



Brandeis University Ombuds

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

1st Quarterly Report 2020-2021: July – September 2020

Ombuds Office Team

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 32 years of conflict resolution process and education experience. [Elena Lewis](#), who has spent over 19 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](#), brings over 21 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

This is the “quarterly” report on the activities of the Brandeis University Ombuds Office, and as such includes data from the months of July through September 2020. This report provides information on the milestones and accomplishments of the Ombuds Office during the 1st quarter of the 2020 - 2021 academic year, and includes selected data on visits, issues and trends. It only includes data from the preceding three months. The office Annual report for 2019-2020 includes data for the past fiscal year (July 1, 2019- June 30, 2020) 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.

Covid-19: Shifts in Ombuds Office Services & Community Support

The Ombuds office has adjusted its operations this past Spring 2020 semester. With the onset of COVID-19 we have shifted our campus operations. 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 moved to working remotely this past spring (March, 2020) 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 Corona virus 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 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 and organization and team leadership. We are continually evaluating our services and support as circumstances related to Covid-19 evolve.

We are treating the non-reporting of Covid-19 as an imminent threat and harm to oneself and/or others on campus. If a visitor shares with any of the team that they have been exposed or diagnosed with the Corona virus, 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.

Outreach

Outreach activities continue to focus on marketing the Office, developing material, and fostering collaborative relationships with other service providers on campus. The Ombuds office continues to facilitate staff and faculty meetings 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, Sr. Vice Presidents, Student Union leadership, office leaders and directors, BUSAC leaders and representatives, and other key campus leaders and stakeholders.

Visitor and Office Statistics:

Total number of Visitors this past quarter: 92

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	31	34 %
Faculty	19	21 %
Staff	36	38 %
Other- Parents, community members	6	7 %
Alumni	0	0 %
Total	92	100%

Table 2a: Time Spent with Visitors

Hours spent with Visitors	Mean	Minimum	Maximum	Total Hrs.	% increase (+) or decrease (-) since last quarter
1st Quarter 2020-21	1.75	.25	17	281.50	+ 22%
4 th Q 2019-2020	1.50	.25	22	255.75	N/A
Last Year (Totals: Jan.- Dec. 2019)	1.80	.25	15	321.55	N/A

Table 2b: Time spent with Visitors

Hours	# of visitors	Percent
up to 1 hour	29	32 %
1-2 hours	35	38 %
2-3 hours	18	19 %
More than 3 hours	10	11 %
Total	92	100%

Table 3: Number of Sessions spent with Visitors

# of Session(s)	# of visitors	Percent
1	31	34 %
2	20	22 %
3 or more	41	44 %
Total	92	100 %

Table 4: Demographics:

Gender	Race	Role
52 % Female 39 % Male 9 % Other/Self described/transgender	52 % White 24 % Black/African American 17 % Asian 5 % Hispanic/ LatinX 2 % 2 or more races	34 % Students 21 % Faculty 38 % Staff 7 % Other including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Parents - Alumni - Non-Brandeis Visitor with an issue relating to Brandeis

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)	4 %
Employment (job related)	30 %
Education (related to faculty, students, classroom issue)	25 %
Personal (health, family, self)	8 %
Covid-19	35 %
Diversity & Inclusion	20 %
Other	4 % ¹

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. Individual issues become “trends” when we recognize that multiple Visitors from one or more offices, departments, or schools throughout the University community are coming to see us about the same problem. The following are the trends that arose this quarter as well as recommendations that the Ombuds feel should be considered by the University.

¹ **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.

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 Community², have shared that they have experienced bullying behavior 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, threats of poor performance reviews, intimidating remarks, 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, issues with roommates/housemates, landlords, fellow tenants, concern about travel, faculty and staff concerned about loss of jobs and benefits, 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. Concerns by dual working parents with young children undertaking virtual educational classes from home. The Ombuds have also seen international student visitors experiencing concerns about visas and taking on line classes during late night/early morning time zone issues. Mental health issues with students who are living outside of MA and inability to refer to BCC. 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 mechanisms³ 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

² 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. It is clear from the visitors that the Ombuds have heard from that a training and policy with specific ramifications should be considered as many of the visitors are choosing to leave rather than stay at Brandeis. This appears to be a systemic problem and training appears appropriate for all individuals who work on teams and manage others.

³ 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.

Goals and Next Steps

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. The goal of these marketing efforts is to inform 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 2020-21 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 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](#), or 2) by emailing brandeisombuds@brandeis.edu to meet with an Ombud outside of the listed meeting times.