



SAIT OMBUDSPERSON ANNUAL REPORT

SEPT 1, 2022 - AUG 31, 2023

NOVEMBER 2023 // PREPARED BY KAMINI BERNARD

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A WORD FROM THE OMBUDSPERSON

Today, I'm pleased to present our second annual report for the Office of the Ombudsperson at SAIT.

Over this past year, our Office has responded to over 400 concerns and enquiries. Our work has involved assisting in the resolution of concerns when appropriate, providing explanations of the fairness of decisions when the process has been in line with SAIT's governing policies and procedures, providing assistance and guidance on processes and available resources, and developing suggestions for changes to procedures and processes to ensure procedural fairness in SAIT's decision making. This year, our Office participated as an impartial observer at numerous student misconduct hearings, partnered with the Office of Community Conduct in providing educational seminars on procedural fairness, and participated in student information fairs and orientation.

Our work to enhance the student journey and overall positive culture of SAIT would not be possible without the support and commitment of faculty, staff, and leadership, as well as Saitsa, and all members of the SAIT community.

I'm proud of our accomplishments and look forward to the year ahead. We're here to listen, provide guidance, and advocate for fairness, ensuring SAIT remains a place where all feel welcome and supported.

Kamini Bernard

KAMINI BERNARD
OMBUDSPERSON





WHAT IS AN OMBUDSPERSON?

The Ombudsperson serves an important role at SAIT, acting as an impartial and independent resource to students, faculty and staff, as well as others who have a connection to SAIT. The Ombudsperson provides a confidential and accessible avenue through which individuals can seek assistance and resolution of their concerns.

SAIT's Ombudsperson is a valuable resource for conflict resolution. They work with individuals to explore options and strategies for resolving disputes, whether they involve academic concerns, interpersonal conflicts, or other challenges related to the learning environment. By offering guidance and facilitating constructive dialogue, the Ombudsperson helps members of the SAIT community find solutions that align with the institution's values and policies.

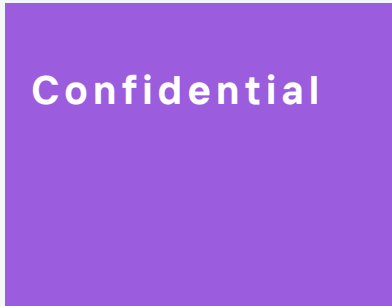
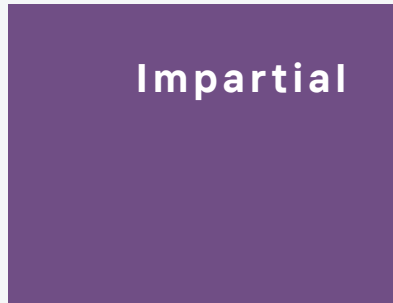
Broadly, the Ombudsperson:

- Works to create a culture of fairness, inclusivity, and respect
- Raises awareness of institutional policies and procedures
- Supports individuals in their path to self-advocacy
- Ensures individuals understand their rights and responsibilities
- Assists in the resolution of disputes where appropriate
- Provides recommendations for change when systemic issues are identified
- Refers to other external resources when they are not able to assist

"An ombudsperson fosters a positive community by resolving disputes, ensuring fairness, and building trust."

THE FIVE PILLARS

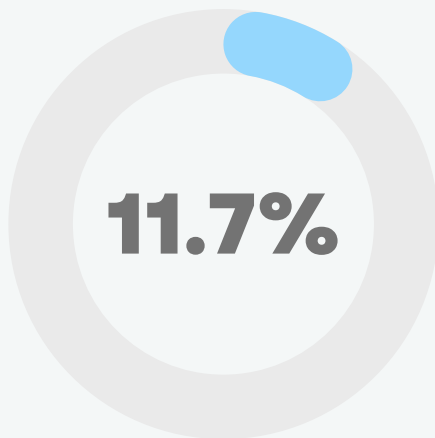
The five foundational pillars that underpin the role of the Ombudsperson at SAIT collectively serve as a framework to provide a fair and equitable approach to address the diverse concerns and issues of students and the broader SAIT community.



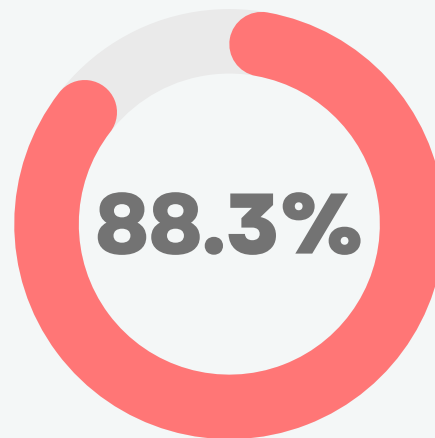


Annual Report Overview

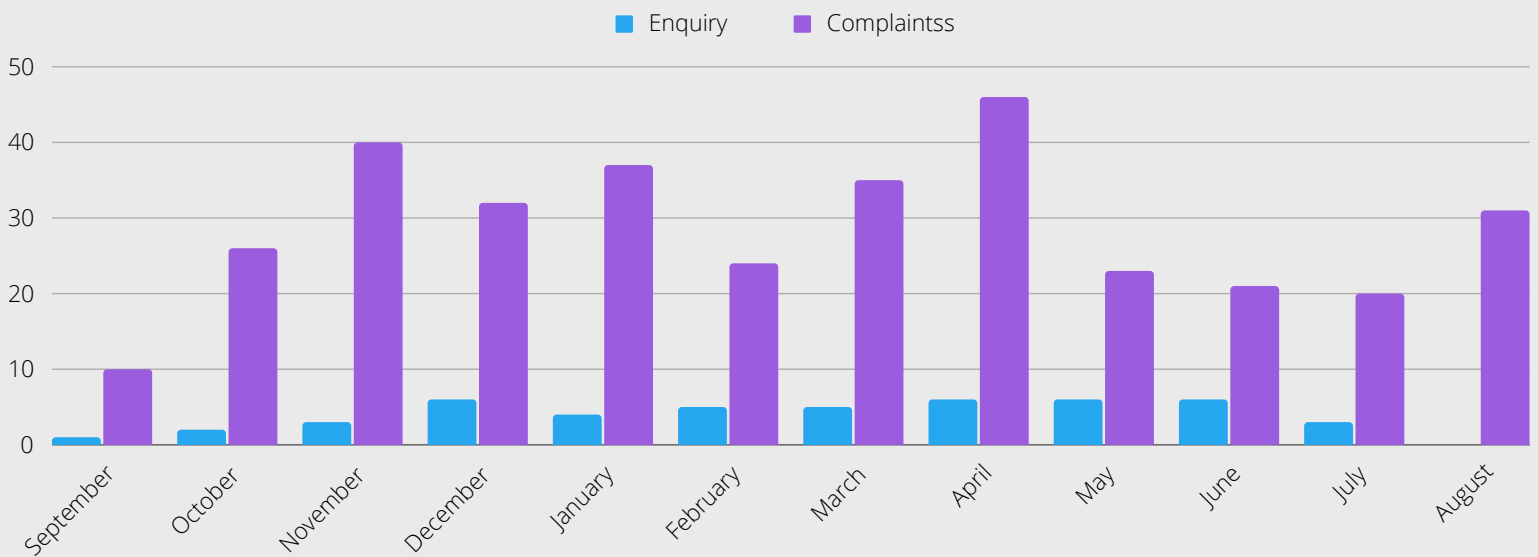
ENQUIRIES



CONCERNS

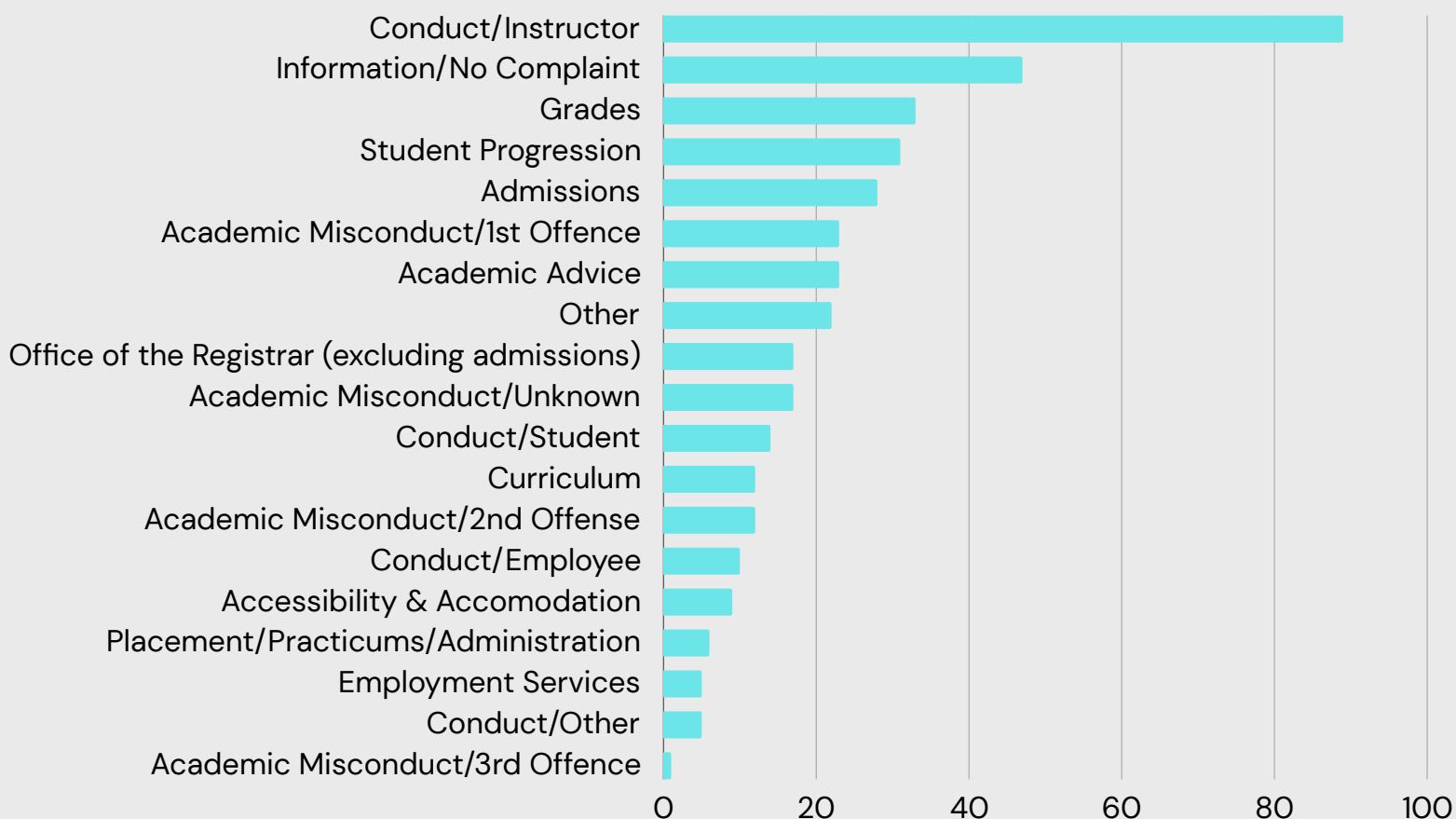


A comparative analysis of the percentage distribution between enquiries and concerns reveals that enquiries predominantly originated from SAIT faculty and staff, with a focus on consultation requests and policy-related concerns. In contrast, concerns were primarily raised by students, centering on issues related to allegations of academic misconduct, their instructors, grades and other related issues.



Analysis of the data shows that April had the highest concerns (46), while April, May, June and December had 6 enquiries. Concerns tend to be highest at the beginning and end of the terms, as well as during mid-term exams. September had the lowest activity this reporting period, with 1 enquiry and 10 concerns. In total, there were 402 entries, encompassing enquiries and concerns across all months from September 1, 2022 to August 31, 2023.

ISSUES ON CLOSED CASES



The above data provides an overview of issues raised on closed cases during the reporting period. It should be noted that these are the issues as identified by the visitor to the Office.

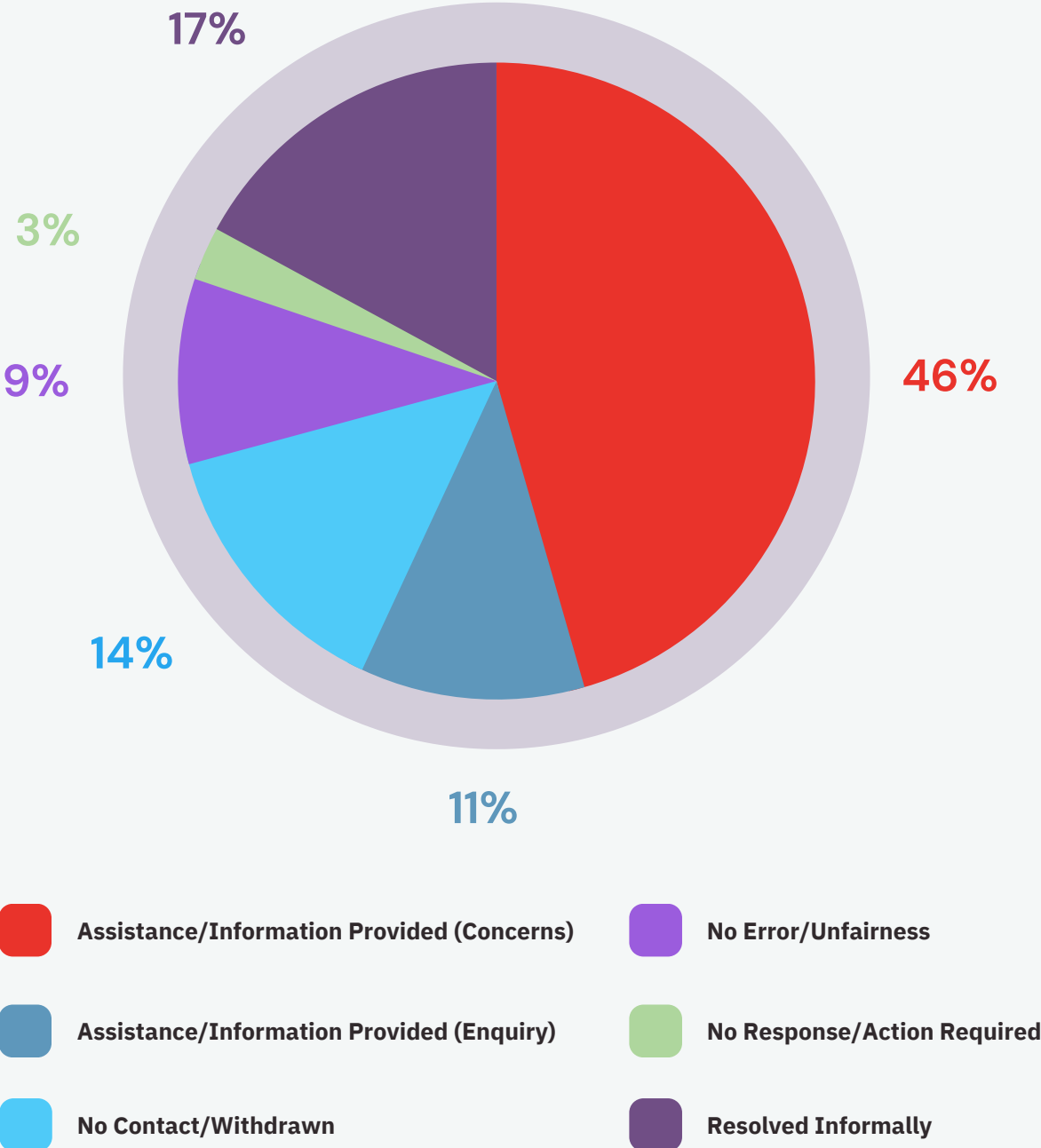
TOP FIVE CONCERNS:

- Instructor concerns
- Academic misconduct (all levels)
- Information requests
- Grades
- Student Progression

The "other" category encompassed diverse cases, including Residence (3 cases), Ancillary Fees (excluding tuition, 3 cases), Privacy (2 cases), Placement/Practicums/Availability (2 cases), Conduct Academic Chair/Dean (2 cases), Campus Facilities (2 cases), Sport Recreation (1 case), SAFA (1 case), Policy and Procedure Concerns (1 case), Non-academic Misconduct 1st & 2nd Offense (2 cases), Health & Safety (1 case), Executive Decision or Direction (1 case), and Accessibility and Accommodation/Non-accommodation issues (1 case).

Closed Case Year-End Results

2022 - 2023



RECOMMENDATIONS MADE:

During the reporting period, there were a number of noteworthy recommendations and suggestions made to improve the student experience and address areas that could have systemic impacts at SAIT.

Specifically, the following recommendations were made:

SAIT Procedure AC3.1.1. Grading and Progression Procedures – Credit Courses

The Ombudsperson worked with the Office of the Registrar to make suggestions for changes to SAIT's procedure on grading and progression. Recommendations included eliminating the permanent withdrawal of academically withdrawn students from all SAIT programs. It was suggested that a temporary withdrawal would be more appropriate and in line with SAIT's philosophy of lifelong learning while recognizing that there are times where a break from studies to allow a student to refocus is also appropriate. The suggestion included a shorter withdrawal from SAIT when a student was returning to a different program.

STATUS: Procedure is currently under review



Emails belonging to groups or former employees of SAIT

Based on a concern brought forward, the Ombudsperson learned that there were potentially a number of emails that once belonged to a group or program at SAIT that were no longer being monitored as the individuals responsible for the group moved on and/or the program was no longer in operation. As a result, the Ombudsperson made two recommendations:

- That a process be developed for “off boarding” employees which included a review of mailboxes assigned to the individual to confirm the mailbox was reassigned, if appropriate and if not, the mailbox was eliminated.

STATUS: Complete

- That an audit be conducted of group/program mailboxes to determine if they should remain active or be deactivated.

STATUS: In progress

Residence disciplinary process

The Ombudsperson was asked to review and comment on the procedures used by SAIT residences when conducting disciplinary hearings for alleged incidents that occurred on the premises. The Ombudsperson noted that the procedures developed by residence were in line with other SAIT disciplinary procedures and were administratively fair. The Ombudsperson made recommendations for minor adjustments to process to ensure that they are consistent with the written procedures.

STATUS: In progress



Have you seen these around SAIT?

The Southern Alberta Institute of Technology (SAIT) welcomes certified service dogs on campus. The initiative was taken after a student raised a concern about the lack of awareness regarding the presence of service dogs on campus. The Ombudsperson, Accessibility Services, and Facilities Management collaborated to have signs placed around the campus to ensure that the SAIT community is aware of the presence of certified service dogs. The signs are intended to help create a welcoming environment for service dogs and their handlers.

The initiative to place signs around the campus is a positive step towards creating a more inclusive and welcoming environment for certified service dogs and their handlers at SAIT.



MORE INFORMATION

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