

# Brandeis University Ombuds

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

## Spring Semester Report: January-May 2021

Revised May 24, 2022

## Our Reporting Cycle

This is a “Semester” report on the activities of the Brandeis University Ombuds Office including data from the months of January through May 2021. This report highlights information around visits, trends, and issues as well as the milestones and accomplishments of the Ombuds Office during the spring semester of the 2020-2021 academic/fiscal year.

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 Trends, Highlights & Consideration

- [Total Visits](#)
- [Time Spent with Visitors](#)
- [Percentage of Number of Sessions with Visitors](#)
- [Mix of Time Spent](#)
- [Mix of Visitor Populations](#)
- [Primary Issues](#)

## Current Ombuds Office Team

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.

The Ombuds 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. The current Ombuds team includes [Don Greenstein](#), [Elena Lewis](#), and [Mike Rozinsky](#). Elena will be leaving the office at the end of this semester but will remain available as an on-call resource for short-term support. [Esther Lin](#), who will be joining as a part-time ombuds this fall, contributed to the updating of this report.

Visit our [website](#) to learn more about our standards of practice of confidentiality, impartiality, informality, and independence in the [Policy Statement](#) on the Brandeis Ombuds Office. The Ombuds are not mandatory reporters, nor an office of notice for Brandeis University. This makes the Ombuds Office a good place to start when you don't know where to go or when you have experienced something, and you want an informal space to explore your options before you potentially involve others.

## 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.

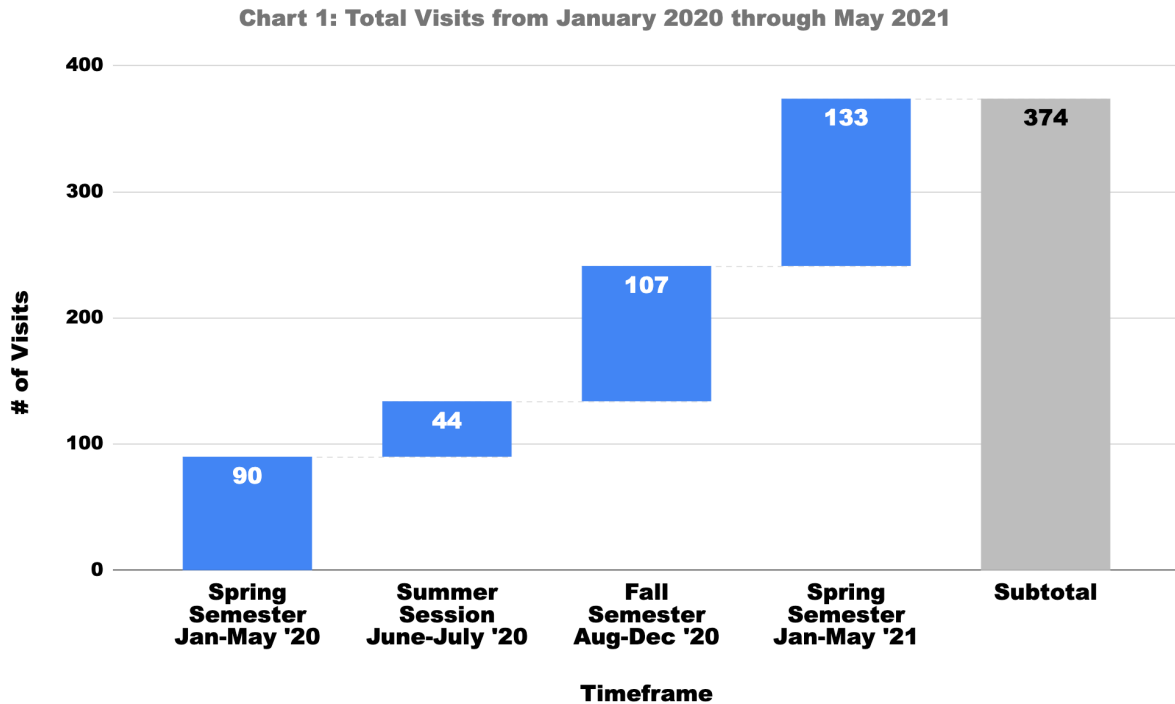
## Updates to Reporting

The Ombuds Office views reporting as adaptive, and we plan to continue to update the format of our reporting in order to further the understanding and identification of opportunities for constructive change and information sharing across the Brandeis community. As such, this information is shared with the University Leadership and across the campus community to encourage institutional change and fair practice throughout Brandeis University.

## Defining “Trends”

“Trends” are informed by our data and the topics and issues raised voluntarily by visitors during visits 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.

## Trends, Highlights & Considerations



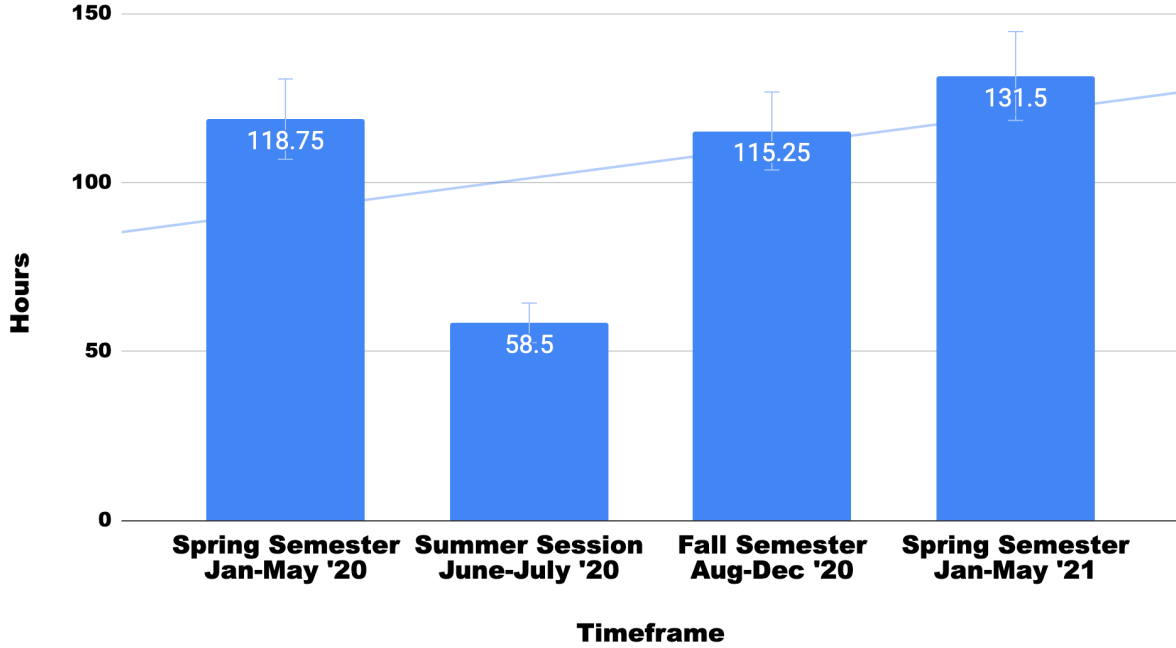
Our total number of visits from January 1, 2021 until May 30, 2021 is 133.

Total visits increased during this time period as compared to the last semester. We met with 133 visitors in the spring semester, as compared to 107 visitors in the prior fall semester. The increase may be related to a number of community concerns and campus-wide upcoming changes:

- the upcoming fall 2021 return to campus;
- the changes in policies surrounding COVID-19;
- concern about policies and retaliation for using formal processes to report harassment, bullying and discriminatory concerns;
- Students, staff and faculty have found the Ombuds as a valuable resource. Visitors come to think through issues that they are uncertain how to resolve on their own and choose to do so in a confidential, and informal manner.

Over sixty percent of the visitors this semester were returning individuals who have visited the office previously for a different or the same concern. This is positive, meaning people who have used the Ombuds Office in the past feel comfortable returning to discuss their concerns or find appropriate resources. [See a tabular view of Chart 1](#)

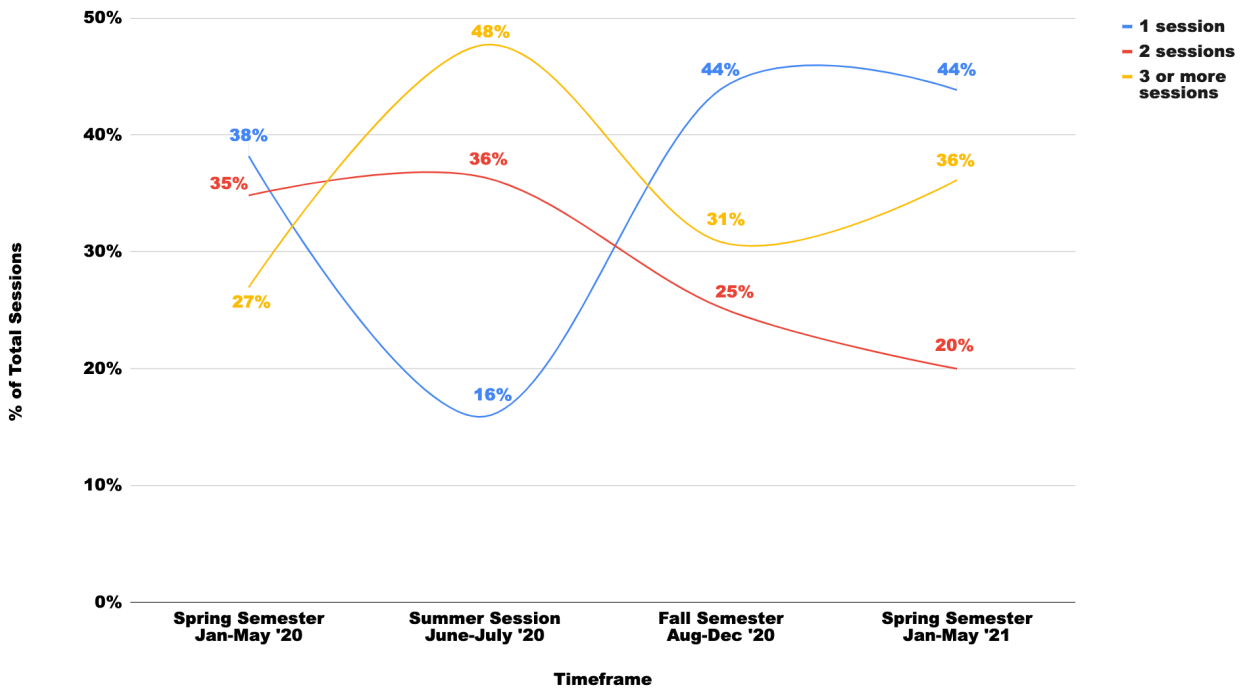
**Chart 2 - Time Spent with Visitors from January 2020 through May 2021**



Total hours spent with visitors this semester was high when compared to prior semesters. We spent more time helping and supporting visitors with their ongoing concerns, issues, identifying resources, individual priorities and goals. Many concerned students, staff, and faculty who are working, living, and studying at home, as well as on campus reported high stress levels.

[See a tabular view of Chart 2](#)

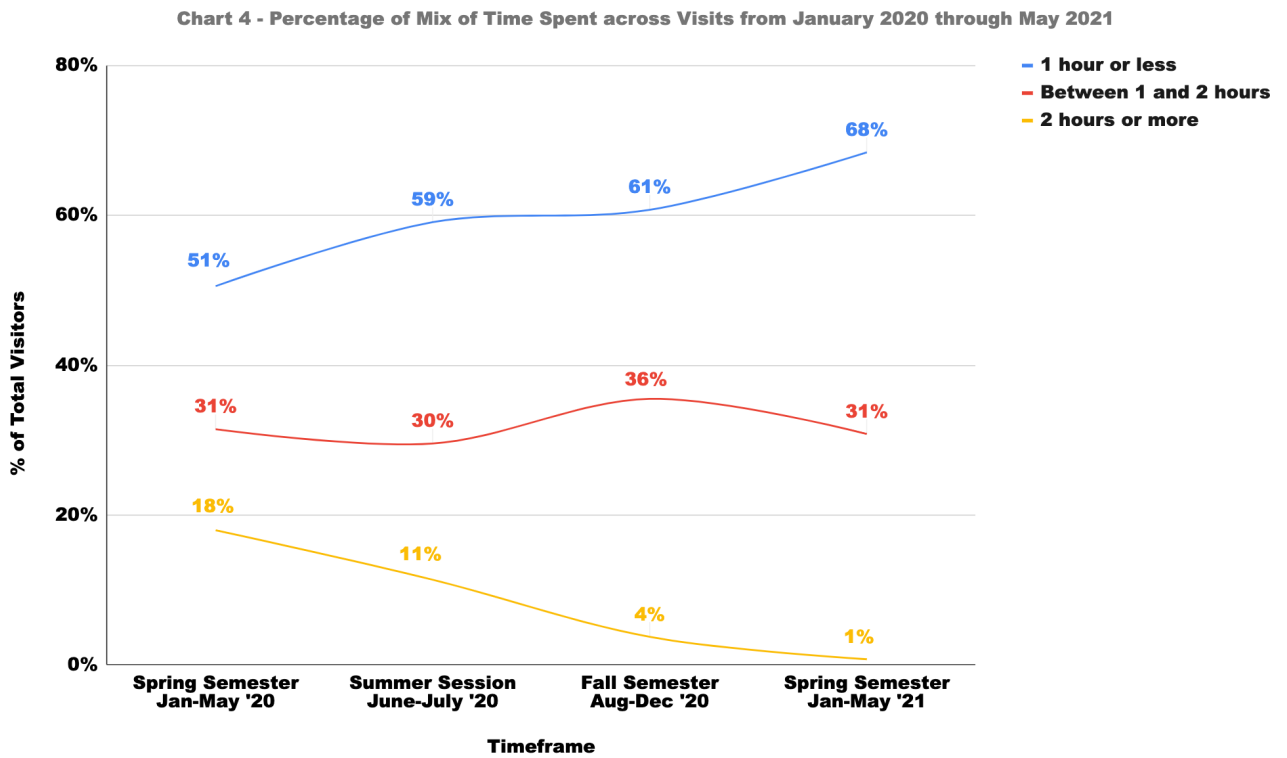
Chart 3 - Percentage of Number of Sessions across Visits from January 2020 through May 2021



The first Spring Semester along with the first Summer Session of the pandemic represent a mix of visit numbers likely related to the complexity of navigating the early stages of the pandemic as the Brandeis community and the world navigated what’s next.

As Brandeis codified its approach to the pandemic the session mix is more representative of what the Ombuds Office is accustomed to where the slight majority of sessions with a visitor are 1 or more sessions. It’s worth noting that the shift from in-person visits to online visits could also be a factor in the multiple sessions since online visits are typically scheduled for one hour to accommodate new meeting norms related to the pandemic. [See tabular view of Chart 3](#)

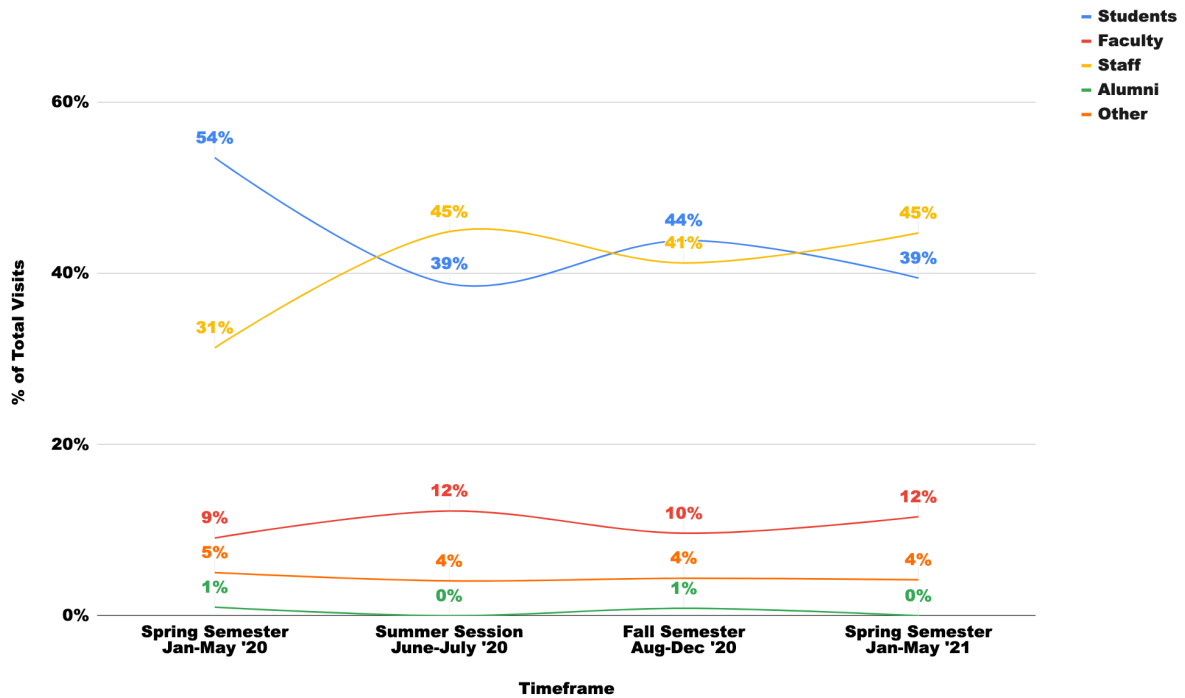
As seen in Chart 4 below, from January 2020 through March 2021, visits length has steadily shifted to 99% of visits lasting one hour or less and between one and two hours from 82% in the first semester of the pandemic when there were more unknowns across the Brandeis community.



It is apparent that those who visit the Ombuds Office need a place to confidentially share their situation and find resources that can help people through difficult, stressful, and uncertain times.

As Charts 3 and 4 demonstrate, the Ombuds Office continuously seeks to be flexible and meet these visitors' needs as circumstances evolve. [See a tabular view of Chart 4](#)

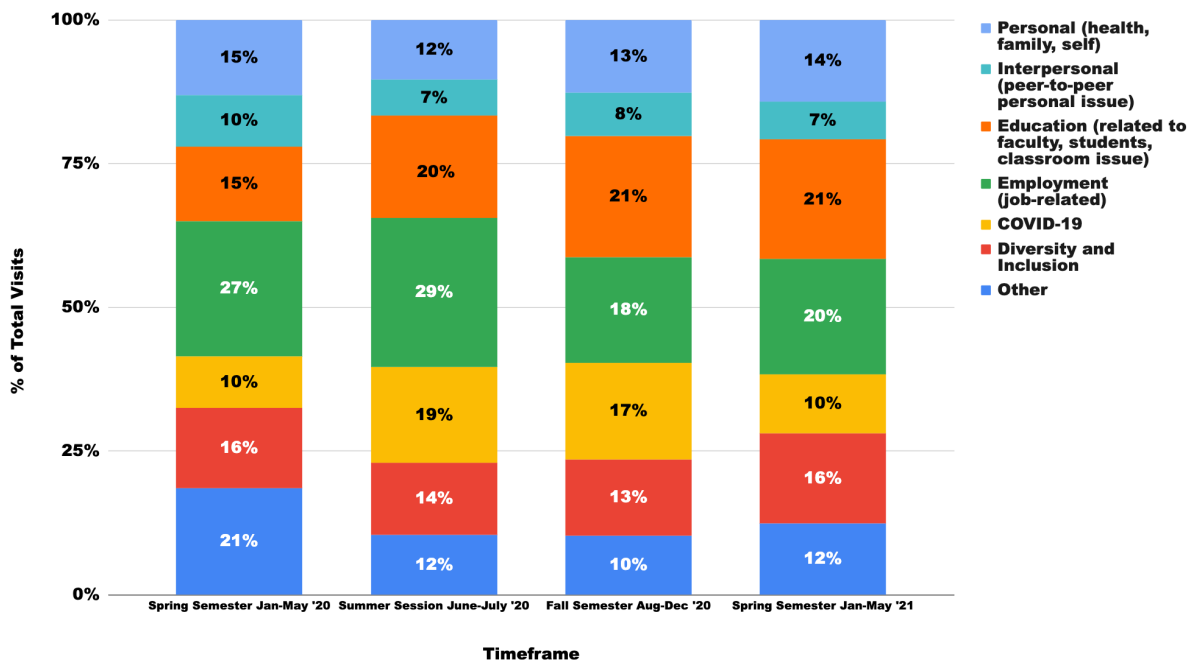
**Chart 5 - Percentage of Visitor Populations from January 2020 through May 2021**



Since Spring Semester 2020, there has been a marked increase in visits with staff. Between January to May 2021, 45% of visits to the Ombuds Office were by staff, 39% by students, and 12% by faculty. This may be a result of staff experiencing various changes and pressures due to COVID-19.

[See a tabular view of Chart 5](#)

Chart 6 - Percentage of Primary Issues across Visitors from January 2020 through May 2021



Many visitors shared more than a single primary issue, so the summary above is reflected as the percentage of total primary issues. Education, Employment, and Diversity and Inclusion issues are the most common among issues that visitors have brought to the Office, and this semester, there has been a slight decrease in COVID-19 related issues. Still, the Ombuds have seen many significant concerns related to COVID, including changes in health and living situations and the impact on virtual classes, the impact of urgent changes and 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 campus policies. The Ombuds have also seen international student visitors experiencing visa concerns and time zone concerns while attending classes online. In addition, this semester the Ombuds team has continued to hear from a large number of individuals concerned about retaliation from faculty (across rank and tenure) as a result of filing formal actions or trying to discuss problematic behavior with the individuals allegedly acting out towards them. This is a past and present trend that continues to raise concerns for the Ombuds Office. We are working with leaders and directors to try and facilitate difficult conversations and establish norms or guiding principles to help create respectful workplace environments and classrooms.

“Other” in Chart 6 reflects issues related to landlord/tenant, off-campus housing, alumni, or other concerns not included in one of the other six areas. [See a tabular view of Chart 6](#)



## Appendix – Tabular view of Charts within the Report

Table View of Chart 1: Total Visits from January 2020 through May 2021

<b>Total Number of Visits</b>	<b>Spring Semester Jan-May '20</b>	<b>Summer Session June-July '20</b>	<b>Fall Semester Aug-Dec '20</b>	<b>Spring Semester Jan-May '21</b>	<b>Subtotal</b>
<i>Number of Visits</i>	90	44	107	133	374

Table View of Chart 2: Time Spent with Visitors from January 2020 through May 2021

<b>Total Hours Spent with Visitors</b>	<b>Spring Semester Jan-May '20</b>	<b>Summer Session June-July '20</b>	<b>Fall Semester Aug-Dec '20</b>	<b>Spring Semester Jan-May '21</b>
<i>Hours</i>	118.75	58.5	115.25	131.5

Table View of Chart 3: Percentage of Number of Sessions across Visits from January 2020 through May 2021

<b>Percentage of Number of Sessions with Visitors by Number of Sessions</b>	<b>Spring Semester Jan-May '20</b>	<b>Summer Session June-July '20</b>	<b>Fall Semester Aug-Dec '20</b>	<b>Spring Semester Jan-May '21</b>
<i>Percentage of Number of Sessions with Visitors with 1 Session</i>	38%	16%	44%	44%
<i>Percentage of Number of Sessions with Visitors with 2 Sessions</i>	35%	36%	25%	20%
<i>Percentage of Number of Sessions with Visitors with 3 or More Sessions</i>	27%	48%	31%	36%

Table View of Chart 4: Percentage of Mix of Time Spent across Visits from January 2020 through May 2021

<b>Percentage of Mix of Time Spent with Visitors</b>	<b>Spring Semester Jan-May '20</b>	<b>Summer Session June-July '20</b>	<b>Fall Semester Aug-Dec '20</b>	<b>Spring Semester Jan-May '21</b>
<i>Percentage of Mix of Time Spent with Visitors 1 Hour or Less</i>	51%	59%	61%	68%
<i>Percentage of Mix of Time Spent with Visitors Between 1 and 2 Hours</i>	31%	30%	36%	31%
<i>Percentage of Mix of Time Spent with Visitors of 2 Hours or More</i>	18%	11%	4%	1%

Table View of Chart 5: Percentage of Visitor Populations from January 2020 through May 2021

<b>Percentage of Visitor Populations</b>	<b>Spring Semester Jan-May '20</b>	<b>Summer Session June-July '20</b>	<b>Fall Semester Aug-Dec '20</b>	<b>Spring Semester Jan-May '21</b>
<i>Percentage of Students</i>	54%	39%	44%	39%
<i>Percentage of Faculty</i>	9%	12%	10%	12%
<i>Percentage of Staff</i>	31%	45%	41%	45%
<i>Percentage of Alumni</i>	1%	0%	1%	0%
<i>Percentage of Other</i>	5%	4%	4%	4%

Table View of Chart 6: Percentage of Primary Issues across Visits from January 2020 through May 2021

<b>Percentage of Primary Visitor Issues</b>	<b>Spring Semester Jan-May '20</b>	<b>Summer Session June-July '20</b>	<b>Fall Semester Aug-Dec '20</b>	<b>Spring Semester Jan-May '21</b>
<i>Personal (health, family, self)</i>	15%	12%	13%	14%
<i>Interpersonal (peer-to-peer personal issue)</i>	10%	7%	8%	7%
<i>Education (related to faculty, students, classroom issue)</i>	15%	20%	21%	21%
<i>Employment (job-related)</i>	27%	29%	18%	20%
<i>COVID-19</i>	10%	19%	17%	10%
<i>Diversity and Inclusion</i>	16%	14%	13%	16%
<i>Other</i>	21%	12%	10%	12%