



Brandeis University Ombuds

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

Annual Report: July 2018 – June 2019

Introduction

The Ombuds Office provides support in helping all members (referred to hereafter as “visitors”) of the Brandeis community resolve issues. 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 constituted the Ombuds team and served the entire Brandeis community throughout this academic year. The team was available to all students, faculty, staff, alumni, and anyone who had 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 and 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. Further, the Office provides information, while respecting visitor confidentiality, to the University community 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 during the 2018-2019 academic year, and includes selected data on visits, referrals, issues and trends.

Milestones and Accomplishments

Outreach

Outreach activities focused on fostering collaborative relationships with other service providers on campus, and speaking with faculty, staff, and student groups.

Outreach efforts this year included meetings with, and providing information to, the following individuals and groups:

Arts and Sciences Dean, Department Chairs

Brandeis Public Safety

Campus Police

Care Team

CATSS Library Staff

Club Conference for student leaders

Communications Office

Community Living, Tim Touchette, Director of CC & Assistant Dean of Student Affairs

Community Living - Community Advisor Program

Faculty member - request for training students who serve as mentors

Faculty Senate

Gender and Sexuality Center

Graduate Student Affairs, Steven Weglinski,

Heller Dean's Leadership Team

Heller School Town Hall

Hiatt Career Center

Human Resources, Larry Lewellen, Acting Director

International Business School Deans and Directors

International Students and Scholars Office (ISSO)

Library Services

New Student Orientation – both undergraduate and graduate students

Office of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion - sessions with new students and facilitators using the Brandeis University Multicultural Communication and Conflict Framework (MCCF)

Prevention, Advocacy & Resource Center (PARC) – Sarah Berg, Director

Rose Museum – Director and Staff

Sociology Department

Student Activities, Dennis Hicks, Director

Student Conduct and Student Affairs Office, Alex Rossetti, Director

Student Government President, Hannah Anderson

Student Services

The Brandeis Hoot, “Ombuds bring confidential resource to Brandeis community”, 9/28/18

Title IX investigator and Paula Slowe, Title IX Case Manager, Anthony Sciaraffa,

Various graduate student groups

Women and Gender Studies Program annual welcome back lunch

This past year the Ombuds heard about numerous interactions that were perceived as disrespectful among faculty and staff. To that end, the Ombuds office facilitated a number of retreats and meetings among a variety of teams all over campus. The work of the Ombuds office has been to help unit teams create working guiding principles for the entire group/office that can be implemented and followed on a regular basis.

Visitors reported finding out about the Office through a variety of means. Among visitors who shared how they learned about the Office, about 17% heard about it through a friend or colleague (peer) and 23% were referred by a non-peer faculty or staff member. Approximately 4.5% learned about the office through a poster, brochure, or advertisement, and 28% heard a talk about the office. Data continue to suggest that using our multi-pronged strategy of written material, office, classroom and event visits, speeches, individual and group meetings, is an effective approach to making people aware of the office and its services.

Visitor and Office Statistics

Total number of informal conflict resolution sessions: 12

Total number of visitors: 213

Visitor Role

Students	97
Faculty	19
Staff	87
Alumni	2
Others */	8

*/ Others- were Brandeis related visitors with concerns relating to Brandeis people, e.g., landlords, people adjoining Brandeis property, previous employees of the University, and parents of enrolled students.

Visits

Tables 1 and 2 below show the number of hours and sessions spent with visitors this year.

Table 1: Hours spent with visitors

Hours	
Mean	1.8
Minimum	.25
Maximum	15.0
Total visitor Hours	321.55

Table 2: Number of sessions spent with visitors

	Instances	Percent
1 session	132	62%
2 sessions	74	35 %
3 or more	7	3%
Total	213	100%

Primary Issues

Table 3 below shows categories of primary issues that were addressed during visits. Note that more than one could be identified during a single visit so percentages will not add to 100%.

Table 3: Primary issues (check all that apply)

Issue	Percentage
Interpersonal (peer-to-peer personal issue)	15%
Employment (job related)	43%
Education (related to faculty, students, classroom issue)	28%
Personal (health, family, self)	23 %
Other (informational or other unique issue/concern)*	25 %

*Other- See Addenda # 1

Primary Referrals

Table 4 below shows referrals made to other offices. Note that more than one referral could be made during a single visit so percentages will not add to 100%.

Table 4: Referrals (check all that apply)

Referred To	Percentage
Campus Police	2%
Chief Diversity Officer	33%
Counseling Center	9%
Dean – Academic	18%
Disabilities Services	7%
EAP	20%
Facilities	1%
Gender and Sexuality Center	2%
Health Service	3%
Human Resources	24%
Intercultural Center	.5%
International Students and Scholars Office	1%
Office of Equal Opportunity	3%
PARC/Office of Prevention Services	4%
Provost	12%
Spiritual and Religious Life	6%

See Addenda #2 for additional referrals

Trends

As noted earlier, “Trends” is a discussion of recurring themes 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. 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 trends, listed by quarter (Q), arose this academic year.

Q1 Trends:

Bullying between and among faculty/ staff.

We continue to hear reports from faculty and/or staff visitors, both individuals and groups, who feel bullied by superiors in their offices/areas. As noted in last year’s annual report, 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. 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 intimidated by tenured faculty, staff being bullied by tenured and non-tenured faculty.

Employee Supervision and Review

We want to highlight two recurring and interrelated issues that concern employee feedback and review. The context is as follows: there is tier of senior faculty, directors, and managers (henceforth referred to as “managers”) who supervise multiple individuals (e.g. from 5 to more than 20), and who themselves report to senior administrators (e.g. deans, directors, VP’s). These managers have authority over discrete units that often operate as silos. The faculty and staff employees in these units do not have a way to evaluate or give negative feedback about their “manager” because of the relative isolation and autonomy of their unit. These faculty and staff employees do not feel like they can communicate upwards to senior administrators out of fear of retaliation. These senior administrators are often perceived as inaccessible, and have not sought out feedback about the manager from direct reports as part of the manager’s review. HR is perceived as a “last straw” option.

The workplace issues that are arising in this context constitute the second aspect of this trend: the lack of good supervision practices. Frequently mentioned examples by visitors include not giving employees feedback on performance until the required annual review, having expectations that do not align with stated job responsibilities, messaging that communicating with others outside the unit about work conditions is not allowed, and on-going behavior that creates a work environment that is perceived as hostile. We know of four visitors who wanted to remain employed at Brandeis but left to pursue competitive offers at other institutions because of their workplace environments and their inability to talk with someone in authority, without making a formal complaint to HR.

Q2 Trends:

Bullying Between and Among Faculty/ Staff

We continue to hear reports from faculty and/or staff visitors, both individuals and groups, who feel bullied by superiors in their offices/areas. As noted in our prior reports, 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. 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 intimidated by tenured faculty, staff being bullied by tenured and non-tenured faculty.

Interpersonal and Staff Communications

We are hearing about issues related to the way various levels of faculty and staff on teams, as well as within informal groups, are failing to communicate. It appears to us to be a systemic issue on campus where people do not know how to collaborate and treat people with respect, when differences arise.

Stressful Academic Classroom Climate

Both graduate and undergraduate students have conveyed experiencing high levels of tension and stress in the academic classroom environment broadly across disciplines. They have described incidents of being publicly ridiculed and critiqued in front of their peers by a faculty member. Some students described feeling overlooked and unacknowledged during class. Furthermore, some described feeling uncomfortable with course content that is not sensitive to marginalized identities. Students articulated apprehensions about discussing challenges they are experiencing in class out of fear of retribution.

Housing Conflicts

Graduate and undergraduate students have reported experiencing conflicts related to off-campus housing and understanding their rights and responsibilities as tenants. The issues are more acute for international students. Students have also experienced interpersonal challenges with roommates both on and off campus.

Q3 Trend:

Poor management practices

Managers who have little or no training in management are viewed by subordinates as disrespectful or as bullying when they do not offer performance reviews or feedback. They are frequently directive of staff/faculty with limited discussion. These units are perceived to have no guiding principles about how a team of people are expected to work together in a positive manner.

Q4 Trends:

Bias Related Incidents

The Ombuds have continued to hear 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 still lacks a known, clear, and uniform system for university members to address these challenges systematically.

Lack of Consistency of Application of Policies throughout Campus:

The Ombuds office has had a variety of individuals come into the office with uncertainty about a policy that is handled one way in one campus organization and disregarded elsewhere on campus. One that regularly has been raised is the lack of performance reviews for all staff on campus. Many feel the present system is not followed and it needs to be revised so that all and staff receive annual performance reviews.

Employment Practices with Student Employees

We have received consistent and significant reports of mistreatment of student employees by professional staff. Visitors report experiencing aggressive disciplinary and termination practices; degrading verbal micro-aggressions specifically related to race and gender bias; and having unstated/unclear position expectations. Student visitors also expressed significant fears of retaliation and job loss with limited or no ability for self-advocacy. Students of marginalized identities, in particular, expressed feelings of being targeted or threatened by people in their work environment. These reports raise concerns about fair treatment, fair process, discrimination and harassment related to student employees across campus (i.e. in both the student services and academic realms of the university).

Annual Goals

The Ombuds team established goals for the 2018-2019 academic year. The following are this year's goals and progress to date.

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.

☒ To Date: We accomplished this goal (see also “Outreach p. 2). We will continue to engage in a number of outreach activities in the next academic year.

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 use our confidential visitor feedback survey to inform and strengthen our practices and services in support of the community.

☒ To Date: We developed and use a voluntary, anonymous visitor feedback form that informs our practice.

Increased Service to the Campus Community

We have 4 goals we are working on accomplishing in order to enhance the services we offer 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. In February Elena Lewis will have special dedicated hours for students from 5:00 to 7:00 pm on Mondays. Interested students can make an appointment by emailing elewis-ombuds@brandeis.edu or calling 781-736-2265, ext. 2.

☒ To Date: We prioritized meeting with visitors based on when it was most convenient for them. However, we did try, based on Ombuds’ availability, to hold dedicated hours for students.

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. Until that occurs we are translating as much of our written material as we can into Chinese (priority item) to be followed by other languages spoken by members of our community.

☒ To Date: We were able to hire a student assistant who was Chinese, and served as a thought partner in our better meeting the needs of international students. Continuing to identify ways to deepen our cultural sensitivity and knowledge is a priority for our practice.

3. We are developing an array of self-help materials for our website on communication, conflict resolution, self-care, harassment and bullying, and discrimination. We have started by posting resources on communication.

☒ To Date: This goal has been completed and will continue to be expanded upon next year.

4. We have implemented offering informal conflict resolution services to individuals and groups.

☒ To Date: This goal has been accomplished and these services will continue next year.

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. Our primary goal continues to be to serve the whole community in ways that are needed, desired and supportive for community growth in hopes of making Brandeis University a **healthy, compassionate, caring, respectful, and productive community**.

Addenda #1:
Other Issues handled by Ombuds

- Athletic travel issues
- Bias related issues
- Boundary issues where administrative staff asked to handle issues outside their Brandeis work
- Disability education plans not being followed
- Facility issue re rodent/ health concerns
- Informal conflict resolution with individuals needing to discuss conflict in their work place
- Landlord tenant issues – off campus
- Meeting facilitation request to support an office team
- Publication concerns – individual who handled research not receiving any credit for work done
- Roommates co-housing concerns
- Supporting an individual in putting together an exit strategy
- Teaching assistant needing to understand a policy related to their new role

Addenda #2
Other Referrals

- Care Team
- Career Counsellors (Outside resource)
- Community Housing Mediation (Outside resource)
- Department of Community Living
- Faculty member
- Graduate Student Services
- Associate Dean Dr. Maria Madison, Heller School
- Office of Equal Opportunity
- Sodexo
- Student Conduct Board
- Mark Hewitt University Registrar
- Waltham Health Department
- Waltham Small Claims Court