

Brandeis University Ombuds

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

Annual Report: July 2023 - June 2024

Introduction

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](#), [Esther Lin](#) and [Kylie Millbern](#).

Visit our [website](#) to learn more about our standards of practice of confidentiality, multipartiality, informality, and independence in the [Policy Statement](#) on the Brandeis Ombuds Office. The Ombuds are not mandated campus 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 and identify resources that can help you work through a difficult situation before you commence any formal process.

Ombuds Mission Statement

The Brandeis Ombuds Office exists to ensure fair process and attentive listening for all visitors. Our goal is to offer resources that empower individuals, teams, and groups to find acceptable and workable solutions for those involved. In our role as Ombuds, we support the dignity, well-being, and safety of each person who visits us by providing a safe space to talk confidentially, off the record about demanding situations. We are an outlet to process any type of challenging situation and a bridge to navigate campus resources. We are here to help, support, and empower you to find all reasonable options and acceptable solutions for everyone involved.

Highlights

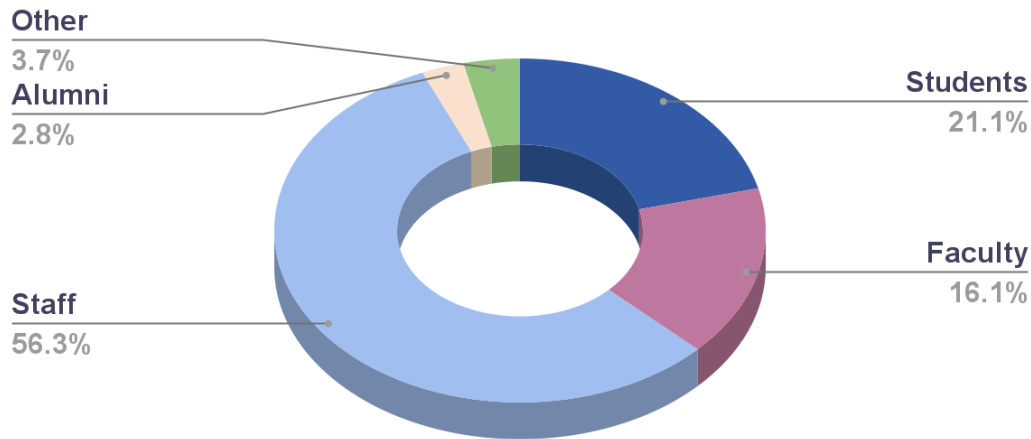
The Ombuds Office continues to support the Brandeis community and has had 323 visitors since July 2023. The Ombuds Office markets our services throughout the campus community. We are engaged in weekly, bi-weekly, and monthly meetings with teams, offices, and campus leaders on a regular basis to discuss issues, concerns, and considerations that individuals are concerned about how to appropriately manage.

Data

Our most recent Ombuds report reflects the following: the Ombuds Office had 210 visitor meetings this past fiscal year, and we met with 323 total individuals. This number reflects that sometimes we met with one individual, and we also facilitated conversations with 2 or more people helping teams and groups of individuals work through difficult situations.

Chart A - Types of Visitors Served

Fiscal Year 2023-2024 (Total # of Visitors: 323)

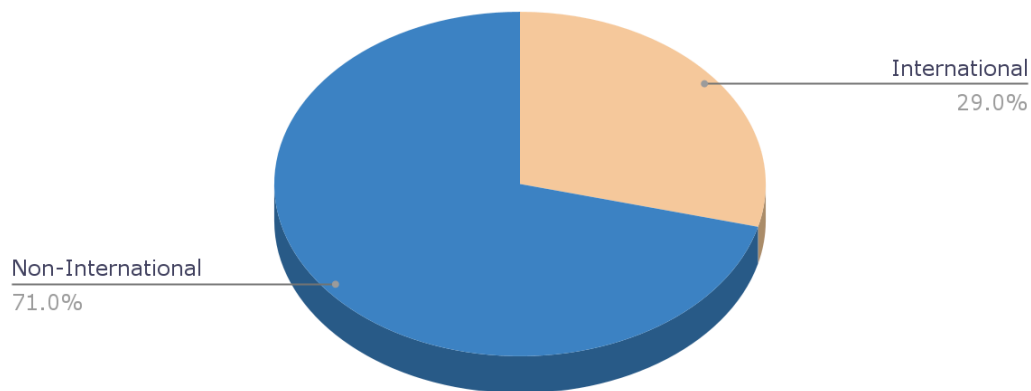


[See tabular view of Chart A](#)

We had an increase in the number of staff visitors this past year. Some of this is likely due to the number of individuals who were impacted by University layoffs this past year as well as concern for the increased workload that is placed upon people in offices that lost staff members.

Chart B - International and Non-International Visitors

Fiscal Year 2023-2024 (only includes self-reported visitor information)



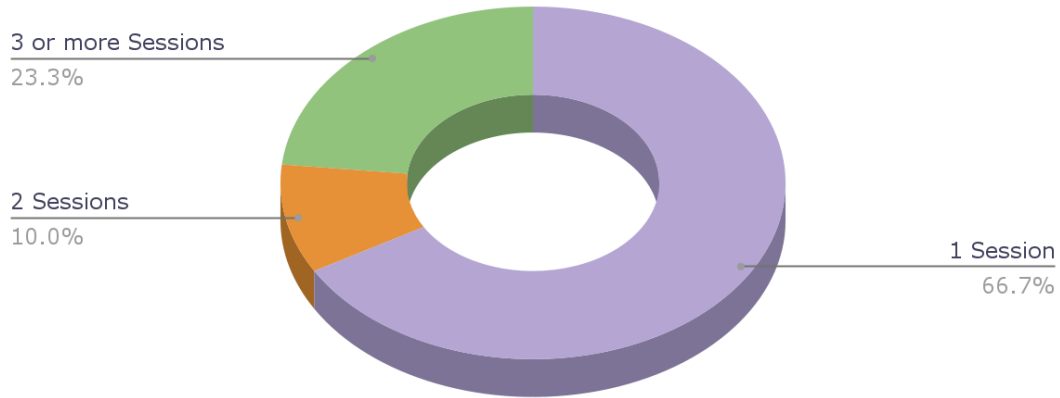
[See tabular view of Chart B](#)

It is interesting to note that the international population at Brandeis is about 21% of the population. Our office only tracks national origin information when visitors share such information in their interactions with us, but it is notable that of the visitors who did self-report, 29% were international visitors. It appears that there is trust from a reasonable number of international

students, staff, and faculty, where cultural differences might have kept visitors from visiting the Ombuds Office.

Chart C - Percentage of Number of Sessions across Visits

Fiscal Year 2023-2024

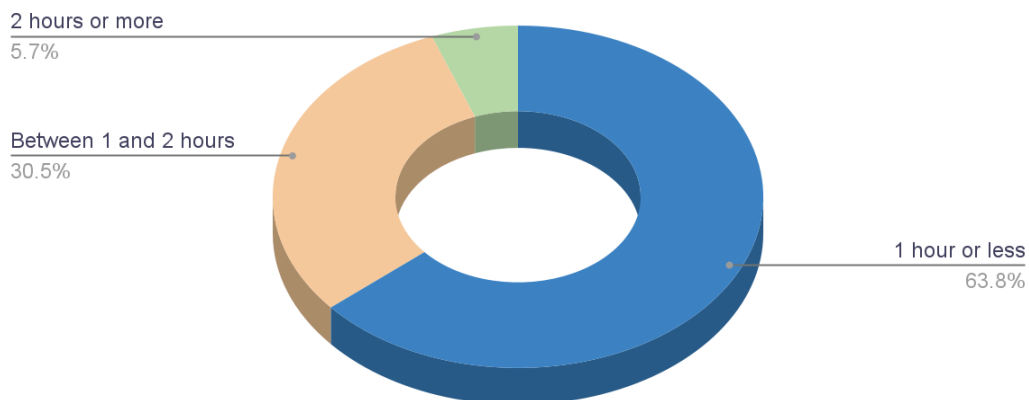


[See tabular view of Chart C](#)

The majority of visitors to the Ombuds Office appear to only need one visit to find options to overcome the concerns being raised. More than a quarter of visitors return for follow-up visits, sometime on the same issue and frequently for new concerns. The largest marketing tool of the Ombuds Office is one successful visit. Most visitors find us because either they have come to the office in the past or they are referred by a previous visitor.

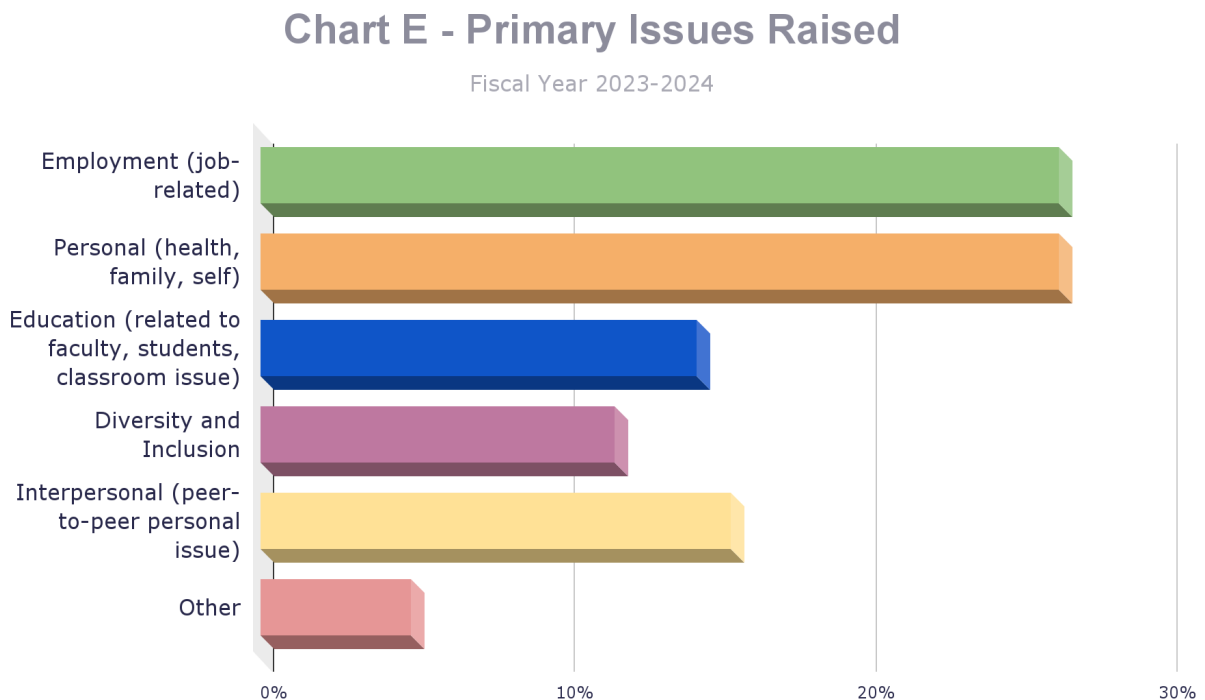
Chart D - Percentage of Mix of Time Spent Across Visits

Fiscal Year 2023-2024



[See tabular view of Chart D](#)

In the past fiscal year most visitors have needed less than 2 hours of an ombuds' time for a visit. Less than 6% spend more than 2 hours in a meeting with an Ombuds.

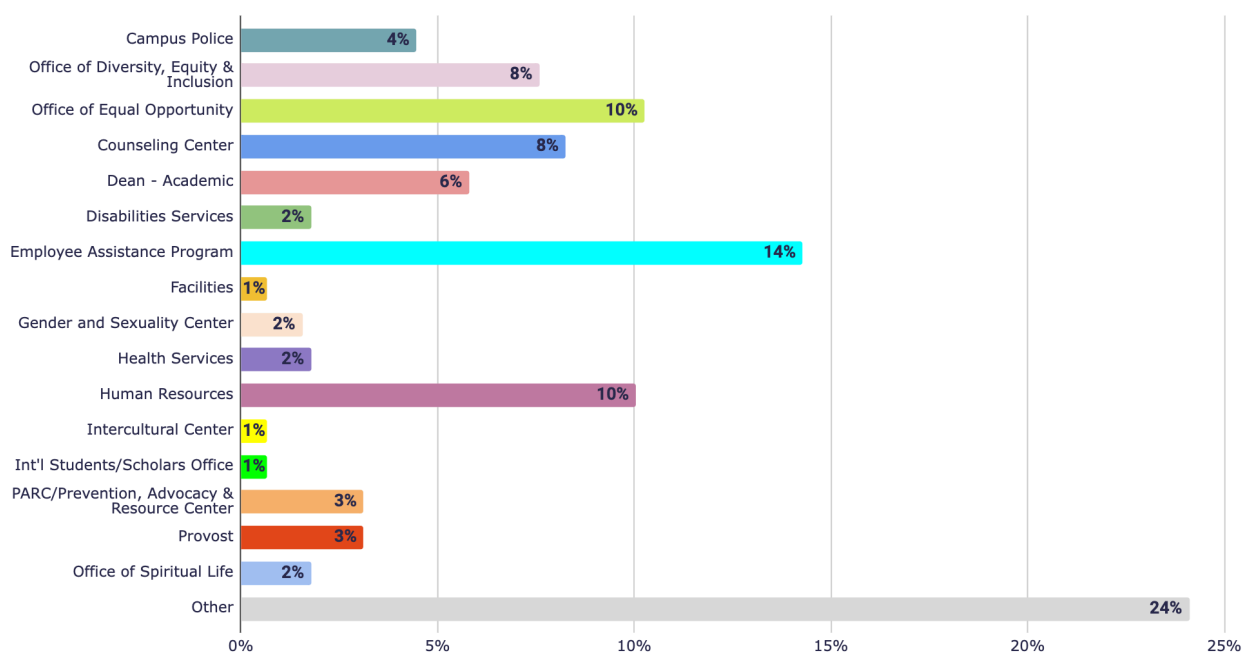


[See tabular view of Chart E](#)

Just under 30% of visitors come with either employment or personal (health, family,) concerns. Interestingly, educational and interpersonal concerns make up a smaller percentage of visitors.

Chart F - Referrals

Fiscal Year 2023-2024



[See tabular view of Chart F](#)

As Chart F shows, the Ombuds team makes a variety of referrals to offices all over campus as well as off campus resources. The “Other” category is made up of referrals to a number of external resources including various law students in court programs (for landlord tenant and small claims legal support), clerk of court in Waltham for general legal and mediation concerns, MA housing court, MA Commission Against Discrimination, etc.

Visitor Feedback

Visitors receive a confidential feedback survey after they meet with an ombuds. Here are examples of post-visit feedback from the past year:

- “The Ombuds has been extremely helpful and done everything possible to help me resolve my problem. They were incredibly helpful from the start, and I now understand what an important role a smart and ethical Ombuds plays in the life of the University.” -Administrator
- “When my problem first arose I was not sure where to look for help or whether I could find any on campus. I feel fortunate to have the ombuds' office to lean on.” -Faculty
- “The Ombuds is a wonderful, important, and deeply needed resource on campus. Thank you.” -Staff
- “The Ombuds was really helpful not least because [they were] a calming presence.” -Student
- “It was a pleasure speaking to the ombuds. Your office is a shining light with more good to give out. Keep being you!” -Student

- "The Ombuds was highly effective in providing me support. Their approach was both refreshing and comforting. I trust [them] completely and sincerely appreciate [their] help." -Staff
- "Students, faculty, and staff have the greatest chance to thrive because of the Ombuds office team!" -Faculty

Themes and Trends

The Ombuds Office has a sense that the following trends are prevalent in the community as they are recurrent themes raised by visitors to the Ombuds Office this past fiscal year:

- Bullying and harassment by senior staff, principal investigators, and faculty toward students at all levels
- Lack of norms/guiding principles of how teams, offices, departments work together
- Concern about job expectations and amount of work required to complete tasks with the number of staff and faculty who have either retired, left, or were laid off. Many staff feel as if they are working harder with more responsibilities and no recognition or salary increase.
- Students stressed about how they are treated by staff, faculty and students in and out of the classroom.
- Off campus landlord tenant housing concerns, leases, and sublease arrangements.
- Interpersonal communication issues, inappropriate language, when is it appropriate to use email or face-to-face meetings.
- Dissatisfaction regarding formal process timelines. For example, timelines are not clearly stated or followed.
- Physical accessibility concerns
- Safety on campus after campus protests
- Lack of manager training for staff
- Lack of respect and support from office personnel working with students and staff all over campus. People appear stressed and are curt and discourteous to those coming to offices for information/support.
- Cyber bullying

Marketing and Outreach

The Ombuds Office has attended and participated in annual orientation and other events:

- Health Director/Wellness programmers
- Annual Stressbusters fair (Health Wellness partnership)
- ISSO inSTEP program,
- End of semester stress sessions in the library and SCC
- ICC barbecue
- ICC club leadership orientations
- GSAS orientation
- Arts and Sciences new student family orientation
- ICC staff and student orientation

- Science Dept. PhD Researchers Orientation and Ethics training
- Heller Orientation and Leadership retreat

The Ombuds website contains our [marketing flyer](#), some [self-help documents](#), as well as other resources.

We are available to offer short presentations to any department, office, or student organization about the many ways we offer support to our visitors.

Goals

The team of three Ombuds will continue to meet the needs of the Brandeis community. We will meet with visitors in a timely manner, continue to take trainings and interact with ombuds from other higher educational institutions, and support the Brandeis community during these stressful times.

We have been facilitating listening circles and will continue to offer these services on an as needed basis. We will continue to highlight the issues and apparent trends as they arise.

Esther, Kylie and Don will continue to be International Ombuds Association Resource trainers, networking and mentoring with ombuds in other higher educational organizations. This allows us to monitor and have resources for better being prepared for trends and issues as they arise at Brandeis. We will continue to participate in skill building and networking training and attend other Ombuds conferences. We plan to update the marketing materials and the Ombuds website with new materials highlighting new personnel and information that reflects and introduces the staffing and work of the Ombuds team. We are creating and locating new self-help materials to share with visitors, related to concerns and issues they bring to the office. We will update the Ombuds website with all such materials and our semester and annual reports.

Summary

We believe that the Ombuds Office has made an impact as a resource to the Brandeis community. We will continue to meet with all visitors in person, virtually by Zoom or phone with office hours for scheduling 5 days a week, Monday-Friday. We plan to offer workshops on

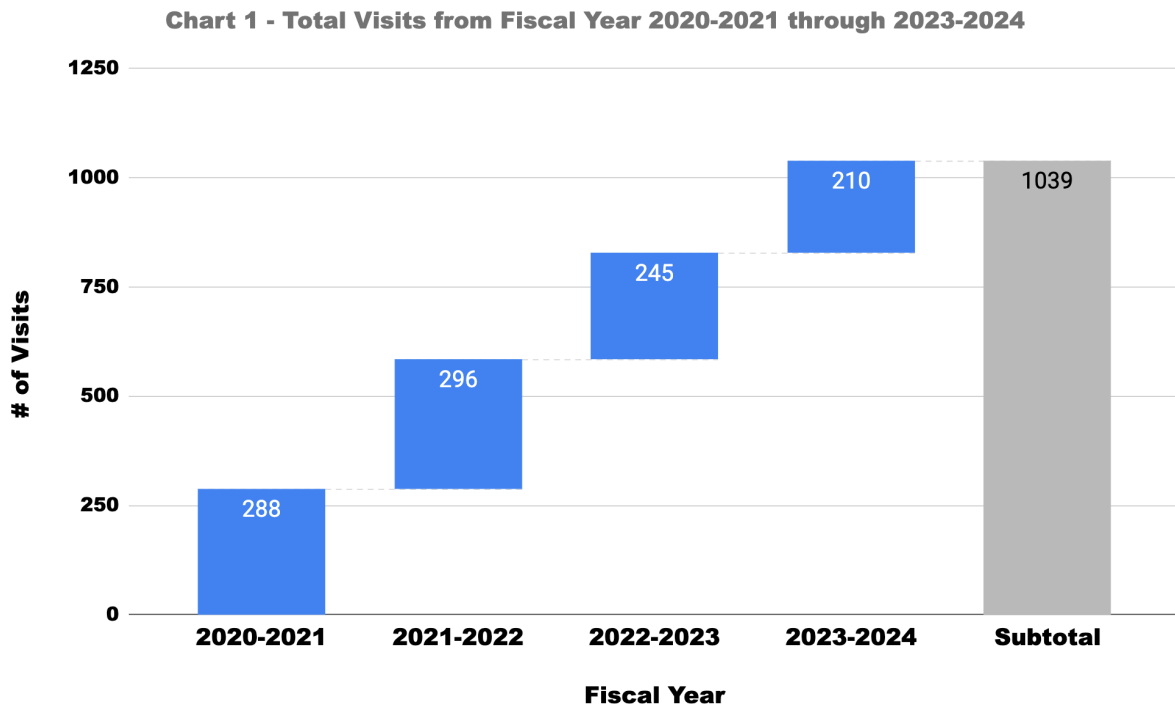
- difficult conversations,
- establishing norms/guiding principles and
- self-care

to any and all campus offices, individuals, and groups who seek such supportive workshops.

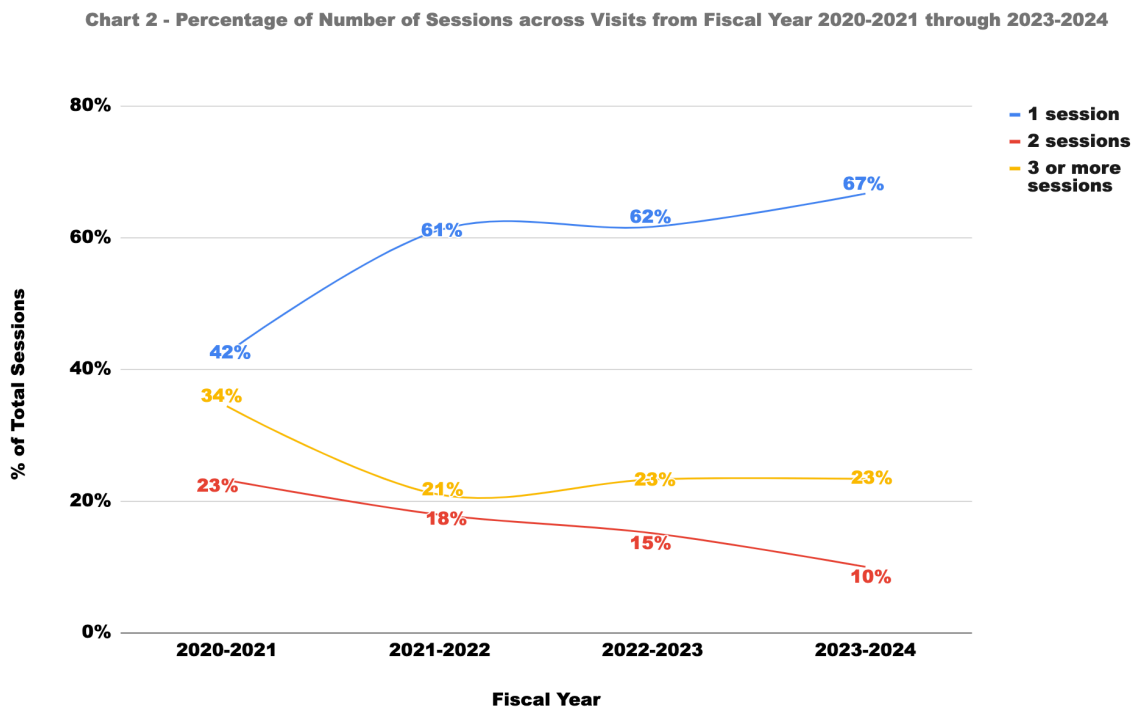
The Ombuds Office will continue to market our services throughout the campus community and offer listening circles to any team or campus department who requests support.

The Ombuds Office continues to promote our services and partner with campus offices that serve the entire Brandeis community. We are available presently for in person meetings on or off campus if such is desired. We are an outlet to process any type of challenging situation, a place to turn when an individual has no idea where to go, a bridge to navigate campus resources, a resource to educate about and facilitate difficult/challenging conversations, and a coach to help, support, and empower anyone affiliated with the Brandeis community. 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, and inclusiveness.

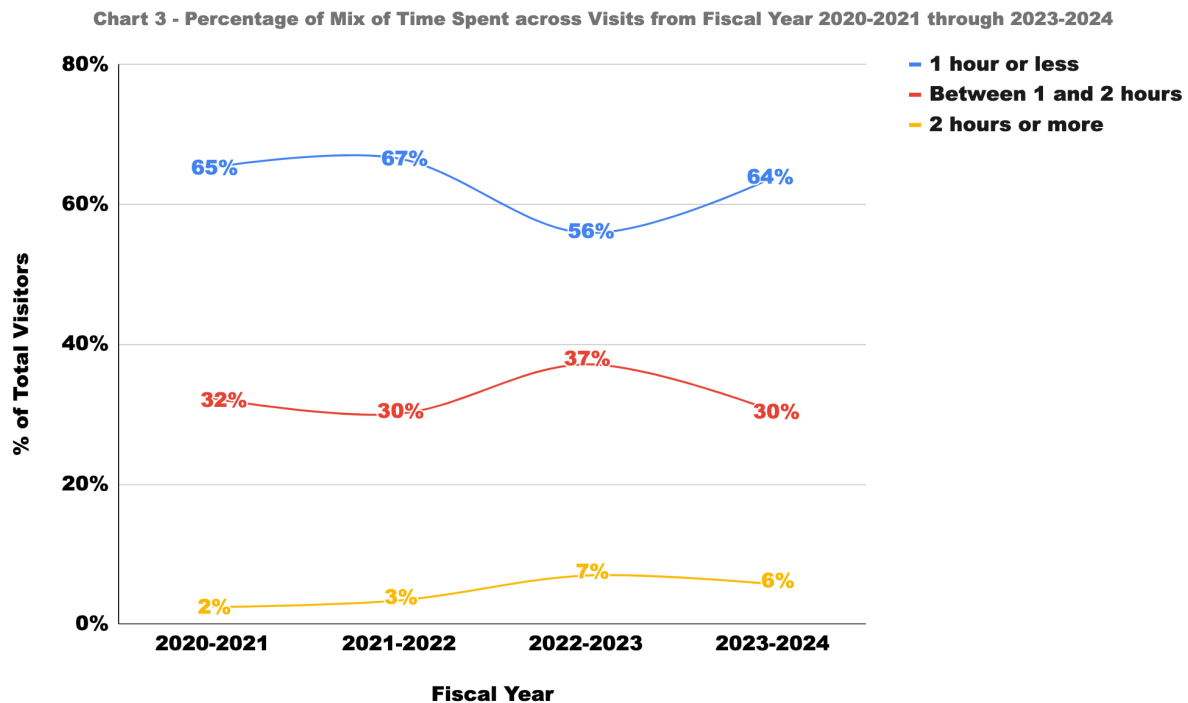
Appendix A – Year-Over-Year Trends



The total number of visits to the ombuds Office from July 1, 2023, through June 30, 2024, is 210. This number does not include workshops, presentations, regular meetings with leadership, and other outreach activities. [See tabular view of Chart 1](#)

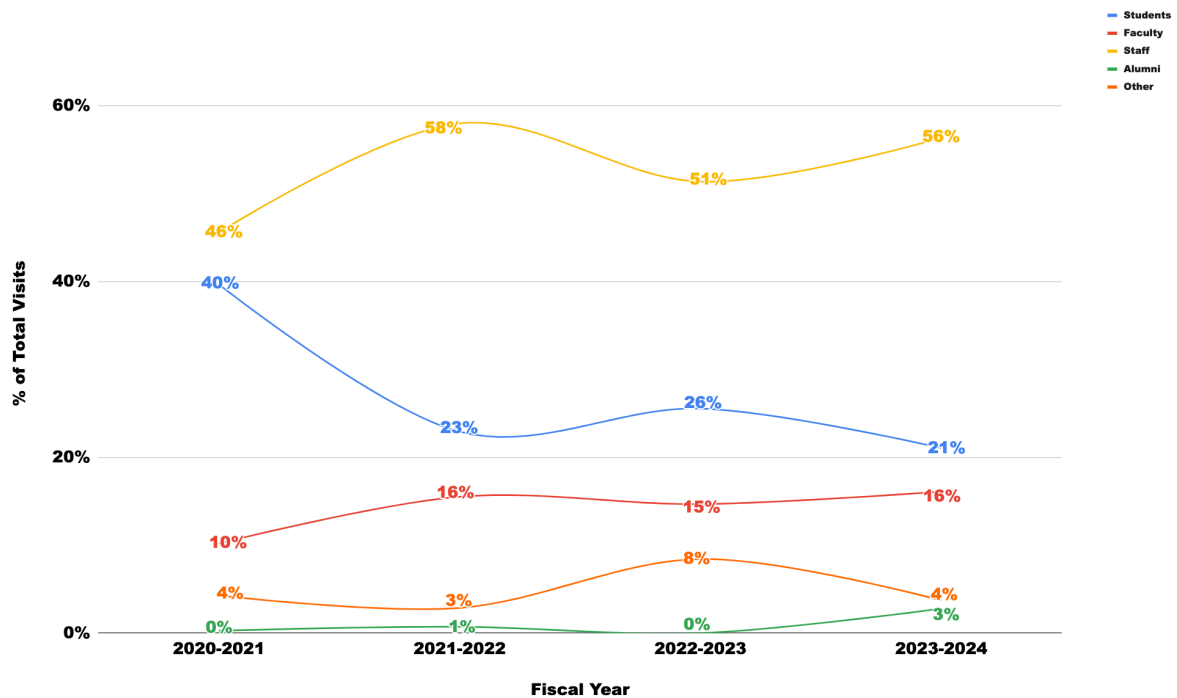


The number of sessions any given visitor has with our Office has changed slightly over the prior year. 67% (141) of visitors come in for a single session, while 10% (22) return for a second session, and 23% (48) for a third session or beyond. [See tabular view of Chart 2](#)



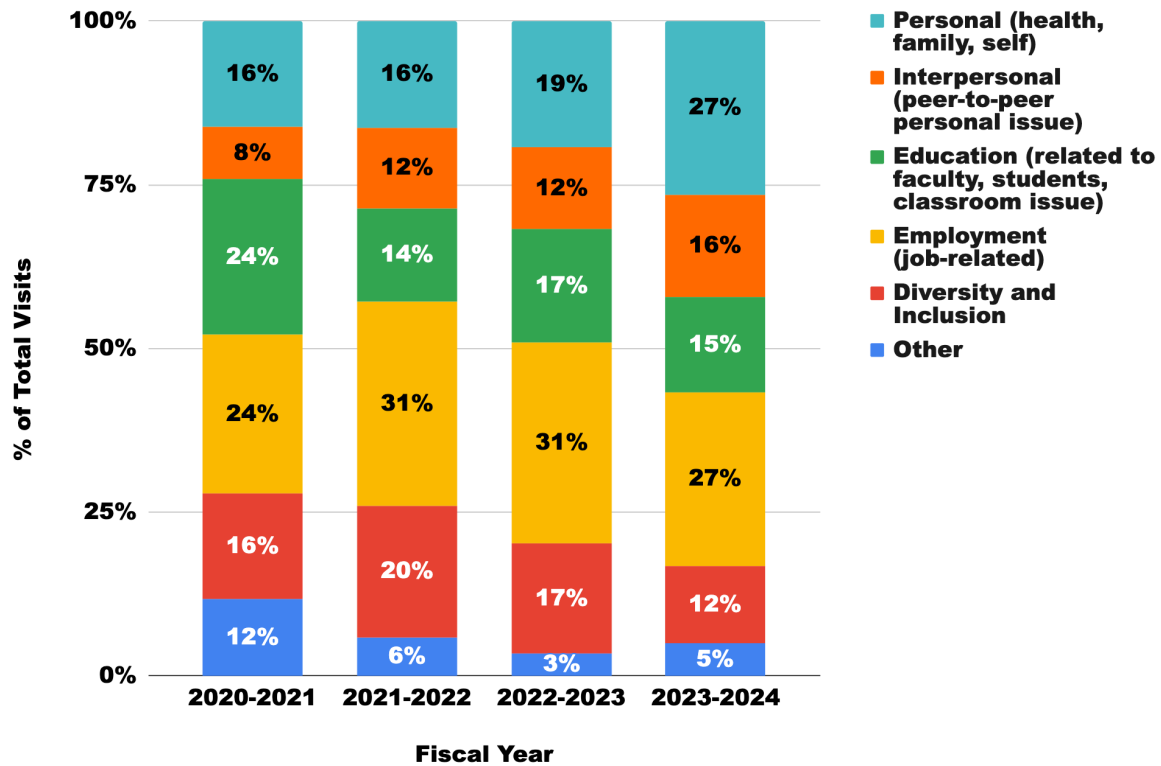
The percentage of visits lasting between 1 hour or shorter increased from 56% - 64% (134), those lasting 1 and 2 hours decreased from 37%, to 30% (63) and visits of 2 hours or more have slightly decreased from 7% to 6% (13). [See tabular view of Chart 3](#)

Chart 4 - Percentage of Visitor Populations from Fiscal Year 2020-2021 through 2023-2024



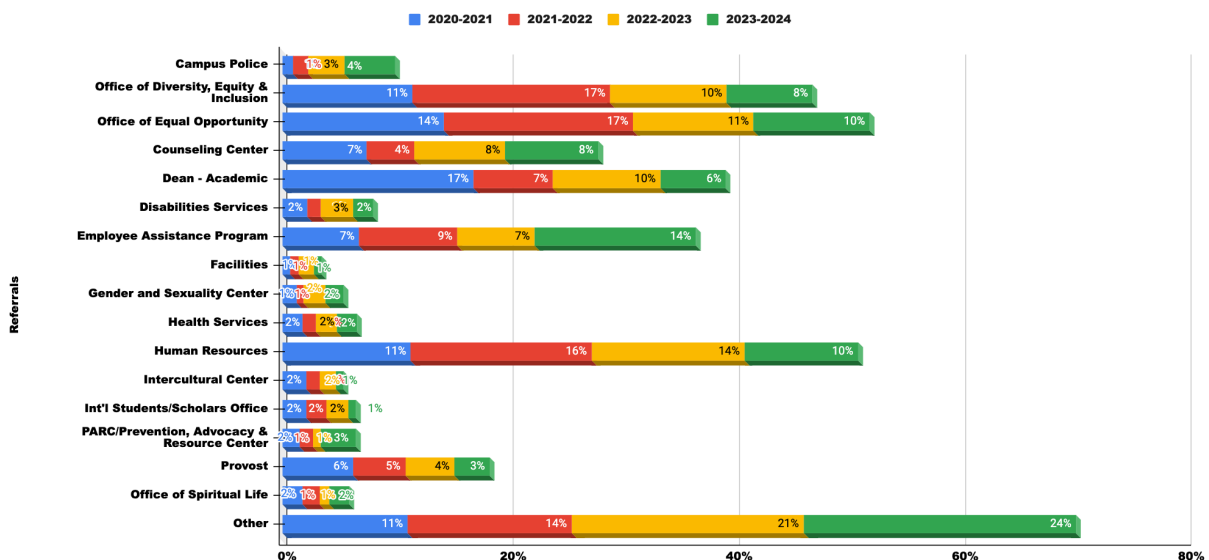
Students and staff remain the most frequent visitors to the Ombuds Office, together composing 77% of our visitors (students 41, Staff 118). Faculty visitors have remained about the same, at 16% (34). [See tabular view of Chart 4](#). All visitors come on a voluntary basis, and no one is ever mandated to come to the Ombuds Office.

Chart 5 - Percentage of Primary Issues across Visits from Fiscal Year 2020-2021 through 2023-2024



The most prevalent type of primary issue we encountered this past year is employment (job-related) at 27%, and personal (health, family, self) also at 27%. Followed by interpersonal, education, and diversity and inclusion. COVID-19 has been removed as a category as we did not see any concerns about it this past year. [See tabular view of Chart 5](#)

Chart 6 - Percentage of Referrals Fiscal Year 2020-2021 through 2023-2024



We regularly refer visitors to on-campus and, occasionally, off-campus resources as appropriate. One of the key roles of the Ombuds Office is to help visitors navigate the breadth of resources available to them and seek the support that fits their situation. A list of referrals in the “Other” category can be found in Appendix C to this annual report. [See tabular view of Chart 6](#)

Appendix B – Tabular View of Charts within the Report

Table View of Chart A: Types of Visitors Served, Fiscal Year 2023-2024 (Total # of Visitors: 323)

<i>Students</i>	21.1%
<i>Faculty</i>	16.1%
<i>Staff</i>	56.3%
<i>Alumni</i>	2.8%
<i>Other</i>	3.7%

Table View of Chart B: International and Non-International Visitors, Fiscal Year 2023-2024 (only includes self-reported visitor information)

<i>International</i>	29.0%
<i>Non-International</i>	71.0%

Table View of Chart C: Percentage of Number of Sessions Across Visits, Fiscal Year 2023-2024

<i>1 Session</i>	66.7%
<i>2 Sessions</i>	10.0%
<i>3 or more Sessions</i>	23.3%

Table View of Chart D: Percentage of Mix of Time Spent Across Visits, Fiscal Year 2023-2024

<i>1 hour or less</i>	63.8%
<i>Between 1 and 2 hours</i>	30.5%
<i>2 hours or more</i>	5.7%

Table View of Chart E: Primary Issues Raised, Fiscal Year 2023-2024

<i>Employment (job-related)</i>	26.5%
<i>Personal (health, family, self)</i>	26.5%
<i>Education (related to faculty, students, classroom issue)</i>	14.5%
<i>Diversity and Inclusion</i>	11.8%
<i>Interpersonal (peer-to-peer personal issue)</i>	15.6%
<i>Other</i>	5.0%

Table View of Chart F: Referrals, Fiscal Year 2023-2024

<i>Campus Police</i>	4%
<i>Office of Diversity, Equity & Inclusion</i>	8%
<i>Office of Equal Opportunity</i>	10%
<i>Counseling Center</i>	8%
<i>Dean - Academic</i>	6%
<i>Disabilities Services</i>	2%
<i>Employee Assistance Program</i>	14%
<i>Facilities</i>	1%
<i>Gender and Sexuality Center</i>	2%
<i>Health Services</i>	2%
<i>Human Resources</i>	10%
<i>Intercultural Center</i>	1%
<i>Int'l Students/Scholars Office</i>	1%
<i>PARC/Prevention,</i>	3%

<i>Advocacy & Resource Center</i>	
<i>Provost</i>	3%
<i>Office of Spiritual Life</i>	2%
<i>Other</i>	24%

Table View of Chart 1: Total Visits from Fiscal Year 2020-2021 through 2023-2024

Total Number of Visits	FY 2020-2021	FY 2021-2022	FY 2022-2023	FY 2023-2024	Total
<i>Total Number of Visits</i>	288	296	245	210	1039

Table View of Chart 2: Percentage of Number of Sessions across Visits from Fiscal Year 2020-2021 through 2023-2024

Percentage of Number of Sessions with Visitors by Number of Sessions	FY 2020-2021	FY 2021-2022	FY 2022-2023	FY 2023-2024
<i>Percentage of Number of Sessions with Visitors with 1 Session</i>	42%	61%	62%	67%
<i>Percentage of Number of Sessions with Visitors with 2 Sessions</i>	23%	18%	15%	10%
<i>Percentage of Number of Sessions with Visitors with 3 or More Sessions</i>	34%	21%	23%	23%

Table View of Chart 3: Percentage of Mix of Time Spent across Visits from Fiscal Year 2020-2021 through 2023-2024

Percentage of Mix of Time Spent with Visitors	FY 2020-2021	FY 2021-2022	FY 2022-2023	FY 2023-2024
<i>Percentage of Mix of Time Spent with Visitors of 1 Hour or Less</i>	65%	67%	56%	64%
<i>Percentage of Mix of Time Spent with Visitors of Between 1 and 2 Hours</i>	32%	30%	37%	30%
<i>Percentage of Mix of Time Spent with Visitors of 2 Hours or More</i>	2%	3%	7%	6%

Table View of Chart 4: Percentage of Visitor Populations from Fiscal Year 2020-2021 through 2023-2024

Percentage of Visitor Populations	FY 2020-2021	FY 2021-2022	FY 2022-2023	FY 2023-2024
<i>Percentage of Students</i>	40%	23%	26%	21%
<i>Percentage of Faculty</i>	10%	16%	15%	16%
<i>Percentage of Staff</i>	46%	58%	51%	56%
<i>Percentage of Alumni</i>	0%	1%	0%	3%
<i>Percentage of Other</i>	4%	3%	8%	4%

Table View of Chart 5: Percentage of Primary Issues across Visits from Fiscal Year 2020-2021 through 2023-2024

Percentage of Total Visits	FY 2020-2021	FY 2021-2022	FY 2022-2023	FY 2023-2024
<i>Personal (health, family, self)</i>	16%	16%	19%	27%
<i>Interpersonal (peer-to-peer personal issue)</i>	8%	12%	12%	16%
<i>Education (related to faculty, students, classroom)</i>	24%	14%	17%	15%
<i>Employment (job-related)</i>	24%	31%	31%	27%
<i>Diversity and Inclusion</i>	16%	20%	17%	12%
<i>Other</i>	12%	6%	3%	5%

Table View of Chart 6: Percentage of Referrals Fiscal Year 2020-2021 through 2023-2024

Percentage of Referrals	FY 2020-2021	FY 2021-2022	FY 2022-2023	FY 2023-2024
<i>Campus Police</i>	1%	1%	3%	4%
<i>Office of Diversity, Equity, & Inclusion</i>	11%	17%	10%	8%
<i>Office of Equal Opportunity</i>	14%	17%	11%	10%
<i>Counseling Center</i>	7%	4%	8%	8%
<i>Dean - Academic</i>	17%	7%	10%	6%
<i>Disabilities Services</i>	2%	1%	3%	2%
<i>Employee Assistance Program</i>	7%	9%	7%	14%
<i>Facilities</i>	1%	1%	1%	1%
<i>Gender and Sexuality Center</i>	1%	1%	2%	2%
<i>Health Service</i>	2%	1%	2%	2%
<i>Human Resources</i>	11%	16%	14%	10%
<i>Intercultural Center</i>	2%	1%	2%	1%
<i>International Students/ Scholars Office</i>	2%	2%	2%	1%
<i>PARC/Prevention, Advocacy & Resource Center</i>	2%	1%	1%	3%

<i>Provost</i>	6%	5%	4%	3%
<i>Office of Spiritual Life</i>	2%	1%	1%	2%
<i>Other</i>	11%	14%	21%	24%

Appendix C – Other Referrals

Chief Financial Officer

General Counsel

Massachusetts Bar Association Lawyer Referral Service

Law school clinics (NE, Suffolk, Harvard, UMass Boston)

Registrar

Student Conduct

Department Chairs

MA Housing Court

Waltham District Court Clerk

Waltham Small Claims Court