

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 2023

The Spring 2023 Semester Report contains various trends, highlights, and considerations arising from visits to the Ombuds Office from January to May 2023. This report includes data from Spring Semester 2023, Fall Semester 2022, Summer Session 2022 (June-July), Spring Semester 2022 (January-May), Fall Semester 2021 (August-December), Summer Session 2021 (June-July), Spring Semester 2021 (January-May). This data allows readers to see trends and changes in visitors and trends over the past few years.

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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- [Total Visitors](#)
- [Time Spent with Visitors](#)
- [Percentage of Number of Sessions with Visitors](#)
- [Mix of Time Spent](#)
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- [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 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 Ombuds team this past semester included [Don Greenstein](#), [Esther Lin](#), and [Mike Rozinsky](#). Mike transitioned from the team at the close of this past semester. We appreciate his service to the Brandeis community and stewardship of the program as part of the Ombuds Office team from February 2020 through June 2023.

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

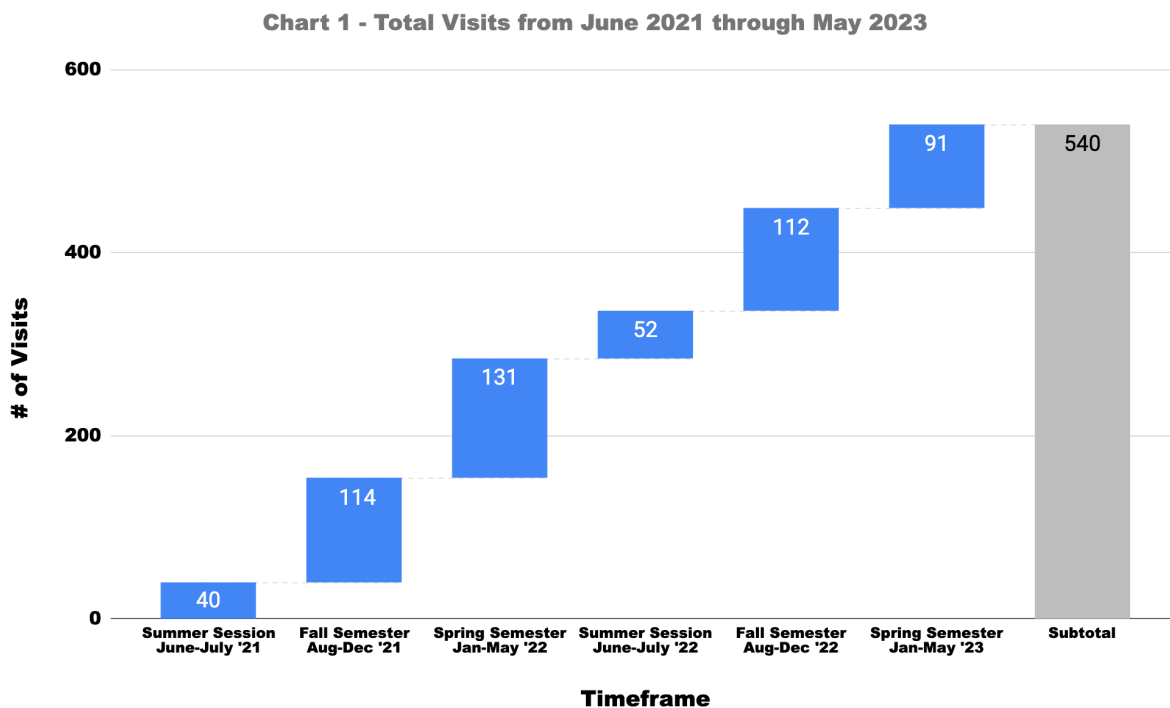
For information on how to schedule appointments, ways we work with visitors, and access our online resources, visit our [website](#) or call the confidential Ombuds Office phone line 781.736.2265. We are available to meet with visitors remotely by phone, Zoom, or in person with social distancing at a 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 with whom 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. We also may choose to raise awareness about a significant issue that may not be a trend but is a major concern that needs to be promptly addressed.

Trends, Highlights, Anomalies, & Considerations



The total number of visits to the Ombuds office from January 1, 2023 through May 31, 2023 until was 91. [See a tabular view of Chart 1](#)

Total visits decreased during this time period as compared to the Fall semester by 18%. The decrease is different to past fall semesters. We typically find that there are fewer visitors in the fall semester than the spring. This past semester one of our Ombuds was on leave and so we were not as able to promptly meet with visitors and this may have deterred some visitors who had timely concerns that one full time and one part time ombuds could not timely meet.

Chart 2 - Total Visitors from June 2021 through May 2023

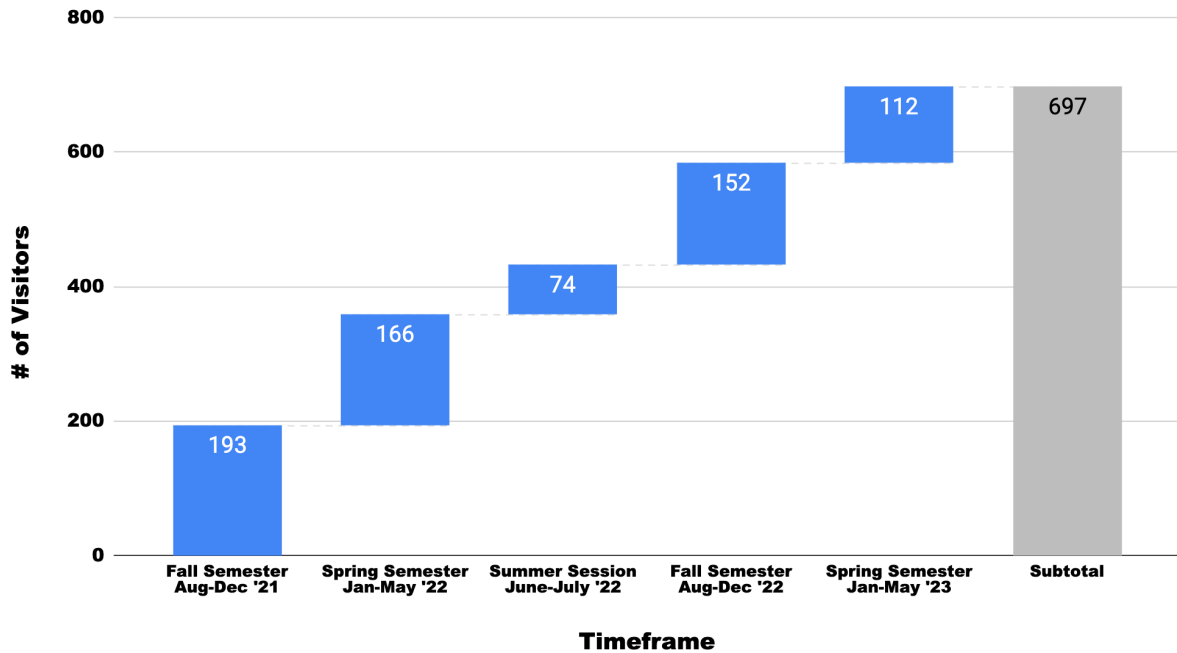
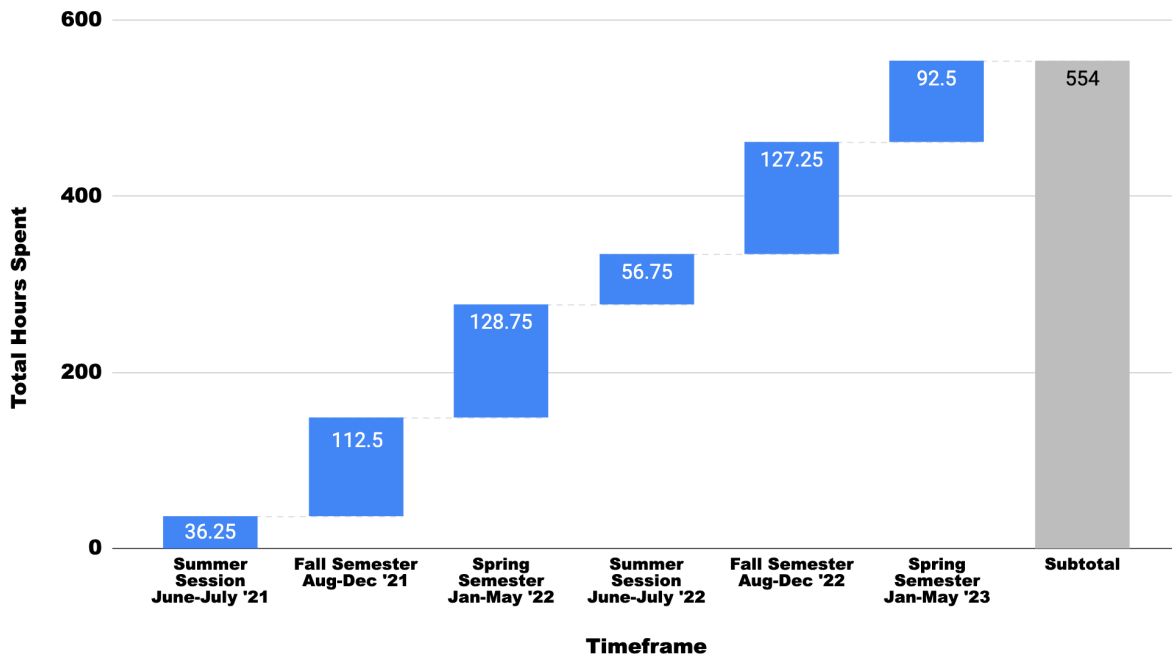


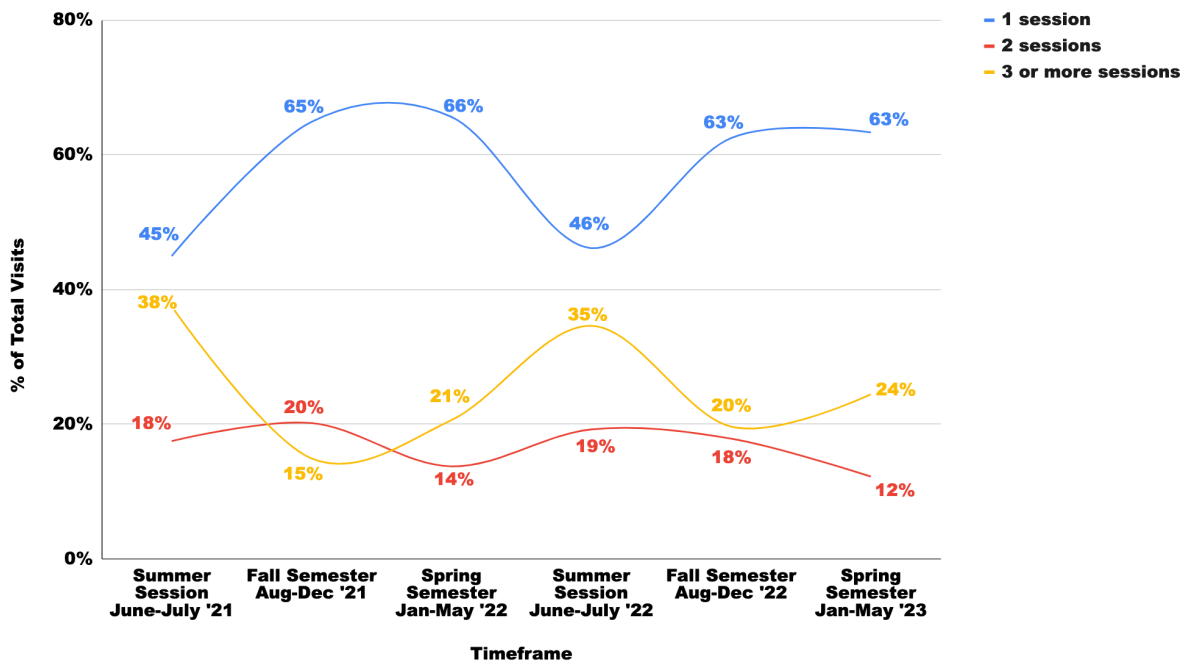
Chart 2 shows the total number of visitors who met with an Ombuds. There are more visitors than visits in each semester ([Chart 1](#)), as an Ombuds may meet with multiple visitors for a facilitated dialogue and other kinds of group work furthering the conflict management capability building across the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

Chart 3 - Time Spent with Visitors from June 2021 through May 2023



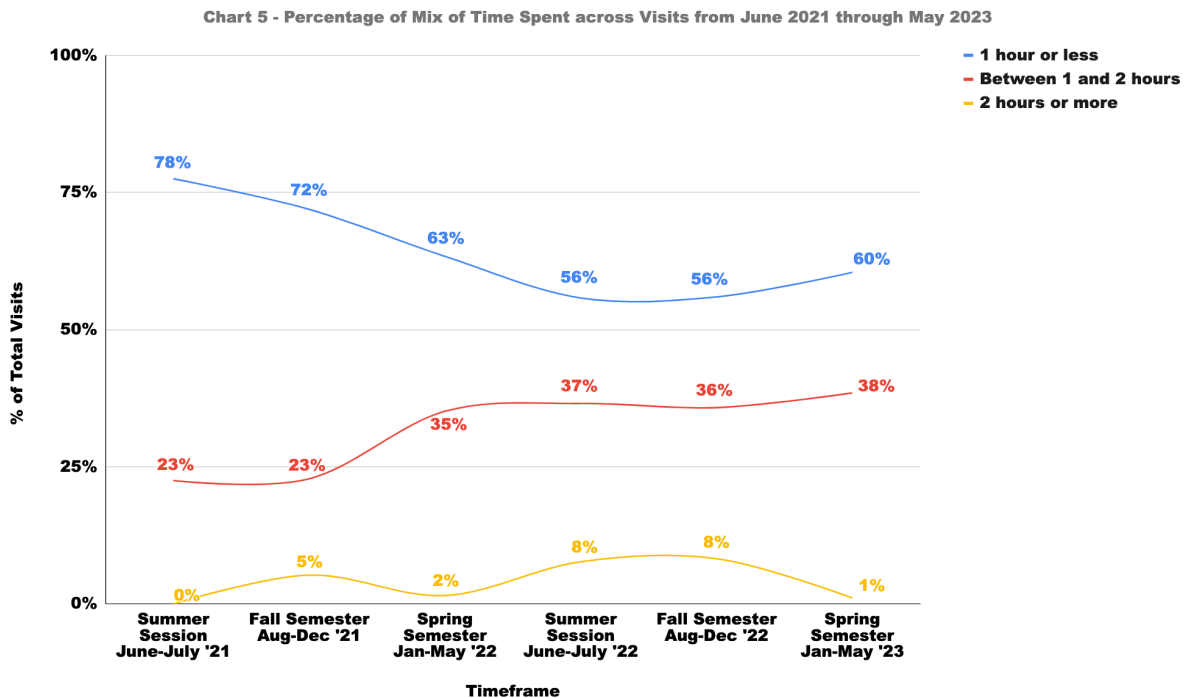
The time included in Chart 3 reflects time spent with visitors helping and supporting their ongoing concerns and issues, as well as identifying resources and individual priorities and goals. It is not inclusive of time by the Ombuds coordinating a visit, reviewing policy, and/or exploring possible options 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 June 2021 through May 2023



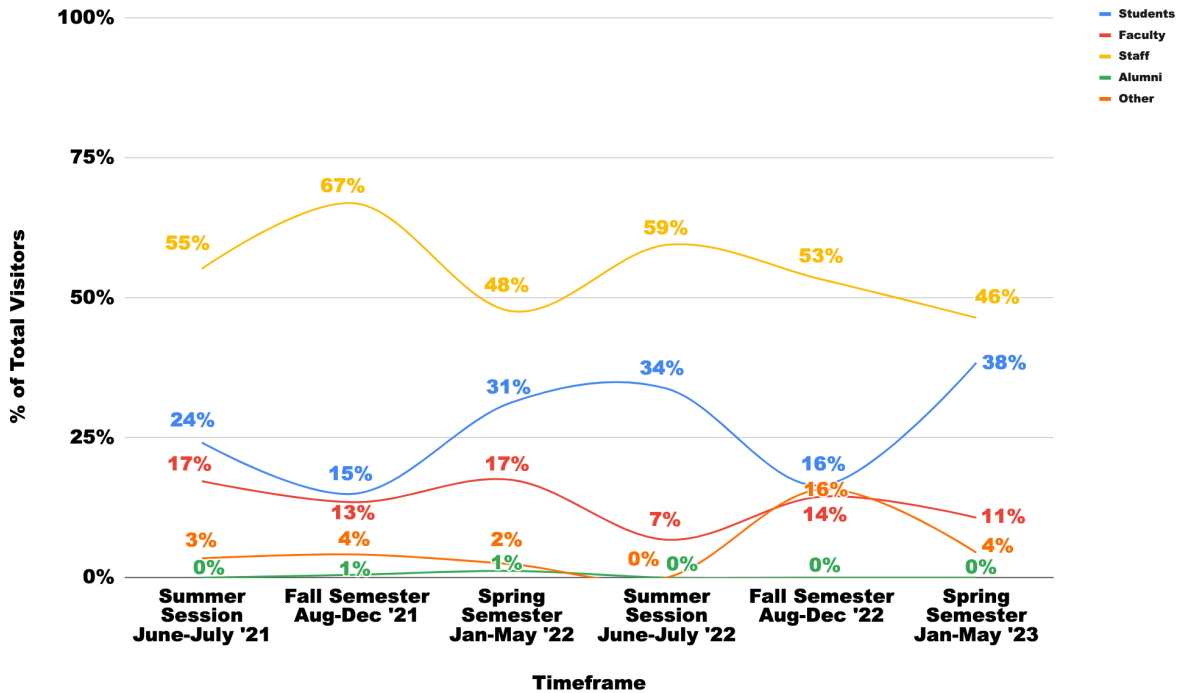
It is apparent that most visitors come for a single visit (63%), which stayed constant the past two

semesters. Visitors who came for two sessions dropped from 18% to 12% this past semester, and three or more visits has increased from 20% to 24%. The increase 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, and/or related to the desire to work through some difficult situations by individual visitors. [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 increasing slightly from 56% up to 60%. Visitors spending between 1-2 hours slightly increased slightly by 2% (36% to 37%), and those spending 2 hours or more decreased from 8% to 1%. The 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 June 2021 through May 2023



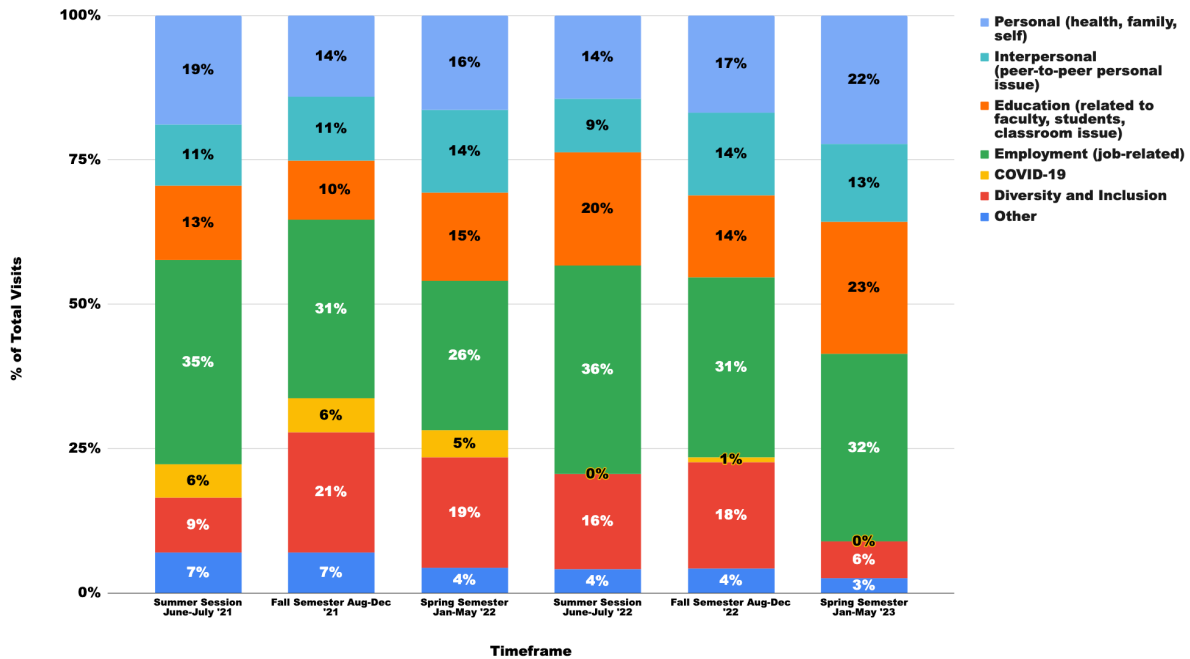
This past semester, Staff visitors have decreased by 7% (53% to 46%) while Student visitors increased by 42% (16% to 38%). The percentage of Faculty visitors decreased by 21% (14% to 11%). Alumni have stayed very low, with no contacts again this past semester. “Other” visitors decreased markedly by 25% (16% to 4%). “Other” reflects a non-Brandesian 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 performance appraisal concerns (a new Workplace performance review system was instituted this past semester). Bullying and concern about retaliation also remain as a major concern, 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 more work responsibilities not in their job description, and not being compensated for doing work outside of their usual work load.

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, student conduct process, 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 departed or are seeking other jobs within Brandeis to remove themselves from what they perceive as an unhealthy workplace environment. [See tabular view of Chart 6](#)

Chart 7 - Percentage of Primary Issues across Visits from June 2021 through May 2023



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, slightly increased this semester by 1% (from 31% to 32%). 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 reduced from 18% to 6% across visits this semester. Visitors described experiencing the impact of cultural differences, religious and freedom of speech concerns, 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 continued concern for lack of BIPOC representation in the faculty and staff.
- Education/classroom concerns increased by 9% this past year (15% in Spring 2021 to 14% in Fall 2022, to 23% this past Spring semester) as students shared issues relating to accessibility and accommodation issues, grading policies, student conduct policy concerns, and communication issues.
- Interpersonal concerns decreased by 1% over the past year 14% in Spring and Fall of 2022 to 13% in Spring 2023), as well as personal health issues increasing (16-22%). Both could be related to increased in-person interactions as we return to campus and mental health concerns. The bus accident impact likely played a key 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 add to the summary above, the following themes and trends appeared in some of the same areas. They are highlighted in the hopes they are considered as issues that campus leadership and the community will choose to consider ways to reduce the impact and address concerns of our campus community:

- **New performance review system-** many feel managers don't know how to give feedback and many managers don't feel employees are able to listen to the feedback offered. Training in this area on giving and receiving feedback would be a consideration.
- **Cultural sensitivities** concerns in departments all over campus have been shared. There have been significant reports of complaints by staff, faculty and students about individuals failing to comprehend cultural differences, Microaggressions are present and lack of sensitivities throughout the Brandeis Community to differences that exist within our international and spiritual communities. Visitors report experiencing aggressive behavior with inappropriate comments, degrading verbal micro-aggressions specifically related to culture, race and religious bias; and having unstated/unclear classroom or lab research expectations and a lack of norms/guiding principles. Many visitors have expressed fear 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. Visitors are fearful of formal processes not being able to help them resolve issues being raised.
- **Student conduct process** has been raised as a concern by visitors this past semester. Visitors feel that the process is slow and is not handled in the manner that is shared on the website.
- A trend raised last semester continued into this semester: relating 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 continues to hear from 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/or their professor. It would be helpful if professors would set forth the campus policy on accommodations in their syllabus at the outset of each semester. Professors also need to be clear about the definition for "collaboration" as some visitors feel that professors encourage people to collaborate but written submissions need to be a students own "voice" and this has not been clearly explained in some syllabuses at the outset of a class.
- **Student, Staff and Faculty mental health concerns** are still present on campus. Campus wide training might be appropriate to address concerns being raised.
- The Office has also been engaged by individuals related to the **campus housing concerns** by students, staff, and administrators, as well as the **Palestinian and Israeli student protest**. The Ombuds office has offered to be a neutral facilitator so long as these processes are informal in nature and to date no one has asked for this service. The office continues to be a place where people can come to share and have a place that listens and helps individuals to consider all options as well as the diverse perspectives involved in these difficult discussions.

- The Ombuds Team has heard from student club leaders as well office teams and staff with support desired in creating **Guiding Principles** and ways for healthier/respectful workplace interactions.
- The Ombuds team has also been engaged in supporting and leading **Restorative Justice Listening Circles** on the topics of civility and mental health concerns.

Appendix – Tabular View of Charts within the Report

Table View of Chart 1: Total Visits from June 2021 through May 2023

| Total Number of Visitors | 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 | Spring Semester Jan-May 2023 | Total |
|---------------------------------|--------------------------------------|-----------------------------------|-------------------------------------|--------------------------------------|-----------------------------------|-------------------------------------|--------------|
| <i>Total Number of Visits</i> | 40 | 114 | 131 | 52 | 112 | 91 | 540 |

Table View of Chart 2: Total Visitors from June 2021 through May 2023

| Total Number of Visitors | 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 | Spring Semester Jan-May 2023 | Total |
|---------------------------------|--------------------------------------|-----------------------------------|-------------------------------------|--------------------------------------|-----------------------------------|-------------------------------------|--------------|
| <i>Total Visitors</i> | 58 | 193 | 166 | 74 | 152 | 112 | 697 |

Table View of Chart 3: Time Spent with Visitors from June 2021 through May 2023

| Total Hours Spent with Visitors | 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 | Spring Semester Jan-May 2023 | Total |
|--|--------------------------------------|-----------------------------------|-------------------------------------|--------------------------------------|-----------------------------------|-------------------------------------|--------------|
| <i>Total Hours Spent with Visitors</i> | 36.25 | 112.5 | 128.75 | 56.75 | 127.25 | 92.5 | 554 |

Table View of Chart 4: Percentage of Number of Sessions across Visits from June 2021 through May 2023

| Percentage of Number of Sessions across Visits | 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 | Spring Semester Jan-May 2023 |
|---|--------------------------------------|-----------------------------------|-------------------------------------|--------------------------------------|-----------------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| <i>Percentage of Number of Sessions across Visits with 1 Session</i> | 45% | 65% | 66% | 46% | 63% | 63% |
| <i>Percentage of Number of Sessions across Visits with 2 Sessions</i> | 18% | 20% | 14% | 19% | 18% | 12% |
| <i>Percentage of Number of Sessions across Visits with 3 or More Sessions</i> | 38% | 15% | 21% | 35% | 20% | 24% |

Table View of Chart 5: Percentage of Mix of Time Spent across Visits from June 2021 through May 2023

| Percentage of Mix of Time Spent with Visitors | 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 | Spring Semester Jan-May 2023 |
|---|--------------------------------------|-----------------------------------|-------------------------------------|--------------------------------------|-----------------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| <i>Percentage of Mix of Time Spent across Visits of Up to 1 Hour</i> | 78% | 72% | 63% | 56% | 56% | 60% |
| <i>Percentage of Mix of Time Between 1 and 2 hours</i> | 23% | 23% | 35% | 37% | 36% | 38% |
| <i>Percentage of Mix of Time Spent across Visits of 2 or More Hours</i> | 0% | 5% | 2% | 2% | 8% | 1% |

Table View of Chart 6: Percentage of Visitor Populations from June 2021 through May 2023

| Percentage of Visitor Populations | 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 | Spring Semester Jan-May 2023 |
|--|--------------------------------------|-----------------------------------|-------------------------------------|--------------------------------------|-----------------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| <i>Students</i> | 24% | 15% | 31% | 34% | 16% | 38% |
| <i>Faculty</i> | 17% | 13% | 17% | 7% | 14% | 11% |
| <i>Staff</i> | 55% | 67% | 48% | 59% | 53% | 46% |
| <i>Alumni</i> | 0% | 1% | 1% | 0% | 0% | 0% |
| <i>Other</i> | 3% | 4% | 2% | 0% | 16% | 4% |

Table View of Chart 7: Percentage of Primary Issues across Visits from June 2021 through May 2023

| Percentage of Primary Visitor Issues | 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 | Spring Semester Jan-May 2023 |
|--|--------------------------------------|-----------------------------------|-------------------------------------|--------------------------------------|-----------------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| <i>Personal (health, family, self)</i> | 19% | 14% | 16% | 14% | 17% | 22% |
| <i>Interpersonal (peer-to-peer personal issue)</i> | 11% | 11% | 14% | 9% | 14% | 13% |
| <i>Education (related to faculty, students, classroom issue)</i> | 13% | 10% | 15% | 20% | 14% | 23% |
| <i>Employment (job-related)</i> | 35% | 31% | 26% | 36% | 31% | 32% |
| <i>COVID-19</i> | 6% | 6% | 5% | 0% | 1% | 0% |
| <i>Diversity and Inclusion</i> | 9% | 21% | 19% | 16% | 18% | 6% |
| <i>Other</i> | 7% | 7% | 4% | 4% | 4% | 3% |