



UNIVERSITY OF NORTH TEXAS SYSTEM FIVE-YEAR PUBLIC INFORMATION REPORT (FY 2019 - 2023)

“Democracy thrives in the light of day and corruption breeds in darkness. It is vital for the citizens of this state to understand their rights to access public information and for government officials to understand their obligations to provide such access.”

- U.S. Senator and Former Texas Attorney General John Cornyn

INTRODUCTION

The Texas Public Information Act (PIA or the Act) requires each governmental body to make information involving the transaction of official governmental business available to the public upon request, unless the information is confidential under state or federal law. The UNT System Public Information Program (Program) ensures each component of the UNT System meets its responsibilities under the Act. This report summarizes the Program’s public information activity during the 2019-2023 fiscal years.

ABOUT THE UNT SYSTEM PUBLIC INFORMATION PROGRAM

The UNT System Office of the General Counsel (OGC) administers the Public Information Program.¹ The Program’s primary function is to respond efficiently to request for information related to the transaction of official business by the UNT System and its component institutions. This function includes:

- Collecting information from the component institutions upon receipt of a public information request and providing responsive information to the public

¹ This structure is common in higher education systems and institutions across the state of comparable size. The respective Office of General Counsel administers the public information programs at Texas Tech University System, the University of Houston System, and Texas State University System. The University of Texas administered the program out of the Office of General Counsel. The Texas A&M University System operates the program out of the Office of General Counsel. Each one these two systems, as well as some of their campuses use a third-party vendor to receive requests.

- Reviewing information collected from the component institutions and determining whether it must or can be withheld from disclosure under one of the PIA’s enumerated exceptions
- Releasing requested information to the public when the information is not confidential or not otherwise excepted from public disclosure
- Maintaining a public information webpage that provides the public and component institutions operational services and educational information related to the PIA
- Providing PIA training
- Collecting and analyzing data related to PIR activity to enhance efficiency and compliance with state law

PUBLIC INFORMATION ACTIVITY – FIVE-YEAR OVERVIEW

UNT SYSTEM ENTERPRISE PIR ACTIVITY - PRE- AND POST-COVID-19

Public information activity System-wide is approaching the 2019 pre-COVID-19 pandemic levels.² For the five-year period covering FY2019 to FY2023, the UNT System Enterprise received 1,553 public information requests; an average of 311 requests per year.

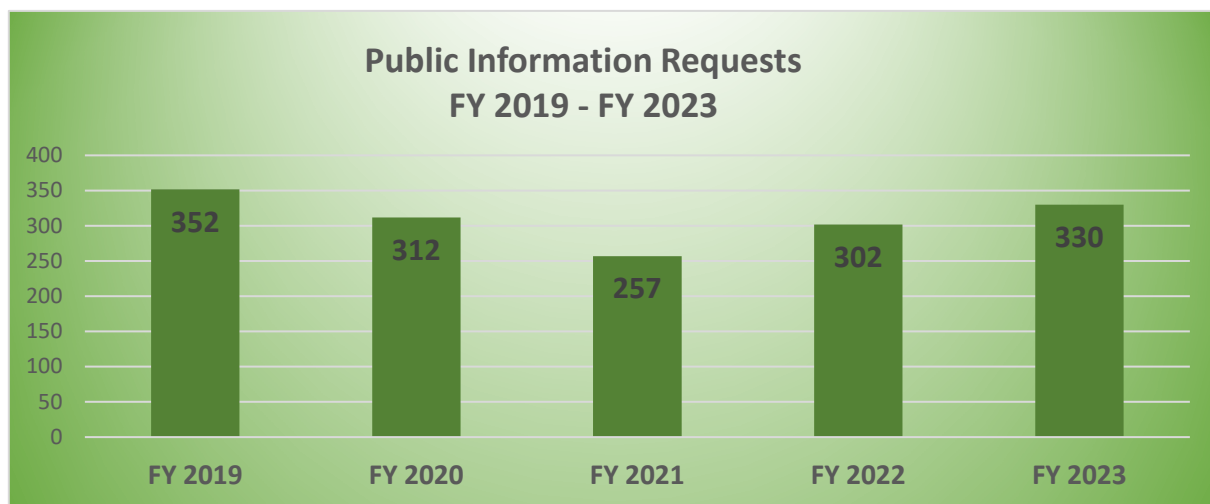


Figure 1

² The World Health Organization classified COVID-19 as a pandemic March 11, 2020. David J. Sencer Center for Disease Control and Prevention Museum COVID-19 Timeline. <https://www.cdc.gov/museum/timeline/covid19.html>. The President Biden Administration ended the COVID-19 public health emergency March 11, 2023. Northwestern University Medicine COVID-19 Pandemic Timeline. <https://www.nm.org/healthbeat/medical-advances/new-therapies-and-drug-trials/covid-19-pandemic-timeline>.

UNT SYSTEM PIR ACTIVITY BY COMPONENT

A breakdown of activity by component over the five-year review period shows the UNT campus received a total of 1,132 PIRs for an annual average of 226. Requests have not reached pre-COVID-19 numbers but are trending upward from a mid-pandemic low of 185 requests. The UNT System Administration received 215 (annual average 43). Requests also are below pre-COVID-19 numbers. The UNT Health Science Center received 117 requests for an average of 23 each fiscal year. Requests for Health Science Center public information increased throughout the pandemic. UNT Dallas received 89 requests for an average of 18 annually. Request have returned to pre-pandemic numbers.

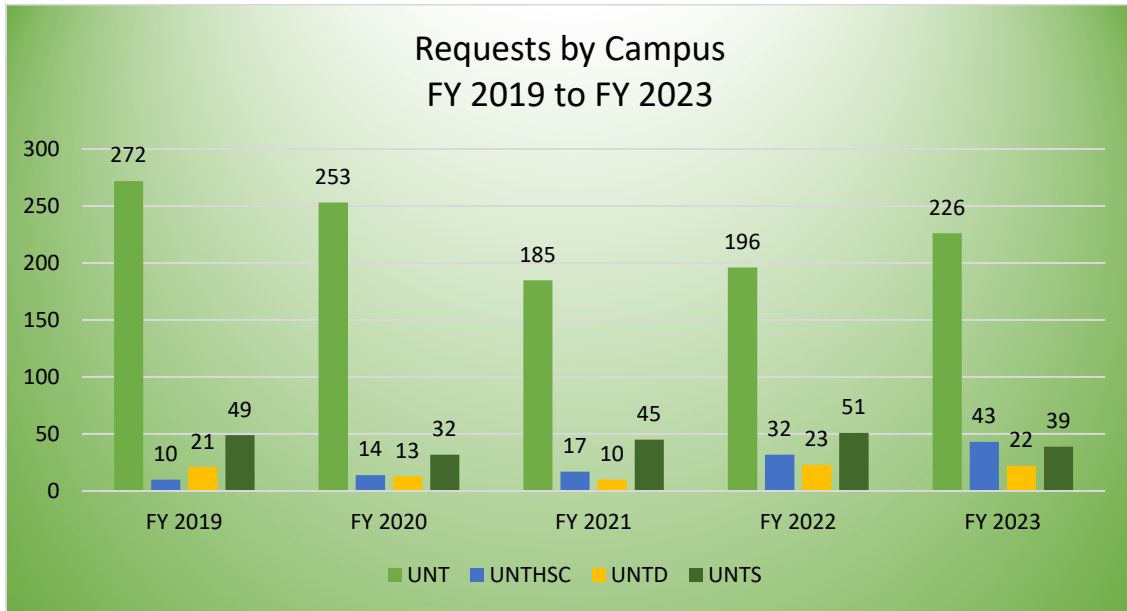


Figure 2

PIR ACTIVITY – FOUR-YEAR INSTITUTIONS WITH AVERAGE ENROLLMENT ABOVE 37,000

Over the five-year review period, the University of North Texas averaged fewer public information request than other comparable-size universities in the State of Texas.

Institution	Annual Average
Texas A&M University	1,233
University of Texas at Austin	1,220
University of Texas at Arlington	457
University of Houston	394
Texas Tech University	371
Texas State University	345
University of North Texas	242

Figure 3

PIR ACTIVITY – FOUR-YEAR INSTITUTIONS WITH AVERAGE ENROLLMENT BELOW 17,000

The number of public information requests received by UNT Dallas, which is appreciably younger than university's in the state with comparable enrollments, was notably lower than its more established counterparts.

Institution ³	Annual Average
Texas Southern University	217
Lamar University	152
Tarleton State University	150
University of North Texas at Dallas	15

Figure 4

PIR ACTIVITY – HEALTH SCIENCE CENTERS

Institution	Annual Average
UT Southwestern	297
UT HSC San Antonio	73
UNT Health Science Center	16

Figure 5

PIR ACTIVITY – PAGES RELEASED

The 1,553 PIRs the UNT System received between FY 2019 and FY 2023 required the components to collect and release a total of 102,221 of pages. This amounted to an average of 20,444 pages collected per year, or 66 pages collected per request.

Component	Total Pages Released	Percentage
University of North Texas	60,339	59%
UNT System Administration	20,077	20%
UNT Health Science Center	18,915	19%
UNT Dallas	2,890	.03%

Figure 6

³ UNT Dallas was founded in 2010 (<https://www.untDallas.edu/about-us/unt-dallas-milestones.php>); Lamar University in 1923 (<https://www.lamar.edu/about-lu/the-university/history.html>); Texas Southern University in 1927 (<https://www.tsu.edu/about/>); and Tarleton State University in 1899 (<https://www.tarleton.edu/about/historical-timeline/>).

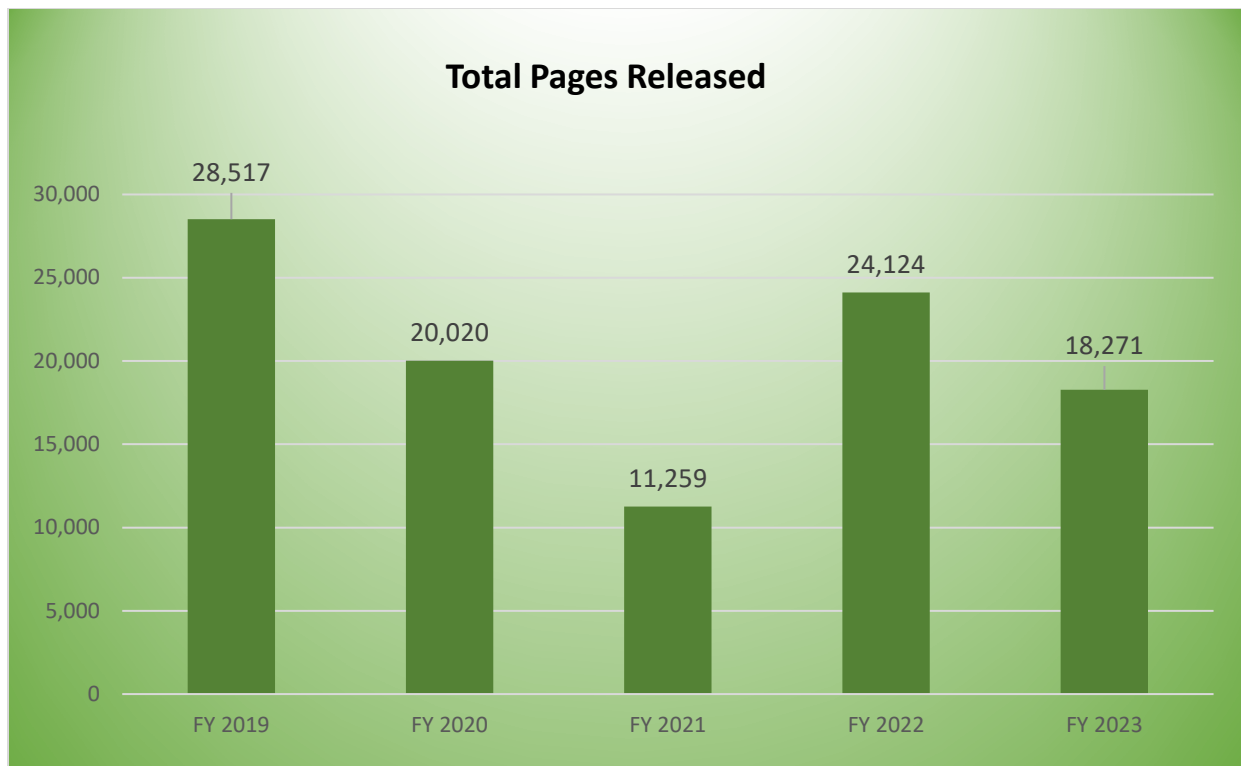


Figure 7

PIR ACTIVITY – COLLECTING INFORMATION

The UNT System components expended an estimated 568 hours responding to public information requests. This total equates to each component spending an average of 114 hours per year or approximately three 40-hour work weeks collecting information responsive to request, including those from legislators, public advocacy groups, the media, and the general public.

PIR ACTIVITY – ASSESSING & COLLECTING FEES

The Public Information Act allows governmental bodies to collect fees associated with making information available to the public. The Act authorizes the Office of the Attorney General to adopt rules that agencies must follow when assessing and collecting fees associated with making information available to the public.⁴ In accordance with these rules, the UNT System Public Information Program charges \$15.00 per hour for general work collecting information and reviewing it to determine whether the records contain information that is not open to the public under state law.⁵ The Program assesses a

⁴ Tex. Government Code, section 552.262.

⁵ In calculating charges for reviewing documents the Program has determined that on average, one page of information can be reviewed in 20 seconds or 180 pages per hour.

fee of \$26.00 per hour for work performed by IT professionals in accessing and producing electronically-stored information.⁶

During the five-year review period, the Program collected a total of \$4,597.00 in fees.

Component	Fees Collected
University of North Texas	\$3,667
UNT Health Science Center	\$777
UNT Dallas	\$0
UNT System Administration	\$0

Figure 8

UNT employees spent approximately 335 hours responding to PIRs; an average of 30 minutes per request.

Over the same time period, Health Science Center employees spent approximately 105 hours responding to requests; an estimated cost of \$13 per request.

UNT Dallas employees spent approximately 16 hours responding to request, at a total estimated cost of \$240.00.

⁶ Title 1 Texas Administrative Code, section 70.3.

CATEGORIES OF INFORMATION REQUESTED

From FY 2019 to FY 2023, the general public and media generally requested 12 types of information: Academic, Advancement, Athletics, Equal Opportunity, Executive (information directly related to Chief Executive Officers), Finance, Human Resources, Police (law enforcement activity), Purchasing & Payments, Registrar, Research, and Student Affairs. Information that did not fall into one of the 12 defined categories is characterized as “other.” Each category is described in the Appendix to this report.⁷

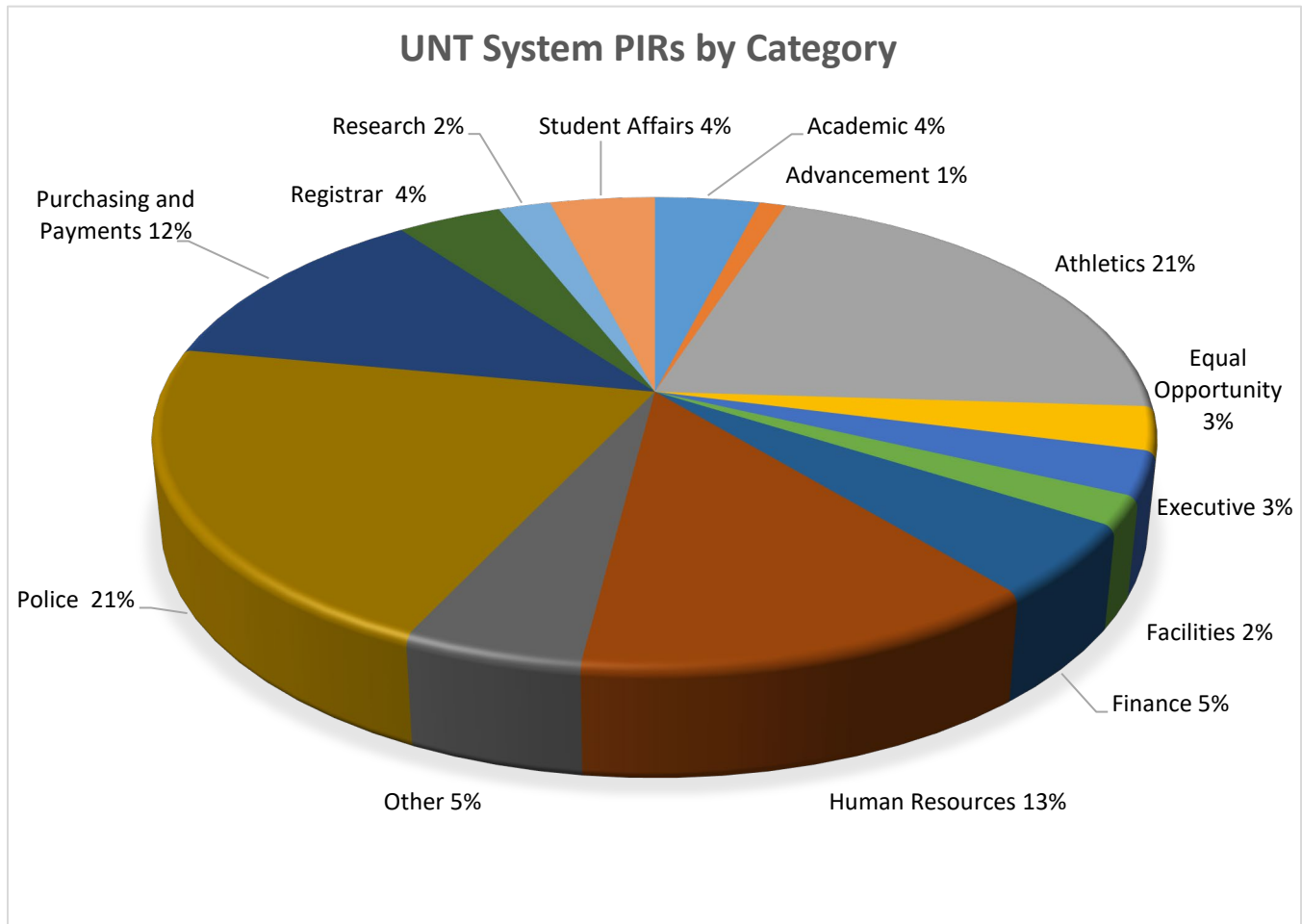


Figure 9

OFFICE OF GENERAL COUNSEL ACTIVITY RELATED TO PUBLIC INFORMATION REQUESTS

⁷ The Program has collected data on the number and types of information requested since 1999. Twice each year, the program reviews the data to assess trends, including trends in the types of information being requested.

The Public Information Program is administered by the Office of General Counsel. However, the Program is primarily an administrative or operational function. The legal component of the public information function entails reviewing information to determine whether it must or may be withheld from public disclosure, and writing legal briefs for submission to the Office of the Attorney General Open Records Division when information is confidential or otherwise excepted from public disclosure under one of the Public Information Act’s exceptions.

During the five-year period covered by this report, the Office of General Counsel reviewed 1,553 requests and 149,420 pages of information. The office researched, prepared and submitted a total of 199 requests for open records rulings on behalf of the component institutions.⁸ Figure 10 shows the number of requests for ruling submitted each fiscal year by PIR category.

Category	FY19	FY20	FY21	FY22	FY23	Total
Academic	1	8	1	4	2	16
Advancement	0	0	1	1	0	2
Athletics	3	2	4	4	0	13
Equal Opportunity	1	3	2	5	2	13
Executive	3	4	1	2	3	13
Finance	1	1	2	0	0	4
Human Resources	4	3	0	2	5	14
Other	3	1	3	2	2	11
Purchasing & Payments	11	6	12	5	3	37
Police	23	15	6	8	10	62
Research	2	4	4	1	0	11
Student Affairs	1	2	0	0	0	3
Total	53	49	36	34	27	199

Figure 10

CATEGORIES OF PUBLIC INFORMATION REQUESTED BY COMPONENT

⁸ The PIA requires governmental bodies to submit legal briefs each time the body wishes to withhold information from public disclosures, all information except social security numbers, driver’s license and license plate numbers, email addresses of a member of the public, direct deposit, I-9 form and attachments, W-2 and W-4 forms, DD-214 form and other military discharge records, and fingerprints.

UNIVERSITY OF NORTH TEXAS

From FY2019 to FY2023, UNT received a total of 1,132 PIRs, an average of 226 requests per year. Requests for law enforcement and athletics department information were the most requested types of information, both by the general public and the media. The campus received 325 requests for police reports. Requests for athletics-related information generally sought employment agreements, athletics department employee salary data, game contracts, financial reports, non-confidential information from student-athlete end-of-year or program exit interviews, apparel contracts, and expense records related to travel and recruitment.

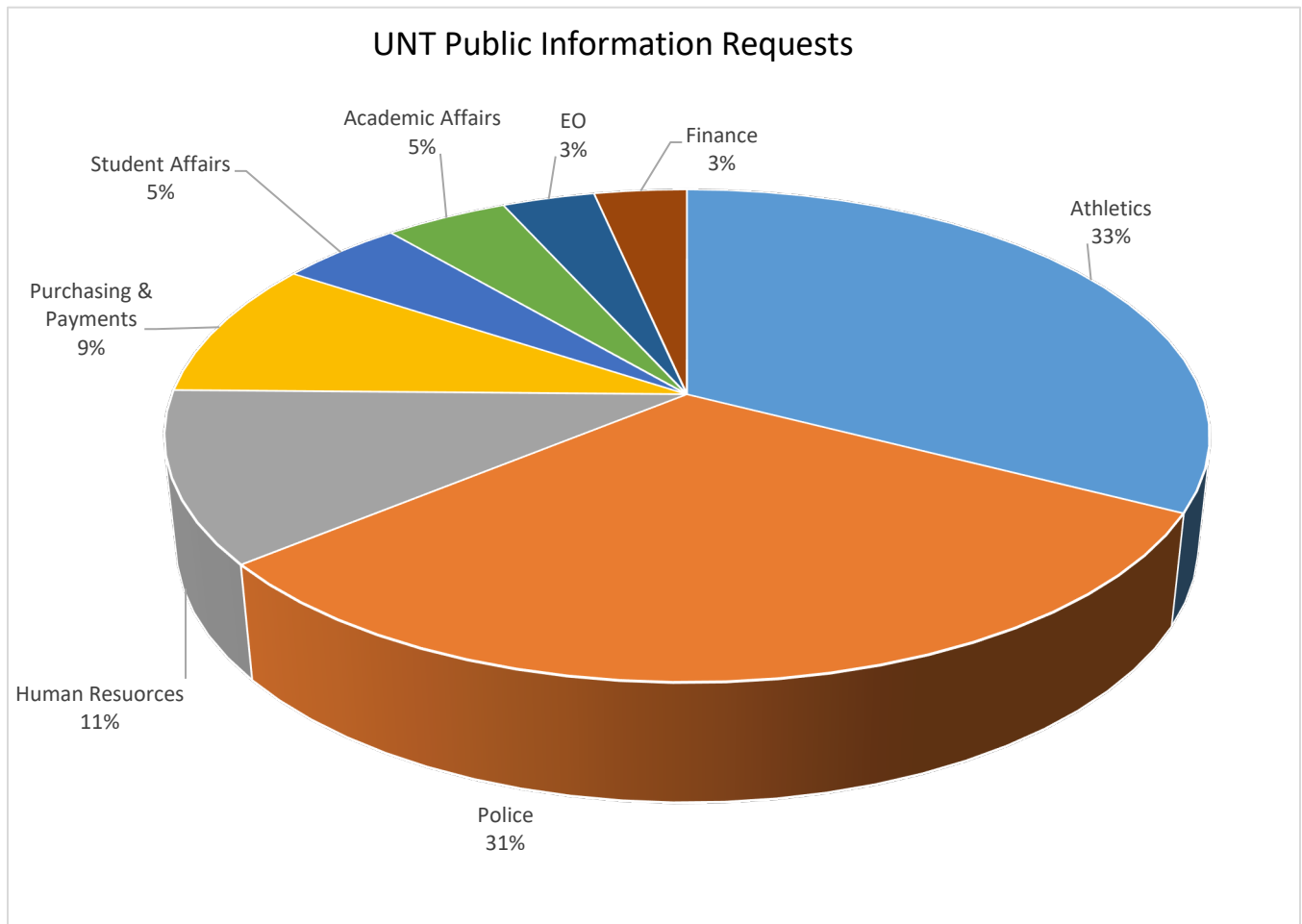


Figure 11

UNT Health Science Center

The Health Science Center received 117 requests from FY2019 to FY2023, an average of 23 per year. Requestors generally sought personnel records, procurement documents, police reports, and research information. The majority of the requests were for human resources, research, and procurement records.

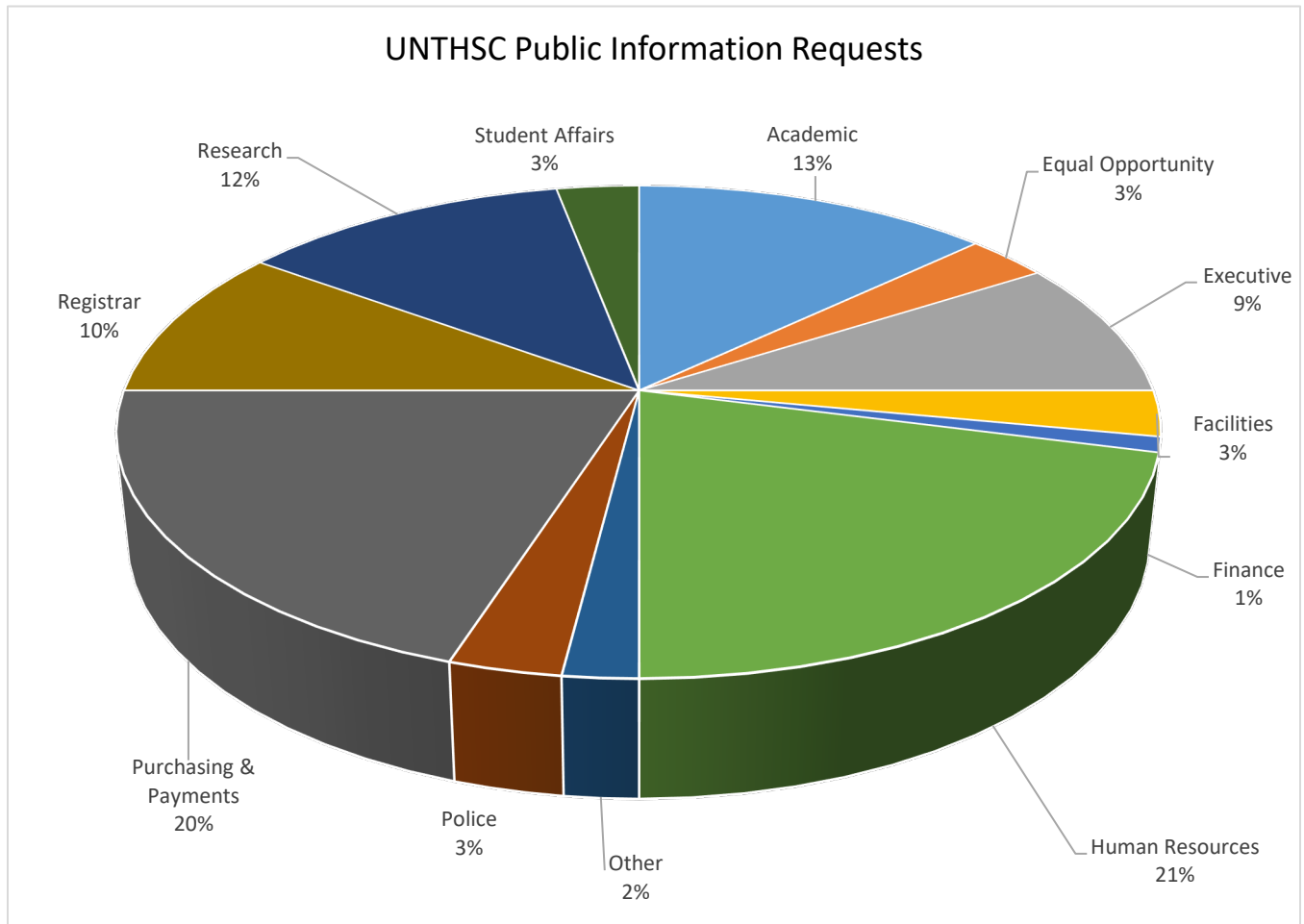


Figure 12

UNT Dallas

The Dallas campus received 89 requests during the five-year review period, an average of 18 per year.

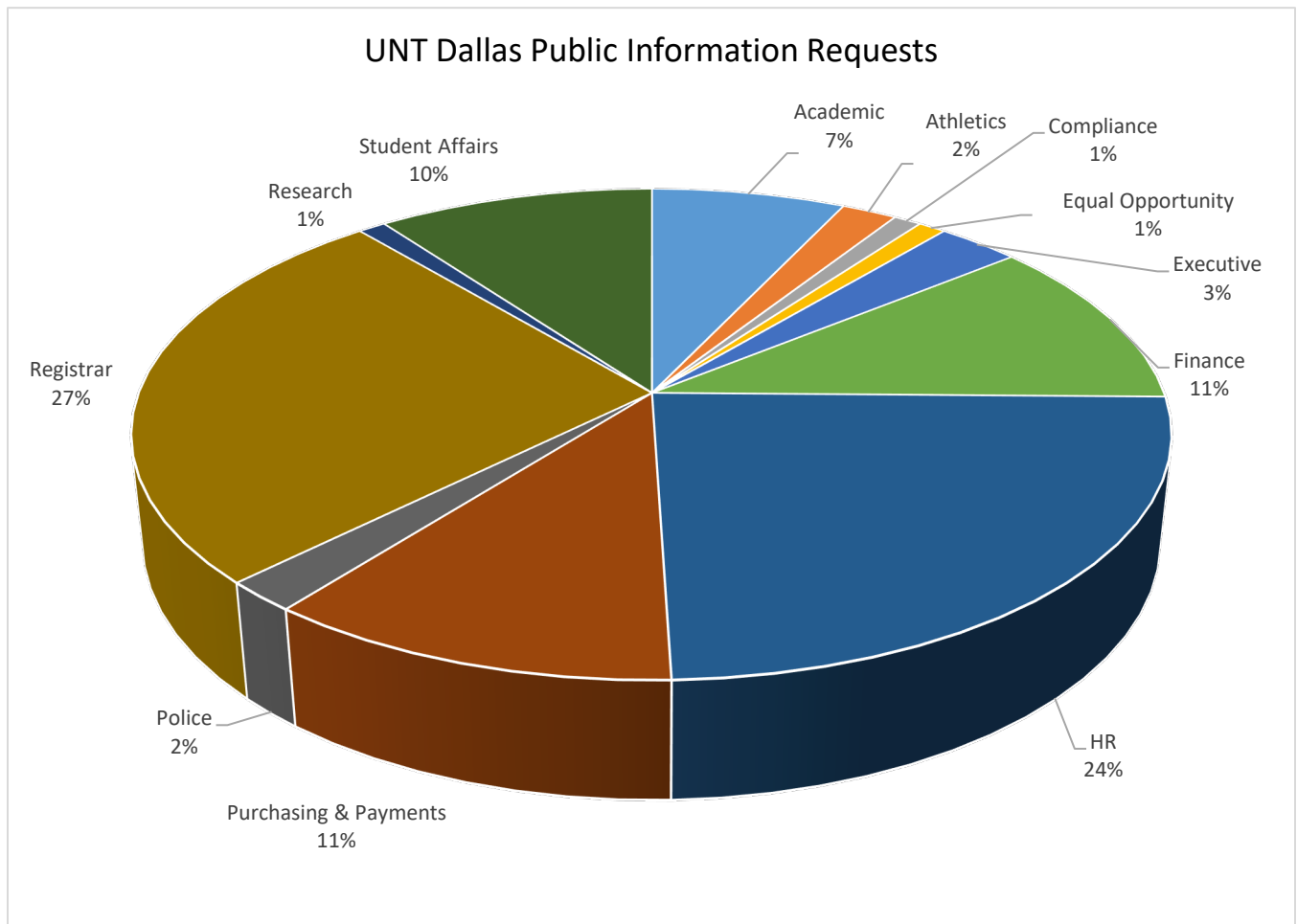


Figure 13

PUBLIC INFORMATION PROGRAM OUTREACH – EMPLOYEE RESOURCES

The Public Information Program provides in-person training covering the Public Information Act to UNT System Enterprise officials and employees tailored to each component and to each operational or academic unit as appropriate. In addition to educational information on its webpage, the Program periodically develops and publishes educational materials for officials and employees including:

The Public Information Act: Quick Reference Guide

The Public Information Act: Privately-Owned Devices and Email Accounts

UNT System Public Information Program: Waiving or Reducing Charges

PUBLIC INFORMATION PROGRAM OUTREACH – PUBLIC RESOURCES

The Program's webpage contains information on how to make a request, including an email dedicated solely to receipt of requests. In addition, the webpage has a Public Frequently Asked Questions page that provides answers to questions about the PIA.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The UNT System Office of General Counsel and Public Information Officer extend thanks to employees at UNT, UNTHSC, UNT Dallas and the UNT System Administration who work diligently fulfilling their open government obligations to the public. The OGC and PIO also thank UNT System Public Information Coordinator Alice Hawes who administers the Program's day-to-day operation and who compiled the data and graphs in this report.

APPENDIX

PUBLIC INFORMATION REQUEST CATEGORY DESCRIPTIONS

Category	Description
Academic Affairs	Faculty Files, Syllabi, Course Evaluations
Advancement	Donor Information, Alumni Information
Athletics	Employment Contracts, Game Contracts, NCAA Reports
Equal Opportunity	Investigation Reports and Statistics
Executive	Compensation, Expenditures (related to the Chancellor or a President)
Finance	Budgets, Expenditures
Human Resources	Personnel Files, Salaries, Demographic Data
Police	Crime Reports, Security Video, Body-worn Camera and Vehicle Dash-camera Video and Audio
Purchasing & Payments	Requests for Production, Bid Responses, Contracts
Registrar	Student Directory Information
Research	Scholarly and Commercial
Student Affairs	Housing Incident Reports, Student Misconduct Data, Student Organization Funding