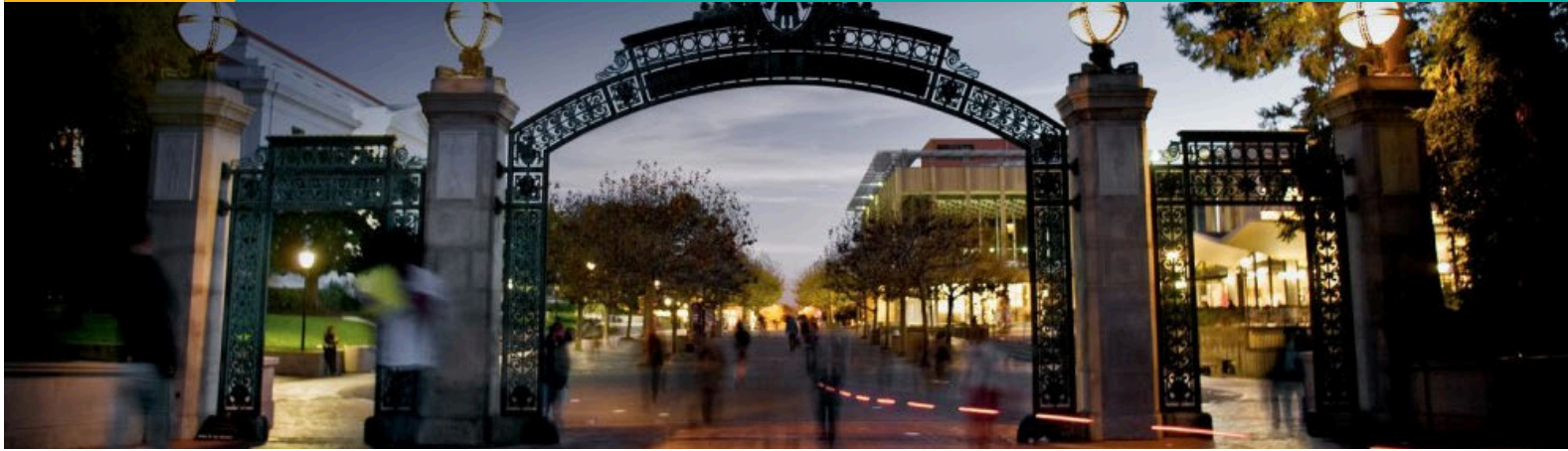


# Ombuds Office for Students & Postdoctoral Appointees

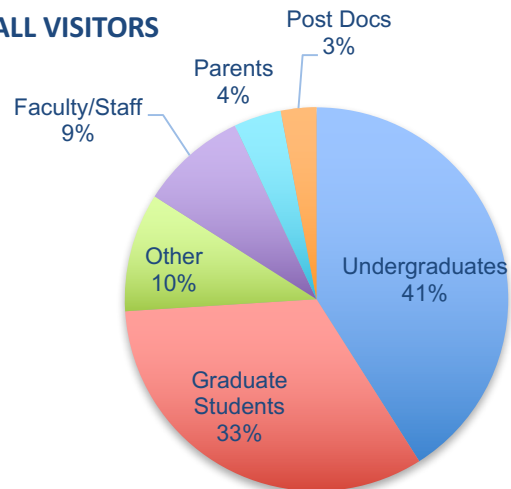
## 2016-17 Annual Report



We saw a total of 166 cases during the 2016-17 academic year which is an 11% increase from the previous year. In addition to students, we served postdoctoral appointees, faculty and staff who had student-related concerns, and other community members. Amongst our visitors this year, 74% were students, 9% were faculty/staff, with the remaining 17% including postdoctoral appointees, alumni, extension students, parents, and others.

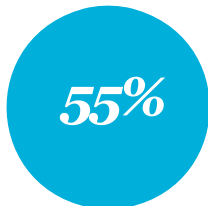
Forty one percent of undergraduate and 42% of graduate student cases required follow-up. Follow-up involved additional meetings with the visitor, outreach to third parties, research on policies, and facilitated resolutions.

### ALL VISITORS

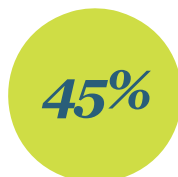


### Student Visitors

Undergraduate



Graduate



RACE	2016-17		2015-16		2014-15	
	UG	Grad	UG	Grad	UG	Grad
Asian/Asian American	13%	12%	35%	16%	27%	32%
Black/African American	12%	15%	10%		16%	4%
Chicanx/Latinx	10%	18%	7%	5%	19%	16%
Middle Eastern	1%	1%	2%	5%	4%	2%
White	20%	13%	25%	37%	16%	26%
Unknown	44%	41%	21%	35%	18%	16%

A photograph of the ornate, green metal gate of the University of California, featuring the words "UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA" in large, gold, serif letters.

# UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA

## Mission

The mission of the Ombuds Office for Students and Postdoctoral Appointees is to provide an informal dispute resolution process in which the Ombudsperson advocates for fairness, justice, respect for differences, and reasonable solutions to student and postdoctoral issues and concerns. As such, the Ombuds Office tracks trends, behaviors and practices that serve as alert mechanisms for systemic and sustainable change at UC Berkeley.

The Ombuds Office for Students and Postdoctoral Appointees was established because this institution cares about and upholds its commitment to fair policies and procedures, and recognizes the value of providing an informal dispute resolution resource for the Cal community. Those who use this office are empowered to decide for themselves how they will address their concerns and are coached in conflict resolution techniques and the language of non-defensive communication. Students are given invaluable resources and information to support them in their process of exploring optimal ways of moving through challenging situations to a viable solution. The Ombuds office works toward mutual resolutions that reflect the highest vision for students, staff and faculty alike.

Our participation is solely geared toward providing fair and impartial outcomes that reflect student success, minimal use of administrative resources, reducing campus liability and exposure, and ultimately, creating and maintaining an environment that furthers the campus' goal of equity, civility and inclusion.







# Campus & Professional Involvement

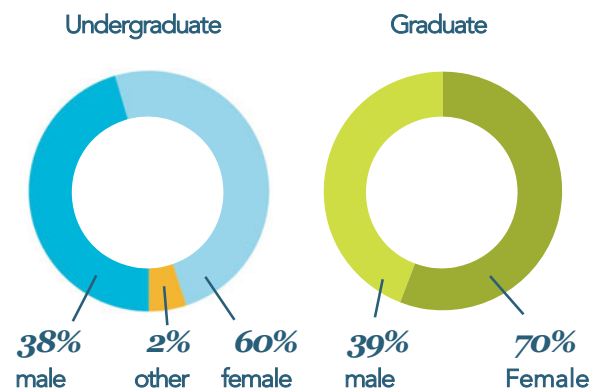
The professional staff are members of the International Ombudsman Association to stay on top of the current trends and best practices in the field of Ombuds. The Director serves on the planning committee for the annual conference and has served as co-chair of three recent annual conferences. The Director will also serve as Co-Covener of the annual California Caucus of College and University Ombuds in 2017. We also have membership in the National Association of Student Personnel Administrators to keep abreast of general issues and trends in the practice of student affairs.

To enhance our outreach and visibility amongst the campus community, we serve on a number of campus and division-wide committees. These include the Asian Pacific American System-wide Alliance, the Graduate Division Social Committee and the Restorative Justice advisory group.

To further stay informed on student issues and trends, we attend division and campus wide meetings including Student Affairs Cabinet, Student Affairs Roundtable, Graduate Division Staff, Graduate Student Services, Graduate Student Advisors, Case Management Team, and Advising Network Council.

OTHER DEMOGRAPHICS	2016-2017		2015-2016	
	UG	Grad	UG	Grad
First Generation	17%	16%	10%	6%
Non-California Resident	7%	9%	10%	6%
Disability	17%	15%	19%	2%
International	6%	6%	7%	2%
Transfers	13%		17%	

## Student Visitors by Gender





# Referrals

We consult with numerous campus departments to facilitate resolutions to our visitors' conflicts and concerns. We also refer students to many other resources on campus. These departments include but are not limited to: Graduate Division, Letters & Science, Disabled Students Program, Tang Center, Students of Concern, Office of Student Conduct, Berkeley International Office, Financial Aid, Registrar, Admissions & Enrollment, Transfer, Re-Entry, Student Parent Program, Student Legal Services, Student Advocates Office, and various academic departments on campus.

The majority of our students find us by way of referral from a staff or faculty member. The next common way students learn about our resource is by searching online or by receiving a referral from a friend. Common sources of referral include Letters and Science, Graduate Division, Tang Center, Social Services, DSP, Student Legal Services, the Berkeley International Office, Student Advocates Office, and academic departments.

# Outreach & Trainings

While the daily assistance provided to our visitors is to effectively respond to difficult situations is essential, the Student Ombuds Office must also proactively maintain good relationships with campus administration, faculty, and staff. We work to ensure broad campus understanding of the purpose and role of our office.

We provided outreach and trainings on conflict resolution, mediation, intercultural conflict styles, giving the gift of feedback, and communication. We provided tailored trainings and workshops to: New Graduate Student Orientation, the Women's Leadership Intensive, LEAD Center Student

Leadership Conference, Extension mediation courses, Graduate Student Instructors, and graduate and undergraduate student organizations. We also provided outreach and consultations to various academic departments throughout the campus.

## **Consultations & Non-Student Visitors**

In addition to serving UC Berkeley's student postdoc populations, we provide consultations to faculty and staff regarding student-related concerns. We also provide services to alumni, parents, prospective students, extension students, and community members on UC Berkeley student related issues.





# Data Summary

## Undergraduate Issues

ISSUES	2016-17	2015-16		2016-17	2015-16
Grades	49%	40%	Disability	17%	13%
Policy/Procedure Not Clear	41%	35%	Treatment/Civility	14%	25%
Communication	29%	46%	Policy/Procedure Not Followed	13%	16%
Financial Concerns	25%	18%	Housing	12%	9%
Responsiveness	19%	4%	Cases with facilitated resolution	16%	28%
Academic Progress	19%	9%	Cases that required follow-up	42%	57%
Mental Health	19%	12%			

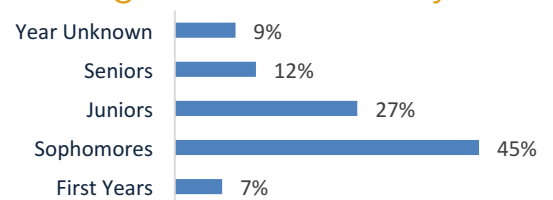
## Graduate Issues

ISSUES	2016-17	2015-16		2016-17	2015-16
Communication	43%	38%	Dept/Org Climate	18%	6%
Treatment/Civility	35%	39%	Responsiveness	18%	
Policy/Procedure Not Clear	28%	25%	Policy/Procedure Not Followed	15%	8%
Academic Progress	21%	27%	Cases with facilitated resolution	21%	25%
Financial Concerns	21%	18%	Cases that required follow-up	42%	34%
Disability	19%	14%			

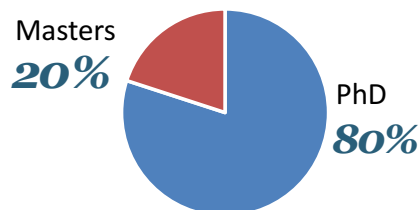
## Faculty, Staff, and Other Groups' Issues

ISSUES	2016-17	2015-16
Policy/Procedure Not Clear	35%	23%
Communication	30%	27%
Grades	22%	16%
Treatment/Civility	22%	25%
Cases with facilitated resolution	10%	25%
Cases that required follow-up	23%	34%

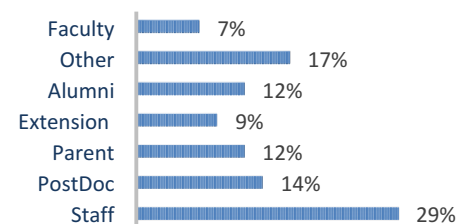
## Undergraduate Visitors by Year



## Graduate Visitors by Degree Program



## Other Visitors





# Trends & Issues

## Grades & Academic Progress

Forty-nine percent of undergraduate visitors stated that grades were an issue of concern and a reason for their appointment with our office. This percentage is an increase from 40% the year prior. Cases involving grades often involved other areas of concern including issues of communication with the instructor or department, perceptions of mistreatment, and lack of understanding or clarity about policy and procedure.

Examples of these types of cases involved students being unclear about grading rubrics or criteria in the class, attendance policies, or feelings of unfair treatment. They came to us for assistance on reaching out to professors and GSIs or departments, to receive coaching on how to best communicate with their faculty, and to discuss options.

We also provided guidance on grade disputes so students were clear about the policy and necessary criteria, timeline, and process before they pursued this avenue. While most students addressed their grade disputes informally, a small percentage pursued formal procedures.

In many cases, conflict could have been avoided by a thorough discussion in the course syllabi or academic program handbook of the factors that would be used to evaluate progress and determine

grades and any non-academic factors like absences and class participation that could be part of that determination. In the absence of clear guidelines and grading rubrics, students may perceive that non-academic criteria are taken into account when academic performance is evaluated.

For graduate students, 21% of our visitors stated academic progress was an area of concern, which is a decrease from 27% in the previous year.

Graduate student cases are often more complex as it can involve longstanding relationship issues with advisors, chairs, and committees. The Ombuds provided coaching to graduate students on how to handle conflict with their faculty, advisor, chair or committee members on a number of factors that were affecting their academic progress. Such concerns included disagreement in academic focus of research, intellectual property issues, communication, treatment and civility. Related issues to their academic progress included financial concerns and lack of understanding of related policies and procedures.



## Unclear Policies & Procedures

Unclear policies and procedures rose to second place for undergraduates from third place in the previous year at 41%, up from 35%. It also rose to third place from fourth place for graduate students (28% from 25%).

The Ombudsperson supported students in finding relevant policies and procedures to student cases when they were not explicit, as well as explaining and interpreting these policies to students. In some cases, students misinterpreted policies or were not aware that they existed as it related to their case. In other situations, students experienced conflict because they were given differing information by faculty, staff, or departments, or they did not know where they could refer to for the appropriate policies that affected their present situation.

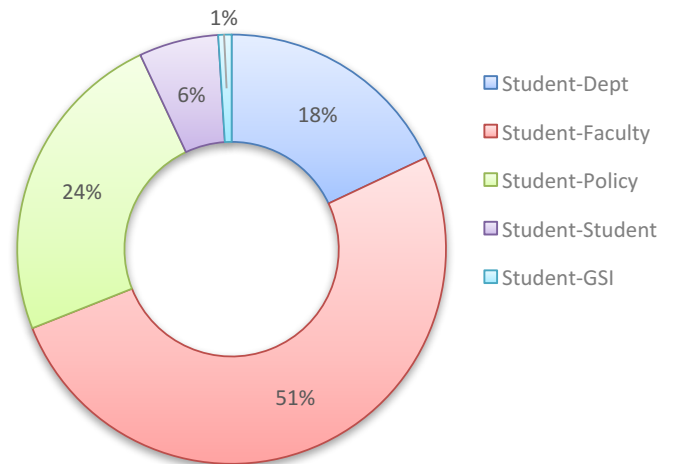
UC Berkeley is a large and complex university that is constantly undergoing growth and change as it strives to meet the needs of the student body. As staff transitions occur and organizational changes are sustained, it is important that updated procedures and policies are communicated to students. We recommend that policies and procedures on websites and handbooks are made explicit, concise, user-friendly, and updated regularly.

We recommend that faculty and staff are provided the necessary information so that they know whom students should be referred to if they have questions or find themselves in a unique situation. Students are sometimes unintentionally provided misinformation that can directly or indirectly lead to a delay in academic progress.

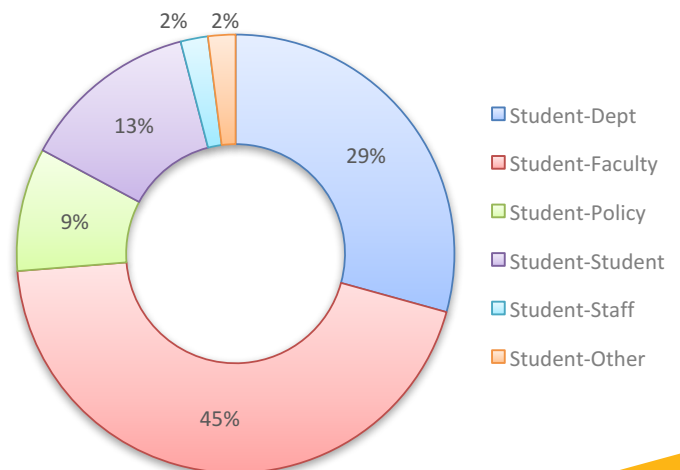
## Financial Concerns

The issue of financial concerns was the fourth most reported concern for both undergraduates and graduate students (25% and 21%, an increase from 18% for both groups from the year prior). With the increase in tuition and the cost of living in the local Berkeley community, students are experiencing financial stressors that impact their educational experience whether it is meeting payment deadlines, food security, or housing options.

### Undergraduate Cases by Parties Involved



### Graduate Cases by Parties Involved







## Communication

Communication was the third highest reported concern for undergraduates and top concern for graduate students. We are finding that students are more frequently requesting coaching for communication skills ranging from getting support to interpreting verbal and written messages from faculty and staff to preparing for difficult conversations with others. We are educating students on the importance of tone of communication, the use of non-defensive language and the difference between intent versus impact. The Ombuds engaged in facilitating resolutions through the exploration of multiple perspectives, creating understanding through sharing of stories, and exploring of options.

How something is said continues to be more important than what is being said. We recommend the use of clear and explicit language in both written and verbal communication. We also discourage the use of email when addressing issues that are more complicated in nature or involving some level of conflict. In-person communication with follow-up in written form is a more effective way of mitigating potential misunderstandings. This can lead to a domino effect of other barriers including financial-related concerns, registration/ enrollment, and access to university services.

## Treatment & Civility

Treatment & civility dropped to ninth place from fourth place and remains a top issue (second place) for graduate students. Cases involving this issue ranged from perception of disrespect or rude behavior, lack of responsiveness to emails or meeting requests, a negative or even hostile environment in one's department or lab, and perceived lack of support both academically and personally. Some cases involved students feeling intimidated and even threatened academically and interpersonally. They came to seek coaching, perspective, and guidance on their options.

## Additional Issues

In addition to the issues listed and discussed above, we also had cases involving the following topics: academic dishonesty, academic integrity, academic problems, assault, harassment, bullying, changing degree, changing programs, compensation/benefits, department/ organizational climate, disability, dismissal, diversity-related, enrollment, exception to policy, faculty behavior/misconduct, financial aid, housing, illness, intellectual property, mediation, medical issues, mental health, quality of service, rape, assault, readmission, registration, responsiveness, roommate disputes, sexual harassment, SHIP, and stalking.