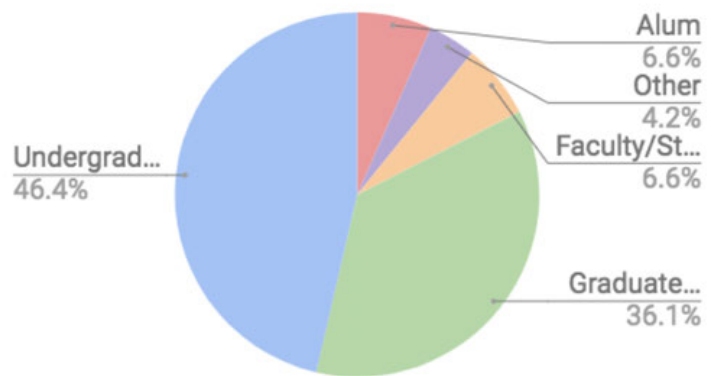


Ombuds Office for Students & Postdoctoral Appointees 2017-18 Annual Report



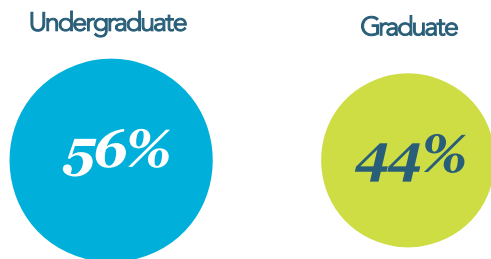
We saw a total of 172 cases during the 2017-18 academic year which is a 3% increase from the previous year. In addition to students, we served postdoctoral appointees, faculty and staff who had student-related concerns, and other community members. Amongst our visitors this year, 82% were students, 9% were faculty/staff, with the remaining 9% including postdoctoral appointees, alumni, extension students, parents, and others.

All Visitors



Forty eight percent of undergraduate and 44% 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.

Student Visitors



RACE	2016-17		2017-18		Campus Wide	
	UG	Grad	UG	Grad	UG	Grad
Asian/Asian American	13%	12%	21%	22%	42%	17%
Black/African American	12%	15%	10%	4%	3%	4%
Chicanx/Latinx	10%	18%	8%	7%	15%	7%
Middle Eastern	1%	1%	1%	2%	<1%	<1%
White	20%	13%	25%	36%	25%	36%
Not Reported	44%	41%	35%	29%	5%	

A close-up photograph of the University of California sign, featuring the words "UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA" in large, gold, serif letters mounted on a dark green, ornate metal structure with intricate scrollwork.

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 stay on top of the current trends and best practices in the field of Ombuds, the professional staff are members of the International Ombudsman Association (IOA). This year, the Director became certified as a Certified Organizational Ombudsman Practitioners (CO-OP). The Director served on the planning committee for the annual conference and has served as co-chair of three recent annual conferences. The Director also served as Co-Convener and President of the annual California Caucus of College and University Ombuds (CCCUCO). The Assistant Ombudsperson co-founded and organizes the Emerging Ombuds Network, an organization designed to advocate for and support the development of ombuds. The Assistant Ombudsperson also serves on the IOA membership committee and the CCCUCO planning committee. As well as serving within these professional organization both the Director and the Assistant presented workshops at their conferences. The Director presented at the 2017 CCCUCO and the Assistant Ombudsperson presented two sessions at the IOA annual conference in Richmond, VA.

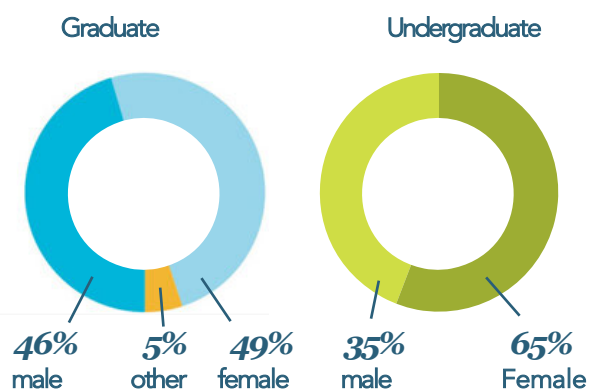
To enhance our outreach and visibility amongst the campus community, we serve on a number of campus and division-wide committees. These include the Asian Pacific American System-wide Alliance, the Graduate Division Social Committee, the Higher Education Reading Organization for Employees & Sidekicks (HEROS), and the Berkeley Facilitators Network.

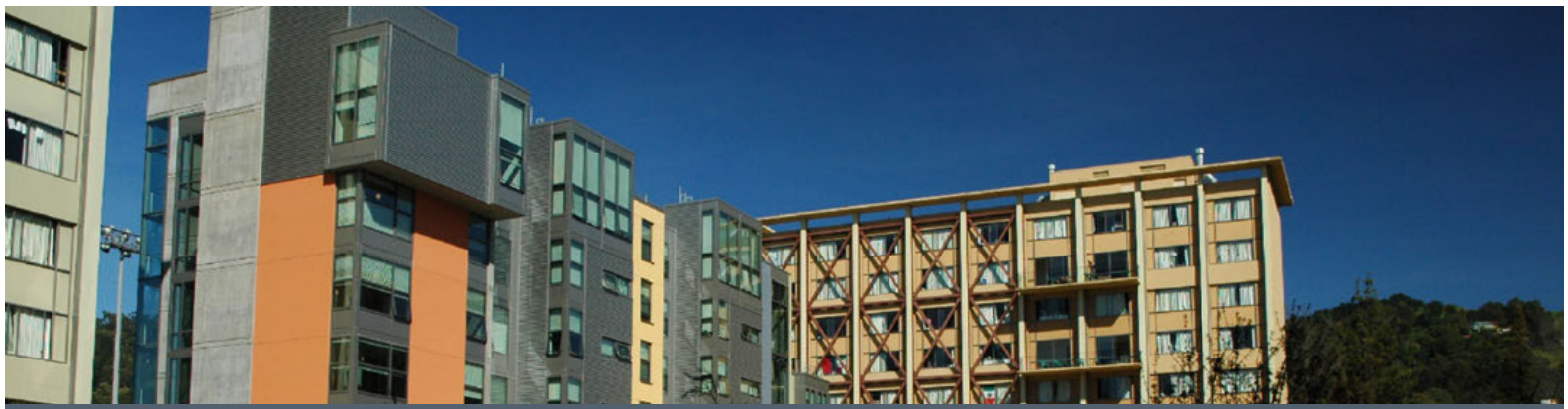
To further stay informed on student issues and trends, we attend division and campus wide meetings including Student Affairs Cabinet, Student Affairs Roundtable, Graduate Division Staff, Graduate Student Services, and Graduate Student Advisors.

We also met with VCSA, VCEI, EVCP to share trends and recommendations on issues that visitors brought to our attention.

OTHER DEMOGRAPHICS	2016-2017		2017-2018	
	UG	Grad	UG	Grad
First Generation	17%	16%	25%	16%
Non-California Resident	7%	9%	23%	34%
Disability	17%	15%	20%	15%
International	6%	6%	13%	26%
Transfers	13%		10%	

Student Visitors by Gender





Services

The daily assistance provided to our visitors to effectively respond to difficult situations is essential. The office works to create a safe and welcoming space to allow visitors the security to share their situations openly and authentically. Students are asked to tell the story of what is going on and then, through dialogue, discover ways to discuss what the next steps may be. This is often through conflict coaching and/or policy clarification. Many of our visitors come in for a single appointment, however, 48% require some form of follow-up. Follow-up includes shuttle diplomacy, facilitating conversations with other parties, and/or making referrals to additional appointments.

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, the Center for Support & Intervention, Center for Student Conduct & Community Standards, Berkeley International Office, Financial Aid, Registrar, Admissions & Enrollment, Transfer, Re-Entry, Student Parent Program, Student Legal Services, Student Advocates Office, Pathway to Care, and various academic departments on campus.

The Student Ombuds Office proactively maintains good relationships with campus administration, faculty, and staff. We work to ensure broad campus understanding of the purpose and role of our office.

On top of the services provided to our student and postdoctoral appointee visitors, we also 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: Golden Bear Orientation, New Graduate Student Orientation, the Berkeley International Office Advisors, the Student Advocates Office, Extension mediation courses, Thriving in Science and other graduate and undergraduate student organizations. We also administered outreach presentations to various academic departments and student groups throughout the campus.

Consultations & Non-Student Visitors

In addition to serving UC Berkeley's student and 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.

Referrals to the Ombuds Office

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.



Data Summary

Undergraduate Issues

ISSUES	2016-17	2017-18	ISSUES	2016-17	2017-18
Grades	49%	52%	Discrimination	5%	11%
Communication	29%	37%	Academic Dishonesty	3%	11%
Policy/Procedure Not Clear	41%	28%	Harassment	6%	11%
Financial Concerns	25%	27%	Quality of Service	3%	10%
Disability	17%	20%	Cases with facilitated resolution	16%	9%
Treatment/Civility	14%	14%	Cases that required follow-up	42%	48%
Responsiveness	19%	14%			

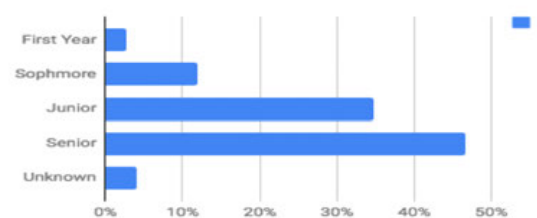
Graduate Issues

ISSUES	2016-17	2017-18	ISSUES	2016-17	2017-18
Communication	43%	41%	Policy/Procedure Not Clear	28%	20%
Academic Progress	21%	32%	Policy/Procedure Not Followed	15%	17%
Treatment/Civility	35%	31%	Disability	19%	15%
Treatment by Advisor/Dis Committee	19%	24%	Cases with facilitated resolution	21%	15%
Financial Concerns	21%	23%	Cases that required follow-up	42%	44%

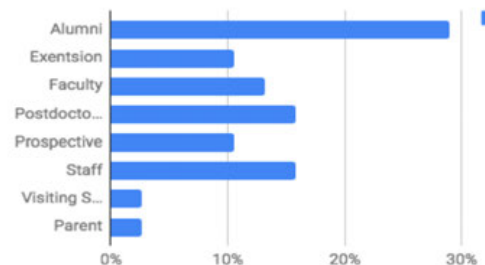
Faculty, Staff, and Other Groups' Issues

ISSUES	2016-17	2017-18
Communication	30%	32%
Policy/Procedure Not Clear	35%	24%
Treatment/Civility	22%	21%
Quality of Service	%	21%
Cases with facilitated resolution	10%	10%
Cases that required follow-up	23%	44%

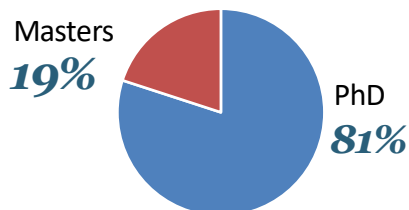
Undergraduate Visitors by Year



Other Visitors



Graduate Visitors by Degree Program





Trends & Issues

Grades & Academic Progress

Fifty-two 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 49% 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 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, 32% of our visitors stated academic progress was an area of concern, which is an increase from 21% 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 conflicts 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 fell to third place for undergraduates from second place in the previous year at 28%, down from 41%. It also fell from third place to sixth place for graduate students (28% to 20%).

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.

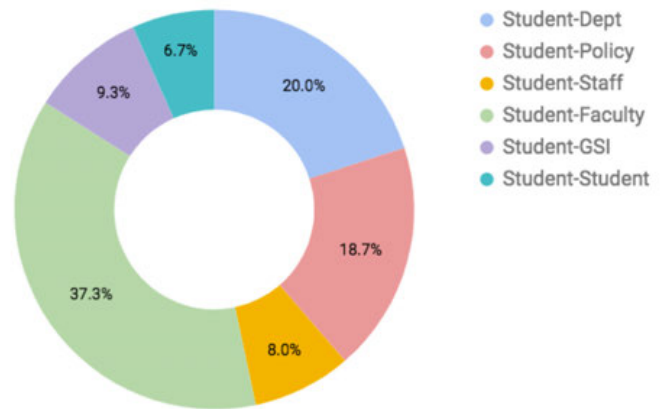
UC Berkeley is a large and complex university that is constantly undergoing growth and change as it strives to meet the needs of the student body. As staff transitions occur and organizational changes are sustained, it is important that updated procedures and policies are communicated to students. We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

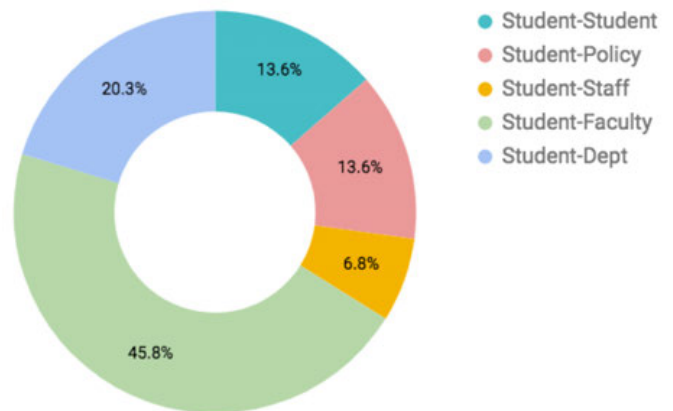
Financial Concerns

The issue of financial concerns was the fourth most reported concern for undergraduates and fifth for graduate students (27% and 23%, an increase of 2% 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 second 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, which can lead to a domino effect of other barriers including financial-related concerns, registration/ enrollment, and access to university services.

Treatment & Civility

Treatment & civility rose to sixth place from ninth place and remains a top issue (third 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, and stalking.