Annual Report of the Brown University Ombuds Office 2016-2017
Fall 2017

This report provides an overview of the Brown University Ombuds Office's activities from July 1, 2016 through June 31, 2017.

The Ombuds Office first opened in 2006 and served only faculty in the first two years. The Office closed and was dormant from 2008 until 2012. In 2012 the Faculty Executive Committee proposed and President Ruth Simmons approved the re-opening of the Office to serve faculty and postdocs with a half-time Ombudsperson. President Simmons appointed Ruthy Kohorn Rosenberg as the Ombudsperson. In 2013, President Christine Paxson approved expansion of the Office to serve graduate students, medical students and all staff. The Ombuds Office does not advertise to undergraduates, but does not turn away those who visit. The University Ombudsperson has been a full time position since 2013 and reports to the President.

Ombuds Office Practice
The Ombudsperson listens, offers information about policies and procedures, helps people identify and examine options for resolving concerns, offers education, consultation and coaching, accepts suggestions and data from individuals who seek a confidential channel for raising responsible concerns about the University, and helps to work for orderly and responsible systems change.

The Brown University Ombuds Office adheres to the International Ombudsman Association (IOA) Code of Ethics and Standards of Practice. Therefore, the Ombuds Office practices in the following manner. (For more detail please see the Ombuds Office website.)

The Ombuds Office does not identify visitors (people who meet with the Ombudsperson) or discuss their concerns with anyone without the visitor's permission and if the Ombudsperson agrees. The Ombudsperson does not have any reporting responsibility within the University and is not a 'responsible person' under Title IX. The exception to this is when the Ombudsperson determines there is an imminent risk of serious harm or the Ombudsperson is compelled to do so, by subpoena, for example.

The Ombudsperson functions on an informal and off-the-record basis. With the permission of the visitor, and at the Ombudsperson's discretion, the Ombudsperson may seek additional information or clarification, or attempt informal resolution.

The Ombudsperson is not authorized to accept "legal" notice for Brown University. The Ombudsperson follows no prescribed sequence of steps, and does not participate in any formal adjudicatory processes. If a visitor wishes to engage in a formal procedure, such as filing a grievance or putting the University on notice, the Ombudsperson can provide information about how to do so.

The Ombuds Office does not keep identifying records about individual visitors. The Office only keeps anonymous statistical information for analyzing and reporting trends and recommendations to the University. All other notes and other materials (calendars, e.g.) are regularly destroyed. The Ombuds Office Policies and Procedures are on its website at brown.edu/ombudsperson. The Ombuds Office reports to the President about issues and trends but is independent of any University structure. The Ombudsperson advocates for fair process and its implementation.

The Ombudsperson is impartial and does not take sides or advocate for individuals, particular positions, outcomes or resolutions. The Ombudsperson seeks ways for individuals and groups to create mutual understanding and benefit. The Ombudsperson has no decision-making authority and does not judge, discipline or reward anyone.

Educational Outreach and Community Involvement
The Ombudsperson tries to ensure that people in the Brown University community know about the Office and its services on an ongoing basis. This includes making presentations at standing meetings of departments, informal meetings, resource fairs and other outreach efforts.

Examples of this past year's efforts include the following: presentations to groups on the role of the Ombuds Office; convening groups for conversations on best practices, and workshops on concepts and skills on communication and conflict management/resolution topics to undergraduates, graduate students, faculty and staff. This year the Ombudsperson offered a Dealing with Conflict Workshop to the entire community in the fall and spring semesters. This was offered in three blocks that built on each other: Block A, 16 hours, personally dealing with conflict, Block B, 12 hours, managing other people's conflict, and Block C, 12 hours, facilitative mediation. One can take all 40 hours and receive a certificate that they had been trained in facilitative mediation. Faculty, staff, graduate students and undergraduates participated. In addition, workshops were offered through Learning Point, Staff Development Day, SAC, and the School of Public Health. The Ombuds facilitated several retreats in both academic and administrative units. The Ombudsperson interacted with about 600 people in this way (twice as many as last year.)

Ombuds Office Reporting
The Ombuds Office operates as an informal resource and only collects non-identifying information. Each year the Ombudsperson critically examines the best practices for reporting.

The Ombuds Office tracks the following:

Number of visitors
Constituency of the visitor (faculty, postdoc, staff, graduate student, medical student, undergraduate student, or other – alumni, parents, etc.)

Concerns categories (the primary and secondary reasons why the visitor seeks Ombuds Office services.) A list of Concerns can be found in the appendix
Demographic data – gender, race/ethnicity
Ombudsperson action

In addition, the Ombuds tracks the number of people attending presentations and workshops.
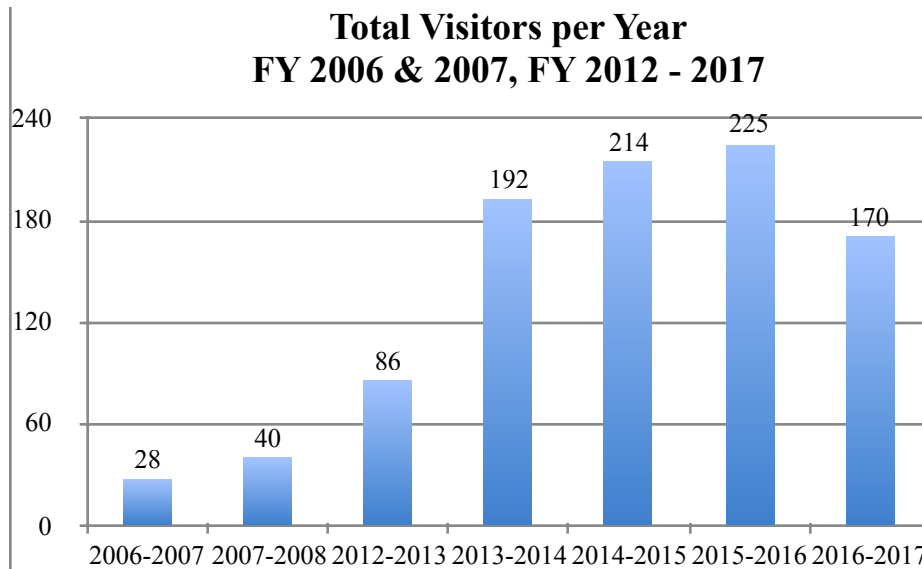
Visitors
A visitor is an individual who meets with the Ombudsperson regarding one or more concerns. The visitor may have additional follow-up meetings with the Ombudsperson regarding a concern but the meetings are still tallied as one visitor. Because the Ombuds Office does not keep identifying records, if a visitor meets with the Ombudsperson on a different occasion regarding a distinct new concern, then he/she is counted as a new visitor. For example a faculty member might meet with the Ombudsperson several times in January regarding a tenure issue and come back again in May to meet about a concern regarding an advisee. The January meeting would be counted as one visitor and the advising issue would be counted as one visitor. The vast majority of visitors, however, are separate individuals.

Number of Visitors Data
From July 1, 2016 to June 30, 2017, 170 visitors sought assistance through the the Ombuds Office. About a quarter of visitors came more than once.

Detail by Constituency	2016-2017
Faculty	36
Postdocs (Fellows & Research Assoc.)	8
Staff (exempt, non-exempt, union)	82
Graduate Students (PhD MA MD)	31
Undergraduate Students	7
Other	6
Total	170

The chart below shows the number of visitors by year.

Total Visitors per Year
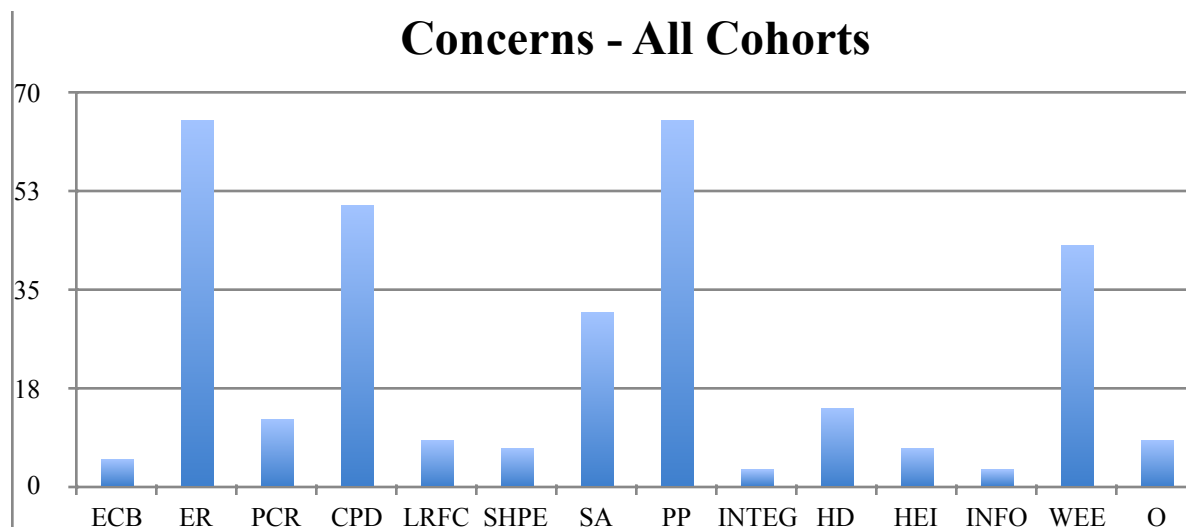**FY 2006 & 2007, FY 2012 - 2017**

Please see Appendix B for additional comparative charts.

Concerns Categories

Visitors meet with the Ombudsperson about anything to do with their lives at Brown University. The Ombuds Office uses a list of Primary Concerns Categories and these represent large buckets issues that could be brought to the attention of the Ombudsperson by the visitor. This is an additional method of protecting visitors' confidentiality while tracking trends. As an informal resource, the Ombudsperson does not conduct investigations, or participate in formal adjudicative processes. While a Concern may represents the subjective view of the visitor, it is nonetheless a problem area for him or her, and may be of broader concern to the University. The Concerns are listed with descriptions in Appendix A.

Concerns Data

The Office keeps track of primary and secondary Concerns. This is rather a simplistic way of illustrating often complex situations, but it provides a picture of the primary and secondary Concerns of the people who visited the Ombuds Office. The following chart shows the Concerns of all visitors in 2016 - 2017.

Concerns - All Cohorts

(Chart: Bar chart with y-axis ranging from 0 to 70 marked at intervals 0, 18, 35, 53, 70. X-axis categories: ECB, ER, PCR, CPD, LRFC, SHPE, SA, PP, INTEG, HD, HEI, INFO, WEE, O)

Observations:

In general, most people who visit the Ombuds Office have great loyalty to Brown and want to do their job in the best way possible. Underlying almost every issue are concerns about fairness and people's wish to be treated with dignity and respect. When treated with dignity and respect, people are able to accept even the most difficult outcomes more easily.

The data shows that the four largest Concerns are Evaluative Relationships, ER (*concerns, issues or inquiries re people in evaluative relationships; this may include differences in cultures, priorities, values or beliefs; problems with supervisory effectiveness, interpersonal relationships, communication or cooperation; mistrust, in civility, lack of cooperation, misunderstandings, etc.*) Career Progression and Development, CPD (*concerns, issues or inquiries re processes or decisions re entering or leaving a job or job duties. May include job progression, stability, future potential professional development, restructuring or changing organizational relationships, nature and place of assignment, termination, etc.*) Policy and Practice, PP (*concerns, issues or inquiries re the efficacy or equity of University policy I or practice. May include perceived need for revision, failure to follow or to adhere to published document, etc.*) and Concerns about the Work or Educational Environment, WEE, (*concerns, issues or inquiries re tone of workplace or educational environment, including leadership style, peer relationships, department dysfunction, or physical working environment.*) This is consistent from last year.

The categories of harassment or discrimination (HD), and hostile environment or incivility (HEI) have smaller numbers than last year.

The few undergraduates that find their way to the Office most often raise issues around University resources, usually about where to go, how to use the resource, or how to get a response.

Evaluative relationships continue to be the Concern most raised in the Ombuds Office as people navigate relationships with their staff, their supervisors, their students and their advisors. This year, another large area of Concern were issues around communication and implementation of University policies and procedures.   There were many questions about what policies are, how they are supposed to be implemented and by whom (who are the decision makers) and questions as to whether they are being implemented correctly and equitably. As with all large organizations, rigorous and ongoing care should be taken to educate employees and especially managers so that they can understand both the policies and how those policies should be implemented equitably. It would be an interesting discussion to see if there is general agreement about what equity means; for example, should all employees and students be treated the same in all situations? Or does equity mean something else?

There is also continued focus on the need to improve the quality of managers and management and for the support of both managers and staff, as reflected in the number of issues raised within the Work or Educational Environment Concern category.

More generally, the University continues to have conversations, both publicly and privately, about power and privilege. For staff, this can be described as an 'Upstairs, Downstairs' feeling; that they are not seen as partners. This is a struggle occurring at many universities as the culture of both universities and the wider world changes.

As the University grows and follows its strategic plan, the pace, scope and scale of work has increased. Roles and expectations change (and relocating about 400 people to South Street Landing) and, while exciting and stimulating, adds a layer of stress to the individuals in the organization impacting performance and relationships.

One more conversation that I note is the tension between academic freedom and civility. How do we, as an organization, keep the quirky, eccentric, creative and sometimes necessarily abrasive, while also expecting people to treat each other with dignity and respect. The University continues to tackle this issue.

Ombudsperson Role as Change Agent
The purpose of this Annual Report is not to criticize or point out fault, but to convey areas where visitors have raised systemic concerns. The Ombudsperson is interested in ensuring that the organization operates at its best, in terms of its people and its mission. It is a sign of strength that the institution recognizes that it is not perfect and that there is a process available to voice concerns and seek improvements. If one thinks about an organization as a system, it is helpful for the organization to know and understand where the organization is working and where it is not.

The Ombudsperson raises issues brought by visitors to the appropriate administrators and leaders throughout the year, and reports overall trend data at the end of each year. In this way the Ombudsperson can act to make sure issues are addressed early and dealt with in the least escalated way, unless it is necessary to escalate an issue. In addition, trend data can underline the

importance of issues that the administration has already noticed, or bring issues to the attention of the administration. In all situations the Ombudsperson takes great care to ensure visitors confidentiality is ensured. So, depending on what permission is given by a visitor there are different ways to raise issues including providing trend information in a non-identifying manner. While confidentiality may limit the Ombudsperson's ability to provide detail, there are still ways to raise issues and themes, especially when they cross divisions and/or the University. Individual's Concerns are very important and often the issues they raise for that part of the organization, or indeed the organization as a whole, are important to raise for the University to operate in the most effective way and in a way that it follows its values.

I would like to thank the Brown University community for their trust in the Ombuds Office, sharing important issues and your work to address those issues, and manage and resolve conflicts. It is a privilege to work with all of you.

Respectfully, Ruthy Kohorn Rosenberg
Brown University Ombudsperson

Appendix A: Brown University Concerns Categories
Appendix B: Comparative Trend Charts

Appendix A: Brown University Ombuds Office -- Concerns Categories

Employee Compensation & Benefit, Concerns, issues or inquiries re: equity, appropriateness or competitiveness of employee compensation, benefits and other benefit programs. ECB

Evaluative Relationships. Concerns. Concerns, issues or inquiries re: people in evaluative relationships (e.g., supervisor-employee, faculty-student.) May include differences in cultures, priorities, values, or beliefs; problems w/supervisory effectiveness, interpersonal relationships, communication or cooperation; mistrust, incivility, lack of cooperation, misunderstandings, etc. ER

Peer/Colleague Relationships. Concerns, issues or inquiries re peers/colleagues not in evaluative relationship (e.g., conflict between among staff, researchers in lab, or members of student organization.) May include differences in cultures, priorities, values, or beliefs; problems w/ interpersonal relationships, communication, or cooperation; mistrust; incivility; misunderstandings, etc. PCR

Career Progression and Development. Concerns, issues or inquiries re: processes or decisions re: entering or leaving a job or job duties. May include job progression, stability, future potential, professional development, restructuring or changing organizational relationships, nature and place of assignment, termination, etc. This category includes graduate students, post-docs, etc. CPD

Legal, Regulatory, Financial and Compliance. Concerns, issues or inquiries perceived to be a risk (financial, sanction, legal, reputation etc.) for the organization or its members if not addressed. May include allegations of waste, fraud or abuse, including business judgment, illegal activity, slander or defamation of character. LRFC

Safety, Health, and Physical Environment, Concerns. Concerns, issues or inquiries re safety and health. May include fear of someone/something w/i the environment, potential for violence, etc. SHPE

Services/Administrative. Concerns, issues or inquiries re services or offices. May include quality of service, responsiveness, application of rules, behavior of service providers, etc. SA

Policy/Practice. Concerns, issues or inquiries re efficacy or equity of University policy or practice. May include perceived need for revision, failure to follow or to adhere to published document, etc. PP

Integrity: academic work, scholarship or intellectual property. Concerns, issues or inquiries re academic honesty, plagiarism, research integrity, ownership or authorship of intellectual property, etc. INTEG

Harassment or discrimination. Concerns, issues, or inquiries re: harassment, disparate treatment, or illegal discrimination based on protected class. HD

Hostile Environment/Incivility. Concerns, issues, or inquiries regarding harassment, hostile environment, or incivility, not based on protected class. HEI

Information Requests and Transferal. (i) Requests for information/assistance in accessing or understanding information, resources, policies, procedures, etc.; (ii) Communication of information, perceptions, experiences from visitor for edification of the Ombuds. INFO

Work or Educational Environment Concerns. Concerns, issues, or inquiries re: tone of workplace or educational environment, including leadership style, peer relationships, departmental dysfunction, or physical working environment.   WEE

Other. Concerns issues, inquiries or requests for options about how to proceed with issues that do not fall within the above categories. O

Appendix B: Comparative Trend Data

Constituency	2006-2007	2007-2008	2012-2013	2013-2014	2014-2015	2015-2016	2016-201
Faculty	28	40	56	47	45	45	36
Postdoc	0	0	5	3	2	3	8
Graduate, Medical, Professional Students	0	0	6	37	42	35	31
Undergraduates	0	0	0	5	2	12	7
Staff	0	0	19	98	120	119	82
Other	0	0	0	2	3	11	6
TOTALS	28	40	86	192	214	225	170

Concerns	2013-2014	2014-2015	2015-2016	2016-2017
Employee Compensation & Benefits	18	12	16	5
Evaluative Relationships	76	98	89	65
Peer/Colleague Relationships	19	40	30	12
Career Progression & Development	62	80	78	50
Legal, Regulatory, Financial & Compliance	5	6	4	8
Safety, Health & Physical Environment	9	7	5	7
Services/Administrative	2	38	22	31
Policy/Practice	20	37	58	65
Integrity: academic, scholarship, IP	5	8	5	3
Harassment or discrimination (protected class)	3	20	21	14
Hostile Environment/Incivility (not protected)	16	23	22	7
Information requests & transferal	5	42	73	3
Work or Educational Environment Concerns	31	61	69	43
Other	13	7	5	8