



# Brandeis University Ombuds

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

3rd Quarterly Report 2019-20: January - March 2020

## Office Establishment

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The Ombuds Office provides support in helping all members (referred to hereafter as “visitors”) of the Brandeis community resolve issues brought to the Ombuds Office. 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 community wide when Don Greenstein was hired as the lead Ombuds, joining collateral duty Ombuds, Cathy Burack and Elena Lewis.

Three Ombuds currently 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 30 years of conflict resolution process and education experience. [Elena Lewis](#), who has spent over 18 years in higher education with extensive knowledge of the student academic and campus experience, the support of underrepresented students, racial reconciliation, and conflict resolution. In February, we welcomed a new Ombuds, [Mike Rozinsky](#), who is a Master’s Candidate in Conflict Resolution UMass Boston, and brings over 20 years of organizational development, conflict management, and change readiness and management experience to our team.

We are a campus resource that serves 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 you.

## Our Reporting Cycle

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This is the “quarterly” report on the activities of the Brandeis University Ombuds Office, and as such includes data from the months of January thru March 2020. This report provides information on the milestones and accomplishments of the Ombuds Office during the 3rd quarter of the 2019 - 2020 academic year, and includes selected data on visits, referrals, and issues and trends. It only includes data from the preceding three months. The office inaugural Annual report for 2018-2019 includes data for the entire fiscal year (July 1, 2018- June 30, 2019) and is posted on the [Ombuds website](#). Subsequent reports will be released on a quarterly and annual basis. This information is shared throughout the campus community all the way up to the University President to encourage institutional change and fair practice throughout Brandeis University.

## Standards of Practice

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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.

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

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The Ombuds office has adjusted its operations this Spring 2020 semester. The onset of COVID-19 has brought shifts in campus operations, 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 mid-semester and shifting visitor meetings online using zoom and phone. 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 make appropriate self-determined decisions.

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 in Brandeis In-Brief magazine, and using online communication mechanisms to bolster our support of students through intentional collaboration with students clubs and organizations. We are continually evaluating our services and support as circumstances related to Covid-19 evolve.

## Milestones and Accomplishments

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### Expanding the Office

Both a milestone and an accomplishment, of continuing to expand the Ombuds Office has been a major focus of the activities of this quarter as well as fully and timely serving all visitors to the Ombuds Office. With the support and assistance of the Brandeis DEI Office, the office has continued to maintain and expand the Ombuds website (<http://www.brandeis.edu/ombuds/>). In November, ODEI was able to secure funding for one full-time Ombuds (Don Greenstein, Ombuds Officer Director went from part time to full time as of November 18, 2019). Elena Lewis continues to work on a collateral duty basis as an "on-call" Ombuds with up to 4 hours a week serving the

Brandeis community as an Ombuds Officer. Mike Rozinsky started work in the Ombuds office also as an “on-call” Ombuds, who comes from outside the Brandeis community and will be available to be on campus up to four hours a week to serve the entire Brandeis community.

## Outreach

Outreach activities continue to focus on marketing the Office, developing material, and fostering collaborative relationships with other service providers on campus. Accomplishments here include:

1. Facilitating a number of Faculty and staff retreats on campus;
2. Appearing at and updating the Brandeis Faculty Senate on the Ombuds office work;
3. Talking on a weekly basis with Student Union leadership
3. Marketing efforts at various Brandeis University constituent meetings among Faculty, Staff and Students:
  - Brandeis Community Faculty meeting
  - Arts and Sciences Staff & Faculty
  - BUSAC Union Representatives
  - Student Government President, and Student Rights and Advocacy Chair
  - Title 9 Director, Sonia Jurado
  - Heller COEX Program Faculty, Students and Staff
  - Raymond Ou, Vice Provost of Student Affairs
  - Brandeis Resilience Fair preparations team
  - Wendy Gordon-Hewick, Care Team Case Manager
  - Student Accommodations Services
4. Meeting with staff from:
  - Counseling Center
  - Gender and Sexuality Center
  - Office of Student Rights and Advocacy (OSRA)
  - Dean of Students and Department of Student Activities staff meeting
  - ISSO and ELP and international students concerned about Brandeis relations with International students.
  - Human Resource Office Acting Director, New Director and HR team
  - Admissions Office
5. Facilitating the Index-Meeting Game with Rose Museum Visiting Artist in Residence Caroline Woolard
  - Difficult Conversations and Bystander issues on Bullying;
  - Open Conversation;
  - Conversation on Disability Services.
6. Facilitating retreats on team building, self-care during Covid-19 isolation, and creating office guiding principles in a collaborative manner.

Visitors find out about the Office through a variety of means. About 30% of visitors heard about the office through a friend or colleague(peer), and 35% were referred by a non-peer faculty or staff member. Approximately 16% learned about the office through a poster, brochure, or advertisement, 16% learned about the office through a talk or presentation about the office and about 3% visited the website. Our early data suggest that continuing to use our multi-pronged strategy of written material, office and event visits, speeches, individual and group meetings, and the Ombuds website are effective approaches to inform people about what the Ombuds office is and how to reach it and use it appropriately.

## Visitor and Office Statistics:

Total number of Visitors: 97

Visitor Tables 1, 2 and 3 below show the number of visitors, hours, and sessions spent with visitors this quarter.

Table 1: Visitors

Visitor Type	Number	Percent
Students	47	48 %
Faculty	5	5 %
Staff	41	43 %
Alumni	2	2 %
Other	2	2 %
Total	97	100%

Table 2a: Time Spent with Visitors

Hours spent with Visitors	Mean	Minimum	Maximum	Total Hrs.	% increase (+) or decrease (-) since last quarter
3rd Quarter	1.5	.25	22	255.75	15%
Year to date (Total: July 2019 to Date)	2.6	.25	22	583.50	N/A
Last Year (Totals: Jan.- Dec. 2019)	1.8	.25	15	321.55	N/A

Table 2b: Time spent with Visitors

Hours	# of visitors	Percent
up to 1 hour	22	22%
1-2 hours	50	59%
2-3 hours	7	7%
More than 3 hours	18	11%
Total	97	100%

Table 3: Number of Sessions spent with Visitors

# of Session(s)	# of visitors	Percent
1	49	50%
2	25	26%
3 or more	23	24%
Total	97	100%

Table 4: Demographics:

Gender	Race	Role
65 % Female 32 % Male 3 % Other/Self described/transgender	70% White 11% Black/African American 7 % Asian 7 % Hispanic/ LatinX 5 % 2 or more races	62 % Students 10 % Faculty 22 % Staff 6 % Other including: -Parents -Alumni -Landlords -Non-Brandeis -Visitor with an issue relating to Brandeis

## Statistical Observations:

The expansion of staffing in the Ombuds office has allowed for more ample time spent with visitors to resolve conflicts with the increased number of visitors the office has experienced. The demand outpaces staff capacity. Total number of visitors has markedly increased this past quarter. Part of this may be due to the fact that the Director of the Office Don Greenstein became full time in December 2019 and has been in the office on a daily basis. 50% of visitors to the Ombuds office return for more than one visit. We have seen a 26% increase in the number of student visitors. Staff and students visitors at a rate of 40% each. The number of visitors (Table 3) who have used the Ombuds Office for at least one visit has increased 13% since the last quarterly report. 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 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:

"Thank you so much for meeting with me. I found it reassuring and I will reach out if I find that I need to work through my concerns and consider more options. The time I spent in your office was helpful and I am glad that Brandeis has a confidential resource to help people work through these types of situations. I am appreciative."

"I'm glad to know that Brandeis has a confidential place I can go to share my concerns about disparate treatment on campus."

"I wish Brandeis had an Ombuds office when I was a first year student here, I would have visited your office on many different occasions."

"How do you market your office to staff and faculty? Many of us need to have a confidential resource to work through difficult conversations with students, and our colleagues. If my friend had not told me about your office I never would have known that Brandeis has such a terrific resource for anyone affiliated with the University. I'll be back!"

## Primary Issues

Table 5 below reflects the categories of primary issues that were addressed during a visit. Note that more than one issue could be identified during a single visit and this is why the percentages exceed 100%.

Table 5: Primary issues	
Issue	Percentage
Interpersonal (peer-to-peer personal issue)	19 %
Employment (job related)	24 %
Education (related to faculty, students, classroom issue)	25 %
Personal (health, family, self)	27 %
Diversity and Inclusion	3 %
Other	2 % <sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> **Other** in **Table 5** reflects issues related to landlord tenant, off campus housing, alumni, or other concerns not included in one of the other 5 areas.

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## Primary Referrals:

Table 6 reflects the referrals made to offices on and off campus to help the visitor resolve their issues.

<b>Table 6: Referrals</b>	
<b>Referred To</b>	<b>Percentage<sup>2</sup></b>
Chief Diversity Officer	5 %
Counseling Center	15 %
Disabilities Services	2 %
Gender and Sexuality Center	2 %
Human Resources	18 %
Health Service	2 %
International Students and Scholars Office	8 %
Spiritual and Religious Life	2 %
Office of Equal Opportunity	27 %
Academic Deans	19 %
Public Safety	3 %
EAP	16 %
Others including:	19 %
Facilities	
Information Technology	
Provost	
President's Office	
Dean of Students	
Off campus resources	

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## Trends and Recommendations

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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

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<sup>2</sup> **Table 6** - More than one referral is frequently made to a visitor thus the percentages exceed 100%

the same problem. The following are the trends that arose this quarter as well as recommendations that the Ombuds feel should be considered by the University.

## Bullying behavior between and among faculty, staff and students

A number of students, faculty, and/or staff visitors, both individuals and groups from all over the Brandeis Community<sup>3</sup>, 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.

## Covid-19 related issues

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, jobs 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.

## 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 reporting mechanisms<sup>4</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 and resources on and off campus related to bias and harassment, (2) identify how the University is presently addressing

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<sup>3</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.

<sup>4</sup> The Ombuds Office refers visitors to the confidential "report it" site, as well as the Office of Equal Employment.



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.

## Goals and Next Steps

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### Continuing Outreach

The Ombuds Team has been meeting regularly and planning marketing 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 where there were more than 50 students in a class with the hope of informing students 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.

### Plans for the balance of the 2019-20 Academic Year

The Ombuds will continue to work with all visitors on line by Zoom or phone with online open office hours for scheduling 5 days a week. Online self-care and marketing training are available to all campus offices and groups during these physically isolating times. The Ombuds Office continues to promote our services, and partner with campus offices that serve the entire Brandeis community. We are 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 you. 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 difficult and isolating times.**

### 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 for the remainder of this academic year and during the summer to meet with visitors remotely by phone or Zoom at a time that works best for you.

There are two options to schedule an appointment: 1) you can schedule an appointment online, [here](#) or 2) by emailing [brandeisombuds@brandeis.edu](mailto:brandeisombuds@brandeis.edu) to meet with an Ombud outside of the listed meeting times.