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August 22, 2025

**MEMORANDUM**

TO: Jere W. Morehead  
President

FROM: S. Elizabeth Bailey   
Interim Director

RE: **2024-2025 Ombuds Program Report**

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The Ombuds Program Report (“Report”) has been submitted annually to the Office of the President since the Ombuds Program (“Program”) began in 2008. The initial purpose of the Program was to address concerns about the handling of sexual harassment complaints. Although the Program continues to serve as a confidential resource for this purpose, it has expanded into a variety of other areas over the years. This Report discusses trends in the reporting of issues and concerns by UGA students, faculty, and staff, as well as outreach efforts and recommendations for changes or improvements to existing policies and procedures.

During the 2024-25 academic year, the ombuds<sup>1</sup> were: Charisse Harper from the Office of the Dean of Students, who served as the student ombudsperson; Dr. Joseph Bartges, Professor of Medicine and Nutrition in the Department of Small Animal Medicine and Surgery in the College of Veterinary Medicine, who served as the faculty ombudsperson; and Anjali Dougherty, Senior Director of Fiscal Affairs in Public Service and Outreach, who served as the staff ombudsperson. All the ombudspersons have one year remaining on their current two-year appointment term.

**2024 – 2025 TRENDS**

The ombudspersons addressed *119* concerns during the 2024-2025 reporting period. The number of concerns raised this past year is consistent with the previous reporting period.<sup>2</sup> Also consistent with several past reporting periods, the number of contacts from students were higher than the contacts from faculty and staff.<sup>3</sup> During the 2019-2020 reporting period, the contacts

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<sup>1</sup> “Ombuds” or “Ombudspersons” are terms used interchangeably throughout this Report.

<sup>2</sup> There were *111* concerns logged during the 2023-2024 reporting period.

<sup>3</sup> Student contacts went from **33%** in 2019-2020 to **39%** in the 2020-2021 reporting year to **57%** in the 2021-2022 reporting year to **75%** 2022-2023. In 2024-2025, student contacts represented **65%** of the total contacts.

for all three areas were similar.<sup>4</sup> Each of the reporting periods since the 2019-2020 reporting period has seen student contacts significantly outnumbering faculty and staff contacts.

The top three concerns for students contacting the ombudsperson during this reporting period were:

- Academic Misconduct—Students are allegedly misusing artificial intelligence (AI) in connection with completing course assignments. This issue experienced a considerable spike this past year as compared to previous reporting periods. Following consultation with UGA's Office of Academic Honesty and Student Appeals, these concerns have been redirected to this Office for further handling;
- Retaliation—Graduate students, particularly international students, expressed fears of retaliation associated with their graduate program. These students are afraid to speak up about their concerns because they fear losing funding for their program. This has been an ongoing issue raised in previous reporting periods; and
- Mental Health—Students reach out to the ombudsperson for mental health support. The ombudsperson sometimes offers informal counseling to students or refers them to appropriate UGA resources for further support. This has been an ongoing issue raised in previous reports.

The top concern for staff and faculty is employment/workplace issues<sup>5</sup>, including:

- interpersonal conflict;
- supervision concerns;
- performance evaluations; and
- job classifications/duties.

This is largely consistent with previous reporting periods.

With one notable exception (Academic Misconduct), the types of issues raised with the Program during this reporting period are consistent with those raised in previous reporting periods, suggesting that these issues are persisting within the community.

## **OUTREACH**

In addition to handling concerns brought to their attention by members of the UGA community, the student ombudsperson and EOO also conducted two training sessions about the Program during the reporting period. One training occurred with staff members at the Exploratory Center, and the other training involved staff from the Fine Arts program. Both training sessions focused on delivering information about how the Program functions. A recurring theme heard during these training sessions was an interest in resources to assist with workplace conflicts.

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<sup>4</sup> Faculty contacts were 35, staff contacts were 39, and student contacts were 37.

<sup>5</sup> Nearly half of all faculty and staff contacts with the Program during this reporting period involved concerns about these topics.

The ombudspersons continue to note that the Program's functions are not well known or well understood by the UGA community. Misperceptions about how the Program operates can sometimes lead to unmet expectations among its users. Increased outreach and education about the Program would likely help to alleviate this issue.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the trends identified and the outreach efforts referenced in this Report, the Program is making the following recommendations:

- Engagement with the graduate program department heads of programs where concerns have been raised to gain a better understanding of their perspectives and what measures may be available to allay fears of retaliation;
- Highlighting policies related to the use of AI in academics with the appropriate UGA representatives and students;
- Reviewing relevant UGA community resources for the Program to distribute when mental health issues arise;
- Increasing awareness and understanding of the Program by including it in student, faculty, and staff orientation sessions; and
- Compiling a list of conflict resolution resources available to the UGA community and distributing it to Program contacts when interpersonal communication issues arise.

## SUMMARY

The Program continues to serve as a resource for the entire UGA community, offering a safe, confidential, and informal environment in which community members can share their concerns. The Program also provides an opportunity for the ombuds to engage in professional development through relationships with ombudspersons at USG and peer institutions, as well as through their International Ombuds Association memberships.

This upcoming year, the Program will continue its work to assist the community with areas of concern. The ombudspersons will meet on a periodic basis with EOO to discuss the Program's activities. They will also seek out and pursue opportunities to engage in outreach to increase awareness and understanding of the Program. During the 2025-2026 reporting period, EOO will be welcoming a new Director who will oversee the Program as part of that position's responsibilities.

The Program is a valued part of the UGA community, and your continued support is appreciated.

Enclosures: 2024-2025 Ombudspersons Data Report

cc: Benjamin C. Ayers, Senior Vice President for Academic Affairs and Provost  
Juanita Hicks, Vice President and Chief Human Resources Officer  
Charisse Harper, HR Senior Manager, Student Affairs  
Joseph Bartges, Professor of Medicine and Nutrition, College of Veterinary Medicine

Anjali Dougherty, Senior Director of Fiscal Affairs, Public Service and Outreach

