

Brandeis University Ombuds

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

2nd Quarterly Report Fiscal Year (FY) '20-'21: October – December '20

Our Reporting Cycle

This is a “quarterly” report on the activities of the Brandeis University Ombuds Office including data from the months of October 2020 through December 2020. This report highlights information around visits, trends, and issues as well as the milestones and accomplishments of the Ombuds Office during the 2nd quarter of the 2020 - 2021 academic/fiscal year. Our previous reports are posted on the [Ombuds website](#).

Subsequent reports will be released on a semesterly basis and our annual report will be released at the end of the Summer. This will be a change 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 and fair practice throughout Brandeis University.

Quick Links to Report Content

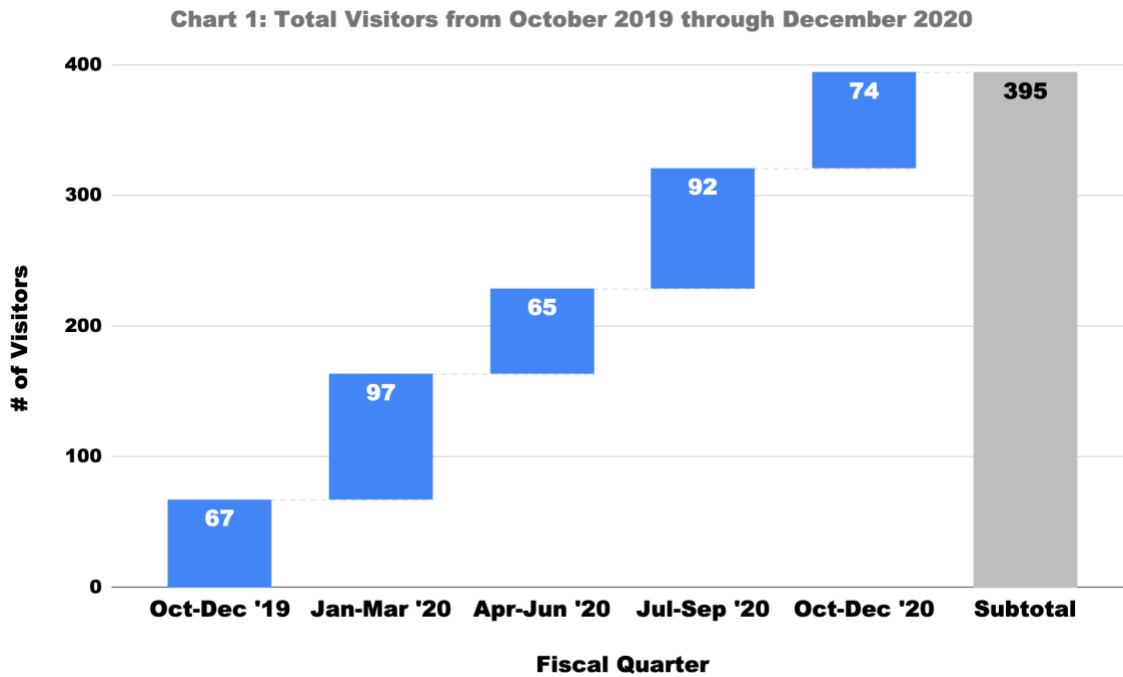
| Information & Highlights | Trends & Recommendations | Current State of Ombuds Office |
|--|--|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Total Visitors• Total Hours Spent with Visitors• Mix of Time Spent with Visitors• Number of Sessions with Visitors• Mix of Gender of Visitors• Mix of Race of Visitors• Primary Issues | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Bullying behavior between and among faculty, staff and students• COVID-19 related issues• Bias Related Incidents• Student-Related Administrative Processes• Professional & Relational Development• Visitor Feedback | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Ombuds Office Team• Ombuds Office Charter• Outreach• COVID-19: Shifts in Service• Goals & Next Steps |

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:

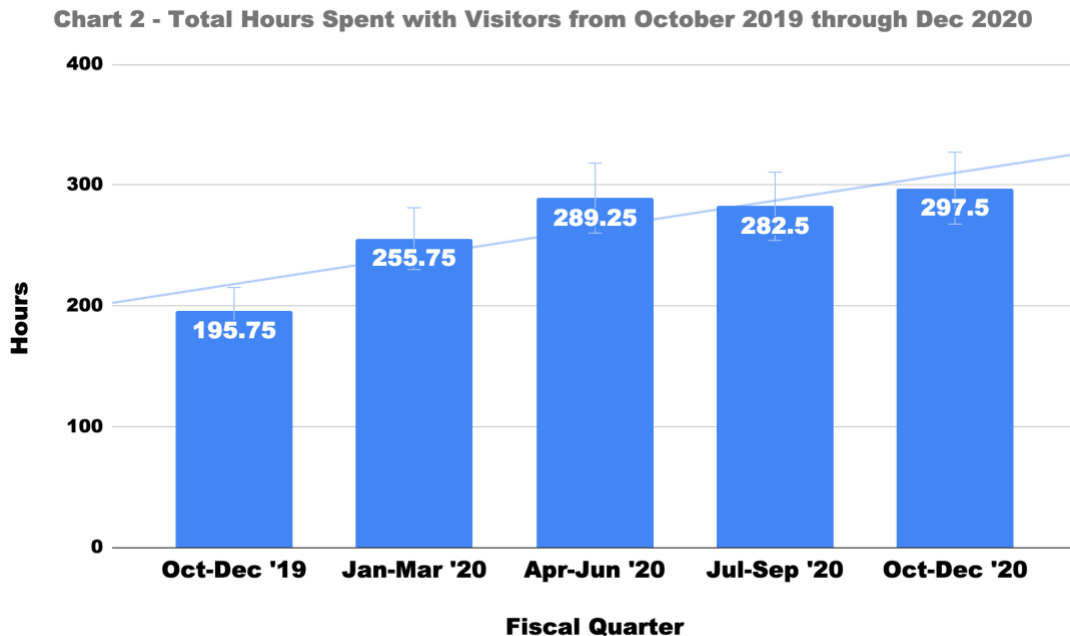
1) you can schedule an appointment online [schedule an appointment online](#) or 2) by emailing brandeisombuds@brandeis.edu to meet outside of the listed meeting times.

Information & Highlights



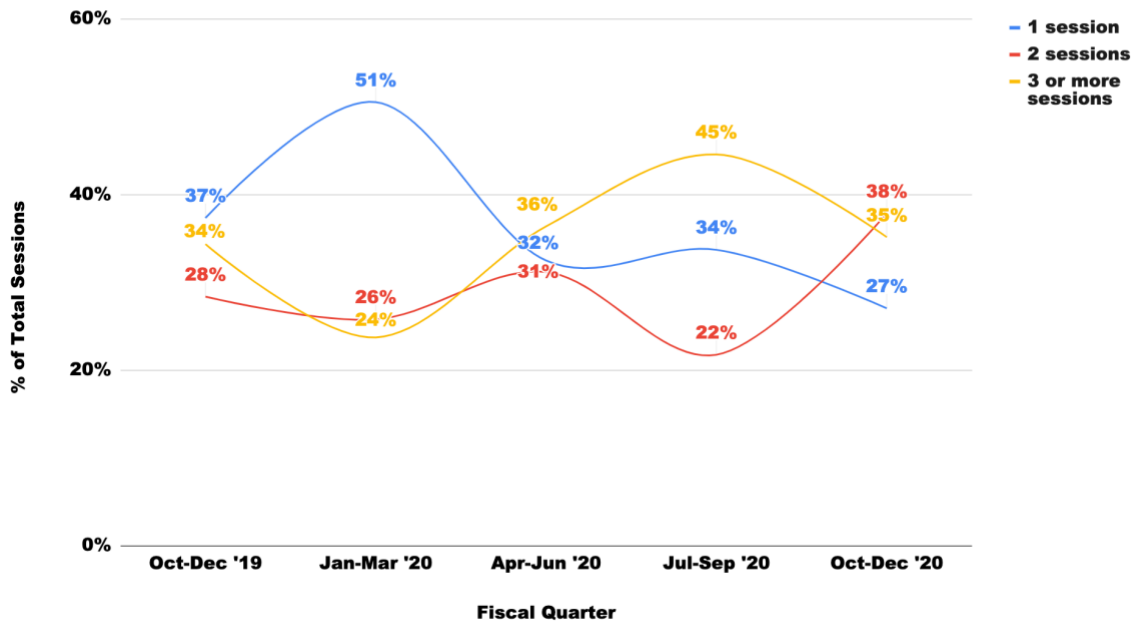
Our total number of visitors from October 2019 through December 2020 is 395. Total visitors decreased from 92 to 74 in the last quarter. The decrease in visitors may be related to the earlier departure of students in November in the semester related to COVID-19 coupled with the holiday period. It is a pattern we will monitor in our transition to semester reporting.

[See a tabular view of Chart 1](#)



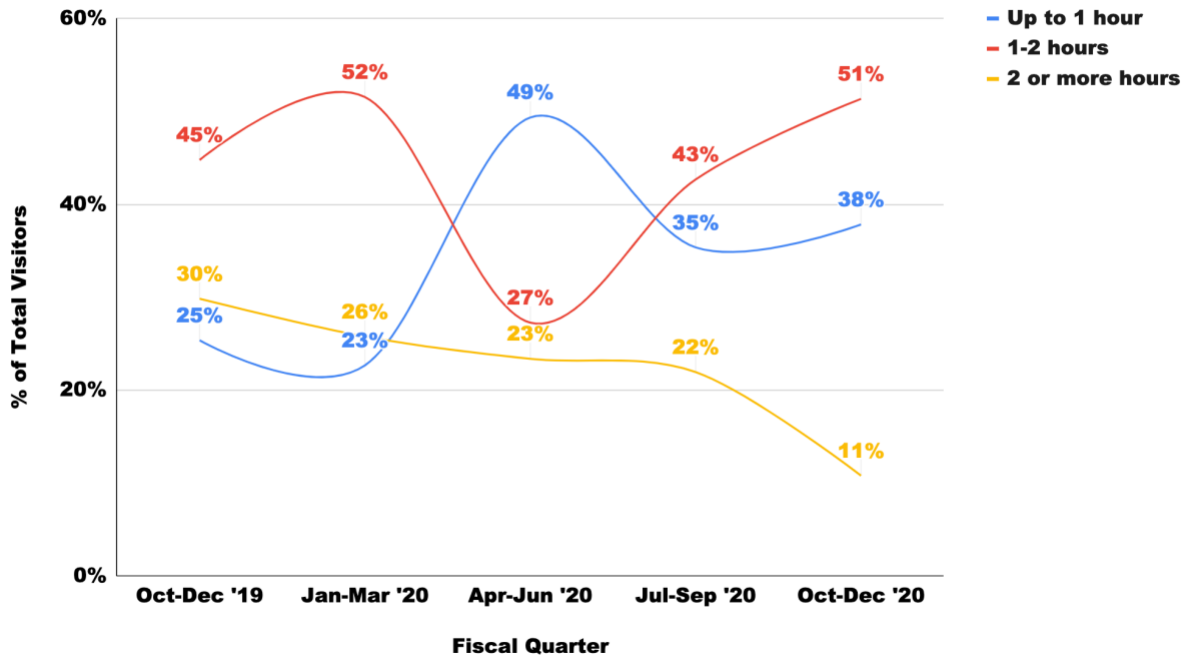
Total hours spent with visitors this quarter was at a high over the last five quarters at 297.5. We spent more time helping and supporting visitors with their on-going priorities and goals. Many concerned students who are living at home arose and the stress level for all who contacted the office this past semester appears to be increased. [See a tabular view of Chart 2](#)

Chart 3 - Number of Sessions with Visitors from October 2019 through December 2020



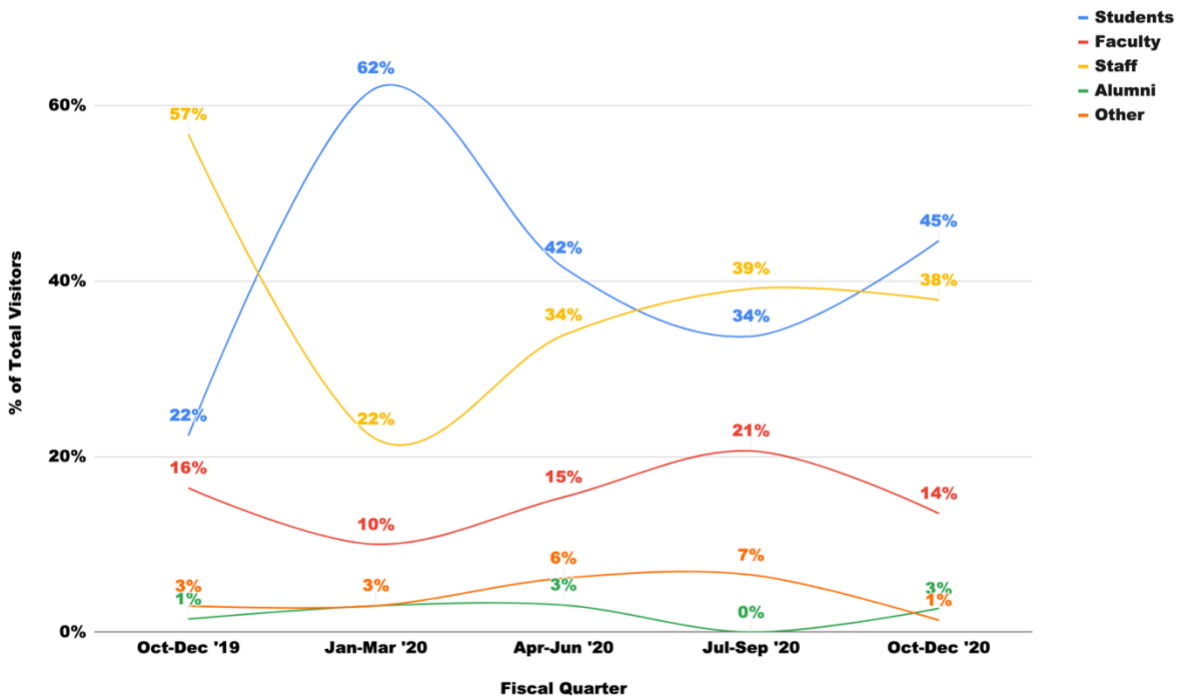
From July 2020 through December 2020, there was an increase in the number of sessions from returning visitors on topics with multiple and/or on-going issues, professional, educational, and relational goals. Since the 4th Quarter of FY 2019-2020 (April-June 2020) we also noted a pattern where the number of hours spent with visitors was for “1-2 hours” with a relative equal percentage decrease for sessions of “up to 1 hour” and “2 or more hours.” [See a tabular view of Chart 3](#)

Chart 4 - Mix of Time Spent with Visitors from October 2019 through December 2020



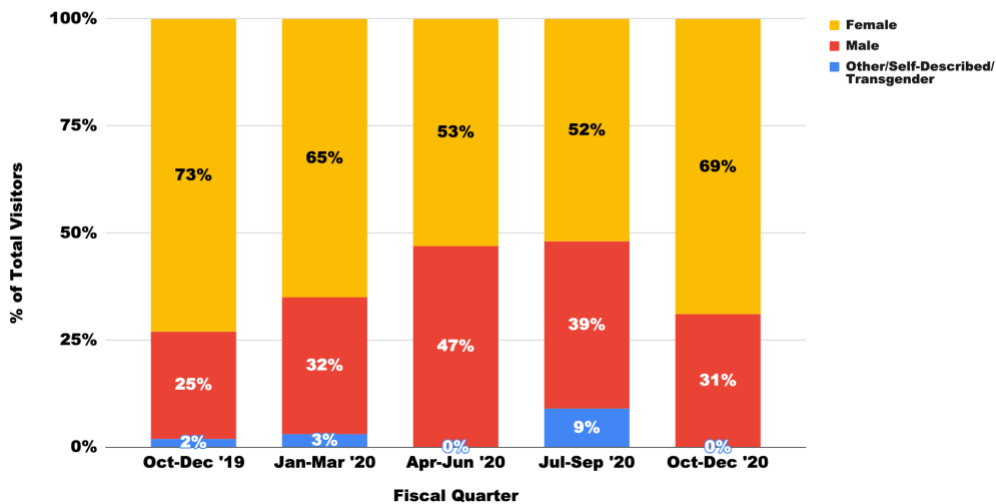
[See a tabular view of Chart 4](#)

Chart 5 - Percentage of Visitor Populations from October 2019 through December 2020



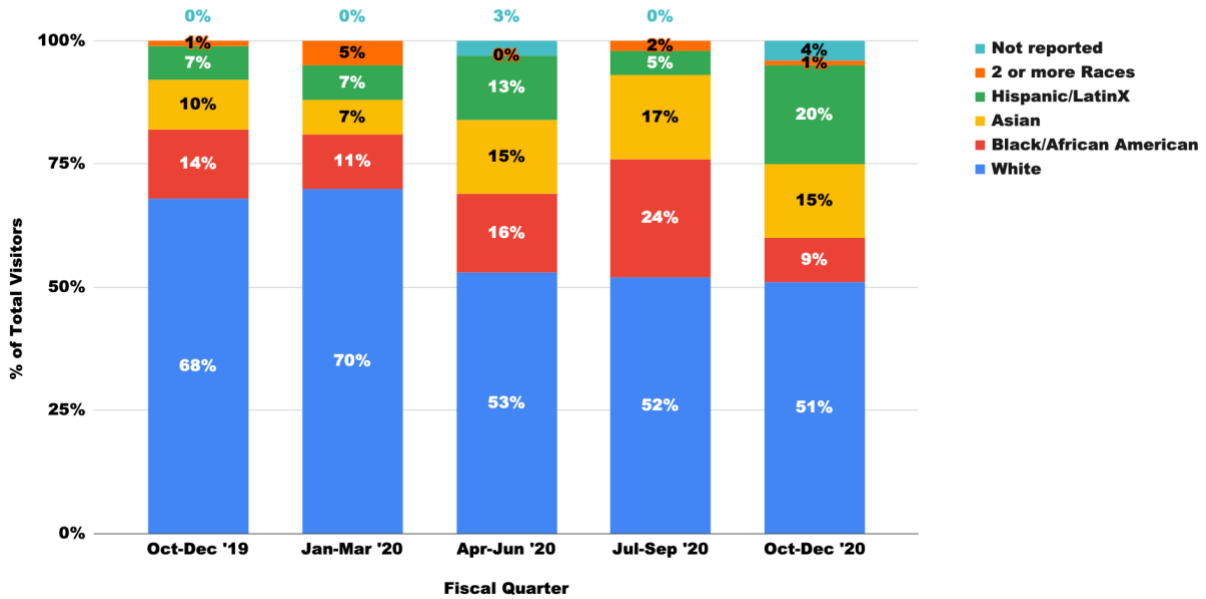
Over the last calendar year between October 2019 through December 2020, there has been a noticeable shift in both the percentage of students and staff we support. The impact of COVID-19 during 2020 coupled with increased visibility through campus communications about COVID-19 where Ombuds were named as a resource resulted in increased usage and subsequent referrals from staff, faculty and students. [See a tabular view of Chart 5](#)

Chart 6 - Gender Mix of Visitors from October 2019 through December 2020



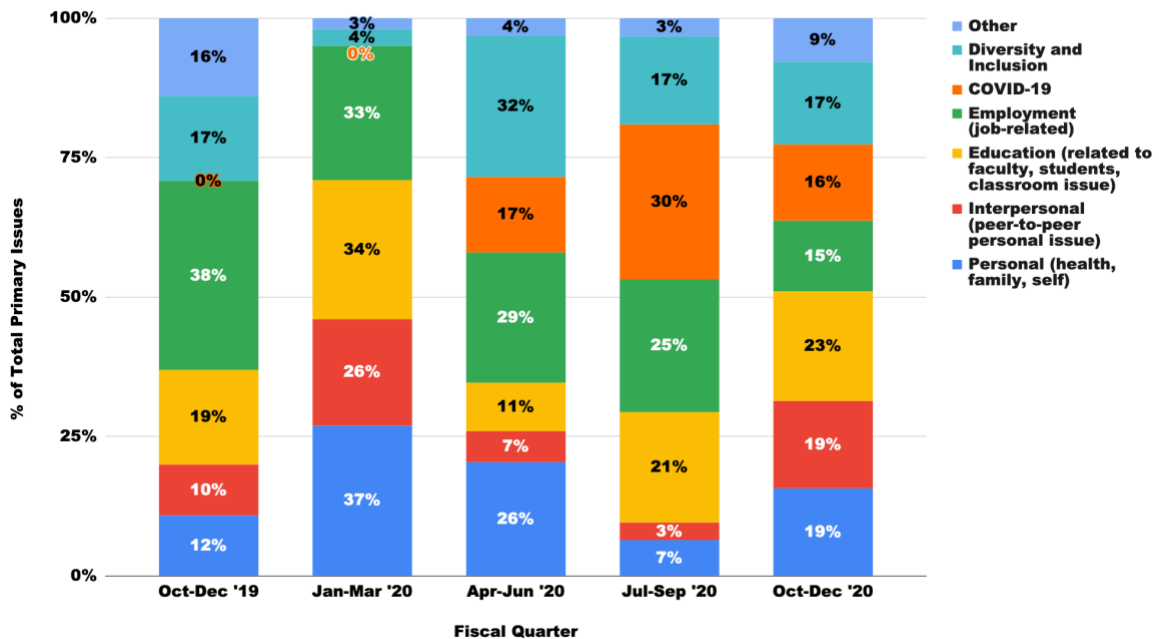
The percentage of visitors by gender are essentially the same when comparing the 2nd Quarter (October-December) of the past two fiscal years. There is noticeable representation for more inclusive gender options during the same time period. It is a pattern we will monitor in our transition to semester reporting in addition to sharing information on how visitors to the Ombuds Office represent the composition of the Brandeis community. We plan to conduct this type of analysis for all of the elements of our report as appropriate and possible. (This is information that represents how visitors either self-identified and noted by an Ombuds or were identified and noted by an Ombuds). [See a tabular view of Chart 6](#)

Chart 7 - Race Mix of Visitors from October 2019 through December 2020



The percentage of visitors representing Black/African American, Asian/Asian American, and Hispanic/LatinX populations since April-June '20 may be related to the disproportionate impacts of COVID-19 on marginalized populations coupled with Ombuds Office outreach across multiple communication channels since the beginning of that period. [See a tabular view of Chart 7](#)

Chart 8 - Primary Visitor Issues from October 2019 through December 2020



Visitors generally experience more than a single primary issue, so the summary above is reflected as the percentage of total primary issues. Specific insights and trends as well as recommendations can be found in the following section of the report. **Other** in **Chart 8** reflects issues related to landlord tenant, off campus housing, alumni, or other concerns not included in one of the other 5 areas. [See a tabular view of Chart 8](#)

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 community. 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/topic/concern. 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, have shared that they have experienced bullying behavior by fellow students, faculty, and staffers who are superiors (people in places of power) 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.

New Emerging Trend: This past Quarter the Ombuds heard from more individuals concerned about retaliation from faculty (across Rank and Tenure) and individuals in places of power all over campus that may terminate individuals or undertake other forms of retaliation for those who file any formal actions or try to discuss these matters with the alleged individuals who are acting out towards them. This continues to raise concerns for the Ombuds office.

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. A mandatory annual performance review system is being considered by the HR department for all employed personnel and may be another way to begin to address this issue. Many of the Visitors are concerned about retaliation or loss of employment if they speak to appropriate leaders or file any formal action against an alleged fellow employee who is acting inappropriately.

All Visitors are directed to the HR, ERO and all other formal complaint processes as well as the anonymous “Report it” site.

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.

New Emerging Trend: The Ombuds have seen issues ranging from stressful situations with supervisors, jobs loss, issues with families for students, faculty and staff working from home as well as 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 and difficulty with online curriculum, demands by supervisors for staff to be on campus during physical distancing, PTSD and stress related to social isolation, and changes in health and living situations and its impact on virtual (online) 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 online 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. First year students who are not on campus and feel the impact of missing out on their college life experiences.

As mentioned above some of the issues raised do not have definitive answers or resources to direct visitors to for answers or support. Being attentive listeners and affirming that these are difficult times is sometimes the only tools our team has to offer a Visitor.

Bias Related Incidents

The Ombuds continue to hear concerns of harassing behavior 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 hand in hand with bullying by tenured personnel based on a concern about retaliation or other unidentified fears. The Ombuds Office refers visitors to the confidential "Report it" site, as well as the Office of Equal Opportunity.

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 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
- (3) continually offer 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.

Student-Related Administrative Processes

Undergraduate and Graduate students have increasingly visited the Ombuds office to receive clarity about academic and student-life related processes and deadlines, particularly with shifts prompted by COVID-19. At times, information for graduate students was confused with that from undergraduates on the website. Undergraduate as well as Graduate student visitors wanted more information about applying for incompletes when experiencing difficulties related to completing their work. Undergraduate visitors asked questions related to academic resources and campus living.

Professional & Relational Development

Across the Brandeis students, staff, and faculty there is a level of engagement and desire to reflect and enhance the experience of working together. These might be developing skills to improve communication practices as well as interpersonal and working relationships in all the combinations that might exist at Brandeis.

As Ombuds we work to be present in the spaces and partner with departments, groups and individuals to in some cases facilitate the skill development as well as connect stakeholders to resources that best serve their interests.

Two aspects of the Ombuds practice are neutrality and independence, so while our designation might be as staff, in public spaces we are listening to all perspectives in order to facilitate and empower the path forward for our community and its members, upholding process fairness. For

example, as independent neutrals, Ombuds attended a number of the [Re-Imagining Public Safety](#) sessions during the 2nd Quarter (October through December 2020) in order to be present, accessible, and supportive as a resource to the entire Brandeis community as this work is continued.

Current State of Ombuds Office

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. A year ago, 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.

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.

Outreach

We are in the process of updating the [Ombuds Charter](#) 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 agreement with the University and all visitors who may use the office.

Other outreach activities continue to focus on sharing more about our services, developing associated marketing 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.

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 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 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 a number of 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 as it evolves.

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

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 virtually by Zoom or phone with online open office hours for scheduling 5 days a week, Monday-Friday. Online self-care, marketing training, and establishing guiding principles for more positive workplace environments 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.**

Appendix – Tabular view of Charts within the Report

Table View of Chart 1: Total Visitors from October 2019 through December 2020

| Total Number of Visitors | October 2019-December 2020 | January-March 2020 | April-June 2020 | July-September 2020 | October-December 2020 | October 2019-December 2020 |
|---------------------------------|-----------------------------------|---------------------------|------------------------|----------------------------|------------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| <i>Total Number of Visitors</i> | 67 | 97 | 65 | 92 | 74 | 395 |

Table View of Chart 2: Total Hours Spent with Visitors from October 2019 through December 2020

| Total Hours Spent with Visitors | October 2019-December 2020 | January-March 2020 | April-June 2020 | July-September 2020 | October-December 2020 |
|--|-----------------------------------|---------------------------|------------------------|----------------------------|------------------------------|
| <i>Total Hours Spent with Visitors</i> | 195.75 | 255.75 | 289.25 | 282.5 | 297.5 |

Table View of Chart 3: Percentage of Sessions with Visitors from October 2019 through December 2020

| Percentage of Number of Sessions with Visitors by Number of Sessions | October 2019-December 2020 | January-March 2020 | April-June 2020 | July-September 2020 | October-December 2020 |
|---|-----------------------------------|---------------------------|------------------------|----------------------------|------------------------------|
| <i>Percentage of Number of Sessions with Visitors with 1 Session</i> | 37% | 51% | 32% | 34% | 27% |
| <i>Percentage of Number of Sessions with Visitors with 2 Sessions</i> | 28% | 26% | 31% | 22% | 38% |
| <i>Percentage of Number of Sessions with Visitors with 3 or More Sessions</i> | 34% | 24% | 36% | 45% | 35% |

Table View of Chart 4: Percentage of Mix of Time Spent with Visitors from October 2019 through December 2020

| Percentage of Mix of Time Spent with Visitors | October 2019-December 2020 | January-March 2020 | April-June 2020 | July-September 2020 | October-December 2020 |
|---|-----------------------------------|---------------------------|------------------------|----------------------------|------------------------------|
| <i>Percentage of Mix of Time Spent with Visitors of Up to 1 Hour</i> | 25% | 23% | 49% | 35% | 38% |
| <i>Percentage of Mix of Time Spent with Visitors of 1-2 Hours</i> | 45% | 52% | 27% | 43% | 51% |
| <i>Percentage of Mix of Time Spent with Visitors of 2 or More Hours</i> | 30% | 26% | 23% | 22% | 11% |

Table View of Chart 5: Percentage of Visitor Populations from October 2019 through December 2020

| Percentage of Visitor Populations | October 2019-December 2020 | January-March 2020 | April-June 2020 | July-September 2020 | October-December 2020 |
|--|-----------------------------------|---------------------------|------------------------|----------------------------|------------------------------|
| <i>Percentage of Students</i> | 22% | 62% | 42% | 34% | 45% |
| <i>Percentage of Faculty</i> | 16% | 10% | 15% | 21% | 14% |
| <i>Percentage of Staff</i> | 57% | 22% | 34% | 39% | 38% |
| <i>Percentage of Alumni</i> | 1% | 3% | 3% | 0% | 3% |
| <i>Percentage of Other</i> | 3% | 3% | 6% | 7% | 1% |

Table view of Chart 6: Percentage of Gender of Visitors from October 2019 through December 2020

| Percentage of Gender of Visitors | October 2019-December 2020 | January-March 2020 | April-June 2020 | July-September 2020 | October-December 2020 |
|---|-----------------------------------|---------------------------|------------------------|----------------------------|------------------------------|
| <i>Percentage of Female Visitors</i> | 73% | 65% | 53% | 52% | 69% |
| <i>Percentage of Male Visitors</i> | 25% | 32% | 47% | 39% | 31% |
| <i>Percentage of Other/Self-Described/Transgender</i> | 2% | 3% | 0% | 9% | 0% |

Table view of Chart 7: Percentage of Race of Visitors from October 2019 through December 2020

| Percentage of Race of Visitor Populations | October 2019-December 2020 | January-March 2020 | April-June 2020 | July-September 2020 | October-December 2020 |
|--|-----------------------------------|---------------------------|------------------------|----------------------------|------------------------------|
| <i>Percentage Not Reported</i> | 0% | 0% | 3% | 0% | 4% |
| <i>Percentage of 2 or More Races</i> | 1% | 5% | 0% | 2% | 1% |
| <i>Percentage Hispanic/LatinX</i> | 7% | 7% | 13% | 5% | 20% |
| <i>Percentage Black/African American</i> | 14% | 11% | 16% | 24% | 9% |
| <i>Percentage White</i> | 68% | 70% | 53% | 52% | 51% |

Table view of Chart 8: Percentage of Primary Visitor Issues from October 2019 through December 2020

| Percentage of Primary Visitor Issues | October 2019-December 2020 | January-March 2020 | April-June 2020 | July-September 2020 | October-December 2020 |
|--|-----------------------------------|---------------------------|------------------------|----------------------------|------------------------------|
| <i>Percentage Other</i> | 16% | 3% | 4% | 3% | 9% |
| <i>Diversity and Inclusion</i> | 17% | 4% | 32% | 17% | 17% |
| <i>COVID-19</i> | 0% | 0% | 17% | 30% | 16% |
| <i>Employment (job-related)</i> | 38% | 33% | 29% | 25% | 15% |
| <i>Education (related to faculty, students, classroom issue)</i> | 19% | 34% | 11% | 21% | 23% |
| <i>Interpersonal (peer-to-peer personal issue)</i> | 10% | 26% | 7% | 3% | 19% |
| <i>Personal (health, family, self)</i> | 12% | 37% | 26% | 7% | 19% |