

Content

This annual report contains information regarding the operations of the Ombuds Office for Students & Postdoctoral Appointees (hereinafter "Ombuds Office" or "Office"). It provides data on the volume and general characteristics of its visitors, as well as detailed information on the types of concerns expressed by those visitors, all of which is used to inform its recommendations that can be found at the conclusion of this report.

Only quantitative data was used in the production of this report. The Office does, however, recognize that qualitative data is also an important component in it fully reflecting the experiences of its visitors. As such, it is in the process of developing a qualitative method for obtaining feedback and plans to introduce that option to visitors in the 2023-24 academic year.

Mission

The Ombuds Office serves as an informal dispute resolution resource that advocates for equality, 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 UC Berkeley Principles of Community.

Executive Summary

The Ombuds Office served **234 visitors** between July 1, 2022 and June 30, 2023. This represents almost an **8% increase** in visitors from the prior reporting year (RY), is **6% higher** than its current five-year average, and for the second consecutive year establishes a new mark as the Office's *second highest* count on record.

Some form of follow-up was requested and/or required for **38%** 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/or* consultations with campus partners to obtain additional information for visitors.

The most common concerns raised by undergraduate and graduate student visitors were about **academic progress, communication, grades, interpersonal behavior** from members of the U.C. Berkeley community, and **unclear policies and procedures**.

Faculty and staff consultations were roughly **11%** 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 63% of all student visitors and 46% of all visitors.

63%

37%

Graduate student visitors were 37% of all student visitors and 27% of all visitors.

Data Collection & Reporting

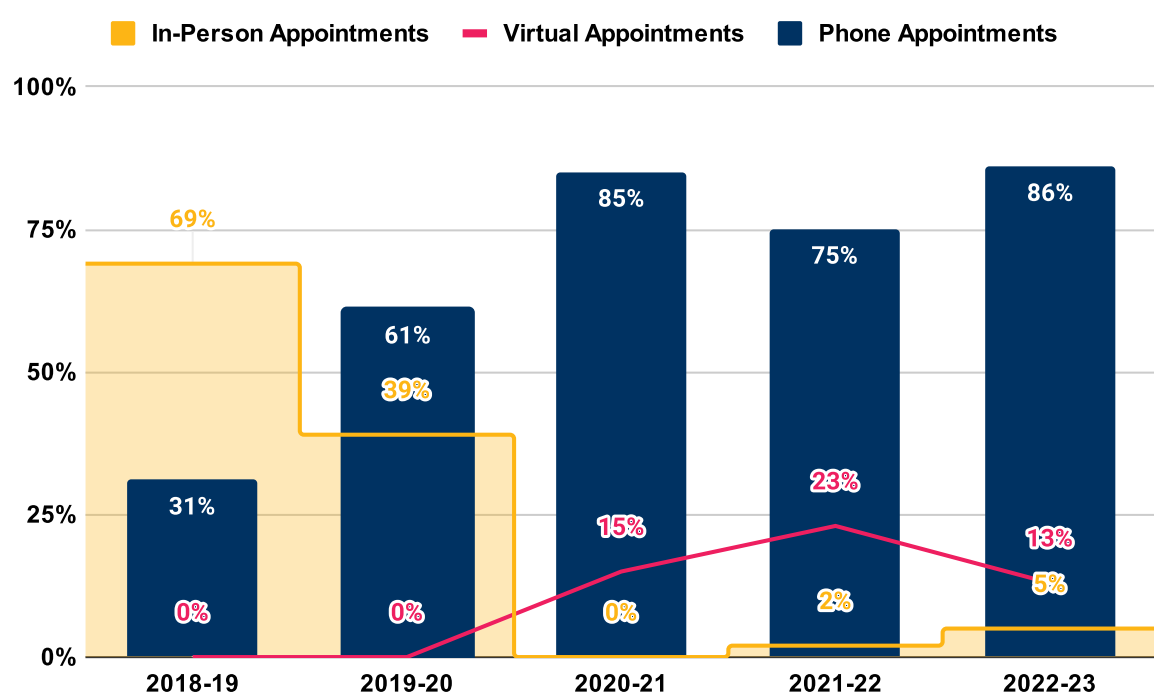
The Ombuds Office independently collects and compiles data from its visitors to spot and analyze trends that may require attention from the institution. To this end, visitors are given the option to voluntarily disclose their demographic information and are informed their responses are anonymous and will not be connected to their individual cases. Demographic data is only requested of student and postdoc visitors, and not of other parties wishing to consult on student and/or postdoc-related matters.

As an informal and confidential resource, the Office does not keep detailed records of specific cases or individual visitors. For historical comparison and reporting purposes it does maintain anonymous records (i.e., basic demographic and nature of concern information), but all uniquely identifying information about visitors is destroyed.

Visitors Appointments

Visitors to the Ombuds Office continue to overwhelmingly prefer phone appointments, a trend that unsurprisingly began at the onset of the global health crisis during RY 2019-20.

The preference for phone appointments was not true, however, in cases where the Ombuds Office facilitated a mediated conversation. Signaling a strong preference for personal interaction in these instances, 85% of Office mediations were held in-person, while the remaining 15% were conducted virtually.



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, 73% were either undergraduate or graduate students, 11% were faculty/staff, and the remaining 16% were largely an assortment of alumni, parents, and postdocs.

Services for All Visitors

	2022-23
Clarifying Policy/Procedure	67%
Referral	19%
Consultation	14%
Coaching	13%
Mediation	3%
Shuttle Diplomacy	2%
33% of visitors were rendered more than one type of service	

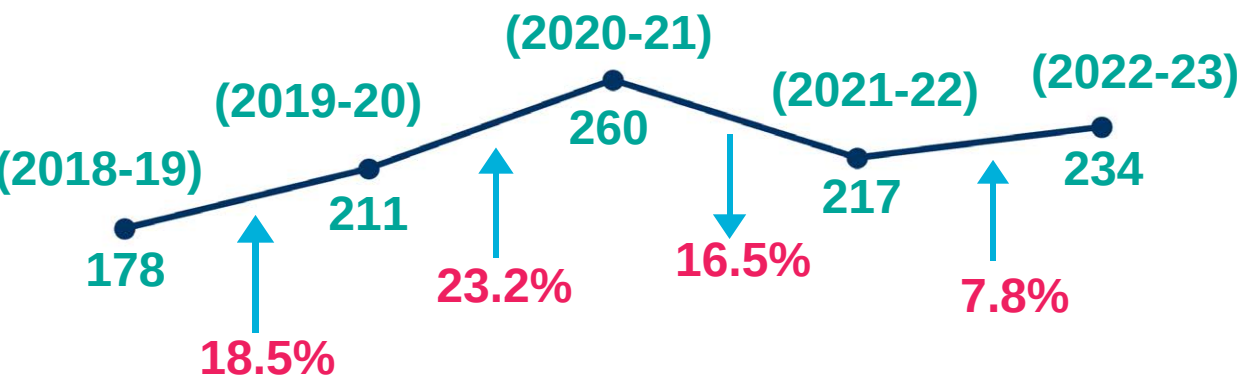
The Ombuds Office is intentionally geared toward fostering fair and impartial outcomes that reflect student success, make minimal use of administrative resources, reduce campus liability and exposure, and support an environment that furthers the university's mission, vision, and core values.

Beyond appointments with individual visitors, the Office performed 19 outreach events and/or trainings for just over 875 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 individual or group to use its services. Visitors must solicit its assistance voluntarily.

All Visitors

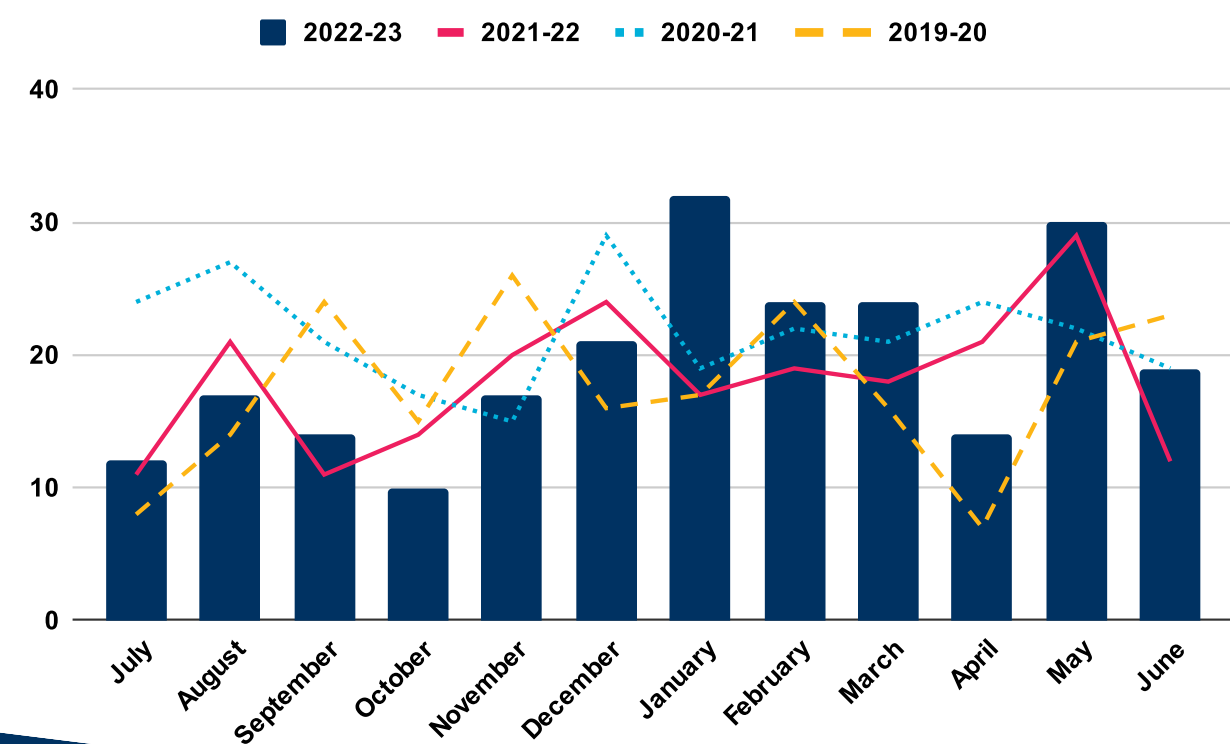
234 visitors worked with the Ombuds Office between July 2022 and June 2023. This is nearly an 8% increase from the previous reporting year and the fourth time in the last five years that the Office saw an increase in its numbers.



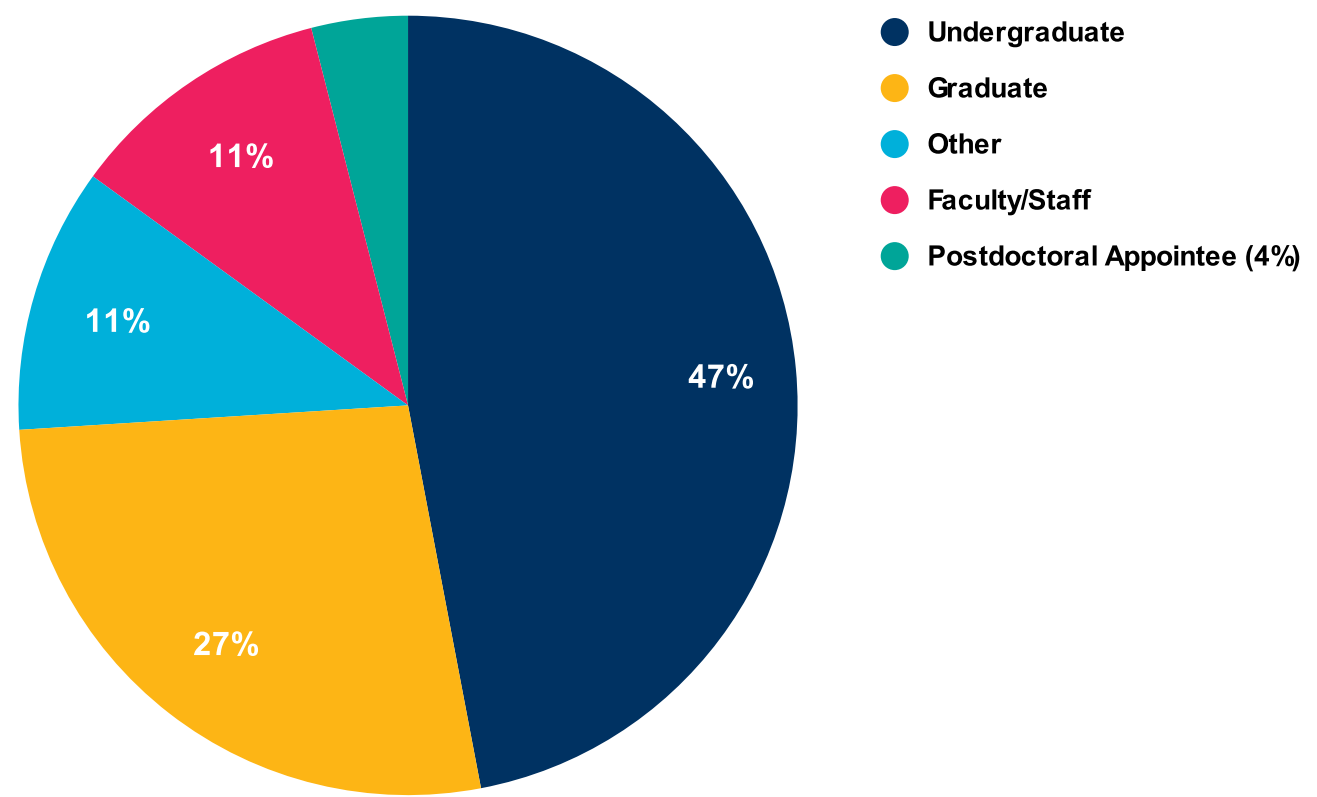
In consecutive years the Ombuds Office met with its second highest number of total visitors in its recorded history. These numbers continue a four-year trend of unprecedented 200+ visitor totals.

With the remarkable increases in its numbers in recent years, it is fair to ask: who are these new visitors and what is bringing them to the Office? Perhaps unsurprisingly, the profiles and concerns of those visitors remain proportionally consistent with recent historical trends. Since RY 2017-18 the annual percentages of students, postdocs and all other visitors have landed somewhere between 74-80%, 2-5%, and 20-25%, respectively. And while most visitors raise multiple issues during their appointments, the majority reported difficulties in at least one or more of the oft-cited concerns of communication, grades, and unclear policies and procedures.

So while the Office may be seeing more visitors, it is largely more of the same when it comes to who and about what.

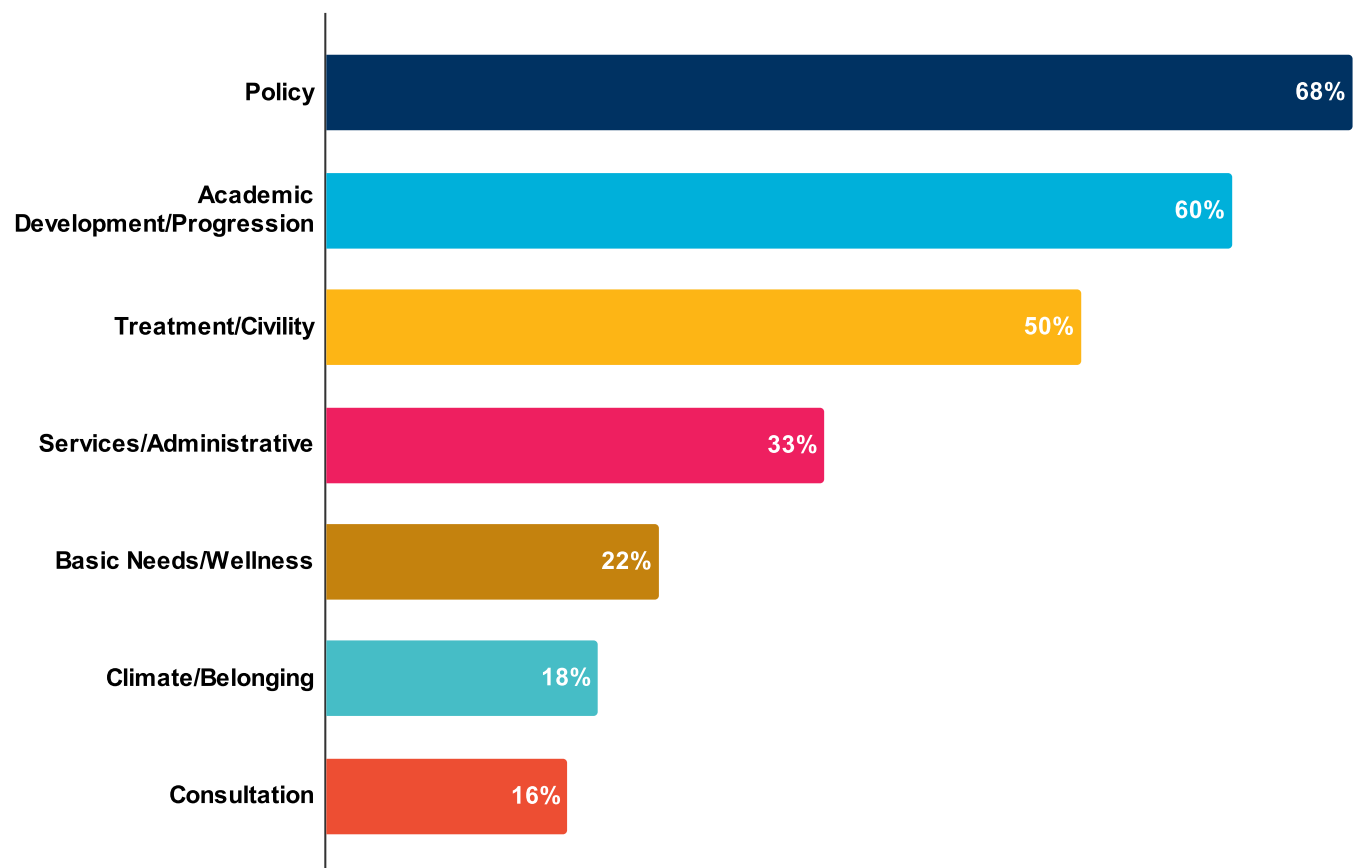


All Visitors Served



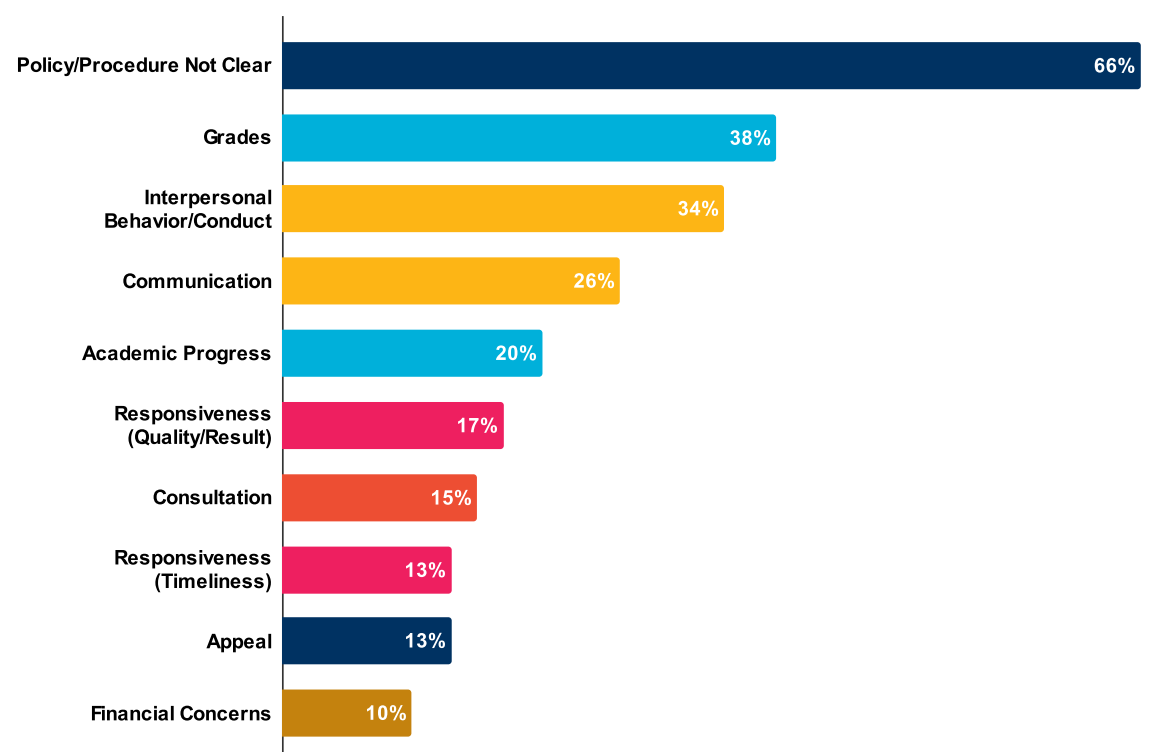
All Visitors Concerns: Main Categories

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



All Visitors Concerns: Top 10 Subcategories*

98% of all visitors reported more than one type of concern



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

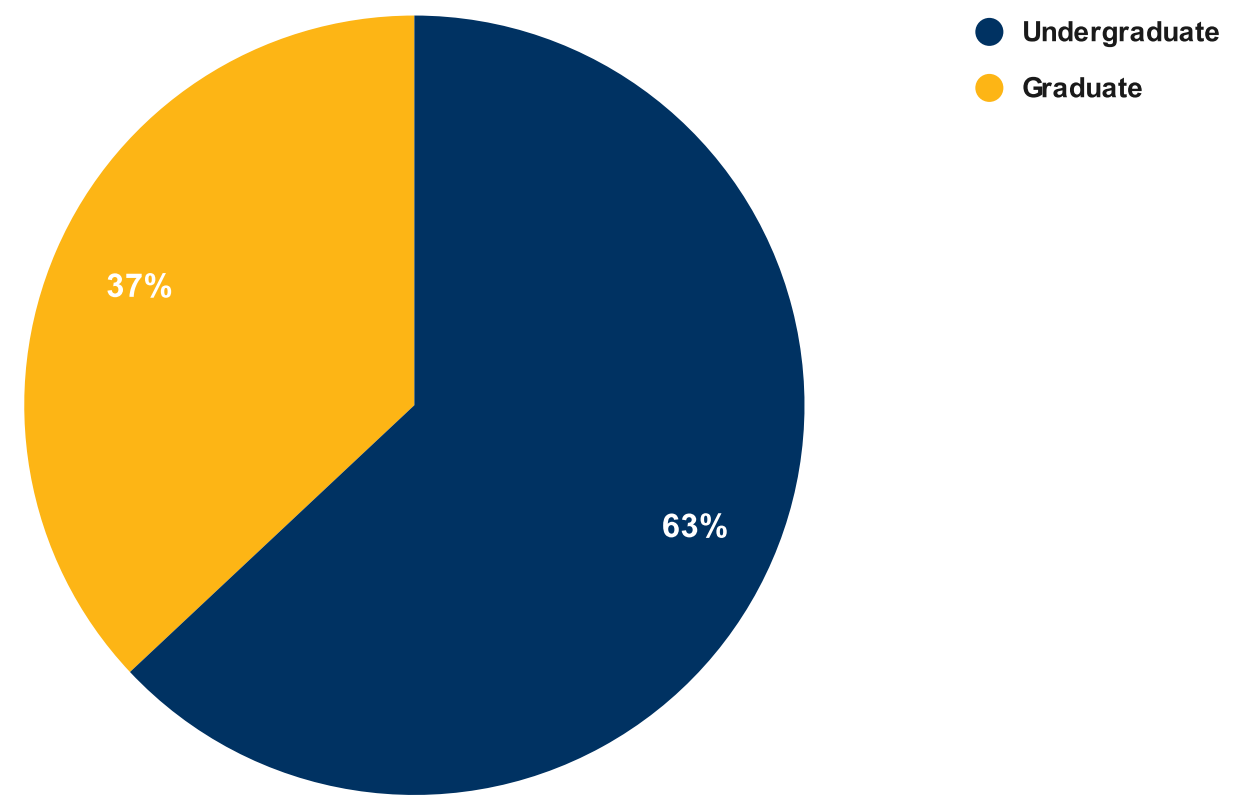
Student Visitors

Undergraduate and graduate students represented 74% of the Ombuds Office's 234 visitors for RY 2022-23. This closely reflects the Office's historical average of 77%.

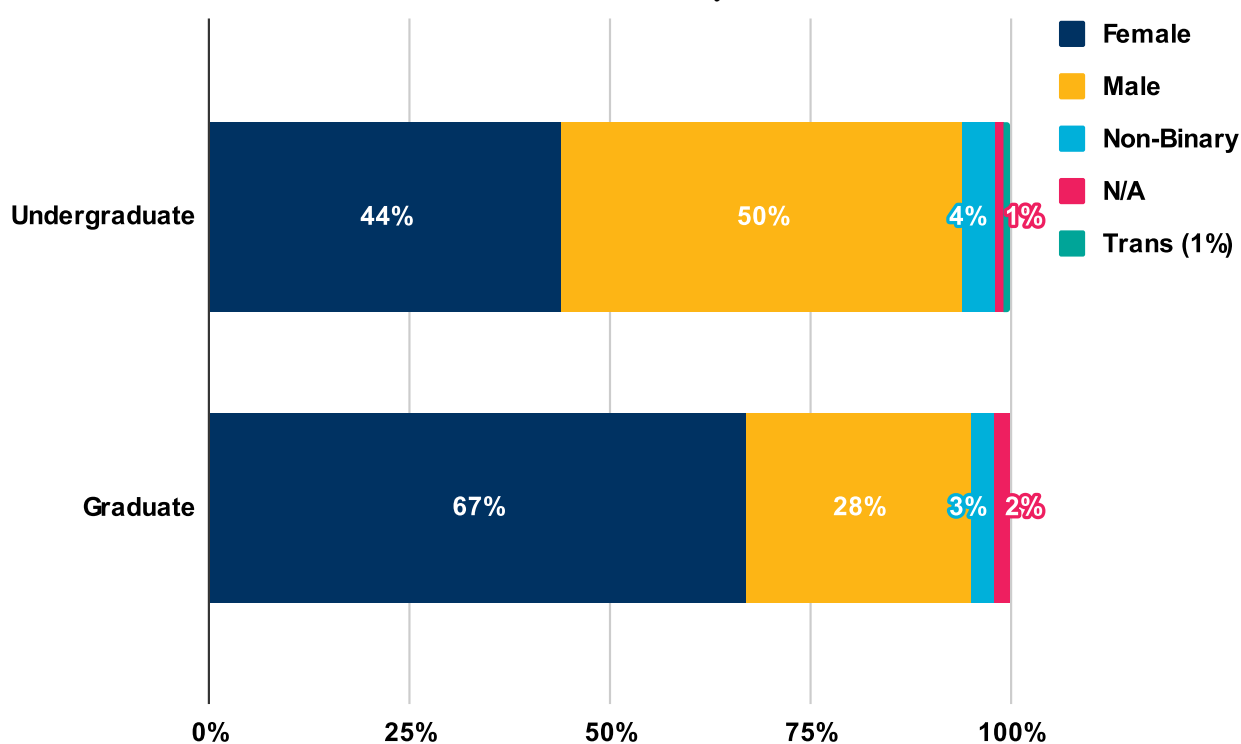
For primary reasons of consistency and simplicity, the data on this page reflects that only of visitors that were *current* undergraduate and graduate student visitors at the time of their appointments. Alumni and UCBX student information is accounted for in the "Other Visitors" section of the report.

Campus-Wide figures for Race/Ethnicity/National Origin were obtained from Cal Answers. Please note that the race of international students is not reported by the university. The Office, however, does collect and include the race of its international student visitors in its reporting.

Student Visitors Served

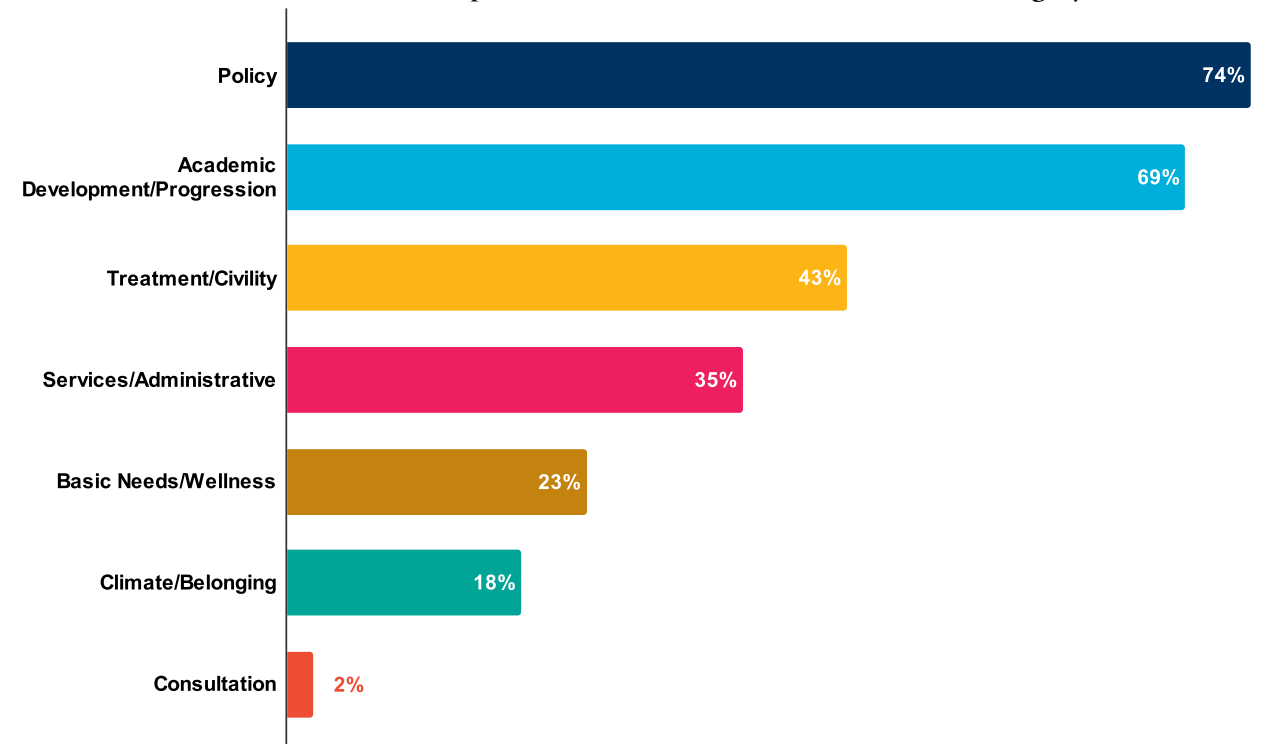


Student Visitors by Gender



All Student Concerns: Main Categories

91% of student visitors reported a concern from more than one main category



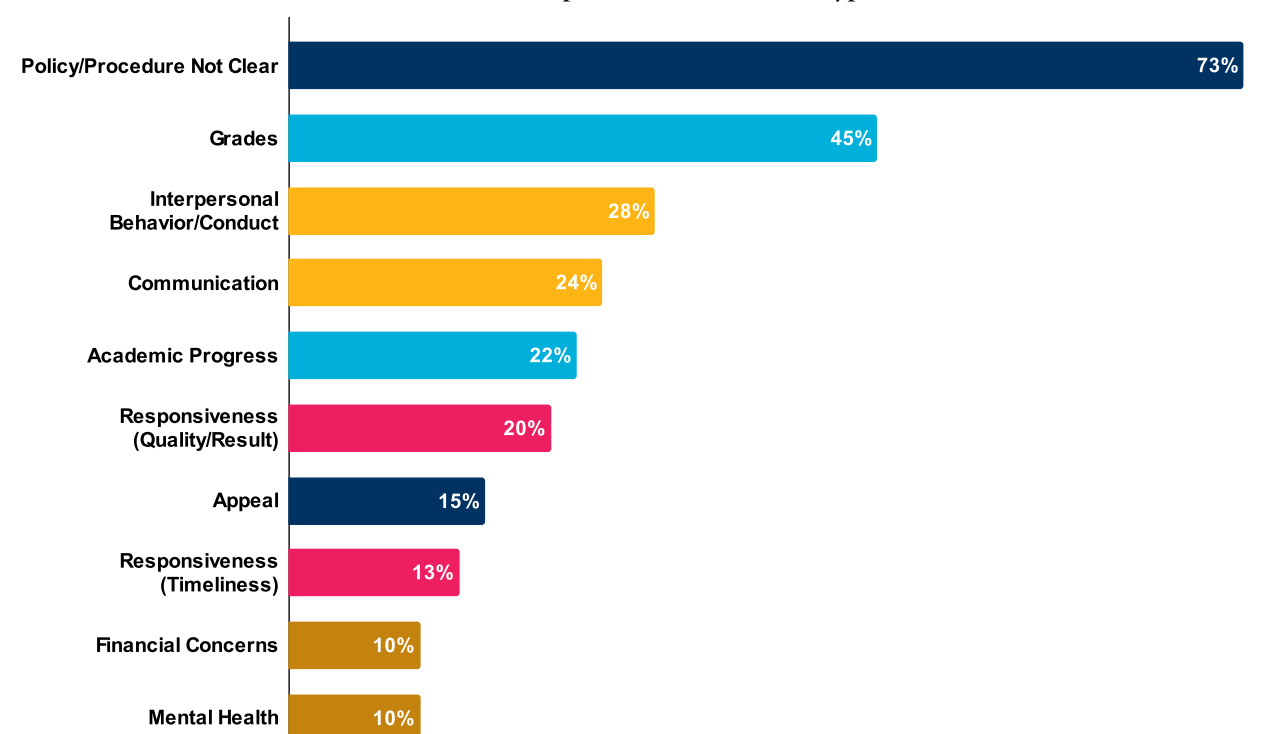
Student Visitors by Race/Ethnicity/National Origin

	Undergraduate Students		Graduate Students	
	22-23	Campus*	22-23	Campus*
Asian/Asian American	29%	40%	25%	27%
Black/African American	6%	4%	14%	7%
Hispanic/Latinx	5%	19%	8%	13%
Native American/Alaska Native	2%	1%	2%	1%
Pacific Islander	3%	>1%	2%	>1%
South Asian/Southwest Asian/North African	24%	5%	8%	4%
White/Caucasian	31%	27%	55%	42%
Other	38%	N/A	13%	N/A
Declined to State/Unknown	6%	4%	0%	6%

35% of undergraduate student visitors identified as more than one race/ethnicity/national origin
 19% of graduate student visitors identified as more than one race/ethnicity/national origin
 *Campus figures are averages of Fall/Spring enrollment data obtained from Cal Answers
 Per UC and federal reporting guidelines, race/ethnicity of international students is not counted in campus figures

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 47% of *all* visitors and 63% of all *student* visitors, undergraduate students were, for the fifteenth consecutive year, the most frequent type of visitor. The concerns expressed by undergraduate visitors were again in alignment with historical trends. More often than not, they contacted the Office to discuss a grade dispute they had with faculty members. These concerns naturally led to larger conversations about campus policies and procedures, most commonly those pertaining to the Academic Senate Procedures for Grade Appeals and the Center for Student Conduct.

While much of the undergraduate visitor data was consistent with previous years, at least one interesting finding was that 93% of undergraduates conducted their communications with the Ombuds Office in part, if not exclusively, over the phone. A small, but significant difference from the 86% average of all visitors (*see, p. 2*).

Undergraduate Student Parties Involved

	2022-23
Faculty	58%
Policy	14%
Department	12%
Student	8%
Staff	5%
Graduate Student Instructor	4%
Other	3%
3% of undergraduate visitors identified more than one party	

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

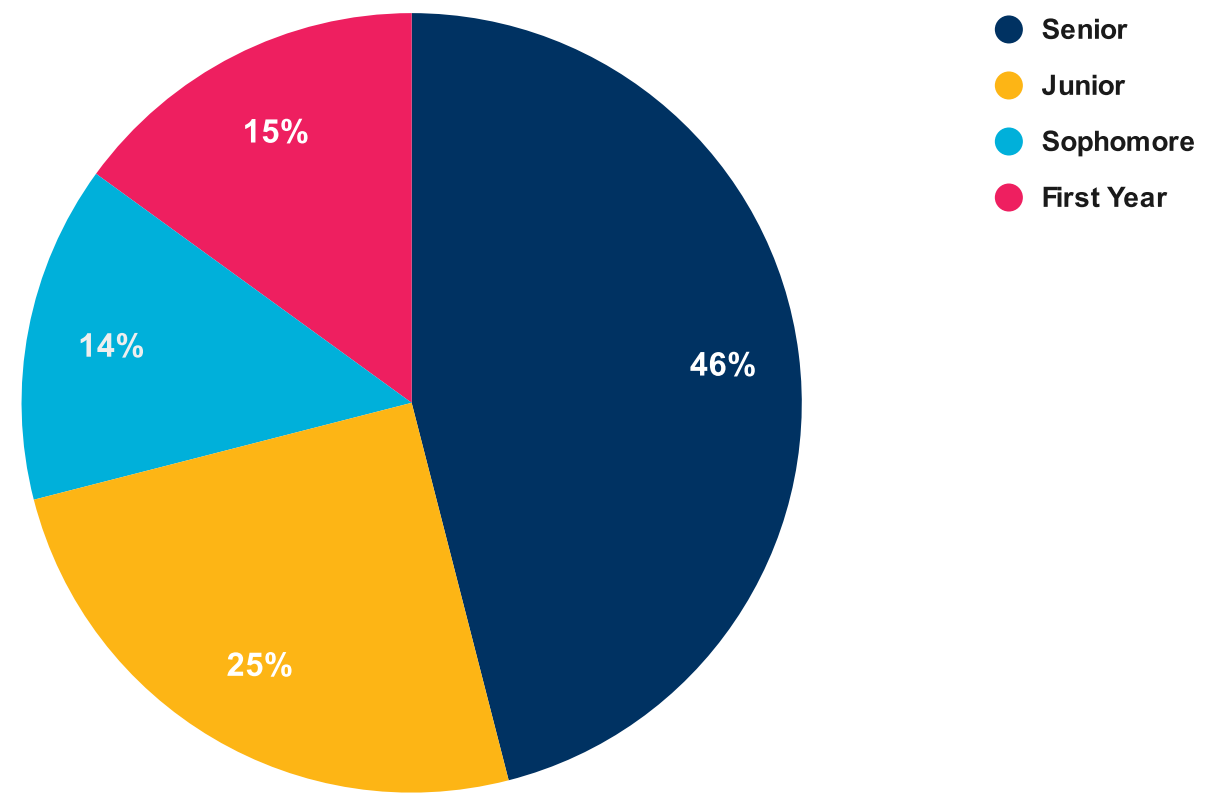
33%

Undergraduate Student Visitors that received Follow-up

3%

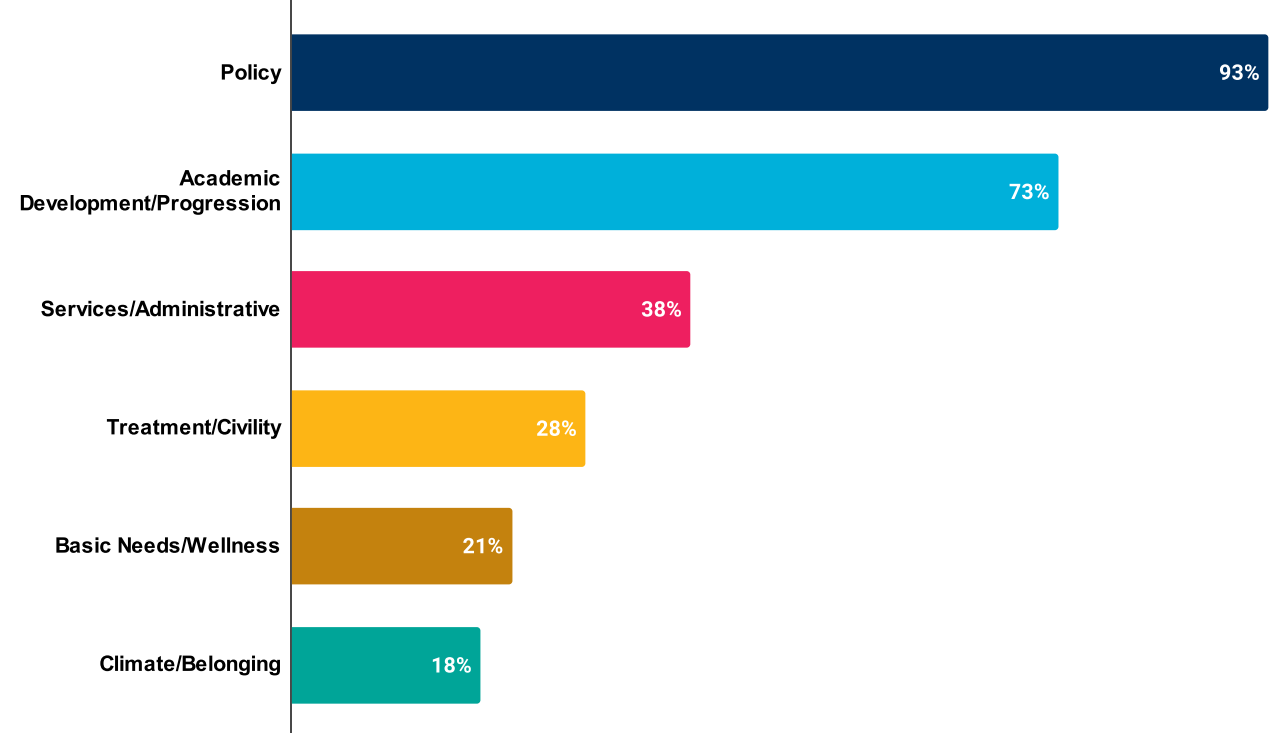
Undergraduate Student Visitors that received a Facilitated Resolution

Undergraduate Student Visitors Served



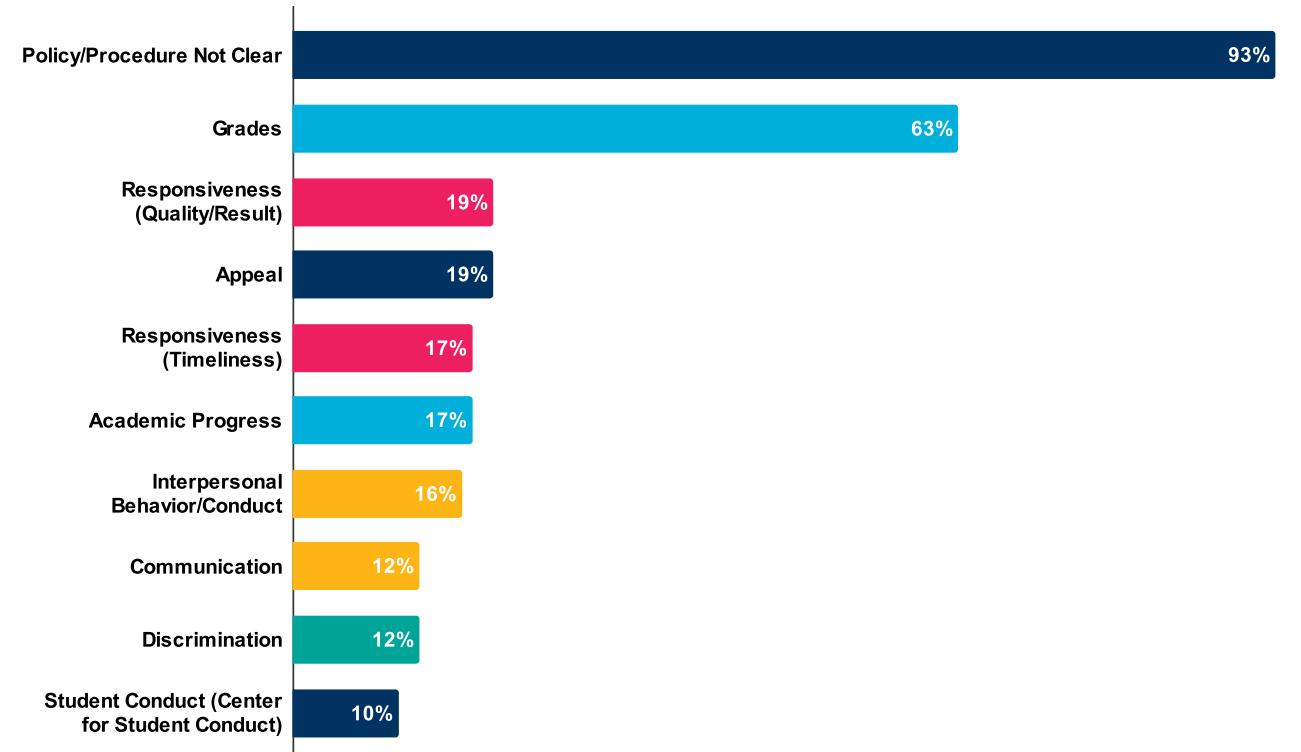
Undergraduate Student Concerns: Main Categories

95% 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

From a numbers standpoint, graduate student visitors were on par with prior reporting years. From a concerns standpoint, however, the Ombuds Office saw a 15% increase in *Treatment/Civility* cases. Interestingly, the Office also observed the number of reported conflicts between graduate students and other students more than doubled from 14% to 33% (see table below). These findings can be explained in part by the natural variation in concerns that occur from year-to-year. But in conjunction with the academic workers' strike, another plausible explanation is that the strike contributed to more interpersonal conflicts not only between students and faculty, but also between graduate students and other students.

As evidenced by the aforementioned increase in *Treatment/Civility* concerns, graduate student cases tend to be more complex than undergraduate cases because they often involve discord in long-term, evaluative relationships. This includes those with advisors, chairs, and dissertation committees. Because of this, graduate student cases are historically more likely to require follow-up and more often result in some form of facilitated resolution (e.g., mediation).

Graduate Student Parties Involved

	2022-23
Faculty	41%
Student	33%
Department	13%
Policy	8%
Staff	3%
Other	2%
3% of graduate visitors identified no other party	

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

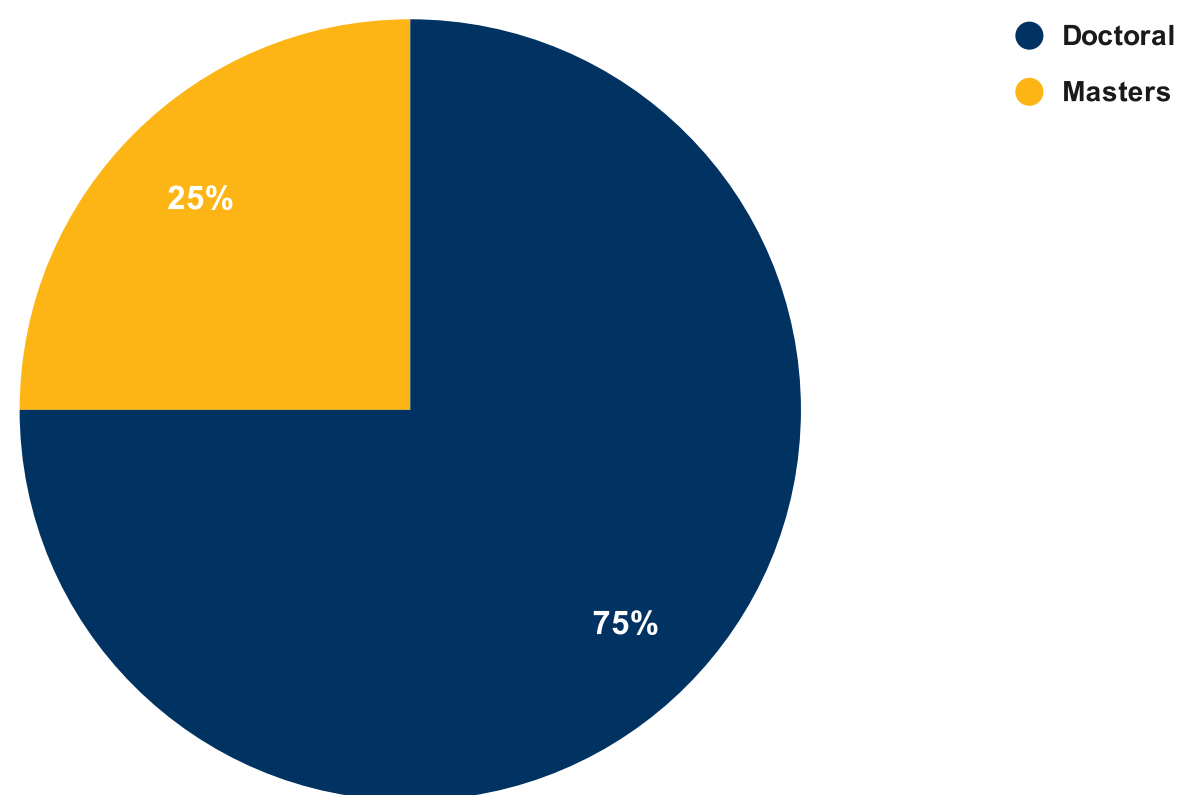
48%

Graduate Student Visitors that received Follow-up

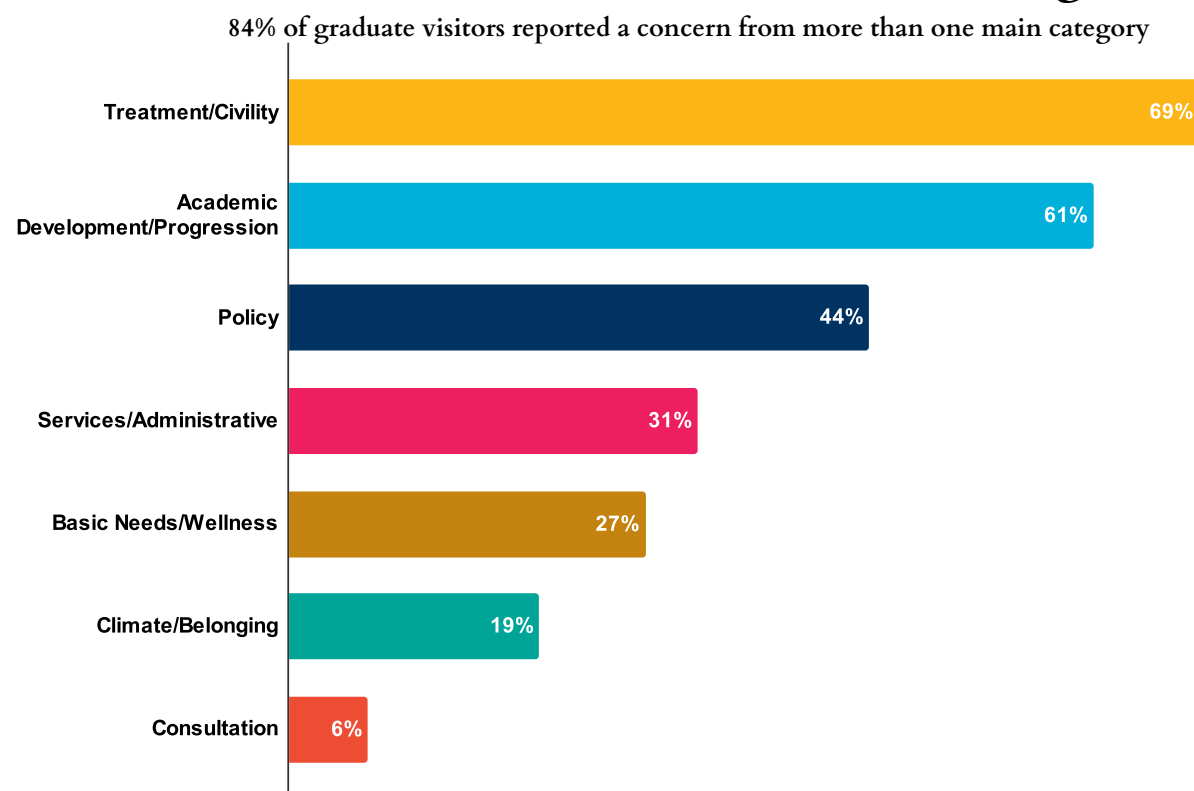
6%

Graduate Student Visitors that received a Facilitated Resolution

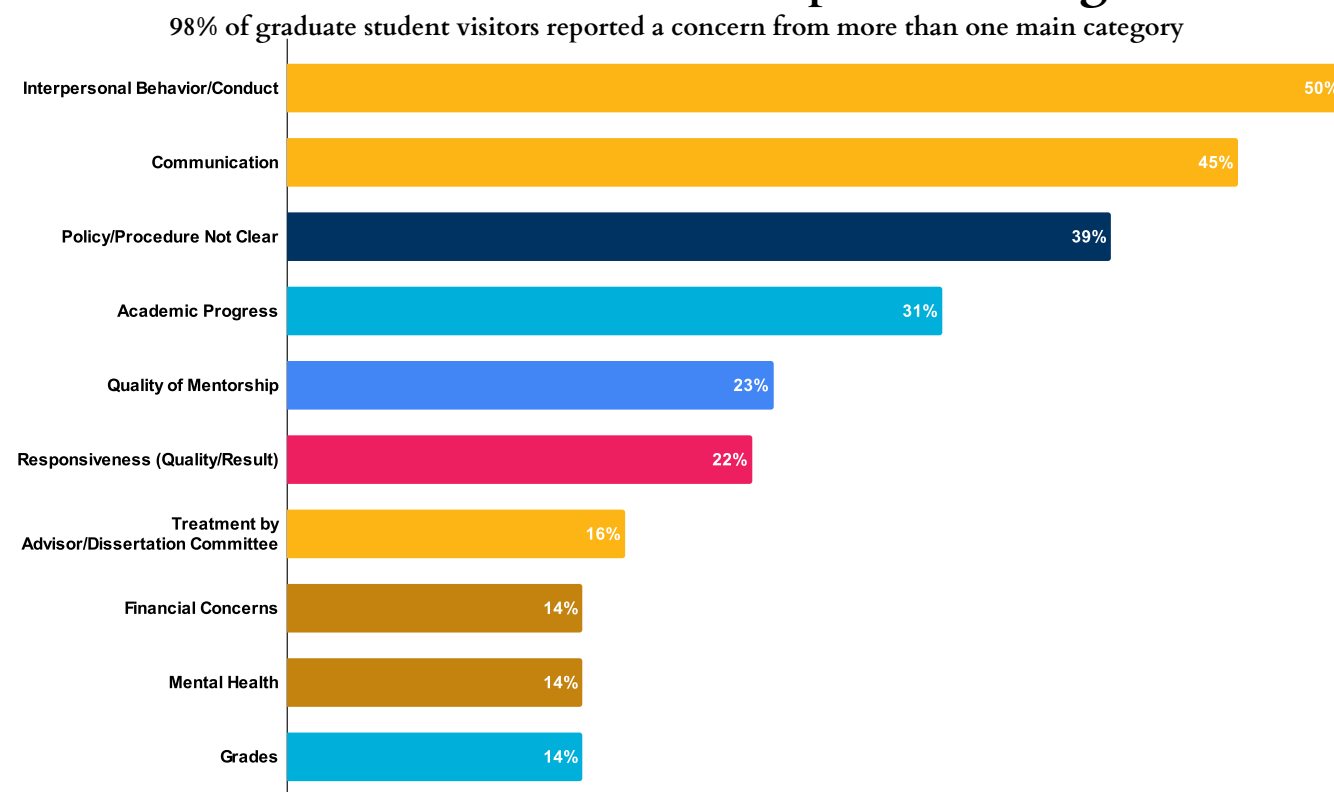
Graduate Student Visitor Served



Graduate Student Concerns: Main Categories



Graduate Student Concerns: Top 10 Subcategories*



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

Other Visitors

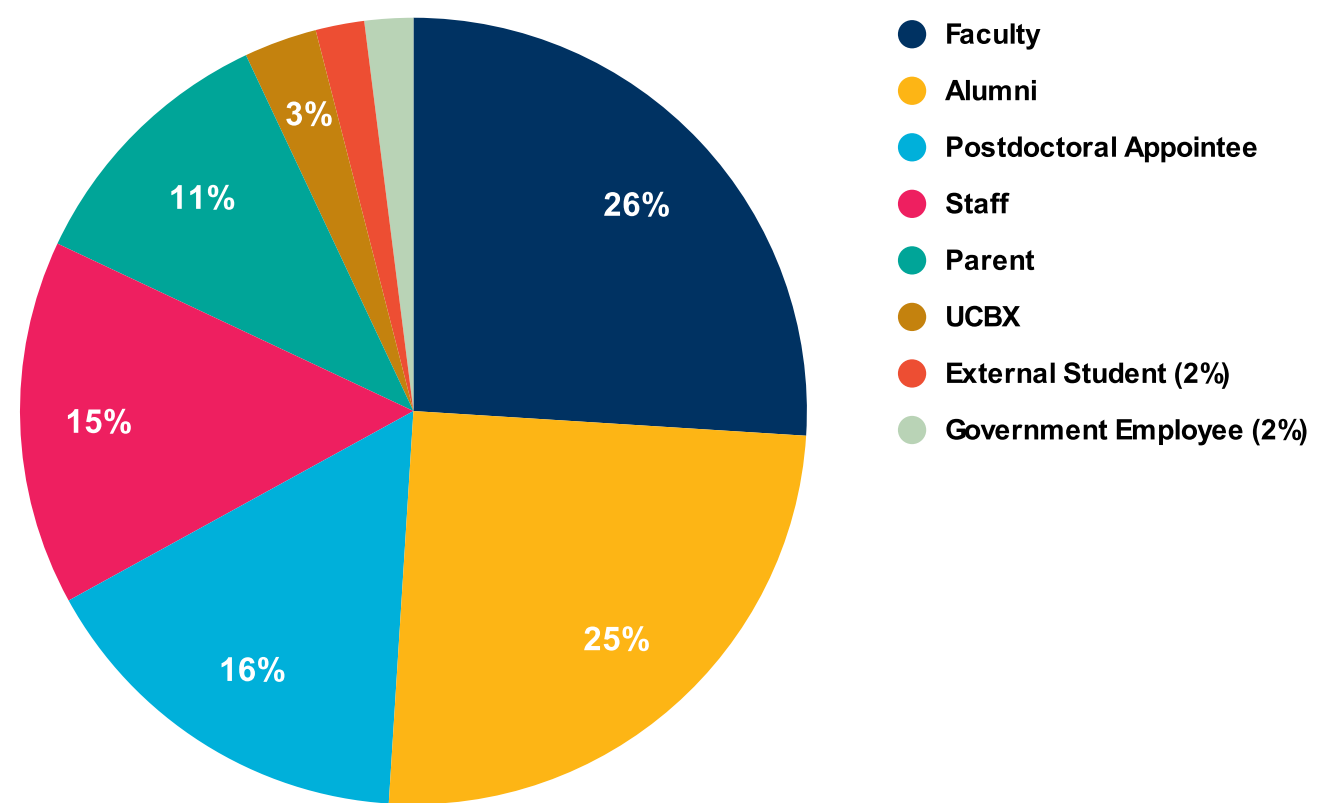
Inclusive of alumni, UCBX students, and postdocs, any visitors who were not current, degree-seeking students at the time of their visits were classified for this report as *Other* visitors. This population represented 26% of all visitors to the Ombuds Office this reporting year.

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 connected to their affiliations with the university.

Among these visitors, a frequent, but unassuming population the Ombuds Office serves is alumni. For the purposes of this report, alumni numbers include both those that did *and* did not earn degrees from UC Berkeley. While some of these visitors have not attended the university in several years, many are recent graduates with lingering grade disputes.* Alumni visitors often, but not always, have questions and concerns that resemble those of current undergraduate students.

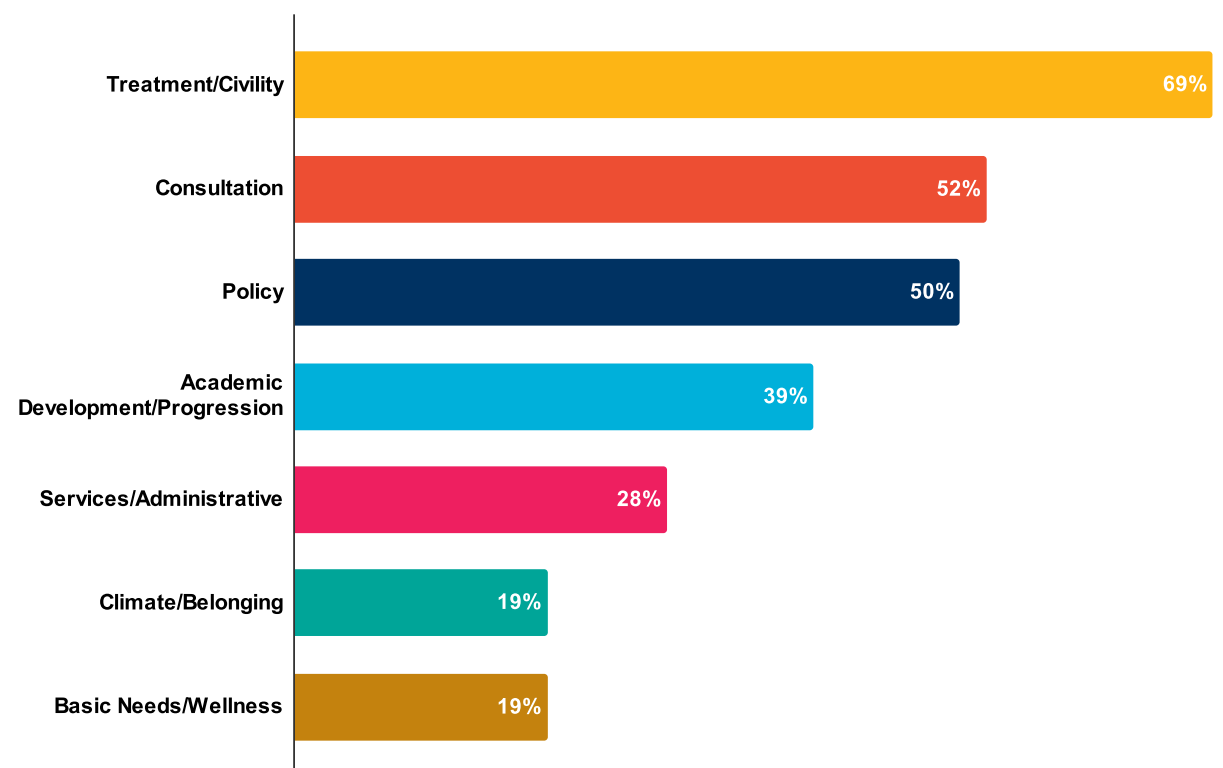
While listed in its title, postdocs are an often overlooked group served by the Ombuds Office. Like graduate students, they can be a particularly vulnerable population of visitors because of their needs to establish and maintain positive relationships with their principal investigators (PIs). Postdoc visitors represented 4% of the Office's visitors, slightly higher than the Office's five-year average of 3%.

Other Visitors Served



Other Visitor Concerns: Main Categories

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



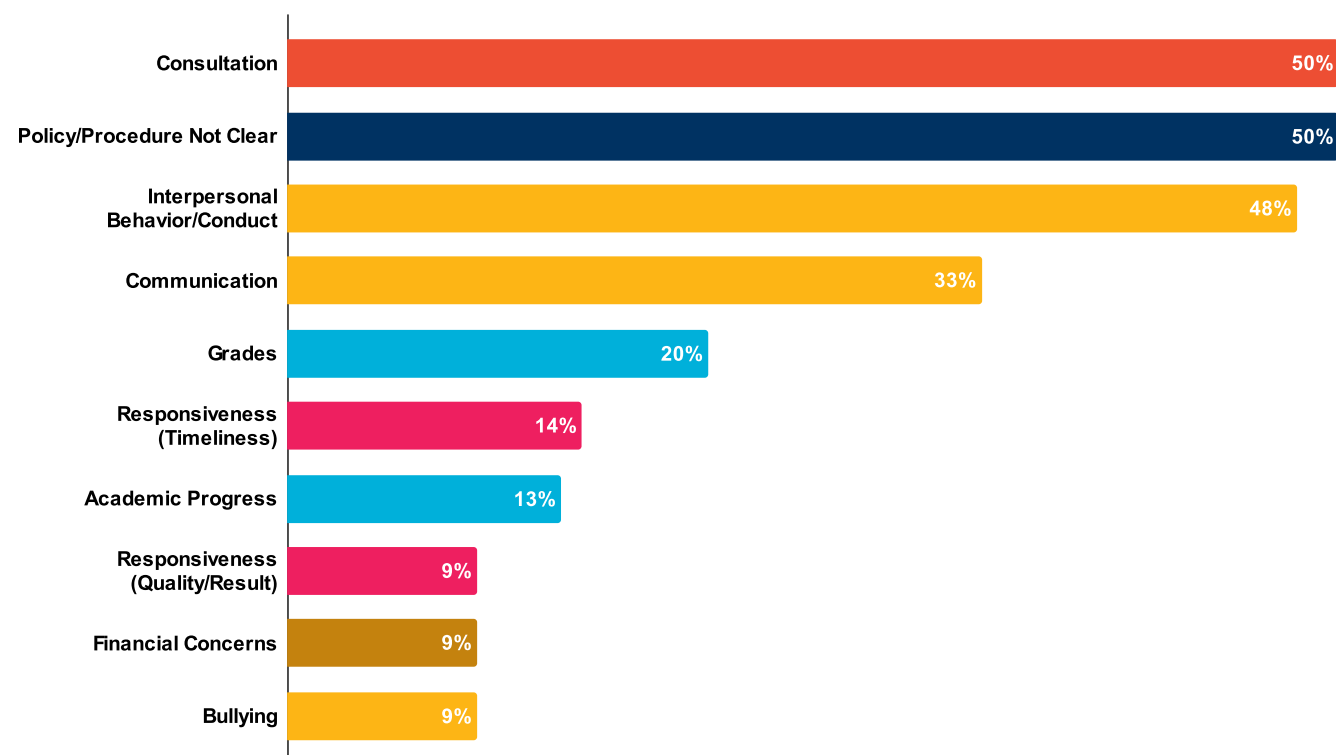
Parties Involved for Other Visitors

	2022-23
Student	41%
Faculty	23%
Department	13%
Policy	11%
Other	8%
Staff	3%
GSI	2%

*The Academic Senate *Procedures for Grade Appeals* policy provides students one year to initiate the grade grievance process. This is a formal process that is facilitated by the academic department home to the course in question. Students are not precluded by graduation from participating.

Other Visitor Concerns: Top 10 Subcategories*

97% 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 of the campus community and the concerns presented by its visitors during the previous reporting year. While not all visitor concerns 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 improving the experiences of the student and postdoc populations.

- **Embrace incrementalism and step-by-step progress when strategizing how to improve large-scale discord between departments and students & postdocs, including those strained as a result of the academic workers' strike**

- While the Office annually receives a handful of these concerns, it saw an increased amount after the onset of the strike in November 2022. With both sides of the dispute reporting (and continuing to report) a disintegration of trust between university administration and its academic workforce, the Office has been asked how the damage that has been done can be repaired, often with the unsaid wish that it happen as soon as possible. As is usually the case in these matters, there is an understandable desire to fix the problem as quickly as possible. Conflicts of this magnitude, however, if resolved at all, are usually fixed incrementally rather than in one fell swoop. This is because larger conflicts are often made up of many smaller ones between unique individuals with equally unique goals and needs. Whether it be related to the strike or otherwise, leaders of departments seeking to solve problems of this ilk should be open to tailored approaches and be prepared to call upon reserves of patience and perseverance to see themselves through the healing process. For its part as an informal conflict resolution resource, the Ombuds Office remains available to consult with all parties experiencing difficulties of this kind.

- **Ensure that students suspected of violations of academic integrity are provided fair and equal treatment to complete coursework prior to an informal resolution or a determination of fact by the Center for Student Conduct**

- An alarming number of students reported that, after being suspected of academic dishonesty, their instructors were unnecessarily and prematurely punitive. At least one student reported being verbally abused and multiple others shared they were interrupted and/or prevented from completing exams. Evidence of guilt notwithstanding, such practices are inconsistent with the guidance provided by the Center for Student Conduct and the UC Berkeley *Principles of Community*. Reports like these suggest faculty and their campus departments could benefit from occasionally revisiting how to appropriately work with students in these instances.

- **Review availability and access to important policy and procedural information**

- Some of the most common questions asked by visitors are about departmental policies and procedures (see, p. 3). More specifically, many are seeking instructions for how to request policy exceptions. Both students and Office staff have observed that this information is often either difficult to find or entirely non-existent. Additionally, as it pertains to grade appeals, department leadership (*i.e.*, chairs or those with equivalent authority) is also inconsistently identified. University departments (academic *and* administrative) would be well-served to regularly review their websites to ensure this information is up-to-date and easily accessible.