

## 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 **260 visitors** between July 1, 2020 and June 30, 2021. This was a **23.2% increase** in visitors from the prior reporting year (RY), and is the culmination of a **46%** increase in visitors since RY 2018-19.

Some form of follow-up was requested and/or required for **42%** of all visitors. Follow-up, in the context of this report, means both multiple appointments with visitors to discuss options and developments of their cases, *and* 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, grade appeals, responsiveness, and unclear policies and procedures.**

Faculty and staff consultations were **10%** 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 65% of all student visitors and 53% of all visitors.*

**65%**

**31%**

*Graduate student visitors were 31% of all student visitors and 25% 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 UC 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 mission, vision, and core values of UC Berkeley.

## 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 secondary parties wishing to consult on student and/or postdoc-related matters.

For reporting purposes, the Ombuds Office has historically identified and catalogued the concerns that visitors expressly state during their confidential appointments. In an effort to better capture and share the concerns brought by its visitors, the Office, beginning RY 2020-21, separated and organized visitor concerns into seven main categories and 56 subcategories. Each of the 56 subcategories fall under one and only one of the seven main categories. The seven main categories consist of the following: 1) *Academic Development/Progression*, 2) *Basic Needs/Wellness*, 3) *Climate/Belonging*, 4) *Consultation*, 5) *Policy*, 6) *Services/Administrative*, and 7) *Treatment/Civility*.

Readers of previous annual reports from the Ombuds Office may recall that the main concern categories of *Consultation* and *Treatment/Civility* have been used before. In fact, these categories date back to the Office's first annual report published for RY 2008-09. For a few reasons, these two categories have been retained and elevated to main concern categories.

The former, *Consultation*, was made a main concern category because it is unique in that it is also a subcategory and a service. Making it a main concern category was done out of necessity to maintain its stand-alone nature. The latter category, *Treatment/Civility*, has, from a reporting lens, become less-and-less informative in recent reports. This is because the Office has been gradually adding related, but more specific concerns over the years. The opportunity seemed ripe to assign it as a larger umbrella category to house the growing subset of related, but more specific concerns. Lastly, continued use of these two longstanding categories preserves some measure of comparison to and connection with past reports.

## 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 78% were either undergraduate or graduate students, 10% were faculty/staff, and the remaining 12% largely included alumni, parents, postdocs, and UC Extension (UCBX) students.

### Services for All Visitors

	2020-21
<b>Clarifying Policy/Procedure</b>	<b>60%</b>
<b>Coaching</b>	<b>42%</b>
<b>Referral</b>	<b>16%</b>
<b>Consultation</b>	<b>15%</b>
<b>Mediation</b>	<b>5%</b>
<b>Shuttle Diplomacy</b>	<b>5%</b>
<b>40% of visitors were provided more than one type of service</b>	

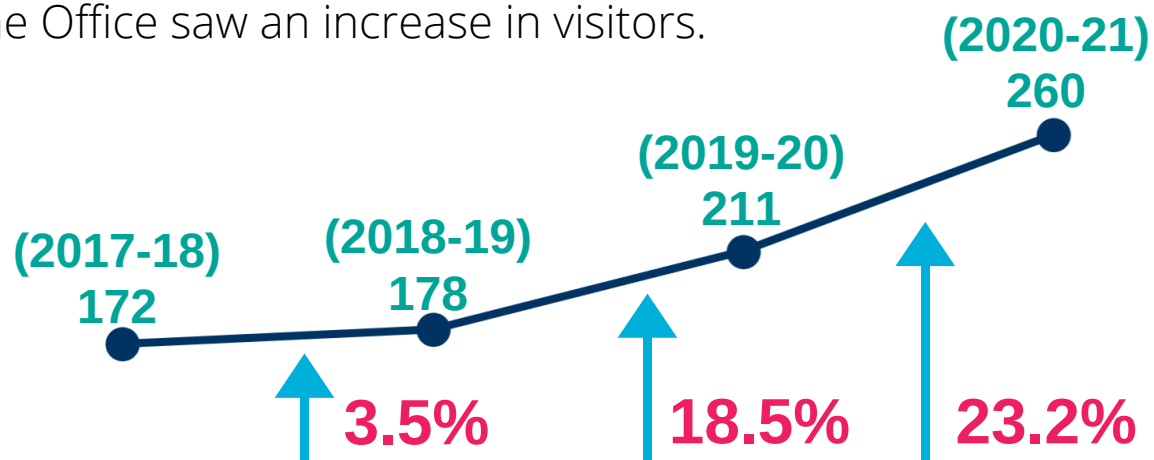
The Ombuds Office is geared toward fostering fair and impartial outcomes that reflect student success, make minimal use of administrative resources, reduce campus liability and exposure, and support an environment that furthers the university's mission, vision, and core values.

Beyond appointments with individual visitors, the Office performed 21 combined outreach events and/or trainings for roughly 700 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

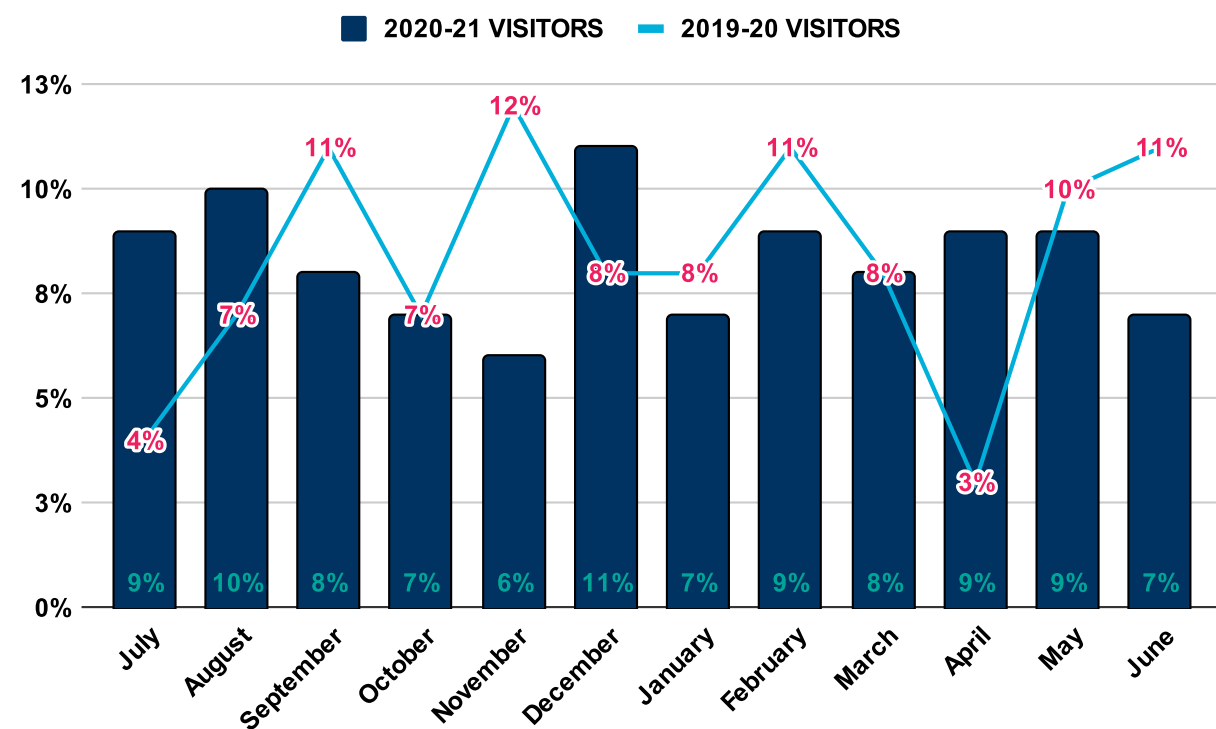
The 260 visitors who contacted the Ombuds Office between July 2020 and June 2021 represented a 23.2% increase from the previous reporting year, and the third consecutive year the Office saw an increase in visitors.



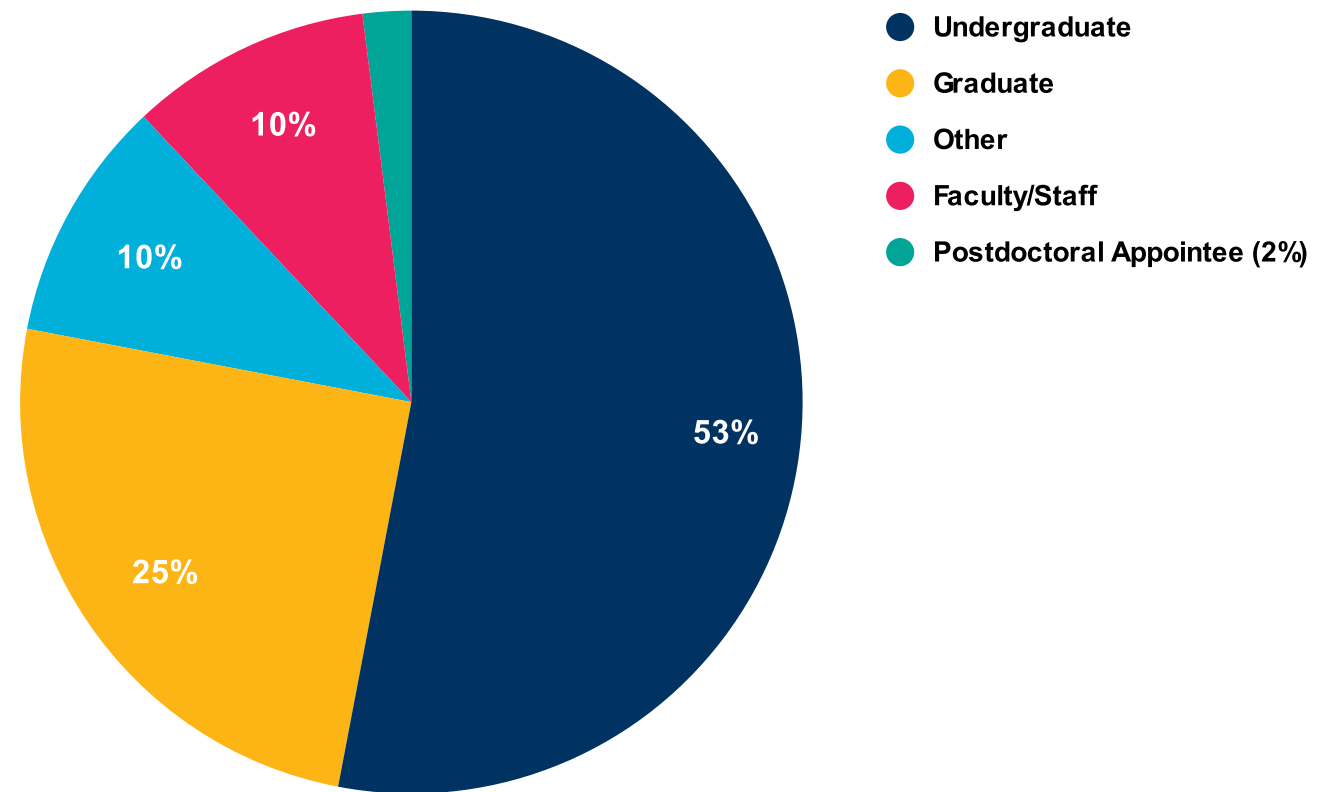
Notably, the last two reporting years have resulted in large, unprecedented increases in the demand for its services. The record number of visitors prior to RY 2018-19 was 174 set during RY 2008-09. The Office believes there to be at least two reasonable explanations for the recent surge in visitor numbers.

First, the global pandemic compelled that most academic activities be conducted exclusively online. As a result, major adjustments were necessary for all members of the campus community, which led to an increase of incidents regarding miscommunication and academic dishonesty, two of the Office's most historically reported concerns.

Next, the Ombuds Office has employed a second full-time professional only as recently as RY 2015-16. The additional staffing hours have made it possible for the Office to increasingly see more visitors, with the largest increases coming in the last two reporting years.

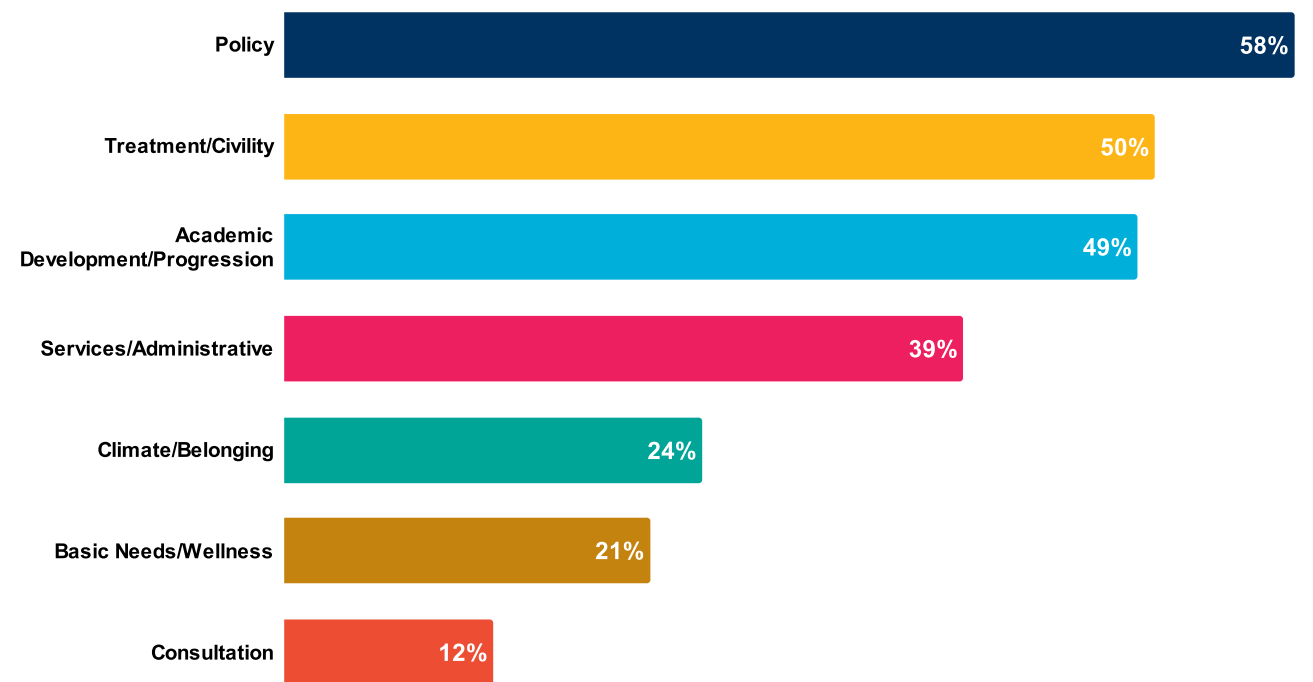


# All Visitors Served



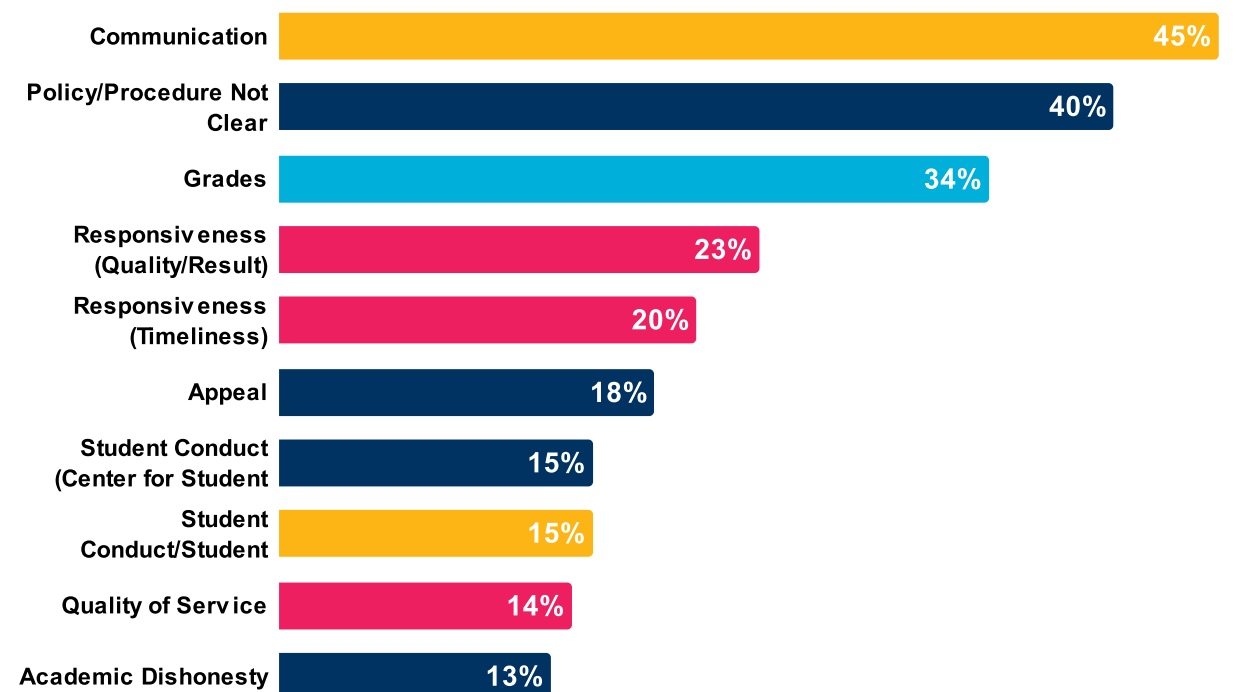
# All Visitors Concerns: Main Categories

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



# All Visitors Concerns: Top 10 Subcategories\*

92% of all visitors reported more than one type of concern



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

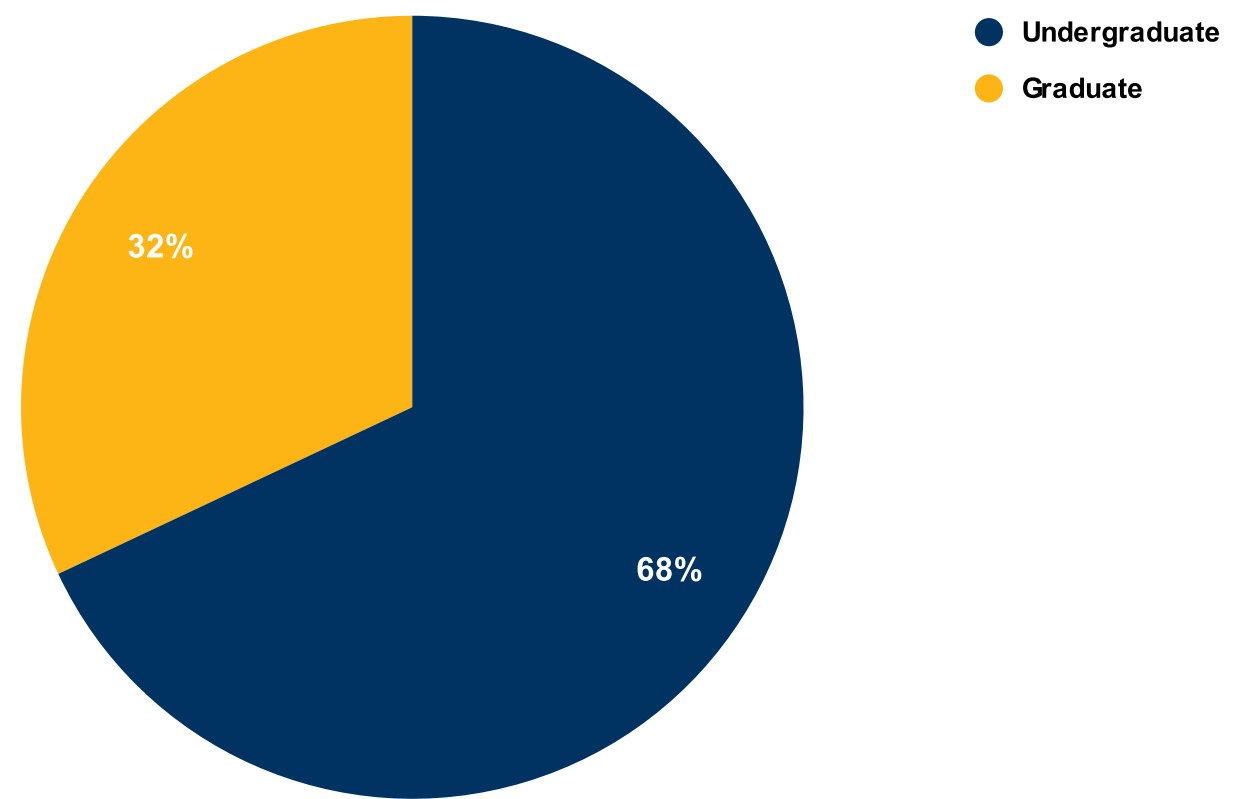
# Student Visitors

Undergraduate and graduate students represented 77.6% of the Ombuds Office's total number of visitors. This number is in step with the Office's ten year average of 76.5% of its visitors being students.

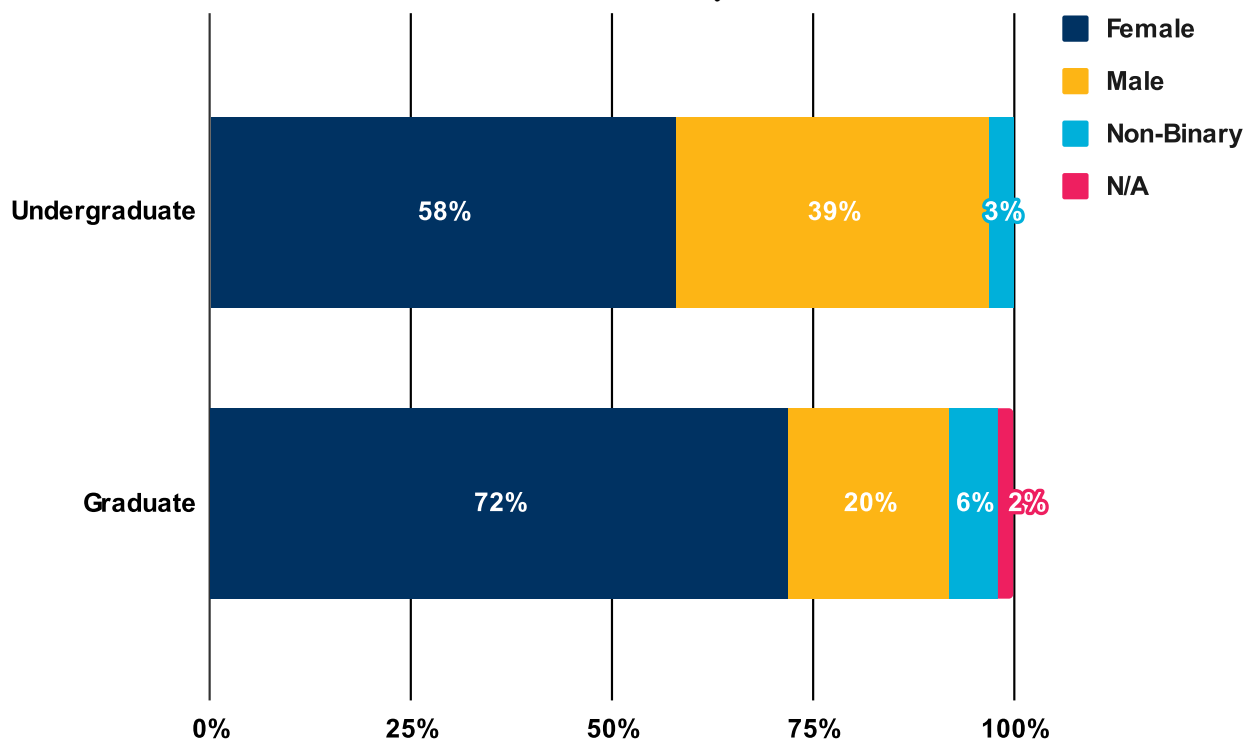
For the primary reasons of consistency and simplicity, the data on this page reflects that only of undergraduate and graduate student visitors. UCBX students information is accounted for in the "Other Visitors" section of the report.

To better reflect race/ethnicity/national origin numbers for the entire academic year, *Campus-Wide* figures were obtained from Cal Answers rather than Fall 2020 reports published by the Graduate Division and the Office of Planning and Analysis, the sources in previous reports.

## Student Visitors Served

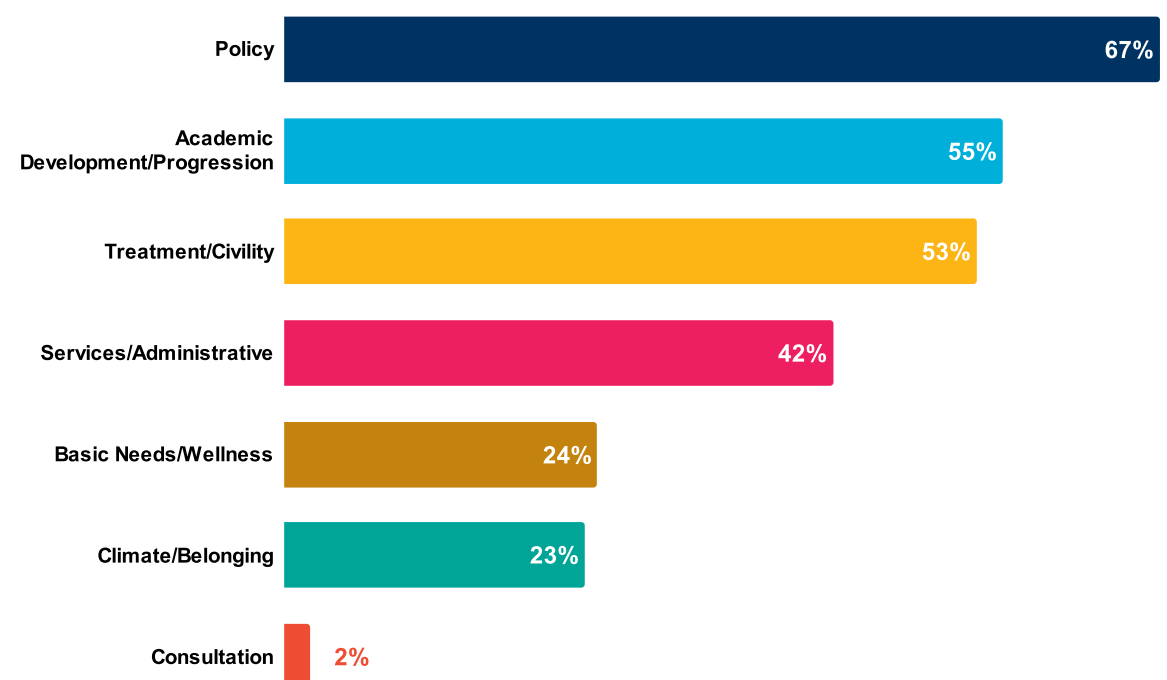


## Student Visitors by Gender



## All Student Concerns: Main Categories

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



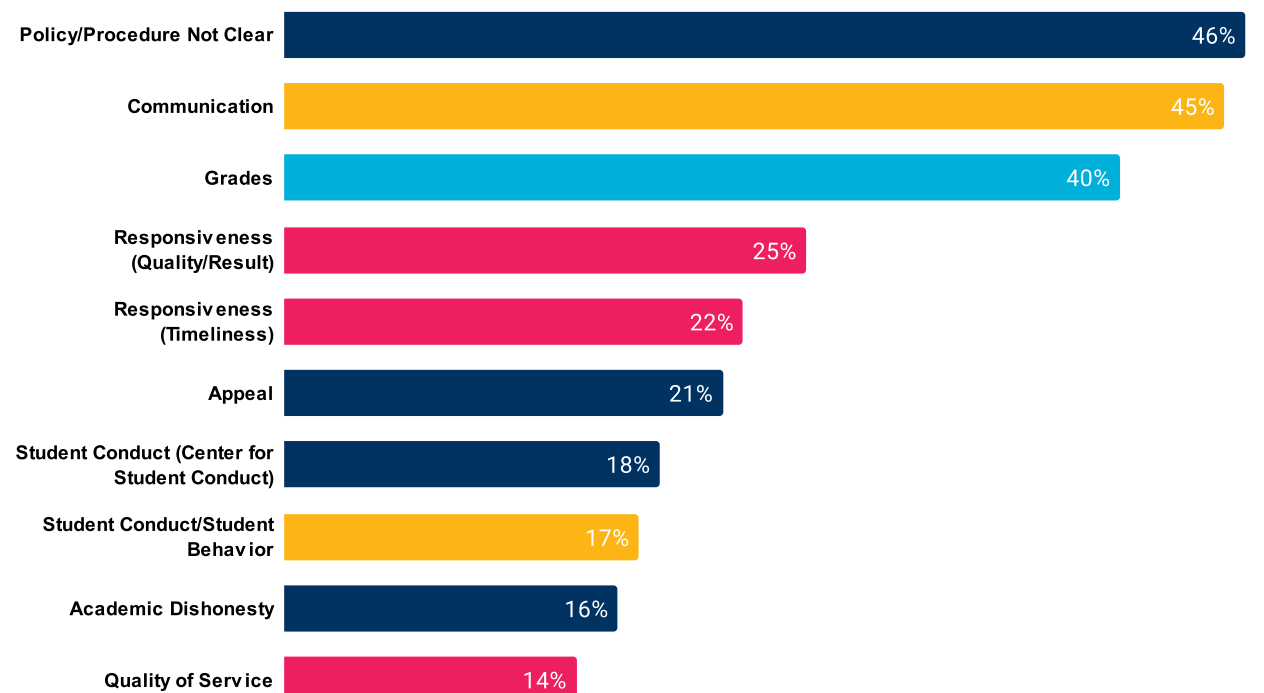
## Student Visitors by Race/Ethnicity/National Origin

	Undergraduate Students		Graduate Students	
	20-21	Campus*	20-21	Campus*
Asian/Asian American	29%	40%	9%	25%
Black/African American	10%	4%	8%	6%
Chicanx/Latinx	16%	18%	17%	11%
Native American/Alaska Native	3%	<1%	0%	1%
Pacific Islander	3%	<1%	2%	<1%
South Asian/Southwest Asian/North African	27%	5%	15%	3%
White/Caucasian	29%	28%	58%	48%
Other	16%	N/A	11%	N/A
Declined to State/Unknown	3%	4%	2%	6%

31% of undergraduate student visitors identified as more than one race/ethnicity/national origin  
 15% of graduate student visitors identified as more than one race/ethnicity/national origin  
 \*Campus numbers are averages of Fall/Spring 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 53% of *all* visitors and 68% of all *student* visitors, undergraduate students were, for the thirteenth consecutive year, the Ombuds Office's most frequent type of visitor. Further, for the fourth consecutive year and the ninth year out of the last ten, Seniors were the most common type of undergraduate visitor.

The concerns expressed by undergraduate student visitors were also consistent with historical trends. More often than not, issues with grades and/or unclear policies and procedures led these visitors to contact the Office. While not a surprise, this supports the notion that the remote learning mandates placed upon students due to COVID-19 created unprecedented challenges that necessitated these conversations more than ever before.

## Undergraduate Student Parties Involved

	2020-21
Faculty	47%
Department	17%
Student	17%
Policy	10%
Graduate Student Instructor	4%
Other	3%
Faculty (Adjunct/Visiting)	2%
Staff	1%
1% of undergraduate visitors identified multiple parties	

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

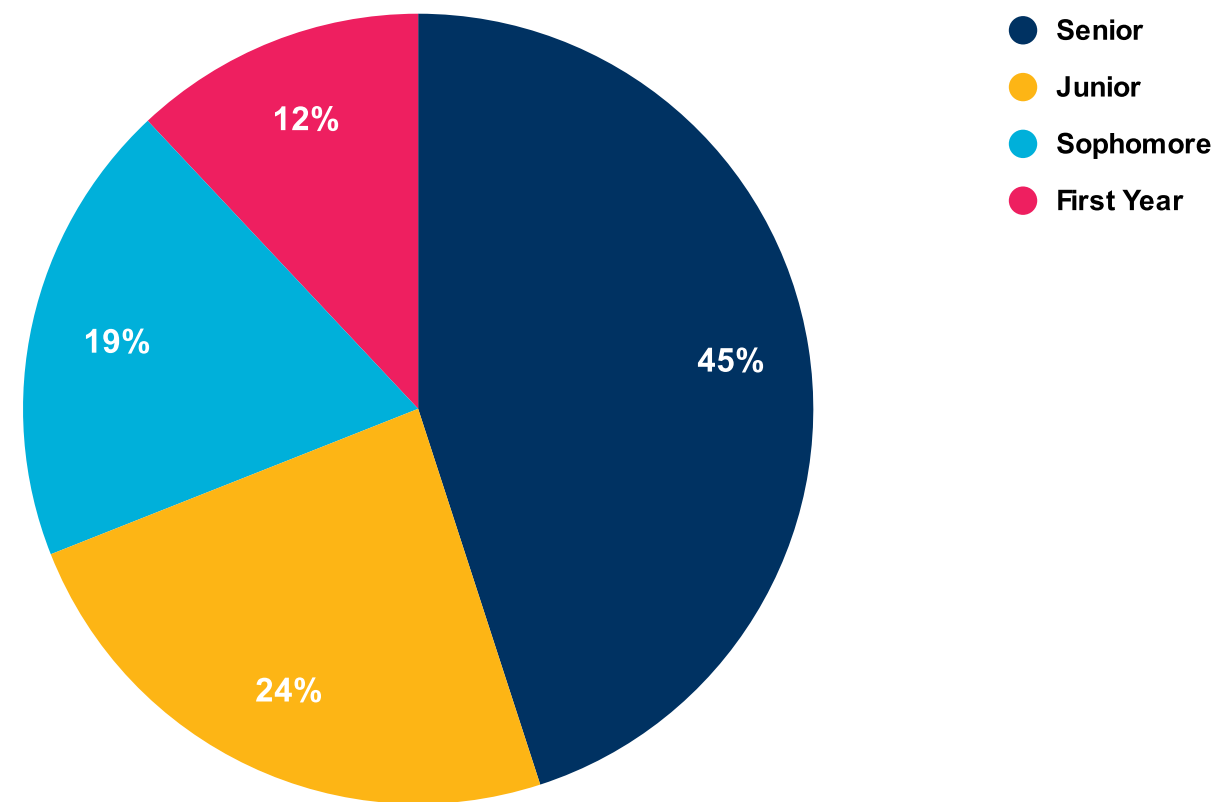
**37%**

Undergraduate Student Visitors that received Follow-up

**13%**

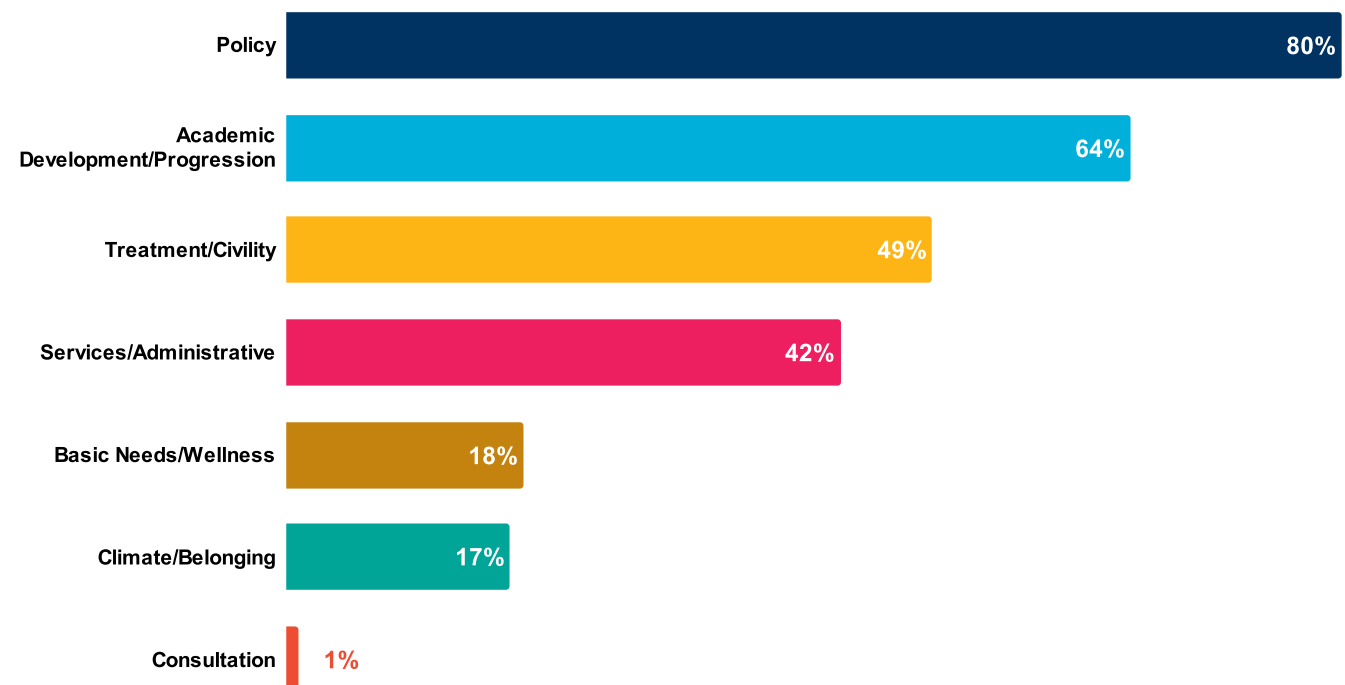
Undergraduate Student Visitors that received a Facilitated Resolution

## Undergraduate Student Visitors Served



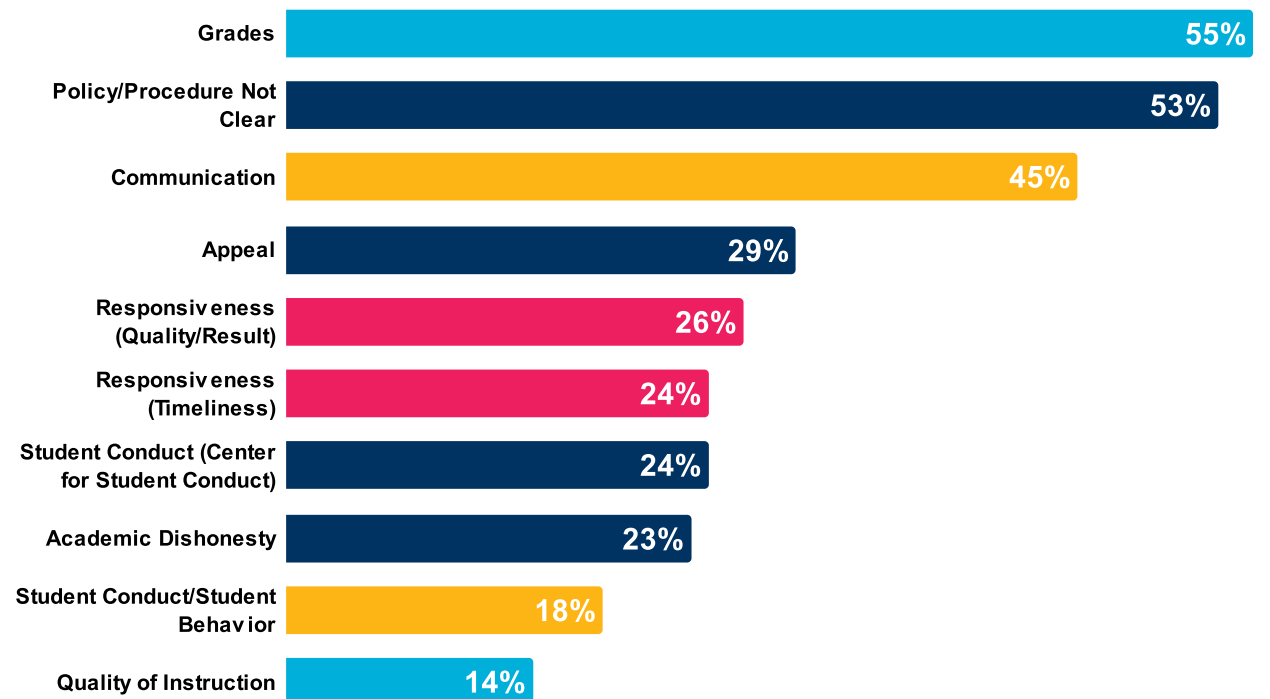
## Undergraduate Student Concerns: Main Categories

93% 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



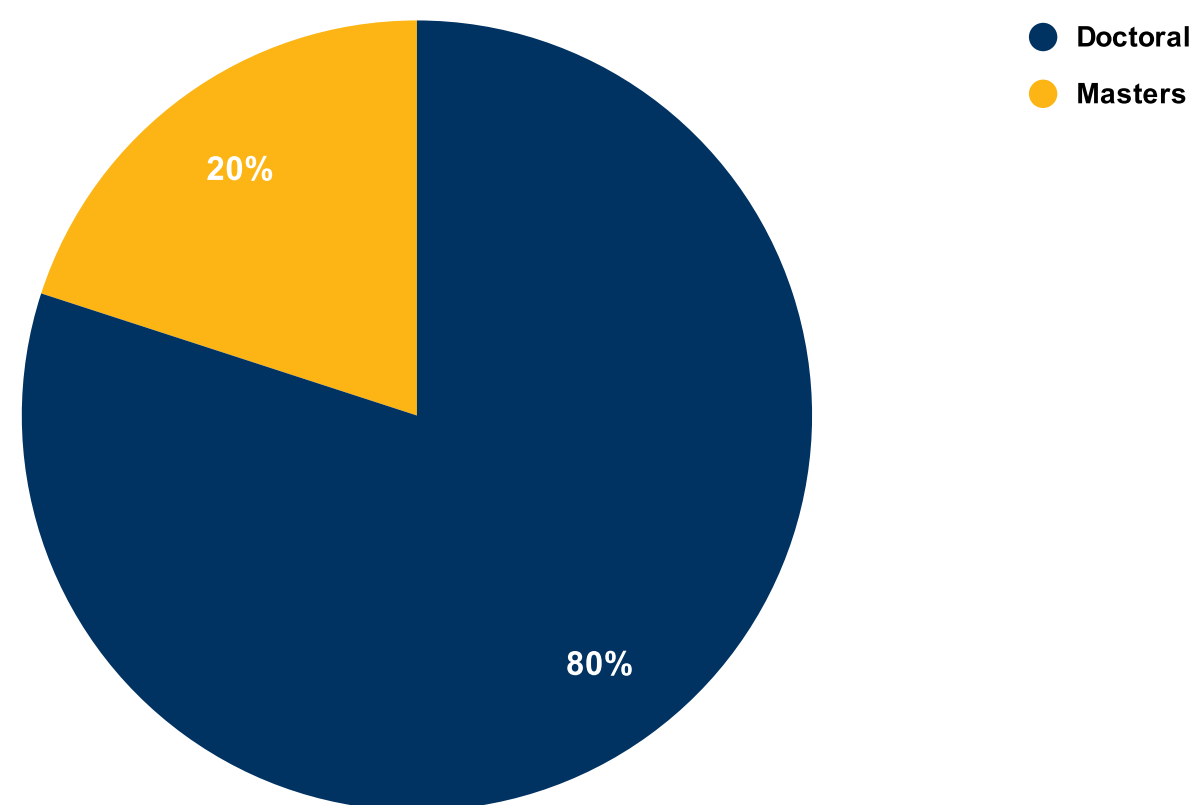
\*Colors of subcategory concerns correspond with colors of main category concerns

# Graduate Student Visitors

For the second consecutive year, the percentage of graduate student visitors shrank in relation to both *all* visitors (32%) and all *student* visitors (25%). In terms of hard numbers, however, the Ombuds Office saw an 8% increase in graduate student visitors from 60 in RY 2019-20 to 65 in RY 2020-21, making it the second highest total since RY 2017-18.

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

## Graduate Student Visitor Served

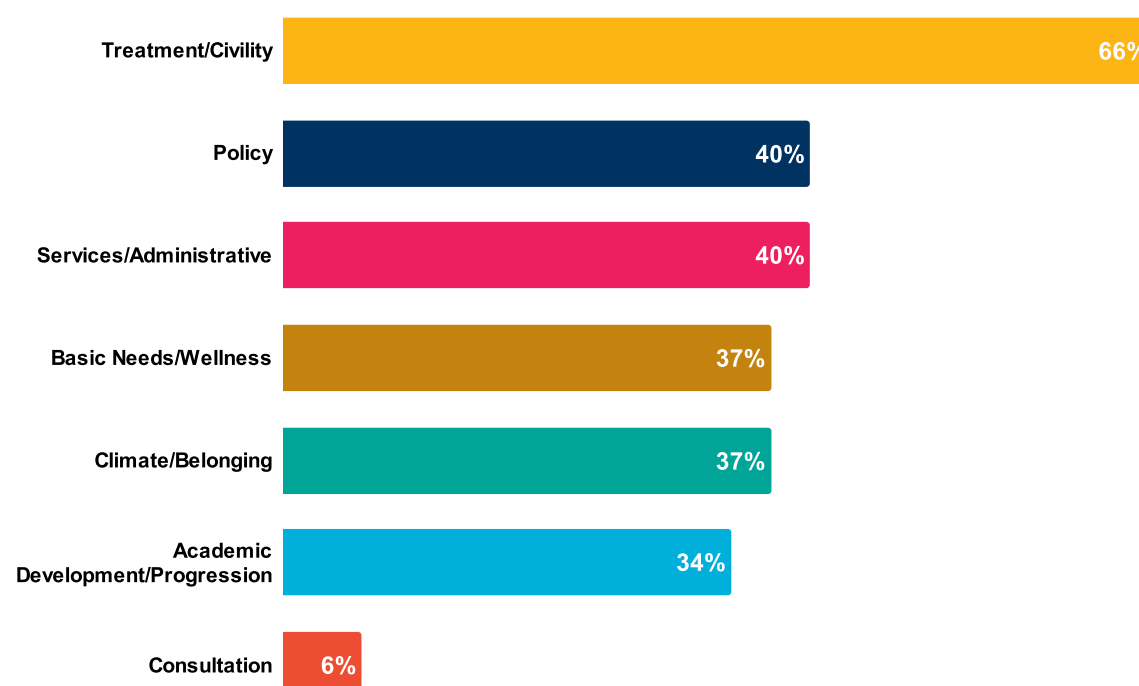


## Graduate Student Parties Involved

	2020-21
Faculty	32%
Department	28%
Student	17%
Policy	11%
Other	5%
Staff	5%
Postdoctoral Appointee	3%

## Graduate Student Concerns: Main Categories

89% of graduate visitors reported a concern from more than one main category



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

**46%**

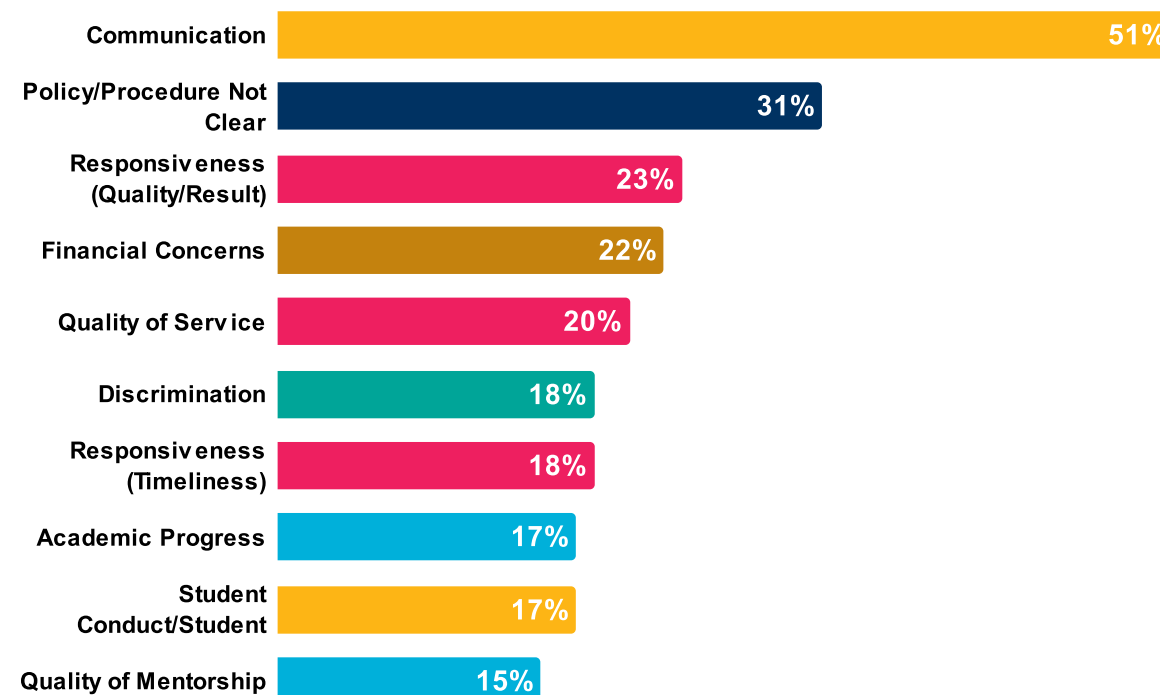
Graduate Student Visitors that received Follow-up

**14%**

Graduate Student Visitors that received a Facilitated Resolution

## Graduate Student Concerns: Top 10 Subcategories\*

94% of graduate student visitors reported a concern from more than one main category



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

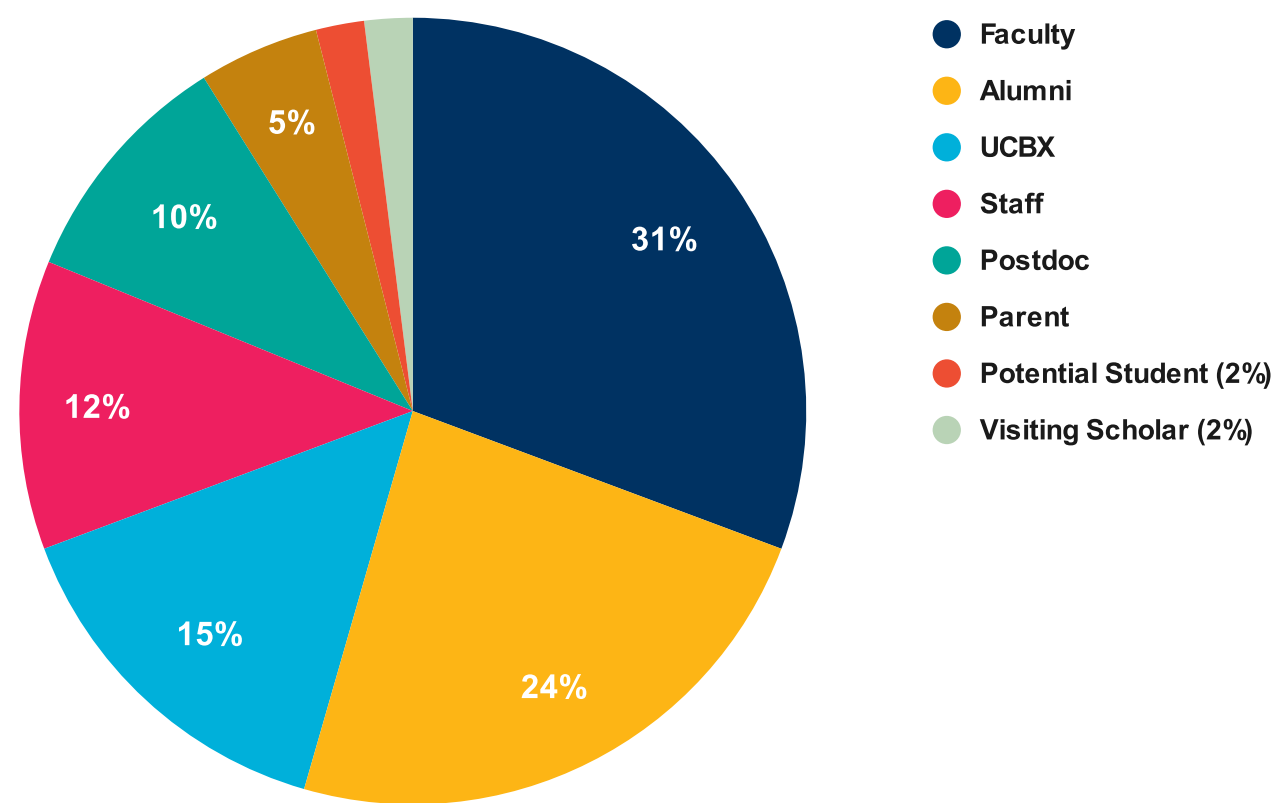
# Other Visitors

Inclusive of UCBX students, any visitors who were not current, degree-seeking students at the time of their visits were classified as *Other* visitors. These visitors represented 22% of all visitors to the Ombuds Office this reporting year. This number, while down from the previous year (25%), is slightly misleading as the Office saw a 9.4% increase in the total number of these types of visitors, resulting in the highest total since RY 2017-18.

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.

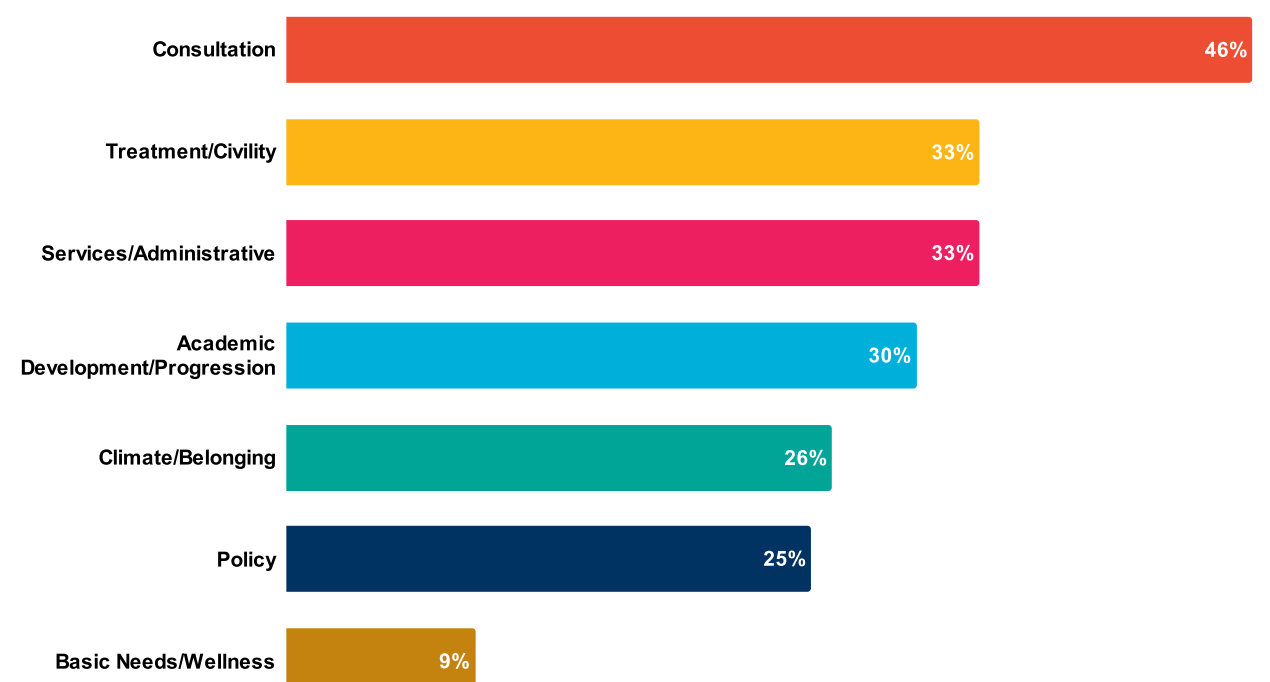
A significant amount of the work undertaken with these visitors were consultations, specifically with faculty and staff. Faculty and staff visitors represented 10% of *all* visitors, 43% of *other* visitors, and requested consultations 96% of the time. These could be as brief as explaining the breadth of services the Office can offer to something more time-consuming like providing guidance in the development of policy and/or procedure. The bulk of consultations with faculty and staff, however, centered on how to address and remedy complex student issues. Often times, these included follow-up (44%) and resulted in some form of facilitated resolution (32%).

## Other Visitors Served



## Other Visitor Concerns: Main Categories

59% of other visitors reported a concern from more than one main category

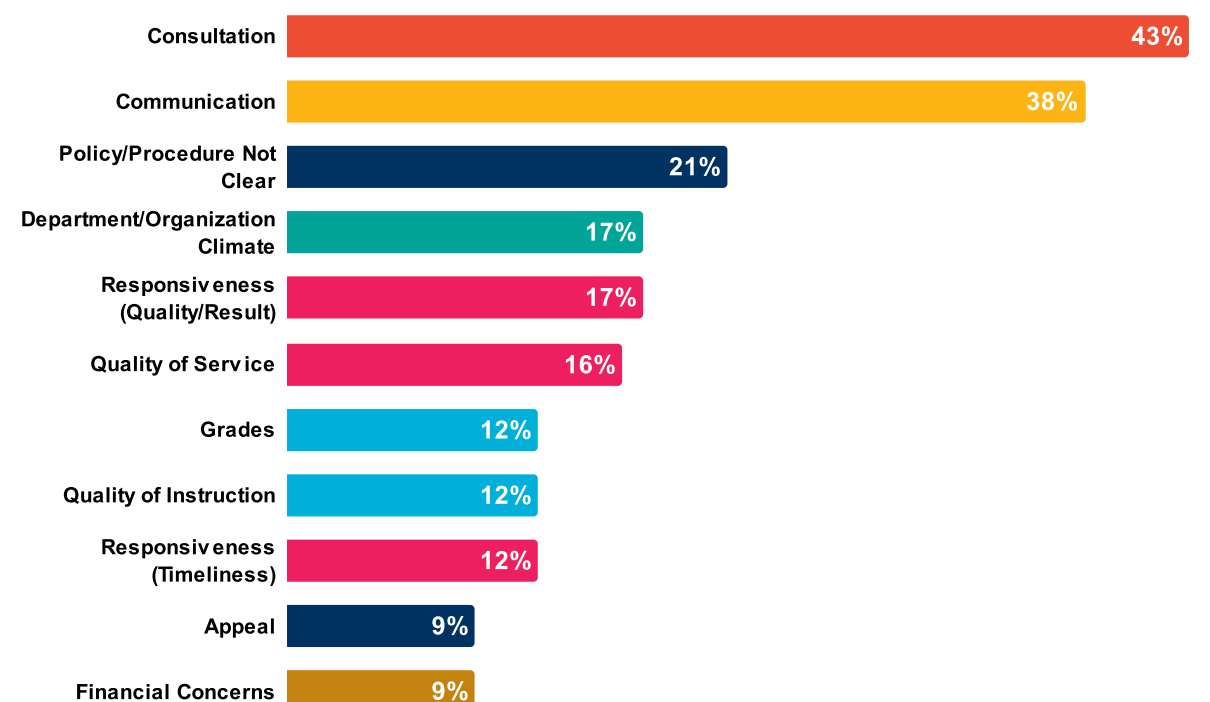


## Parties Involved for Other Visitors

	2020-21
Student	38%
Department	36%
Faculty	19%
Postdoctoral Appointee	7%
Policy	5%
5% of other visitors identified more than one party	

## Other Visitor Concerns: Top 10 Subcategories\*

72% of other visitors reported a concern from more than one main category



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

# Recommendations

The Ombuds Office makes recommendations based on both its observations and the concerns presented by visitors during the previous reporting year. While not all concerns raised by visitors 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 potentially improving the experiences of the student and postdoc populations.

- **Improve instructor consistency, protocol, and transparency with students regarding practices in reporting allegations of academic misconduct**

- COVID-19 has necessitated many academic courses be instructed partially or exclusively online. Logically, the dramatically altered instruction methods have contributed to the documented campus-wide increases in academic misconduct allegations. While it is unclear and ultimately immaterial to the Ombuds Office to what degree the increased number of allegations were accurate or merited, the increase does square with what it has seen as its student visitor concerns of academic misconduct have risen each of the last two reporting years (5% in RY 2019-20 and an additional 7% in RY 2020-21). More pertinent to the Office and this recommendation is the feedback received from its student visitors about their experiences during the process. Students regularly expressed feelings of being blindsided when disclosing they had been reported. Further, students routinely shared that while they generally understood the increased challenges placed on instructors in discouraging and monitoring for academic misconduct, they also felt the process with instructors could have been more informative and transparent. Consistent with the helpful and thorough resources provided on the Center for Student Conduct website, the Office recommends that instructors be more intentional in notifying students on what they can expect should they be suspected of academic dishonesty.

- **Maintain a position of flexibility and patience, and be open-minded to creative and reasonable alternatives in the service of students and postdocs navigating their return to in-person activities**

- Even with campus leadership anticipating and planning a full-scale return to in-person instruction and research practices during the 2021-22 academic year, it remains as important as ever that faculty and staff members be flexible and patient with students and postdocs who are returning to campus (some for the first time) in the wake of the pandemic. For a host of reasons, the Office believes it is foreseeable, if not likely, to expect varying levels of comfort and safety among students and postdocs. As a result, faculty and staff should be prepared to develop creative and reasonable accommodations to facilitate the learning and professional goals of these populations without compromising the academic integrity of the institution or the health and safety of the larger campus community.

- **Prioritize educating students and postdocs on having difficult conversations**

- Continuing from RY 2019-20, the Ombuds Office saw a steady and marginal increase in the number of Climate/Belonging and Treatment/Civility-related concerns from its visitors. Many visitors specifically brought questions to the Office on ways to discuss sensitive matters, including those on diversity, equity, inclusivity, and belonging, that encourage civility and respect. Based on both its visitors and general observations of national and local conversations of this kind, this Office recommends that campus leadership prioritize the development of this skill with students and postdocs, and with those who work with these populations. Difficult conversations and potential resulting conflicts are often challenging, but are also tremendous opportunities for personal growth. The Ombuds Office is one resource dedicated to such a task, but it is not equipped to handle it alone. In the upcoming year, it plans to continue working diligently to support the campus community to improve competency in this area and looks forward to partnering on developmental interventions.