OFFICE OF THE UNIVERSITY OMBUDSPERSON

2013-2014 Annual Report

Office of the University Ombudsperson
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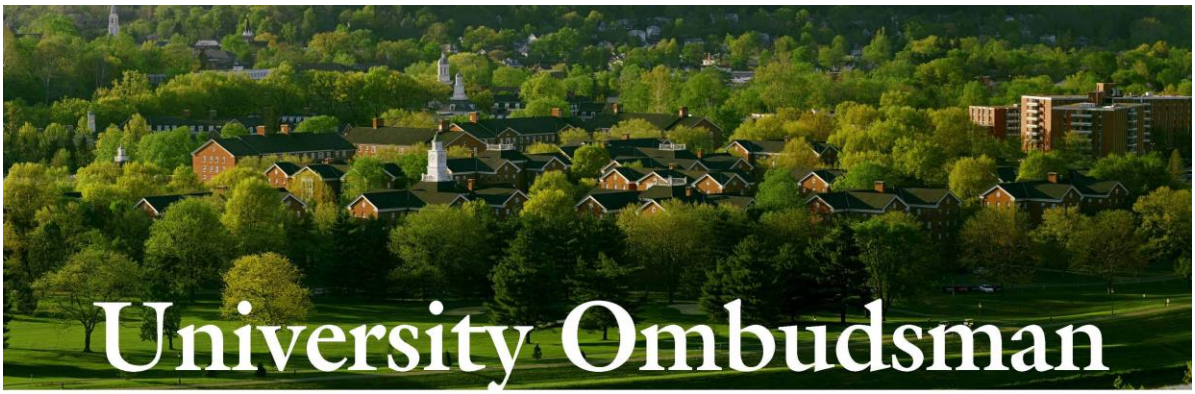

Confidential ■ Neutral
Independent ■ Informal

The Ombuds Office is an independent and confidential resource for all students, faculty and staff affiliated with Ohio University, who need assistance on an issue that is internal to the university.

The Ombudsman helps to identify formal and informal avenues for resolving conflicts, and works with visitors to determine the appropriate response for their situation.

The Ombudsman is neutral and does not serve as an advocate for an individual, but as an advocate for fair processes and procedures.

Please contact the office if you need assistance.

OHIO UNIVERSITY

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Introduction

This year celebrates the 44th year of operation for the Ohio University Office of the Ombuds. One of the critical roles of the Ombudsperson is to offer insights to the University community about the patterns and trends related to office visitors and their issues, with the goal of helping this institution respond to issues systematically and fairly. This annual report is one such vehicle for providing this information.

The office was established in the fall of 1970 with the appointment of its first Ombudsman following the campus riots, political unrest and school closing in the spring of that year. The office staffing model has changed over time. Until 2008-09 the Ombudsman was an appointed position and always a tenured member of the faculty; since that time, an administrator has been appointed to the role. From 1994-2005, the office staff included both a part-time Ombudsman and an administrative staff member serving as assistant or associate Ombudsman, as well as student support staff. In 2008, the University Ombudsman was a full-time year-round administrator with no student support staff. In March 2010, the position became half-time for 11 months of the year. In October 2012, the position increased to 12 months, .65 FTE. In July 2013 the name changed to the Office of the Ombudsperson (or Ombuds). During the past four decades, the following individuals served in the Office of the Ombudsman.

Ohio University Ombudsman 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
	Dianne Bouvier, M.A., M.B.A., Assistant Ombuds
1997-2002:	Dr. Butch Hill, Professor, Engineering
	Dianne Bouvier, M.A., M.B.A., Assistant Ombuds
2002-2007:	Dr. Elizabeth Graham, Professor, Communication Studies
	Dr. Katherine Ziff, Associate Ombudsman
2008-2010:	Merle Graybill, M Ed., LSW
2010-July 2013	Dr. Dianne Bouvier
Current	Judith Piercy, M.Ed.

The Ombudsman Profession

The Ombudsperson's field continues to evolve toward a profession with training standards, a code of ethics, standards of practice, and a growing body of research and literature, all facilitated by the International Ombudsman Association (IOA), which is a membership organization. This evolution of the field, 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 to the institution, obliges the University to support continuous professional development for its Ombudsperson. At Ohio University, the Ombudsperson follows the "organizational ombudsman" model.

Goals, Role, and Activities

The Ombudsperson provides services with these goals in mind:

- Fostering respect across the university community
- Promoting and facilitating effective communication between constituents
- Promoting procedural fairness, equity, and clarity
- Increasing retention of students, faculty and staff
- Saving time for all constituents and university entities

As outlined in the International Ombudsman Association Standards of Practice, the nature of the role of the "organizational ombudsman" is best characterized by the words independent, confidential, neutral, and informal.

Confidentiality - No identifying records of interactions with visitors are kept, and no information is revealed unless the visitor provides permission to do so, and the Ombudsman agrees to this. Each visitor is informed that the only exceptions are cases of imminent harm to self or others.

Neutrality - The Ombuds strives to understand all perspectives in a situation and seeks outcomes that balance the needs of individuals with the requirements of the institution. The Ombuds serves as an advocate for fair processes and procedures.

Independence – In order to minimize conflicts of interest, the office is placed outside of the University's formal lines of authority. The Ombuds is empowered to seek information as needed and to craft solutions toward the overall good when possible. The Ombuds reports to the Provost, to provide insight about overall trends within the university.

Informality - The office does not receive or act upon official complaints, grievances or legal matters, nor can the Ombudsman require an action of any party. The Ombuds helps to identify formal and informal avenues for resolving conflicts, and works with visitors to determine the appropriate response for their situation.

Anticipatory and Responsive

The usual activities of the Office of the Ombudsperson are both anticipatory and responsive:

Anticipatory

- Maintaining proactive interface with individuals and units such as Human Resources, Institutional Equity, OUPD, Senates, Legal Affairs, and University leaders
- Recommending changes to policy and procedure as needed
- Alerting our community to developing issues and concerns

Responsive

- Receiving and attending to the concerns of visitors to the office
- Communicating with constituents through presentations, resource fairs and other events
- Disseminating "snapshots" of our community through annual reports and website content

Activities of the Ombudsman

The activities for 2013-2014 were varied and numerous. Most time was spent with the cases brought by 282 visitors which are summarized later in this report. In addition the following activities occurred:

Internal

- Distributed print materials to inform the community about services – brochure, bookmarks, grade appeal guide
- Attended the International Ombudsman Association conference for academic ombuds (July 2014).
- Supervised a graduate student who assisted with annual report data preparation
- Completed mediation training certification through Athens Area Mediation Services
- Participated in the campus Inclusion & Accessibility Transformational Leadership Roundtable
- Served as facilitator for the university committee that revised university policy 03.004 – Sexual Misconduct Policy
- Attended a professional development presentation on stalking

Outreach

- Participated in the Bobcat Student Orientation Resource Fair
- Participated in the new International Student Orientation
- Participated in the RA resource fair for Residential Housing
- Presented to College of Communication TA's on managing classroom civility
- Presented to student leaders at Hillel
- Presented to Student Personnel Association (GA's) on the Ombuds role
- Conducted a Post interview promoting the office
- Attended the LGBT Office advocacy day interactive activity

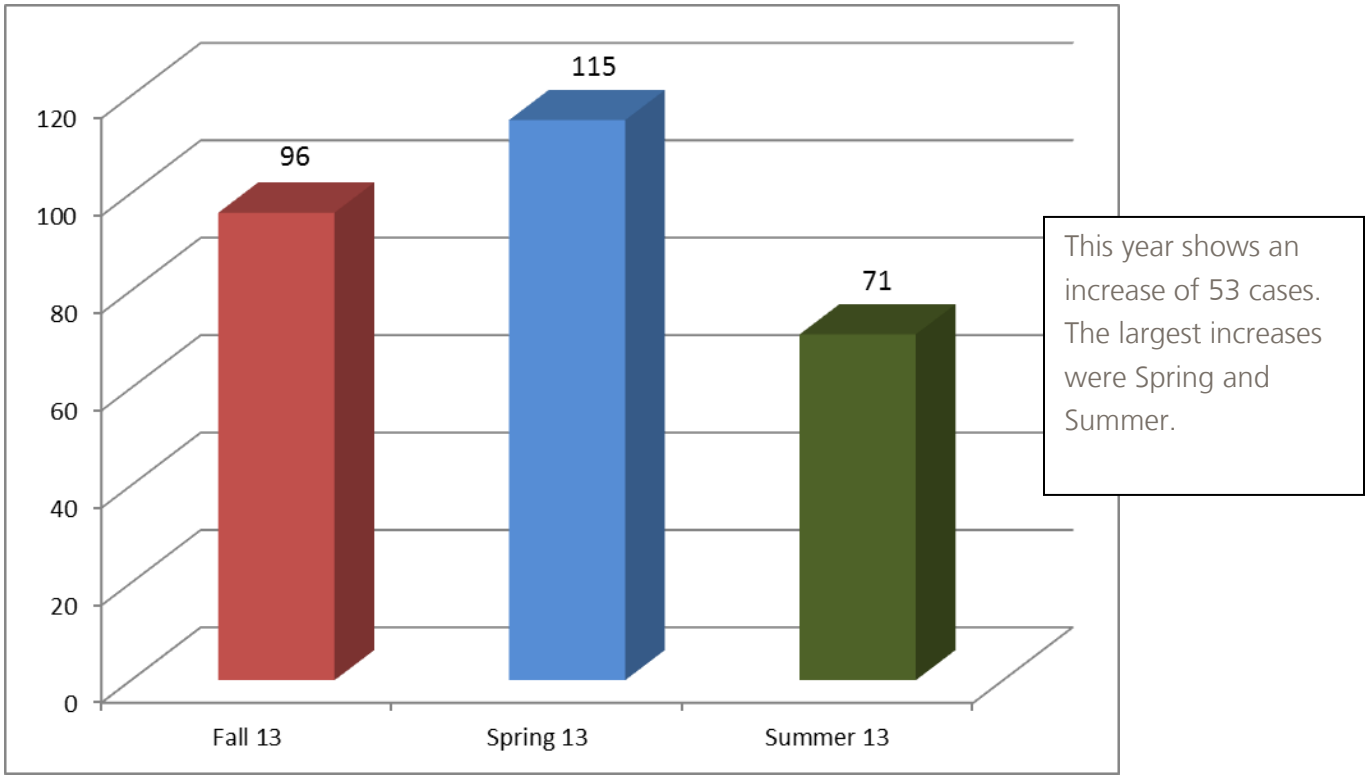
- Provided information for campus brochures (i.e., Student Handbook)
- Provided information bookmarks to UHR for new Employee Orientations
- Assisted 282 visitors to the office with their concerns

Services of the Ombudsman

The rest of this report describes (1) the issues and concerns that were brought forth and the interventions of the Ombudsperson, (2) the people who contacted the Ombudsperson, and (3) the people and areas with whom they had concerns or issues. Included as well are the Ombuds' recommendations for issues warranting future attention from the University. Throughout the report the category of N/A is used to indicate information that was not available or not applicable.

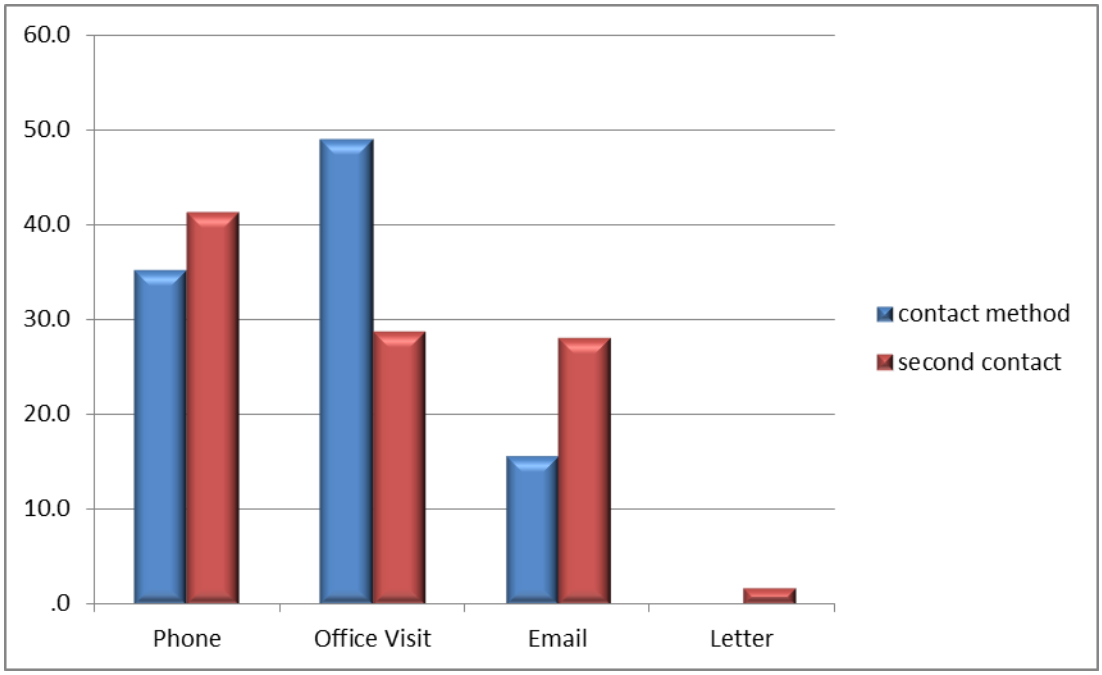
Overview of Services

Table 1: Number of Cases by Quarter 2013-2014



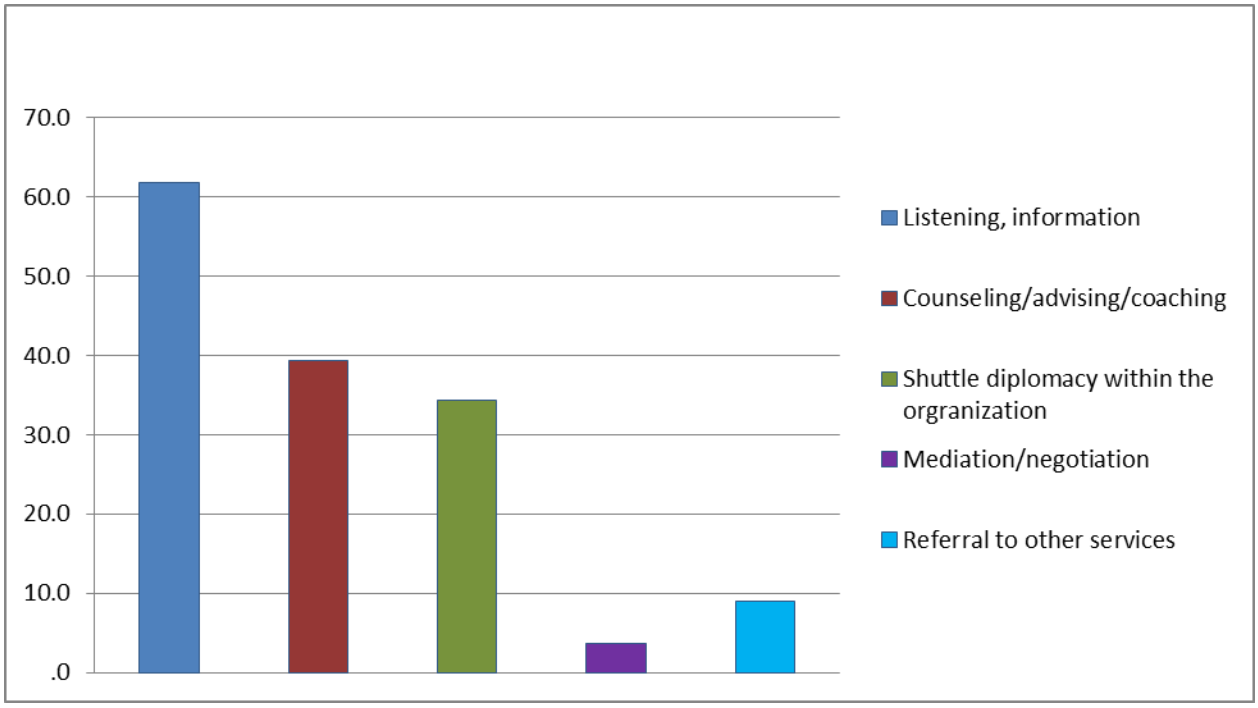
Data was collected on 282 situations that the Ombudsperson was presented with by visitors to the office during the academic year 2013-2014, as shown in Table 1 below. This represents an increase of 53 cases over the previous year with Spring showing the largest increase. Many cases involve numerous appointments and phone calls, so the total number of contacts to address situations far exceeds 282 people. Understandably, numerous brief and casual interactions that happen by phone or out in public are not included. There does not appear to be one significant factor for the increase in cases.

Table 2: Initial and Follow-up Means of Contact (percentages)



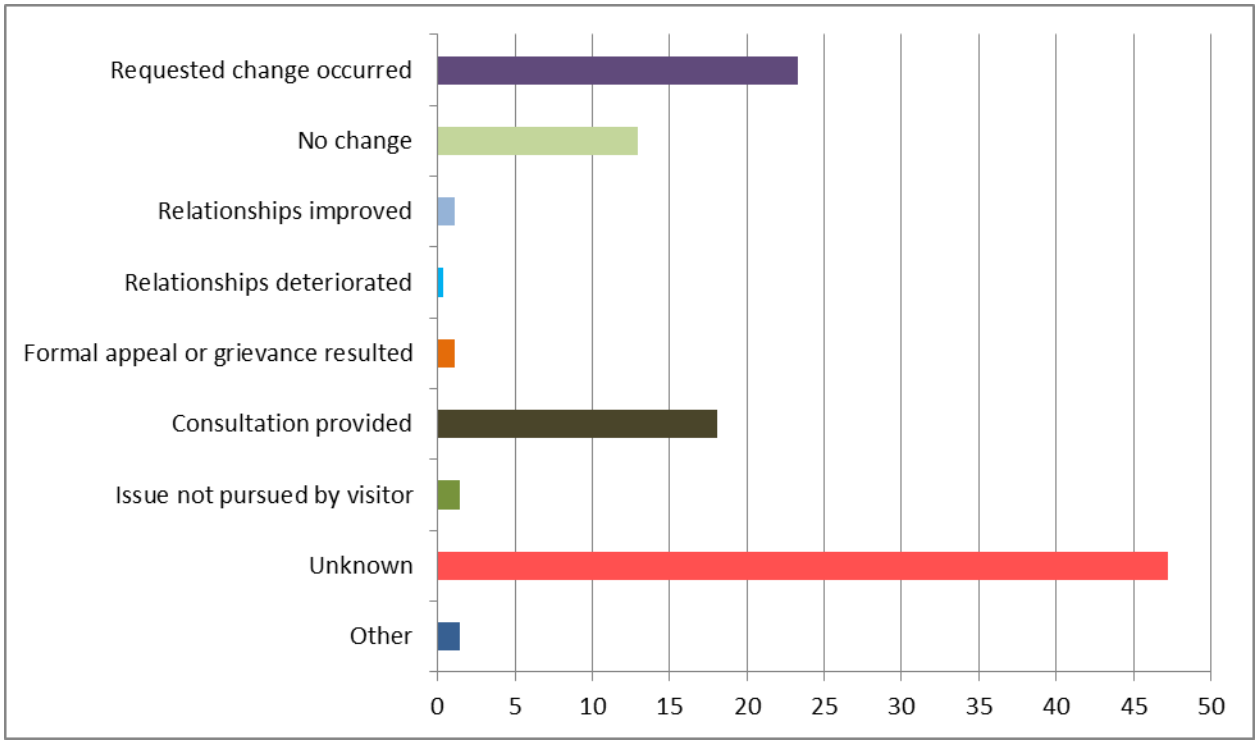
Visitors contact the office by various means. As shown in Table 2, most initial contacts were made by an office visit (49%) followed by the phone (35%); and most subsequent contacts were by phone (40%). Office visits are encouraged whenever possible because a face-to-face interaction is most effective in rapport building with the visitor and enhances a depth of discussion. It's interesting to note that the use of e-mail as contact to the office has continued to decrease over the past year as it did the previous year.

Table 3: Type of Intervention (percentage)



Many visitors come to the Ombuds Office to explain their concerns, be heard, seek advice and/or information, and gain a new perspective. While it is a common perception that the Ombuds frequently conducts mediations, visitors often elect to resolve issues on their own after consultation. Table 3 reflects the Types of Interventions most requested by visitors; most cases require a combination of interventions, along with researching policies, practices and norms related to the inquiry. The intervention of shuttle diplomacy is utilized whenever agreed upon by the visitor because it can be very effective in assisting with situations, primarily resolving issues more efficiently and preventing the need for formal appeals or grievances.

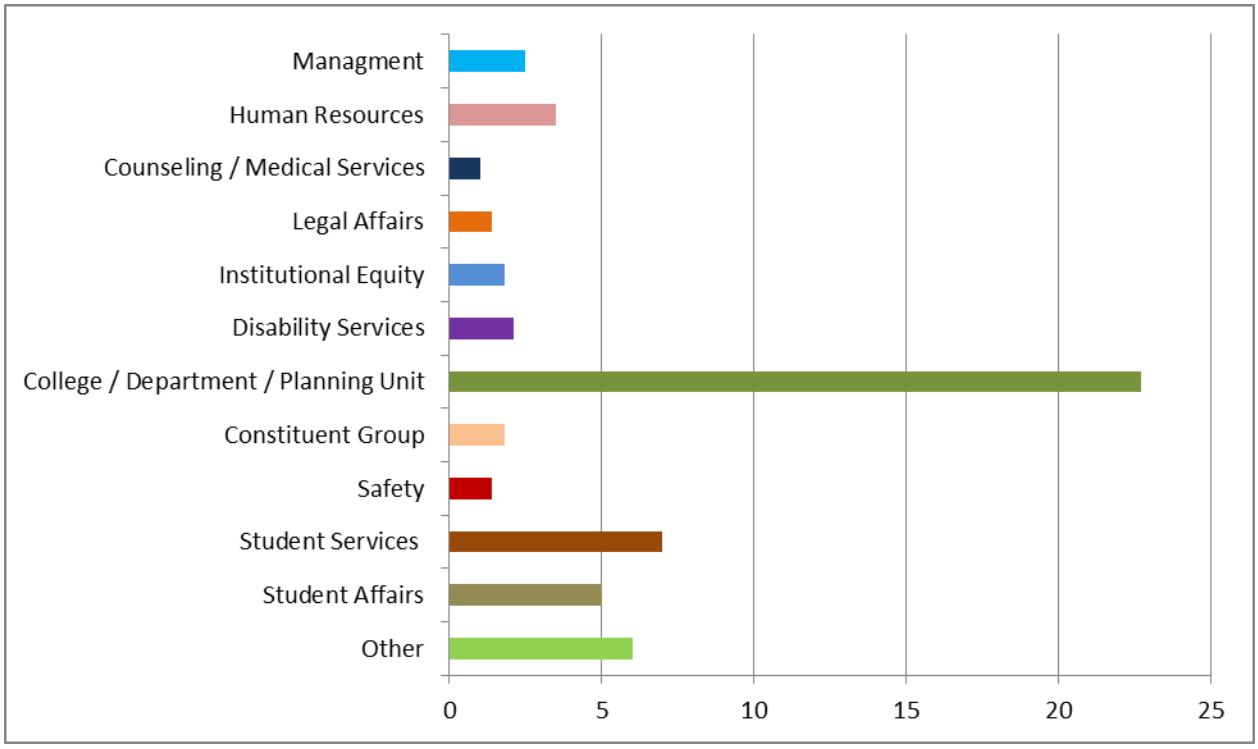
Table 4: Outcomes of Cases (percentages)



The Outcomes of Cases in Table 4 provides general outcomes for visitors. In some cases, there may have been more than one outcome. Not all issues have a positive resolution, and in many cases the final result is unknown because the visitor does not let the Ombuds know the outcome. Another reason is that when students or employees are experiencing a stressful campus climate, they may have reasons not to pursue their issue. In these cases, the Ombuds Office is an appropriate place to discuss issues, allowing them to be safely relayed without fear of retaliation. When issues can be addressed within departments or with individuals in a manner that protects the confidentiality of visitors, they are so addressed.

It is also worth noting that the "best" or "most fair" solution may be "no change" or "Issue not pursued by the visitor." In many cases visitors are seeking remedy for their situation, but they may not have complete information. Finding out the missing links clarifies that procedures were followed fairly and appropriately, which, in itself, also relieves stress. Often people need a safe space to think out loud and not necessarily to plan an action. The Ombuds Office fulfills that need.

Table 5: Offices involved in intervention (percentages)



Many issues could not be resolved without the cooperation of individuals in other units; Table 5 reflects the inter-relatedness of our campus. The Ombudsman appreciates the prompt and attentive support received throughout the year in responding to the issues brought forward.

Nature of Issues and Concerns Brought to the Ombudsman

Data about the nature of issues and concerns brought to the Ombudsperson were collected in two ways. A case-by-case notation was made of the type of relationship between the visitor with a concern and the person or area of the University with which they had this concern. An accumulative tally of types of issues was kept using a data reporting tool developed by the International Ombudsman Association, which is called the Uniform Reporting Categories for Issues/Concerns. Situations that involve multiple "categories" or "issues," or that are simultaneously brought forth by one or more people, are counted once in the tally of cases. The number of circumstances and issues exceeds the 229 total "cases." The nature of these concerns is presented in the pages that follow.

While numbers and descriptive statistics present one form of office activity, it is the stories and situations that truly reflect the depth and complexity of the office cases. Not all stories can be represented, as they could compromise the visitor's confidentiality. A broad anecdotal perspective regarding issues presented during this year identifies the following university-wide problems:

- Increased expansion of on-line education offerings present technological, administrative, and support services challenges for students, faculty and staff. Communicating with on-line faculty is challenging for many students.
- Faculty and department chairs are challenged by how to respond effectively to uncivil, non-collegial behavior within their department. Employees (both faculty and staff) find some departmental cultures to be hostile including the presence of bullying behavior. Units are challenged by how to respond, especially with the absence of a university bullying policy.
- Undergraduate students' most frequent reason to visit the Ombudsperson is for grade concerns.
- Some graduate students report feeling vulnerable and experience difficulties when issues are compounded by departmental politics.
- Lack of understanding of disability processes for faculty and staff; services are new for employees and many are not aware of their existence within the Office of Institutional Equity. There is continued need for educating managers and supervisors about providing appropriate disability accommodations in the workplace.
- Faculty and students need more training about how to best use Blackboard as an educational tool.
- The timing of international student dismissals from academic programs creates visa, funding and appeal process issues.
- Departments can struggle with appropriate approaches to address performance concerns.
- Employees are unsure of where to address concerns when their unit director/chair is problematic
- The process of the Performance Improvement Plan through Human Resources is unclear

Ohio University Office of the Ombudsperson
Uniform Reporting Categories
International Ombudsman Association

Questions, Concerns, Issues or Inquiries where Information or Options are Explored (2012-2013)

	Category	Number	Percent	
1	**Compensation & Benefits** Questions, concerns, issues or inquiries about the equity, appropriateness and competitiveness of employee compensation, benefits and other benefit programs.			
	Sub-total	**3**		**0.8%**
1.a	***Compensation*** *(rate of pay, salary amount, job salary classification/level)*	2	67%	
1.b	***Payroll*** *(administration of pay, check wrong or delayed)*			
1.c	***Benefits*** *(decisions related to medical, dental, life, vacation/sick leave, education, worker's compensation insurance, etc.)*			
1.d	***Retirement, Pension*** *(eligibility, calculation of amount, retirement pension benefits)*			
1.e	***Other*** *(any other employee compensation or benefit not described by the above categories) Please specify below:*	1	33%	
	Other 1:			
	Other 2:			
	Other 3:(add additional rows, if necessary)			
2	**Relationships** Questions, concerns, issues or inquiries arising between people in relationships (i.e. supervisor-employee, faculty-student; peer relationships, colleague-colleague, student-student)			
	Sub-total	**232**		**58.2%**
2.a	***Priorities, Values, Beliefs*** *(differences about what should be considered important - or most important –often rooted in ethical or moral beliefs)*			
2.b	***Respect, Treatment*** *(demonstrations of inappropriate behavior, disregard for people, rudeness, crudeness, etc.*	59	25%	
2.c	***Trust, Integrity*** *(suspicion that others are not being honest, whether or to what extent one wishes to be honest, etc.)*	11	5%	
2.d	***Reputation*** *(possible impact of rumors and/or gossip about professional or personal matters)*	4	2%	
2.e	***Communication*** *(quality and/or quantity of communication)*	6	3%	
2.f	***Bullying, Mobbing*** *(abusive, threatening, and/or coercive behaviors)*	11	5%	
2.g	***Diversity-Related*** *(comments or behaviors perceived to be insensitive, offensive, or intolerant on the basis of an identity-related difference such as race, gender, nationality, sexual orientation)*	1	0%	

2.h	***Retaliation*** *(punitive behaviors for previous actions or comments, whistleblower)*	1	0%	
2.i	***Physical Violence*** *(actual or threats of bodily harm to another)*			
2.j	***Assignments, Schedules*** *(appropriateness or fairness of tasks, expected volume of work)*	13	6%	
2.k	***Feedback*** *(feedback or recognition given, or responses to feedback received)*	1	0%	
2.l	***Consultation*** *(requests for help in dealing with issues between two or more individuals they supervise/teach or with other unusual situations in evaluative relationships)*	14	6%	
2.m	***Performance Appraisal/Grading*** *(job performance in formal or informal evaluation)*	9	4%	
2.n	***Grading (academic performance in formal or informal evaluation)***	63	27%	
2.o	***Departmental Climate*** *(prevailing behaviors, norms, or attitudes within a department for which supervisors or faculty have responsibility)*	7	3%	
2.p	***Supervisory Effectiveness*** *(management of department or classroom, failure to address issues)*	7	3%	
2.q	***Insubordination*** *(refusal to do what is asked)*			
2.r	***Discipline*** *(appropriateness, timeliness, requirements, alternatives, or options for responding)*	2	%	
2.s	***Equity of Treatment*** *(favoritism, one or more individuals receive preferential treatment)*	3	1%	
2.t.	***Academic*** *(dismissal from program,delayed graduation, freedom of expression)*	18	8%	
2.u.	***Other*** *(any other evaluative relationship not described by the above categories) Please specify below:*	2	1%	
	Other 1:			
	Other 2:			
	Other 3:(add additional rows, if necessary)			
4	**Career Progression and Development** Questions, concerns, issues or inquiries about administrative processes and decisions regarding entering and leaving a job, what it entails, (i.e., recruitment, nature and place of assignment, job security, and separation.)			
	Sub-total	**28**		**7%**
4.a	***Job Application, Selection and Recruitment Processes*** (recruitment and selection processes, facilitation of job applications, short-listing and criteria for selection, disputed decisions linked to recruitment and selection)			
4.b	***Job Classification and Description*** (changes or disagreements over requirements of assignment, appropriate tasks)	7	25%	
4.c	***Involuntary Transfer, Change of Assignment*** (notice, selection and special dislocation rights/benefits, removal from prior duties, unrequested change of work tasks)			

4.d	***Tenure-Position Security, Ambiguity*** (security of position or contract, provision of secure contractual categories), Career Progression (Promotion, Reappointment, or Tenure)	1	4%	
4.e	***Career Progression*** *(promotion, reappointment, or tenure)*	5	18%	
4.f	***Rotation and Duration of Assignment*** (non-completion or over-extension of assignments in specific settings/countries, lack of access or involuntary transfer to specific roles/assignments, requests for transfer to other places/duties/roles)			
4.g	***Resignation*** (concerns about whether or how to voluntarily terminate employment or how such a decision might be communicated appropriately)			
4.h	***Termination/Non-Renewal*** (end of contract, non-renewal of contract, disputed permanent separation from organization)	5	18%	
4.i	***Re-employment of Former or Retired Staff*** (loss of competitive advantages associated with re-hiring retired staff, favoritism)			
4.j	***Position Elimination*** *(elimination or abolition of an individual's position)*	5	18%	
4.k	***Career Development/Coaching/Mentoring*** *(classroom, on-the-job, and varied assignments as training and developmental opportunities)*	1	4%	
4.l	***Other*** (any other issues linked to recruitment, assignment, job security or separation not described by the above categories) Please specify below:	4	2%	
	Other 1:			
	Other 2:			
	Other 3:(add additional rows, if necessary)			
5	**Legal, Regulatory, Financial and Compliance** Questions, concerns, issues or inquiries that may create a legal risk (financial, sanction etc.) for the organization or its members if not addressed, including issues related to waste, fraud or abuse.			
	Sub-total	**16**		**4%**
5.a	***Criminal Activity*** *(threats or crimes planned, observed, or experienced, fraud)*	2	13%	
5.b	***Business and Financial Practices*** *(inappropriate actions that abuse or waste organizational finances, facilities or equipment)*			
5.c	***Harassment*** *(unwelcome physical, verbal, written, e-mail, audio, video, psychological or sexual conduct that creates a hostile or intimidating environment)*	3	19%	
5.d	***Discrimination*** *(different treatment compared with others or exclusion from some benefit on the basis of, for example, gender, race, age, national origin, religion, etc.[being part of an Equal Employment Opportunity protected category - applies in the U.S.])*	3	19%	
5.e	***Disability, Temporary or Permanent, Reasonable Accommodation*** *(extra time on exams, provision of assistive technology, interpreters, or Braille materials including questions on policies, etc. for people with disabilities)*	6	38%	

5.f	***Accessibility*** *(removal of physical barriers, providing ramps, elevators, etc.)*			
5.g	***Intellectual Property Rights*** *(e.g., copyright and patent infringement)*			
5.h	***Privacy and Security of Information*** *(release or access to individual or organizational private or confidential information)*			
5.i	***Property Damage*** *(personal property damage, liabilities)*	1	6%	
5.j	***Other*** *(any other legal, financial and compliance issue not described by the above categories) Please specify below:*	1	6%	
	Other 1:			
	Other 2:			
	Other 3:(add additional rows, if necessary)			
6	**Safety, Health, and Physical Environment** Questions, concerns, issues or inquiries about Safety, Health and Infrastructure-related issues.			
	Sub-total	**3**		**0.8%**
6.a	***Safety*** *(physical safety, injury, medical evacuation, meeting federal and state requirements for safety training and equipment)*			
6.b	***Physical Working/Living Conditions*** *(temperature, odors, noise, available space, lighting, etc)*			
6.c	***Ergonomics*** *(proper set-up of workstation affecting physical functioning)*			
6.d	***Cleanliness*** *(sanitary conditions and facilities to prevent the spread of disease)*			
6.e	***Security*** *(adequate lighting in parking lots, metal detectors, guards, limited access to building by outsiders, anti-terrorists measures (not for classifying "compromise of classified or top secret" information)*			
6.f	***Telework, Flexplace*** *(ability to work from home or other location because of business or personal need, e.g., in case of man-made or natural emergency)*			
6.g	***Safety Equipment*** *(access to/use of safety equipment as well as access to or use of safety equipment, e.g., fire extinguisher)*			
6.h	***Environmental Policies*** *(policies not being followed, being unfair ineffective, cumbersome)*			
6.i	***Work Related Stress and Work-Life Balance*** *(Post-Traumatic Stress, Critical Incident Response, internal/external stress, e.g. divorce, shooting, caring for sick, injured)*			
6.j	***Other*** *(any safety, health, or physical environment issue not described by the above categories) Please specify below:*	3	100%	
	Other 1:			
	Other 2:			
	Other 3:(add additional rows, if necessary)			
7	**Services/Administrative Issues** Questions, concerns, issues or inquiries about services or administrative offices including from external parties.			

	Sub-total	**92**		**23.1%**
7.a	***Quality of Services*** *(how well services were provided, accuracy or thoroughness of information, competence, etc.)*	6	7%	
7.b	***Responsiveness, Timeliness*** *(time involved in getting a response or return call or about the time for a complete response to be provided)*	10	11%	
7.c	***Administrative Decisions and Interpretation, Application of Rules*** *(decisions about requests for academic or administrative services, e.g., exceptions to policy deadlines or limits, refund requests, appeals of library or parking fines, application for financial aid, etc.)*	66	72%	
7.d	***Behavior of Service Provider(s)*** *(how an administrator or staff member spoke to or dealt with a constituent, customer, or client, eg., rude, inattentive, or impatient)*	3	3%	
7.e	***Course availability; completing degree in timely fashion***			
7.f.	***Technology-related*** *(Bb, ecommunication)*	7	8%	
7.f	***Other*** *(any services or administrative issue not described by the above categories) Please specify below:*			
	Other 1:			
	Other 2:			
	Other 3:(add additional rows, if necessary)			

8 **Organizational, Strategic, and Mission Related** Questions, concerns, issues or inquiries that relate to the whole or some part of an organization.

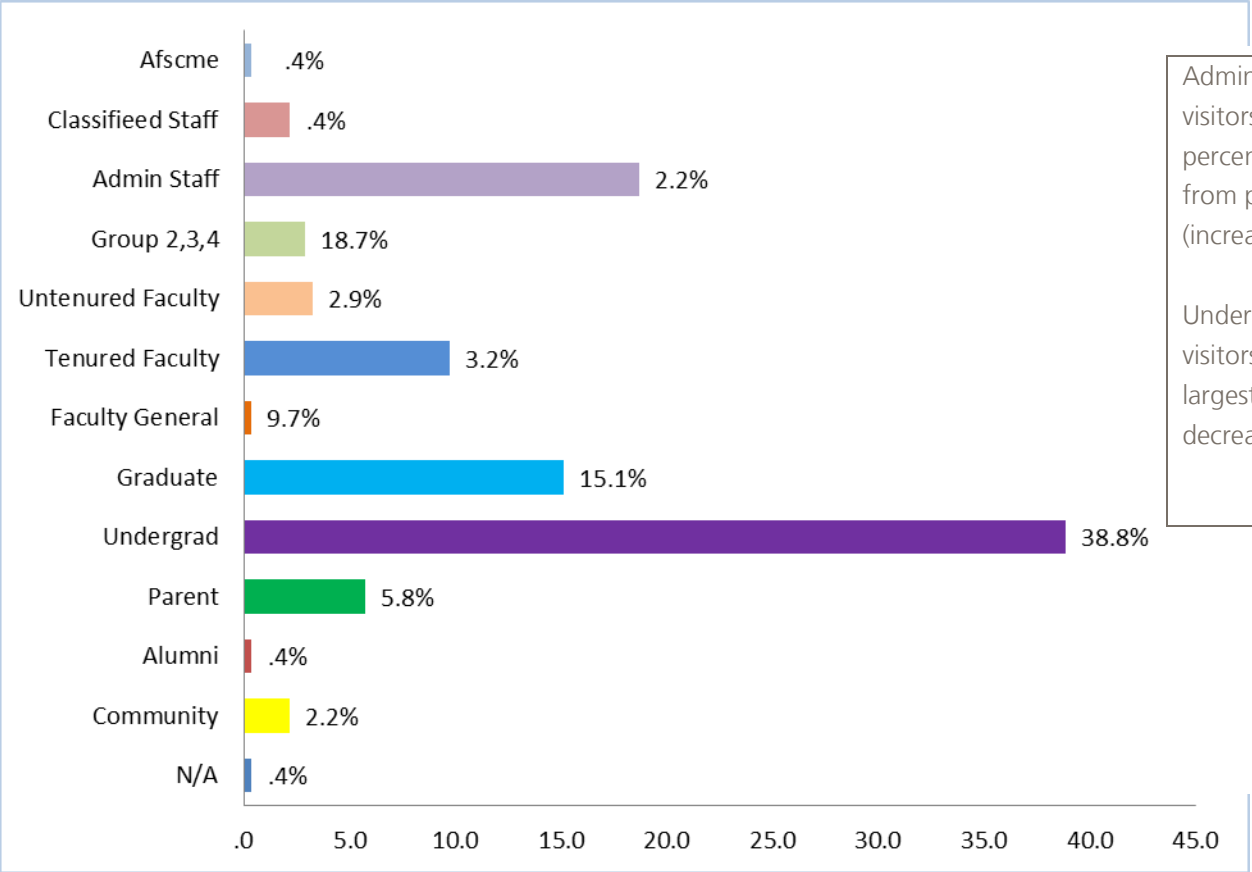
	Sub-total	**23**		**5.8%**
8.a	***Strategic and Mission-Related, Strategic and Technical Management*** *(principles, decisions and actions related to where and how the organization is moving)*			
8.b	***Leadership and Management*** *(quality/capacity of management and/or management/leadership decisions, suggested training, reassignments and reorganizations)*	12	52%	
8.c	***Use of Positional Power, Authority*** *(lack or abuse of power provided by individual's position)*	2	9%	
8.d	***Communication*** *(content, style, timing, effects and amount of organizational and leader's communication, quality of communication about strategic issues)*			
8.e	***Restructuring and Relocation*** *(issues related to broad scope planned or actual restructuring and/or relocation affecting the whole or major divisions of an organization, eg. downsizing, offshoring, outsourcing)*			
8.f	***Organizational Climate*** *(issues related to organizational morale and/or capacity for functioning)*	9	39%	
8.g	***Change Management*** *(making, responding or adapting to organizational changes, quality of leadership in facilitating organizational change)*			

8.h	***Priority Setting and/or Funding*** *(disputes about setting organizational/departmental priorities and/or allocation of funding within programs)*			
8.i	***Data, Methodology, Interpretation of Results*** *(scientific disputes about the conduct, outcomes and interpretation of studies and resulting data for policy)*			
8.j	***Interdepartment, Interorganization Work, Territory*** *(disputes about which department/organization should be doing what/taking the lead)*			
8.k	***Other*** *(any organizational issue not described by the above categories) Please specify below:*			
	Other 1:			
	Other 2:			
	Other 3:(add additional rows, if necessary)			
9	**Values, Ethics, and Standards** Questions, concerns, issues or inquiries about the fairness of organizational values, ethics, and/or standards, the application of related policies and/or procedures, or the need for creation or revision of policies, and/or standards.			
	Sub-total	**1**		**0.3%**
9.a	***Standards of Conduct*** *(fairness, applicability or lack of behavioral guidelines and/or Codes of Conduct, e.g., Academic Honesty, plagiarism, Code of Conduct, conflict of interest)*	1	100%	
9.b	***Values and Culture*** *(questions, concerns or issues about the values or culture of the organization)*			
9.c	***Scientific Conduct, Integrity*** *(scientific or research misconduct or misdemeanors, e.g., authorship; falsification of results)*			
9.d	***Policies and Procedures NOT Covered in Broad Categories 1 thru 8*** *(fairness or lack of policy or the application of the policy, policy not followed, or needs revision, eg., appropriate dress, use of internet or cell phones)*			
9.e	***Other*** *(Other policy, procedure, ethics or standards issues not described in the above categories) Please specify below:*			
	Other 1:			
	Other 2:			
	Other 3:(add additional rows, if necessary)			
	TOTAL	**398**		

Visitors to the Office

The Ombuds Office continues to see visitors that represent a cross-section of campus constituents, including every employment and student group, and with representation from all campuses, colleges and distance education. The following tables represent the visitor's affiliation, campus, gender, race, affiliated unit, and the relationship between the visitor and person/area of concern. Overall changes from the 2012-2013 Annual Report to this reporting cycle will be noted.

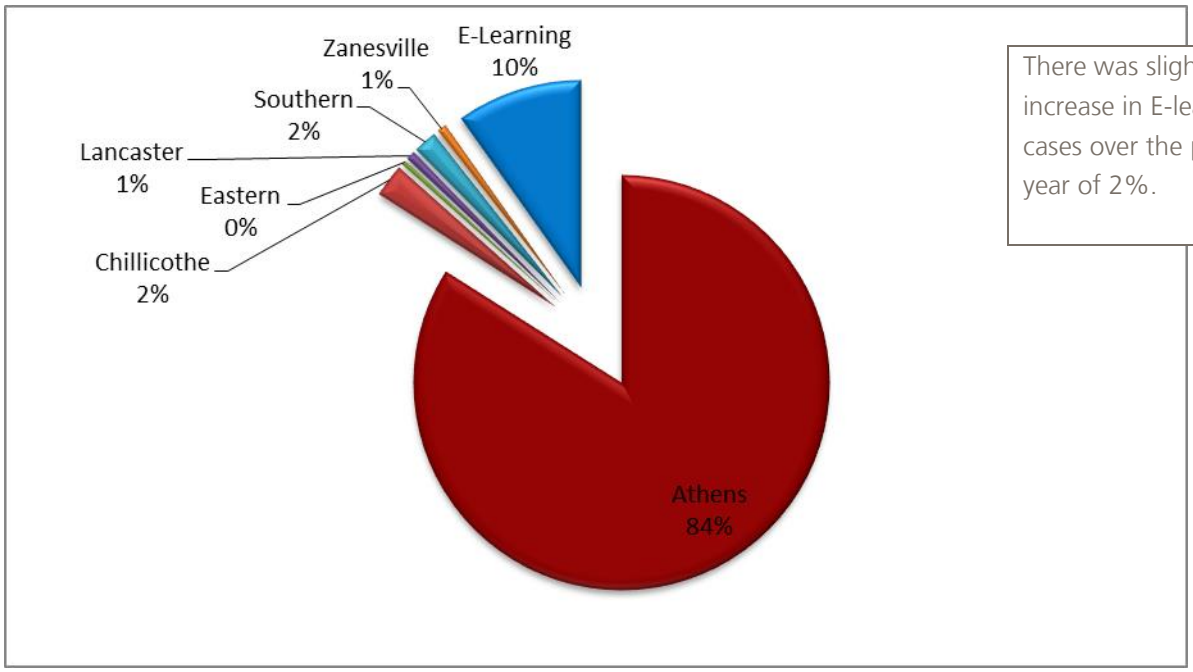
Table 6: Visitor's Affiliation (percent of total)



Administrative staff visitors the largest percentage increases from previous year: (increase of 11%)

Undergraduate student visitors showed the largest decrease (7% decrease).

Table 7: Visitor's Campus (percent of total)



There was slight increase in E-learning cases over the previous year of 2%.

Table 8: Visitor's Academic or Support Unit

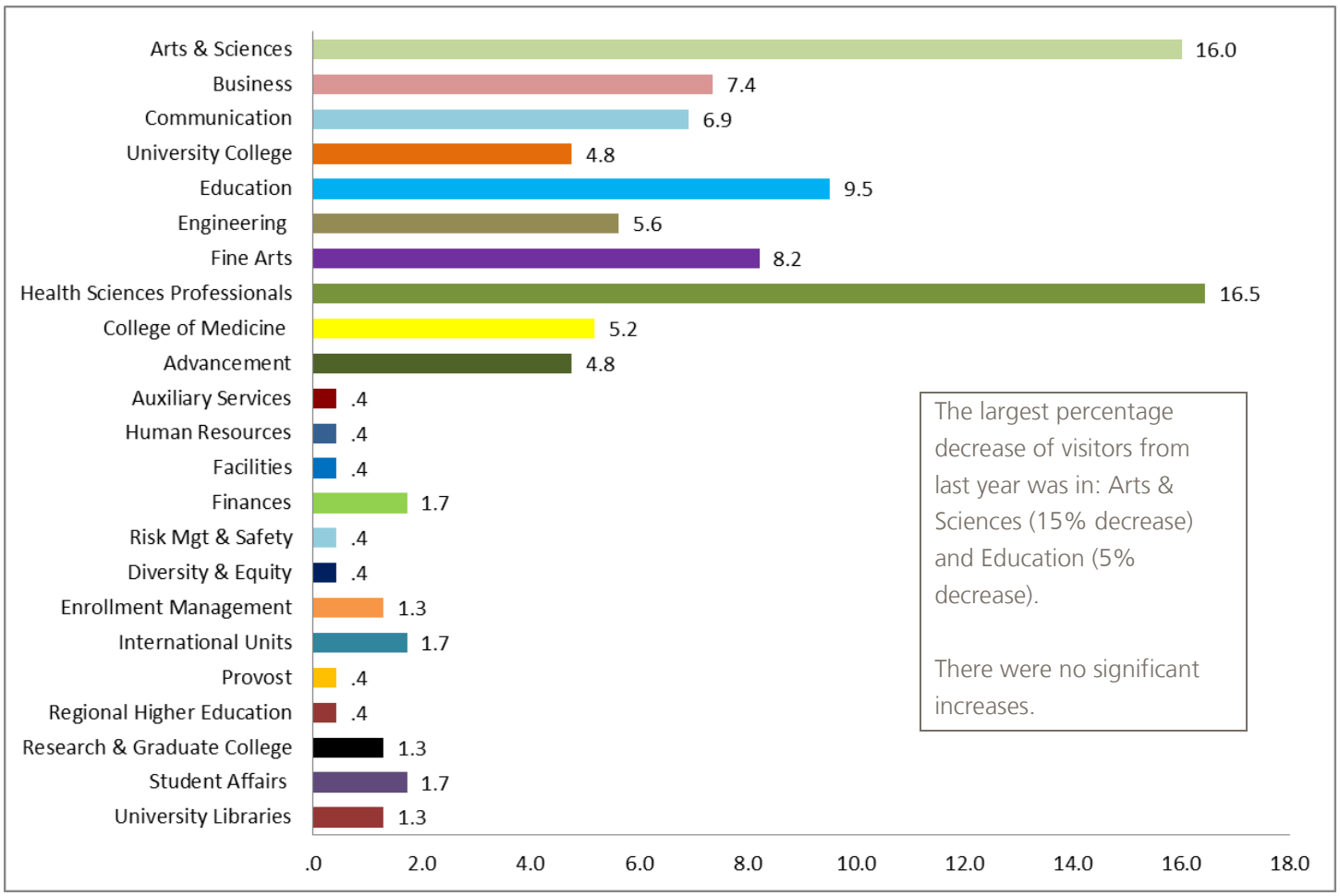


Table 9: Visitor's Gender (percent of total)

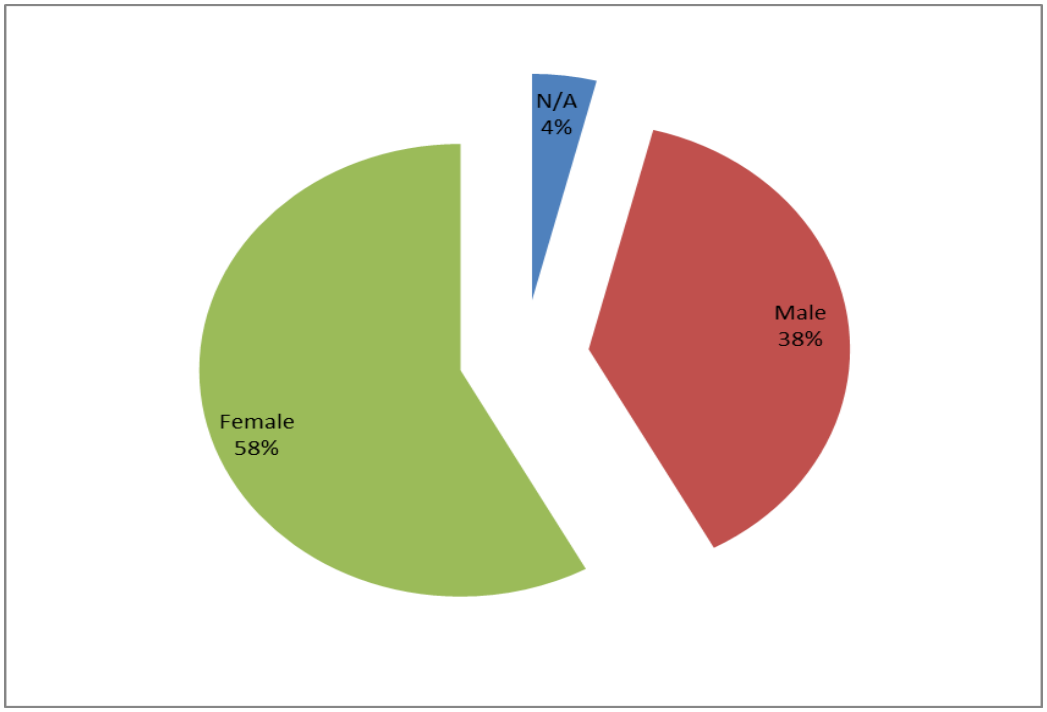


Table 10: Visitor's Race/Ethnicity (percent of total)

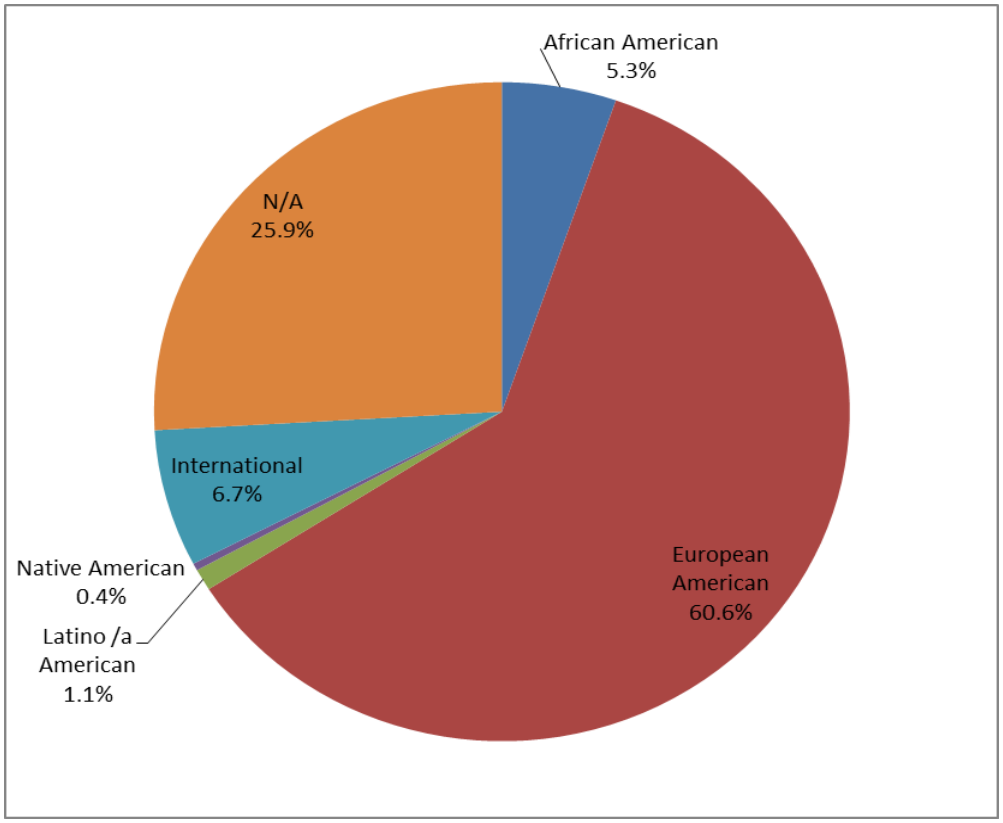
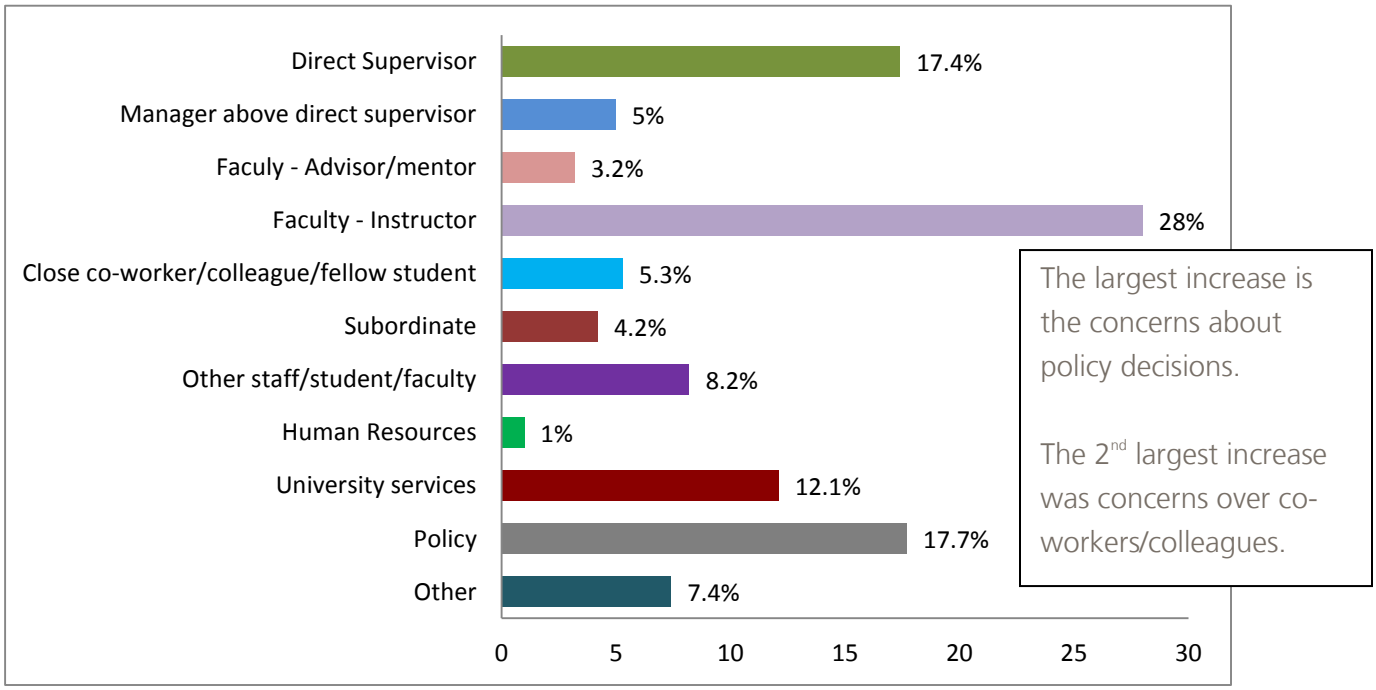


Table 11: Relationship between Visitor and Person/Area of Concern (percent of total)



Persons or Units of Concern

The following section shows data about the people, units or services with whom or about whom visitors had concerns or issues. Tables represent University affiliation, unit within the University structure, campus, gender, and ethnicity.

Table 12: Person of Concern's Affiliation (percent of total)

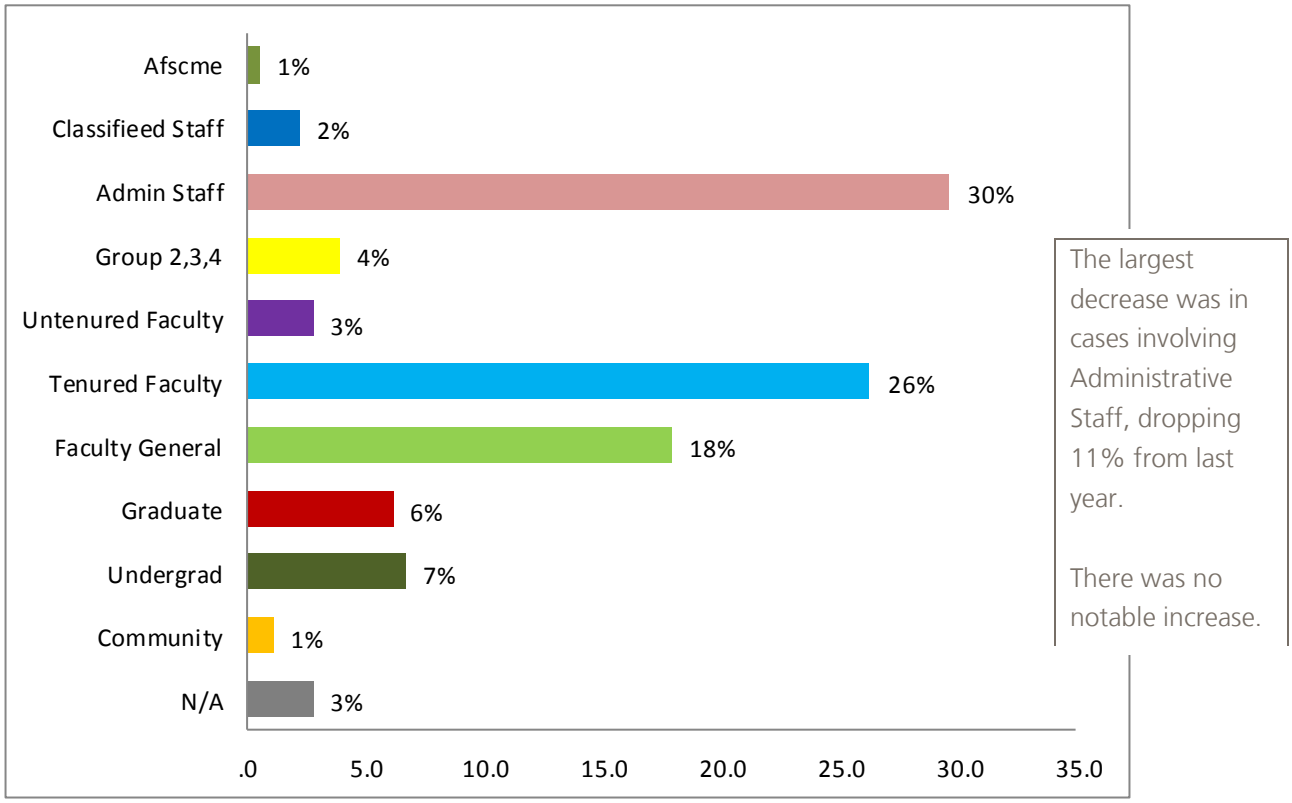


Table 13: Person/Area of Concern's Campus (percent of total)

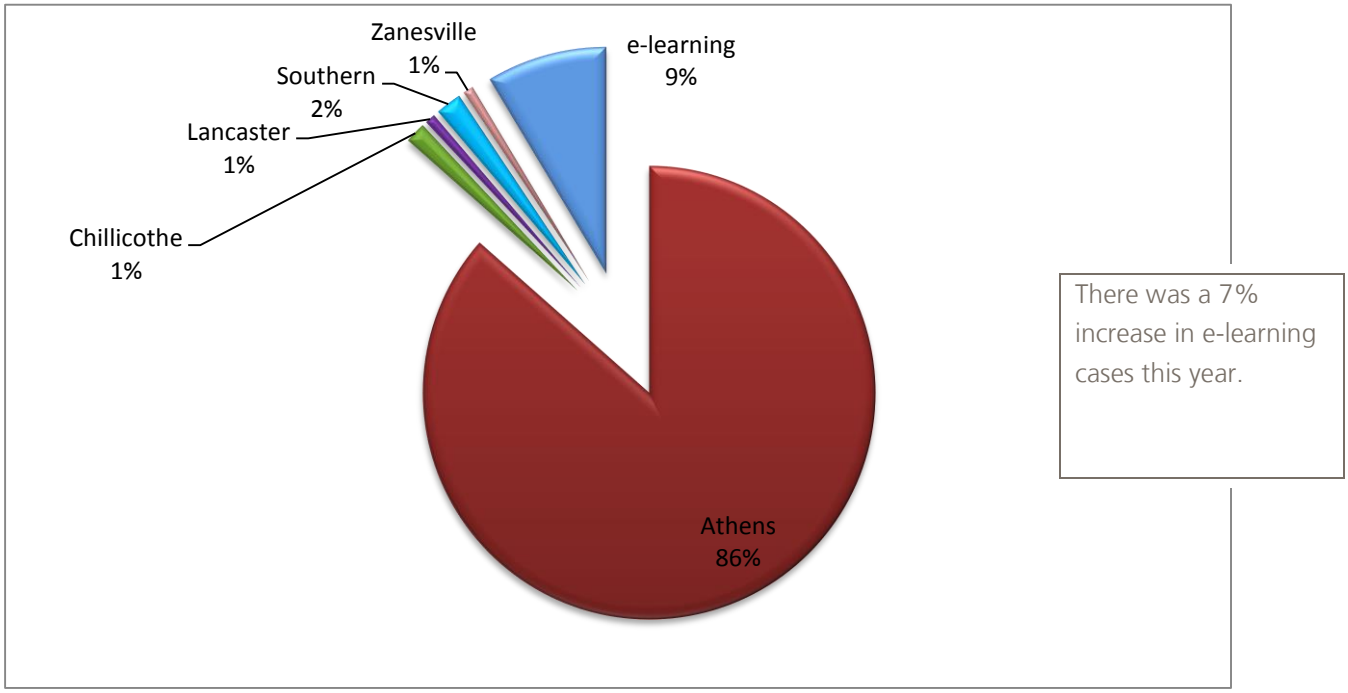
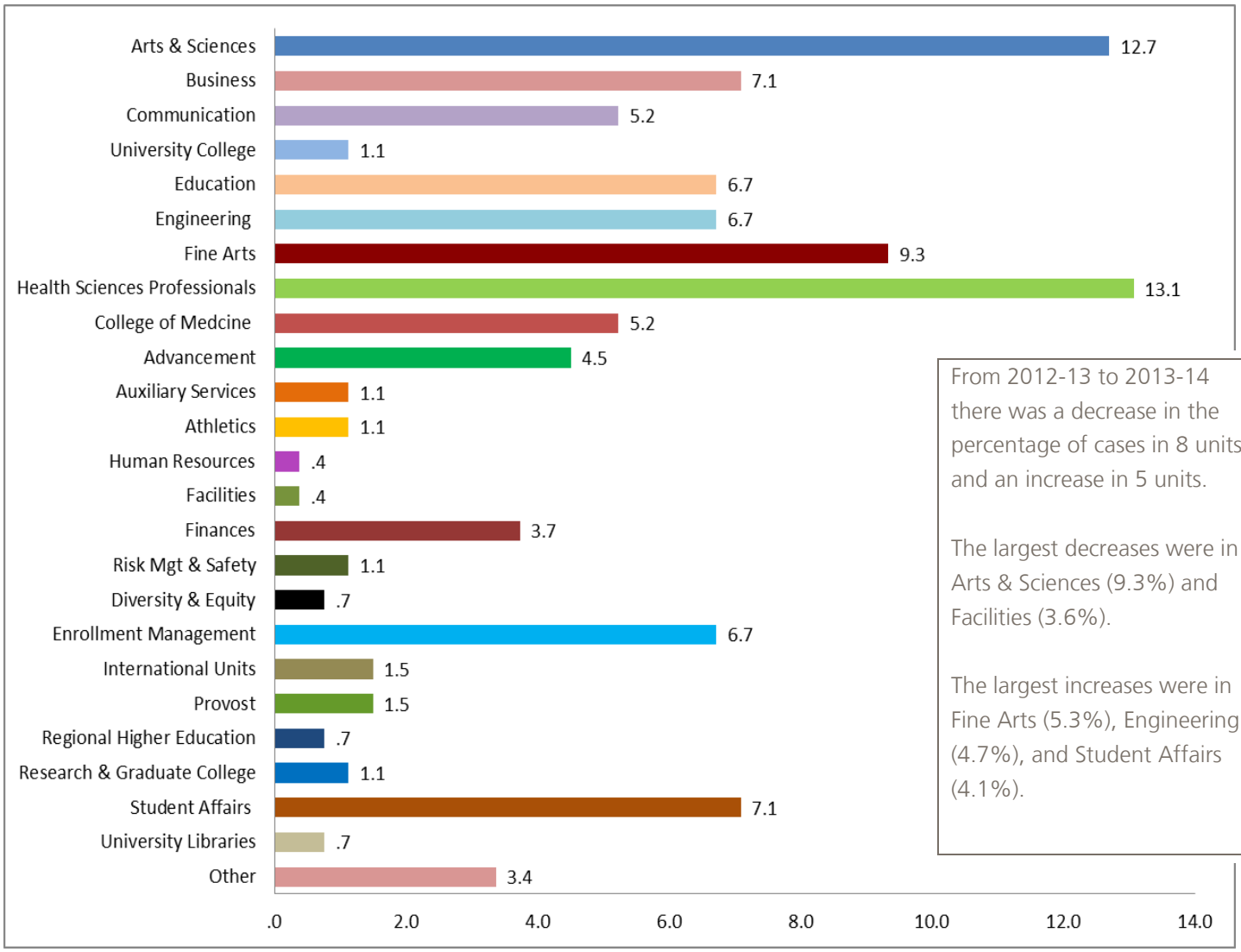


Table 14: Person/area of concern's unit (percent of total)



From 2012-13 to 2013-14 there was a decrease in the percentage of cases in 8 units and an increase in 5 units.

The largest decreases were in Arts & Sciences (9.3%) and Facilities (3.6%).

The largest increases were in Fine Arts (5.3%), Engineering (4.7%), and Student Affairs (4.1%).

Table 15: Person/Area of Concern's Gender (percent of total)

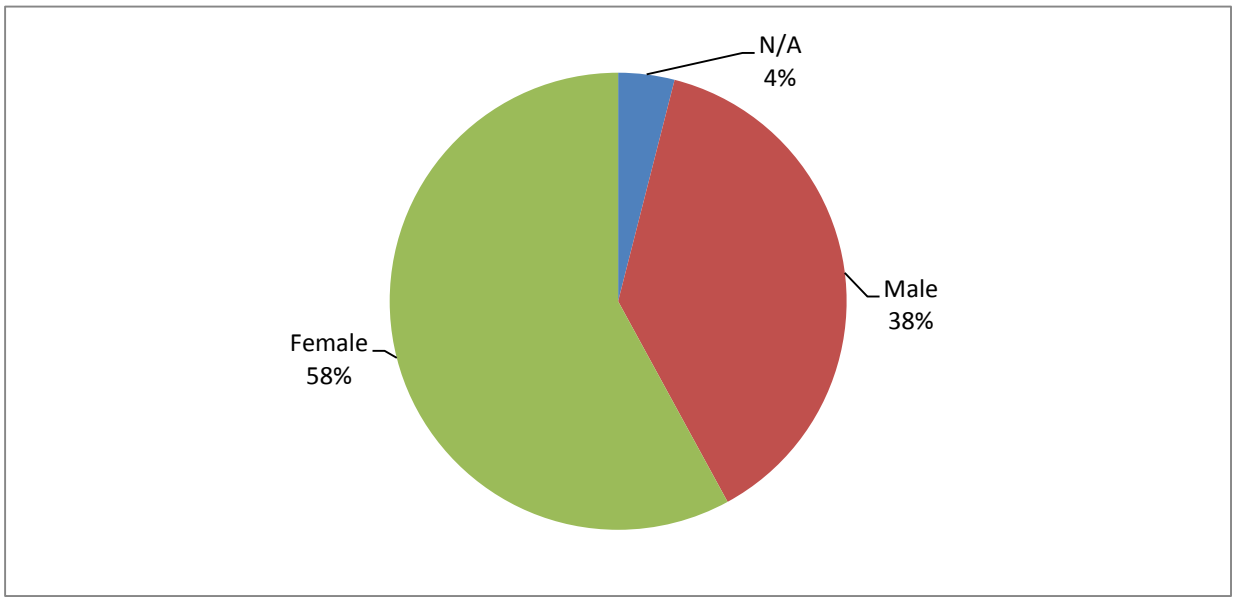
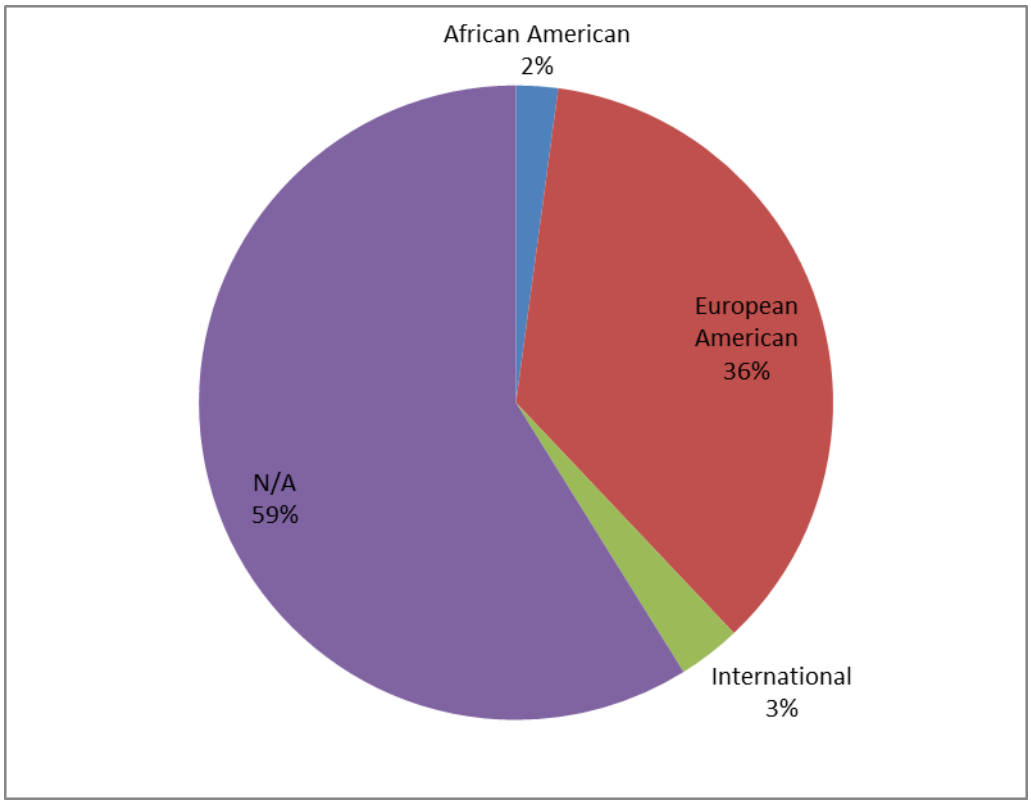


Table 16: Person/Area of Concern's Race/ethnicity (percent of total)



Analysis and Recommendations

The following is an analysis of annual report highlights and recommendations about emerging issues.

Caseload and Types of Cases

Historical caseload data shows 236 individual cases in 2009-2010, 206 in 2011-2012, 229 in 2012-2013, and now 282 in 2013-14 indicating a rise in visitors over the past few years. It appears manageable for the .65 FTE of the Ombuds position, but leaves little time for proactive work and initiating projects that could be developed from this office.

The predominant type of case this past year was regarding administrative decisions, interpretation, or application of rules. (This ranked second last year.) The second highest case type was course grading-related brought forth by students (tied for first last year). And the third highest case type was respect/treatment (also tied for first last year). This case category includes inappropriate behavior, disregard for people, and rudeness.

Employees

Faculty

Managing perceptions of inappropriate faculty behavior and bullying behavior concerned both individual faculty, groups of faculty within a department, or department chairs. The Ombuds often served as a consultant in strategizing to address such concerns. Often faculty feel their hands are tied, fear retribution if non-tenured faculty or Group II, or are unsure of how to address the concerns. A future recommendation is for the Ombuds to continue her own professional development on this issue as well as making recommendations to the university on strategies for addressing inappropriate behavior.

Administrators or Administrative Decisions

It's important to note that administrative concerns can be about and administrative process and not a person. Concerns about administrative decisions ran the gamut from simple fixes of getting the visitor in touch with the right person to complex decisions such as contract non-renewals for cause. The perception of the visitor often begins with, "the decision isn't fair." Further review often uncovers that the decision may have been fair (according to process) but certainly not the one preferred by the visitor. That being said, when questions were brought to light, in large part efforts were consistently made to re-assess and address situations fairly and within policy.

Compensation, Job Status, and Performance Concerns

Issues continue to rise around job security and job responsibility changes. There is particular concern when communication about such changes is not open or inclusive of those employees being affected. Performance reviews continued to be a high source of anxiety and frustration particularly when a

Performance Improvement Plan (PIP) was initiated. The PIP process is relatively new and unclear to most employees. The Ombuds initiated conversations with Human Resources to ask for a better understanding of the process. The office will continue to monitor how this process is being used and the level of understanding across the campus.

Students

Undergraduates

The primary concerns of undergraduate students were the same as past years: grading concern, inquiring about the grade appeal process, loss of financial aid, and on-line course difficulties, specifically wanting connections with faculty which is more difficult with on-line courses. The Ombuds routinely uses shuttle diplomacy with departments to improve communication access for on-line students to their professors.

Graduate Students

The concerns of graduate students this past year were primarily around conflicts with an instructor and concern about its impact on them successfully completing their program. The Ombuds strategy most used in such cases has been counseling/advising/coaching. Most of the graduate visitors chose to resolve matters themselves.

International Students

Cases involving international students are often more complex, because finances, visas, and home-country expectations for academic success weigh into the person's circumstance. The Ombuds often interacts with the faculty, academic departments, and International Faculty and Student Services to resolve these cases..

Parental concerns

Parents continue to call with concerns with a slight increase in parental calls of 2%. Typical parental concerns relate to business processes, grade appeals, financial aid, and timeliness in responding to issues. Parents become more involved with cases when finances are impacted and want to take the lead in addressing the financial concerns. However, it's promising to note that most parental inquiries end with the parent encouraging the student to make contact with the Ombuds.

Campus-wide issues

Communication

The ability to connect with a person is essential for clarifying misunderstandings and preventing errors concerning processes. This is especially true for students wanting to communicate with faculty. The recommendation from the Ombuds Office is that faculty and staff have a default "department number" and email so that persons who need to contact them have a way to reach them. Recommend that every department website includes a list of all staff and their titles and contact information. This is particularly critical in on-line courses.

On-Line and Distance Learning

The concerns in this area have not changed in the past year. Increased understanding of the support and challenges posed by Blackboard and other technologies point to the need for more training for faculty and students. Complications arise when assumptions are made as to whether tests or discussion board content were submitted properly or not, thus causing increased numbers of grade appeals.

First-time distance learning students or traditional students taking on-line courses often do not know whether their particular technology circumstance is compatible with the Ohio University framework, or if their learning style is conducive to this format, until after the course begins. One recommendation is that campus course appeal and refund policies be reviewed and perhaps altered for on-line circumstances.

Conclusion

While initially created during a time of crisis and unrest over forty year ago, the Ombuds Office continues to provide a needed function at Ohio University. Offering a service that is informal, confidential, neutral and independent is invaluable as evidenced by the number and types of cases that are addressed. The "safe haven" nature of the Ombuds Office allows individuals to ask for assistance as they sort through their concerns and options without fear of their information being shared. The objective and confidential nature of the office puts visitors at ease. As many have said, "It's a relief having someone to talk to about this," or "I didn't know where to go to receive help finding a solution."

It's a pleasure to acknowledge colleagues across campus who have favorably responded to my inquiries and requests to help a student, parent, or employee. There is a genuine interest by many at Ohio University to help relieve the confusion, frustration, or problems someone may face. Often the Ombuds is a conduit between the visitor and the answer found elsewhere on campus. This office helps break down the silos that can easily develop at a university the size of OHIO. We, as a campus community, have the ability to foster an equitable and fair academic and working climate. Thank you for the opportunity to serve the University in this capacity.

Respectfully,

Judy Piercy
University Ombudsman (through August 2013)