



Brandeis University Ombuds

Supporting an ethical and civil culture encouraging mutual understanding and resolution through respectful dialogue and fair practices.

Annual Report: December 2017 – June 2018

Introduction

This is the first “annual” report on the activities of the Brandeis University Ombuds Office, “Ombuds Office” and as such includes data from the month of its inception, December 1, 2017 through June 30, 2018.

The Ombuds Office provides support in helping all members of the Brandeis community resolve issues (referred to hereafter as “visitors”). The Office serves as a resource that is confidential, independent, impartial, and informal.

The Office was established in December 2017 at the recommendation of the Brandeis Chief Diversity Officer and Vice President of Diversity, Equity & Inclusion, Dr. Mark Brimhall-Vargas. The concept of a fully-staffed office that would serve the entire campus had its roots in Ford Hall 2015 and the demand by students that there be an Ombuds service for students. The services were broadened when Don Greenstein was hired as the lead Ombuds, joining collateral duty Ombuds, Cathy Burack, and Elena Lewis. The three constitute the Ombuds team and serve the entire Brandeis community. The team is available to all students, faculty, staff, alumni, and anyone who has a situation, related issue, or conflict involving Brandeis University or anyone affiliated with Brandeis. The Ombuds staff practices in accordance with the professional organizational standards of the International Ombuds Association (IOA).

The Office’s primary purpose is to provide a confidential resource, where visitors can bring their concerns, questions, obtain assistance in self-empowered problem-solving, and support in considering their possible options for handling difficult situations. The Ombuds Office also serves as an alternative to formal channels of dispute resolution. The Office also provides information, while respecting Visitor confidentiality, to University leaders on trends, policies or procedures, and patterns of issues that raise concerns so that they may be prevented from recurring or escalating.

This report provides information on the milestones and accomplishments of the Ombuds Office in its first seven months of operation, and includes selected data on visits, referrals; issues and trends that were shared with senior administrators, and goals for the 2018-19 academic year.

Milestones and Accomplishments

Establishing the Office

Both a milestone and an accomplishment, establishing the Ombuds Office was a major focus of the activities of the past seven months. With the campus-wide support and assistance of the Brandeis

Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Office, the Library and Technology Services, Student Affairs, and various administrative support staff, the Ombuds Office has:

- a secure, private and accessible office within the Goldfarb library
- designated email addresses and phone numbers for each Ombuds
- a functioning website (<http://www.brandeis.edu/ombuds/>)
- a private data management system
- an Office Charter
- establishment of staffing patterns to ensure maximum accessibility for Visitors
- Visitor response/call-backs within 24 hours
- an anonymous feedback survey for Visitors

Outreach.

Outreach activities focused on the official launch of the Office, developing collateral material, fostering collaborative relationships with other service providers on campus, and speaking with faculty, staff and student groups. Accomplishments here include:

1. VP Brimhall-Vargas's announcement letter to the Brandeis Community, January 10, 2018
2. Articles in the January 12, 2018 *Justice* and the *The Hoot*, January 12, 2018
3. Handout used at meetings and events
4. Speaking with numerous office, committees, and centers campus-wide
5. Meeting with a variety of staff, faculty, and students

Visitors are finding out about the Office through a variety of means. About a quarter of visitors heard about the office through a friend or colleague (peer), and 15% were referred by a non-peer faculty or staff member. Approximately 10% learned about the office through a poster, brochure, or advertisement, and an equal number visited the website. Our early data suggest that continuing to use our multi-pronged strategy of written material, office, classroom and event visits, speeches, individual and group meetings, and the Ombuds website is the most effective approach to making people aware of the office and its services.

Visitor and Office Statistics

Total number of Visitors: 157

Visits

Tables 1 and 2 below show the numbers of sessions and hours spent with Visitors this quarter.

Table 1: Hours spent with Visitors

Hours	Mean	2.3	41.7%
	Median	1.5	27.1%
	Minimum	.50	16.7%
	Maximum	7.0	14.6%
	Total Visitor Hrs	117.75	100.0%

Table 2: Number of sessions spent with Visitors

		Visitors	Percent
Sessions	1	57	36%
	2	26	17%
	3 or more	15	10%
	Not indicated	59	37%
	Total	157	100.0%

Primary Issues

Table 3 below shows categories of primary issues that were addressed during the visit. Note that more than one could be identified for a single visit.

Issue	Percentage
Interpersonal (peer-to-peer personal issue)	12%
Employment (job related)	37%
Education (related to faculty, students, classroom issue)	13%
Personal (health, family, self)	7%
Other (informational or other unique issue/concern)	31%

Primary Referrals

Table 4 below shows referrals made to other offices.

Table 4: Referrals (check all that apply)

Referred To	Percentage
Chief Diversity Officer	17%
Compliance Officer	1%
Counseling Center	7%
Dean – Academic	4%
Disabilities Services	1%
EAP	5%
Gender and Sexuality Center	3%
Human Resources	19%
Health Service	1%
ICC	1%
International Students and Scholars Office	8%
Office of Prevention Services	2%
Spiritual and Religious Life	3%
Other including:	24%
Facilities	
IT	
Provost	
President	
Dean of Students	

Trends

As noted above, “Trends” is a discussion of themes and trends that are informed by our data and the issues raised by Visitors which we believe either signal the need, and/or present an opportunity, for intervention or action by campus leadership. Individual issues become “trends” when we recognize that multiple Visitors from one or more offices, departments, or schools throughout the University community are coming to see us about the same problem. The following are the trends that arose this year. These trends have been shared with Vice President and Chief Diversity Officer Mark Brimhall-Vargas.

Bullying between and among faculty/ staff.

A number of faculty and/or staff Visitors, both individuals and groups, have shared that they have felt bullied by superiors in their offices. The bullying is not gender-based. While many of the complaints have been about men bullying women, we have also encountered women bullying other women as well. While power differentials exist between the bully and their target, the bullying occurs across rank and role, i.e., staff toward other staff, tenured faculty toward other tenured faculty, contract employees being bullied by tenured faculty, staff being harassed by tenured and non-tenured faculty.

Contract Faculty Concerns

A few Visitors to the Ombuds office are individuals working as faculty under 1, 3, 5, or 7-year renewable contracts. While we are aware that the University’s contract employees are governed by the policies outlined in the Contract Faculty Guidelines, the Visitors explained that their employment arrangements are not as specific as they could be and that newer contract employees do not have a full understanding of the arrangements they are entering into with the University. It appears that some departments do not identify the existing Guidelines and some seem not to know that there is a policy governing contract employees at all. Visitors that knew about the policy felt that it was not applied or shared with those that it directly affects

Students coping with peers’ mental health issues

In our work we have noticed that some students, faculty and staff are encountering difficulties working and/or living with students who have serious mental health issues. It is important to note that the Visitors indicated that the students experiencing mental health issues are getting help from service providers both on and off campus. This observation presents a possible opportunity for education and training around how to successfully navigate relationships with those dealing with these issues (e.g., how to be compassionate AND take care of oneself).

Bias Related Incidents

The Ombuds have heard concerns of harassment and conflicts motivated by bias and/or prejudice based on race, gender, age, sexual orientation, and faith. This observation presents a concern that the university lacks a clear and uniform system for university members to address these challenges systematically.

Goals and Next Steps

The Ombuds team has established goals for the coming academic year.

Continuing Outreach

The Ombuds team has been meeting regularly and planning marketing meetings with all major offices and constituent groups within the University. The team will continue to schedule and meet with offices and groups on our list and is planning to schedule outreach trainings as well as brief meetings with students, faculty and staff in the upcoming semester. The Ombuds used the 2018-2019 academic calendar to leverage existing Brandeis events and deadlines to continue promoting our services, and partner with other offices that serve the Brandeis community. We will also attempt to make briefings to larger student groups and classes during the upcoming fall semester. The Ombuds office is working with HR to implement a video or in-person overview on the Ombuds Office for all new personnel in the coming year. We are also working with student orientations to inform all new and transfer students about the Ombuds service.

On-Going Service/Program Evaluation

The Ombuds Office is committed to continuous improvement to ensure we are operating efficiently and effectively as a unit. Last year we began to articulate the Ombuds Office theory of change to allow us to plan how to evaluate our impact on our Visitors and the Brandeis community over time. In the short term, we will use our confidential Visitor feedback survey to inform and strengthen our practices and services in support of the community.

Increased Service to the Campus Community

We have 4 goals we hope to accomplish to enhance services to all members of the Brandeis Community.

1. We plan to set up office hours in specific areas of the campus to make the Ombuds Office more visible and accessible to students, faculty and staff in the coming year.
2. With three part-time Ombuds on staff presently, we'd like to add a multilingual Ombuds to the team to expand the Ombuds team's availability and accessibility to the Brandeis Community.
3. We are developing an array of self-help materials for our website on communication, conflict resolution, self-care, harassment and bullying, and discrimination.
4. While we currently offer limited conflict resolution services to individuals and groups, we aim to expand the availability of this service.

The number of Visitors we have seen and the range of issues that have been brought to us underscore the necessity for the Ombuds Office. As we enter the 2018-19 academic year our goal is to serve the whole community in ways that are needed, desired and supportive for community growth in hopes to make Brandeis University a **healthier, compassionate, caring, respectful, and more productive community.**