

Ombuds Office for Students & Postdoctoral Appointees

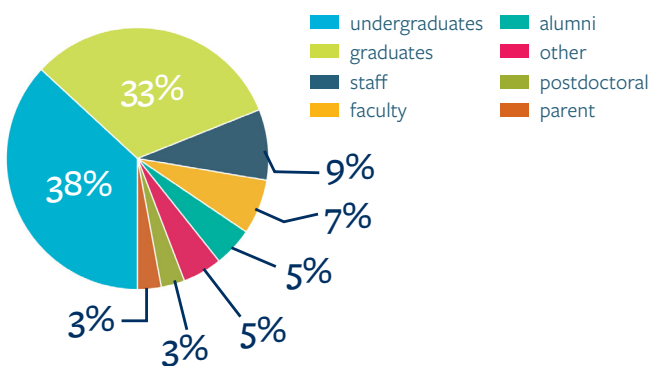
2015-16 Annual Report



We saw a total of 150 cases during the 2015-16 academic year. In addition to students, we served postdoctoral appointees, faculty and staff who had student-related concerns, and other community members such as recent graduates, alumni, prospective students, and parents. Amongst our visitors this year, 71% were students, 16% were faculty/staff, with the remaining 13% including postdoctoral appointees, alumni, extension students, parents, and others.

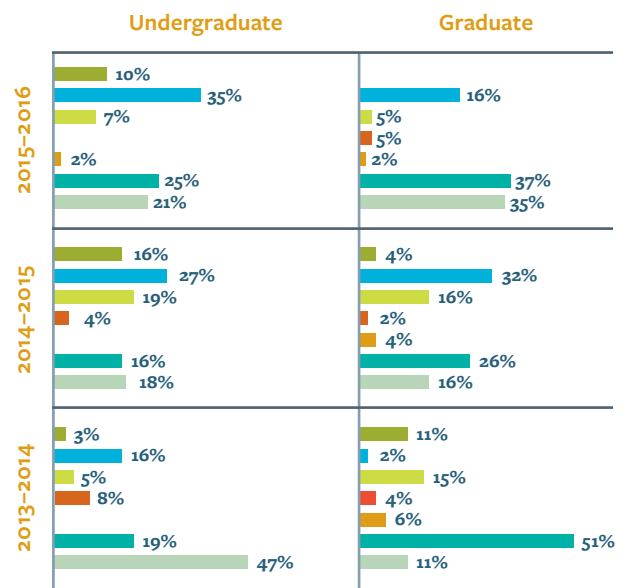
More than half of all student cases required follow-up (56% for undergraduates and 53% for graduate students). Follow-up involved additional meetings with the visitor, outreach to third parties, research on policies, communication, and mediation.

All Visitors by Role



Demographics

- Black/African American
- Asian/Asian American
- Chicano/a & Latino/a
- Middle Eastern
- Native American
- White
- Not Given



Other Demographics 2015-2016

	Undergraduate	Graduate
first-generation	10%	6%
non-California resident	10%	6%
disability	19%	2%
international	7%	2%
transfers	17%	

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.



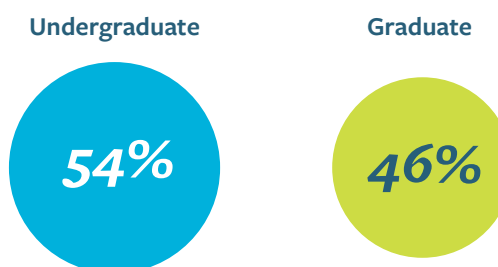
Campus & Professional Involvement

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, Stay-Day Conference Committee, Student Affairs Strategic Planning Initiative, the Graduate Division Social Committee and the Restorative Justice advisory group.

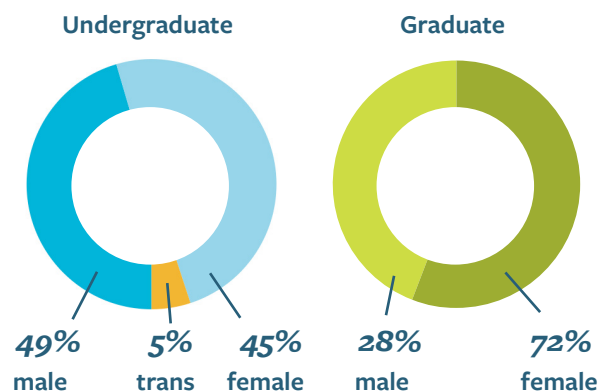
In order to stay abreast of student issues and trends, we attend division and campus wide meetings including Student Affairs Cabinet, Student Affairs Roundtable, Graduate Division Staff, Graduate Student Services, Graduate Student Advisors, Case Management Team, and Advising Network Council.

We are also members of the International Ombudsman Association and serve on the planning committee for the annual conference. The director has served as co-chair of the annual conference for the past three years. We also have membership in the National Association of Student Personnel Administrators.

Student Visitors



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.

Approximately 37% 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, S/LAS, the Berkeley International Office, Student Advocates Office, and academic departments.





Outreach & Trainings

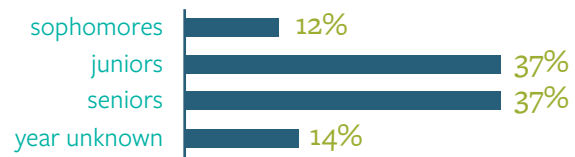
While the daily assistance provided to our visitors is to effectively respond to difficult situations is essential, the Student Ombuds Office must also proactively maintain good relationships with campus administration, faculty, and staff. We work to ensure broad campus understanding of the purpose and 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, LEAD Center Student Leadership Conference, University Village residents, Optometry New Student Orientation, 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.

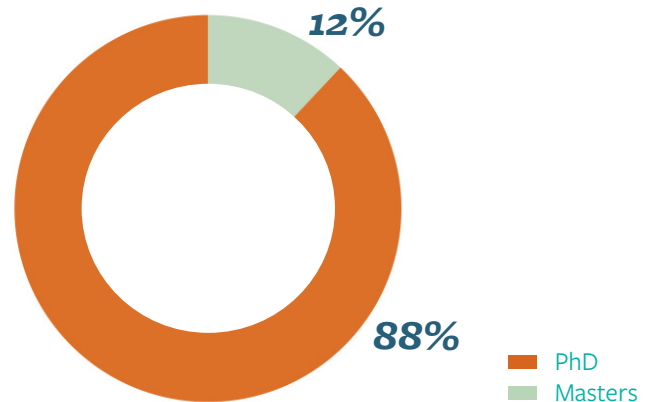
Consultations & Non-Student Visitors

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.

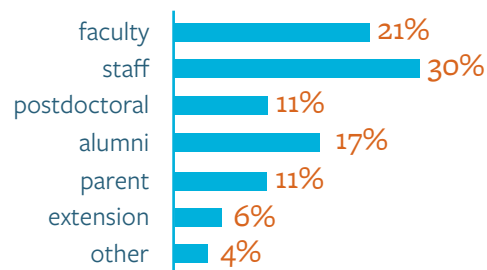
Undergraduate Visitors by Year



Graduate Visitors by Degree Program



Non-Student Visitors



Trends & Issues

Communication

Communication rose to the top of the list for issues amongst undergraduates (compared to third most frequently reported in the previous year) and dropped from first to second place for graduate students. For faculty and staff, it rose to second place from third.

For undergraduates, communication issues rose from 27% to 46%. 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.

Grades & Academic Progress

Forty percent of undergraduate visitors stated that grades were an issue of concern and a reason for their appointment with our office. This percentage is the lowest it has been in the past three years yet it is still the second most highly reported issue for undergraduates. Cases involving grades often involved other areas of

Undergraduate Issues

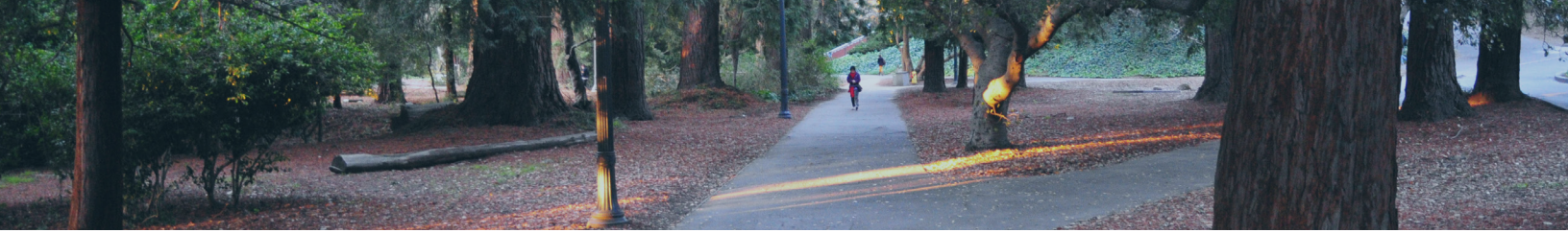
Communication	46%	Policy/Procedure Not Followed	16%
Grades	40%	Disability	12%
Policy/Procedure Not Clear	35%	Mediations	2%
Treatment/Civility	25%	Cases with facilitated resolution	28%
Financial Concerns	18%	Cases that required follow-up	57%

Graduate Issues

Treatment/Civility	39%	Disability	14%
Communication	38%	Illness	14%
Academic Progress	27%	Mediations	8%
Policy/Procedure Not Clear	25%	Cases with facilitated resolution	25%
Financial Concerns	18%	Cases that required follow-up	53%
Treatment by Adv/Dis Communication	18%		

Faculty, Staff, and Other Groups' Issues

Policy/Procedure Not Clear	23%	Mental Health	20%
Treatment/Civility	25%	Mediations	11%
Communication	27%	Cases with facilitated resolution	25%
Grades	16%	Cases that required follow-up	34%



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, 27% of our visitors stated academic progress was an area of concern, which is an increase from 23% in the previous

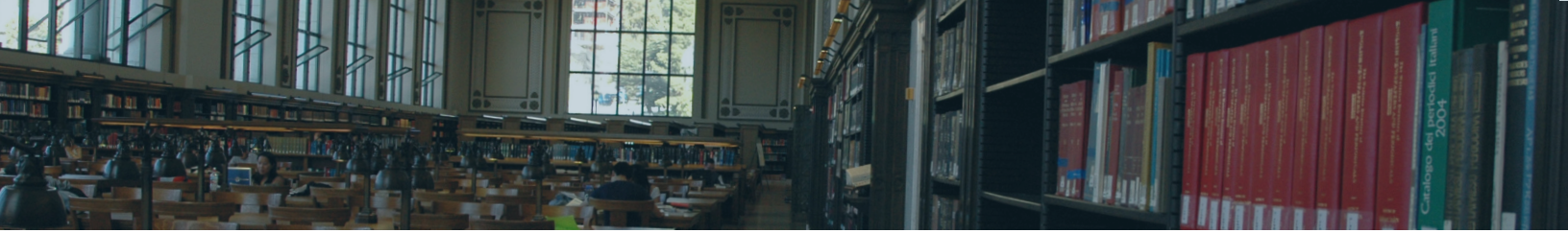
year. It rose from fifth place in the previous year to the third most reported issue this year.

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.

Treatment & Civility

Treatment & civility dropped to fourth place from second for undergraduates (34% to 25%), and rose to the top of the list for graduate students from third place in the previous year (28% to 39%).

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.



Unclear Policies & Procedures

Unclear policies and procedures rose to third place for undergraduates from fourth in the previous year at 35%, up from 27%. It decreased to fifth place from second place for graduate students (25% from 33%).

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.

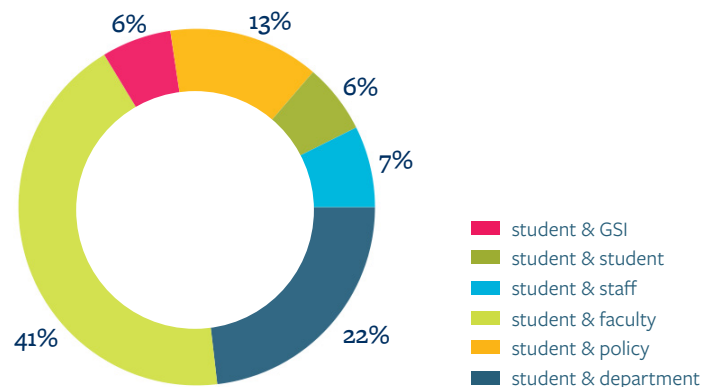
We recommend that faculty and staff are provided the necessary information so that they know whom students should be referred to if they have questions or find themselves in a unique situation. Students are sometimes unintentionally provided misinformation that can directly or indirectly lead to a delay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

This can lead to a domino effect of other barriers including financial-related concerns, registration/enrollment, and access to university services.

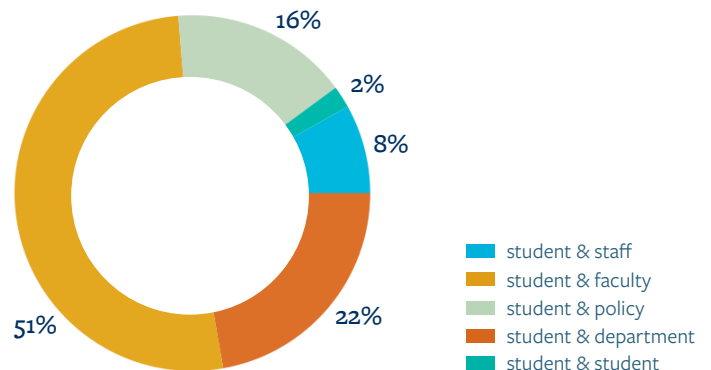
Financial Concerns

The issue of financial concerns was the fifth most reported concern for both undergraduates and graduate students (at 18%). 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





Sexual Harassment and Assault

Prior to 2013, less than 1% of cases involved sexual harassment or assault. Since 2013, sexual harassment and assault cases averaged five to seven percent of cases overall. Since 2008, 65% of all cases in this category have been reported in the last three years. 19% of these cases since 2008 were categorized as sexual assault. This increase does not necessarily indicate more incidents of sexual assault and harassment but can be contributed to increased awareness and education about reporting options, resources and revised policies and procedures.

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.