



Brandeis University Ombuds

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

Quarterly Report: October 2018 – December 2018

Introduction

The Ombuds Office provides support in helping all members (referred to hereafter as “visitors”) of the Brandeis community resolve issues. The Office serves as a resource that is confidential, independent, impartial, and informal.

The Office was established in December 2017 at the recommendation of the Brandeis Chief Diversity Officer and Vice President of Diversity, Equity & Inclusion, Dr. Mark Brimhall-Vargas. The concept of a fully-staffed office that would serve the entire campus had its roots in Ford Hall 2015 and the demand by students that there be an Ombuds service for students. The services were broadened when Don Greenstein was hired as the lead Ombuds, joining collateral duty Ombuds, Cathy Burack and Elena Lewis. The three constitute the Ombuds team and serve the entire Brandeis community. The team is available to all students, faculty, staff, alumni, and anyone who has a situation, related issue, or conflict involving Brandeis University or anyone affiliated with Brandeis. The Ombuds staff practices in accordance with the professional organizational standards of the International Ombuds Association (IOA).

The Office’s primary purpose is to provide a confidential resource, where visitors can bring their concerns, questions, obtain assistance in self-empowered problem-solving, and support in considering their possible options for handling difficult situations. The Ombuds Office also serves as an alternative to formal channels of dispute resolution. Further, the Office provides information, while respecting visitor confidentiality, to the University community on trends, policies or procedures, and patterns of issues that raise concerns so that they may be prevented from recurring or escalating.

This report provides information on the milestones and accomplishments of the Ombuds Office during the 2nd quarter of the 2018-2019 academic year, and includes selected data on visits, referrals; and issues and trends.

Milestones and Accomplishments

Outreach

Outreach activities focused on fostering collaborative relationships with other service providers on campus, and speaking with faculty, staff, and student groups.

Outreach efforts include meetings with, and providing information to, the following individuals and groups:

1. Brandeis Public Safety
2. Care Team
3. Faculty Senate
4. Faculty member request for training students who serve as mentors
5. Heller School Town Hall
6. Hiatt Career Center
7. Sociology
8. Student Services

Visitors are finding out about the Office through a variety of means. About 25% of visitors heard about the office through a friend or colleague (peer), and 19% were referred by a non-peer faculty or staff member. Approximately 5% learned about the office through a poster, brochure, or advertisement, and 5% visited the website. Data continue to suggest that using our multi-pronged strategy of written material, office, classroom and event visits, speeches, individual and group meetings, and the Ombuds website is the most effective approach to making people aware of the office and its services.

Visitor and Office Statistics

Total number of visitors: 64
(YTD 100)

Role

Students	28
Faculty	8
Staff	26
Alumni	1
Other	4

(Includes visitors reporting having dual roles)

Visits

Tables 1 and 2 below show the number of hours and sessions spent with visitors this quarter.

Table 1: Hours spent with visitors

Hours	Mean	1.57
	Minimum	.50
	Maximum	7.50
	Total visitor Hours	100.50

Table 2: Number of sessions spent with visitors

		Visitors	Percent
Sessions	1	36	56 %
	2	26	41 %
	3 or more	2	3 %
	Total	64	100%

Primary Issues

Table 3 below shows categories of primary issues that were addressed during visits. Note that more than one could be identified during a single visit so percentages will not add to 100%.

Table 3: Primary issues (check all that apply)

Issue	Percentage
Interpersonal (peer-to-peer personal issue)	9 %
Employment (job related)	39 %
Education (related to faculty, students, classroom issue)	39 %
Personal (health, family, self)	22 %
Other (informational or other unique issue/concern)	20 %

"Other" includes off-campus housing, disability, general campus culture.

Primary Referrals

Table 4 below shows referrals made to other offices. Note that more than one referral could be made during a single visit so percentages will not add to 100%.

Table 4: Referrals (check all that apply)

Referred To	Percentage
Chief Diversity Officer	38 %
Campus Police	5%
Compliance Officer	2 %
Counseling Center	13 %
Dean – Academic	22 %
Disabilities Services	9 %
EAP	14 %
Facilities	2%
Gender and Sexuality Center	2 %
Human Resources	22 %
Health Service	2 %
International Students and Scholars Office	2 %
PARC/Office of Prevention Services	5 %
Provost	16 %
Spiritual and Religious Life	8 %
Other including: student conduct board, Waltham police	5 %

Total number of informal conflict resolution sessions: 10 (YTD=11)

Ten conflict resolutions sessions were held in the 2nd quarter. Total session participants: 12 students, 10 faculty, 4 staff, and 1 “Other.”

Trends

As noted earlier, “Trends” is a discussion of recurring themes that are informed by our data and the issues raised by visitors which we believe either signal the need, and/or present an opportunity, for intervention or action. Individual issues become “trends” when we recognize that multiple visitors from one or more offices, departments, or schools throughout the University community are coming to see us about the same problem. The following trends arose this quarter.

Bullying Between and Among Faculty/ Staff

We continue to hear reports from faculty and/or staff visitors, both individuals and groups, who feel bullied by superiors in their offices/areas. As noted in our prior reports, the bullying is not gender-based. While many of the complaints have been about men bullying women, we have also encountered women bullying other women. While power differentials exist between the bully and their target, the bullying occurs across rank and role, i.e., staff toward other staff, tenured faculty toward other tenured faculty, contract employees being intimidated by tenured faculty, staff being bullied by tenured and non-tenured faculty.

Interpersonal and Staff Communications

We are hearing about issues related to the way various levels of faculty and staff on teams, as well as within informal groups, are failing to communicate. We have been asked to facilitate meetings and offer trainings so people can learn how to communicate more effectively. It appears to us to be a systemic issue on campus where people don't know how to collaborate and treat people with respect, when differences arise.

Stressful Academic Classroom Climate

Both graduate and undergraduate students have conveyed experiencing high levels of tension and stress in the academic classroom environment broadly across disciplines. They have described incidents of being publicly ridiculed and critiqued in front of their peers. Some students described feeling overlooked and unacknowledged during class. Furthermore, some described feeling uncomfortable with course content that is not sensitive to marginalized identities. Students articulated apprehensions about discussing challenges they are experiencing in class out of fear of retribution.

Housing Conflicts

Graduate and undergraduate students have reported experiencing conflicts related to off-campus housing and understanding their rights and responsibilities as tenants. The issues are more acute for international students. Students have also experienced interpersonal challenges with roommates both on and off campus.

Goals

The Ombuds team has established goals for the 2018-2019 academic year.

Continuing Outreach

The Ombuds team has been meeting regularly and planning marketing meetings with all major offices and constituent groups within the University. The team will continue to schedule and meet with offices and groups on our list and continues to schedule outreach trainings as well as brief meetings with students, faculty and staff. The Ombuds uses the 2018-2019 academic calendar to leverage existing Brandeis events and deadlines to continue promoting our services, and partner with other offices that serve the Brandeis community.

On-Going Service/Program Evaluation

The Ombuds Office is committed to continuous improvement to ensure we are operating efficiently and effectively as a unit. Last year we began to articulate the Ombuds Office theory of change to allow us to plan how to evaluate our impact on our visitors and the Brandeis community over time. In the short term, we use our confidential visitor feedback survey to inform and strengthen our practices and services in support of the community.

Increased Service to the Campus Community

We have 4 goals we are working on accomplishing in order to enhance the services we offer to all members of the Brandeis Community.

1. We plan to set up office hours in specific areas of the campus to make the Ombuds Office more visible and accessible to students, faculty and staff in the coming year. In February Elena Lewis will have special dedicated hours for students from 5:00 to 7:00 pm on Mondays. Interested students can make an appointment by emailing elewis-ombuds@brandeis.edu or calling 781-736-2265, ext. 2.
2. With three part-time Ombuds on staff presently, we'd like to add a multilingual Ombuds to the team to expand the Ombuds team's availability and accessibility to the Brandeis Community. Until that occurs we are translating as much of our written material as we can into Chinese (priority item) to be followed by other languages spoken by members of our community.
3. We are developing an array of self-help materials for our website on communication, conflict resolution, self-care, harassment and bullying, and discrimination.
4. We have implemented offering informal conflict resolution services to individuals and groups.

The number of visitors we have seen and the range of issues that have been brought to us underscore the necessity for the Ombuds Office. Our primary goal continues to be to serve the whole community in ways that are needed, desired and supportive for community growth in hopes of making Brandeis University a **healthy, compassionate, caring, respectful, and productive community**.