



UNIVERSITY  
OF ALBERTA

Annual Report 2023-24

**Office of Safe Disclosure  
and Human Rights  
Office of Vice-Provost  
(Access, Community and Belonging)**

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# Executive Summary

**The Office of Safe Disclosure and Human Rights (OSDHR), within the portfolio of the Vice-Provost of Access, Community and Belonging, provides the university community with a safe, neutral and confidential space to hear about disclosures related to: discrimination, harassment (including bullying), accommodations, health and safety, ethical concerns, financial mismanagement and other forms of possible misconduct or wrongdoing.**

OSDHR continued to experience a higher demand for its services in the reporting year of July 1, 2023 – June 30, 2024. Overall, OSDHR’s visibility across the institution has increased in the last four years.

OSDHR experienced a **20% increase** in disclosures compared to last reporting year and a **50% increase** since 2020.

The increase in disclosures is likely due to a number of contributing factors, some of which relate to changes within the institution and some that relate to the overall global context that the University operates within.

YEAR	Number of Disclosures Received
2023-24	278
2022-23	232
2021-22	208
2020-21	185



Like many other post secondary institutions, the University is tasked with navigating global shifts, which ultimately impacts the overall university community. Some of the most significant global shifts in the past year relate to global security, food security, and economic development. In particular, the human rights crisis in the Middle East has had an impact on students, staff, and faculty. OSDHR received a large number of disclosures as a result of this global crisis. Some of these disclosures were from external parties who had no affiliation with the University directly. While OSDHR's mandate is to provide a space for the university community, many disclosures regarding the global crisis were streamlined to either the Dean of Students or the Vice-Provost of Accessibility, Community and Belonging (ACB).

In 2023-24, OSDHR in collaboration with Human Resources, Health, Safety and Environment (HRHSE) launched a Workplace Response Coordinator Pilot. The goal of the pilot was to better respond to sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) related disclosures and ensure a consistent response from the University. The pilot also integrated more informal restorative pathways such as interim measures and modifications. The pilot concluded in March 2024 and its success led to the alignment of a Workplace Response Coordinator function within HRHSE.





# The Role of OSDHR

**OSDHR is unique in that it provides services to all members of the university community such as: students, faculty, staff, postdoctoral fellows, visitors, and volunteers.**

The role of OSDHR is to provide disclosers with appropriate advice and referrals. It is always the decision of the person disclosing to decide how they wish to proceed or whether they wish to initiate any informal or formal processes.

The Office also provides various education sessions and workshops to the university community, with a specific focus on human rights, discrimination, harassment, inclusivity, anti-racism, equity, and how to receive and respond to disclosures. The goal of the education sessions is to: increase awareness of human rights related topics, share best practices for addressing oppression, and inform community members about university policies and procedures in order to mitigate the barriers to actualizing human rights.



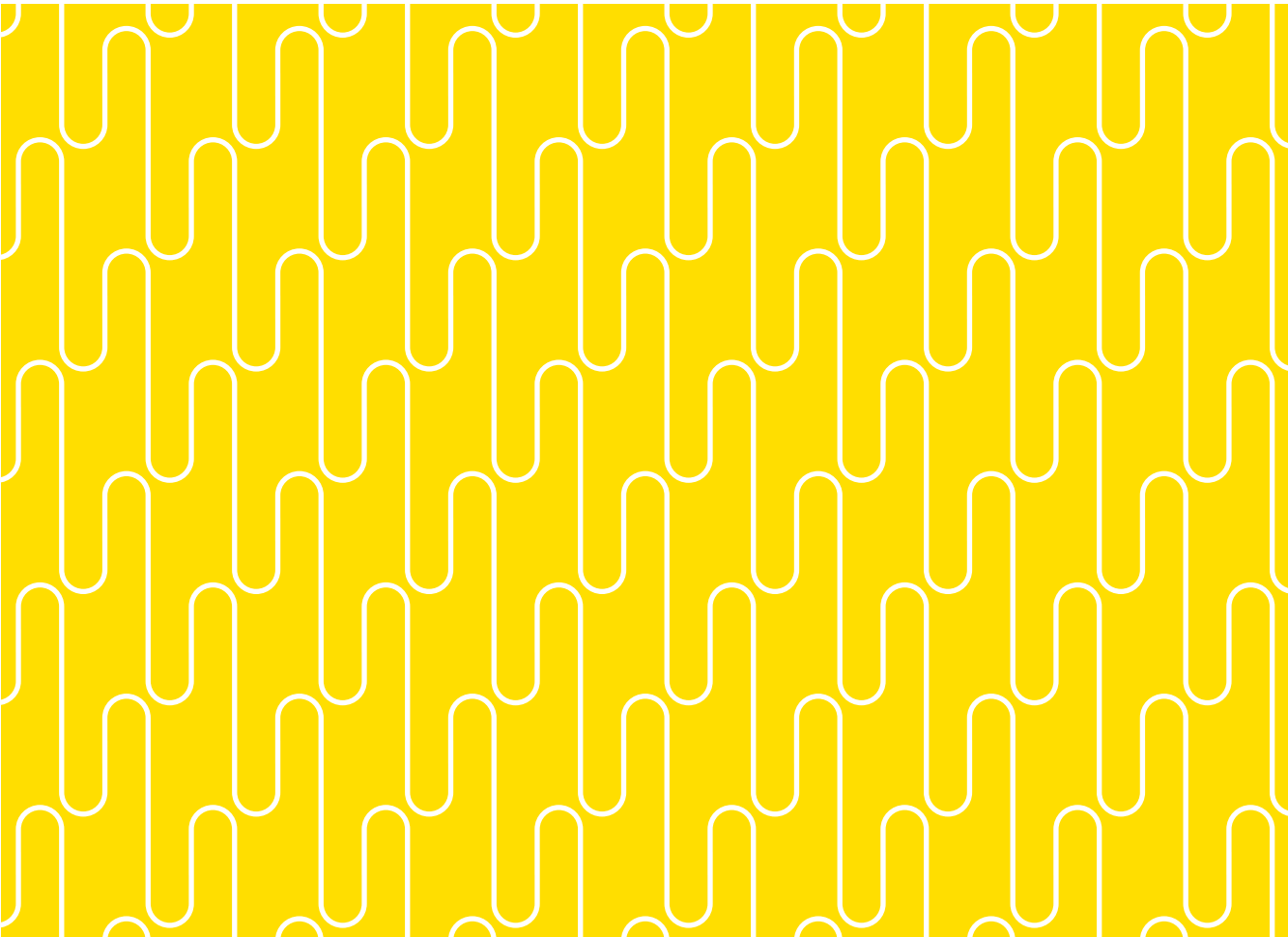
# Disclosures: 2023–2024

## Overall Summary of Disclosures

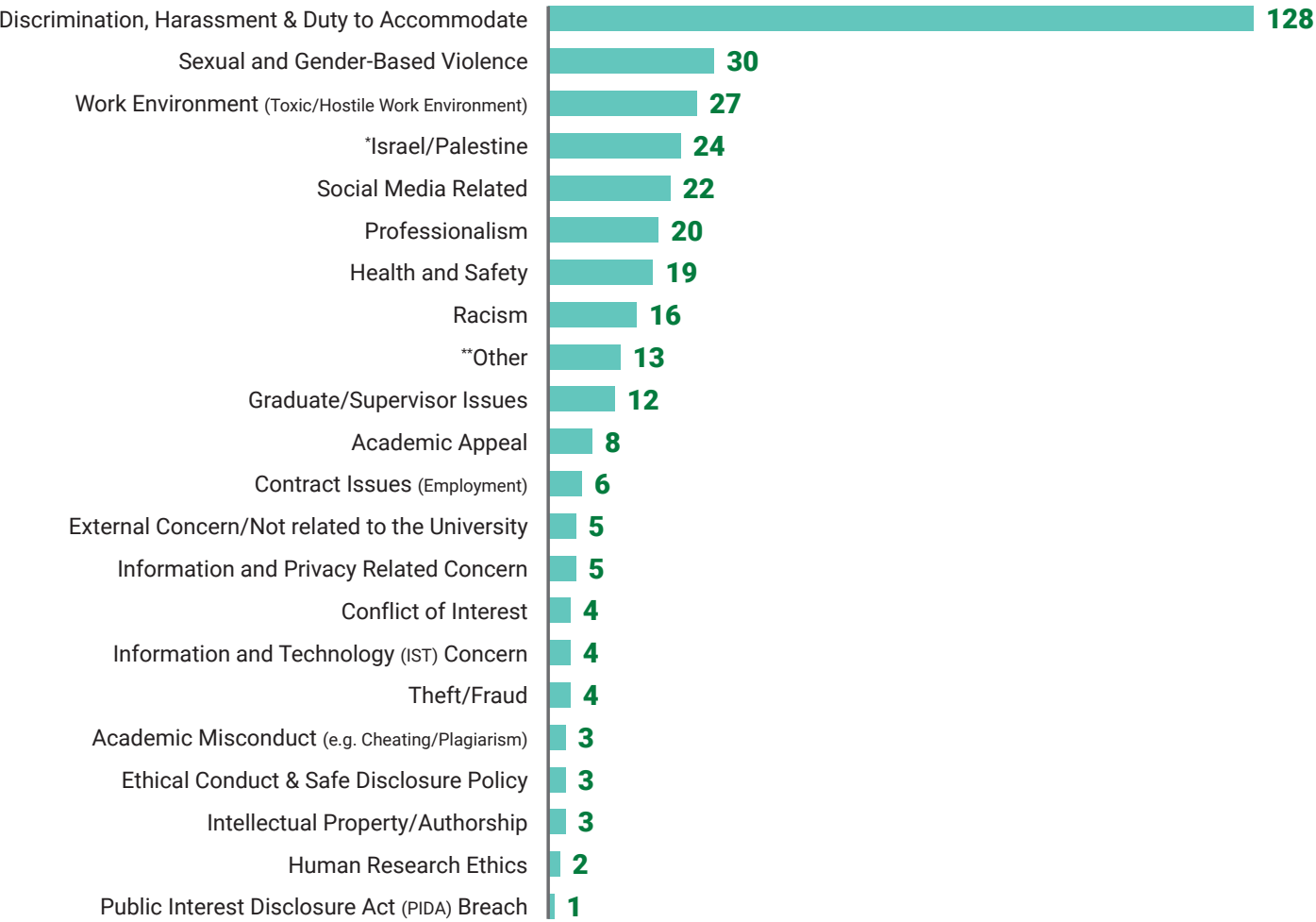
Individuals may disclose multiple concerns during their disclosure; therefore, the type of disclosure may be captured in multiple categories listed in the charts below. The discloser is always the decision maker in terms of what information they would like to share with OSDHR. As such, OSDHR is only able to track the types of disclosures and specific details when the discloser has provided these.

In 2023–24, the Office received 278 disclosures compared to 232 in the previous year. This represents a **20% increase** of disclosures. There continued to be a high number of disclosures related to discrimination, harassment, accommodation, and sexual and gender-based violence. Compared to 2022-23 there was also more disclosures received about the work environment, professionalism, and health and safety.

Please note that in the charts below some categories have been collapsed to protect privacy.



Types of Disclosures: 2023-24



**\*Israel/Palestine** reflects the number of disclosures OSDHR received about the ongoing events in the Middle East (including but not limited to Israel, Palestine, Gaza, the West Bank, Hamas, etc.) along with the ways these events affected the university's work, learning or living environment

**\*\*Other** reflects disclosures that did not fall within OSDHR's standard categories such as off-campus events

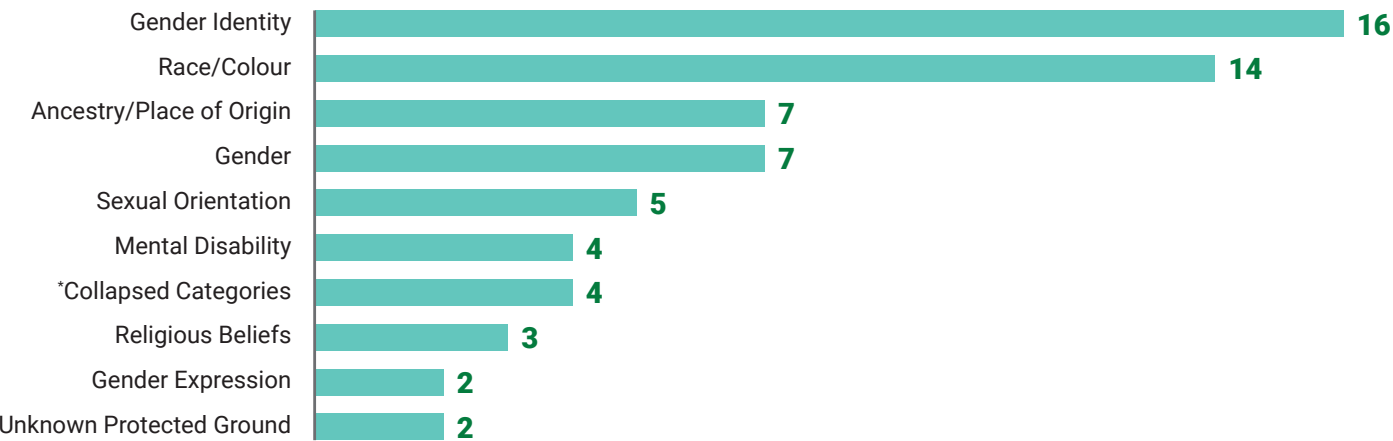


# Disclosures of Discrimination

The fifteen protected grounds listed under the [Discrimination, Harassment and Duty to Accommodate \(DHDA\) policy](#) (currently under revision) are as follows: race, colour, ancestry, place of origin, religious beliefs, gender, gender identity, gender expression, physical disability, mental disability, marital status, family status, source of income, sexual orientation, age, political beliefs, or any other groups as amended from time to time.

Discrimination based on the protected grounds of: gender identity, race/colour, and ancestry/place of origin were the top three areas of discrimination disclosed in 2023-24. In previous years (2020-23) race/colour and ancestry/place of origin were the highest reported, however, this year we have seen an exponential increase of discrimination based on gender identity.

## Discrimination based on Protected Grounds



\*Collapsed Categories include: age, family status, physical disability, and political beliefs



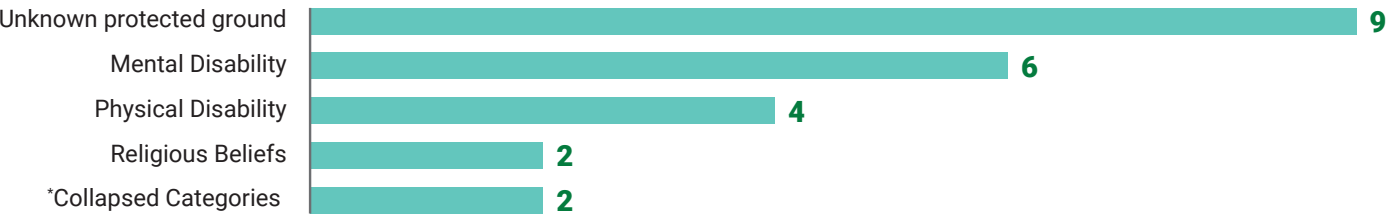


# Disclosures Regarding Accommodation

Compared to previous years, OSDHR received a similar number of disclosures in 2023–24 regarding accommodation concerns based on the protected grounds of mental disability and physical disability.

Please note that in some cases, disclosers did not share specific details regarding their accommodation concerns. These situations are reflected as “unknown protected grounds,” in the chart below.

## Duty to Accommodate based on Protected Grounds



\*Collapsed Categories: Family status and gender identity

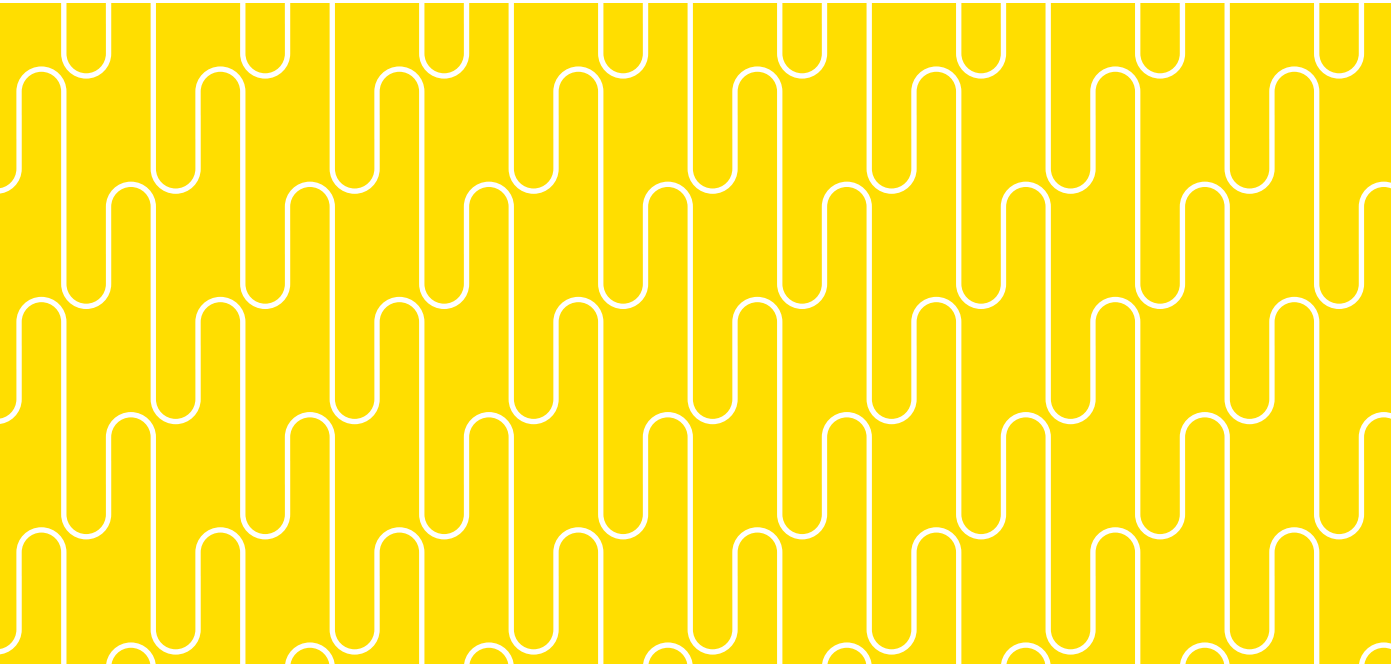
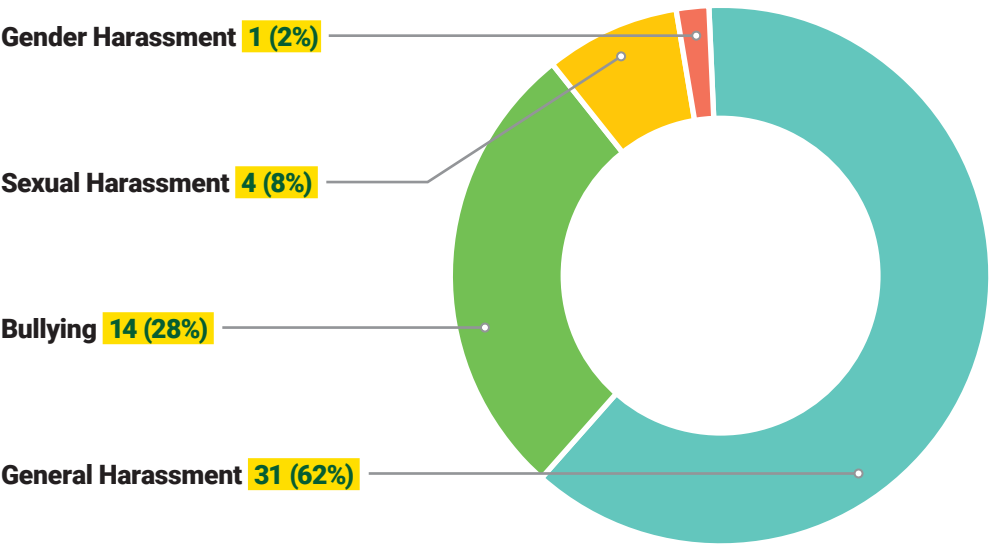


# Disclosures of Harassment

Please refer to the [Discrimination, Harassment and Duty to Accommodate \(DHDA\) policy](#) (currently under revision) for the definitions of harassment, bullying, and sexual harassment. OSDHR is only able to track the type of harassment when the discloser wishes to share these details.

Compared to the previous year, there has been a slight increase in disclosures regarding general harassment in 2023-2024. General harassment is harassment that is not linked to a protected ground. In the chart below, please note that sexual harassment is a form of gender discrimination.

## Disclosures of Harassment

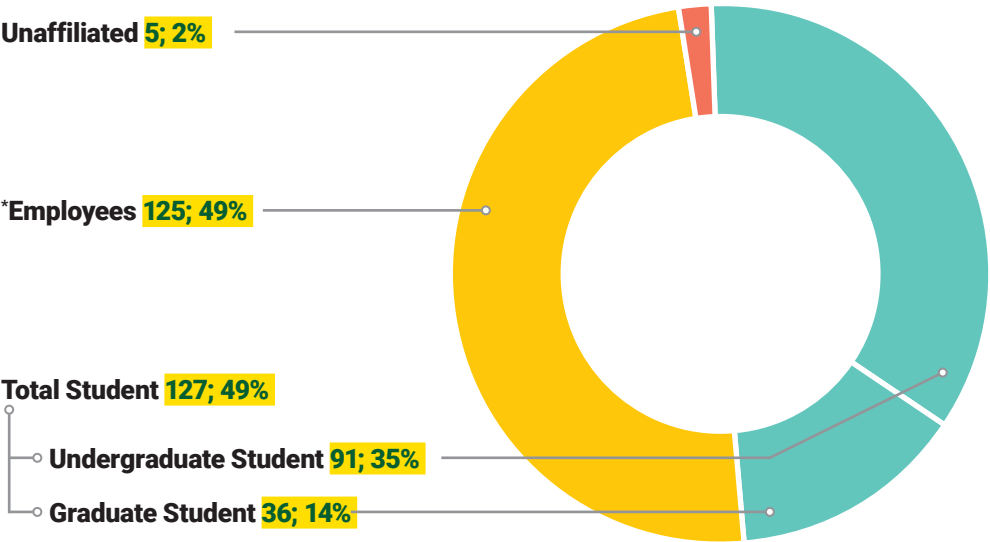


# Discloser Demographics

The chart below provides a percentage breakdown of the three primary categories of disclosers: Employees, Students, and those Unaffiliated with the University of Alberta.

OSDHR can receive disclosures from more than one individual. For example, two students may choose to come to the Office together to disclose the same concern. In 2023-24, disclosures from staff and students were comparable, with both groups portioned at 49%. This is very consistent with OSDHR’s previous reporting periods, indicating that both employees and students are consistently accessing OSDHR at the same rate.

## Overview of Disclosers



\*Employees include all groups of employees (faculty, support staff, management, and excluded staff, etc.)



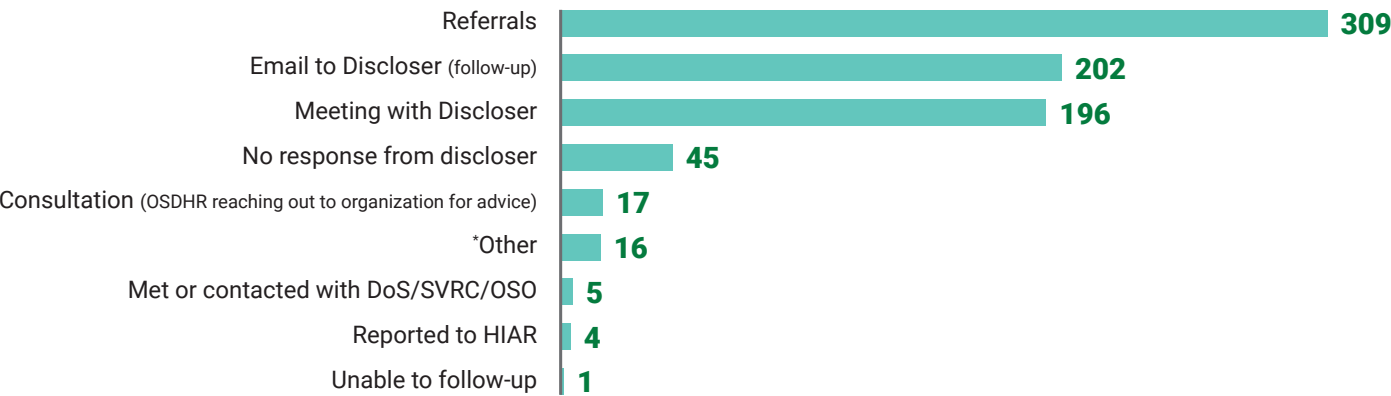


# Overview: Disclosure Actions

OSDHR typically meets with a discloser via phone, in-person, or virtually to gain a comprehensive understanding of the concerns being brought forward. OSDHR then provides advice and referrals to the discloser so they can make a more informed decision about the most appropriate and best path forward.

The chart below provides an overview of the actions or steps that OSDHR has taken with a disclosure. Please note that emails to disclosers capture the amount of follow-ups, resources shared (policies, procedures, etc.) and general checking in with disclosers.

## Overview: Disclosure Actions



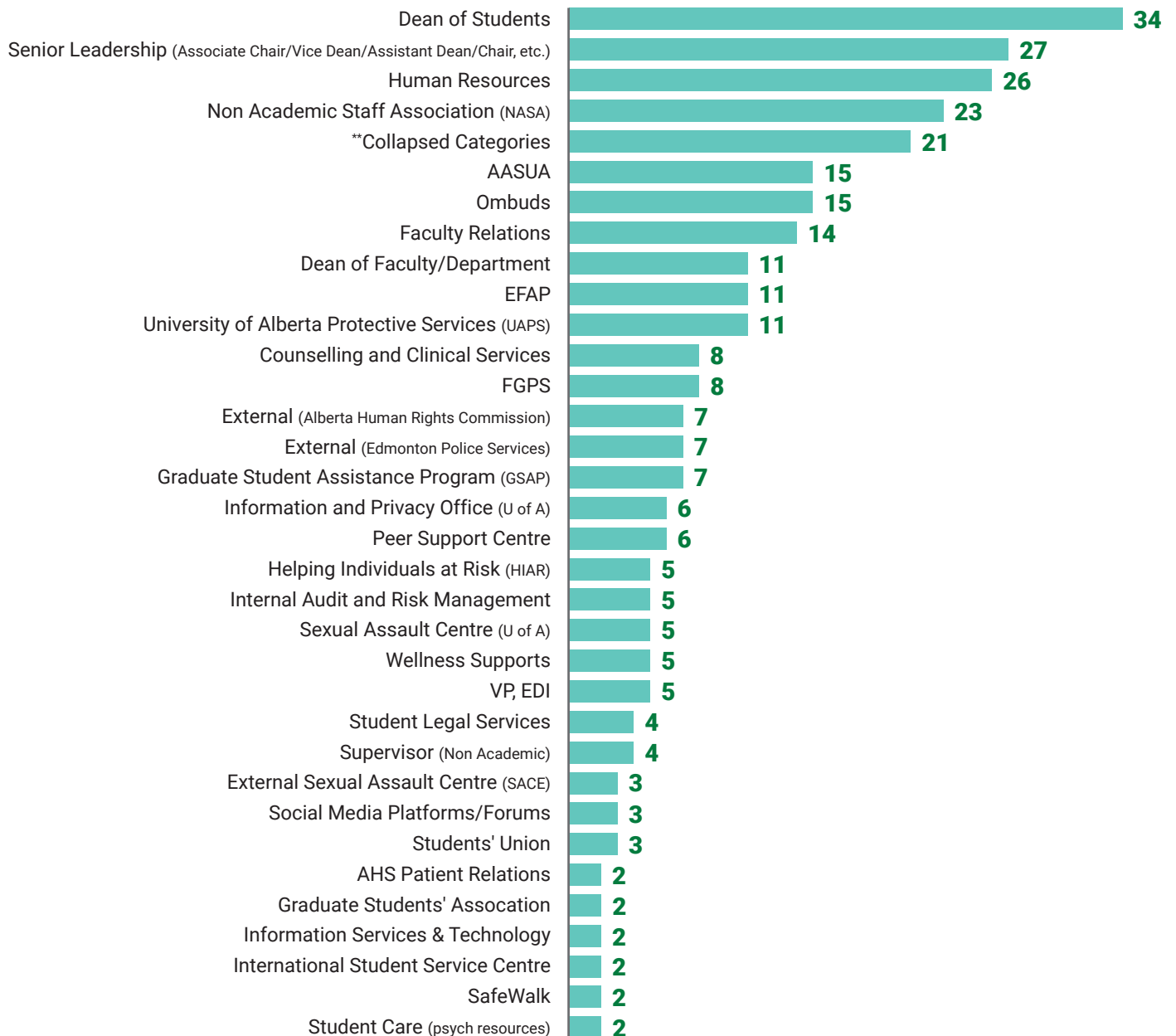
\*Other reflects action on a disclosure that is not reflected in OSDHR’s typical categories



# Referrals

Multiple referrals may be provided to a discloser in a meeting, however it depends on the nature of the concerns that the discloser shares. In 2023-24, OSDHR provided 309 referrals to disclosers. The highest number of referrals was made to the Dean of Students' Office (34), followed by Senior Leadership (Vice Dean, Chair, etc.) (27) and then Human Resources (26). Overall, this is consistent with previous years, with the exception of higher referrals to senior leadership within faculty and departments.

## Referrals



**\*\*Collapsed Categories** – includes Accessibility Resources, External Agencies (CMHA Distress Line, SACE, etc.), Student Legal Services, PDFA, Information & Privacy Office, Research Ethics Office, International Services Centre

# Meetings

In 2023-24, OSDHR had a total of 196 meetings with disclosers, which is comparable to the previous reporting year. The “other meetings” category reflects OSDHR meeting with another office or stakeholder regarding a disclosure, which is often required in cases of complex and sensitive disclosures. This is done with consent from the discloser, given that they are the decision-maker in the process. In addition to meetings, OSDHR sent 202 emails to disclosers in 2023–24 to provide information, resources, referrals and to also follow up with them regarding their concerns.

## Meetings with Disclosers



**\*Other Meeting:** reflects OSDHR meeting with HIAR, Human Resources Partner, and Dean of Students staff





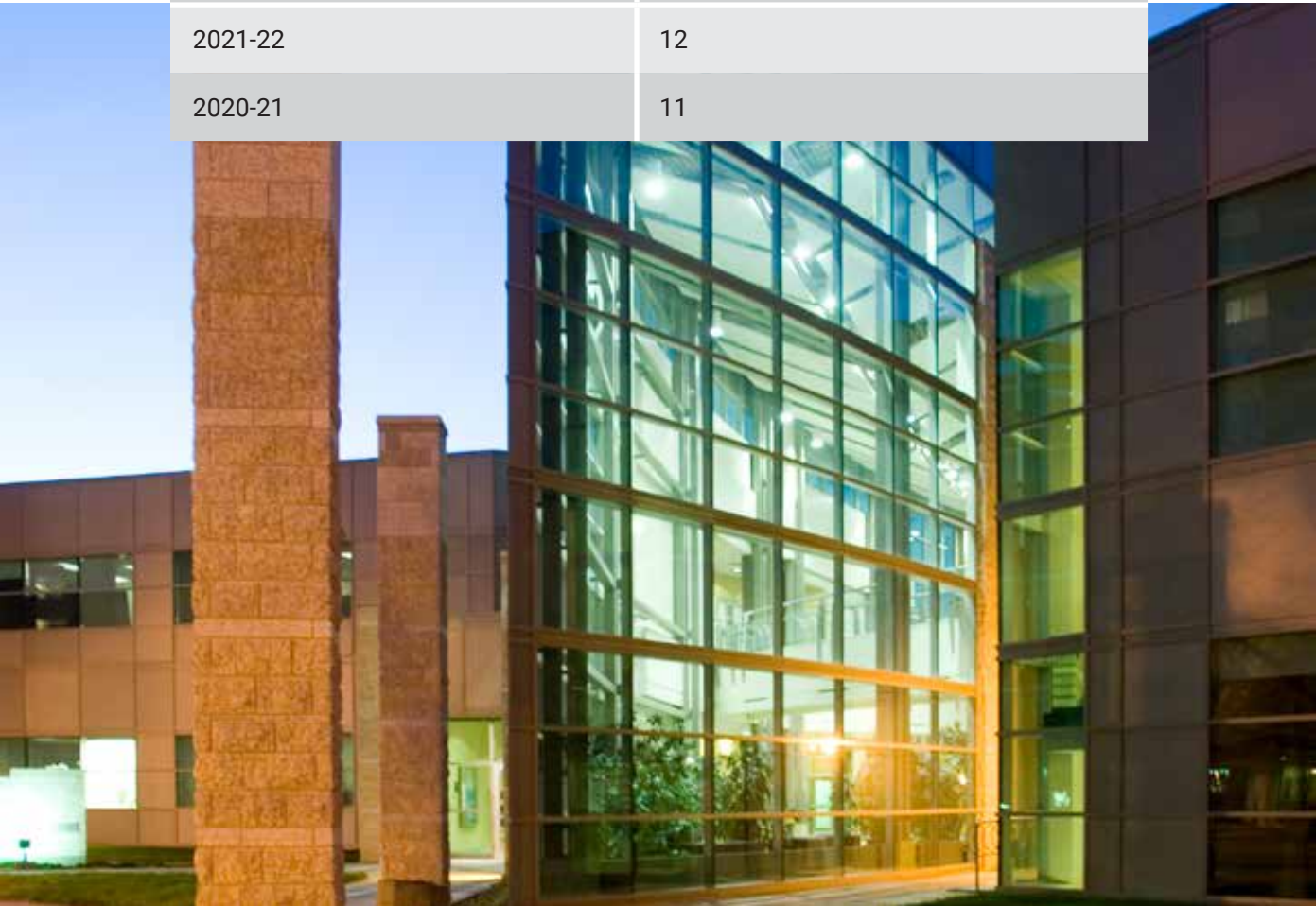
# Consultations

OSDHR provides consultations to staff, faculty, student service providers and senior leaders on policies, procedures, best practices or legislation such as the *Alberta Human Rights Act*.

In these contexts, the requestor is not disclosing a specific concern, instead they are requesting broader information and/or advice on policies, procedures, resources, best practices or legislation.

OSDHR had a slight decrease in the number of consultations (8) for 2023–24 compared to previous years.

YEAR	Number of Consultations
2023-24	8
2022-23	14
2021-22	12
2020-21	11



# Article 18 Intake Officer Role

The Advisor in OSDHR was the Intake Officer for Article 18 complaints as outlined in the [Non-Academic Staff Association \(NASA\) Collective Agreement](#) for the 2023-24 reporting period. The Intake Officer is a person designated by the Employer and endorsed by the Union who is skilled in the assessment of discrimination and harassment complaints. The role of the Intake Officer was transitioned to the Workplace Response Coordinator Area within Human Resources, Health, Safety, and Environment (HRHSE) at the end of June 2024. This transition will provide better role clarity for the Office, given that disclosers and various stakeholders were often confused by the Advisor’s role within OSDHR doing the intake of article 18 complaints.

In 2023-24, seven complaints were received by the Intake Officer. Out of the seven complaints, six were accepted and moved to the next stage of case management and one complaint was withdrawn by the Complainant. Please note that in 2024-25 the Office will no longer be reporting on Article 18 complaints.

YEAR	Number of Article 18 Complaints
2023-24	7
2022-23	7
2021-22	9
2020-21	3



# Education

OSDHR facilitated 8 workshops for the University community during the 2023-24 reporting period with a total number of 289 participants. These training sessions were a combination of general workshops for the entire university community and specific workshops tailored for various faculties/departments. Due to limited capacity of the Office, these workshops were only offered from July 2023 – December 2024, except one workshop which was offered in June 2024.

YEAR	Number of Education Sessions	Number of Participants
2023-24	8	289
2022-23	23	898
2021-22	14	375
2020-21	14	349

Education requests for this reporting period continued to come from student body groups, faculty and staff. In addition, OSDHR has received external requests from organizations and individuals; however, these requests were declined as it is was outside the scope of the Office. The most sought out workshops for 2023-24 were: “Being Anti-Racist”, which OSDHR developed last year after receiving a high number of requests; and “Receiving & Responding to Disclosures”, which has been consistently requested by various faculties and departments.

Since its development, “Being Anti-Racist” continues to fill up quickly and as a result, OSDHR has increased the number of participants in order to meet the demand. This particular workshop will be extended to students for the 2024-25 academic year.

“Allyship” is another workshop that OSDHR has developed to accommodate the high volume of requests by staff and faculty. This workshop will be launched and offered to staff and faculty in October 2024 and it is anticipated that it will garner a lot of attention and attendance. The workshop is currently tailored to staff and faculty; however, adjustments will be made in 2025 to accommodate student requests.



## Discourse Human Rights

“Discourse Human Rights” (DHR) is an initiative created by OSDHR to meet the needs of the broader university community, who prefer informal conversation, storytelling and discussions as a means of learning. The goal of the series is to provide an opportunity for the university community to: gain insight into the work of people championing human rights within our institution; reflect on the systemic and procedural challenges/barriers in actualizing human rights, equity and inclusion; and collectively identify strategies for removing these barriers.

The webinar series found great success in the 2022-23 reporting period with approximately **138** people attending three sessions. The series picked up momentum for the 2023-24 reporting period resulting in approximately **157** people attending two sessions. The topics were relevant to major concerns in post secondary institutions globally and once again aligned with national and international days of recognition. The topics included: Islamic Heritage & Combating Islamophobia, to commemorate Islamic Heritage Month; and Systemic Ableism, to commemorate The International Day of Persons with Disabilities.

Due to the reduced capacity of the office, OSDHR was only able to provide 2 sessions for the series in the 2023-24 reporting period; however, members of the University community have also shared their appreciation for this education format and have encouraged OSDHR to continue offering DHR.

### DHR Participants included:

- Dr. Evelyn Hamdon | Senior Advisor, Equity & Human Rights
- Dr. Danielle Peers | Associate Professor | Academic Lead on Equity Praxis & Systemic Ableism
- Nathan Viktor Fawaz | PhD candidate | NSERC SMART-CREATE intern

## What We Heard

- “I appreciate that the space was a safe space for attendees to share. Sagal is a great presenter, very engaging and the pace of the presentation was really good. I like that we took a break half-way through as well. The scenarios were good practice.”
- “That our current Muslim students today are negotiating their identities relative to their non-Muslim and Muslim peers and also negotiating racial identities. Discussion around these issues encourages me to reflect on the feelings and beliefs brought forward by various Muslim students.”
- “The idea that intervention in racist situations does not necessarily have to be confrontational; checking in on those victimized and supporting them through whatever processes they’d like to take can also be highly empowering.”
- “I will continue learning and growing as a student, a teacher, and a researcher with these skills to try and make the spaces that I hold and operate in a better and safer place for BIPOC peers, students, and friends”
- “understanding the difference between disability rights and disability justice”

# Awareness

## Anti-Islamphobia Awareness during Islamic Heritage Month (October 2023)

In October 2023, The University of Alberta officially recognized October as Canadian Islamic History Month. This was the first time in the institution's 115 year legacy, that Islamic Heritage was officially recognized and celebrated. This endeavor was led by the Vice-Provost, ACB. The month of recognition set forth two events, which were organized by OSDHR and the Vice-Provost ACB, in collaboration with the Dean of Students Office.

## Sisters Dialogue Anti-Islamophobia Awareness Campaign

[Sisters Dialogue](#) is a grassroots organization, which provides culturally informed safe spaces and supports for racialized Muslim women and girls. For over two years, the Sisters Dialogue team has been working on "Muslim Women Tell it As It Is", a storytelling campaign and workshop series to better understand the experiences of Muslim women in the aftermath of hate-based attacks in Alberta. The initiative culminated with a photoshoot featuring Muslim women from all walks of life. The photos are now part of a moving exhibit and have been commissioned by the City of Edmonton, the Federal Government, the Vice-Provost ACB & Dean of Students' Office, to spread awareness about the experiences of racialized Muslim women in Alberta.

In collaboration with the University of Alberta Libraries, the photos were displayed at the Rutherford Library Galleria from October 2, 2023 to October 27, 2023. Rutherford library services approximately 1000 people per day and as such, we can estimate that approximately 15,000 – 18,000 members of the university community were able to view and engage with the moving art exhibit.

The exhibit culminated with an evening of conversation and reflection, which was meant to capture the essence of the awareness campaign. The event was held on October 27, 2023, in collaboration with the Department of Drama (Faculty of Arts) at the Timms Centre for Arts. It provided an opportunity for participants to engage with the art pieces and enjoy a panel discussion and performances by City of Edmonton Poet Laureate and Multidisciplinary Artist Timiro Mohamed and Musician and Multidisciplinary Artist Kija Lado.

# Further Considerations

Due to the increase of OSDHR's visibility, the Office has seen a continuous surge of disclosures and education requests within the reporting year. While there have been several challenges, the office continues to meet its mandate by effectively and efficiently maintaining service levels.

Some of the challenges the Office has encountered relate to overall global crises, while others are unique to the Office's position within the University's structure.

## Challenges resulting from global crises

During the 2023-24 reporting period, the crisis in the Middle East was a major contributing factor in the challenges faced by the Office. October 7, 2023 marked the beginning of what became a major conflict and humanitarian crisis in the Middle East, which impacted members of the university community, including students, staff and faculty. This resulted in various activist movements, including a protest encampment at the University of Alberta. On May 11, 2024, the University of Alberta responded by calling Edmonton Police Service to remove protesters. These actions greatly impacted the university community and led to a lack of trust with University leadership and services. OSDHR was impacted, along with other front-facing offices, who were then tasked with providing support to community members and receiving inquiries from external stakeholders.

Given the complexity of some of the disclosures, many required support from the VP, ACB or the Office of the Dean of Students, to ensure a coordinated, effective and efficient response.

## Alignment within Portfolio

Since November 2022, OSDHR has sat under the VP, ACB portfolio. While changes to any reporting structure can be a challenge, this transition has provided a clear path for communication, critical decision making and accountability. Furthermore, the VP, ACB not only houses OSDHR, but the Office of the Student Ombuds (OSO), Helping Individuals at Risk (HIAR), Sexual & Gender Based Violence Prevention & Response and the Council on Systemic Ableism, providing an opportunity to work collaboratively and concurrently to meet our shared goal of addressing barriers.



## Capacity Challenges

Historically, OSDHR has operated with limited capacity, making it difficult to meet the high demands of the Office, given the volume, complexity and nature of the work. In 2023-24 the Office experienced reduced capacity and was unable to provide its full services. To address this challenge, OSDHR hired and on-boarded a Disclosure Advisor in May 2024, who has successfully been able to offset the demand and increase in disclosure intakes. Concurrently, this has provided an opportunity for the Education Coordinator to focus on and address the increased demand of education requests.

