

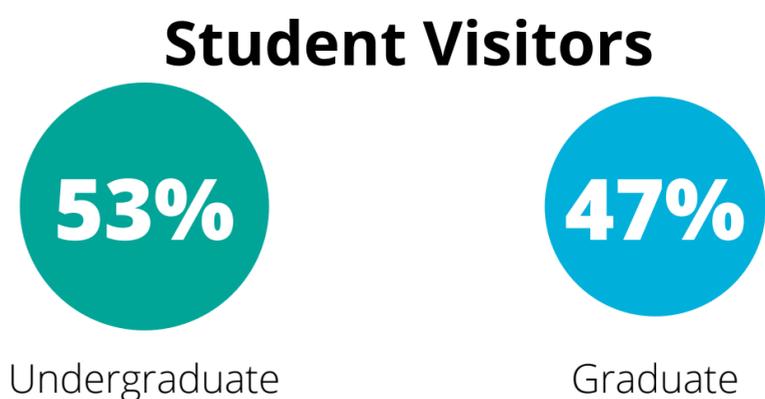
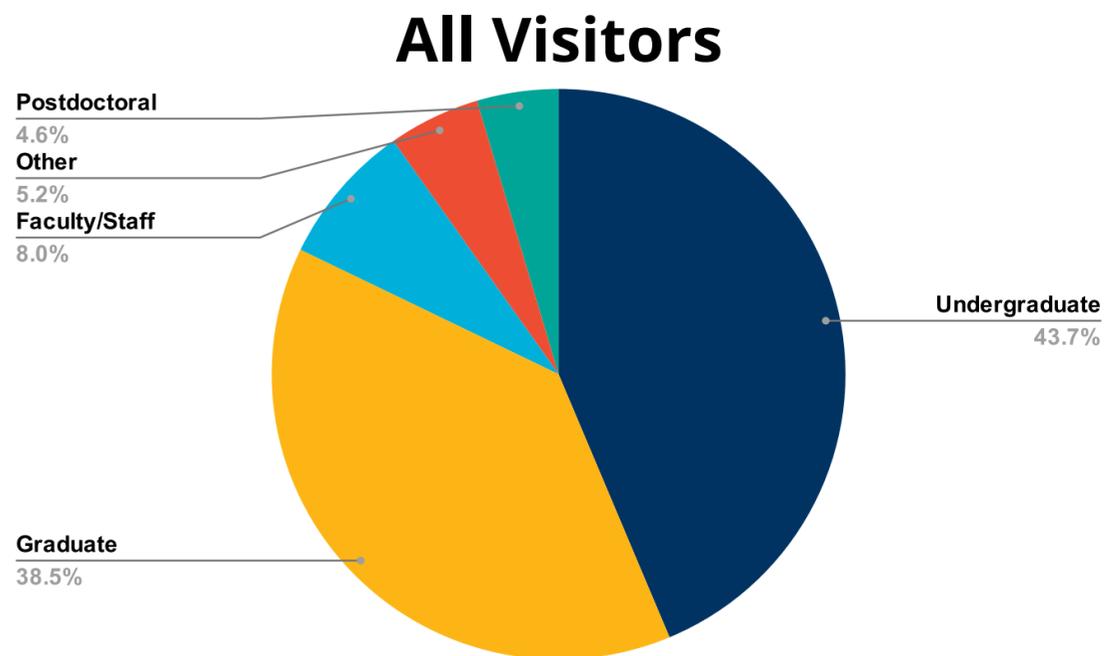
Ombuds Office for Students & Postdoctoral Appointees 2018-2019 Annual Report



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 issues addressed with those visitors.

For data collection purposes, the Ombuds Office maintains anonymized records of cases, tracking only basic information regarding demographics and nature of dispute. Any records with personal identifying information are destroyed.

There were 178 distinct visitors who contacted the Office July 2018 thru June 2019. This is a 3.5% increase from the previous year. In addition to students and postdoctoral appointees, the Ombuds Office served faculty, staff, and members of the broader university community regarding student-related concerns. Of the visitors, 82% were students, 8% were faculty/staff, and the remaining 10% were a combination of alumni, extension students, parents, postdoctoral appointees, and prospective students.



Other Demographics	Undergraduates		Graduate Students	
	17-18	18-19	17-18	18-19
Disability	20%	29%	15%	22%
First Generation	25%	12%	16%	20%
International	13%	18%	26%	9%
Non-California Resident	23%	42%	34%	58%
Transfer	10%	22%	N/A	0%



Mission

The mission of the Ombuds Office 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 appointee issues and concerns. To that end, it tracks trends, behaviors and practices that serve as alert mechanisms for systemic and sustainable change at UC Berkeley.

The Office was established and is maintained because this institution cares about and upholds its commitment to fair policies and procedures and recognizes the value of providing a confidential and informal dispute resolution resource for the campus community. Office visitors are coached in conflict resolution techniques and the language of non-defensive communication, and are ultimately empowered to decide for themselves how to address their concerns. All visitors are encouraged to work toward mutually agreed upon resolutions.

The Ombuds Office's involvement in any matter is generally initiated by visitors and 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 goals of equity, civility and inclusion.





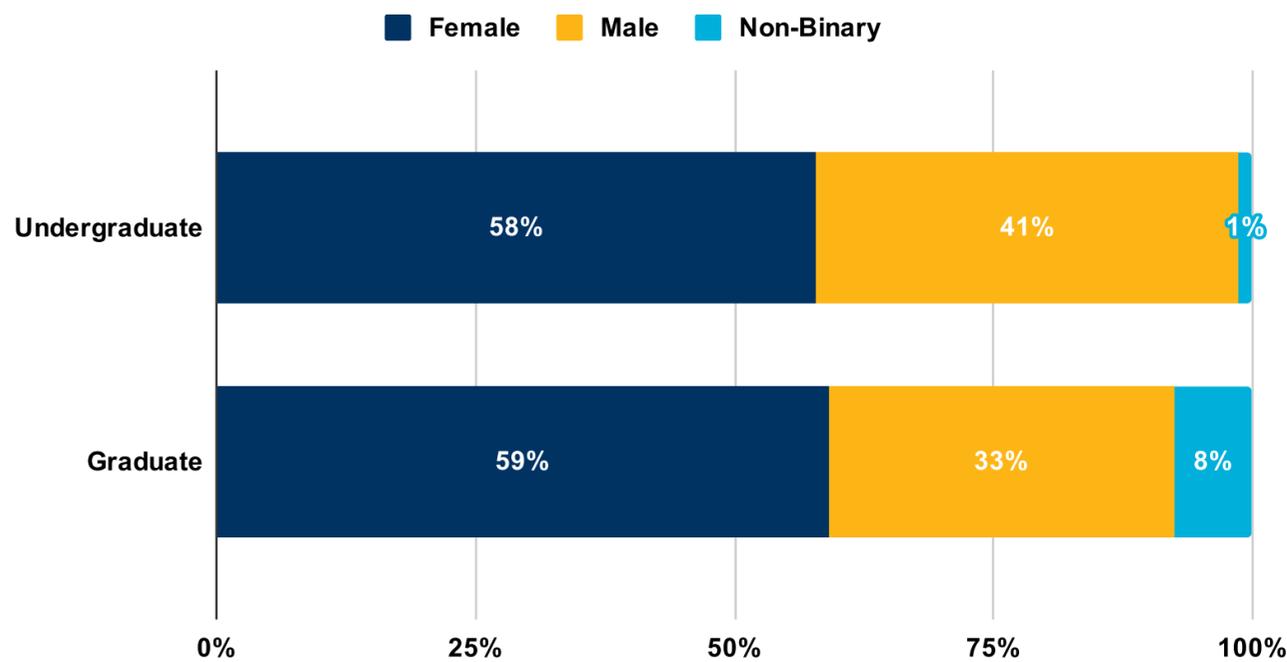
Campus & Professional Engagement

To stay current with recent trends and best practices in the field, both professional staff members belong to the International Ombudsman Association (IOA). This year, the Director was on the planning committee for the annual IOA conference and while there served as a first-time instructor for the “Foundations of Organizational Ombudsman Practice” course. The Director also served as Co-Convener and Vice President of the annual California Caucus of College and University Ombuds.

To enhance the Office’s outreach and visibility, staff served on a number of campus and division wide committees. These included the Asian Pacific American Systemwide Alliance, the Berkeley Facilitators Network, the Coordinated Committee Review Team (CCRT), the Graduate Division Social Committee, and the Higher Education Reading Organization for Employees & Sidekicks (HEROES).

To further stay informed on student issues and trends, staff attended division and campus-wide meetings including Student Affairs Cabinet, Student Affairs Roundtable, and Graduate Student Affairs Officers (GSAO) meetings. Further, in an effort to share trends on issues that brought visitors to the Office, the staff met with the Vice Provost of Graduate Studies and Dean of the Graduate Division, the Vice Chancellor for Student Affairs, and the Vice Chancellor for Equity & Inclusion.

Student Visitors by Gender



Student Visitors by Race/Ethnicity/National Origin

	Undergraduates			Graduate Students		
	17-18	18-19	Campus Wide	17-18	18-19	Campus Wide
Asian/Asian American	21%	26%	39%	22%	15%	17%
Black/African American	10%	8%	3%	4%	4%	3%
Chicanx/Latinx	8%	12%	15%	7%	4%	8%
White/Caucasian	25%	21%	25%	36%	49%	34%
Native American/Alaska Native	N/A	0%	<1%	N/A	0%	<1%
Pacific Islander	N/A	0%	<1%	N/A	0%	1%
Other	1%	12%	13%	2%	6%	9%
Declined to State/Unknown	35%	30%	4%	29%	30%	28%
*8% of undergraduate visitors identified more than one race/ethnicity/national origin						
*9% of graduate students visitors identified more than one race/ethnicity/national origin						



Services

The Ombuds Office strives to provide a safe and welcoming space so visitors may feel comfortable sharing their concerns openly and authentically. During an appointment, visitors are invited to disclose what led them to contact the Office, and then, with the Ombudsperson, discuss their desired outcomes and the next steps in addressing their issues. This is often done through conflict coaching and/or policy clarification.

Many visitors needed only a single appointment, however, 51% of all cases required some form of follow-up. Of students specifically, follow-up was needed in 57% of undergraduate cases and 42% of graduate student cases. This entailed additional meetings with visitors, outreach to third parties, research on policies and procedures, facilitated resolutions, shuttle diplomacy, and making referrals to other university resources.

Office staff regularly conferred with and collected information from campus departments and offices in the interest of better informing its visitors. These included but were not limited to: Berkeley Division of the Academic Senate, Center for Student Conduct, College of Letters & Science, Disabled Students' Program (DSP), Financial Aid and Scholarships, Graduate Division, Housing, Office for the Prevention of Harassment and Discrimination (OPHD), Office of the Registrar, Office of Undergraduate Admissions, Residential Life, and University Health Services (UHS).

To better facilitate its work with campus partners, and to broaden the community's understanding of its function and responsibilities, the Office provided outreach and tailored trainings on conflict resolution, mediation, intercultural conflict styles, giving feedback, and communication to various academic departments and student groups.

Consulting & Non-Student Visitors

In addition to serving the university's student and postdoctoral appointee populations, the Ombuds Office consulted with alumni, extension students, faculty, parents, prospective students, staff, and members of the broader Berkeley community regarding student-related concerns.

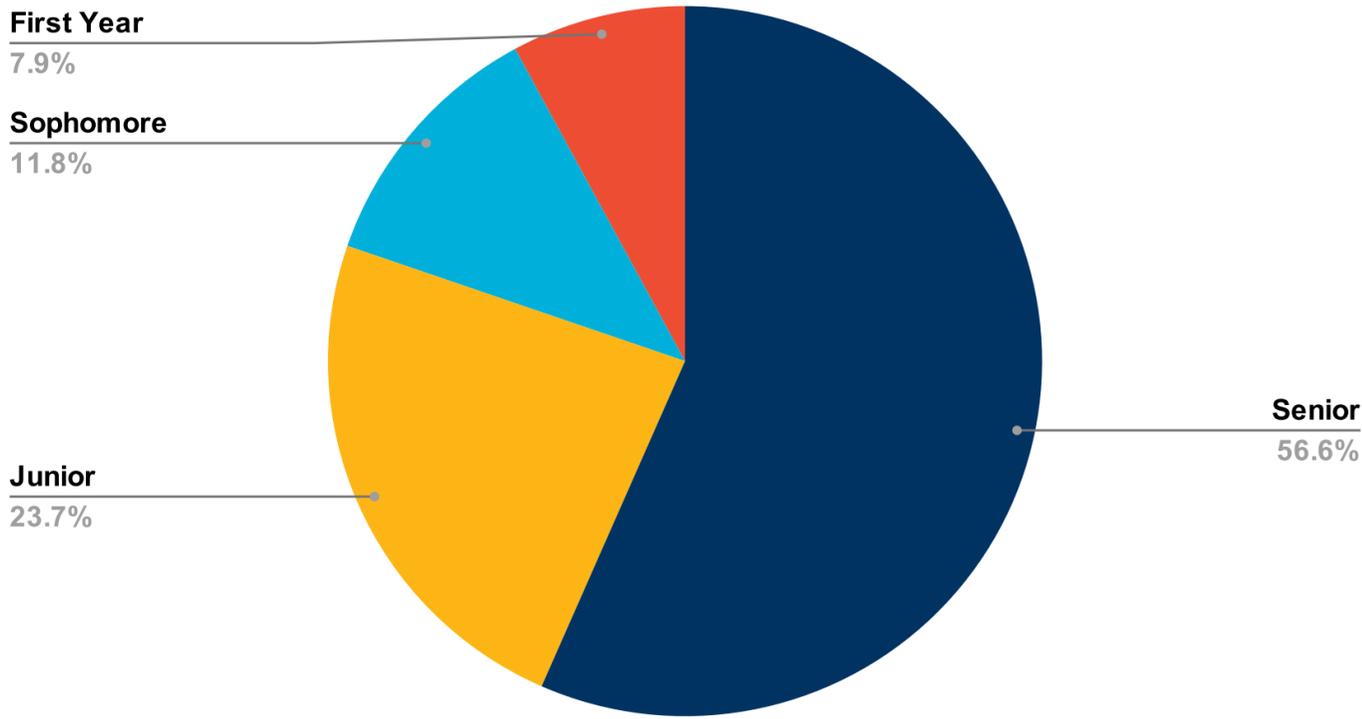
Referrals to the Ombuds Office

The majority of referrals to the Office were made by members of the faculty or staff. The next most common ways visitors learned about the Ombuds Office were via Internet research and referrals from friends. Other popular referral sources included the Center for Support and Intervention, DSP, OPHD, PATH to Care, Student Advocate's Office, Student Legal Services, and UHS.



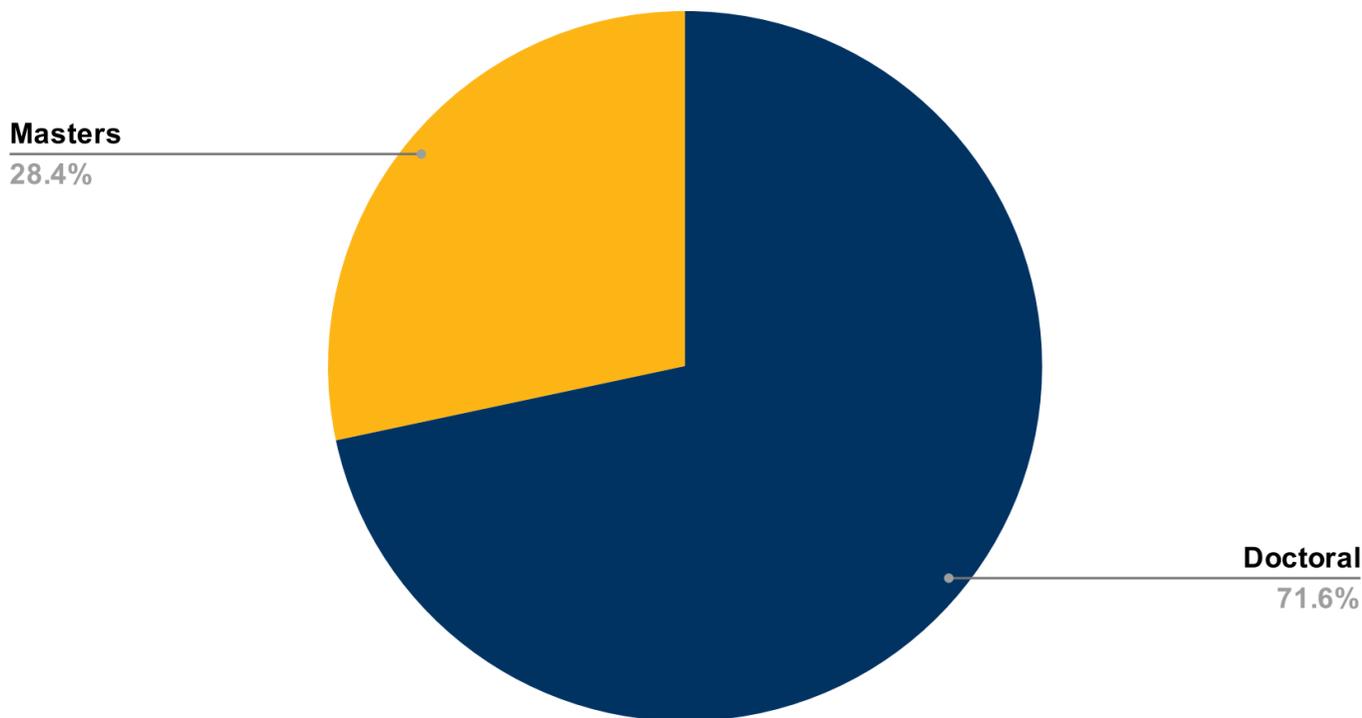
Data Summary

Undergraduate Visitors by Year



Undergraduate Parties Involved	2018-19
Faculty	45%
Department	15%
Student	15%
Policy	12%
Staff	9%
GSI	3%
Friend	1%
Postdoctoral Appointee	1%
*1% of visitors identified more than one party	

Graduate Visitors by Degree

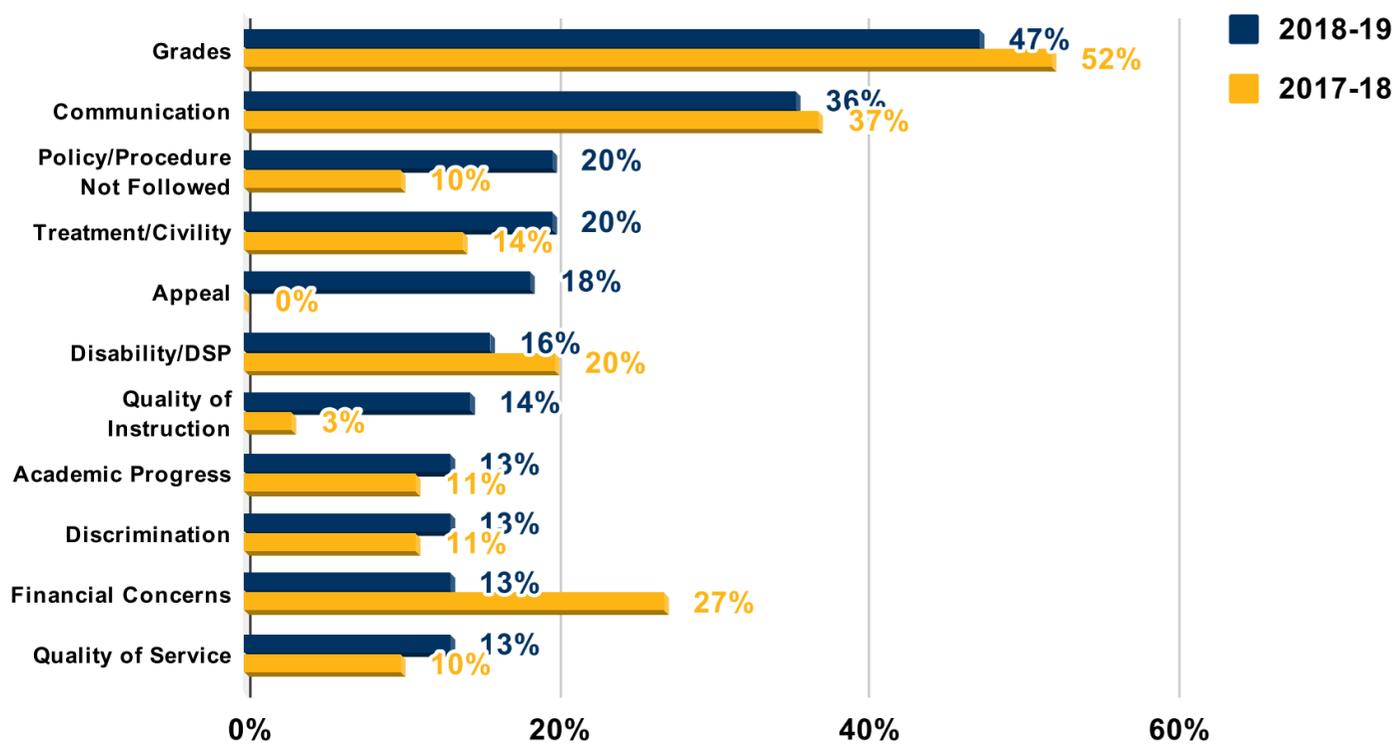


Graduate Parties Involved	2018-19
Faculty	58%
Department	20%
Student	14%
Policy	5%
Staff	5%
GSI	2%
*1% of visitors identified more than one party	



Data Summary

Undergraduate Issues



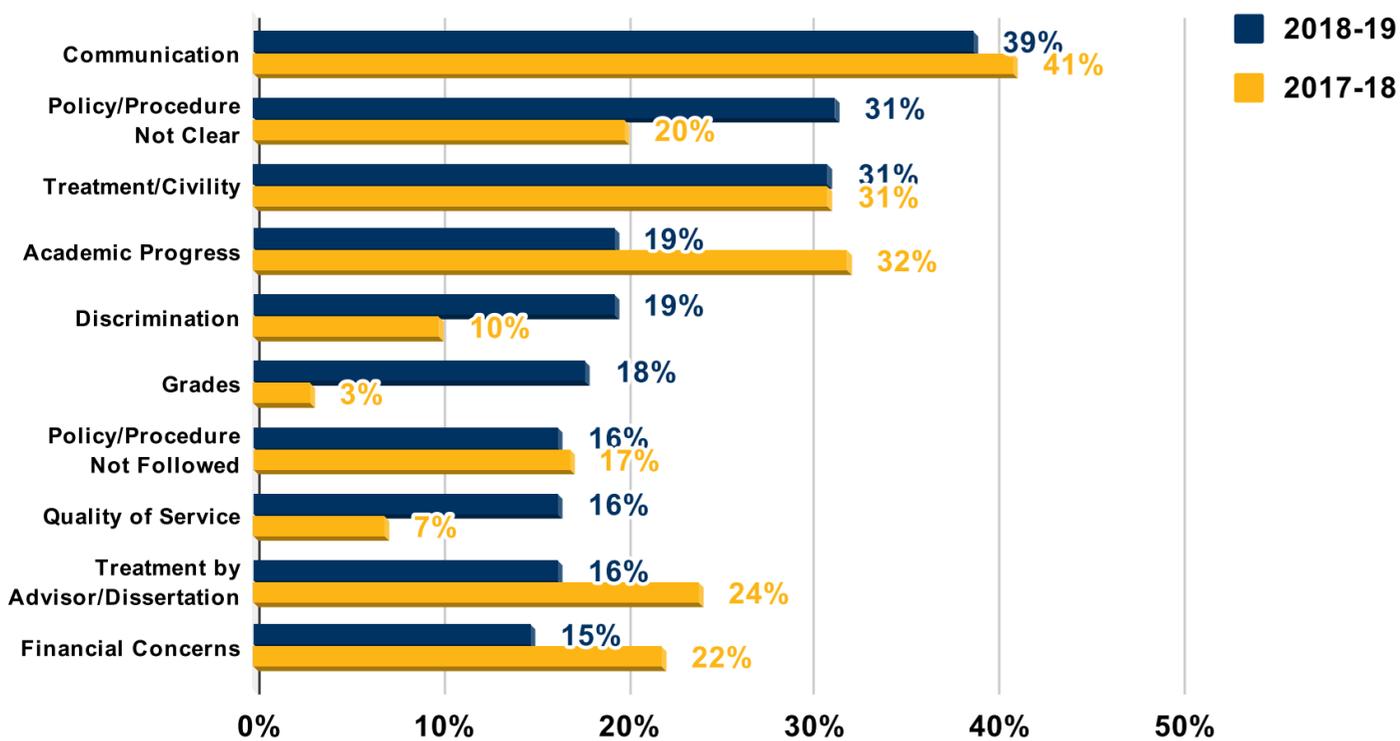
57%

Cases Required Follow-up

13%

Cases with Facilitated Resolution

Graduate Issues



42%

Cases Required Follow-up

13%

Cases with Facilitated Resolution



Trends & Issues

Grades & Academic Progress

For the third consecutive year grades were the leading issue reported by undergraduate student visitors. Forty-seven percent (47%) of undergraduate visitors identifying grades as a reason for their appointments with the Ombuds Office. This is a decrease from 52% the previous year. For graduate students, grades were the sixth most prevalent issue, rising from 3% to 18%. 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. Visitors came to the Office for assistance on reaching out to professors, GSIs, or departments, to receive coaching on how to best communicate with their instructors, and to discuss options.

The Ombuds Office also provided guidance on grade disputes so students were clear about the policies, criteria, timelines, and processes before they decided how to engage. While many students addressed their grade disputes informally, some pursued formal methods.

In many cases, conflict could have been avoided if there had been an explanation in the course syllabi or academic program handbook of the factors that would be used to evaluate progress and determine grades, and any factors (e.g., absences and class participation) that could be a part of that determination. In the absence of clear guidelines and grading rubrics, students may perceive that non-academic criteria are being applied when evaluating academic performance.

For graduate students, 19% of visitors shared academic progress as an area of concern, which is a decrease from 32% in the previous year.

Graduate student cases are often more complex as they can involve longstanding relationship issues with advisors, chairs, and committees. The Ombuds Office provided coaching to graduate students on how to handle conflicts with those parties on a number of factors that were affecting their academic progress. Such concerns included disagreement in academic focus of research, intellectual property issues, communication, and treatment and civility. Issues related to academic progress included financial concerns, lack of mentorship, and lack of understanding of related policies and procedures.



Trends & Issues

Policies & Procedures

Unclear policies and procedures accounted for only 3% of undergraduate student cases. This was a decrease from 28% the previous year. For graduate students, unclear policies and procedures rose from 20% to 31%, making it the second most common issue influencing graduate students to contact the Office.

For undergraduate visitors, the citing of policies and procedures not being followed rose from 10% to 20% and was the third most common reason they contacted the Ombuds Office. For graduate visitors, this issue decreased slightly from 17% to 16%.

The Ombuds Office supported students in finding and understanding relevant policies and procedures when those policies and procedures 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 cases. In other situations, students experienced conflict because they were given inconsistent guidance, or were unaware of where they could find pertinent information applicable to their individual situations.

UC Berkeley is a large and complex university that is constantly undergoing growth and change as it strives to meet the needs of the campus community. As staff transitions occur and organizational changes are sustained, it is important that updated procedures and policies are communicated to students proactively and broadly.

This office recommends that policies and procedures on websites and handbooks are made explicit, concise, user-friendly, and updated regularly. Further, faculty and staff should be provided the necessary information so that they know to whom students should be referred if they have questions or find themselves in unique situations. Students are sometimes unintentionally provided misinformation that can directly or indirectly lead to a delay in academic progress.

Other Visitors	2018-19
Staff	35%
Postdoctoral	26%
Alumni	16%
Faculty	10%
Extension	3%
Non-Affiliate	3%
Parent	3%
Prosepective Student	3%

Other Visitors' Issues	2018-19
Communication	42%
Policy/Procedure Not Clear	23%
Treatment by Advisor/Dissertation Committee	19%
Feedback/Recognition	16%
Intellectual Property	13%



Trends & Issues

Communication

Communication was the second highest reported concern for undergraduates (36%) and the top concern for graduate students (39%). The Ombuds Office observed that visitors are more frequently requesting coaching for communication skills ranging from interpreting verbal and written messages to preparing for difficult conversations. The Office coached visitors on the importance of tone, the use of non-defensive language and the difference between intent versus impact. Ombuds staff 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. This office recommends the use of clear and explicit language in both written and verbal communication. The use of email when addressing issues that are more complicated in nature or involving some level of conflict is also discouraged. In-person communication with follow-up in written form is a more effective way of mitigating potential misunderstandings, which can lead to a domino effect of other barriers including financial-related concerns, registration or enrollment issues, and access to university services.

Financial Concerns

The eighth most reported issue by undergraduates and tenth most by graduate students (13% and 15%, respectively) was Financial Concerns. With the increase in tuition and the cost of living in the local Berkeley community, students are coping with financial stressors like meeting payment deadlines, food security, or housing concerns that negatively impact their educational experiences.

Treatment & Civility

Treatment & Civility rose from sixth to the third most common issue (20%) for undergraduate visitors, and it remains a top issue (31%) 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 both academic and personal support. Some cases involved visitors feeling intimidated and even threatened academically and interpersonally. Visitors came to seek coaching, perspective, and guidance on their options.

Additional Issues

The Ombuds Office also received 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, and stalking.