

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 2024

Executive Summary

It was a different semester, and while no two semesters are identical, this one had an impact on all people affiliated with Brandeis University. From the remnants of last semester's on-campus protests, the war in Gaza, to university financial concerns, things are not the same for Brandeis. Themes to note are that there was an increase in employment/workplace related issues and the personal (family, self) issues. The Ombuds team felt that many visitors carried a large amount of stress with them related to the concerns they brought to the Ombuds Office.

This report includes data from Spring Semester 2024 (January-May), Fall Semester 2023 (August-December), Summer Session 2023 (June-July), Spring Semester 2023 (January-May), Fall Semester 2022 (August-December), and Summer Session 2022 (June-July).

In addition to meeting with visitors and facilitating conversations, the Ombuds Office presented workshops on attentive listening and difficult conversations and participated in various outreach events to educate the campus community about the ombuds role. In total, the Office reached close to 300 participants through these gatherings.

The campus climate has been precarious this semester. There have been concerns about financial issues, lack of clarity about financial issues for the coming fiscal year, as well as budget cuts and personnel layoffs. The information in this report will highlight the trends and concerns presented to the Ombuds team this past semester.

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 and Considerations

- [Total Visits](#)
- [Total Visitors](#)
- [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 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 [Kylie Millbern](#). Kylie Millbern joined the team in September 2023. She comes to us with a depth of experience as a mediator with The Mediation Group (TMG), in Brookline, MA. She graduated from UMass Boston

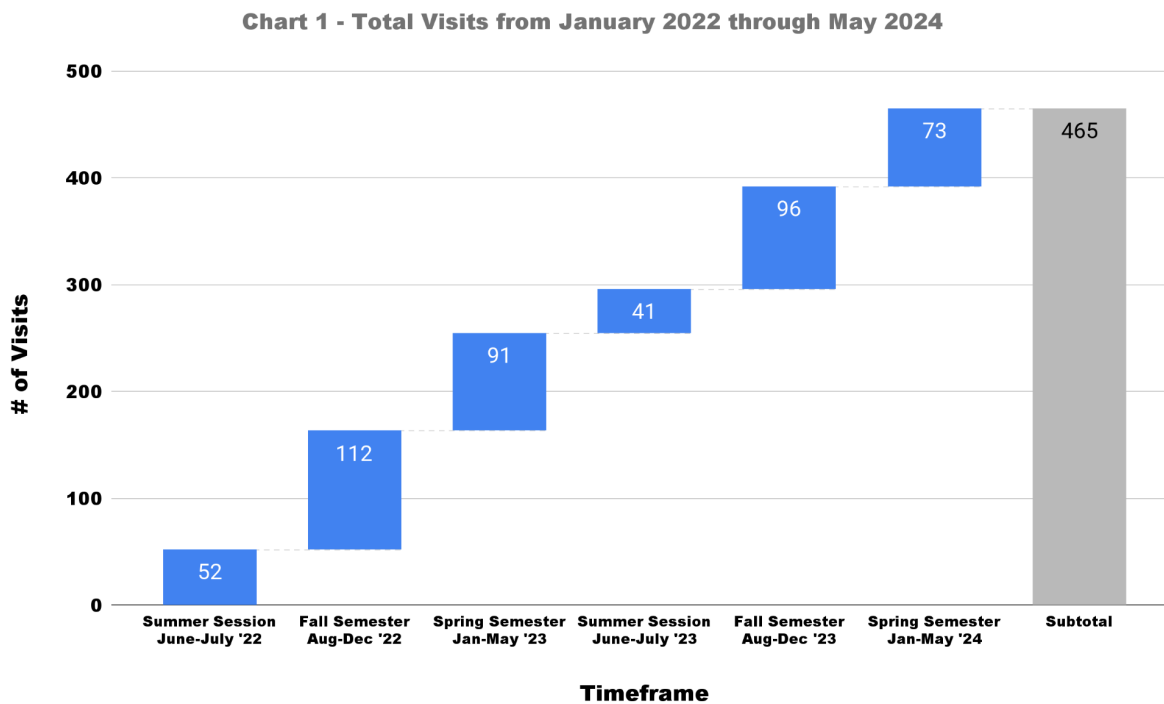
with a Masters in Conflict Resolution. She helps to diversify the team by bringing a background in group interventions and training.

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. The Ombuds Office is a place to consider when you have experienced something and want an informal space to explore your options before you potentially involve others or commence a formal process.

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 at 781.736.2265. We are available to meet with visitors remotely by phone, Zoom, or in person at a time that works best for the individual. At this time please schedule an appointment by emailing brandeisombuds@brandeis.edu. 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.

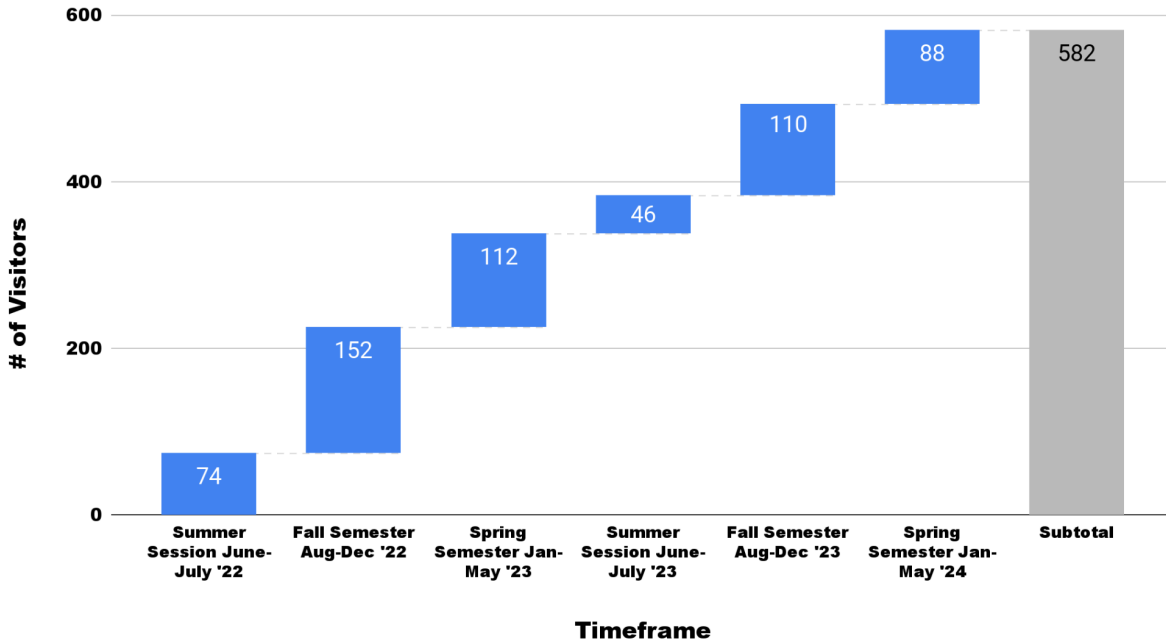
Trends and Considerations



The Ombuds Office collects data on a visit-by-visit basis. This chart reflects the total number visits for each semester over the past two year period.

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

Chart 2 - Total Visitors from June 2022 through May 2024



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 team and or group work furthering the conflict management capability across the community. [See a tabular view of Chart 2](#)

Chart 3 - Time Spent with Visitors from June 2022 through May 2024

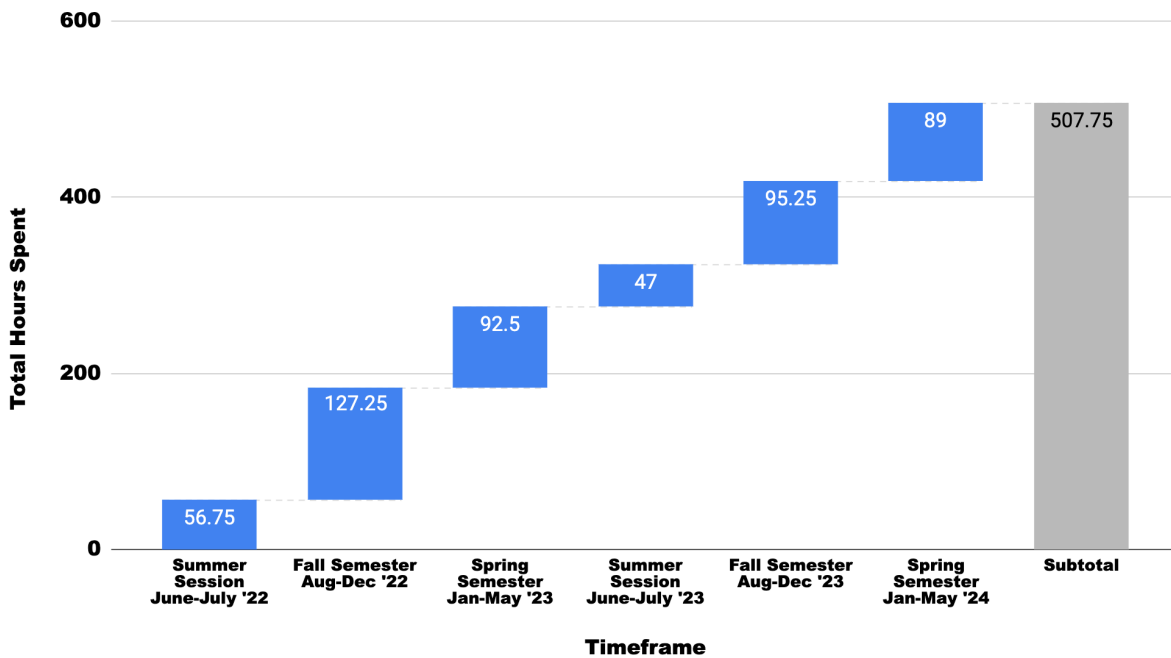
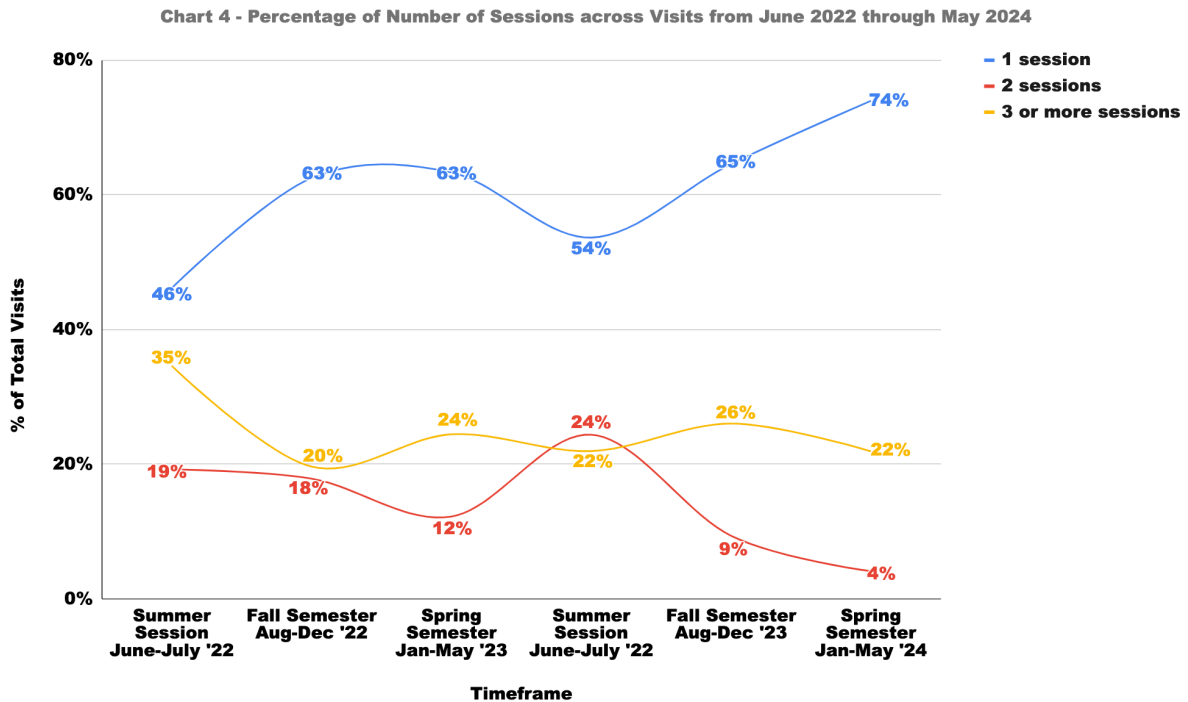


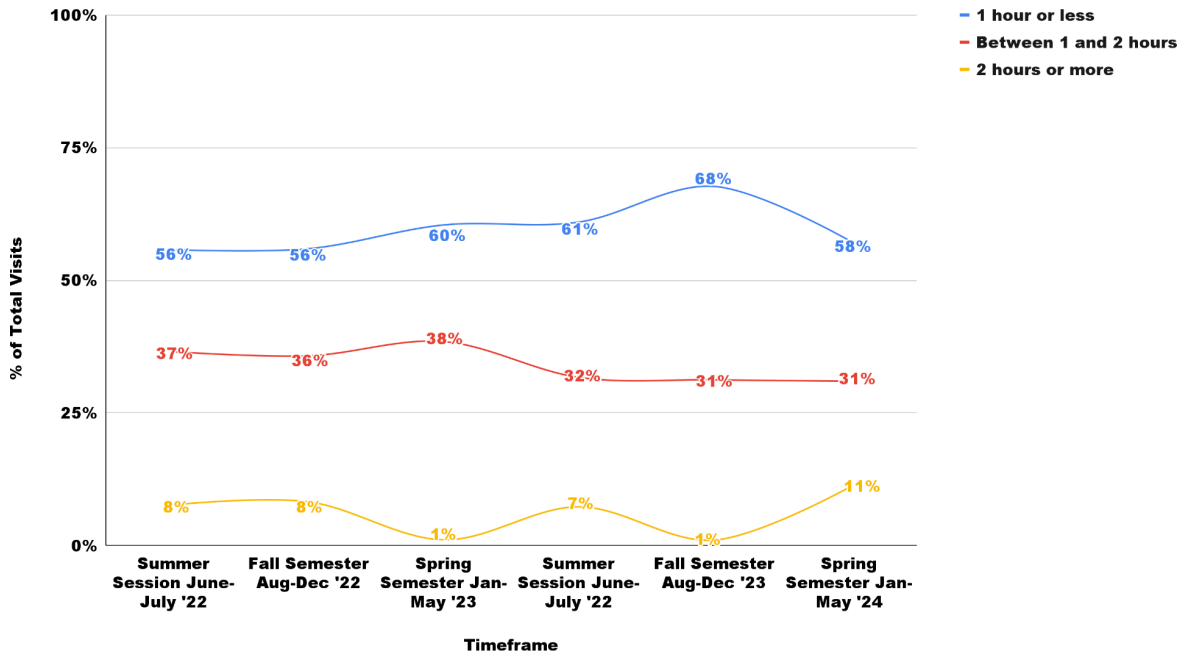
Chart 3 reflects the time spent with visitors helping and supporting their ongoing concerns and issues. It also includes time spent identifying resources and individual priorities and goals during visitor meetings. It is not inclusive of time spent by the Ombuds coordinating a visit, reviewing

policy, and/or exploring possible options independently from the visitor(s). Time spent conducting educational workshops 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](#)



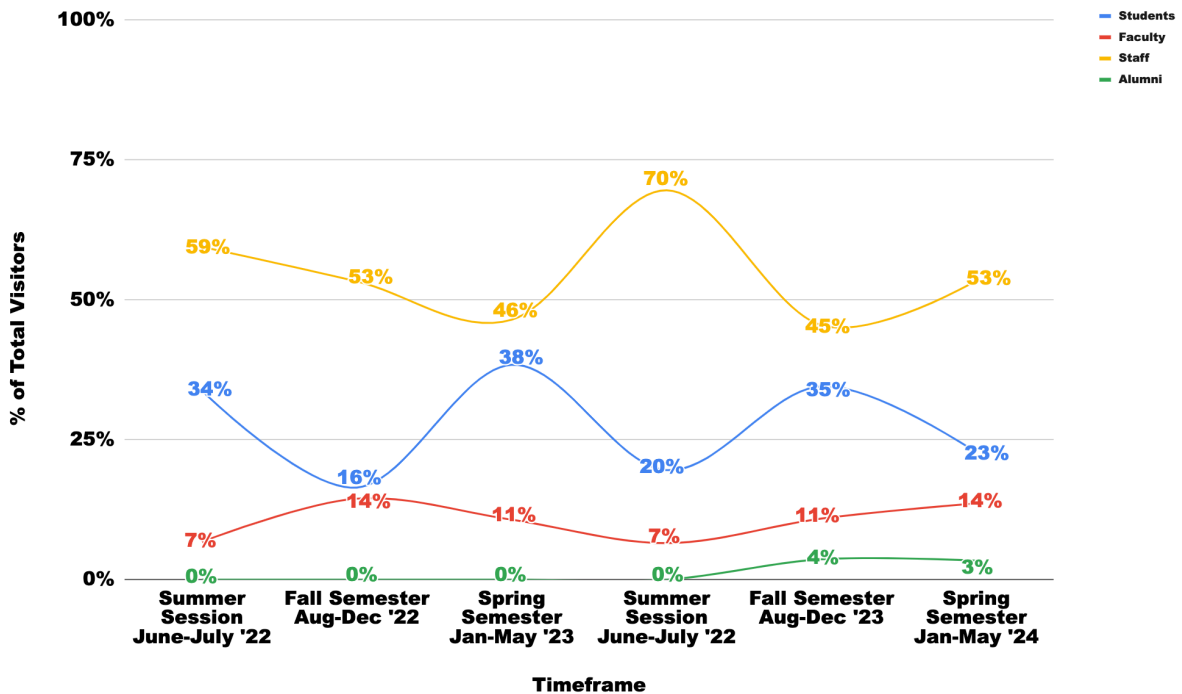
This chart reflects the number of sessions that the Ombuds Office has with a particular visitor or group of visitors. This semester, there was a noticeable increase in visitors who come in for a single visit, which may indicate that more visitors leave the office feeling they have what they need to manage their challenging situations. [See tabular view of Chart 4](#)

Chart 5 - Percentage of Mix of Time Spent across Visits from June 2022 through May 2024

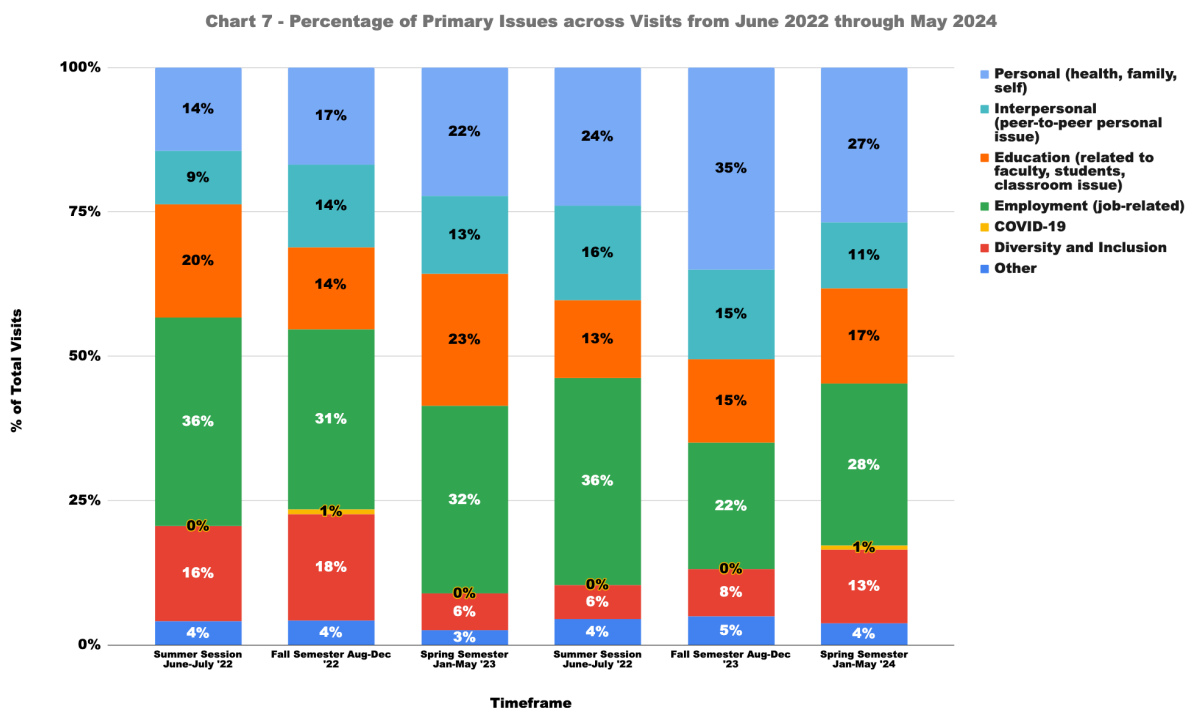


From this past Fall to Spring, there has been a 10% decrease in visits of one hour or less in duration, and a corresponding 10% increase in visits of two hours or more in duration. [See tabular view of Chart 5](#)

Chart 6 - Percentage of Visitor Populations from June 2022 through May 2024



The percentage of visitor populations varies from semester to semester. This semester, 23% of visitors were students, 53% staff, 14% faculty, and 3% alumni. [See tabular view of Chart 6](#)



During this academic year (2023-2024), our office has seen a sizable increase in the number of visits in which visitors report issues of personal concern (health, family, self). Education concerns have remained largely the same, as have interpersonal concerns. Employment concerns have decreased since the prior academic year (2022-2023) but have increased in Spring Semester 2024 as compared to Fall Semester 2023. [See tabular view of Chart 7](#)

There are issue categories to highlight:

- Team communications: The Ombuds Office was asked to work with a variety of teams (varying in size from 4 up to 20 people). The goal was to help the teams establish guiding principles on how they can best work together in a positive manner.
- A number of staff visitors have come with concern about the level of stress they have relating to workplace assignments that are outside their job descriptions.
- Communications concerns and interpersonal relationship issues among students, staff as well as professors, as well as communication concerns between staff/faculty to Brandeis leadership.
- Concerns with the parking office relating to lack of transparency, communication issues, and unclear or inequitable policies and practices.
- Giving and receiving feedback: Concerns by a number of staff members that they were not getting mid-year or annual performance reviews, and when they occurred that their supervisors were quite denigrating toward them.
- Students and staff have raised accessibility issues surrounding the physical environment on campus.

- Bullying and cyber-bullying: A few students and staff have shared that they have experienced bullying on and off campus by peers, by known and unknown people. Others have shared about being cyber-bullied by unknown people from unknown locations.
- Financial concerns: This year has also brought concerns of layoffs, RIFs, and major budget reductions resulting in anxiety and unease all over campus.
- Staff employees have complained that they have been asked to take on work not in their own job description to fulfill responsibilities in the office for others who have left. Concern is about unfair work equity. People working long days and nights need some compensation and respect for the level of their efforts.
- 1-1 conversations with their manager: Many visitors come to the Ombuds Office for help in thinking through and planning difficult conversations with one or more individuals.
- 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 set out in the policy. There are concerns that people who attend to support a student cannot speak to the student during the process.
- Visitors often come to us with concerns that don't fit into the available grievance processes and seek a way to share their feedback and/or experience through a formal channel.

Appendix – Tabular View of Charts within the Report

Table View of Chart 1: Total Visits from June 2022 through May 2024

Total Number of Visits	Summer Session June-July 2022	Fall Semester Aug-Dec 2022	Spring Semester Jan-May 2023	Summer Session June-July 2023	Fall Semester Aug-Dec 2023	Spring Semester Jan-May 2024	Total
<i>Total Number of Visits</i>	52	112	91	41	96	73	465

Table View of Chart 2: Total Visitors from June 2022 through May 2024

Total Number of Visitors	Summer Session June-July 2022	Fall Semester Aug-Dec 2022	Spring Semester Jan-May 2023	Summer Session June-July 2023	Fall Semester Aug-Dec 2023	Spring Semester Jan-May 2024	Total
<i>Total Visitors</i>	74	152	112	46	110	88	582

Table View of Chart 3: Time Spent with Visitors from June 2022 through May 2024

Total Hours Spent with Visitors	Summer Session June-July 2022	Fall Semester Aug-Dec 2022	Spring Semester Jan-May 2023	Summer Session June-July 2023	Fall Semester Aug-Dec 2023	Spring Semester Jan-May 2024	Total
<i>Total Hours Spent with Visitors</i>	56.75	127.25	92.5	47	95.25	89	507.75

Table View of Chart 4: Percentage of Number of Sessions across Visits from June 2022 through May 2024

Percentage of Number of Sessions across Visits	Summer Session June-July 2022	Fall Semester Aug-Dec 2022	Spring Semester Jan-May 2023	Summer Session June-July 2023	Fall Semester Aug-Dec 2023	Spring Semester Jan-May 2024
<i>Percentage of Number of Sessions across Visits with 1 Session</i>	46%	63%	63%	54%	65%	74%
<i>Percentage of Number of Sessions across Visits with 2 Sessions</i>	19%	18%	12%	24%	9%	4%
<i>Percentage of Number of Sessions across Visits with 3 or More Sessions</i>	35%	20%	24%	22%	26%	22%

Table View of Chart 5: Percentage of Mix of Time Spent across Visits from June 2022 through May 2024

Percentage of Mix of Time Spent with Visitors	Summer Session June-July 2022	Fall Semester Aug-Dec 2022	Spring Semester Jan-May 2023	Summer Session June-July 2023	Fall Semester Aug-Dec 2023	Spring Semester Jan-May 2024
<i>Percentage of Mix of Time Spent across Visits of Up to 1 Hour</i>	56%	56%	60%	61%	68%	58%
<i>Percentage of Mix of Time Between 1 and 2 hours</i>	37%	36%	38%	32%	31%	31%
<i>Percentage of Mix of Time Spent across Visits of 2 or More Hours</i>	8%	8%	1%	7%	1%	11%

Table View of Chart 6: Percentage of Visitor Populations from June 2022 through May 2024

Percentage of Visitor Populations	Summer Session June-July 2022	Fall Semester Aug-Dec 2022	Spring Semester Jan-May 2023	Summer Session June-July 2023	Fall Semester Aug-Dec 2023	Spring Semester Jan-May 2024
<i>Students</i>	34%	16%	38%	20%	35%	23%
<i>Faculty</i>	7%	14%	11%	7%	11%	14%
<i>Staff</i>	59%	53%	46%	70%	45%	53%
<i>Alumni</i>	0%	0%	0%	0%	4%	3%
<i>Other</i>	0%	16%	4%	4%	5%	7%

Table View of Chart 7: Percentage of Primary Issues across Visits from June 2022 through May 2024

Percentage of Primary Visitor Issues	Summer Session June-July 2022	Fall Semester Aug-Dec 2022	Spring Semester Jan-May 2023	Summer Session June-July 2023	Fall Semester Aug-Dec 2023	Spring Semester Jan-May 2024
<i>Personal (health, family, self)</i>	14%	17%	22%	24%	35%	27%
<i>Interpersonal (peer-to-peer personal issue)</i>	9%	14%	13%	16%	15%	11%
<i>Education (related to faculty, students, classroom issue)</i>	20%	14%	23%	13%	15%	17%
<i>Employment (job-related)</i>	36%	31%	32%	36%	22%	28%
<i>COVID-19</i>	0%	1%	0%	0%	0%	1%
<i>Diversity and Inclusion</i>	16%	18%	6%	6%	8%	13%
<i>Other</i>	4%	4%	3%	4%	5%	4%