



## **2010-2011 ANNUAL REPORT**

### **INTRODUCTION**

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.

### **MEDIATION**

Mediation is an important part of the work of the Ombuds Office. Managing contentious situations can be very challenging, and having a third party mediate these potentially difficult conversations fosters a more objective environment where creative, sustainable resolution can occur. Mediation allows for all parties to be heard and seen, which is often what people in conflict are searching for. The Ombudsperson conducted 39 mediations and facilitated resolutions during the 2010-2011 academic year. While this is an area that we've just started tracking, we look forward to sharing comparative data in years to come.

### **OUTREACH**

While the daily assistance provided to students, postdocs, and others to respond to difficult situations effectively is essential, the Ombuds Office must also proactively maintain good relationships with campus administration, faculty, and staff and ensure broad campus understanding of the purpose and role of the Student Ombuds Office.

Unfortunately, due to staff transitions, our outreach efforts were minimal for the past academic year. As we envision the coming year, outreach is an area of high priority for the Ombuds Office, and we are planning a more focused approach to increase our reach and visibility on campus.



## **TRAINING**

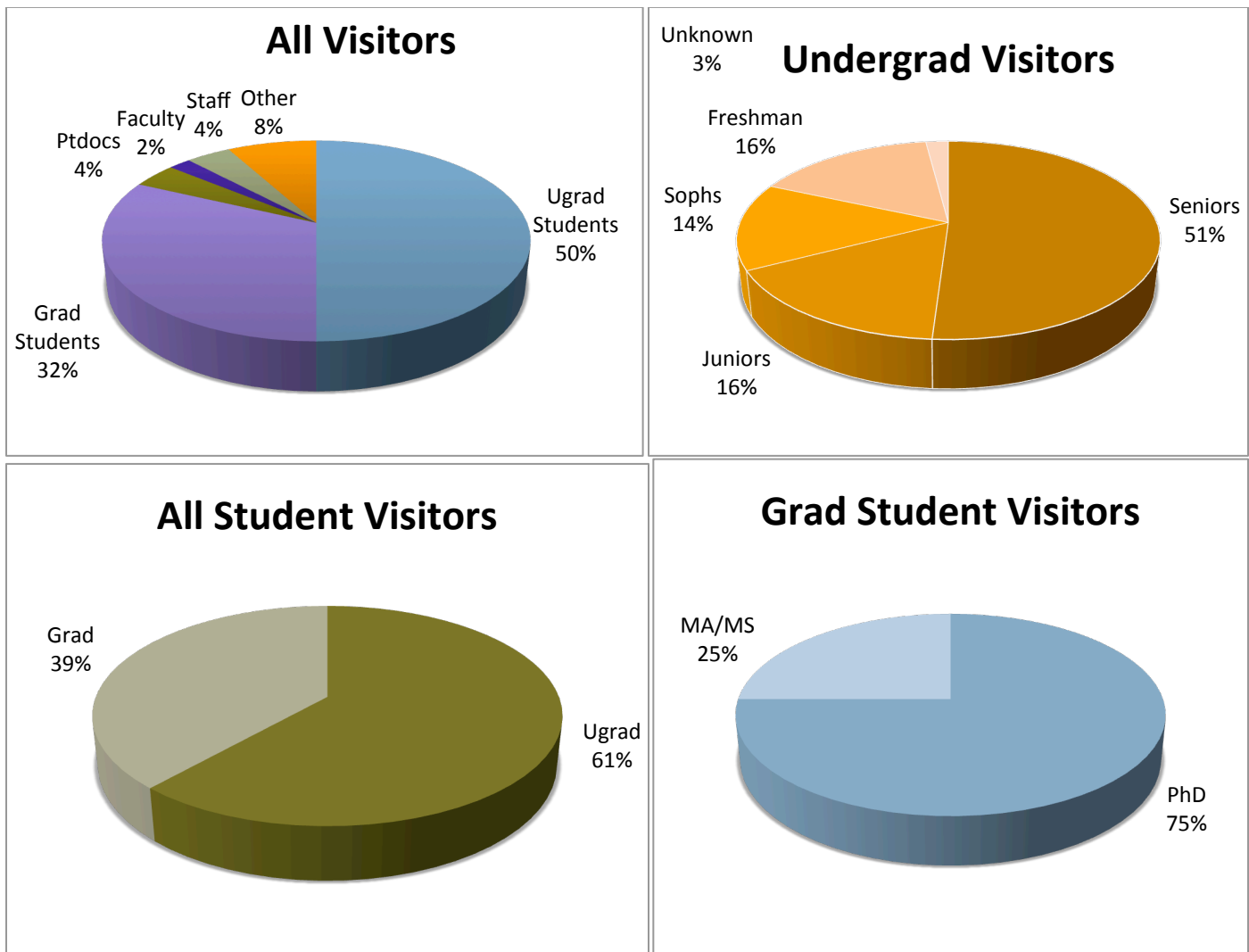
The Cal community is a dynamic environment with diverse populations that all bring their own styles and ways of being in the world. Those ways and behaviors can conflict with one another. Part of the work of the Ombudsperson is facilitating trainings that teach conflict resolution techniques, and how to have difficult conversations that are more productive and less argumentative. These trainings expand the capacity of intact groups and inform campus populations on how to communicate with a greater degree of respect, integrity and compassion. This year, the Ombudsperson participated in various panels and trainings, including CalServe/Bridges, Residential Life Staff Training and the Graduate Student Instructors.



## VISITORS TO THE STUDENT OMBUDS OFFICE

All of the information in this report is based on the number of new cases or issues brought to the Student Ombuds Office in 2010-2011. While some of those issues involved just one phone consultation or visit to the office, many required additional appointments, meetings with other parties, and/or phone calls, and some cases continued for several months. On average, 28% of the monthly caseload was made up of issues continuing from previous months. In addition, about 80% of the time spent on cases each month was spent on in-office appointments. The remaining time was dedicated to phone consultations and follow-up meetings with the student and/or other parties involved.

Between July 1, 2010, and June 30, 2011, 137 individuals contacted the Student Ombuds Office for assistance with new issues. While the majority of the visitors were undergraduate and graduate students, we also assisted postdoctoral appointees, as well as faculty and staff that had student-related concerns, and other community members such as recent graduates, alumni, and parents.



59% of the visitors to the Student Ombuds Office were women and 41% were men. Campus-wide, the split is 54% women and 46% men. Undergraduate students made up 61% of the student visitors and graduate students made up 39% although undergrads are 71% of the total UC Berkeley student population and grads are 29%.



**DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION (7/2010 – 6/2011)**

When students and postdocs come in for an appointment, we ask them if they would be willing to provide demographic information. Participation is voluntary and the information is kept anonymous. The information below is based on new visitors only.

Self-Reported Ethnicity Information

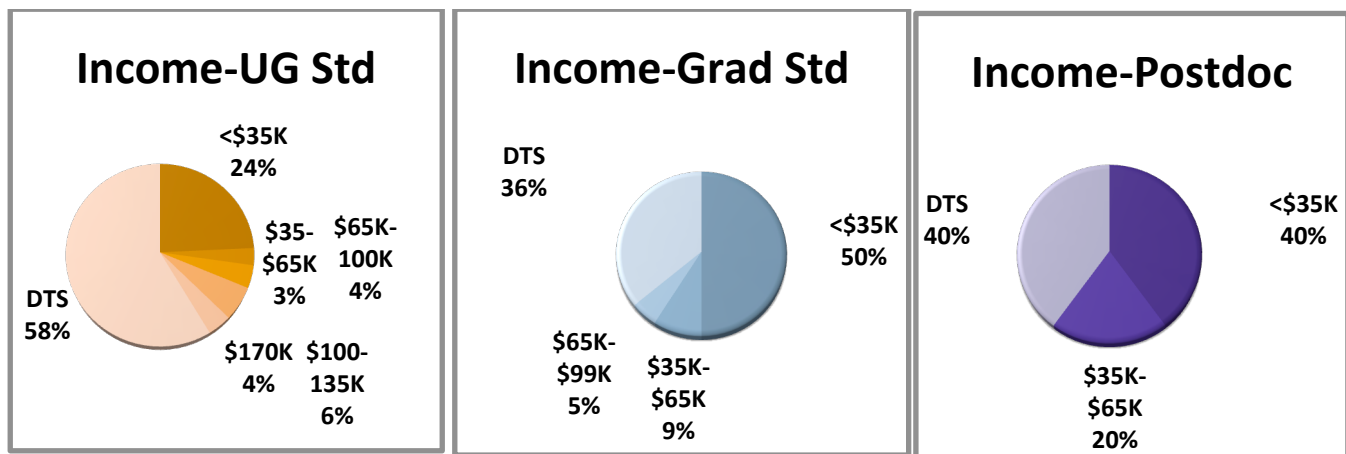
2010-2011

	UG	Grad	Ptdocs
Af/AfAm	3%		
As/AsAm	4%	16%	
Hist/Chic/Lat	13%	11%	
White	19%	32%	40%
Mixed Race	9%	5%	
Other	3%	2%	
Not Given	49%	34%	60%

2009-2010

	UG	Grad	Ptdocs
Af/AfAm	14%	4%	
Am Ind	2%		
As/AsAm	17%	15%	34%
Hist/Chic/Lat	5%	35%	
White	24%	15%	
Mixed Race	2%	15%	
Other	2%	4%	
Not Given	33%	12%	66%

Self-Reported Financial Information



**47% of undergrad visitors, 88% of graduate student visitors, and 100% of postdoc visitors consider themselves to be financially independent from parents/guardians.**



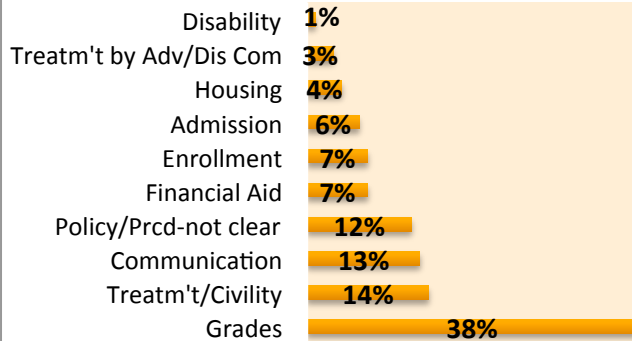
## ISSUES BROUGHT TO THE STUDENT OMBUDS OFFICE (7/2010 – 6/2011)

We currently track a wide range of issues, including the following:

Academic Dishonesty, Academic Probation, Academic Progress, Admission, Assault/Harassment, Career Path, Communication, Compensation/Bft, Compensation/Fellowship, Consultation, Dept/Org Climate, Disability, Discrimination, Dismissal, Diversity-Related, Enrollment, Facilities, Financial Aid, Financial Concerns, Grades, Health/Safety, Housing, Policy/Pracd-not clear, Policy/Pracd-not followed, Quality of Service, Rape/Assault, Readmission, Registration, Religious Accommodation, Residency, Responsiveness/Timeliness, Sexual Harassment, Student Conduct, Treatment by Advisor/Dissertation Committee, and Treatment/Civility.

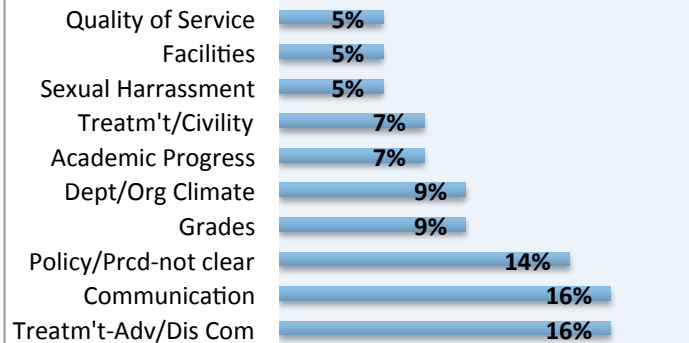
The most common issues or conflicts vary by group:

### Undergrad Issues



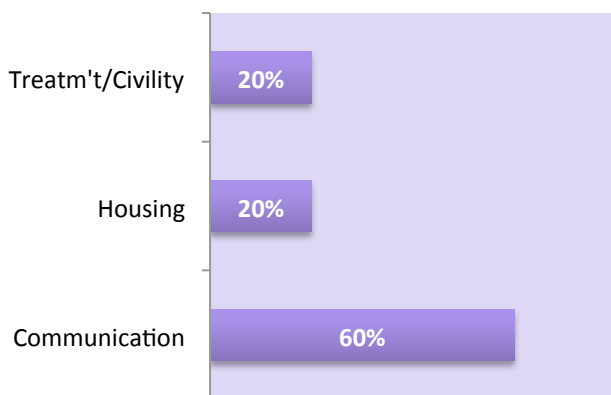
>100% due to multiple issues per visitor

### Grad Student Issues

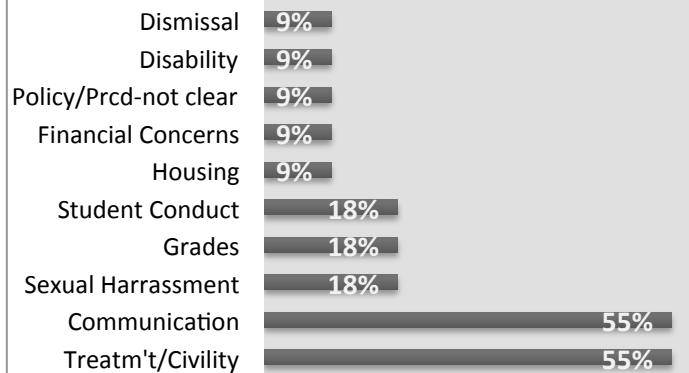


>100% due to multiple issues per visitor

### Postdoc Issues



### Faculty/Staff/Other Issues





## THE OMBUDS OFFICE FOR STUDENTS AND POSTDOCTORAL APPOINTEES

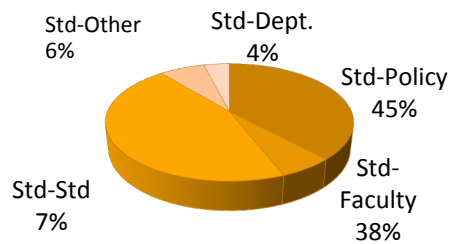
Most Common Issues compared to our previous reports.

Undergraduate Most Common Issues	7/1/10-6/30/11	7/1/09-6/30/10	7/1/08-6/30/09
Grades	38%	33%	11%
Treatm't/Civility	14%	16%	17%
Communication**	13%		
Policy/Pracd-not clear	12%	17%	26%
Financial Aid**	7%		
Enrollment	7%	11%	1%
Admission**	6%		
Housing	4%	8%	7%
Treatm't by Adv/Dis Com**	3%		
Disability**	1%		
**New in 2011			

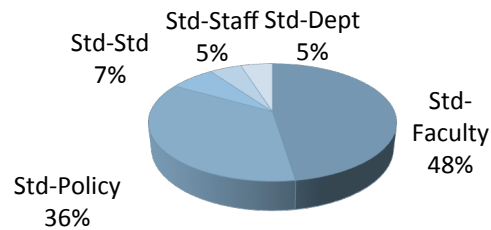
Grad Student Most Common Issues	7/1/10-6/30/11	7/1/09-6/30/10	7/1/08-6/30/09
Treatment-Adv/Dis	16%	21%	24%
Communication	16%	13%	2%
Policy/Pracd-not clear	14%	34%	33%
Grades	9%	13%	10%
Dept/Org Climate**	9%		
Academic Progress	7%	16%	10%
Treatm't/Civility	7%	16%	10%
Sexual Harassment**	5%		
Facilities**	5%		
Quality of Service**	5%		
**New in 2011			

The parties involved in the issue/conflict vary by visitor type.

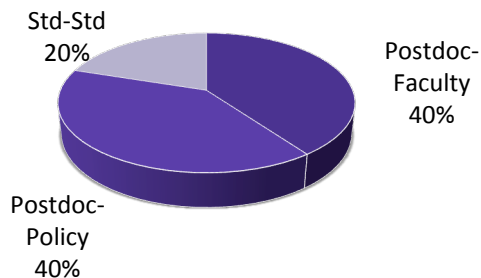
### UG Std Issues Involve



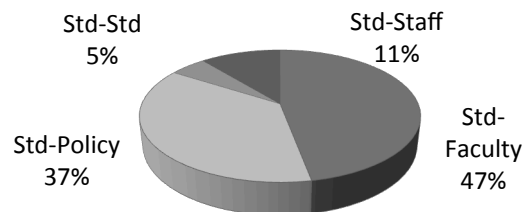
### Grad Stud Issues Involve



### Postdoc Issues Involve



### Faculty/Staff/Other Issues Involve





### TRENDS AND ISSUES

In the 2009-2010 report, three areas of concern were discussed: Treatment and Civility, Unclear Policies and Procedures, and Grades. While these three issues continue to be common areas of concern, this current 2010-2011 academic year has seen a rise in the issue of Communication. All of these areas speak to an opportunity for us to be more mindful, clear, thorough, proactive and respectful in all of our expressions. The stresses put on academic departments and other campus resources by budget cuts and lay-offs due to the current financial situation make it even more important to have clear, well-documented policies in syllabi, handbooks, and websites. Where this information is made readily available to all, many misunderstandings and mistakes can be avoided.

**Treatment and Civility:** In 2010-2011 this was an area of concern for 14% of the undergraduate and 7% of the graduate students who visited our office. It was also a major concern for 55% of the faculty, staff and other types of visitors to the office. An additional 16% of the graduate students were specifically concerned about treatment received from their advisor or dissertation committee members. The issues included treatment that was perceived as rude or disrespectful, lack of responsiveness to emails or meeting requests, an environment in the department or lab that the student felt was discouraging or hostile, as well as a perceived lack of support, both academically and personally.

**Communication:** 13% of the undergraduate visitors, 16% of the grad students, 60% of the postdoctoral appointees, and 55% of the others who contacted the Student Ombuds Office expressed concerns about how we communicate with one another. In many of these cases what was said was less important than how it was said. Clearly explaining guidelines and expectations up front and doing so in a way that is direct and supported by policies makes it less likely that communications about performance, grades, or denied petitions will be perceived as somewhat arbitrary and personal in nature.

**Unclear Policies and Procedures:** As a more specific form of the issue of Communication, 12% of undergraduates, 14% of graduate students, and 9% of other office visitors reported Unclear Policies and Procedures as an issue.

Overall, it is very helpful to have clear, detailed information about policies and procedures on websites and in handbooks and fliers. It is equally important that we personally relay this information in a way that is professional, respectful and concise. Advisors, faculty and staff should know where to find information and identify resources, and to whom students should be referred if they have questions or find themselves in a unique situation. In an effort to assist, advisors can inadvertently provide incomplete or inaccurate information on topics about which they have limited knowledge. It is much wiser to promise to look for the information or refer to someone who is well versed on the topic. As layoffs and other cuts affect the availability of faculty and staff and we are all asked to take on new areas of responsibility, it is crucial that appropriate training be provided and that we be clear about what we know and don't know so that we can get correct information to the students and avoid misinformation that can lead to mistrust, academic difficulties, perceptions of mistreatment, and time consuming and costly grievances.

**Grades:** Concerns related to grades were expressed by 38% of undergraduate, 9% of graduate student, and 18% of other visitors to the Student Ombuds Office. An additional 16% of the graduate students were concerned about Treatment by Advisors or Dissertation Committee members. In many cases, conflict could be 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 can feel that more personal factors are taken into account when academic performance is evaluated.