, and included expressions of welcome and appreciation for the opportunity to share and learn. We plan to continue in our effort to enhance humanity through service at Ohio University.

Participation in Campus Initiatives and Special Events

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

- Core Diversity Committee (July 2006 - January 2007)
- Search committee for the Vice Provost for Diversity, Equity, and Access (June 2007-present)
- Second Annual Program on Addressing Employment Issues at Ohio University (May 2007)
- Media Relation Training (January 2007)
- Speaker at the 21st Annual Ohio University Human Resource Institute (May, 2007)
- VISION OHIO (Environment Team) (2006)
- Ad hoc Task Force on International Graduate Students (2006)
- Residence Life Annual Staff Resource Fair (August 2006)
- Health and Wellness Fair (April, 2007)
- Green Jacket Crew (Halloween, October 2006)
- Women in Leadership panel (April, 2007)
- University College Advisor

Professional Development and Service to the Ombuds Profession

- Katherine Ziff, co-editor of *The Journal of the California Caucus of College and University Ombuds*
- Elizabeth Graham, editorial board member for *The Journal of the California Caucus of College and University Ombuds*
- Journal article co-written by Elizabeth Graham and Katherine Ziff titled *Anticipatory vs. Responsive Ombudsing: Reflections, Questions, and Future Challenges* published

in *The Journal of the California Caucus of College and University Ombuds*
November 2006, Volume 8, 13-17.

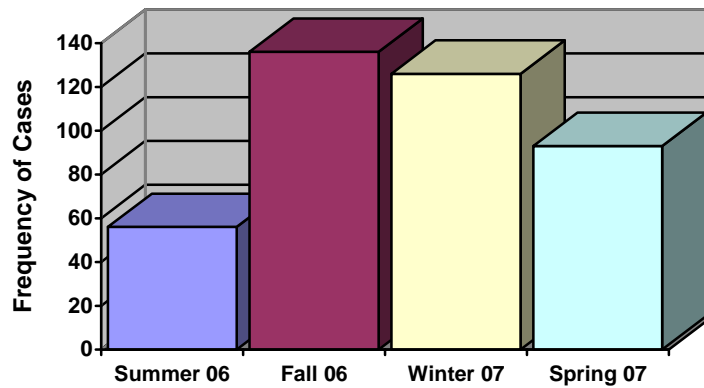
- Elizabeth Graham and Katherine Ziff presentation at the California Caucus of College and University Ombuds Association. *Anticipatory vs. Responsive Ombudsing: Reflections, Questions, and Future Challenges* (Monterey, CA, November 2006)
- Katherine Ziff and Elizabeth Graham presentation at the International Ombuds Association. *Strengthening Our Skills: Intervening With Suicidal Ideation* (St. Louis, MO, April, 2007)
- Consultation with various universities on establishment and operation of an Ombuds Office

III. Profile of Office Visitors

Number of Cases

The University Ombuds Office processed 411 cases during the fiscal year 2006-2007. This figure does not reflect the more than 50 telephone calls or casual conversations on the street that required quick and easy answers. Responses to visitor queries usually involve more than one action before satisfactory resolution is, if ever reached. There is consistency in number of visitors from 2005-06 to 2006-07 suggesting that the office continues to be of central importance to the university community.

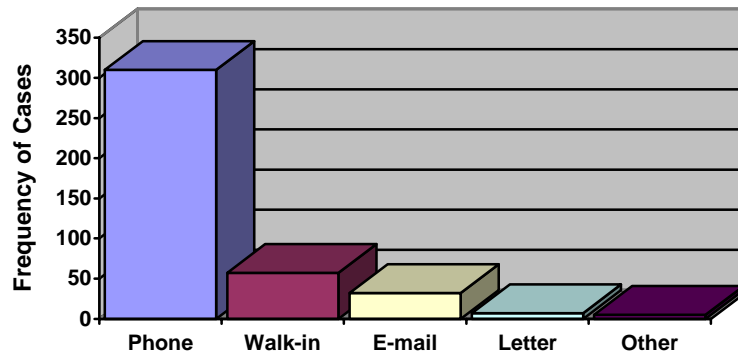
Fig. 1 - Total Number of Cases



Initial Means of Contact

Visitors contact the Ombuds Office most often by telephone, followed by walk-ins, e-mail, and letter and other means, indicating to some degree, an ease of access to our services.

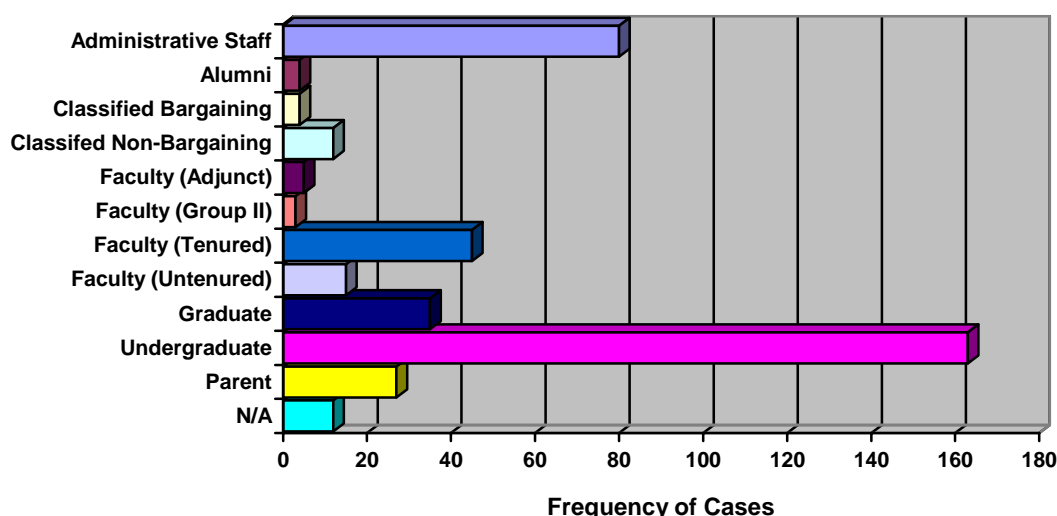
Fig. 2 - Initial Means of Contact



Visitor's Status

The most frequent group of visitors were undergraduate students, followed by administrative staff, tenured faculty, graduate students, parents, untenured faculty, and classified and other staff as indicated in Figure 3. Of special note are the increasing numbers of contacts initiated by administrators and 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. Administrative staff and faculty make the most use of the Ombuds Office.

Table 1 - Distribution of Office Visitors by OU Population Group

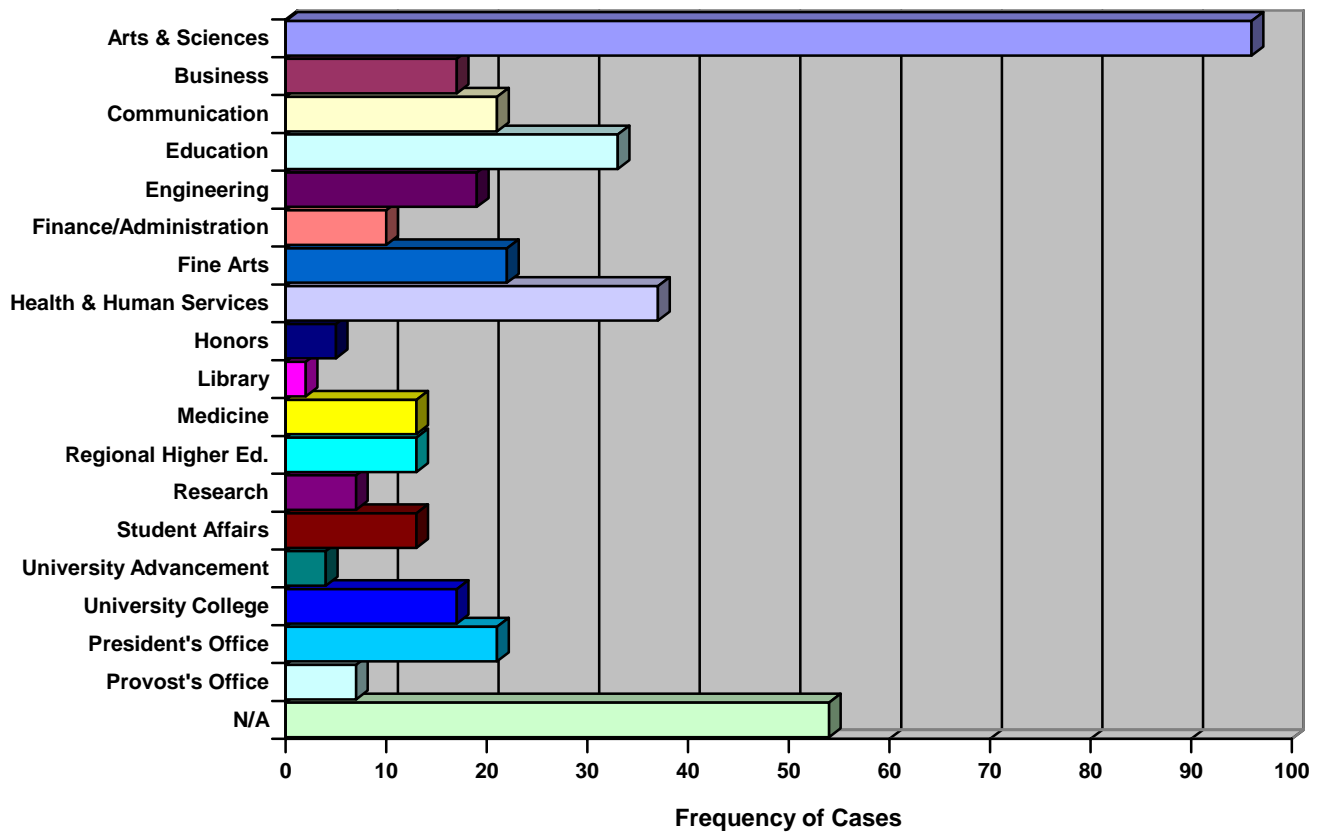
Position	Faculty	Administrative	Classified Bargaining	Classified Non-bargaining	Undergrad Students	Graduate Students
Population Number	1,857	1,619	693	662	24,858	3,584
% of Population	3.66%	4.94%	0.57%	1.81%	0.68%	0.98%

*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, President's Office, Fine Arts, and Communication 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.

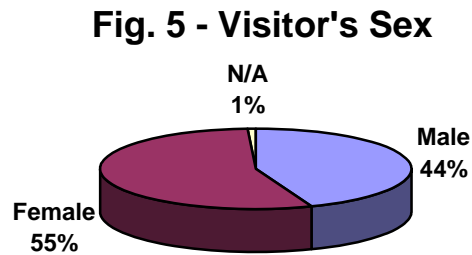
Fig. 4 - Visitor's Unit



*See Appendix B 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%.



Visitor's Ethnicity

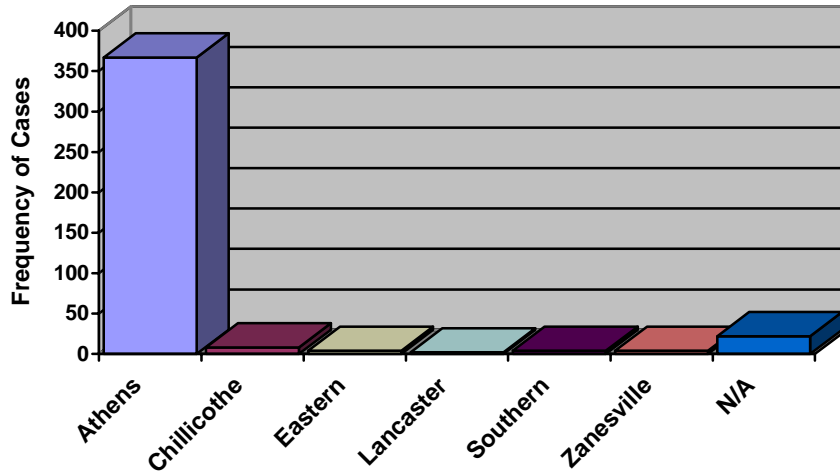
The prevalence of Caucasian visitors to our office is reflective of the racial composition of the university. The figures represent raw numbers.



*N/A = Not applicable/Not Available

Visitor's Campus Location

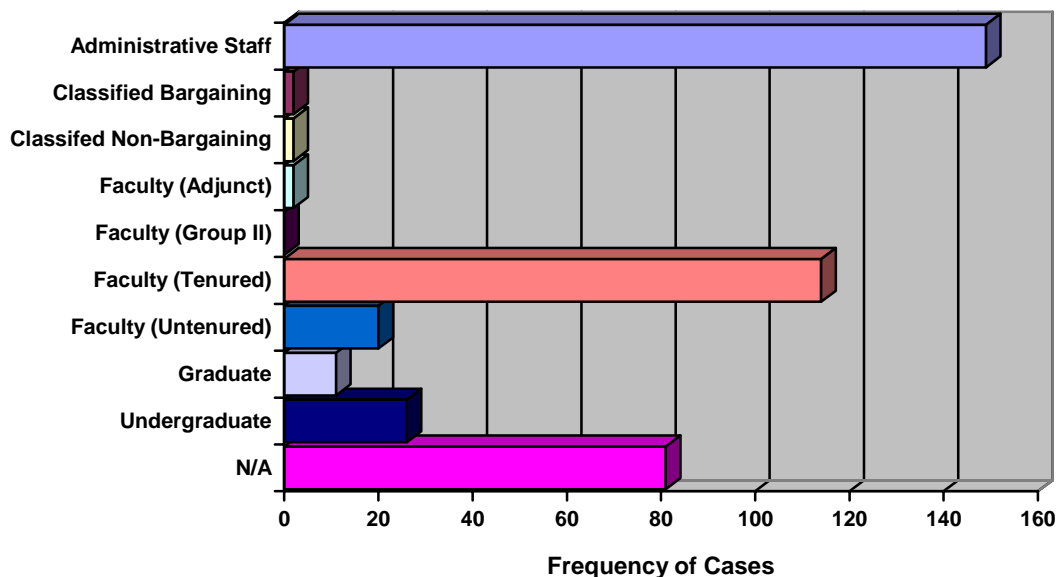
Fig. 7 - Visitor's Campus Location



Area/Person of Concern's Status

Figure 8 shows status, rank, and/or classification of persons cited by the visitor. 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. The data in Table 2 compares the data in Figure 8 against the total population of each unit/group.

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

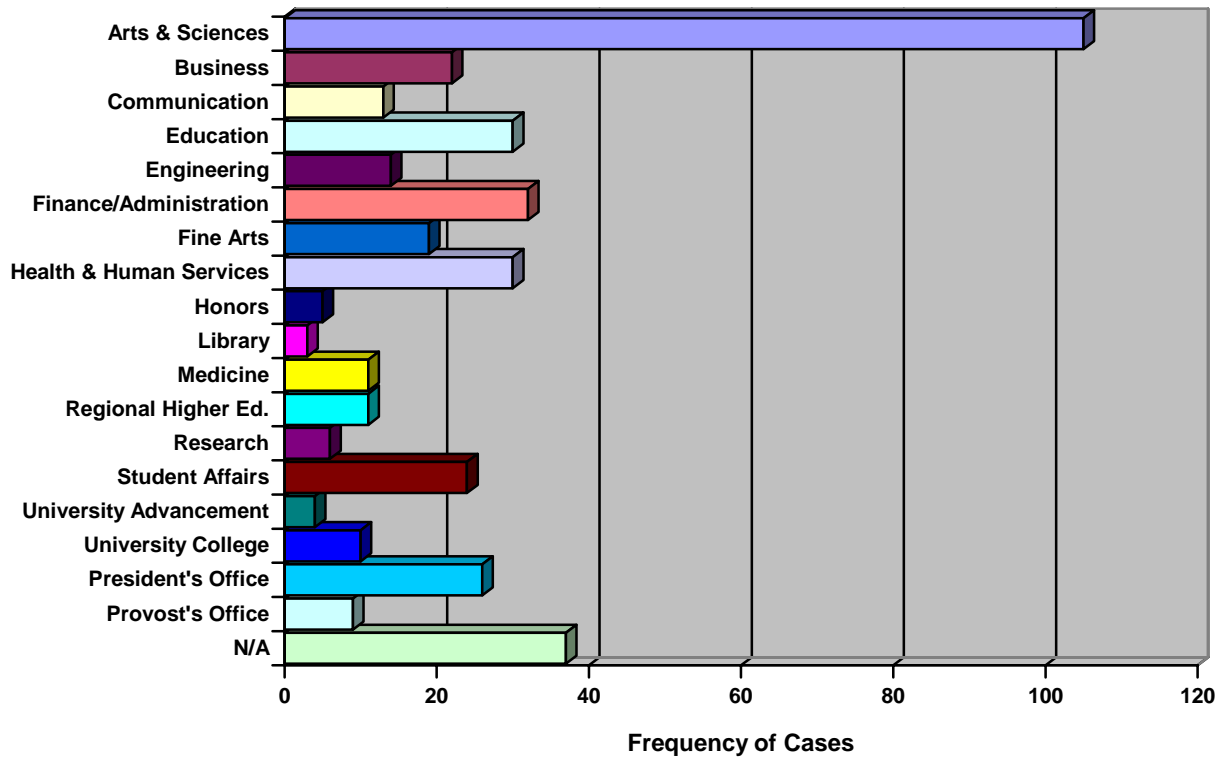
Position	Faculty	Administrative	Classified Bargaining	Classified Non-bargaining	Undergrad Students	Graduate Students
Population Number	1,857	1,619	693	662	24,858	3,584
% of Population	7.32%	9.20%	0.29%	0.30%	0.10%	0.31%

*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 potential resolution.

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

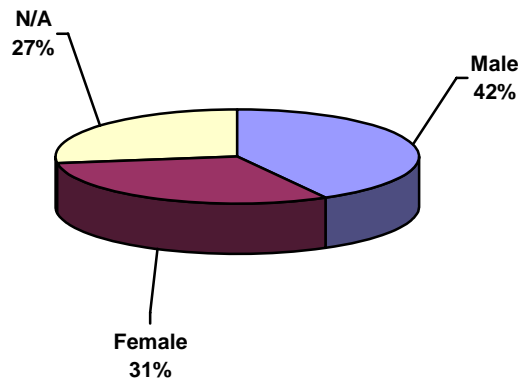


*See Appendix B for University Governance flowchart for information concerning composition of categories

Area/Person of Concern's Sex

Figure 10 shows sex of persons cited by complainants. The high percentage (27%) associated with not applicable/not available reflects that the visitor was not having issue with a person but rather was experiencing difficulty with an office or a policy/procedure.

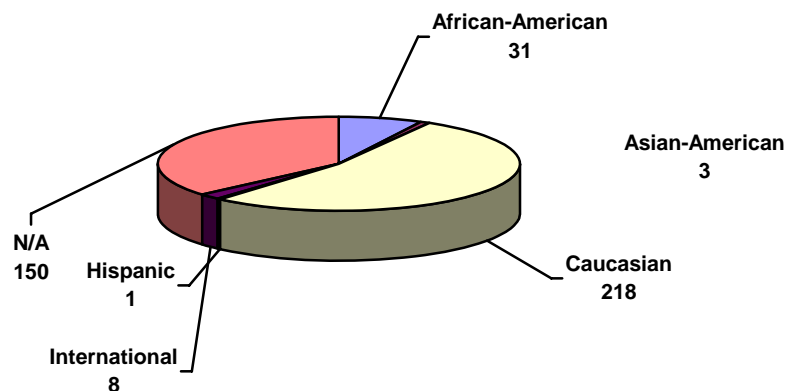
Fig. 10 - Area/Person of Concern's Sex



Area/Person of Concern's Ethnicity

Figure 11 illustrates ethnicity of persons cited by complainant. The high number (n = 150) 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

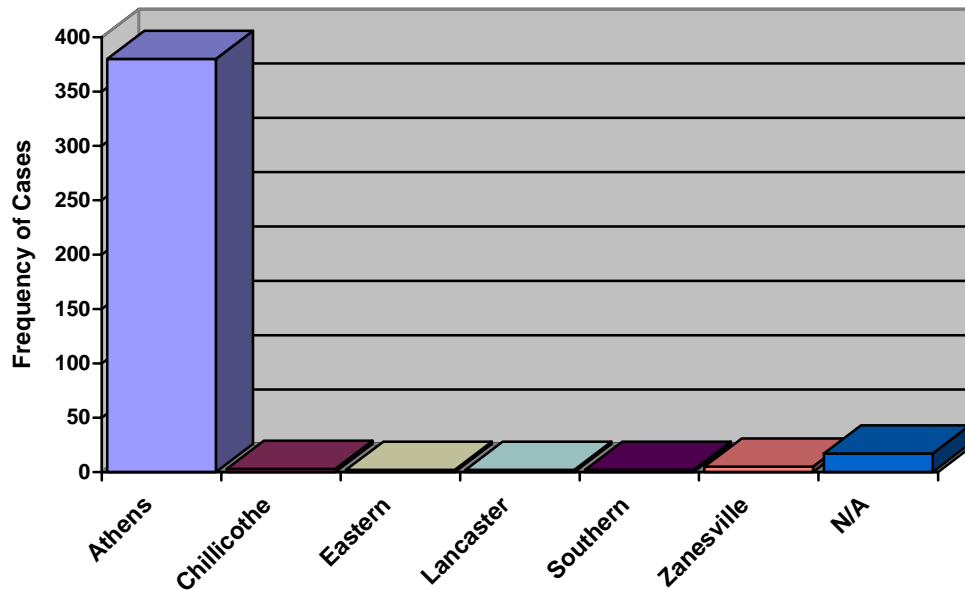


*N/A = Not applicable/Not Available

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

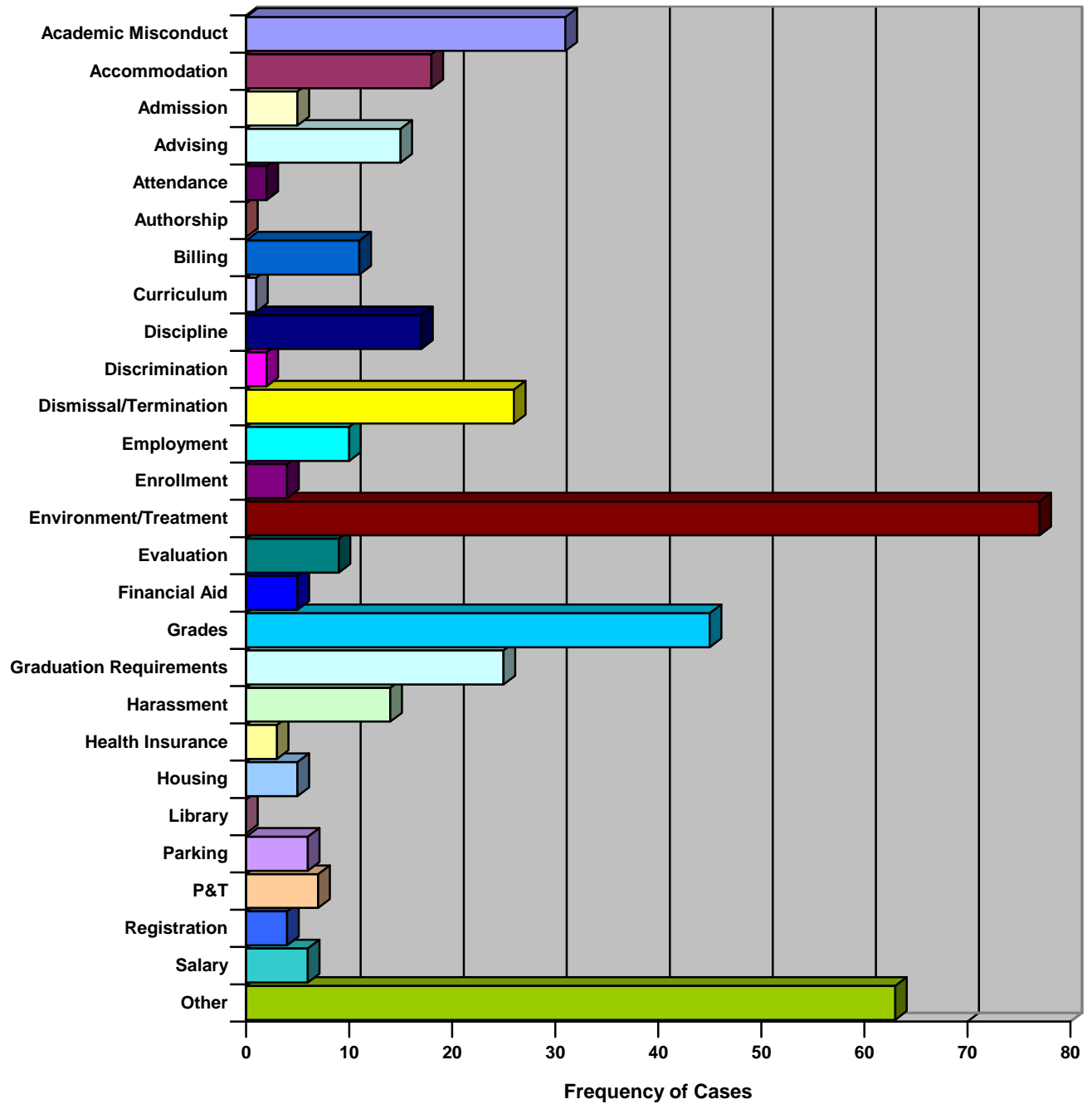


Nature of Concern

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. Regardless, incivility is expensive and results in problematic work environments and morale problems. It is evident that incivility on campus is prevalent and experienced by all constituents in the community.

Fig. 13 - Nature of Concern



*See Appendix C for detailed definition of case categories

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

Work/family issues/needs such as maternity leave, child-care availability, and spousal hire opportunities.

Retirement, hiring, employee benefits, such as payroll discrepancies, graduate student contracts, and ERIP.

Visa problems. Primarily a problem for international graduate students.

Teaching load for current faculty and early retirees. Overworked and underpaid.

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 (and graduate students) not showing up or canceling 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. Accommodation for student absences due to observation of religious holiday not as forthcoming as the faculty handbook suggests.

Job stress, including worries about job security and increased job requirements. The resounding theme is: *Tomorrow I may have no job – or two jobs!*

Legal services, including access to Student Legal Services, Athens Area Mediation Services, and legal settlement of problems.

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 and well-being.

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 and late add/drop fees.

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 readmission, “expunging” of grades, how to get a new dissertation chair, professional licensure, and unsatisfactory classroom facilities.

Privacy concerns including student work left outside faculty office containing personal information (PID, name, grades etc...)

IV. Observations, Concerns and Recommendations

The recommendations offered and issues raised are the result of listening to the cares and concerns of almost 500 members of the university community. Based on this information, we identify problems, trends, noticeable changes, and other issues that merit attention. We craft recommendations that are rooted in good faith and motivated by a desire to create a more humane and dignified environment at OU.

1. University community members continue to seek increased understanding of and input into administrative decision making. While it is difficult to codify the impact of genuine dialogue between university members and shared governance, we know that when people feel valued, they can participate in the university mission more fully. We know that people are empowered when they are privy to policies and information. And we know that valued, empowered university members are less distracted by peripheral issues and more willing to be engaged. Cultivating an environment in which exchange of ideas from all stakeholders is encouraged will contribute to an informed and committed university community.
2. Administrators will benefit from the newly approved Professional Development for Administrators Program (see policy #41.129 in policy/ procedures) designed to enhance the professional skills of administrators through further education, study, training, and/or creative work. The administrator, their unit, and the university community will profit from such improvements in the enhanced professional competence of its staff. Perhaps the program could be made more widely available and further subsidized by the university much like the Faculty Fellowship Program.
3. An increase in the student population, unprecedented construction and development, coupled with limited space and ambiguous/absent road signage have contributed to an unsafe environment for pedestrians, motorists, and cyclists at several locations in which the university intersects with the city of Athens.

In addition to the five-way intersection at Richland Avenue and Route 682, there are other treacherous pedestrian and motorist traffic patterns as well. For example, pedestrians and motorists cross as though the area on Richland Ave. between Grover Center (and Porter Hall) and the Convocation Center is a legal crosswalk. This area is

regarded as such because: (1) the brick pavers look like a pedestrian crosswalk, (2) the rumble strips on the road, just prior to the brick pavers, suggest to motorists that they are approaching a pedestrian crosswalk, and (3) the signage is ambiguous/inadequate for both motorists and pedestrians.

Another dangerous and heavily trafficked area is located at the intersection of Richland Ave. (near RTECH) and President Street (near the Bentley Hall Annex). With the exception of one marked crosswalk that leads people to an island of isolation, there is no official crosswalk, a situation that places pedestrians and motorists at an impasse. It is only the courtesy and watchfulness of some drivers that allows safe passage. This area also suffers from poor sight lines.

While it is heartening to know that Athens city and university officials are collaborating to address the Richland corridor project/problem, immediate intervention is required to ensure the safety of motorists and pedestrians. In the short-term, temporary signs need to be posted that instruct roadway inhabitants about appropriate and safe navigation procedures on campus and nearby city property. In addition to temporary signage, an information campaign aimed at alerting the community of the proper protocols is necessary.

4. The recently initiated wellness program “Healthy Ohio” is a promising initiative and will likely provide benefits to those best positioned to take advantage of this program. For those with less flexibility in their schedules, wellness activities are oftentimes out of reach. Perhaps a commitment from the university to support employee wellness by providing time during the course of the workday for employees to avail themselves of the wellness resources would be valuable to everyone’s health and wellbeing.
5. As the university continues to streamline budgets through non-renewal of contracts, outplacement services (i.e., retraining/retooling) for displaced employees would be both beneficial and humane. Although progress has been made in assisting with employee turnover, codified procedures for how to best enact employee transitions are necessary.
6. As the demographic profile of the university shifts to include non-traditional students, we will need to be more responsive to their needs. A growing number of students are simultaneously holding down jobs and raising families. Results of the childcare initiative will help ease the childcare concern for these student parents. In addition, the new Women’s Center might provide resources and support non-traditional female students.
7. The University needs to articulate and codify a plan for those seeking maternity/paternity leave. Little direction (especially for faculty) and general confusion capture the state of affairs on this issue and detract from a family friendly environment. Request for promotion and tenure clock adjustments, due to maternity/paternity, are forthcoming but not without consequence. It is noteworthy that faculty senate has identified maternity/paternity issues as an agenda item.

8. There is a trend in Ohio, and across the nation, of elders relocating to college towns and availing themselves to university resources – especially university courses. The state of Ohio offers a program titled the Sixty Plus Program and Ohio University is a participating member. The premise of the program permits elders (60 +) to attend Ohio University for virtually free. Although our partnership in the Sixty Plus Program is noted in the course catalog, very few people know of its existence. We should feature this program in our outreach efforts to the community and the region. Furthermore, opportunities for elders could serve as a recruiting tool for those job candidates whose parents might choose to join them in their new location. As the size of this age group increases, there will be a niche for the university community to serve this growing and active segment of society.
9. Data from institutional research reveals that the administrative ranks have increased by 82 (05-06: N = 1537 vs. 06-07: N = 1619) and the classified (non-bargaining) numbers have declined by 51 (05-06: N = 713 vs. 06-07: N = 662). Restructuring, internal transitions, layoffs, and retirements are responsible for some of these shifts. While these fluctuations might be meaningful and indicative of future trends, they might also simply represent minor changes in the composition of the workforce. Further study and future attention to this data is necessary to draw any definitive conclusions.
10. 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). Inform parents of FERPA guidelines to avoid subsequent unproductive requests for information from university officials. Perhaps Students Affairs could provide parents with periodic reminders about FERPA.
11. The balance between collective safety and individual privacy is a dynamic tension experienced at OU and most universities across the country. The Ombuds Office has noticed an increase in the number of questions, especially from faculty, that center on the ever-shifting line between “duty to warn and protect” and “duty to safeguard privacy.” These unpredictable times require delicate, sensitive, and nimble responses to unanticipated situations. More dialogue would undoubtedly ease some uncertainties and provide some necessary guidance to all parties.
12. According to the Student/Faculty Handbook, students must begin their grade appeal by the quarter following submission of the grade. However, there are no time stipulations for responses associated with each step of the appeal process. Codified and reasonable time limits need to be instituted to process student grade appeals.

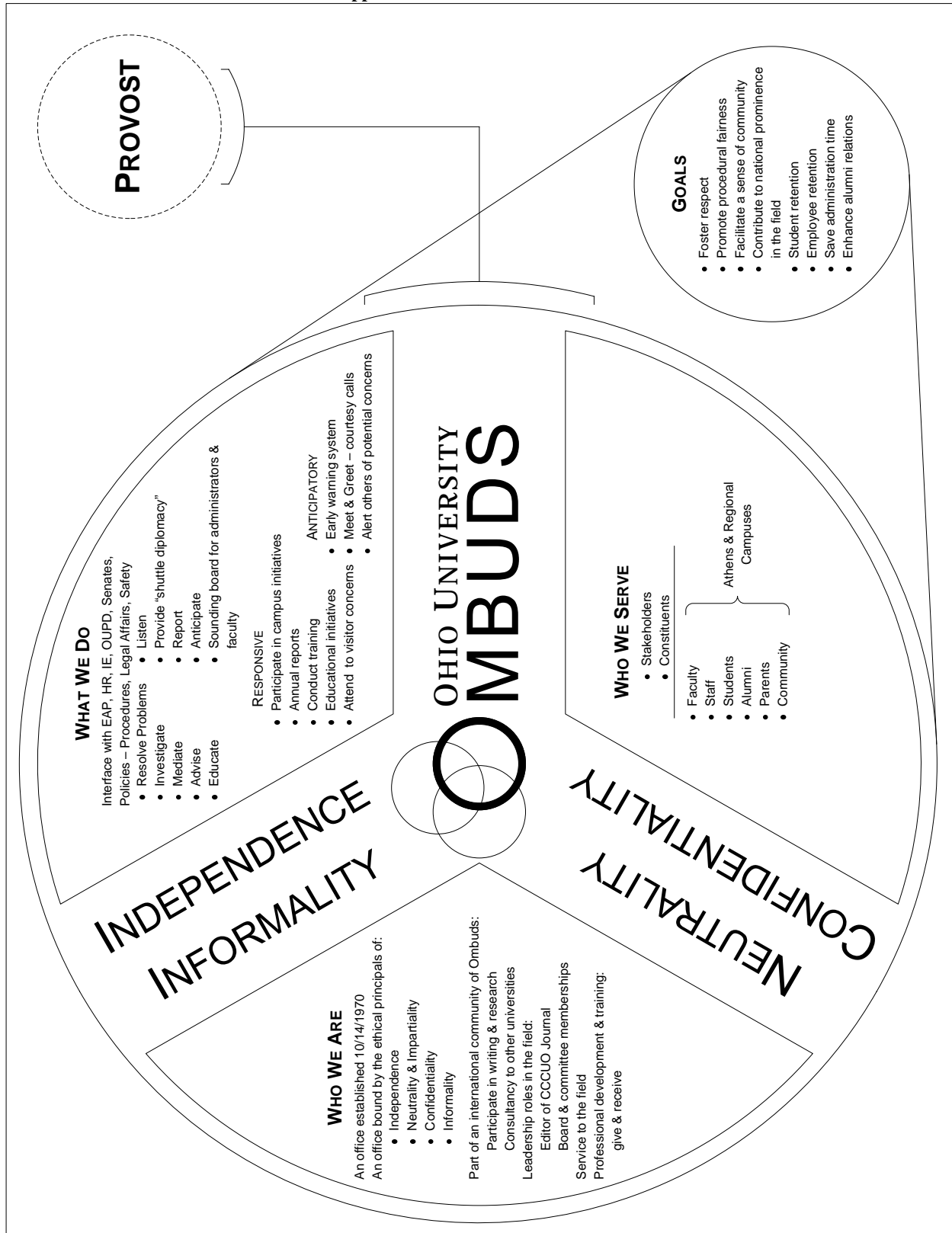
Certainly, these concerns are not unique to Ohio University. In addition, for every problematic situation, we can recount dozens of helpful ones. Many students, faculty, and staff are gifted—exceptionally so. Some academic environments are model, some university documents are open and inviting, and some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

V. Future Plans and Needs of the Ombuds Office

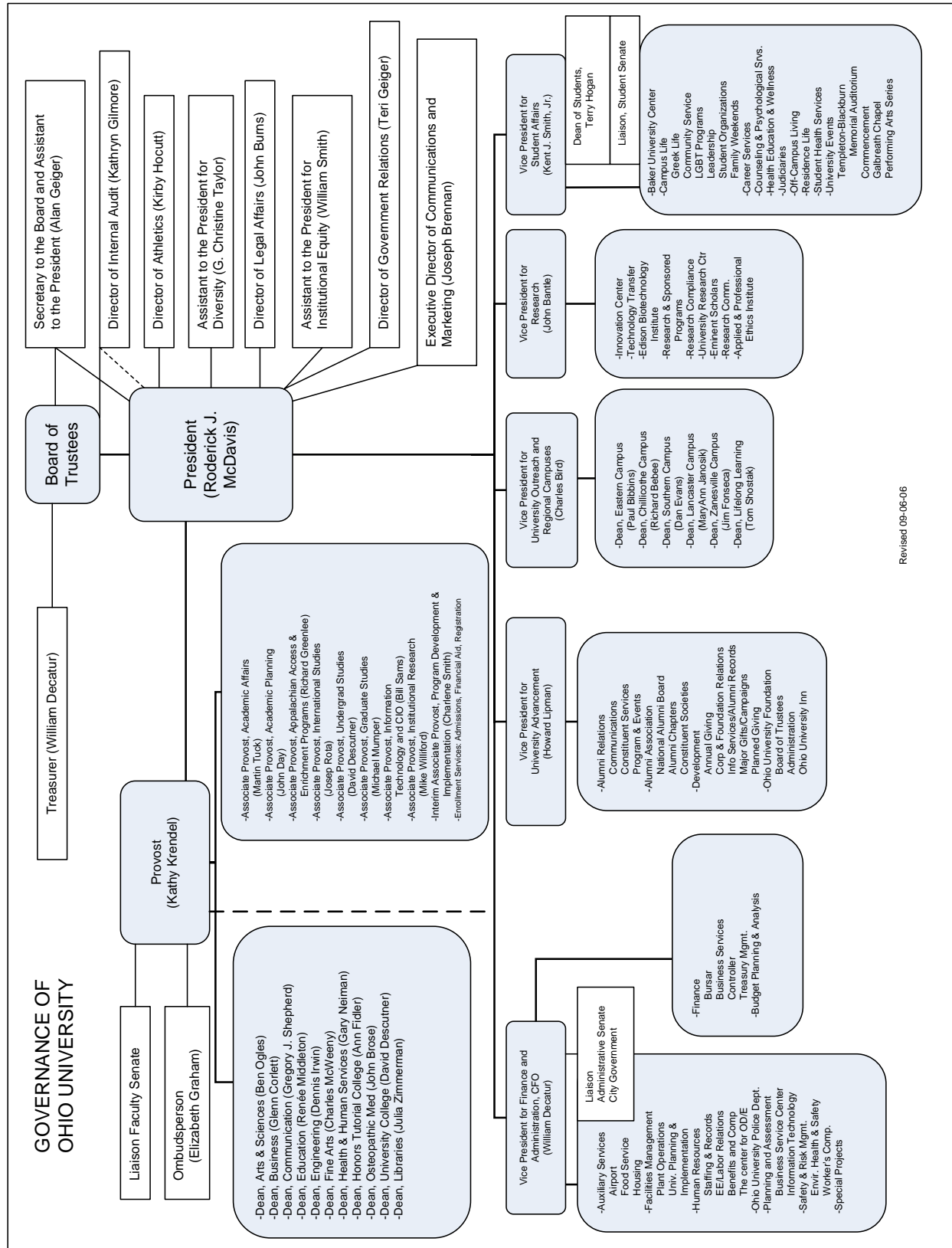
In the broadest of terms, we hope to cultivate a humane and dignified environment in which members empower themselves through dialogue with others to seek resolutions to issues of concern.

1. 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.
2. 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.
3. Although a Visitor Satisfaction Survey is posted on our website, very few visitors complete the questionnaire. To encourage visitor feedback, we will be instituting more accessible and immediate means of gathering this type of data.

Appendix A: Ombuds Office Visual



Appendix B: University Governance Flowchart



Revised 09-06-06

Appendix C: 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 D: Affirming Humanity Series Announcements

Placeholder