



**OFFICE OF THE OMBUDSPERSON**

November 2022

# **2021-22 Annual Report**

**Presented by**

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Ombudsperson, SAIT

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# Message from the Ombudsperson

I am pleased to provide you with the first annual report for the Office of the Ombudsperson at SAIT. In the Office's first official year, we were busy defining the Office's terms of reference and internal processes, setting up a case management system, and settling into our new home in Stan Grad. We also met with many departments, worked closely with Saitsa, and the Ombudsperson Leadership Committee to discuss the role of the Office and to learn more about how the Office could best serve its community - in particular SAIT students and employees.

Since this marked the Office's first full year in operation, this year's annual report includes cases received between May 1, 2021 - August 31, 2022. Moving forward, annual reports will run from September 1 - August 31.

In addition to responding to individual concerns, the Office also completed a report on academic misconduct and presented the findings to the Executive Management group. Areas identified for further review and consideration included: categories of misconduct, sanctions, expansion of in-class and employee workshops, support for international student success, and more centralized information on academic misconduct. This report is one of the pieces of information now being considered by the Academic Integrity Committee as it completes a SAIT wide review of academic integrity.

I am proud of what the Office has accomplished in its first year and look forward to the year ahead.

Sincerely,

*Kamini Bernard*

Kamini Bernard  
Ombudsperson

# What we do

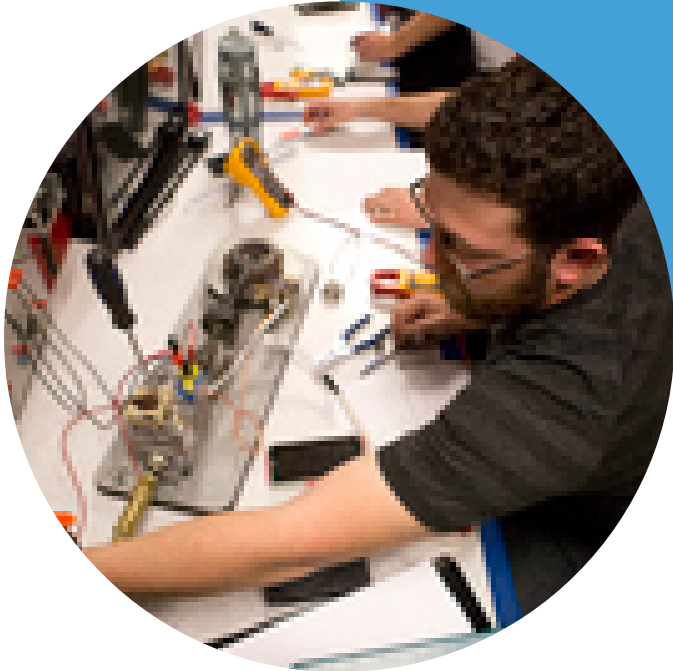
**The Ombudsperson is  
an advocate for  
*fairness and due  
process.***

## **The Ombudsperson can...**

- listen to your concerns as an objective third-party
- talk to you about the different options you have
- help you understand SAIT's rules and processes
- attempt to informally resolve issues and concerns
- investigate complaints and systemic issues
- make recommendations for policy or process changes
- point you in the right direction when we can't help.

## **The Ombudsperson can't...**

- review or interpret contracts or collective agreements
- become involved in an issue that is before the courts
- look at any matter or process that is outside of SAIT
- consider any legal or pending legal issue that involves SAIT
- investigate criminal matters.



**The Ombudsperson is:**

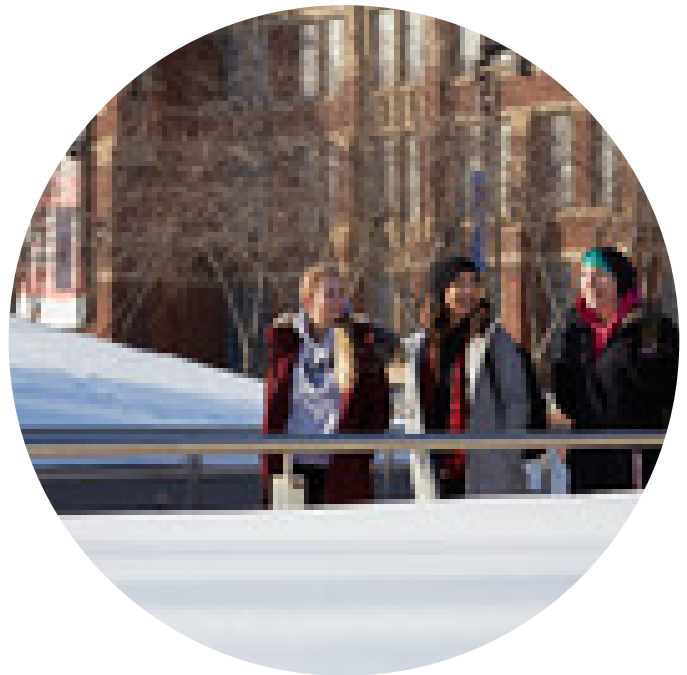
**Independent** — reviews concerns without direction or influence from any member of the SAIT community.

**Impartial** — considers issues from a third-party perspective and is not an advocate for any one person or for SAIT.

**Accessible** — provides services to all members of the SAIT community.

**Informal** — attempts to resolve an issue at the lowest level possible.

**Confidential** — listens to concerns and discusses your options in strict confidence. The Ombudsperson will not confirm you spoke to her or act on your concern without your consent.



**Cases received**

**261**

## **Cases At A Glance**

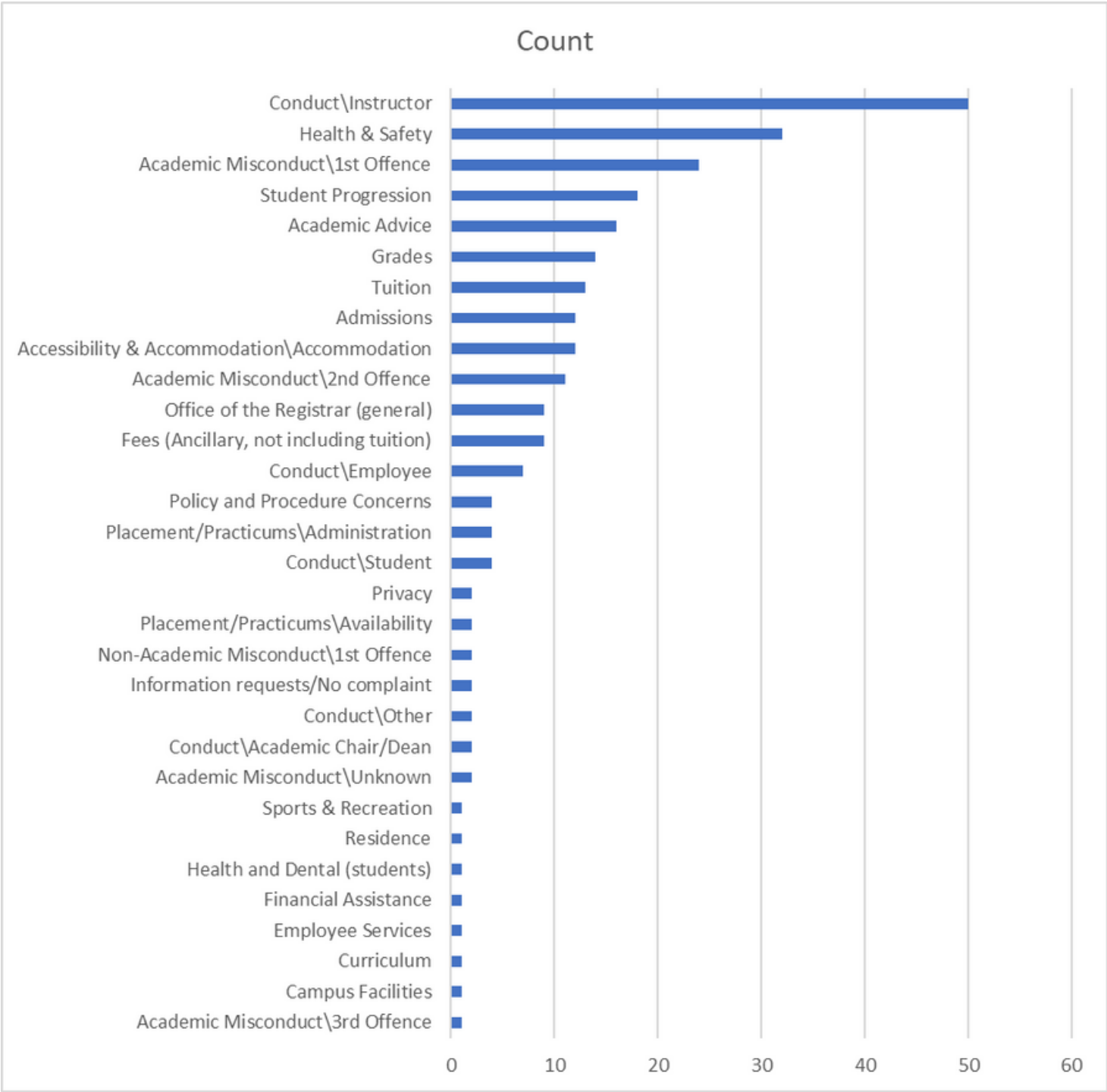
### **Top 5 issues**

- Instructor
- Academic misconduct
- Health and safety
- Student progression
- Academic advice

**90%**  
of visitors are  
SAIT students

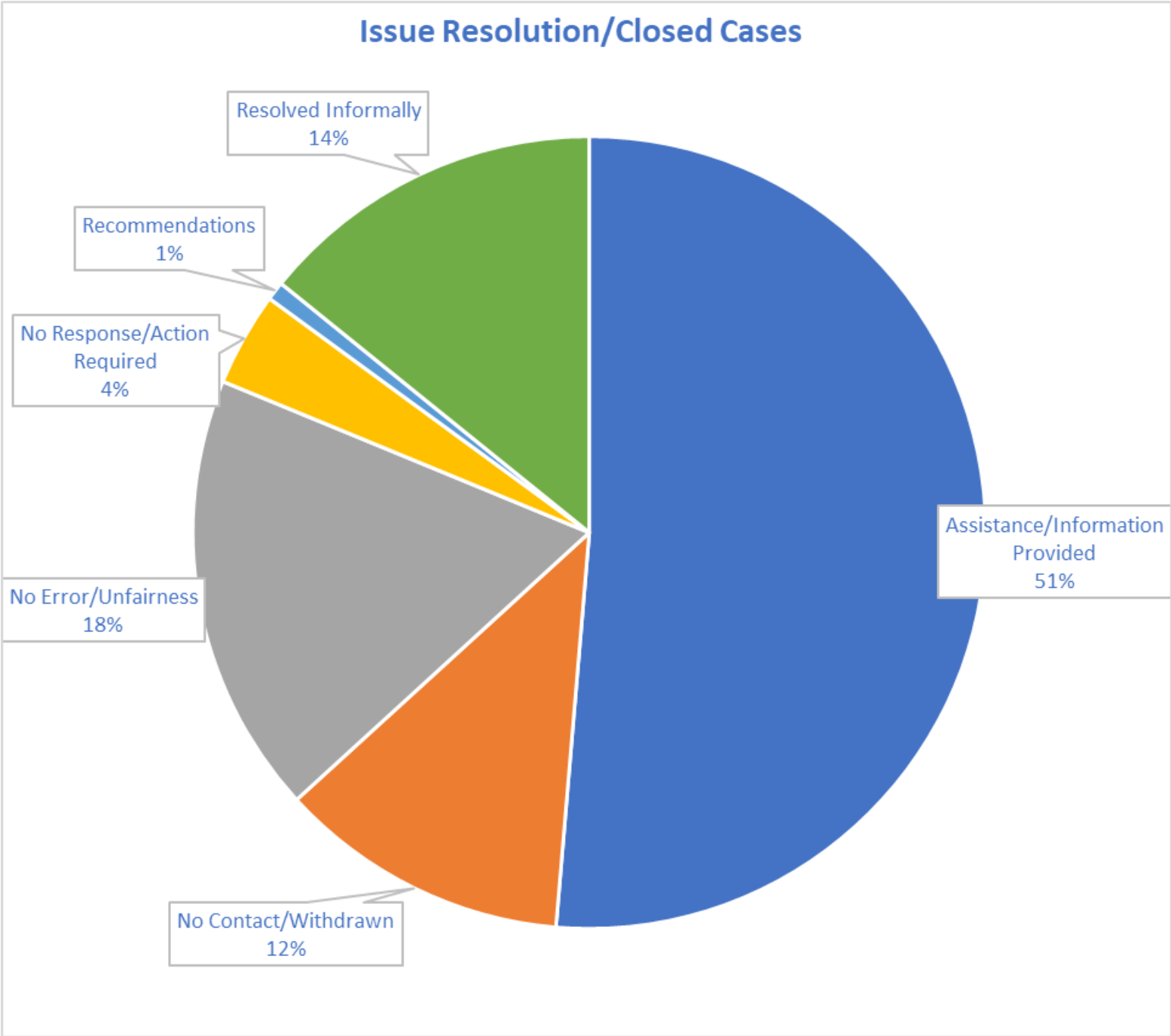
# Metrics

## Issue of concern as defined by visitor to Office



# Metrics

## How issues are resolved





# Measuring success

*How does an Ombudsperson  
measure success?  
It depends on who you ask!*

When a student brings forward a concern to the Ombudsperson, they are generally looking for some type of resolution such as a change to a decision or action to resolve the issue. For that student, success may mean an informal resolution occurred that addressed their concern or a decision was changed in their favour.

For SAIT, success could look very different. Though SAIT may consider the informal resolution of a concern as success, it could also mean that the Ombudsperson found there was no error/unfairness in the decision making and thus the decision stands. While a student may not consider "no error/unfairness" a success, this type of closure of a case means that SAIT followed its policies and procedures, even though the student did not agree with the decision. However disagreeing with a decision does not mean it was not a fair decision.

An Ombudsperson's role is not as an alternate decision maker or another level of appeal. Similarly, it is not the role of the Ombudsperson to ensure decisions are made in a person's favour. Rather, the Ombudsperson's mandate is to ensure a decision was fair. This means that the Ombudsperson reviews concerns from all sides of an issue to ensure the person making the decision followed the established policy, procedures or process and treated the person fairly.

*Ultimately, success to the Ombudsperson means you were treated fairly.*

# Sample cases

\*Details have been changed to protect the identity of the parties

## Case 1

### Instructor concern

A student approached the Ombudsperson to discuss a concern about online assessments that the student believed were not following the course outline. The student discussed the concern with their instructor and although it was partially resolved, the student indicated they believed there were still issues. Since this issue could potentially impact an entire cohort, the Ombudsperson spoke to the Academic Chair in an attempt to resolve the issue. The school investigated and identified technical issues with the program that would not have been visible to the instructor. These issues were addressed and resolved. Further, the instructor reviewed past assessments of all impacted students and adjusted where appropriate.

## Case 2

### Academic misconduct

A student received a notice to attend a hearing for academic misconduct. It was alleged that the student had cheated, because their IP address name did not match their name/location. The student explained to the Ombudsperson that they had been out of province visiting family, but did not know how to prove this information. The Ombudsperson discussed the evidence the student had to confirm their travel arrangements (evidence of travel and of family member's address). The student submitted this information in advance of the hearing and the hearing was cancelled.

### Case 3

### Accommodation

A student approached the Ombudsperson as they were concerned they would fail a course since the instructor was counting a day missed for a medical emergency as an unexcused absence. The Ombudsperson spoke to the program about excused versus unexcused absences per SAIT's procedure on Attendance Requirements. The program reviewed the circumstances surrounding the absence and agreed the absence was excused, thus resolving the student's concern.

### Case 4

### Health and safety

A student approached the Ombudsperson during the government of Alberta's vaccine restrictions with concerns about not being able to attend classes in person due to their vaccine status. The Ombudsperson explained SAIT was required to follow government requirements and although SAIT had decided to end testing, students received adequate notification of this change and a mechanism to request an exemption from vaccine requirements. Thus, SAIT was following their established process and the student had been treated fairly.





## Questions? Contact us.

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