

Content

This annual report of the Ombuds Office for Students & Postdoctoral Appointees (hereinafter "Ombuds Office" or "Office") provides data on the volume and general characteristics of the visitors who have utilized the Office, as well as detailed information on the types of concerns addressed with those visitors. Although the data in this report captures the concerns of only a small portion of the student and postdoctoral appointee (postdoc) populations, the Office uses this data to spot behaviors, practices, and trends that can serve as alert mechanisms which inform its recommendations for systemic and sustainable change.

As an informal and confidential resource, the Ombuds Office does not keep records of specific cases or individual visitors. All uniquely identifying information about its visitors is destroyed. For data collection purposes, however, the Office maintains anonymized records, tracking only basic information regarding demographics and nature of concern.

Executive Summary

The Ombuds Office served **217 visitors** between July 1, 2021 and June 30, 2022. Though it is a 16.5% decrease in visitors from the prior reporting year (RY), it is also the Office's *second highest* count on record, and is just over **4% higher** than its five-year average.

Some form of follow-up was requested and/or required for **35%** of all visitors. Follow-up, for the context of this report, means both multiple appointments with visitors to discuss options and developments of their cases, *and/or* consultations with campus partners to obtain additional information for visitors.

The most common concerns raised by undergraduate and graduate student visitors were about **communication, grades, responsiveness, interpersonal behavior** from members of the U.C. Berkeley community, and **unclear policies and procedures**.

Faculty and staff consultations were roughly **8%** of all Office visitors. These cases can often be time-consuming because of their frequency for high degrees of complexity.

Undergraduate student visitors accounted for 59% of all student visitors and 45% of all visitors.

59%

41%

Graduate student visitors were 41% of all student visitors and 32% of all visitors.

Mission

The Ombuds Office serves as an informal dispute resolution resource that advocates for equity, fairness, justice, respect for differences, and reasonable solutions to the issues and concerns of the student and postdoctoral appointee populations at U.C. Berkeley.

Principles of Practice

The Ombuds Office follows the International Ombuds Association's standards of practice and code of ethics, including: *Confidentiality, Independence, Informality, and Neutrality*. The Office also upholds and promotes the U.C. Berkeley Principles of Community.

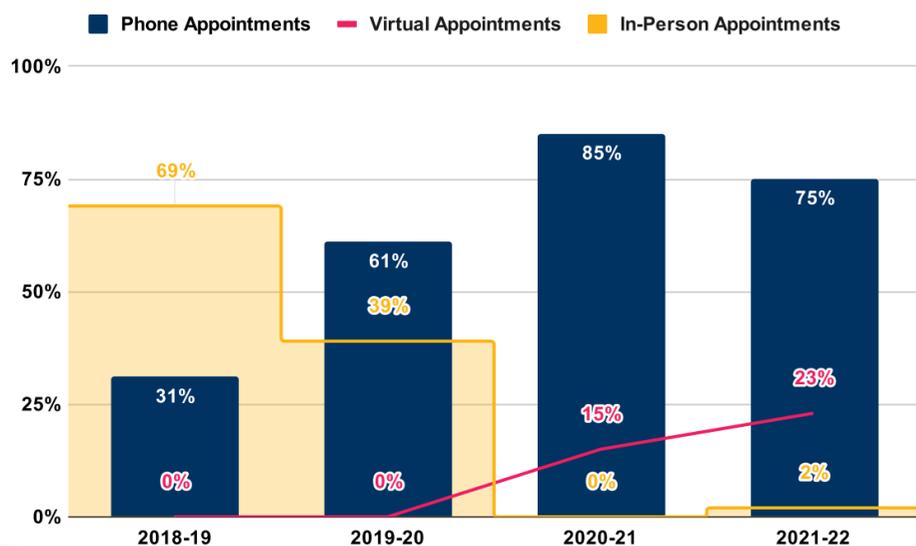
Data Collection & Reporting

All Office visitors were given the option to voluntarily disclose their demographic information and were informed their responses would be anonymous and not be connected to their individual cases. Demographic data is only requested of student and postdoc visitors, and not of other parties wishing to consult on student and/or postdoc-related matters.

The Ombuds Office added two new subcategories to its list of reportable concerns for RY 2021-22: *Classroom Climate* and *Lab Climate*. These new subcategories were created to provide greater breadth and specificity to the often varying instances of climate-related concerns. Complementing the pre-existing subcategory of *Department/Organization Climate*, the Office believes these additions will more accurately reflect where climate concerns can and do occur.

Visitors Appointments

Since the final quarter of RY 2019-20, whether by necessity or visitor preference, Ombuds Office staff have served campus in an overwhelmingly remote capacity. To illustrate, consider the drastic shift in numbers away from in-person appointments in recent years. In RY 2018-19, the last full year uninterrupted by the global pandemic, 69% of all visitors had in-person appointments. That number by RY 2021-22 shrank to only 2%. By contrast, phone and virtual appointments rose sharply from 31% to 98% in the same time period despite in-person appointment availability. Be it a trend or something more permanent, the Office will continue to monitor the appointment preferences of its visitors as the public health situation continues to evolve.



Services

Once again, the bulk of services provided by the Office consisted of clarifying campus policies and procedures, and coaching visitors in conflict resolution techniques and the language of non-defensive communication. All visitors were ultimately empowered to decide for themselves how to address their concerns and were encouraged to work toward resolutions that met their needs.

In addition to students and postdoctoral appointees, the Ombuds Office served faculty, staff, and members of the broader university community regarding student and postdoc-related concerns. Of its visitors, 77% were either undergraduate or graduate students, 8% were faculty/staff, and the remaining 15% were largely an assortment of alumni, parents, and postdocs.

Services for All Visitors

	2021-22
Clarifying Policy/Procedure	68%
Coaching	43%
Referral	14%
Consultation	12%
Mediation	3%
35% of visitors were provided more than one type of service	

The Ombuds Office is intentionally geared toward fostering fair and impartial outcomes that reflect student success, make minimal use of administrative resources, reduce campus liability and exposure, and support an environment that furthers the university's mission, vision, and core values.

Beyond appointments with individual visitors, the Office performed 16 outreach events and/or trainings for just over 530 individual undergraduate and graduate students, postdoctoral appointees, faculty, and staff.

Finally, it is important to note that since the Ombuds Office is, among other things, an informal resource, it therefore cannot and will not compel any party to use its services. Visitors solicit its services voluntarily.

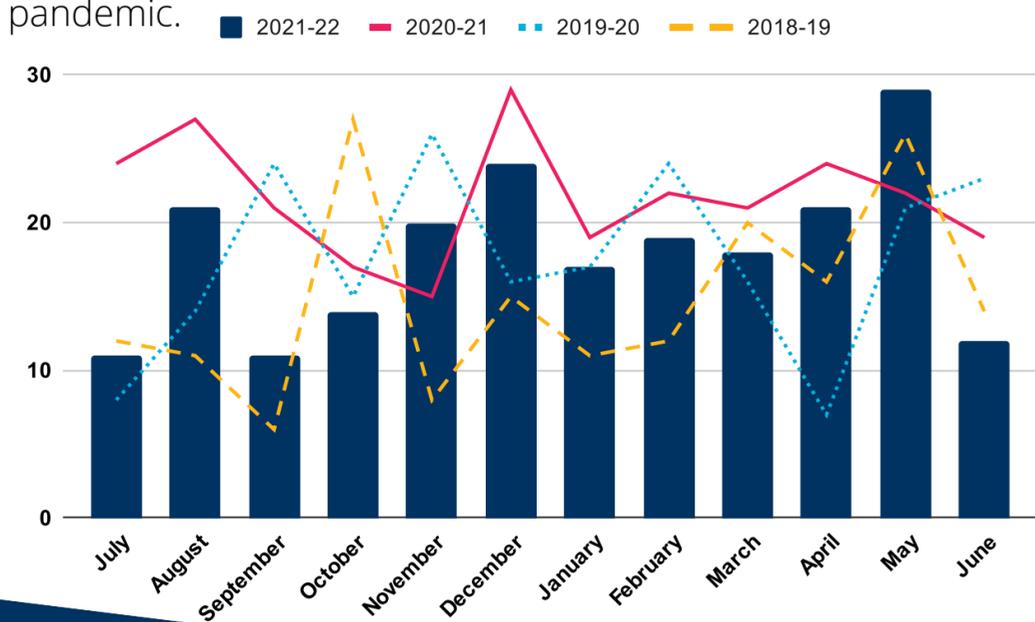
All Visitors

217 visitors worked with the Ombuds Office between July 2021 and June 2022. This represented a 16.5% decrease from the previous reporting year and is the first time in the last four years that the Office saw a decrease in total visitor numbers.

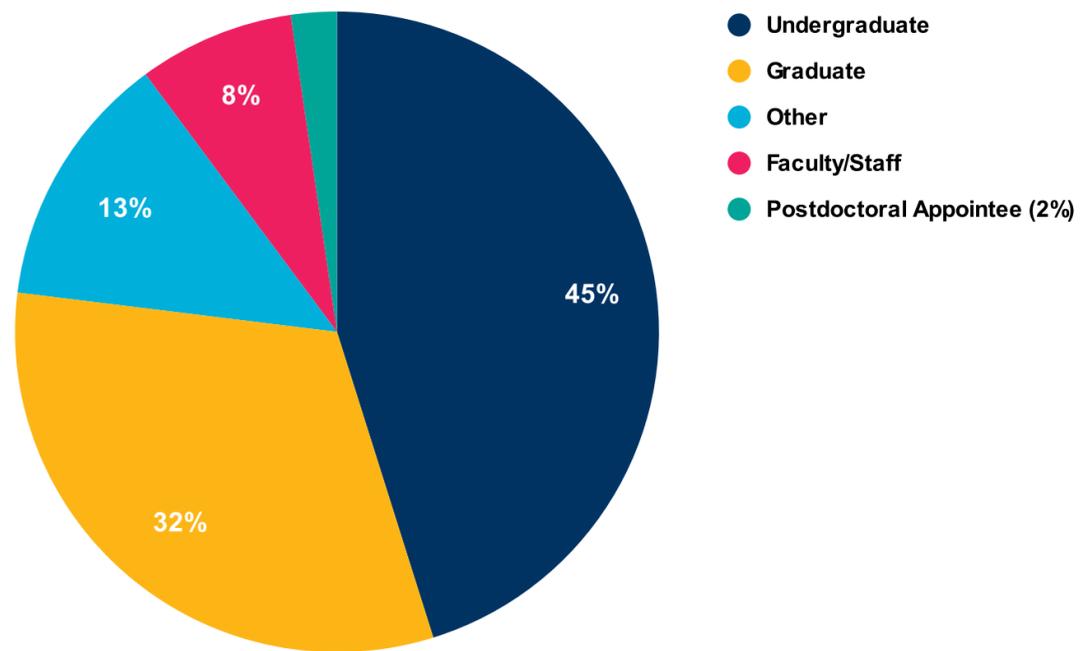


Despite the dip in total visitors, Ombuds Office staff met with the second highest number of total visitors in its recorded history. It continues a three-year trend of unprecedented 200+ visitor totals. As a tempering factor, the uptick in visitor numbers also coincided with the global pandemic. So, does the increased visitor traffic of the past three years signal a new normal in terms of demand for its services, or should the Office expect to see its numbers fall back down to pre-pandemic levels as the public health situation continues to steady? Though it is too early to make any definitive conclusions, the answer is probably closer to the latter than the former.

In tandem with the public health crisis, sociopolitical events occurring between May of RY 2019-20 and December of RY 2020-21 created a situation that was ripe for conflict and thus a heightened need for Ombuds services. Since that time, however, monthly visitor numbers have stabilized and resemble something more akin to the modest (but still optimistic) growth the Office was seeing before the pandemic.

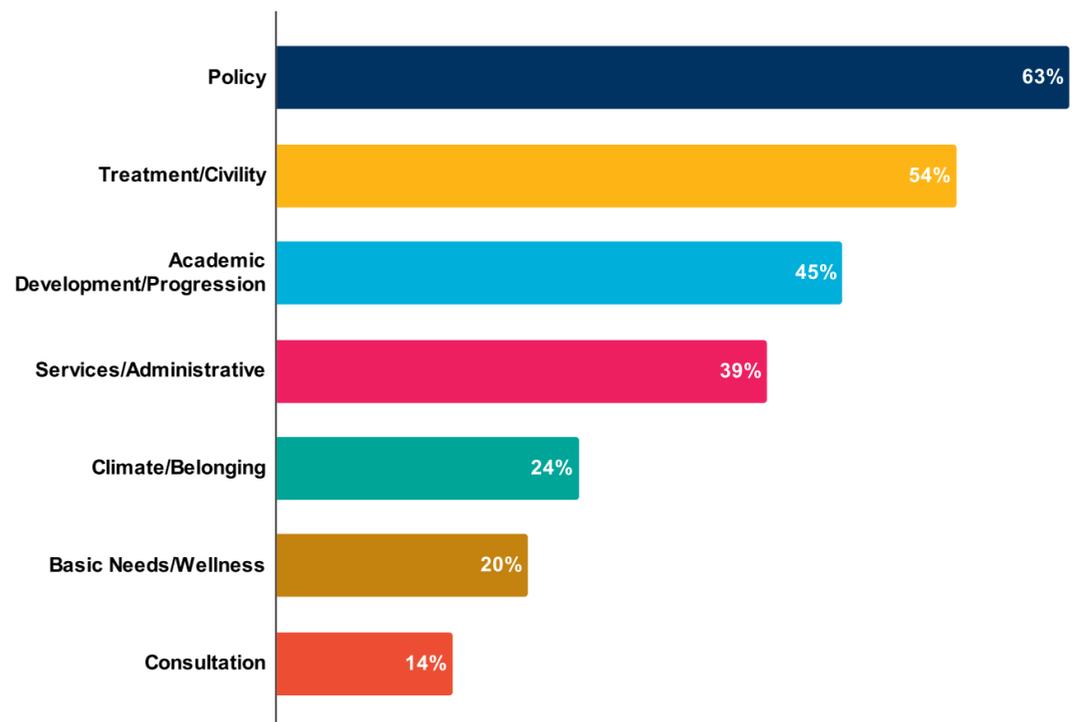


All Visitors Served



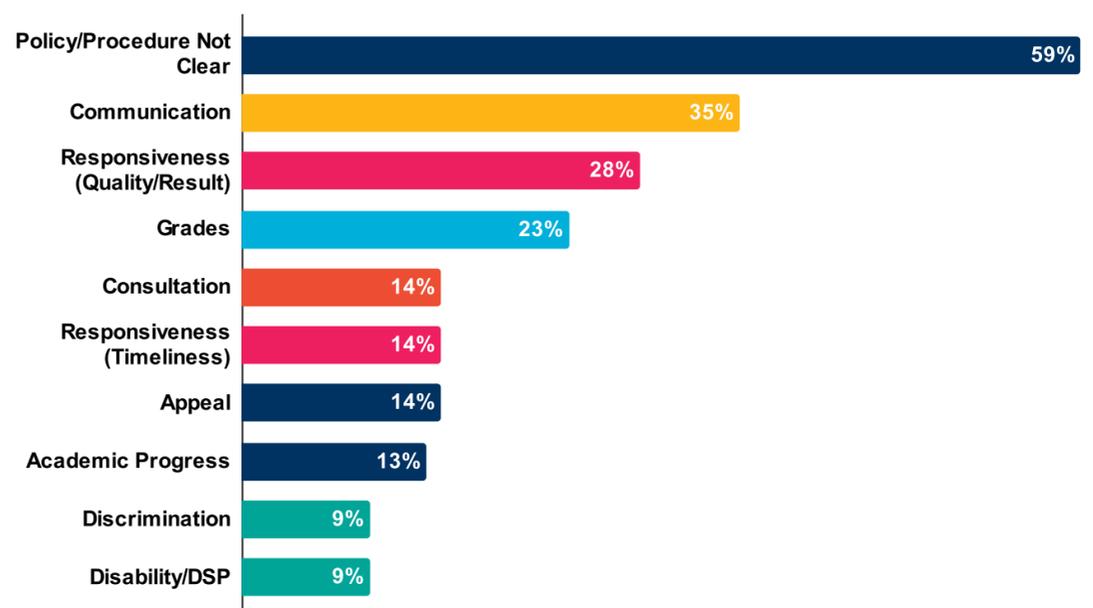
All Visitors Concerns: Main Categories

84% of all visitors reported a concern from more than one main category



All Visitors Concerns: Top 10 Subcategories*

90% of all visitors reported more than one type of concern



*Colors of subcategory concerns correspond with colors of main category concerns

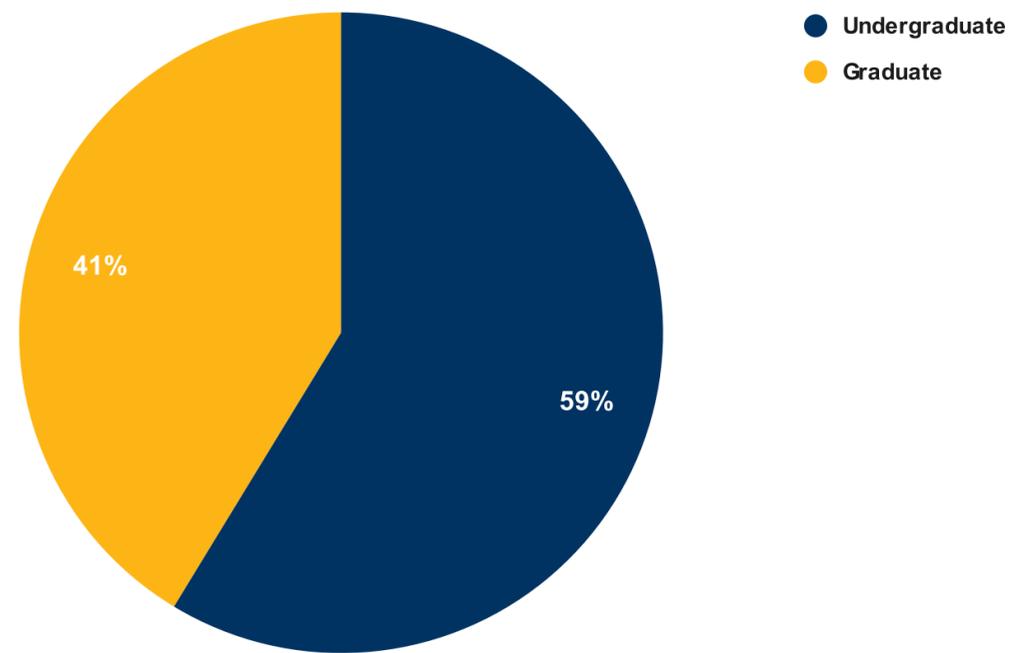
Student Visitors

Undergraduate and graduate students represented 77% of the Ombuds Office's 217 visitors for RY 2021-22. This nearly matches the Office's five-year average of 78%.

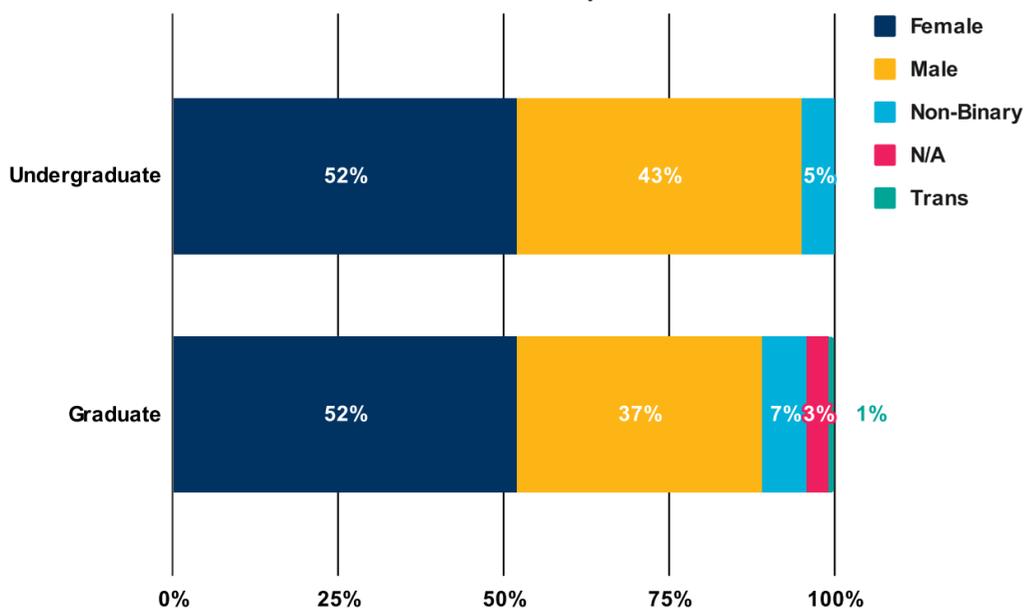
For primary reasons of consistency and simplicity, the data on this page reflects that only of visitors that were *current* undergraduate and graduate student visitors at the time of their visits. Alumni and UCBX student visitor information is accounted for in the "Other Visitors" section of the report.

Once again, *Campus-Wide* figures for Race/Ethnicity/National Origin were obtained from Cal Answers. For the sake of comparison, racial categories are virtually identical to those used by the university.

Student Visitors Served

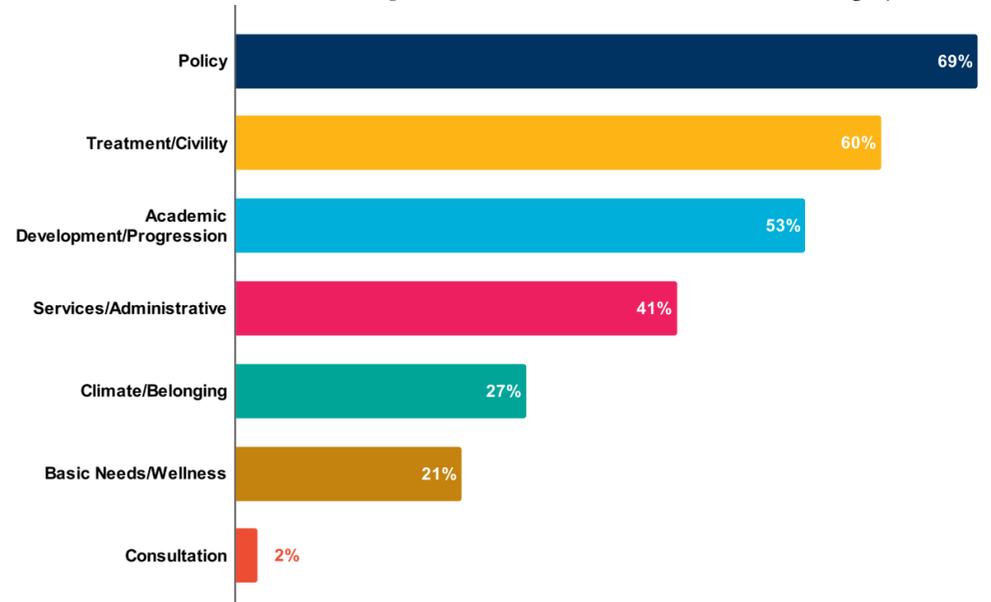


Student Visitors by Gender



All Student Concerns: Main Categories

92% of student visitors reported a concern from more than one main category

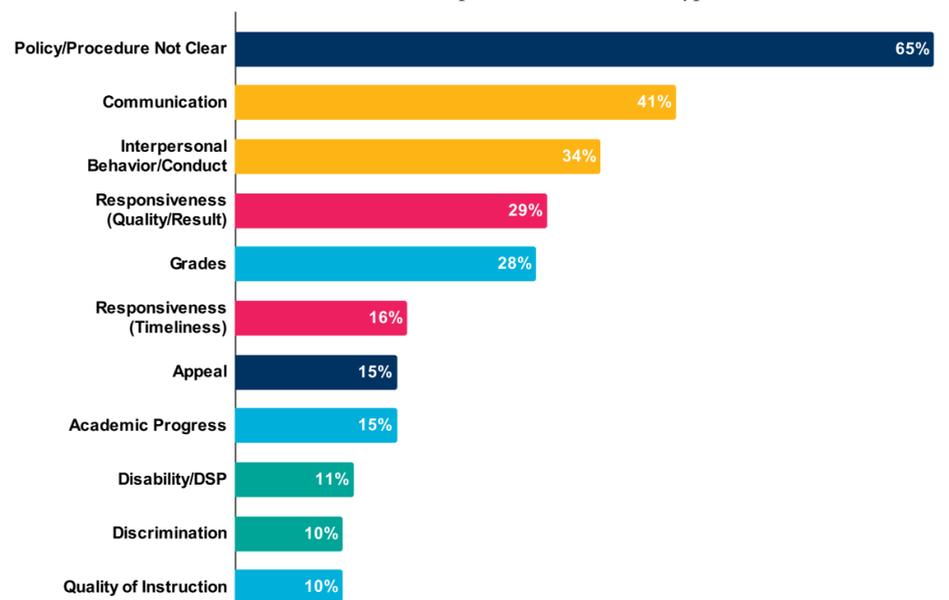


Student Visitors by Race/Ethnicity/National Origin

	Undergraduate Students			Graduate Students		
	21-22	20-21	Campus*	21-22	20-21	Campus*
Asian/Asian American	26%	29%	39%	25%	9%	26%
Black/African American	3%	10%	4%	4%	8%	6%
Chicanx/Latinx	13%	16%	19%	14%	17%	12%
Native American/Alaska Native	1%	3%	1%	0%	0%	1%
Pacific Islander	3%	3%	<1%	0%	2%	<1%
South Asian/Southwest Asian/North African	31%	27%	5%	7%	15%	3%
White/Caucasian	36%	29%	27%	51%	58%	45%
Other	32%	16%	N/A	20%	11%	N/A
Declined to State/Unknown	7%	3%	4%	6%	2%	6%
41% of undergraduate student visitors identified as more than one race/ethnicity/national origin						
23% of graduate student visitors identified as more than one race/ethnicity/national origin						
*Campus numbers are averages of the 21-22 fall and spring semesters enrollment data obtained from Cal Answers						

All Student Concerns: Top 10 Subcategories*

98% of student visitors reported more than one type of concern



*Colors of subcategory concerns correspond with colors of main category concerns

Undergraduate Student Visitors

Representing 45% of *all* visitors and 59% of all *student* visitors, undergraduate students were, for the fourteenth consecutive year, the most frequent type of visitor. For the fifth consecutive year, and the ninth year out of the last ten, seniors were the most common type of undergraduate visitor. While it is not surprising that senior students once again led the way, it is notable that they accounted for 59% of all undergraduate visitors, which is the largest percentage of seniors in single year on record.

The concerns expressed by undergraduate student visitors were again in alignment with historical trends. More often than not, undergraduates contacted the Office to discuss a grade dispute they had with a faculty member. These concerns naturally led to larger conversations about campus policies and procedures, most commonly those pertaining to the Academic Senate Procedures for Grade Appeals and the Center for Student Conduct.

Undergraduate Student Parties Involved

Undergraduate Parties Involved	2021-22
Faculty	45%
Policy	18%
Student	13%
Department	10%
Faculty (Adjunct/Visiting)	4%
Graduate Student Instructor	4%
Other	4%
Postdoctoral Appointee	1%
Staff	1%

Undergraduate Student Visitors with Follow-up and/or Facilitated Resolutions

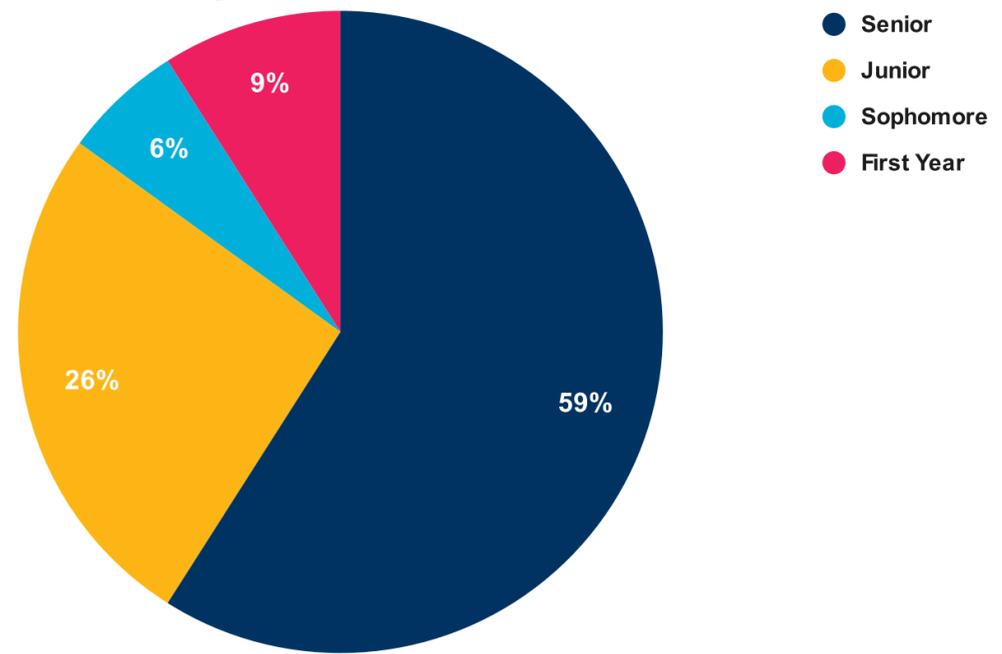
31%

Undergraduate Student Visitors that received Follow-up

4%

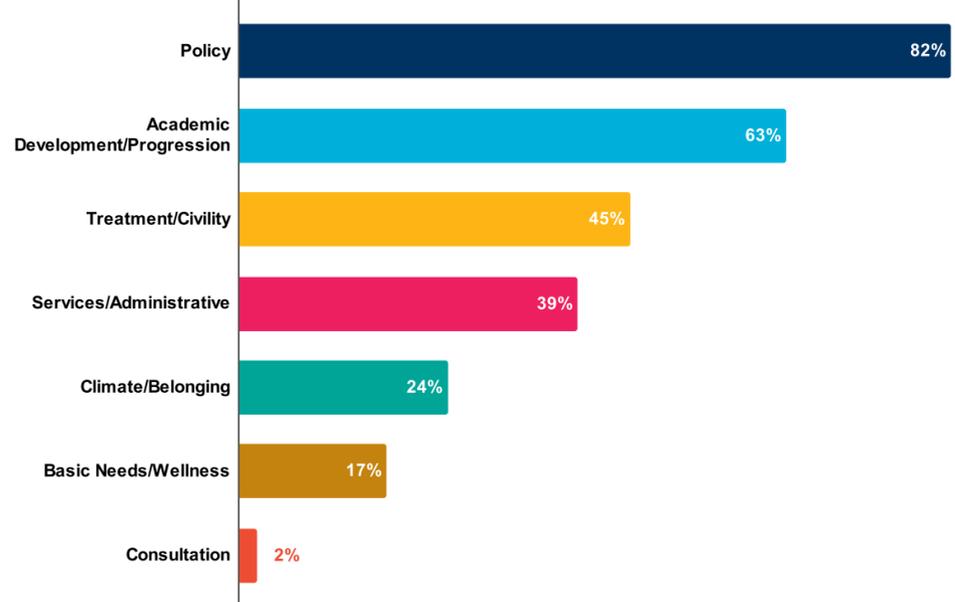
Undergraduate Student Visitors that received a Facilitated Resolution

Undergraduate Student Visitors Served



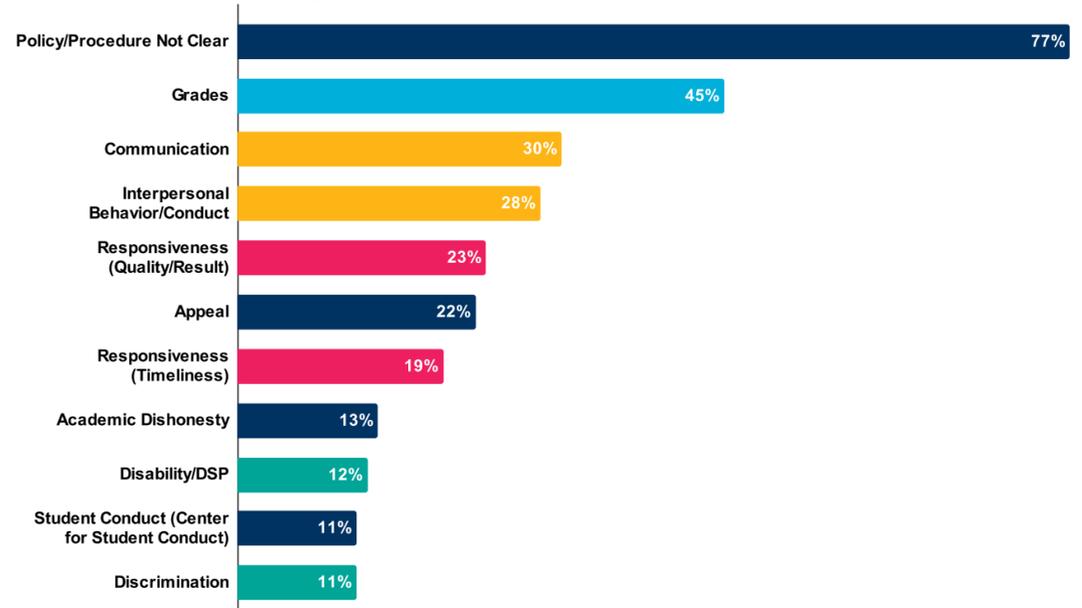
Undergraduate Student Concerns: Main Categories

92% of undergraduate student visitors reported a concern from more than one main category



Undergraduate Student Concerns: Top 10 Subcategories*

99% of undergraduate student visitors reported more than one type of concern



*Colors of subcategory concerns correspond with colors of main category concerns

Graduate Student Visitors

In a reverse of trends, graduate student numbers rose in all respects. These visitors accounted for 32% of *all* visitors (up 7%), and 41% of all *student* visitors (up 9%). In terms of hard numbers, there was a 6% increase in graduate student visitors from 65 in RY 2020-21 to 69 in RY 2021-22, making it the Ombuds Office's highest total of graduate students in the last five years.

Graduate student cases tend to be more complex than undergraduate student cases because they often involve concerns about long-term evaluative relationships. This includes relationships with advisors, chairs, and dissertation committees. Because of this, graduate student cases are historically more likely to require follow-up and often result in some form of facilitated resolution (e.g., mediation).

Graduate Student Parties Involved

	2021-22
Faculty	49%
Department	14%
Student	14%
Policy	12%
Graduate Student Instructor	4%
Other	3%
Postdoctoral Appointee	3%
Staff	1%
1% of graduate visitors identified more than one party	

Graduate Student Visitors with Follow-up and/or Facilitated Resolutions

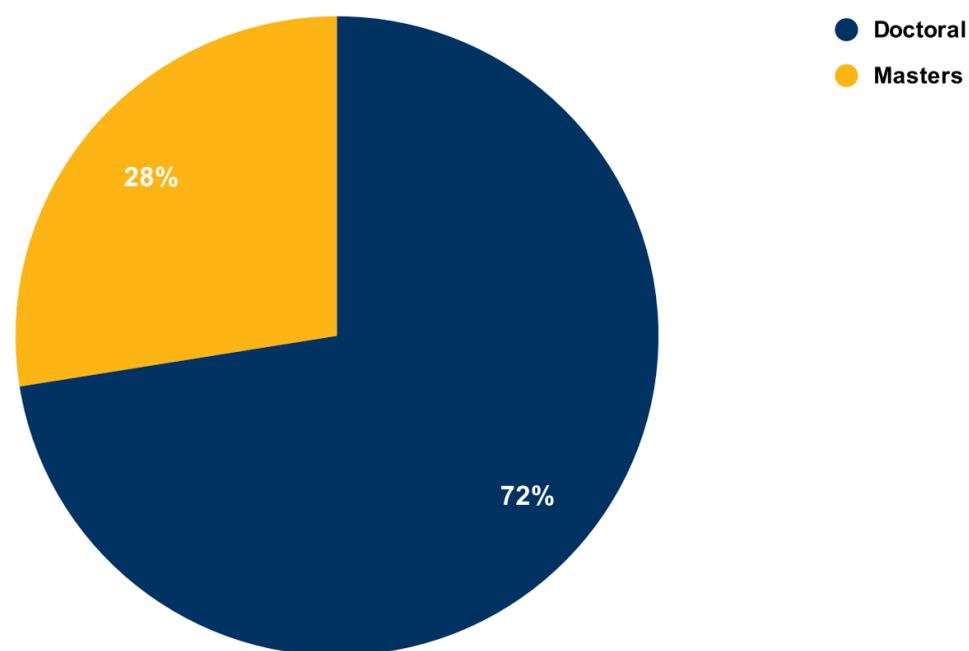
33%

Graduate Student Visitors that received Follow-up

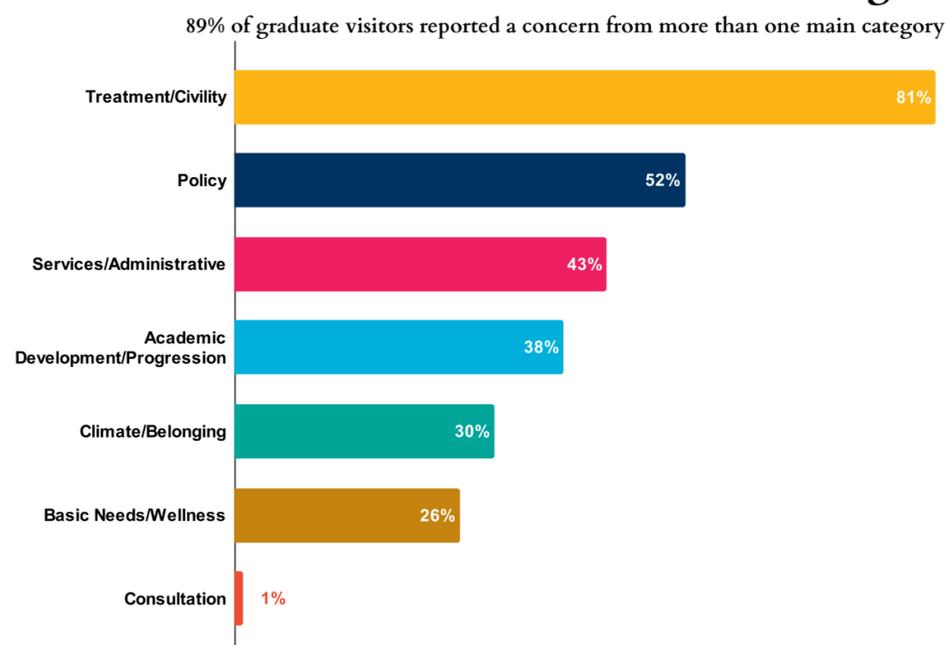
3%

Graduate Student Visitors that received a Facilitated Resolution

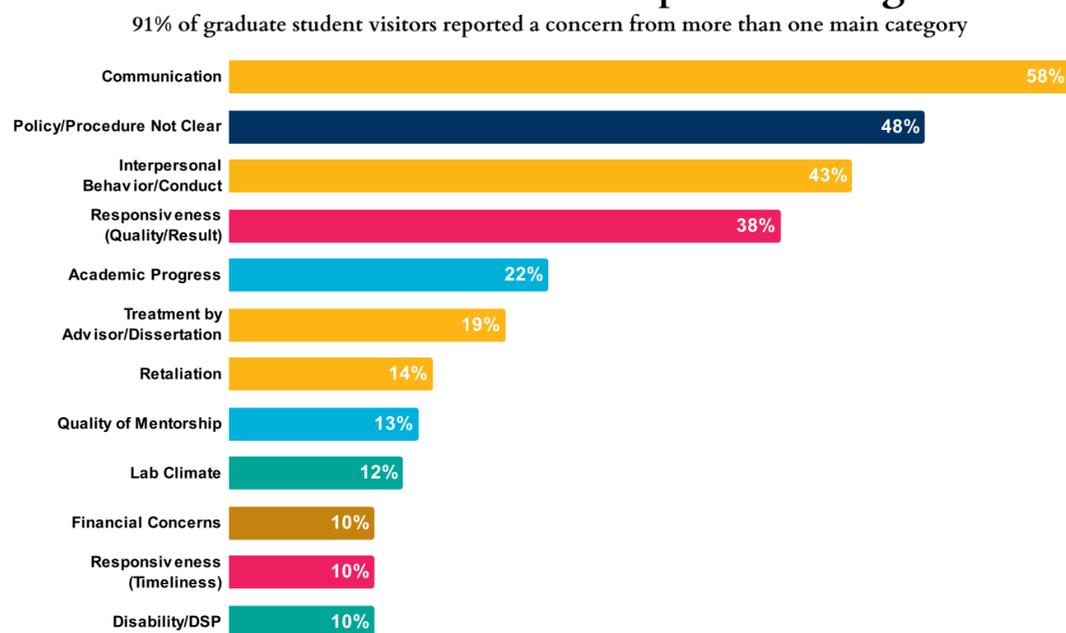
Graduate Student Visitor Served



Graduate Student Concerns: Main Categories



Graduate Student Concerns: Top 10 Subcategories*



*Colors of subcategory concerns correspond with colors of main category concerns

Other Visitors

Inclusive of alumni, UCBX students, and postdocs, any visitors who were not current, degree-seeking students at the time of their visits were classified for this report as *Other* visitors. These visitors represented 23% of all visitors to the Ombuds Office this reporting year.

The nature and extent of assistance the Ombuds Office offers to members of this population varies depending on an individual visitor's identity. All concerns, regardless of the visitor's identity, must stem from future, current, or past students or postdocs and be related to their affiliations with the university.

A significant amount of the work undertaken with these visitors were consultations, specifically with faculty and staff. Faculty and staff visitors represented 8% of *all* visitors, 34% of *other* visitors, and requested consultations 76% of the time. These consultations could be as brief as explaining the breadth of services the Office can offer to something more time-consuming like providing guidance in the development of policy and/or procedure.

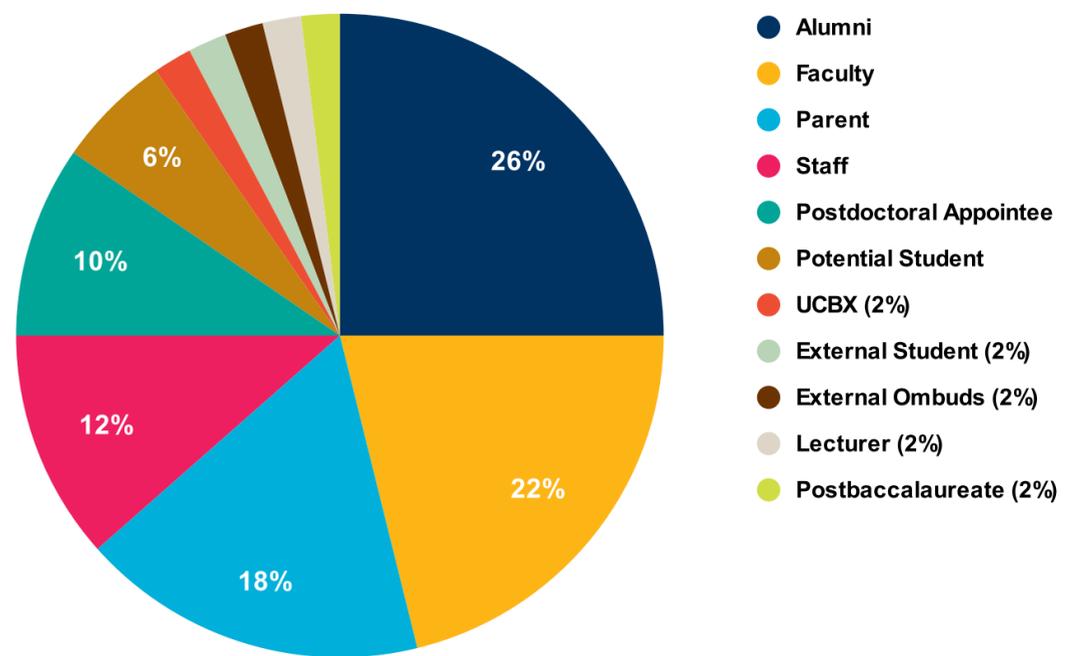
Amongst its *Other* visitors, another common population the Ombuds Office serves is alumni. For the purposes of this report, alumni numbers include both degree earning *and* non-degree earning visitors. While some of these visitors have not attended U.C. Berkeley in several years, many are recent graduates with lingering grade disputes.* Alumni visitors often have questions and concerns that resemble those of current undergraduate students.

Parties Involved for Other Visitors

	2021-22
Department	27%
Policy	27%
Student	25%
Faculty	12%
Other	9%

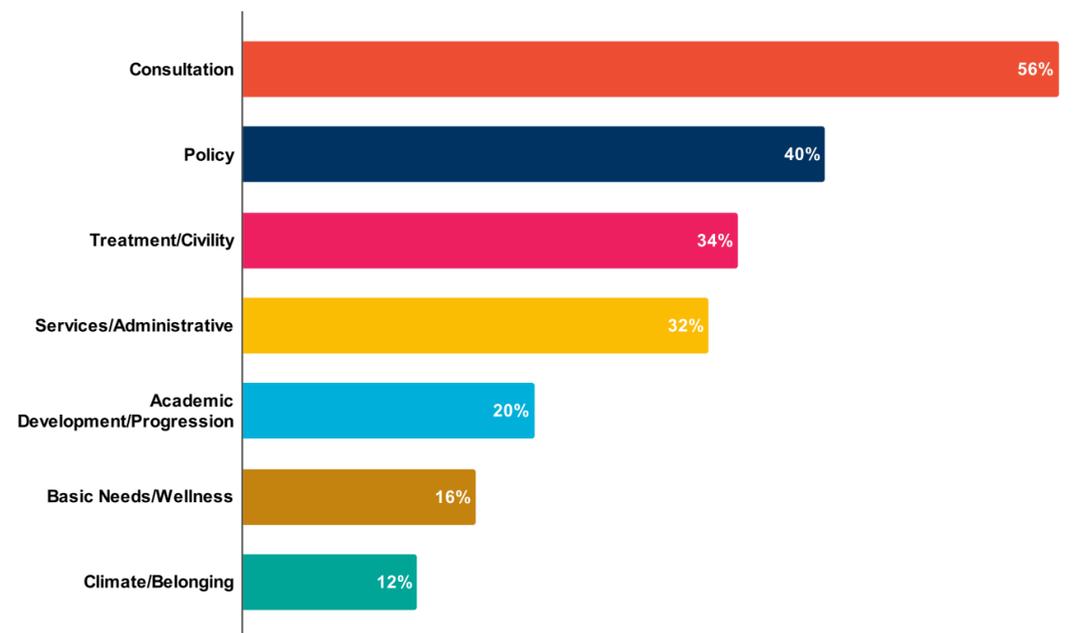
*The Academic Senate *Procedures for Grade Appeals* policy provides students one year to initiate the grade grievance process. This is a formal process that is facilitated by the academic department home to the course in question and students are not precluded by graduation from participating.

Other Visitors Served



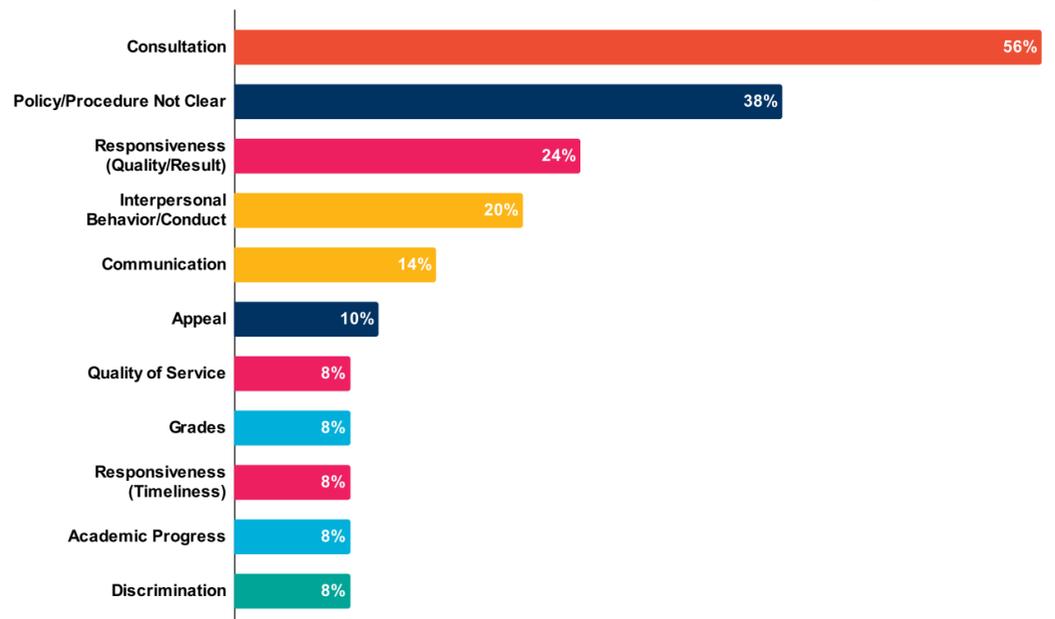
Other Visitor Concerns: Main Categories

60% of other visitors reported a concern from more than one main category



Other Visitor Concerns: Top 10 Subcategories*

66% of other visitors reported a concern from more than one main category



*Colors of subcategory concerns correspond with colors of main category concerns

Reflections and Findings

Because of the global pandemic, the last few years have been rife with ambiguity and wary transition. Its effect at a local level was a lot of discomfort and growing pains for the campus community as all adjusted to a *new normal*. It continues to disrupt the established, and for many, comforting sequence of the academic year. A result from all of this, however, is that the Office has seen a historical and sustained high demand for its services.

The period covered by this report was in the wake of the most isolated and uncertain conditions of the pandemic. It brought a welcomed, but unscripted return for many to in-person instruction and social activities. With that came excitement and hope, but also varying degrees of caution and comfort. The Ombuds Office and its staff navigated this time with as much finesse and deference to its visitors' safety and wellbeing preferences as possible. Office staff are proud of their efforts and unweathered commitment to providing the campus community a safe space to have off-the-record, confidential conversations, explore their situations informally, and consider their options regarding their student or postdoc-related issues.

Despite all the transition and uncertainty brought by the pandemic, it can be summarized from the RY 2021-22 data that students and postdocs experienced challenges not dramatically different than previous years. With the added layer of adjusting to health concerns and how to return to and engage in in-person activities, issues of communication and unclear policies and procedures once again were the primary motivating factors visitors expressed as reasons for contacting the Ombuds Office.

Follow-up and facilitated resolution numbers for both undergraduate and graduate students were noticeably lower than previous years. While this can be explained in part by the unpredictable needs of visitors on an annual basis, the Office believes this may also be in part to the tenure of its staff and their ability to confidently provide information about a variety of policies, procedures, and potential actions during an initial consultation, resulting in less need for follow-up action.

Recommendations

The Ombuds Office makes recommendations based on both its observations of the campus community and the concerns presented by its visitors during the previous reporting year. While not all visitor concerns are symptoms of harmful university policies, procedures, and/or culture that need correction, they can highlight areas deserving of attention and can be instructive to university leadership when making policy and procedural decisions. The following recommendations provide options to examine for improving the experiences of the student and postdoc populations.

- **Determine if campus policies and procedures align with the realities of a post-pandemic world**
 - Students continue to bring questions that arrive from a lack of clarity. The Office believes this may be occurring for at least two reasons: 1) policies were not written for current times and may need updating; and 2) the ways in which people now communicate leads to more misunderstanding. Because students and postdocs are now more heavily relying on electronic communications with faculty and academic departments than they did before the pandemic, it may be leading to increased instances of misunderstanding. This Office recommends campus departments and offices perform an audit of their respective practices and processes to ensure they meet the post-pandemic needs of students and postdocs.
- **Prepare students and postdocs to embrace conflict in a way that develops better, healthier habits of mind**
 - An annual theme in the findings of the Office is that students and postdocs regularly struggle with conflict. When these concerns go unresolved, visitors report experiencing heightened levels of stress that can impact every aspect of their lives. The Office believes a reframing of conflict could be helpful. Conflict is not on its face something to be avoided at all costs. In addition to being opportunities for learning and personal growth, conflicts also prepare individuals for difficulties beyond life on campus. Conflict is not something to be eradicated, rather it is something that needs to be engaged thoughtfully and with civility.