

Brandeis University Ombuds

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

Fall Semester Report: August-December 2022

The Fall 2022 Semester Report contains various trends, highlights, and considerations arising from visits to the Ombuds Office from August to December 2022. This report includes data from the Fall Semester 2022 (August-December), Summer Session 2022 (June-July), Spring Semester 2022 (January-May), Fall Semester 2021 (August-December), Summer Session 2021 (June-July), and Spring Semester 2021 (January-May).

Ombuds Office reports are posted on the [Ombuds Office website](#). Our current practice is to report at the end of every semester and one annual summary report that is published in the fall of each year.

Quick Links to Trends, Highlights, Anomalies, & Considerations

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- [Percentage of Number of Sessions with Visitors](#)
- [Mix of Time Spent](#)
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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 a coach to help, support, and empower community members, offices, and teams. We like to think of it as a place to go when you don't know where to go!

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](#), [Esther Lin](#), and [Mike Rozinsky](#).

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.

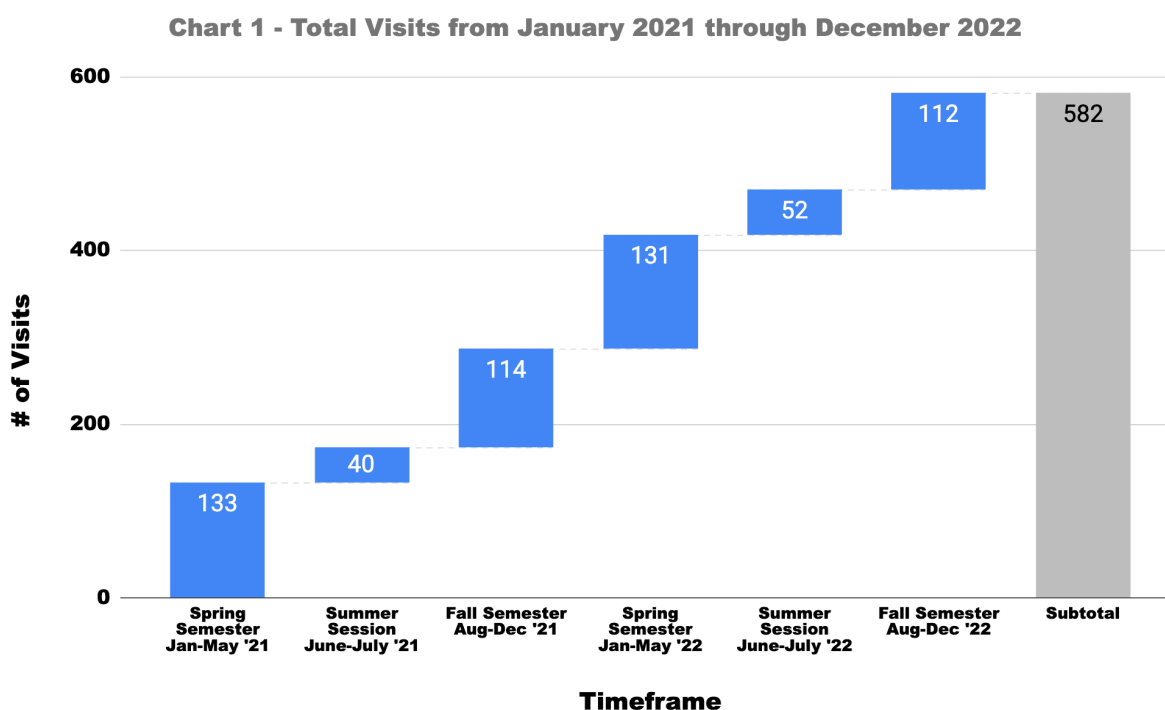
Contact Us

For information on how to schedule appointments, ways we work with visitors, and access our online resources, visit our [website](#) or call the confidential Ombuds Office phone line 781.736.2265. We are available 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 to meet with an Ombuds. You may request a specific individual or one will be assigned to contact you. Visiting the Ombuds Office is always voluntary, and each visitor may choose which Ombuds they would like to meet.

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, Anomalies, & Considerations



The total number of visits to the Ombuds office from August 1, 2022 until December 31, 2022 was 112. [See a tabular view of Chart 1](#)

Total visits decreased during this time period as compared to the spring semester by 15%. The decrease is similar to past fall semesters. We typically find that there are fewer visitors in the fall semester than the spring. It may be that there are a number of new individuals on campus who do not yet know about the Ombuds office, and people are getting adjusted to Brandeis.

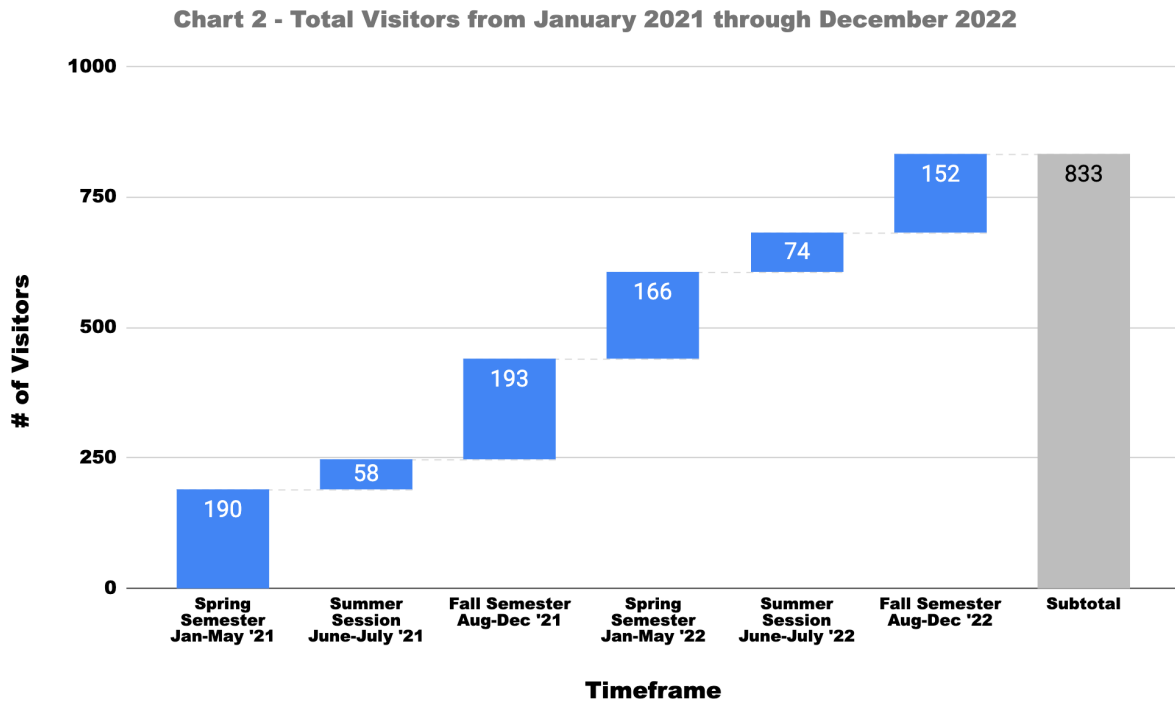
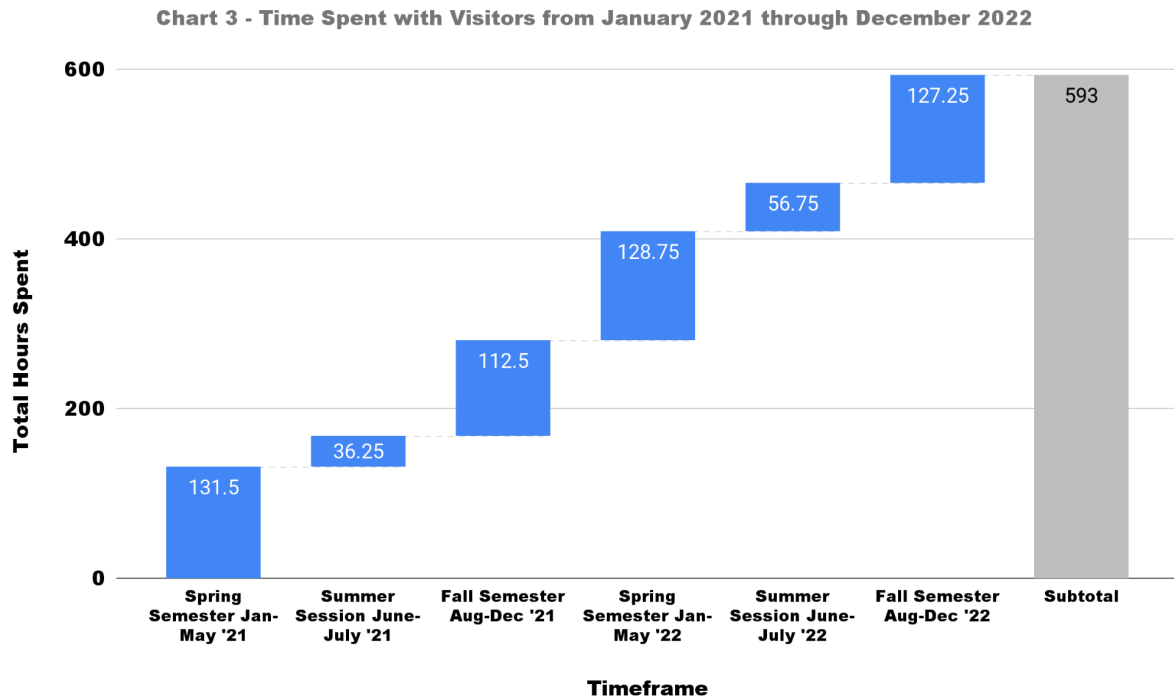
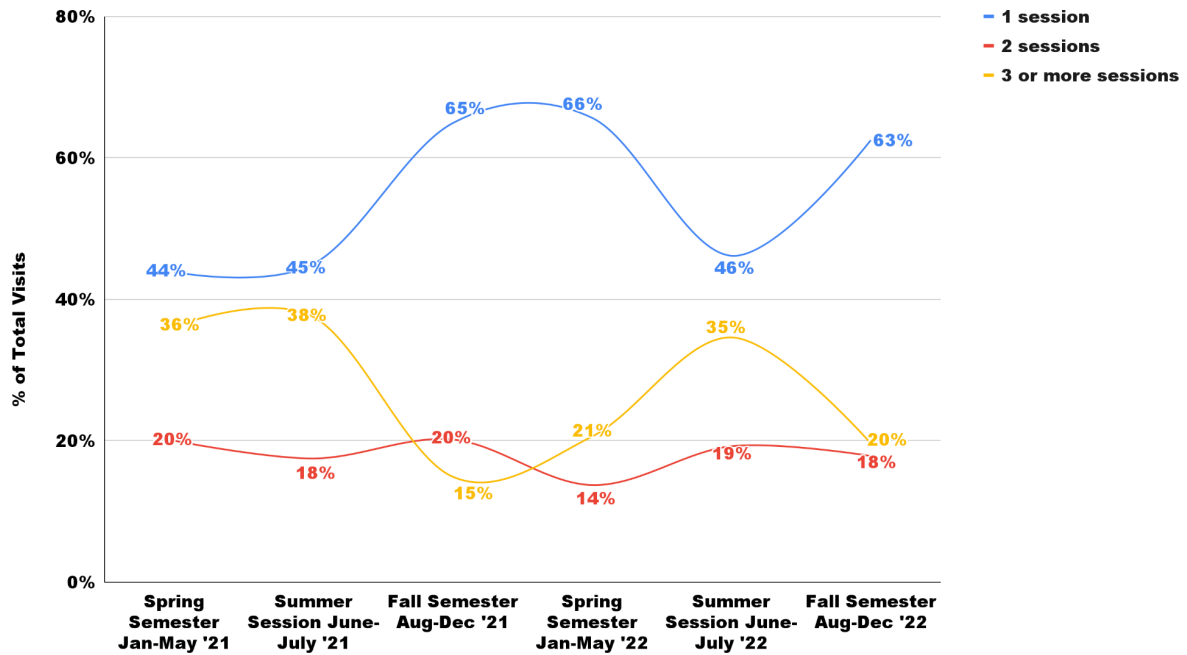


Chart 2 shows the total number of visitors who met with an Ombuds. There are more visitors than visits in each semester ([Chart 1](#)), as an Ombuds may meet with multiple visitors for a facilitated dialogue and other kinds of group work furthering the conflict management capability building across the community. [See a tabular view of Chart 2](#)

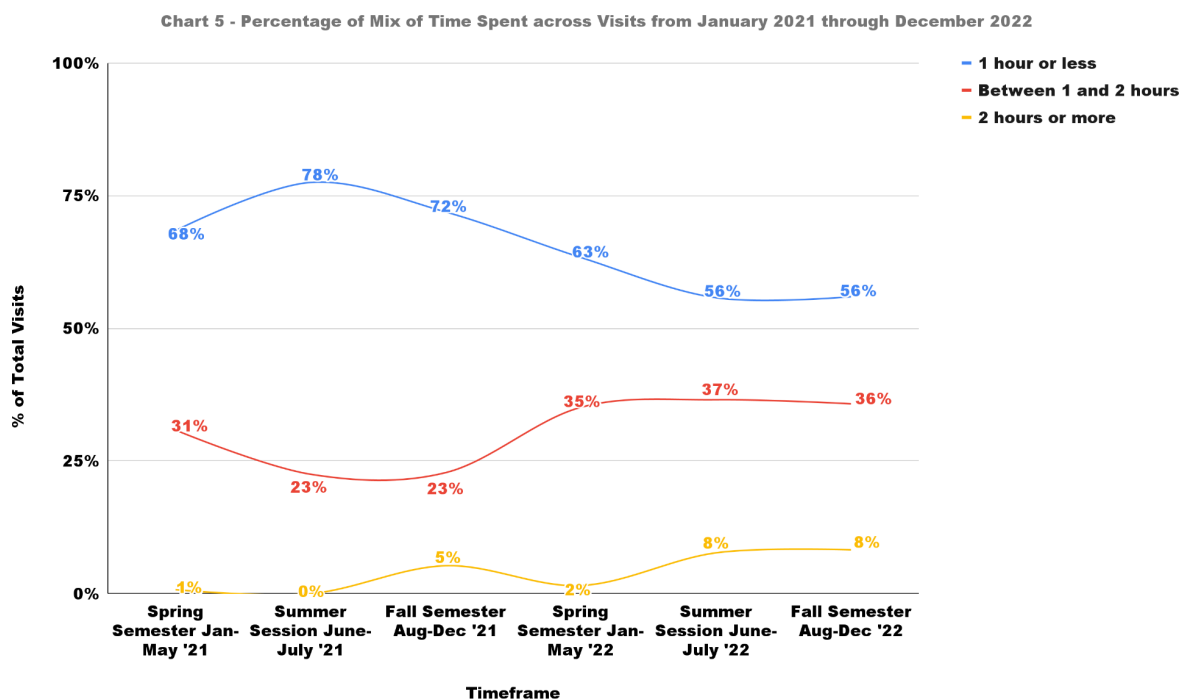


The time included in Chart 3 below reflects time spent with visitors helping and supporting their ongoing concerns and issues, as well as identifying resources and individual priorities and goals. It is not inclusive of time by the Ombuds coordinating a visit, reviewing policy, and/or exploring possible options independently from the visitor(s). Time spent conducting training and informational/marketing sessions or meeting with various leaders and committees across campus to learn about ongoing needs is in addition to the time reflected in this chart. [See tabular view of Chart 3](#)

Chart 4 - Percentage of Number of Sessions across Visits from January 2021 through December 2022

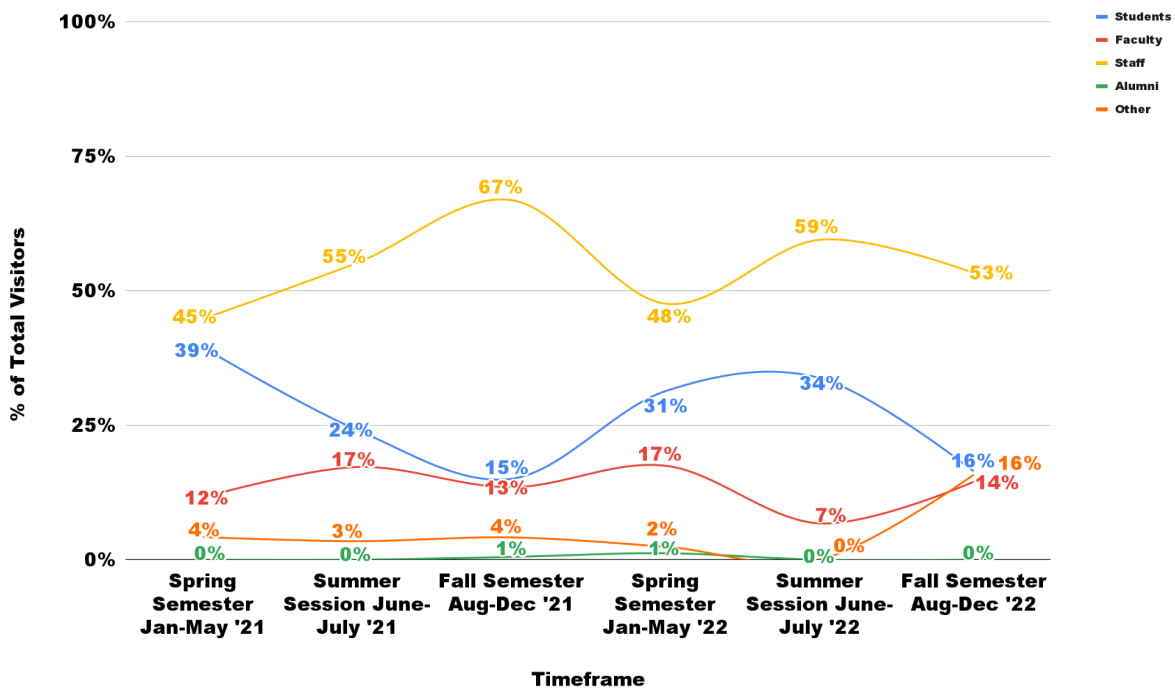


It is apparent that most visitors come for a single visit (63%). Visitors who came for two sessions dropped slightly from 19% to 18% this past semester, and three or more visits has decreased from 35% to 20%. The decrease in three or more visits is possibly related to the change in meetings from Zoom to in person as we returned to campus from the COVID-19 protocol changes. [See tabular view of Chart 4](#)



It is clear that most visitors meet with an Ombuds for 1 hour or shorter. Visits of this duration remained constant this past semester at 56%. Visitors spending between 1-2 hours slightly decreased by 1% (37% to 36%), and those spending 2 hours or more stayed constant at 8%. The slight changes in time spent with visitors is solely dependent on the needs of the visitor. We design our initial meetings to last no more than 90 minutes, and since this is a voluntary meeting, the visitors generally control how long they choose to spend in a meeting with the Ombuds. [See tabular view of Chart 5](#)

Chart 6 - Percentage of Visitor Populations from January 2021 through December 2022



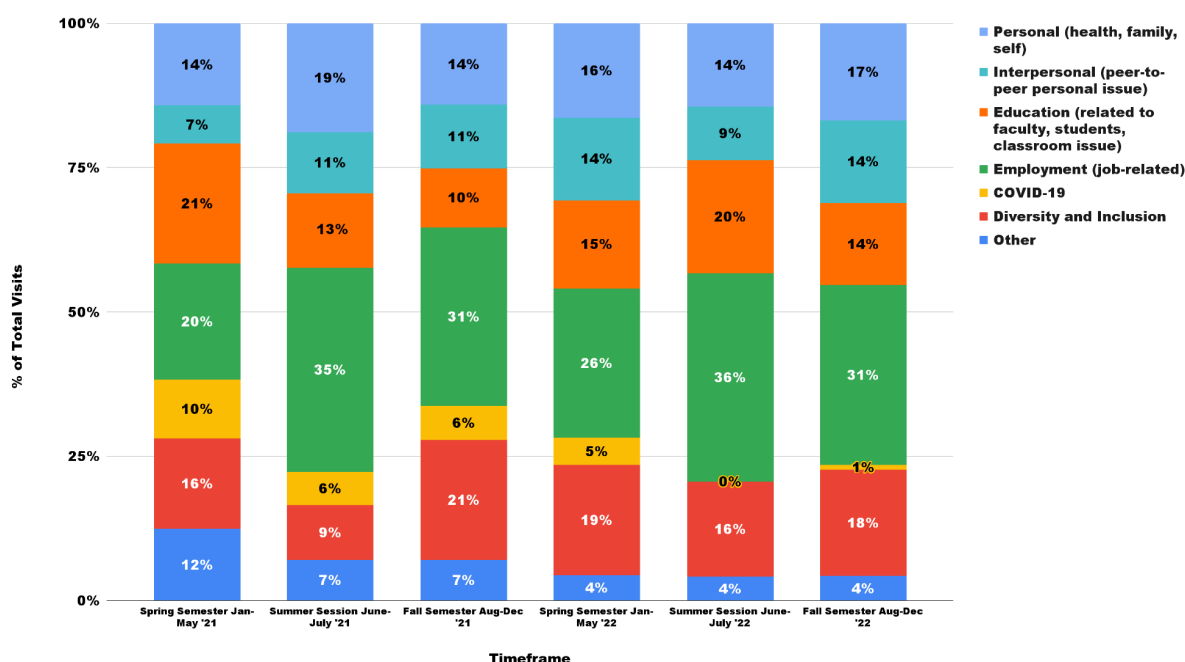
This past semester, Staff visitors have decreased by 6% (59% to 53%) while Student visitors decreased from 34% to 16%. The percentage of Faculty visitors doubled (7% to 14%), possibly related in part to Ombuds reporting at the Faculty meetings all over campus on a regular basis this past semester. Alumni have stayed very low, with no contacts this past semester. "Other" visitors increased markedly from 0 contacts last semester to 16% this past semester. "Other" reflects a non-Brandeisian visitor (parent, landlord, community member with a Brandeis related concern, etc.). We did have a number of parental concerns that arose this past semester (parents contacting the office with or without student involvement).

Topics raised by Staff and Faculty visitors range from policy concerns, adherence to policy, discriminatory practices, communication issues, ineffective and inappropriate management styles and practices, civility, stress in the workplace, and return to campus concerns. Bullying and concern about retaliation also remain rampant, with many individuals unwilling to file a formal grievance for fear of retaliation or loss of their job. There also has been a significant rise in concern about staff having to handle the work of individuals who have departed for long durations when no replacement or temporary staff are hired to replace the position that has not been filled. Some individuals have complained of having to handle two or more positions, and not being compensated for doing work outside of their usual job description.

Topics raised by Student visitors include housing and roommate conflicts, lack of due process in formal processes, health and accessibility, lack of civility, respect in the classroom and on campus, bullying, and concerns about retaliation if a formal action is filed.

These concerns have grown for all visitors as many people in leadership roles on campus have recently announced their departures. [See tabular view of Chart 6](#)

Chart 7 - Percentage of Primary Issues across Visits from January 2021 through December 2022



The primary issues as discussed in the comments associated with Chart 6 above are reflected in Chart 7. The primary issues remain relatively constant since the prior semester. Still, there are issue categories to highlight:

- The job-related employment concerns, although the largest topic area, decreased this semester by 5% (from 36% to 31%), and remain the same as a year ago, in the fall of 2021 (31%). We still regularly hear about concerns related to poor management styles, lack of 1-1 meetings and information shared prior to a performance review, people having to cover for others' departure, feeling as if they are handling significantly more work with little or no recognition (and no increase in compensation) for the extra workload they are carrying above and beyond their usual job responsibilities.
- Diversity and Inclusion concerns account for 18% of the primary issues across visits this semester. Visitors described experiencing the impact of cultural differences, microaggressions, lack of sensitivity in communications as well as poor interpersonal workplace relationships, disparate treatment on the basis of various identities, microaggressions, power dynamics, and the need for more training and BIPOC representation in the faculty and staff.
- Education/classroom concerns increased by 4% this past year (10% in Fall 2021 to 14% in Fall 2022) as students shared issues relating to accessibility and accommodation issues, grading policies, and communication concerns.
- Interpersonal concerns increased by 3% over the past year (11% in Fall 2021 to 14% in Fall 2022), as well as personal health issues (14-17%). Both could be related to increased in-person interactions as we return to campus and mental health concerns. The bus accident impact played a role here as well.
- "Other" reflects visitors with concerns relating to housing, landlord/tenant issues off-campus, legal issues relating to visas of international students, and parents with concerns about their child/student. [See tabular view of Chart 7](#)

Further to the summary above, the following themes and trends appeared in many of the same areas. They are highlighted in the hopes they are considered as issues that campus leadership and the community will choose to impact:

- Cultural sensitivities and gender and LGBTQ+ concerns have been shared with the Ombuds team. There have been significant reports of complaints by staff, faculty and students about individuals failing to comprehend cultural diversity throughout the Brandeis Community. Visitors report experiencing aggressive behavior with inappropriate comments, degrading verbal micro-aggressions specifically related to culture, race and gender bias; and having unstated/unclear classroom or lab research expectations and a lack of norms/guiding principles. Student visitors also expressed significant fears of retaliation 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 classroom and/or work environment. Another area of concern is the misuse of gender pronouns and lack of sensitivity to LGBTQ+ issues that need to be addressed throughout the community and campus classrooms.
- The Ombuds team has been engaged by various teams and offices as well as families relating to the tragic bus accident this past semester. The office has held listening circles and debriefings for campus personnel involved in the accident. This support service will likely continue into the Winter/Spring semester.
- A new trend that has arisen this past semester relates to formal policy processes. A number of students have visited the office sharing concerns about being required to appear in a duplicative formal process with little information shared with them about the complaints being addressed and the factual situations they are being accused of being engaged in that give rise to the process. It might be appropriate for someone to review the goals of all student processes for transparency and the need for duplicative processes. Is restorative justice ever considered? How can our community resolve conflicts when they do arise? Is there a systemic design process that might add value for our community?
- The Ombuds team has heard from a number of visitors about the lack of communication and respect for accommodations that are needed for a student to be successful. Sometimes the students are concerned about how an accommodation request will be received so they fail to discuss it with a TA and professor. It would be helpful if professors would set forth the campus policy on accommodations in their syllabus at the outset of each semester.

Appendix – Tabular View of Charts within the Report

Table View of Chart 1: Total Visits from January 2021 through December 2022

Total Number of Visitors	Spring Semester Jan-May 2021	Summer Session June-July 2021	Fall Semester Aug-Dec 2021	Spring Semester Jan-May 2022	Summer Session June-July 2022	Fall Semester Aug-Dec 2022	Total
<i>Total Number of Visits</i>	133	40	114	131	52	112	582

Table View of Chart 2: Total Visitors from January 2021 through December 2022

Total Number of Visitors	Spring Semester Jan-May 2021	Summer Session June-July 2021	Fall Semester Aug-Dec 2021	Spring Semester Jan-May 2022	Summer Session June-July 2022	Fall Semester Aug-Dec 2022	Total
<i>Total Visitors</i>	190	58	193	166	74	152	833

Table View of Chart 3: Time Spent with Visitors from January 2021 through December 2022

Total Hours Spent with Visitors	Spring Semester Jan-May 2021	Summer Session June-July 2021	Fall Semester Aug-Dec 2021	Spring Semester Jan-May 2022	Summer Session June-July 2022	Fall Semester Aug-Dec 2022	Total
<i>Total Hours Spent with Visitors</i>	131.5	36.25	112.5	128.75	56.75	127.25	593

Table View of Chart 4: Percentage of Number of Sessions across Visits from January 2021 through December 2022

Percentage of Number of Sessions across Visits	Spring Semester Jan-May 2021	Summer Session June-July 2021	Fall Semester Aug-Dec 2021	Spring Semester Jan-May 2022	Summer Session June-July 2022	Fall Semester Aug-Dec 2022
<i>Percentage of Number of Sessions across Visits with 1 Session</i>	44%	45%	65%	66%	46%	63%
<i>Percentage of Number of Sessions across Visits with 2 Sessions</i>	20%	18%	20%	14%	19%	18%
<i>Percentage of Number of Sessions across Visits with 3 or More Sessions</i>	36%	38%	15%	21%	35%	20%

Table View of Chart 5: Percentage of Mix of Time Spent across Visits from January 2021 through December 2022

Percentage of Mix of Time Spent with Visitors	Spring Semester Jan-May 2021	Summer Session June-July 2021	Fall Semester Aug-Dec 2021	Spring Semester Jan-May 2022	Summer Session June-July 2022	Fall Semester Aug-Dec 2022
<i>Percentage of Mix of Time Spent across Visits of Up to 1 Hour</i>	68%	78%	72%	63%	56%	56%
<i>Percentage of Mix of Time Spent across Visits of 2 or More Hours</i>	1%	0%	5%	2%	8%	8%

Table View of Chart 6: Percentage of Visitor Populations from January 2021 through December 2022

Percentage of Visitor Populations	Spring Semester Jan-May 2021	Summer Session June-July 2021	Fall Semester Aug-Dec 2021	Spring Semester Jan-May 2022	Summer Session June-July 2022	Fall Semester Aug-Dec 2022
<i>Students</i>	39%	24%	15%	31%	34%	16%
<i>Faculty</i>	12%	17%	13%	17%	7%	14%
<i>Staff</i>	45%	55%	67%	48%	59%	53%
<i>Alumni</i>	0%	0%	1%	1%	0%	0%
<i>Other</i>	4%	3%	4%	2%	0%	16%

Table View of Chart 7: Percentage of Primary Issues across Visits from January 2021 through December 2022

Percentage of Primary Visitor Issues	Spring Semester Jan-May 2021	Summer Session June-July 2021	Fall Semester Aug-Dec 2021	Spring Semester Jan-May 2022	Summer Session June-July 2022	Fall Semester Aug-Dec 2022
<i>Personal (health, family, self)</i>	14%	19%	14%	16%	14%	17%
<i>Interpersonal (peer-to-peer personal issue)</i>	7%	11%	11%	14%	9%	14%
<i>Education (related to faculty, students, classroom issue)</i>	21%	13%	10%	15%	20%	14%
<i>Employment (job-related)</i>	20%	35%	31%	26%	36%	31%
<i>COVID-19</i>	10%	6%	6%	5%	0%	1%
<i>Diversity and Inclusion</i>	16%	9%	21%	19%	16%	18%
<i>Other</i>	12%	7%	7%	4%	4%	4%