

Student Ombuds Services 2022-23 Annual Report

Submitted by Mike Giancola
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- Demand for Ombuds Services continues to increase. 409 cases were handled by Student Ombuds Services during the 2022-23 academic year, resulting in 617 total contacts. This represents a 4% increase in cases as compared to 2021-22*.

* Student ombud heard faculty and staff cases with the retirement of the faculty/staff ombud in June 2022.

Financial Ombuds – Pack Essentials

- Served as an active member on the Pack Essentials steering committee and helped lead the campus efforts to support students experiencing food, housing and/or financial insecurity.
- The Student Ombud continues to serve as the first point of contact for students experiencing food, housing and/or financial insecurity.
 - 1187 Pack Essentials applications were submitted in 2022-23
 - 392 grants were provided from the Student Emergency Fund totaling \$152,420
 - 9 meal scholarships were provided totaling \$12,264
 - 38 housing scholarships were provided totaling \$26,573
 - * Note significant resources from the student emergency fund were also provided to support housing security.
 - 3825 meal share meals were provided for students to eat in the dining halls (11% increase over previous year)
 - At least 13% of applications were directly related to health concerns
 - 54% of applications were from undergraduates; 46% from graduate students
 - 32% of applications were from international students
- The vision was created for the Pack Essentials Hub in North Hall. The hub serves as a centralized location to support students' basic needs. As part of the expanded resources, the Feed the Pack relocated to North on April 11, 2023. The official ribbon cutting event is scheduled for September 11, 2023.
- Significant funds raised in support of Pack Essentials resources in partnership with DASA Development and other campus development offices:
 - Approximately \$1,463,744 was raised in support of the Student Emergency Fund and Endowment, Meal and Housing Scholarships and Feed the Pack Pantry,

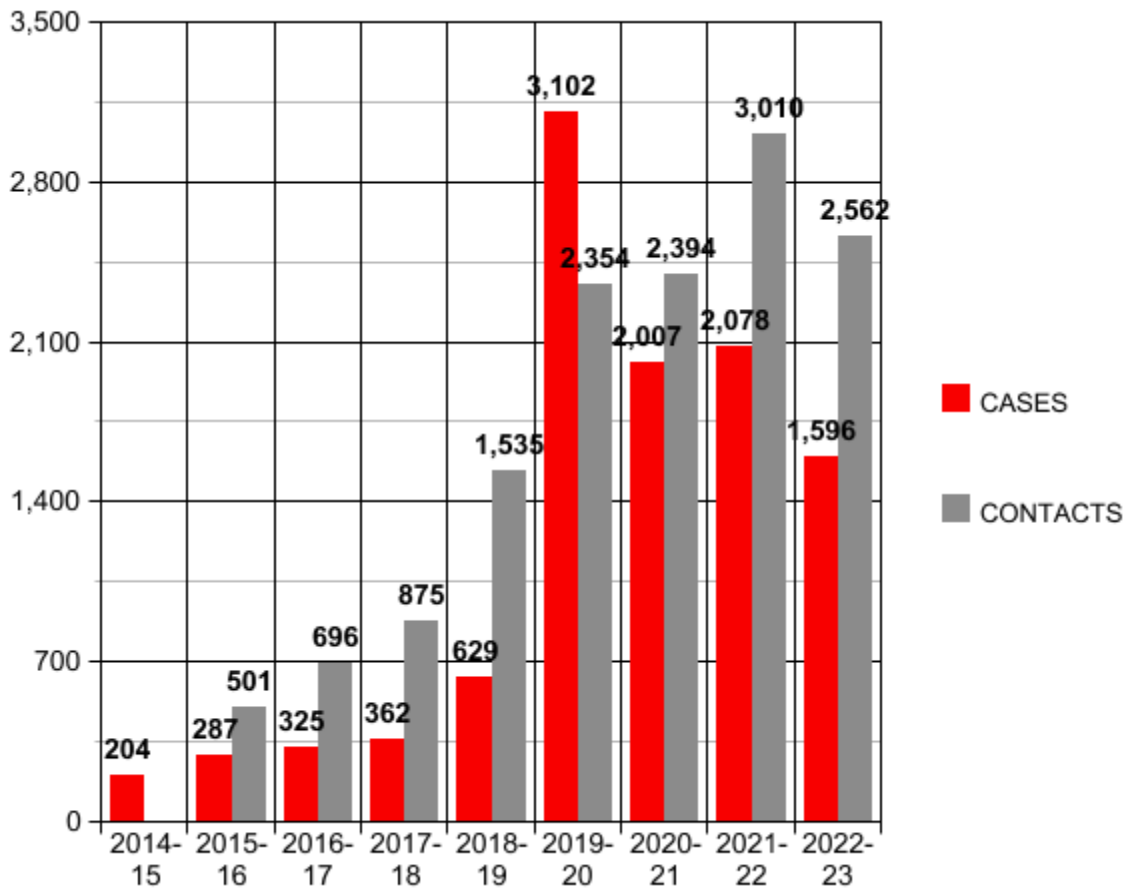
during the 2022-23 academic year (of which \$682,300.00 was for the SEF endowment). This represents a 7.5% increase over 2021-22 fundraising.

- Created the Pack Essentials fund to allow for greater operational flexibility. Donated funds can be used to cover the cost of operations for the Pack Essentials Hub and Feed the Pack pantry, staffing and direct support to students as needed.
- Partnered with Financial Aid to move Pack Essentials application to the Student Information System, with the application being available to students in the My Pack Portal.
- Partnered with Office of International Services and Global Engagement to support international students impacted by various catastrophic events and helped identify students in need to nominate for various outside funding opportunities.
- Met with DGPs of Computer Science and Computer Engineering and OIS to discuss trends and how to better communicate with prospective students.
- Facilitated meeting with ES King and Western Manor residents. Utilized SEF to help supplement housing grants to lessen financial impact on residents during change in rent payment structure.
- Feed the Pack crowdfunding campaign - exceeded our goal - \$7200 raised to purchase cooking equipment.
- Co-presented two sessions for OIS' "Packing Up Series: Managing Finances & How to Save Money in the US" for incoming international students.
- Recorded podcast for University Development on student basic needs and how donor support makes a difference.
- Met with CVM staff to better coordinate Pack Essentials support for vet-med students.

Staff Updates:

- Mike Giancola completed the process to become a Certified Organizational Ombudsman Practitioner (CO-OP) and was recognized as a TRIO Champion
- Vickie Youngblood retired as administrative assistant in January 2023. James Turner has been serving in a temporary position to provide administrative support.
- Stevie Kimmet started in January 2023 as the graduate assistant for Pack Essentials replacing Emilia Cordero Ocegueda. Funding for the position was provided by Student Government and the Graduate Student Association over three years through the 2023-24 year.

Student Ombuds Cases (since inception)

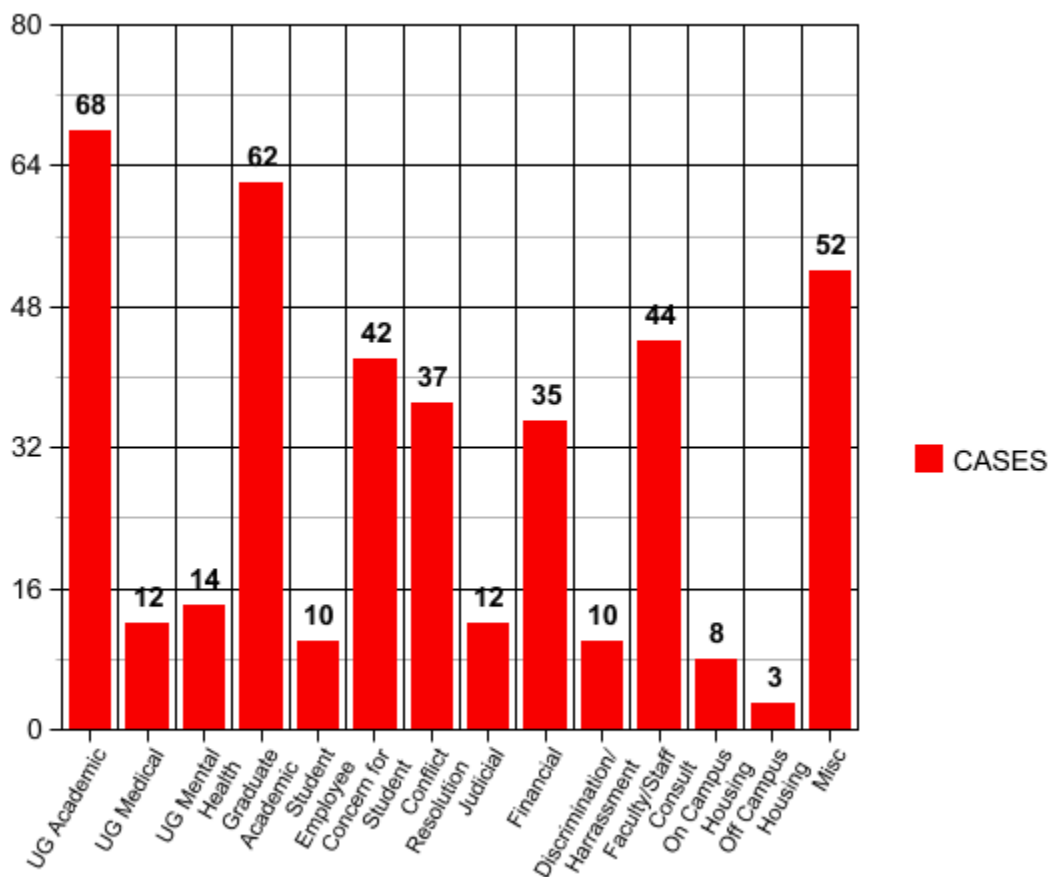


- Note: Each visitor to the office constitutes a unique case (If multiple students are involved in the same situation, collectively they are recorded as one case). A

contact refers to each interaction with a visitor and any contacts made to a campus entity.

- Caseloads were elevated in 2019-2022 due to the high number of Pack Essentials applications from students impacted by COVID and inflation.
- The student ombud handled faculty and staff ombud cases during the 22-23 academic year.

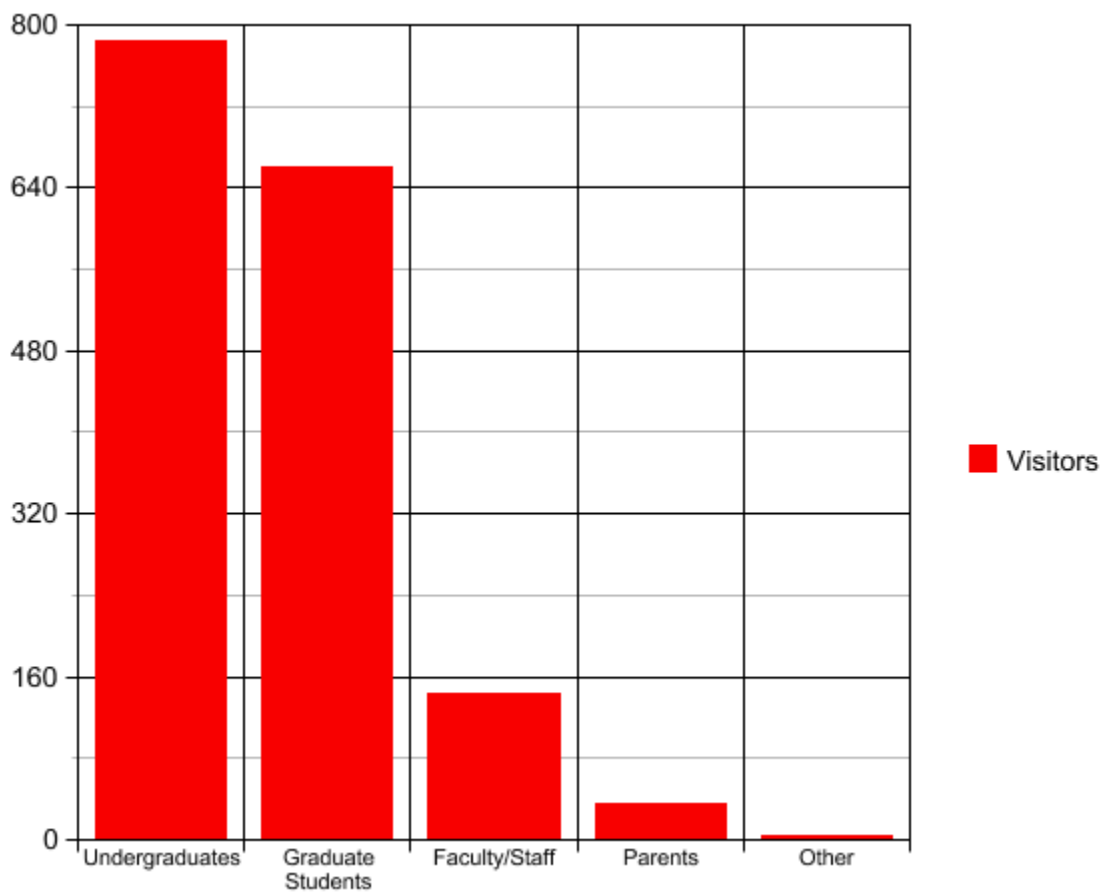
Types of Cases



- NOTE: Graph does not include Pack Essentials applications.
- General Academic concerns include grade disputes, concerns regarding treatment by professors and related academic policies.
- UG Academic (medical) often involved requests for assistance after some traumatic medical incident (car accident, difficult diagnosis, etc.)
- UG Academic (mental health) often involved requests for assistance during or after psychological distress (stress, hospitalization, etc.) and often times involved parents.

- Graduate Academic concerns include relationship issues with advisor/PI, disputes over intellectual property with PIs, and other general academic issues.
- Most judicial cases involved students wanting to understand their rights within the judicial process, specifically after an academic integrity charge.
- There were increases in undergraduate academic cases, undergraduate mental health concerns, cases related to DRO accommodations, conflict resolution and facilitated discussions, and faculty/staff consultations as compared to 2021-22.

Visitor Status



- Graduate students continue to utilize Student Ombud/Pack Essentials disproportionately, representing 40% of all visitors.
- Increased faculty and staff visitors due to Student Ombud covering cases during 22-23 academic year. Increase in faculty/staff/administrator consultations as well as facilitated discussions with PIs and graduate students.

Selected Cases & Recommendations

Recommendations are shared with units, departments, colleges, and administrators on an ongoing basis. *(Note: This is a partial list and efforts have been made to maintain confidentiality for the visitor. More specific issues and concerns are shared with the appropriate administrators per the Student Ombuds' charter).*

- Provided mediation support for several cases where students were having a contract/roommate dispute. Increased number of cases dealt with financial conflicts in which students left their apartments without taking responsibility for their financial obligations.
- Continue to connect with CARES team and Office of Institutional Equity and Diversity on an increasing number of cases.
- Increasingly provided leadership coaching to faculty, staff and administration on student life and personnel issues.
- Met with Office of Student Conduct, Division of Academic and Student Affairs and Graduate School to share feedback and discuss student trends.
- Shared concerns with appropriate campus leaders about financial stress many students are experiencing including graduate student stipends, significant increases in off-campus rent, and impact of inflation on students' overall food, housing, and financial security.
- Concerns expressed by families living in ES King and Western Manor who have been made to vacate their apartments due to occupancy issues (family size over 4) - impact on families and kids' schools. Surfaced concern to University Housing.
- Several cases with graduate students on IP and authorship issues.
- Continue to receive concerns from students about being victims of scams (check cashing scams; falsified identity including posing as faculty, law enforcement and government officials; gift card scams; and extortion based on online activity/altered videos). Connected with Student Legal Services and Office of International Services.
- Provided facilitation in high profile case and helped bring entrenched conflict to a successful resolve (consulted with OGC/Prevention Services and departmental leadership).
- Surfaced concern from graduate student that PI was allegedly sexually harassing and worked with OIED to ensure case was investigated.
- Increase in calls from parents: mental health concerns, roommate issues, concern for their students' health.
- Concern shared by parent of alleged racism by sorority.

- Facilitated multiple discussions among roommates experiencing conflict.
- Surfaced alleged concern that TA was sleeping with student - shared with department head and consulted on next steps.
- Consulted with faculty and staff on how to address a concern from a student that a fellow student shared confidential information from an online discussion forum with their mutual site supervisor (from their full-time employment).
- Met with Graduate School, Prevention Services, and University Legal regarding concerns with a specific graduate program and how academic decisions are being made and the impact on student mental health.
- Continued to see an increase in students claiming faculty/DRO aren't providing needed accommodations. Review of cases did not yield the same conclusion but does point to increased (and in some cases, unrealistic) expectations from students about what accommodations should be approved.
- Worked with LGBTQ Pride Center & Registration & Records to address concerns from trans-identified alumni who must pay a fee to have their diplomas reprinted with preferred names.
- Assisted student who was reported to Student Conduct/OIED for alleged stalking behaviors. Charges were dropped. Student had concerns with how long the process took as well as some process concerns and how they were treated.
- On-going support for graduate students with mental health concerns and PIs. Provided consultation to faculty members on how to share expectations while also providing needed support.
- Consulted with University Development staff regarding donor's daughter's experience on study abroad several years ago.
- Consulted with faculty member on how to respond to student who shared concerns about how mental health is addressed on campus. Surfaced feedback to mental health taskforce.
- Concern from several students who do research at Kannapolis Campus about the lack of access to student fee resources. Surfaced concern about how students on "satellite" campuses are supported.
- Student alleged observing fellow student doing assignments in Moodle for fraternity brothers as part of a pledging process.
- Assisted with several cases of alleged bullying by fellow students - parents/family involved in both cases.
- Surfaced concern that PI pulled funding from an international graduate student two weeks before fall semester started.

Selected Faculty/Staff cases:

- Consultation with supervisor regarding HR issue with direct report.
- Consultation with faculty on how to address student with substance abuse problem/concerns for safety in the lab.
- Staff member concerned with departmental climate and expectations for their role in the department.
- Staff member with concerns of how workman's compensation case was settled.
- Assisted post-doc with workplace conflict.
- Facilitated dialogue between faculty member and department head.
- Met with staff member concerned that their job was not classified correctly based on what they are being asked to do.
- Consulted with administrator on student written student complaint.
- Consulted with faculty member on personal concerns.
- Consulted on a conflict between a staff member and their former employer on campus.
- Continued to see an increase in faculty/staff/post doc cases - successfully mediated conflicts between faculty members; helped facilitate dialogue between faculty (PIs) and PhD students.
- Advised a staff member who received performance concerns from supervisor.
- Faculty member concerned with how faculty colleague treats female-identified students.
- Conflict among faculty colleagues: Helped develop a strategy to address the conflict in a way that both members were comfortable.
- Assisted staff member who was not receiving appropriate pay.
- Staff member wanted to process their experience with microaggressions from a fellow staff member and what options they had to address their concerns.
- Faculty member who had concerns with supervisor. Was engaged in formal processes with college leadership/HR but wanted to process their experience.

Student Ombud Assessment:

- Based on a survey of visitors to Student Ombuds Services:
(49 responses representing a 16% response rate)
 - 93% indicated that scheduling was easy and convenient
 - 96% reported being able to meet in a timely manner
 - 94% said Ombud was courteous and respectful
 - 92% indicated Ombud was objective throughout interactions

- 92% reported Ombud was knowledgeable of institutional policies and procedures.
- 96% trust Ombud to maintain confidentiality
- 88% indicated Ombud helped identify and evaluate options
- 85% would refer others to Student Ombuds Services

- Selected comments from the survey included:

“Mike was very helpful. I expected a different answer about COVID policies than he provided, but he was able to clearly explain the rationale behind the policies that existed and recommend my possibilities for action.” – Graduate Student

“Helped me process my problem and work through the feelings.” – Undergraduate Student

“Mike was wonderful at listening, validating and remaining neutral throughout the meeting.” – Faculty

“Student ombuds remained impartial. I guess I was seeking something more partial, but that's not really possible.” – Graduate Student

“During my meeting with Mike I felt completely relaxed, and the conversation flowed easily even though we discussed some very heavy topics. I felt like a priority and that the reasons for which I had come were addressed beyond my expectations.” – Staff

“While knowledgeable, the Ombuds came off as trying to dismiss my concerns and told me fixing them was likely impossible.” – Graduate student seeking clarification on policy

“My experience with the Student Ombuds service was fantastic, it was non-partial, and answered all of my questions about university policies. The ombudsman laid out all of my options and allowed me the ability to choose which option worked best for me after going through the pros and cons of each.” – Graduate Student

“Excellent resource for resolving conflicts and helping students” – Faculty

"I had such an amazing experience! They were very kind and respectful, helped me solve my issue and responded quickly and appropriately." – Faculty seeking consult on student issue

Pack Essentials Assessment:

- Based on a survey of students who completed a Pack Essentials application: (125 responses representing a 14% response rate)
 - 92% indicated Ombud followed up within 24 hours
 - 97% felt concerns were listened to and treated with respect
 - 95% felt comfortable talking to the Ombud
 - 94% felt Ombud was knowledgeable about campus and community resources
 - 90% felt Ombud provided options and appropriate resources
 - 87% felt support was helpful and allowed them to focus on their success
 - 95% said it was important to them that Ombud was a confidential resource

- Selected comments from the survey included:

"Ombuds were kind and understanding. Resource provided much relief and is a definite contributor to my success as a student."

"Great assistance for the community unfortunately I did not like knowing I have to pay back the money for the resources. It was truly heartbreaking which I had to take out a school loan to help me for the academic year."

"I found it to be very helpful and they did everything in their power to assist me. Their help made the difference in me successfully finishing my degree (and subsequently becoming admitted to graduate school (at NC State))"

"Has always been incredibly helpful to a shocking level."

"I do wish there was more they could do for students facing a sudden medical crisis like I was. I will say they did seem to try their to best to help in ways that they could. For that, I am very thankful."

"I hope you all can expand the program to help as many as needed!"

"More students need to be aware of all the resources available to them!"

"All the folks I spoke with were very kind and knowledgeable...I am grateful for this support and this support needs to not have any restrictions as to how many times you can be awarded help."

"Interaction with Student Ombuds was awesome! It was quick and not a lengthy process. I appreciated that I was treated with lots of respect and empathy. I also appreciate not needing to provide lots of documentation for verification."

"Not entirely sure who I talked with on the phone, but they really got me through the year and times when I was struggling which was a couple times my last two semesters."

Recommendations and concerns for the future

- Caseloads within the ombud office have grown significantly since inception in 2014. With the addition of faculty and staff ombud cases during the 22-23 academic year, I had less time than in previous years to focus on preventative strategies and educational outreach to help prevent conflict and promote a healthy campus community. Cases involving conflicts and the demand for facilitated discussions to resolve conflicts were up dramatically this year. My focus for the new year will be prioritizing outreach and developing modules for conflict resolution strategies that can be used around campus.
- Demand for Pack Essentials resources has continued at a steady rate, although at a somewhat lower rate than the levels we saw during COVID. Inflation and dramatic increases in housing rental costs have had a dramatic impact on students' food/housing/financial security.

Our efforts to partner with OIS and other campus departments to ensure that students have the resources to successfully complete their degrees, while at the same time, reinforcing the purpose of the Pack Essentials resources as an emergency resource post-COVID, have proven successful as we have "reset" the expectations of the Pack Essentials resources for emergency and unexpected financial concerns. We continued to receive many applications from graduate and international students. The recent announcement of the increases in the minimum GSSP support over the next two years will have a positive impact on graduate student food and housing security for those on GSSP. The large number of

unfunded graduate students (mostly master's students) will continue to be a challenge.

Another major concern is the lack of affordable housing on and around campus. With off campus rents rising over 20% last year along with the anticipated growth in engineering students, the need for more affordable housing is essential to our students' success. The addition of University Towers in the on-campus inventory will provide some relief, but the need is much greater. One impact I am monitoring is the pressure for students to sign leases for off campus apartments much earlier than in the past (as early as the fall for the following academic year). Not only does this add tremendous pressure to students and families, but it is impacting students who do not return at the end of the academic year for personal or academic reasons, but still have an expensive lease.

Our partnership with HOST (a local non-profit focused on expanding housing options for students through identifying families who will agree to host students in their homes) continues to be an important resource, especially in the most severe cases where students have exhausted their financial aid and Pack Essentials options. While this program is an innovative solution and HOST is working to expand their capacity, the university must consider other robust housing options as well to be prepared for the growing enrollment and ever-increasing challenging housing market.

- As mentioned in last year's report, the vision for the Pack Essentials Hub will help us better meet the needs of students experiencing food, housing and/or financial insecurity. With the successful relocation of the Feed the Pack food pantry to North Hall along with the plan to expand services to develop a greater sense of community among students experiencing challenges while providing a one-stop resource for students, we are poised to fully implement the vision. The staffing of the Hub is essential to our advancement of this important work. Transitioning to the proposed Student Advocacy Office will take coordinated communication to ensure a seamless impact on students and reflective of the many relationships that have been built over the years with campus and community partners, alumni, donors, and friends. We have made a lot of progress in positioning NC State as a national leader in basic needs support for students and I am committed to continuing the work moving forward.