

Brandeis University Ombuds

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

Annual Report: July 2024 - June 2025

Executive Summary

The Brandeis Ombuds Office remained a trusted, confidential resource for navigating complex interpersonal and institutional challenges across the University community. With a mission rooted in fairness, dignity, and empowerment, the office supported 252 visitors through individual consultations and facilitated conversations, despite staff reductions.

Key Highlights

- **Community Engagement:** Sustained outreach through regular meetings, orientation events, and listening circles.
- **Visitor Demographics:** 43% students, 36% staff, 13% faculty, with 29% identifying as international—a promising sign of cross-cultural trust.
- **Primary Concerns:** Most frequent issues included employment (26%), personal matters (23%), interpersonal conflict (26%), and education-related concerns (22%).

Trends & Insights

- **Usage Patterns:** 66.7% resolved concerns in a single visit; with time spent per session under 2 hours for most.
- **Emerging Themes:** Staff burnout, organizational change, lack of operational norms, concerns about accessibility, difficult faculty-student interactions, and stress linked to institutional and world political change.
- **Referrals:** Broad distribution across campus and community services, reflecting multidisciplinary needs.

Strategic Goals

- Continue proactive listening, resource navigation, and informal resolution support.
- Offer targeted workshops on communication, conflict in the workplace, norms-setting, and stress management.
- Expand self-help resources and maintain visibility as a voluntary, off-the-record space for all Brandeis affiliates.

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 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.

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 office visitors to find all reasonable options and acceptable solutions for everyone involved.

Highlights

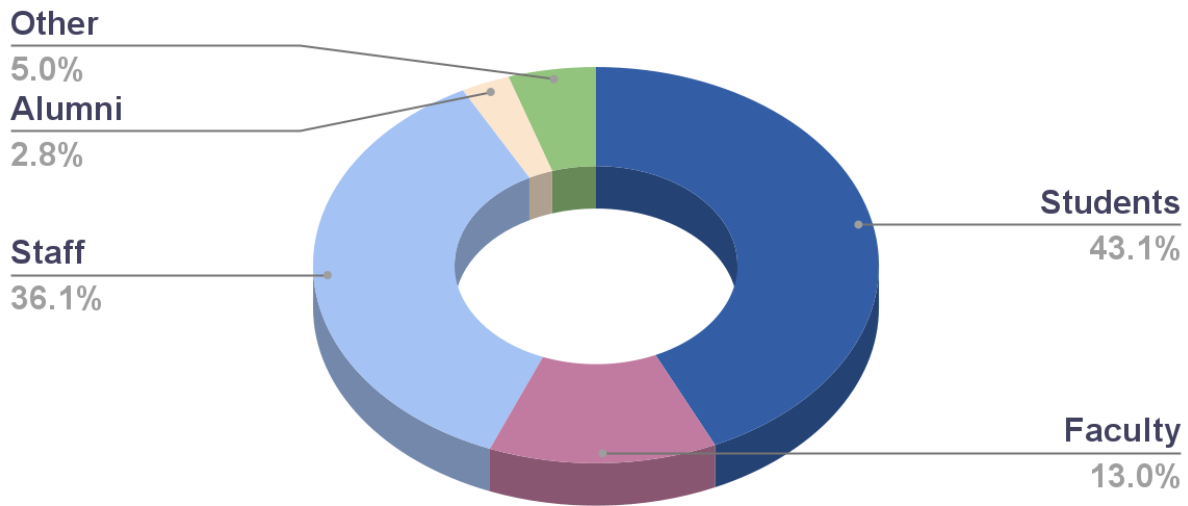
The Ombuds Office continues to support the Brandeis community and has had a total of 252 visitors come to the office since July 2024. The Ombuds Office shares information about our services throughout the campus community. We are engaged in weekly, bi-weekly, and monthly meetings with teams, offices, and campus leaders on a regular basis to discuss issues, concerns, and considerations that individuals are discussing with our office about how to appropriately manage and address.

Data

Our most recent Ombuds report reflects the following: the Ombuds Office had 207 visitor meetings this past fiscal year, and we met with 252 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 2024-2025 (Total # of Visitors:252)

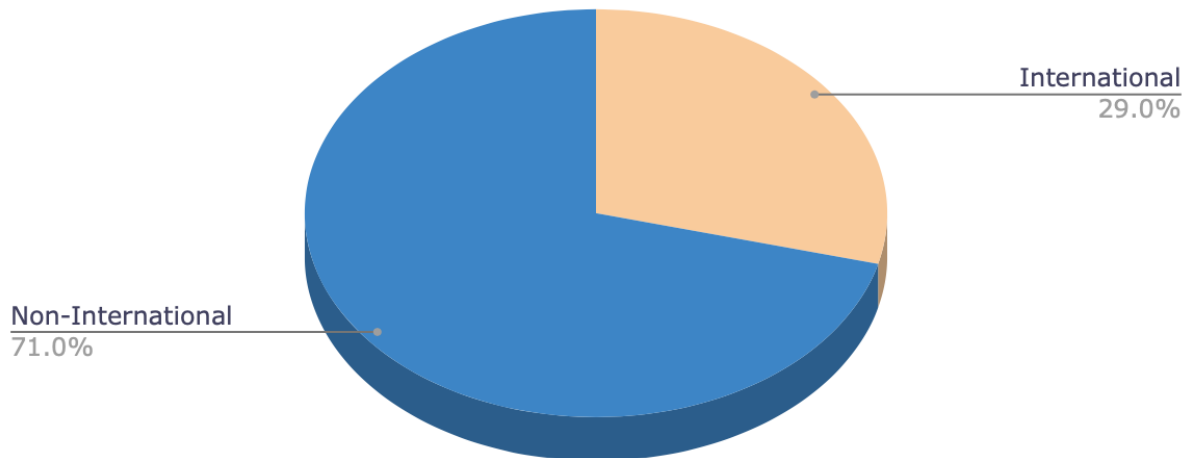


[See tabular view of Chart A](#)

We had a decrease in the number of total visitors coming to the office this past year. This is likely due to a reduction in Ombuds staff and the frequent community meeting updates where concerns and questions that frequently come to the Ombuds office may have been addressed. There was an increase in the number of student visitors as well as faculty visitors.

Chart B - International and Non-International Visitors

Fiscal Year 2024-2025 (only includes self-reported visitor information)

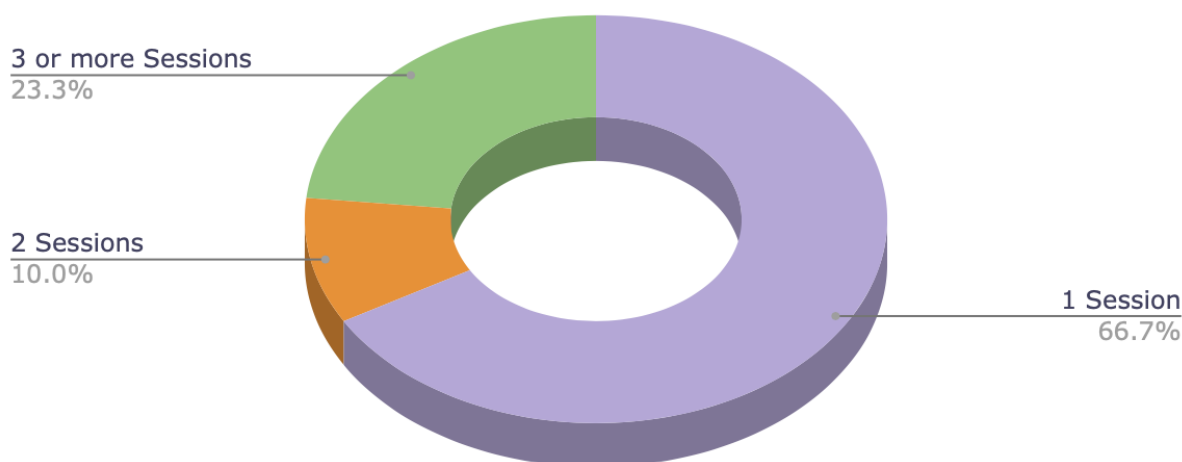


[See tabular view of Chart B](#)

It is interesting to note that the international population at Brandeis is about 19% 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 high number of international students, staff, and faculty, where there has been a concern that cultural differences might have kept visitors from visiting the Ombuds Office.

Chart C - Percentage of Number of Sessions Across Visits

Fiscal Year 2024-2025

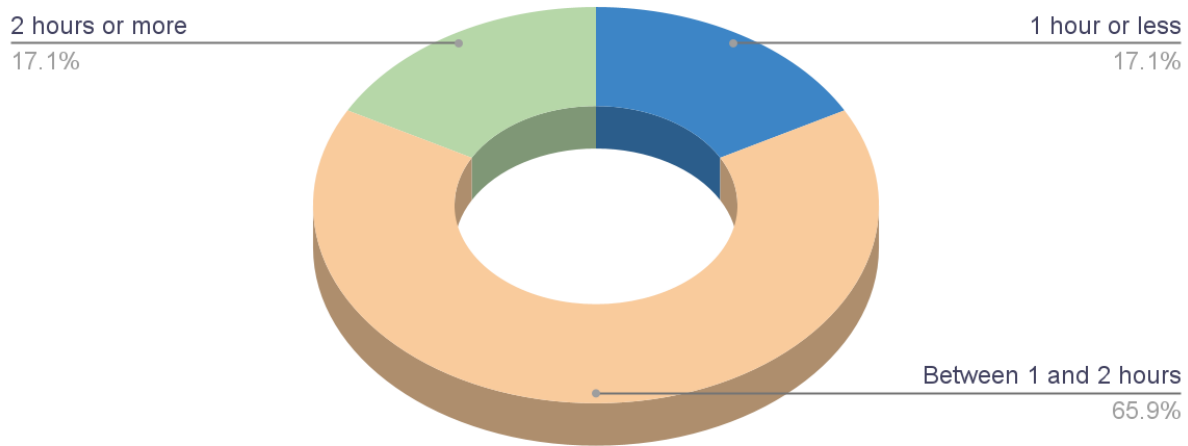


[See tabular view of Chart C](#)

The majority of visitors to the Ombuds Office appear to only need one visit to find options to overcome the concerns being raised. About a third of visitors return for follow-up visits, sometime on the same issue and frequently with new concerns. The largest informational tool of the Ombuds Office is one successful visitor. 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 2024-2025

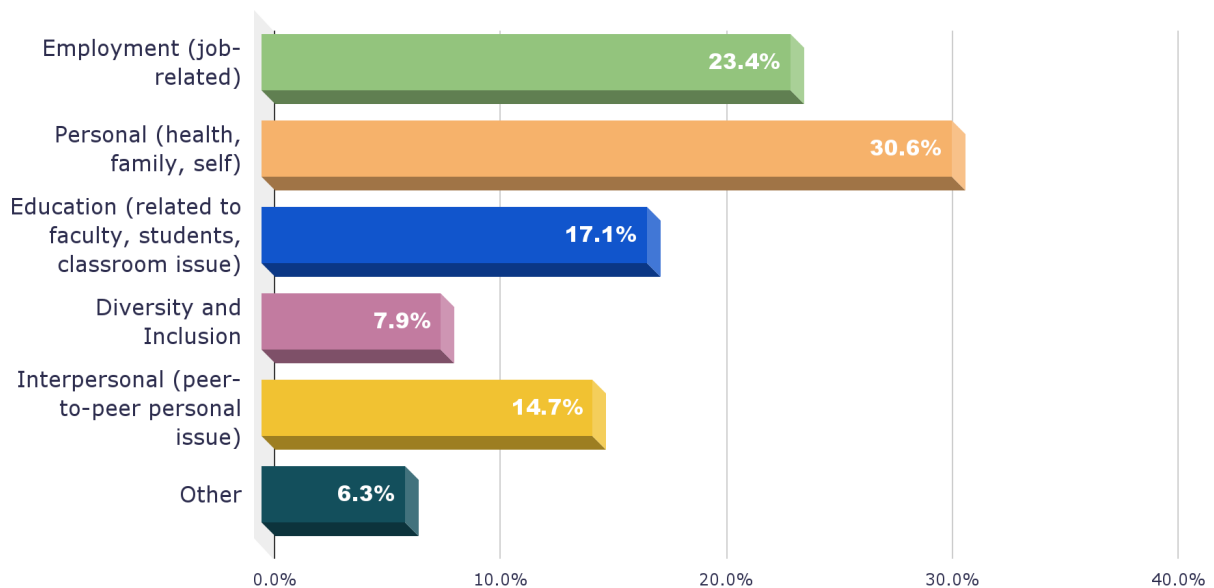


[See tabular view of Chart D](#)

In the past fiscal year most visitors have needed under 2 hours of time for a visit. Less than 20% spend more than 2 hours in a meeting with an Ombuds.

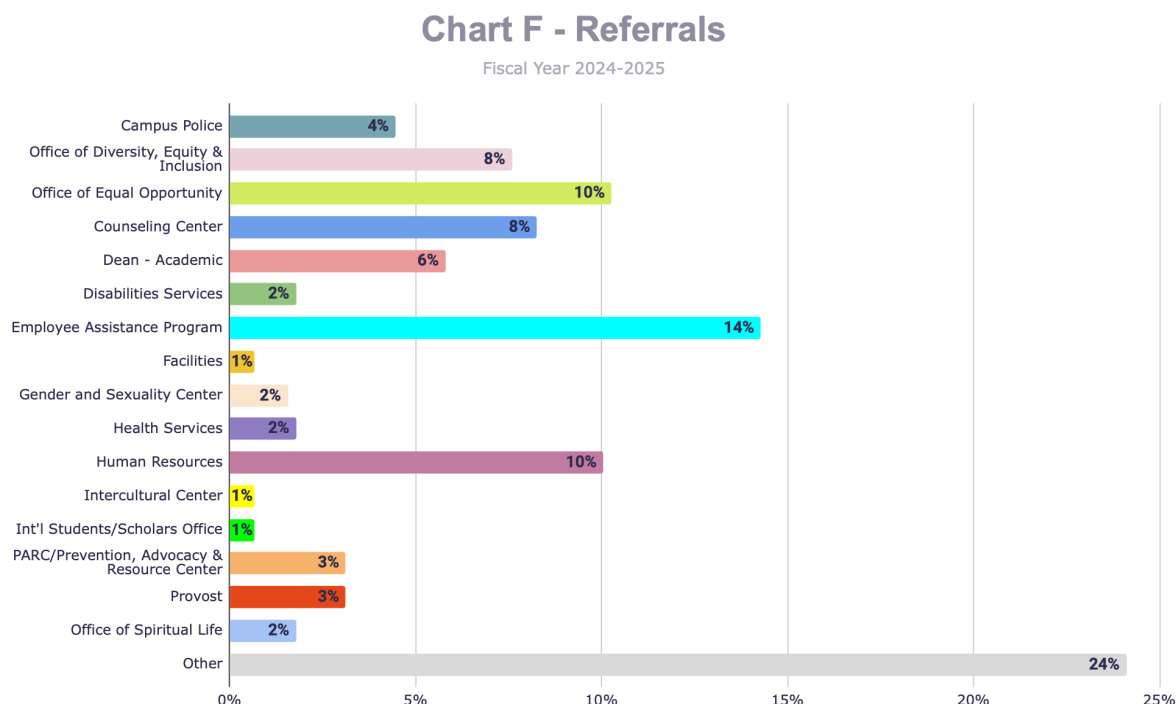
Chart E - Primary Issues Raised

Fiscal Year 2024-2025



[See tabular view of Chart E](#)

Just under 55% of visitors come with either employment or personal (health, family,) concerns. Interestingly, educational and interpersonal concerns make up a smaller percentage of visitors.



[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 as well as other legal support issues), legal service offices for immigration legal concerns, clerk of court in Waltham for general legal and mediation concerns, MA housing court, MA Commission Against Discrimination(MCAD).

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:

- “Thank you to the ombuds office. I cannot state emphatically enough how helpful the staff has been. I hope that the leadership of the university appreciates the ombuds office and understands that their skillset is unique.”
- “I’m impressed with the professionalism and kindness that the Ombuds demonstrate.”
- “I felt heard and the Ombuds took the time to understand the issue, and remained neutral.”
- “I am grateful to have the Ombuds as a resource at Brandeis and the folks working in the Ombuds office have been very helpful.”

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:

- Physical accessibility concerns.
- Lack of norms/guiding principles of how teams, offices, departments work together.
- Concerns about job expectations, the amount of work required to complete tasks with the number of staff and faculty who have either retired, left, or were laid off. 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 other students in and out of the classroom.
- Concerns about travel as an international student. Faculty or staff.
- Concerns about changes on and off campus downsizing and potential change in job description, demotion or loss of job.
- Concerning the new performance review system.
- Landlord tenant issues.
- Roommate communication issues?
- Difficult conversations between students and professors.
- Difficult conversations between staff, faculty, and supervisors.
- Staff concerns about poor management practices by their supervisors.
- Lack of training and support for managers.
- Stressful situations on campus with federal government and campus changes.
- Perceive bullying and poor listening/communication skills leading to desire to change jobs or leave the organization.

Educational 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 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
- Chaplaincy student social gatherings

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

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

Goals

The team was made-up of three ombuds and has been downsized to one (Don Greenstein) This past winter due to financial constraints. The Ombud will continue to meet the needs of the Brandeis community. Don will meet with visitors in a timely manner, continue to take training and interact with Ombuds from other higher educational institutions and support the Brandeis community during these times of change.

This past year the team has been facilitating listening circles and will continue to offer these services on an as needed basis. The Ombud will continue to highlight the issues and apparent trends as they arise.

Don will continue to be an International Ombuds Association resource trainer, networking and mentoring with other Ombuds in other higher educational organizations. This allows the ombud to monitor and have resources so he is prepared for trends and issues as they arise at Brandeis. The Ombud will continue to participate in skill building and networking training and attend other conferences (as allowed within the office budget). Don plans to update the information, self-help materials on the Ombud website with new materials highlighting new information that reflects and introduces the work of the Ombuds Office, reflecting the issues that are presently arising on the Brandeis campus. The Ombud is creating and locating new self help material that will be shared with visitors related to concerns and issues that they bring to the office.

Summary

The Ombuds Office has made an impact as a resource to the Brandeis community. Don 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

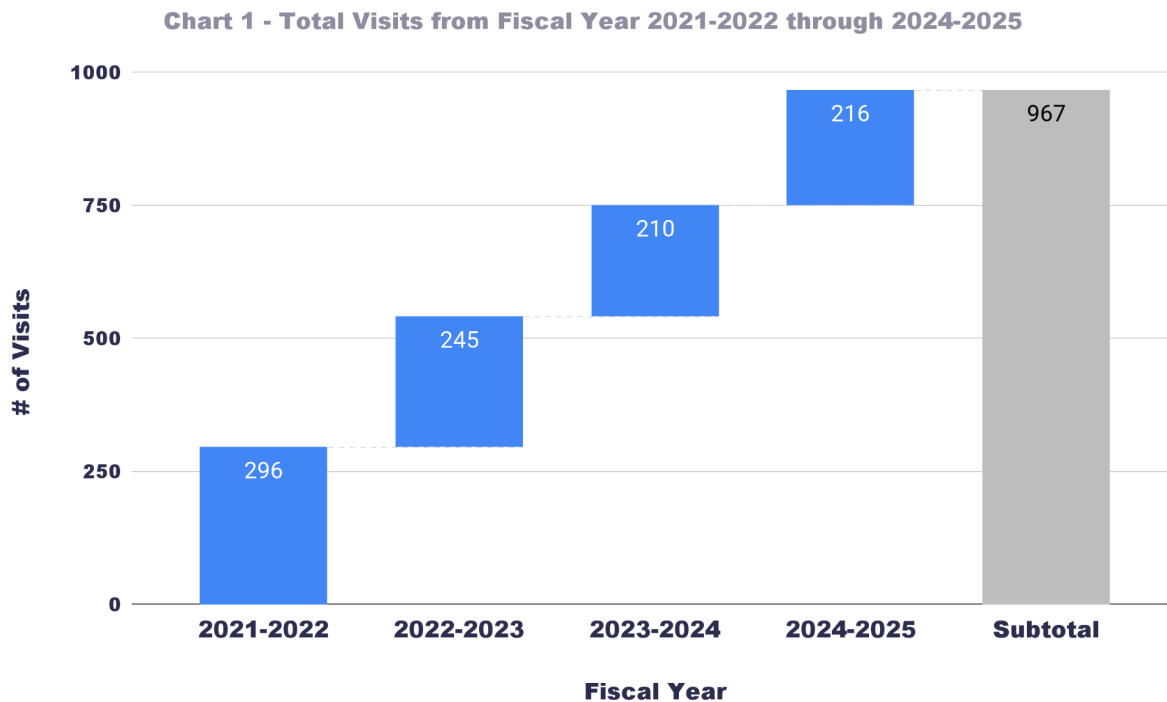
- difficult conversations,
- establishing norms/guiding principles and
- self-care and stress during times of change

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

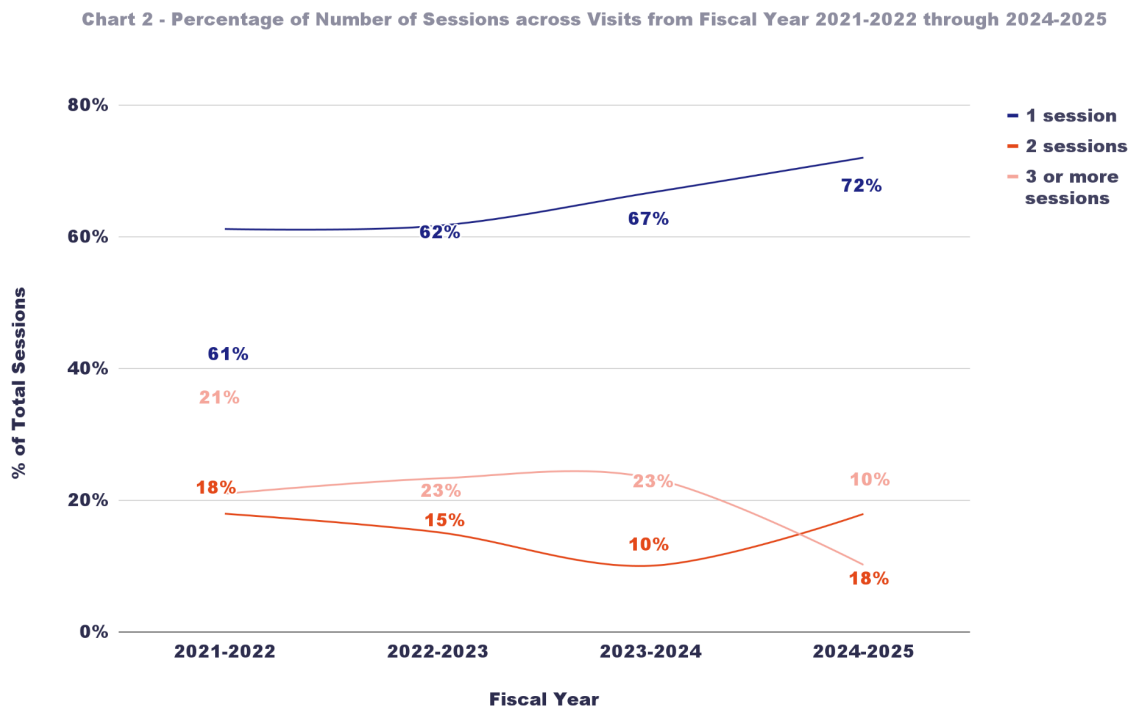
The Ombuds Office will continue to share information about our services throughout the campus community and offer listening circles to any team or campus department who requests support.

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 when such is requested and desired. We are a voluntary 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

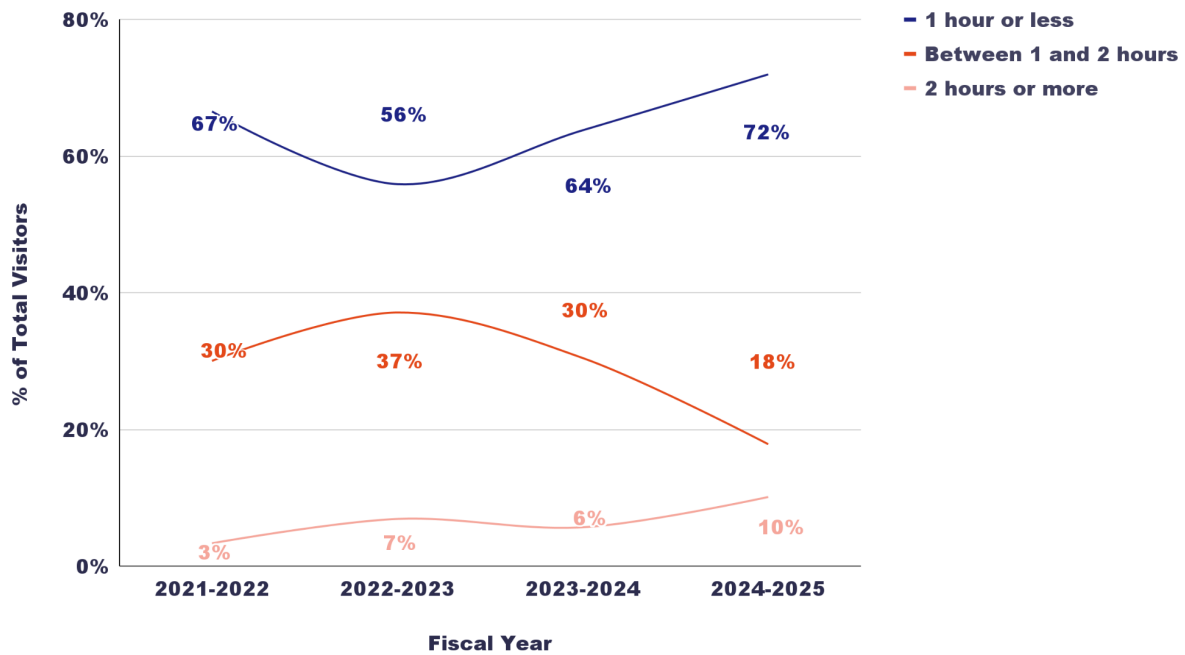


The total number of visits to the ombuds Office from July 1, 2024, through June 30, 2025, was 216. This number does not include workshops, presentations, regular meetings with leadership, and other outreach activities. [See tabular view of Chart 1](#)

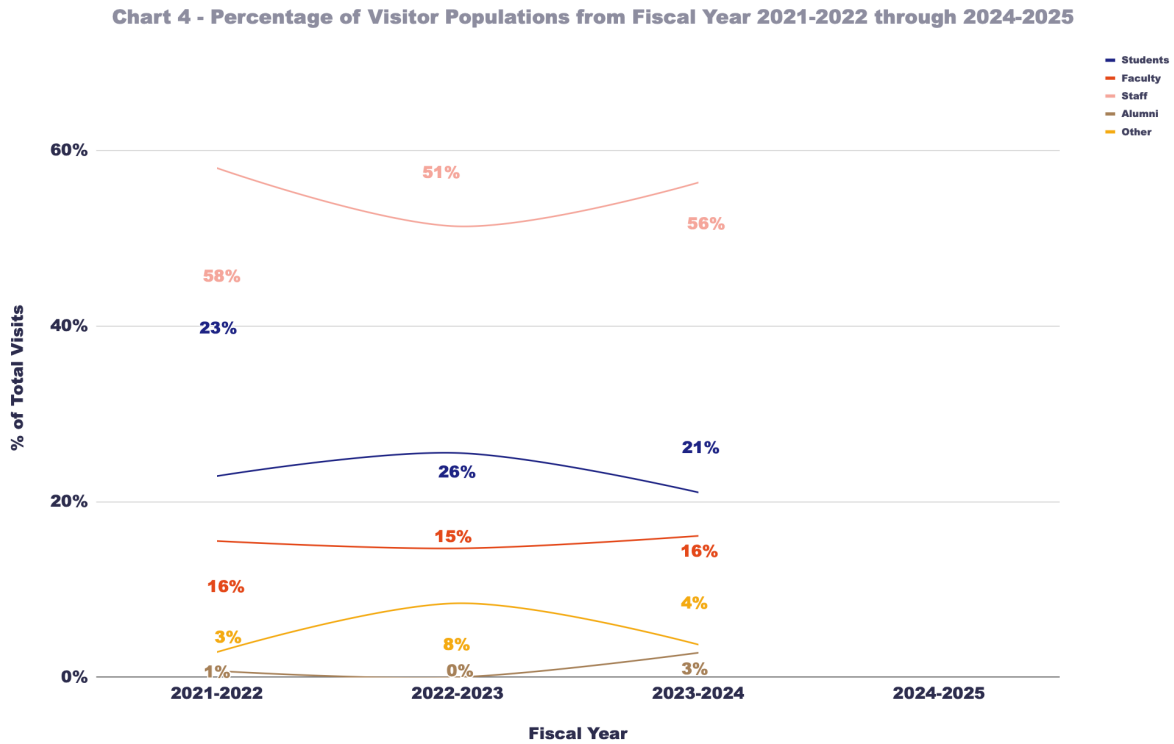


The number of sessions any given visitor has with our Office has changed slightly over the prior year. 72% (149) of visitors come in for a single session, while 18% (37) return for a second session, and 10% (21) for a third session or beyond.

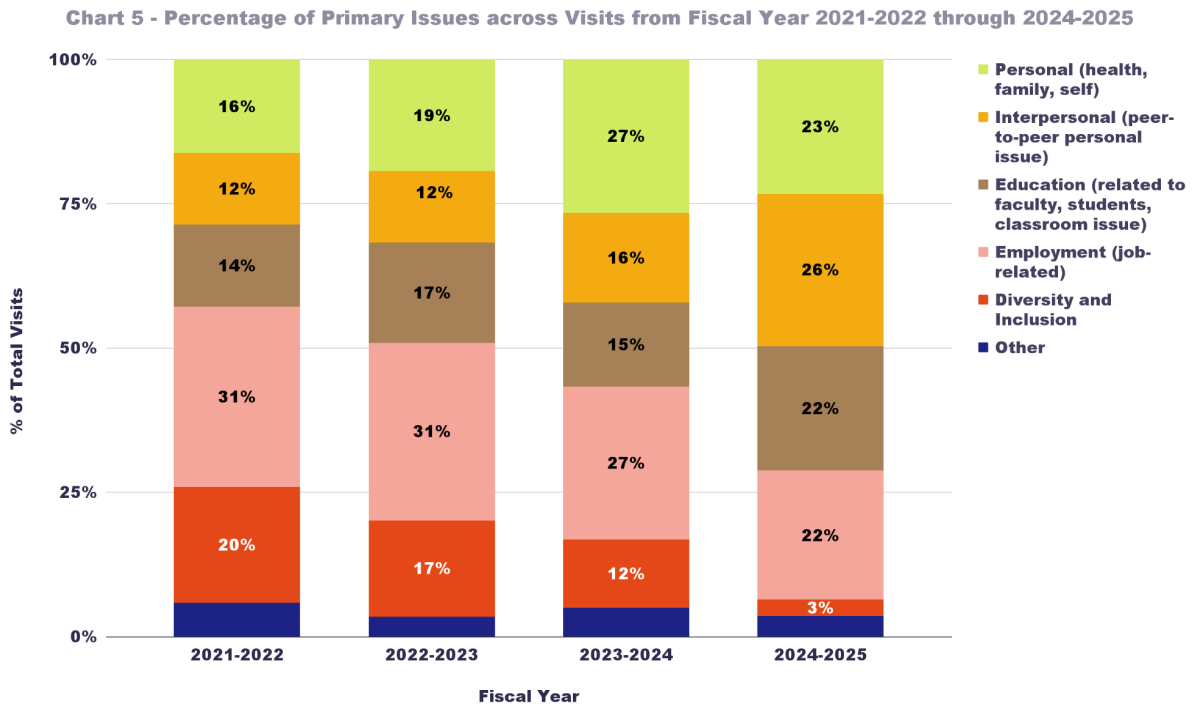
Chart 3 - Percentage of Mix of Time Spent across Visits from Fiscal Year 2021-2022 through 2024-2025



The percentage of visits lasting between 1 hour or shorter increased from 64% to 72% (134), those lasting 1 and 2 hours decreased from 30%, to 18% (63) and visits of 2 hours or more have slightly increased from 8% to 10% (13) .



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.



The most prevalent type of primary issue we encountered this past year is employment (job-related) at 26%, and personal (health, family, self) at 23%. 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](#)

Appendix B – Tabular View of Charts within the Report

Table View of Chart A: Types of Visitors Served, Fiscal Year 2024-2025 (Total # of Visitors: 252)

<i>Students</i>	43.1%
<i>Faculty</i>	13.0%
<i>Staff</i>	36.1%
<i>Alumni</i>	2.8%
<i>Other</i>	%

Table View of Chart B: International and Non-International Visitors, Fiscal Year 2024-2025 (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 2024-2025

<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 2024-2025

<i>1 hour or less</i>	17.0%
<i>Between 1 and 2 hours</i>	65.9%
<i>2 hours or more</i>	17.1%

Table View of Chart E: Primary Issues Raised, Fiscal Year 2024-2025

<i>Employment (job-related)</i>	22%
<i>Personal (health, family, self)</i>	23%
<i>Education (related to faculty, students, classroom issue)</i>	22%
<i>Diversity and Inclusion</i>	3%
<i>Interpersonal (peer-to-peer personal issue)</i>	26%
<i>Other</i>	4%

Table View of Chart F: Referrals, Fiscal Year 2024-2025

<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, Advocacy & Resource Center</i>	3%
<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 2024-2025

<i>Total Number of Visits</i>	FY 2020- 2021	FY 2021- 2022	FY 2022- 2023	FY 2023- 2024	FY 2024- 2025	Total
<i>Total Number of Visits</i>	288	296	245	210	216	1255

Table View of Chart 2: Percentage of Number of Sessions across Visits from Fiscal Year 2020-2021 through 2024-2025

<i>% of # of Sessions with Visitors by # of Sessions</i>	FY 2020-2021	FY 2021-2022	FY 2022-2023	FY 2023-2024	FY 2024-2025
<i>% of # of Sessions with Visitors with 1 Session</i>	42%	61%	62%	67%	72%
<i>% of # of Sessions with Visitors with 2 Sessions</i>	23%	18%	15%	10%	10%

<i>% of # of Sessions with Visitors with 3 or More Sessions</i>	34%	21%	23%	23%	23%
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Table View of Chart 3: Percentage of Mix of Time Spent across Visits from Fiscal Year 2020-2021 through 2024-2025

<i>% of Mix of Time Spent with Visitors</i>	FY 2020-2021	FY 2021-2022	FY 2022-2023	FY 2023-2024	FY 2024-2025
<i>% of Mix of Time Spent with Visitors of 1 Hour or Less</i>	65%	67%	56%	64%	72%
<i>% of Mix of Time Spent with Visitors of Between 1 and 2 Hours</i>	32%	30%	37%	30%	18%
<i>% of Mix of Time Spent with Visitors of 2 Hours or More</i>	2%	3%	7%	6%	10%

Table View of Chart 4: Percentage of Visitor Populations from Fiscal Year 2020-2021 through 2024-2025

<i>% of Visitor Populations</i>	FY 2020-2021	FY 2021-2022	FY 2022-2023	FY 2023-2024	FY 2024-2025
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<i>% of Students</i>	40%	23%	26%	21%	43%
<i>% of Faculty</i>	10%	16%	15%	16%	13%
<i>% of Staff</i>	46%	58%	51%	56%	36%
<i>% of Alumni</i>	0%	1%	0%	3%	3%
<i>% of Other</i>	4%	3%	8%	4%	5%

Table View of Chart 5: Percentage of Primary Issues across Visits from Fiscal Year 2020-2021 through 2024-2025

Percentage of Total Visits	FY 2020-2021	FY 2021-2022	FY 2022-2023	FY 2023-2024	FY 2024-2025
<i>Personal (health, family, self)</i>	16%	16%	19%	27%	23%
<i>Interpersonal (peer-to-peer personal issue)</i>	8%	12%	12%	16%	26%
<i>Education (related to faculty, students, classroom)</i>	24%	14%	17%	15%	22%
<i>Employment (job-related)</i>	24%	31%	31%	27%	22%

<i>Diversity and Inclusion</i>	16%	20%	17%	12%	3%
<i>Other</i>	12%	6%	3%	5%	4%

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