

# Brandeis University Ombuds

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

Annual Report: July 2020 - June 2021

Revised May 24, 2022

## Our Reporting Cycle

This is an “Annual” report on the activities of the Brandeis University Ombuds Office including data from the months of July 2020 through June 2021. This report highlights information around visits, trends, and issues as well as the milestones and accomplishments of the Ombuds Office during the 2020 - 2021 academic/fiscal year. Previous Ombuds reports are posted on the [Ombuds website](#).

Following the Spring Semester 2020, we released our first semesterly based-report and updated our annual report schedule to be released following the Summer. These are changes as the Ombuds office has been reporting on a fiscal quarterly and annual year basis since the spring of 2018. We plan to continue to update the format of our report in order to further the understanding and identify opportunities for constructive change across the Brandeis community. As such, this information is shared throughout the campus community all the way up to the University President to encourage institutional change, equitable, and fair practices throughout Brandeis University.

## Quick Links to Report Content

Information & Highlights	Observations, Trends, & Recommendations	Current State of Ombuds Office
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <a href="#">About the Report</a></li><li>• <a href="#">Milestones and Accomplishments</a></li><li>• <a href="#">Total Visits</a></li><li>• <a href="#">Informal Conflict Resolution Sessions</a></li><li>• <a href="#">Number of Sessions</a></li><li>• <a href="#">Mix of Time Spent</a></li><li>• <a href="#">Mix of Populations</a></li><li>• <a href="#">Primary Issues</a></li><li>• <a href="#">Referrals</a></li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <a href="#">Observations</a></li><li>• <a href="#">Visitor Feedback</a></li><li>• <a href="#">Trends &amp; Recommendations</a><ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>○ <a href="#">First Quarter</a></li><li>○ <a href="#">Second Quarter</a></li><li>○ <a href="#">Third Quarter</a></li><li>○ <a href="#">Fourth Quarter</a></li></ul></li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <a href="#">Annual Goals</a></li><li>• <a href="#">Ombuds Office Team</a></li><li>• <a href="#">Ombuds Office Policy</a></li><li>• <a href="#">Goals &amp; Next Steps</a></li></ul>

## Contact Us

For information on how to schedule appointments, ways we work with visitors, and access our online resources, visit us online at <https://www.brandeis.edu/ombuds/> or call the confidential Ombuds office phone line 781.736.2265. We are available over the summer months and into the fall to meet with visitors remotely by phone, Zoom or in-person with social distancing at a time that works best for the individual. At this time please schedule an appointment by emailing [brandeisombuds@brandeis.edu](mailto:brandeisombuds@brandeis.edu) to meet with an Ombuds. You may request a specific individual or one will be assigned to contact you.

# About the 2020-2021 Annual Report

Welcome to the Annual Report of the Brandeis University Ombuds Office!

Shall we call this the year of virtual Ombudsing, or was it the year of COVID-19 and now the mutant viruses? Whatever the name, it has certainly been a very different year for everyone in the Brandeis community!

While the full service Ombuds office is only 3.5 years old at Brandeis, it has built a solid foundation across the University by providing independent, confidential, informal, and impartial conflict engagement services. The Ombuds team serve as navigators who support visitors empowerment and connect people with appropriate and necessary resources.

The Ombuds reporting cycle has changed from a fiscal year reporting cycle to a semester reporting this past spring. The Ombuds office will also be reporting a summary of the year in an annual report that will come out in Sept. of each year. This initial (revised cycle) annual report will include a summary of information from July 1, 2020 – June 30, 2021 and hereafter September through August of the next year. It will include information on continual efforts to integrate and connect Ombuds services throughout the community and campus-wide. It will update and summarize educational outreach services as the Ombuds team visits many different departmental faculty, staff, and student meetings/events. The Ombuds team spends time marketing its office services by attending meetings and making introductions with numerous campus offices, departments, and many student organizations and clubs. The Ombuds team continues to revisit some of these offices on an annual basis while balancing the needs of the community for visitor meetings, as well as making certain the office is known to all Brandesians. Most of this work has been virtual since March 13, 2020, as the Campus shut down for most in-person activities with the outbreak of COVID-19.

People voluntarily speak with the Ombuds confidentially and off-the-record, and they obtain assistance to address a wide range of issues. For many office visitors, the Ombuds serves as a first stop for support, information, and resource identification and can lead to contact with other university and external community services.

We have a new member of our team, Esther Lin, who is joining us in August 2021. Elena Lewis left the office after 5 years of wonderful Ombuds service to the entire Brandeis community. Elena will be pursuing other activities and desired time away from the Ombuds work. She will be missed and has agreed to remain a resource to the Ombuds team if her services are ever needed.

Operationally, this past year saw an increase in visitor numbers by faculty, students, and staff. The office saw an 38% increase in visitors over the prior year (209 in the '19-'20 fiscal year and 288 visitors in the '20-'21 fiscal year). Cases again ranged across topics and numbers of contacts with themes and observations noted below.

The Brandeis Ombuds Office has been staffed by Don Greenstein, Ombuds Director, with two part-time Ombuds, Elena Lewis and Mike Rozinsky supporting the office (up to four hours a week). These three have constituted the Ombuds team this past year and have served the entire Brandeis community. The team has been available to all students, faculty, staff, alumni, and anyone who has a situation or conflict related to Brandeis University. The Ombuds staff practices in accordance with the professional organizational standards of the International Ombuds Association (IOA). This report provides information on the milestones and accomplishments of the Ombuds Office during the 2020-2021 academic year and includes selected data on visits, referrals, issues, and trends. As the office looks to the future, it is important to appreciate the range of support offered from across the university. Special thanks to Brandeis Chief Diversity Officer and Vice President of Diversity, Equity & Inclusion, Dr. Mark Brimhall-Vargas, Provost Lisa Lynch and Brandeis' new Provost, Carol Fierke, and President Ron Liebowitz for their continued support.

# Milestones and Accomplishments

## Outreach

New part-time Ombuds Mike Rozinsky was added to the Office in Feb. 2020. 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:

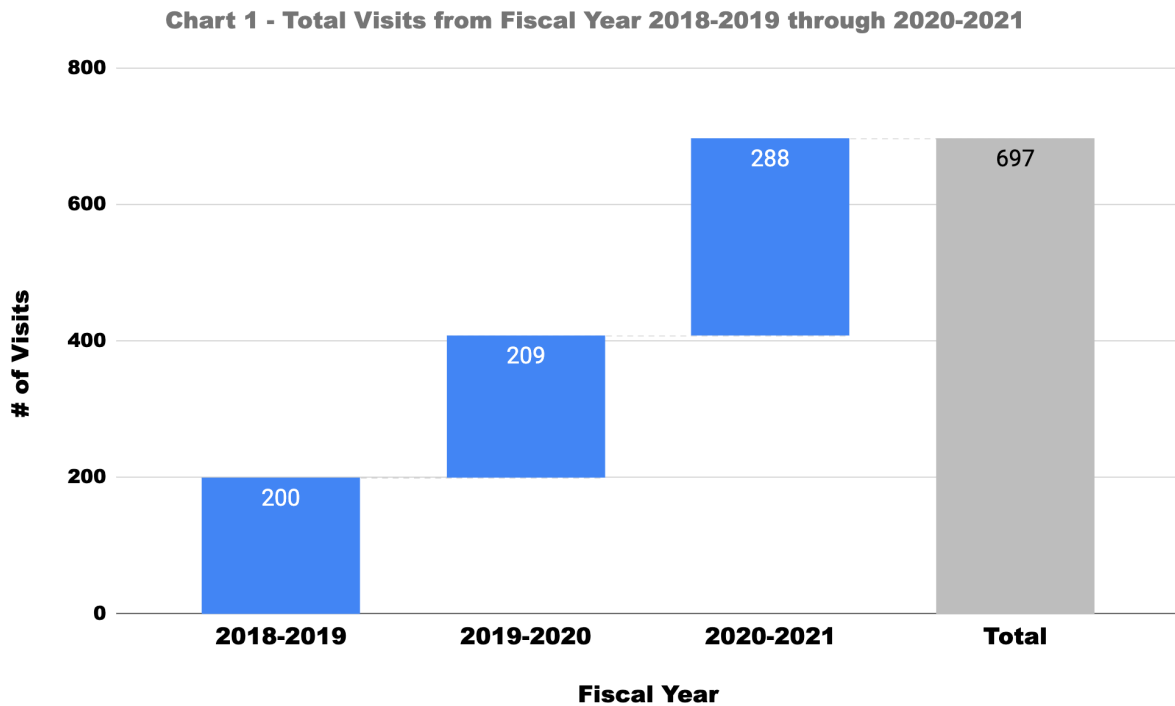
- Arts and Sciences Dean, Department Chairs
- Science Department
- Care Team
- Goldfarb Library Staff
- Community Living Director & Assistant Dean of Student Affairs
- Community Living - Community Advisors
- Faculty member - request for training students who serve as mentors
- Faculty Senate
- Gender and Sexuality Center
- Graduate Student Affairs Director and Assistant Director
- Heller Dean's Leadership Team
- Heller School Town Hall
- Hiatt Career Center
- Human Resources 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)
- Rose Museum – Director and Staff
- Sociology Department
- Student Accessibility Team
- Student Conduct and Student Affairs Office, Director and Staff
- Student Government President
- Office of Equal Opportunity- Director and Staff
- Various graduate student groups
- Women and Gender Studies Program
- Rabb leadership
- Institutional Advancement

## Facilitated Retreats & Meetings

This past year, visitors told the Ombuds about numerous interactions among faculty and staff that were perceived as inappropriate. To that end, the Ombuds office facilitated a number of retreats and meetings among a variety of teams across campus. The Ombuds office has been asked to help a variety of offices/teams create guiding principles/norms that can be implemented and followed on a regular basis, offering ways to work through differences in a positive manner. This is an effort that the Ombuds office has continually offered and will be available to help teams and groups on campus find ways to work in a positive manner when conflict, incivility, and differences exist. It's important for our community to understand that although differences will always exist in the Brandeis community, we learn from our differences in so many ways.

Visitors reported finding out about the Ombuds through a variety of means. Among visitors who shared how they learned about the Ombuds, about 35% heard about it through a friend or colleague (peer) and 26% were referred by a non-peer faculty or staff member. Approximately 6% learned about the Ombuds through a poster, brochure, or advertisement, and 33% heard a presentation, training, or marketing appearance by an Ombuds team member. The data continue to support the continued multi-pronged strategy of written material, office, classroom and event visits, speeches, individual and group appearance, and meetings as an effective approach to helping to make people aware of the office and its services, be it by Zoom or in person. All presentations this past year have been by Zoom/virtual involvement.

## Information & Highlights



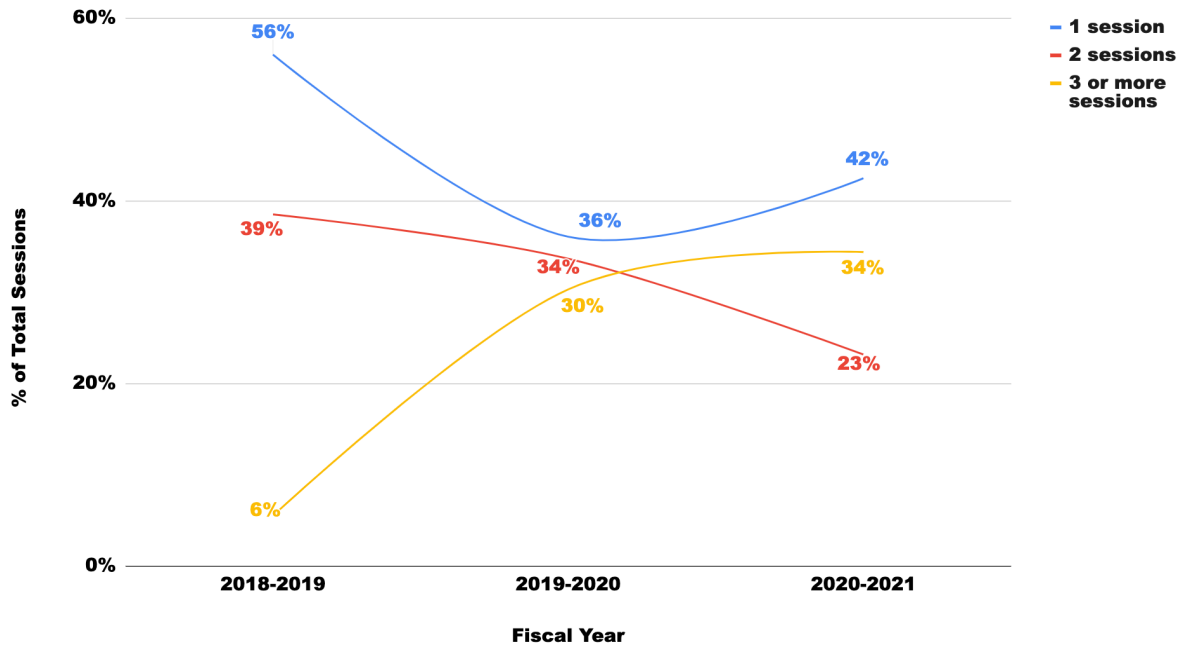
Our total number of visits from July 1, 2020 until June 30, 2021 is 288. This represents a 38% increase FY 2019-2020 and a 44% increase from FY 2018-2019 FY visitors. [See a tabular view of Chart 1](#)

### Informal Conflict Resolution Sessions

The total number of informal conflict resolution sessions in 2020-2021 was 13 sessions which is an increase over last year's 10 sessions.

Visitors opted for individual one-on-one sessions over group sessions, or only the one visitor was willing or able to converse about the conflict, or felt it was appropriate for a neutral facilitator's involvement.

Chart 2 - Percentage of Number of Sessions across Visits from Fiscal Year 2018-2019 through 2020-2021



While there has been some fluctuation in the number of sessions a visitor has with an Ombuds it is clear that returning visitors have built some trust and desire to return to the Ombuds team. [See tabular view of Chart 2](#); [See a tabular view of Chart 3](#)

Chart 3 - Percentage of Mix of Time Spent across Visits from Fiscal Year 2018-2019 through 2020-2021

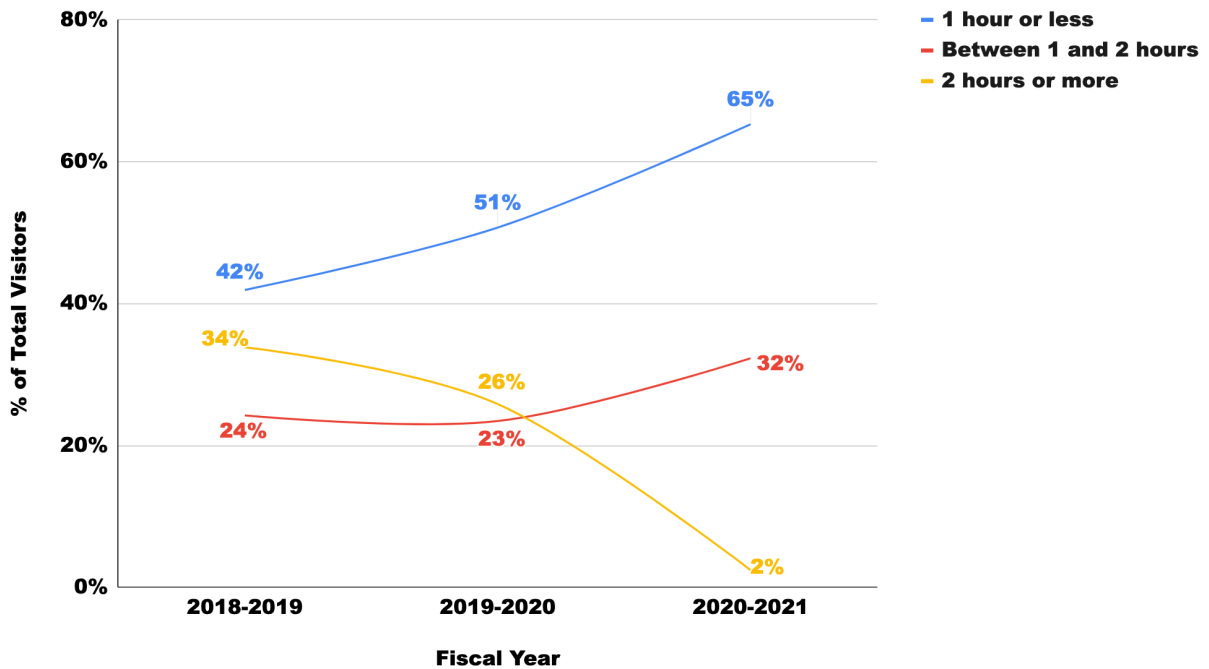
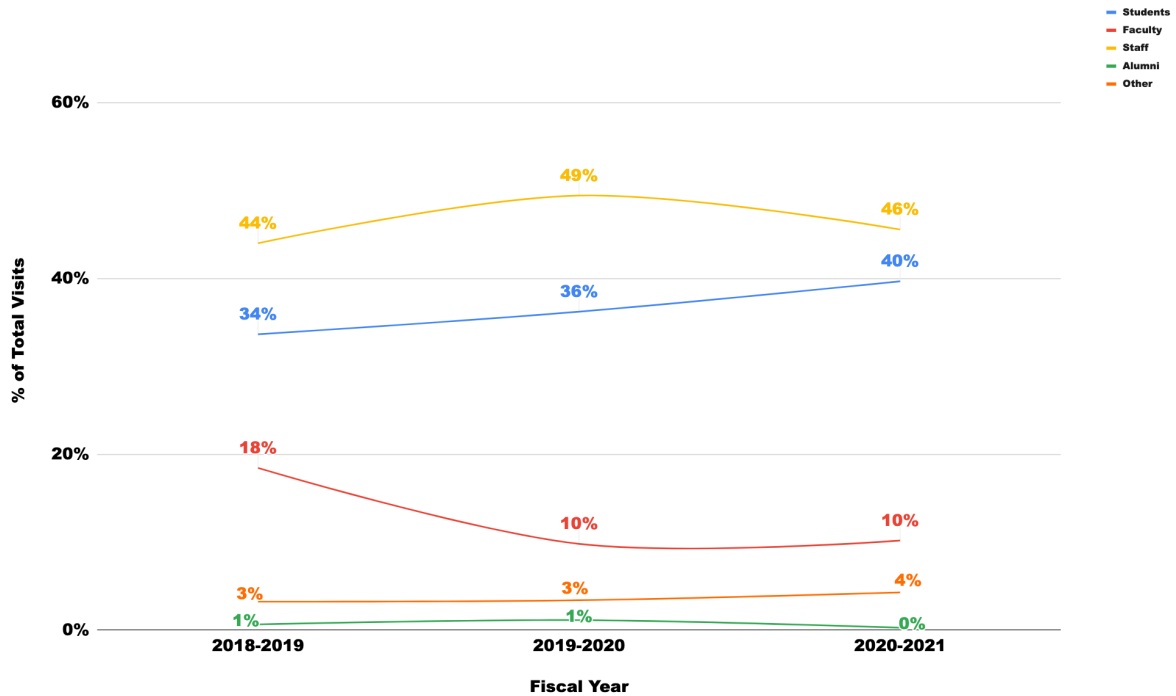
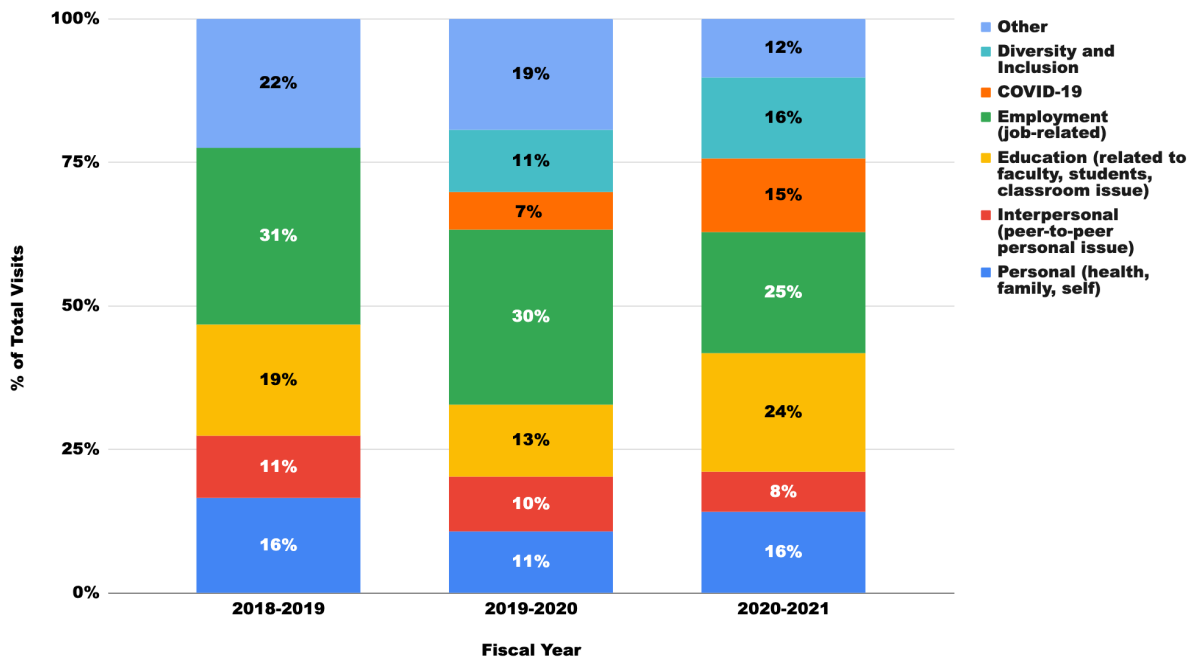


Chart 4 - Percentage of Visitor Populations from Fiscal Year 2018-2019 through 2020-2021



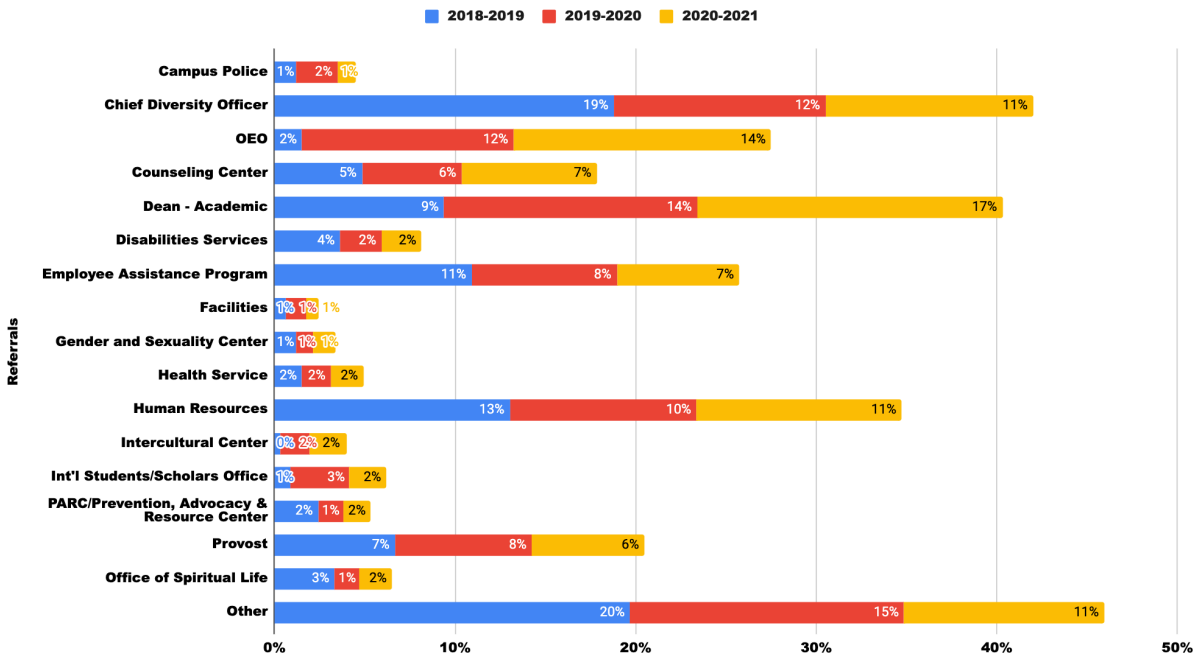
It is quite clear that students and staff are the frequent and regular visitors to the Ombuds office. The significant number of staff who visit the Ombuds office clearly indicates a need to focus on the concerns and issues being raised by the staff. It may be that staff feel comfortable with the confidentiality of the Ombuds office, and are concerned about what happens with formal processes. We have heard from many visitors about concerns relating to retaliation whenever a formal process is discussed. Faculty (especially tenured faculty) have not been a large percentage of the visits to the ombuds office. Faculty makes up less than 20% at the highest point in time in the past three years. Contract faculty have been more routine visitors to the office. They also are carrying the highest faculty class workload, and many feel overworked and underpaid for their position on campus. [See a tabular view of Chart 4](#)

**Chart 5 - Percentage of Primary Issues across Visits from Fiscal Year 2018-2019 through 2020-2021**



The Other issues that were brought to the Ombuds office are identified in Addenda #1 to this annual report. Overall the Ombuds office has seen an increase in personal and interpersonal issues and a slight decrease in employment related concerns this past year. During COVID with most of the Brandeis community off campus and locked down the interpersonal and personal concerns have likely been forefront for many, while workplace and employment issues have not been as prevalent compared to FY 2019-2020 and FY 2018-2019. People working off campus have not had the day to day contact for the most part as Zoom meeting have become more the norm, so the complaints about supervisors and fellow employees have been easier to handle for most people, and the interpersonal conflict or personal stress of being at home, in a dorm or office without others present has caused many other/new concerns. [See a tabular view of Chart 5](#)

**Chart 6 - Percentage of Referrals Fiscal Year 2018-2019 through 2020-2021**



The mix of referrals made across the landscape of the Brandeis Community is an example of the Ombuds Office helping people find the help across formal channels they are interested in pursuing in order to meet their needs. The variation year over year across office referrals underscores the shifting needs for support that visitors have in different years. The Ombuds team works hard to stay connected to campus resources by organizing networking meetings to share, learn and educate campus partners about what the Ombuds can offer, as well as how best to support and refer to other offices. Other referrals made by the Ombuds team are identified in Addenda #2 to this annual report. [See a tabular view of Chart 6](#)



## Numeric Observations

The expansion of staffing in the Ombuds office has allowed for more time spent with visitors to resolve conflicts with the increased number of visitors the office has experienced. The demand continues to outpace our staff capacity. Total number of visitors continued to increase this past year. Part of this may be due to the fact that COVID-19 concerns and issues have raised the stress level of all people connected to Brandeis. The number of visitors who return to the office for more than one visit is 59%. We have seen a 54% increase in the number of student visitors. Staff visitors increased by 30% and faculty decreased by over 46%. Over the year, the total number of visitors to the office has increased. This reflects that the Ombuds Office is serving its purpose of helping people work through some of their concerns in an expedient and focused manner.

## Visitor Feedback

Some visitors do return for further support relating to the original issue they came to the office to discuss, as well as return with new issues or concerns that have arisen. Visitors may have increased trust in the office as they return or refer others to our office. An example of the feedback from post visit surveys is reflected below:

---

“How long has this office been in existence? How come I did not know about it before now? You’ve been very helpful in letting me know about resources I did not know existed on campus.”

“The Ombuds could not have been more helpful - they went above and beyond what I would have expected.”

“Although my concern is not resolved at this time, I was offered some other resources by the Ombuds, to consider in addressing my concerns. This was very useful to me!”

# Trends and Recommendations

“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 and the Brandeis community. Individual issues become “trends” when we recognize that multiple visitors from one or more offices, departments, or schools throughout the University community are visiting us about the same problem/topic/concern. The following are the trends, listed by quarter (Q), and suggestions that the Ombuds feel should be considered by the University.

## Q1 Trends

### Poor Management Practices

Managers who are perceived to have little or no training in management are viewed by subordinates as disrespectful or as bullying when they do not offer annual performance reviews or feedback. They are frequently overly directive of staff/faculty with limited discussion. These units may have no guiding principles about how a team of people is expected to work together in a positive manner. Training offered by the HR department for managers is not viewed as adequate to prepare managers to be the best they can be. With many changes occurring across campus at this time, some training opportunities for managers would be appropriate.

### Grading Policies

Concerns by students that faculty do not always follow the policy on grading as set out in the faculty and student manuals. Little if any explanation and when issues arise related to grading there is a refusal to discuss or limited explanation about why the grading policy is not being followed. Students would like clarity on grading at the outset of the semester so they can understand and attempt to meet expectations as well as follow policies in the student manual.

### Mental Health Concerns

From faculty and students about students’ accommodations that are offered but are not adequate to meet the health needs of those requiring accommodations. Concern about the Student Accessibility Office, its management, and a perception of a lack of appropriate responsiveness when issues are raised with the office team.

Changes are occurring in this department that hopefully will address these concerns in the near future.

### Title IX

Mandated reporters on campus expressed a need for training about reporting requirements and the process for reporting such information shared with them. The OEO Director and her staff have been offering extensive new equal rights training on campus that are responsive to these concerns.

### Fear of Retaliation

International Graduate Students, Undergraduates, Staff, and Contract Faculty on campus continue to express concerns about reporting any issues for fear of retaliation and loss of work that will affect their job, their Visas, and their relationships on campus. Graduate and undergraduate students working in research environments are of particular concern. Bystanders also have expressed fears of sharing information about inappropriate behavior on campus. Although strong statements have been made by leadership on campus about no tolerance for retaliation, there is still a very strong concern about reporting, or even meeting with,

those that are displaying this behavior. The fear of repercussions (losing a position or being demeaned by a person in power) is severe.

## Bullying

This is reported at all levels of the University, staff on staff, faculty on other faculty staff and students, and students on students. This is a continuing trend on campus that the Ombuds office keeps hearing about.

## Q2 Trends

### Bullying Between and Among Faculty, Staff, and Students

A number of faculty and/or staff visitors, both individuals and groups, have shared that they have been bullied by superiors in their offices. The bullying behavior is not always gender-based. While many of the complaints have been about men bullying women, we have also encountered women bullying other women, and women bullying men as well. While power differentials exist between the alleged individual exhibiting the bullying behavior and their target, the behavior appears to occur 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 bullied by tenured and non-tenured faculty, and students feeling bullied by students, faculty, and staff. While a policy has been in the works for the past several years, no policy has been finalized, and these behaviors continue to arise all over the Brandeis community.

### 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 trend (which has been observed in the past) presents an opportunity for education and training around how to successfully navigate relationships with those dealing with these issues (e.g., how to be compassionate, take care of oneself, and be a healthy, supportive friend, colleague, and bystander). The Ombuds have shared this information with staff at the Brandeis Counseling Center.

### Bias Related Incidents

The Ombuds continue to hear concerns of harassment motivated by bias and/or prejudice based on race, gender, age, sexual orientation, and faith. This is different from the bullying referred to above. The types of issues arising that are of concern relate to visitors feeling that another individual or group of individuals are being treated with favoritism over the visitor; and, they perceive they are being treated differently specifically based on their race, gender, age, sexual orientation, faith, or spiritual belief.

This continuing trend presents a concern that visitors are not feeling comfortable utilizing the formal reporting mechanisms<sup>1</sup> based on a concern about retaliation or other unidentified fears. Strong considerations should be made to: (1) continue to broadly publish, and distribute institutional policies related to bias and harassment, (2) identify how the University is presently addressing issues through formal processes, and any other method, to educate everyone on campus that bias, harassment, and prejudice will not be tolerated anywhere in the Brandeis community.

---

<sup>1</sup> The Ombuds Office refers visitors to the confidential "report it" site.

## Split Positions Among Departments

Staff with split positions among multiple departments are experiencing a lack of clarity about their roles, responsibilities, and supervision expectations. In the event that there are formal performance conflicts, issues related to the process for how formal corrective/disciplinary processes are handled between supervisors have arisen.

## Q3 Trends

### Bullying Behavior Between and Among Faculty, Staff, and Students<sup>2</sup>

As highlighted above in Q1, a number of students, faculty, and/or staff visitors, both individuals and groups from all over the Brandeis Community, have shared that they have experienced bullying behavior (defined below) by fellow students, faculty, and staffers who are superiors in their offices or classes. While power differentials exist between the alleged bully and their target, the bullying behavior complained about allegedly occurs across rank and role, i.e., staff toward other staff, tenured faculty toward other faculty, staff and students, contract employees being bullied by tenured faculty, staff being bullied by tenured and non-tenured faculty, and students feeling bullied by students, faculty, and staff. The bullying behavior that has presented itself in visitor situations includes intimidation, belittling, put downs, isolation, exclusion, name calling, severe tone, and professional sabotage.

The onset of COVID-19 has brought shifts in policy, academic, and professional expectations, and changes in our communication and interpersonal engagement with social and physical distancing. A number of visitors this quarter have come to the Ombuds office with issues that have arisen related to COVID-19 and these changes. The Ombuds have seen issues ranging from:

- stressful situations with supervisors,
- job loss,
- online scams where students experienced fraud,
- issues with roommates/housemates, landlords, fellow tenants,
- concern about traveling home,
- faculty and staff concerned about loss of jobs,
- the impact of urgent changes/shifts/transition to online curriculum,
- demands by supervisors for staff to be on campus during physical distancing,
- PTSD and stress related to social isolation,
- sudden changes in living situations and its impact on online classes, and
- changes in campus policies.

The Ombuds have also seen international student visitors experiencing harassment and bullying behavior concerns related to appearance and use of personal protective equipment (as early as January 2020) while on campus and in the Waltham community. As mentioned above some of the issues raised do not have definitive answers or resources to direct visitors to for answers or support.

---

<sup>2</sup> Bullying behavior has been reported to the Ombuds team from **throughout** the University. Concern shared by all visitors that if they report it formally retaliation will occur. Noted: Most reported the individuals with the alleged behavior have not been removed or appropriately sanctioned for uncivil and inappropriate behaviors.

## Bias Related Incidents

The Ombuds continue to hear concerns of harassment motivated by bias and/or prejudice based on race, gender, age, sexual orientation, and faith. This is different from the bullying behavior referred to above. The types of issues arising that are of concern relate to visitors feeling that an individual or group of individuals are being treated with favoritism over the visitor and they perceive they are being treated differently specifically based on their race, gender, age, sexual orientation, faith or spiritual belief.

This continuing trend presents a concern that visitors are uncomfortable utilizing the formal complaint processes based on a concern about retaliation or other unidentified fears. Strong reporting mechanisms considerations should be made to: (1) continue to broadly publish, and distribute institutional policies and resources on and off campus related to bias and harassment, (2) identify how the University is presently addressing issues through formal processes, and any other method to educate everyone on campus through, that bias, harassment and prejudice will not be tolerated anywhere in the Brandeis community, (3) continual education for the entire community about the Title IX and VII investigation process and how retaliation will not be tolerated anywhere in the Brandeis Community.

## Split Positions Among Departments

Staff with split positions among multiple departments are experiencing a lack of clarity about their roles, responsibilities and supervision expectations. In the event that there are formal performance conflicts, issues related to the process for how formal corrective/disciplinary processes are handled between supervisors have arisen. It may behoove the HR office to consider implementing a policy on split positions and coordination of the supervisory duties, such that one supervisor oversees an individual employee rather than two different supervisors, or that when there are two supervisors they need to regularly communicate, especially when conducting performance reviews.

## 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 have no guiding principles about how a team of people are expected to work together in a positive manner.

## COVID-19

The onset of COVID-19 has brought shifts in policy, academic and professional expectations, and changes in our communication and interpersonal engagement with social and physical distancing. A number of visitors this quarter have come virtually (through Zoom or met with us by phone) to the Ombuds office with issues that have arisen related to COVID-19 and these changes. The Ombuds have seen issues ranging from stressful situations with supervisors, job loss, online scams where students experienced fraud, issues with roommates/housemates, landlords, fellow tenants, concern about traveling home, faculty and staff concerned about loss of jobs, the impact of urgent changes shifts/transition to online curriculum, demands by supervisors for staff to be on campus during physical distancing, PTSD and stress related to social isolation, and sudden changes in living situations and its impact on on-line classes, and changes in campus policies.

The Ombuds have also seen international student visitors experiencing harassment and bullying behavior concerns related to appearance and use of personal protective equipment (as early as January 2020) while on campus and in the Waltham community. As mentioned above some of the issues raised do not have definitive answers or resources to direct visitors to for answers or support. The Ombuds team listens and stays connected to the visitors to help them find resources and answers as the Brandeis leadership finalizes the planning and policies related to the upcoming semester, housing, online and in person classes, food, and any other COVID related concern or issue.

## Q4 Trends

### 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.

### General Management Effectiveness

The office has heard from a number of Brandeis employees about performance management, evaluation, and job status changes including faculty to faculty, staff to staff, faculty to staff, staff to faculty, faculty to grad assistants.

Across a number of cases it is clear the training and development of management principles and that the ways support services (e.g., HR and other administrators) operate to effectively support changes and difficult situations are not handled in the most appropriate manner. Visitors ask regularly for increased training for managers on giving and receiving feedback, difficult conversations, mandatory performance reviews, etc. In some ways it may take a more empathetic lens in which the community interacts with itself.

### Bias Related Incidents

The Ombuds continue to hear concerns of harassment and conflicts motivated by bias and/or prejudice based on race, nationality, 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 systemic challenges.

### Lack of Continuity 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 faculty and staff receive annual performance reviews and have up to date job descriptions.

### 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).

### COVID-19

Faculty, staff, students, and parents have limited understanding of universities policies and procedures related to COVID-19. This includes information about emergency funds, protocols for emergency and non-emergency personnel, campus upscaling processes and dissemination of information related to Coronavirus. Expectations for coming into work on campus, establishing and management of working relationships. Varied protocols for contractors who were on campus and not following Brandeis health operating procedures.

# Annual Goals

The Ombuds team established goals for the 2021-22 academic year. The following are this year's goals and progress to date.

## Continuing Outreach

The Ombuds team has weekly meetings and plans marketing meetings with 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 training as well as brief meetings with students, faculty, and staff in the upcoming semester. The Ombuds used the 2020-2021 academic calendar to continue building on existing relationships by attending Brandeis events by Zoom, holding virtual meetings to continue promoting our services, and partnering with other offices that serve the Brandeis community. We will continue to attempt to make briefings to larger student groups and classes during the upcoming fall semester. The Ombuds office has worked with Human Resources in creating a video introduction of the Ombuds Office for all new employees during the onboarding process. We have worked with student orientation to inform all new and transfer students about Ombud services. To date: We will continue to engage in and expand our outreach activities in the next academic year.

## Ongoing Service/Program Evaluation

The Ombuds Office is committed to continuous improvement to ensure we are operating efficiently and effectively as a unit. We have been using a confidential visitor feedback survey to inform and strengthen our practices and services in support of the community. To date: We have developed and use a voluntary, anonymous visitor feedback form that offers the office feedback information on what is working and areas for review and potential changes that should be considered. Information shared has been very positive, with limited issues, all relating to a desire for more opportunities for meetings in a very quick turnaround time period.

## Increased Service to the Campus Community

We have 4 goals we are working to accomplish in order to enhance the services we offer to all members of the Brandeis Community.

1. We plan to continue with scheduling of meetings online. There is a link on the Ombuds website to schedule meetings for all visitors. Visitors can make an appointment by emailing [brandeisOmbuds@Brandeis.edu](mailto:brandeisOmbuds@Brandeis.edu) or calling 781-736-2265. We prioritize visitor meetings on when it is most convenient for the visitor. We will continue to offer Ombuds Office meetings in person, by Zoom, and by phone during the upcoming year.
2. With one full time and two on-call (part-time) Ombuds on staff presently, we'd like to add more hours to our part-time Ombuds so that we are better able to meet with visitors in a more timely manner.
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 in the next year.
4. We have implemented offering informal conflict resolution services to individuals and groups as well as facilitating community discussions and supporting groups/teams in establishing guiding principles/norms. To date: This goal has been accomplished, and these services will continue next year.

The number and diversity of visitors who have contacted the office, as well as the range of issues that have been shared with us, underscore the necessity of 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, respectful, diverse, and productive community**.

## Current State of Ombuds Office

### Ombuds Office Team

Three Ombuds currently (July 1, 2020-June 30, 2021) 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 having an affiliation with Brandeis. Our seasoned Ombuds team includes [Don Greenstein](#), a reformed lawyer, who brings over 32 years of conflict resolution process and education experience. [Elena Lewis](#), who has spent over 19 years in higher education, has extensive knowledge of the student academic and campus experience, the support of underrepresented students, racial reconciliation, and conflict resolution. Elena will be leaving the ombuds team at the end of the current semester. We are appreciative for all of Elena's past support, and she has offered to continue to be available as an on-call resource to the office for short term support.

A year ago (Feb. 2020), we welcomed a new Ombuds, [Mike Rozinsky](#), who brings over 21 years of organizational development, conflict management, and change readiness and management experience to our team. Mike has added terrific value to the team as a facilitator and experienced ombuds. He has led a number of team building and mission and goal setting sessions for various offices all over campus, as well as met with a number of new and repeat visitors to the Ombuds office. Mike has grown quickly to understand the unique policies at Brandeis and help visitors find appropriate ways to resolve differences and concerns.

The Ombuds office is a campus resource that serves as an outlet to process any type of challenging situation, a bridge to navigate campus resources, and to serve as a coach to help, support, and empower community members, offices, and teams.

We have hired a new part time Ombuds [Esther Lin](#) (Aug. 2021) who comes to the Brandeis community with mediation and international experience. Her diverse language skills (English, Korean, and some background in Chinese) add value to our team. Esther will commence work in the Ombuds office in the fall of this year.

### Outreach

We are in the process of changing from an [Ombuds Charter](#) to a University Ombuds Policy. The Brandeis Policy Review Committee has discussed, reviewed, and approved a [Brandeis Ombuds Policy](#) in collaboration with the General Counsel and the Chief Diversity Officer to more appropriately reflect our work and to identify our standards of practice in a transparent policy agreement with the entire University community and all visitors who may use the office. It has recently been approved by University President Ron Liebowitz and is being posted on the Ombuds website and will be announced community wide.

Other outreach activities continue to focus on sharing more about our services, engaging in more guiding principle workshops, organizing diverse orientation opportunities, developing new online and hard copy marketing materials, updating our website, revising the team marketing video, and fostering collaborative relationships with other service providers all over campus. The Ombuds office continues to facilitate staff and faculty meetings, workshops, and retreats as neutrals. We also spend time meeting with offices and campus groups/organizations marketing what we do and how we work with individuals and groups. Meetings frequently occur with deans, faculty, senior vice presidents, Student Union leadership, office leaders and directors, BUSAC leaders and representatives, and other key campus stakeholders.



## COVID-19: Shifts in Ombuds Office Services & Community Support

The Ombuds office adjusted its operations during the Spring 2020 semester. With the onset of COVID-19 we shifted our campus operations in March 2020. The University itself has seen changes to university policy, professional expectations, and changes in our communication and interpersonal engagement with our office visitors with social and physical distancing. The office has been faced with moving off campus and shifting visitor meetings online using Zoom, phone, and off campus face-to-face meetings. We expanded our appointment making capabilities by allowing our visitors to schedule appointments online. Ombuds have also played a key role in meeting the needs of visitors who are experiencing conflicts related to COVID-19. Prior to that time, the team was having visitors in the office with concerns related to the public health crisis that has made the Ombuds team consider how best to support the Brandeis community amid these worldly concerns.

The team continues to undertake daily research and resource development work to stay abreast of novel Coronavirus concerns and issues. The team assists those who visit in finding answers to questions that help each individual consider all appropriate (self-determined) decisions, for campus and personal self care concerns.

We have continued our ongoing efforts to inform the campus community about our availability by sending email outreach to our campus partners across campus, updating our website, publicizing our contact information by marketing meetings via Zoom with diverse organizations throughout the Brandeis community, and using online communication mechanisms to bolster our support of students through intentional collaboration with student clubs and organizations. We are working with staff and faculty in a similar manner by attempting to meet and market our services online at staff and office meetings, with office directors, organization faculty/staff meetings, and team leadership. The Ombuds Director meets bi-weekly or monthly with various campus leaders and is open to meeting with anyone who desires a meeting to learn more or have any discussion about how the Office works and serves the community as a whole. We are continually evaluating our services and support as circumstances related to COVID-19 evolve, as well as any other concern or issue.

We are treating the non-reporting of COVID-19 as an imminent threat to others on campus. If a visitor shares with any of the team that they have been exposed or diagnosed with the Coronavirus, and returned to campus without reporting it to the Brandeis Health Director, we are urging them to do so. If they choose not to, we view this as a major concern and imminent health threat, so the Ombuds with notice is viewing this as a reason to breach confidentiality. This is being explained to all visitors at the outset of their visit as well as if it is shared during a meeting.

## Goals and Next Steps

### Office Expansion

The Ombuds office has been in existence since 2015 for students and since 2017 for the entire community. The staff has grown from 3 collateral duty personnel serving students only to one full time director and two 4 hour a week ombuds. The use of the office has markedly increased this past year and will undoubtedly continue to increase in the coming years. In order for the Ombuds office team to meet the needs of the community and be timely responsive to all visitors, the leadership needs to be considering ways to grow and support the success of this office. The present budget and staffing is inadequate to continue to meet the community's needs and requests for services. The Director and the entire team need to be able to be available without being overstretched. The community feedback and use of this office speaks for itself on the need for an efficient operation that can be available to meet the community needs. The Ombuds team needs to be made up of diverse individuals who are available to the community in an efficient and effective manner.

## Continuing Outreach

The Ombuds Team has been meeting regularly and planning marketing and fall orientation meetings with all major offices and constituent groups within the university community. The Team will continue to schedule and meet with offices and groups online, including those we have previously met with to keep connections and marketing efforts open to everyone at Brandeis who might have a need to use the Ombuds Office. The Office had been scheduling presentations in all first year and graduate school programs. The goal of these marketing efforts is to inform staff, students, and faculty early and often about the Ombuds office, and how it can support them during their studies and time at Brandeis. The Team will continue to schedule meetings with various staff and faculty offices around the Brandeis community in hopes of keeping the office in the minds of all Brandeis community members.

The focus for the coming fall 2021-22 semester is on the upcoming orientations and the return to campus for new and rising 2nd year undergrad and grad students (faculty and staff also) who have never been on the Brandeis campus.

## Plans for the Upcoming Academic Year

The Ombuds will continue to work with all visitors virtually by Zoom or phone with online open office hours for scheduling 5 days a week, Monday-Friday. Online difficult conversations, self-care, marketing training, and establishing guiding principles for more positive workplace environments are available to all campus offices and groups during these ever changing, physically isolating, and return-to-the-“next normal” times. The Ombuds Office continues to promote our services and partner with campus offices that serve the entire Brandeis community. The Ombuds team expects to have a presence back on campus this summer and with more consistency this fall. We are available presently for in person meetings on or off campus if such is desired, following campus, Massachusetts, and CDC COVID-19 guidelines.

We are an outlet to process any type of challenging situation, a bridge to navigate campus resources, a resource to educate about and facilitate difficult/challenging conversations, and a coach to help, support, and empower anyone affiliated with the Brandeis community. Our goal is to serve the community as a whole in ways that are needed, desired, and supportive for community growth, advocacy of fair process, inclusiveness, and to make Brandeis University a **healthier, compassionate, caring, respectful, and more productive community during these ever changing and stressful times.**

## Appendix – Tabular View of Charts within the Report

Table View of Chart 1: Total Visits from Fiscal Year 2018-2019 through 2020-2021

<b>Total Number of Visits</b>	<b>FY 2018-2019</b>	<b>FY 2019-2020</b>	<b>FY 2020-2021</b>	<b>Total</b>
<i>Total Number of Visits</i>	200	209	288	697

Table View of Chart 2: Percentage of Number of Sessions across Visits from Fiscal Year 2018-2019 through 2020-2021

<b>Percentage of Number of Sessions with Visitors by Number of Sessions</b>	<b>FY 2018-2019</b>	<b>FY 2019-2020</b>	<b>FY 2020-2021</b>
<i>Percentage of Number of Sessions with Visitors with 1 Session</i>	56%	36%	42%
<i>Percentage of Number of Sessions with Visitors with 2 Sessions</i>	39%	34%	23%
<i>Percentage of Number of Sessions with Visitors with 3 or More Sessions</i>	6%	30%	34%

Table View of Chart 3: Percentage of Mix of Time Spent across Visits from Fiscal Year 2018-2019 through 2020-2021

<b>Percentage of Mix of Time Spent with Visitors</b>	<b>FY 2018-2019</b>	<b>FY 2019-2020</b>	<b>FY 2020-2021</b>
<i>Percentage of Mix of Time Spent with Visitors of 1 Hour or Less</i>	42%	51%	65%
<i>Percentage of Mix of Time Spent with Visitors of Between 1 and 2 Hours</i>	24%	23%	32%
<i>Percentage of Mix of Time Spent with Visitors of 2 Hours or More</i>	34%	26%	2%

Table View of Chart 4: Percentage of Visitor Populations from Fiscal Year 2018-2019 through 2020-2021

<b>Percentage of Visitor Populations</b>	<b>FY 2018-2019</b>	<b>FY 2019-2020</b>	<b>FY 2020-2021</b>
<i>Percentage of Students</i>	34%	36%	40%
<i>Percentage of Faculty</i>	18%	10%	10%
<i>Percentage of Staff</i>	44%	49%	46%
<i>Percentage of Alumni</i>	1%	1%	0%
<i>Percentage of Other</i>	3%	3%	4%

Table View of Chart 5: Percentage of Primary Issues across Visits from Fiscal Year 2018-2019 through 2020-2021

<b>Percentage of Total Visits</b>	<b>FY 2018-2019</b>	<b>FY 2019-2020</b>	<b>FY 2020-2021</b>
<i>Personal (health, family, self)</i>	16%	11%	16%
<i>Interpersonal (peer-to-peer personal issue)</i>	11%	10%	8%
<i>Education (related to faculty, students, classroom issue)</i>	19%	13%	24%
<i>Employment (job-related)</i>	31%	30%	25%
<i>COVID-19</i>		7%	15%
<i>Diversity and Inclusion</i>		11%	16%
<i>Other</i>	22%	19%	12%

Table View of Chart 6: Percentage of Referrals Fiscal Year 2018-2019 through 2020-2021

<b>Percentage of Referrals</b>	<b>FY 2018-2019</b>	<b>FY 2019-2020</b>	<b>FY 2020-2021</b>
<i>Campus Police</i>	1%	2%	1%
<i>Chief Diversity Officer</i>	19%	12%	11%
<i>OEO</i>	2%	12%	14%
<i>Counseling Center</i>	5%	6%	7%
<i>Dean - Academic</i>	9%	14%	17%
<i>Disabilities Services</i>	4%	2%	2%
<i>Employee Assistance Program</i>	11%	8%	7%
<i>Facilities</i>	1%	1%	1%
<i>Gender and Sexuality Center</i>	1%	1%	1%
<i>Health Service</i>	2%	2%	2%
<i>Human Resources</i>	13%	10%	11%
<i>Intercultural Center</i>	0%	2%	2%
<i>International Students/Scholars Office</i>	1%	3%	2%
<i>PARC/Prevention, Advocacy &amp; Resource Center</i>	2%	1%	2%
<i>Provost</i>	7%	8%	6%
<i>Office of Spiritual Life</i>	3%	1%	2%
<i>Other</i>	20%	15%	11%

## **Addenda #1:**

### **Other Issues Handled by Ombuds**

International travel issues

COVID-19 testing and returning to campus concerns

Bias related issues

Boundary issues where administrative staff asked to handle issues outside their Brandeis work

Disability education plans not being followed (ADA compliance concerns)

Issues with the Accessibility office, policies and practices

Facility issue health and food concerns

Informal conflict resolution with individuals needing to discuss conflict in their workplace

Landlord tenant issues – off campus (tenant and subleasing, unhealthy living conditions, terms of lease, etc.)

Roommates co-housing concerns

Meeting facilitation request to facilitate an office team conversation

Publication concerns – individual who handled research not receiving any credit for work done

Supporting individuals trying to decide if they can remain in their present position and work with their manager/ supervisor

Student trying to understand a policy related to appealing student conduct issues

Students with mental health issue concerned about their treatment by different campus offices

## **Addenda #2**

### **Other Referrals**

Care Team

Career Counselors (Outside resource)

Waltham Group

Community Housing Mediation (Outside resource)

Waltham Clerk of Court (Small claims action)

Department of Community Living

Graduate Student Services

Maria Madison, Heller School Associate Dean for Diversity, Equity, & Inclusion

Office of Equal Opportunity

Student Conduct Board

Waltham Health Department

Mediation Program affiliated with Suffolk Law School, New England School of Law, and Harvard for mediation services