

Student Ombuds Services 2019-20 Annual Report

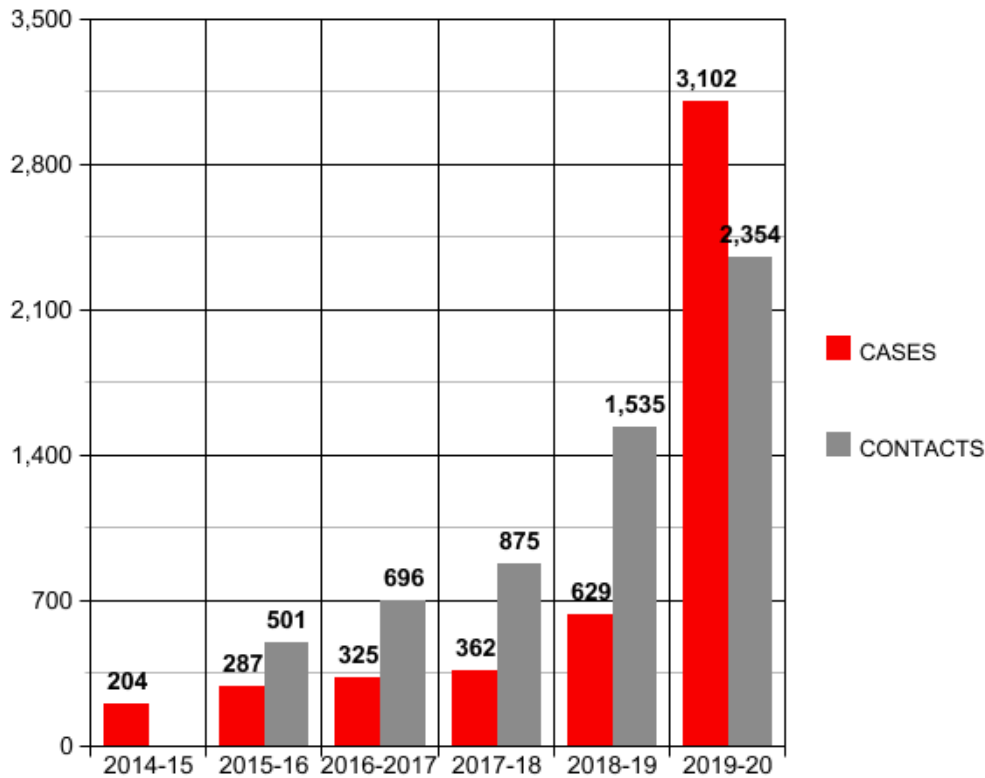
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Assistant Vice Provost/Student Ombuds

- Student Ombuds Services provides confidential, impartial and informal assistance to address issues of concern, and support to address conflict management, prevention and resolution. The Ombuds advocates for fair processes and empowers students to navigate their NC State experience.
- Student Ombuds Services provides confidential consultations to faculty, staff, administration and parents on a variety of student life issues in support of their roles to promote student success. Additionally, the Student Ombuds helps students, faculty and staff resolve conflicts in productive ways and regularly makes recommendations to campus leaders to help improve student success and organizational excellence.
- Demand for Student Ombuds Services continues to increase. 3102 cases were handled by the Student Ombuds Services during the 2019-20 academic year resulting in 2354 total contacts. This represents a 393% increase in cases and a 53% increase in total contacts, largely in part to responding to Pack Essentials applications during COVID-19 pandemic.
 - Note: *Case data* includes the Pack Essentials applications handled by the 20 additional staff who were trained to respond to applications during COVID-19. *Contact data* only includes those contacts made by the Student Ombuds (and *does not* include the contacts made by the other staff).
- Preliminary planning for Student Ombuds Services review to take place in Fall 2020 was completed. Primary questions to explore are:
 - Is Student Ombuds Services meeting the needs of students/partners on campus?
 - What are the pro/cons of a comprehensive Ombuds office for students/faculty/staff?
 - Are there other ways in which SOS can serve the campus?

Financial Ombuds – Pack Essentials

- Served as an active member on the Pack Essentials steering committee and helped lead the campus efforts to support students experiencing food, housing and/or financial insecurity.
- 2757 Pack Essentials applications submitted in 2019-20
 - Additional staff were trained to assist with application review during COVID-19.
 - Student Emergency Fund – over 2000 awards totaling \$955,101 in emergency fund grants (of which \$922,597 was COVID-19 related)
 - Meal Plan Scholarships – 15 valued at approximately \$13,373.54
 - Meal Share program – 2752 meals shared with students (not as many as projected due to campus closure during COVID-19)
 - \$7900 in donated gift cards to Player’s Retreat were distributed to students
- Significant funds raised in support of Pack Essentials resources in partnership with DASA Development and other campus development offices:
 - Approximately \$1.5 million raised in support of Student Emergency Fund, Meal Scholarships and Feed the Pack Food Pantry (of which about \$1.15 million was COVID-19 related in 19-20), and includes over \$100,000 in support of Student Emergency Fund endowment.
- Assisted several students who were victims of fraud and helped connect them to appropriate resources.
- Provided limited outreach to students who submitted Pack Essentials applications to alert them to campus jobs, resources and other opportunities.
- Collaborated with Prevention Services to provide on-going case management for students in need.

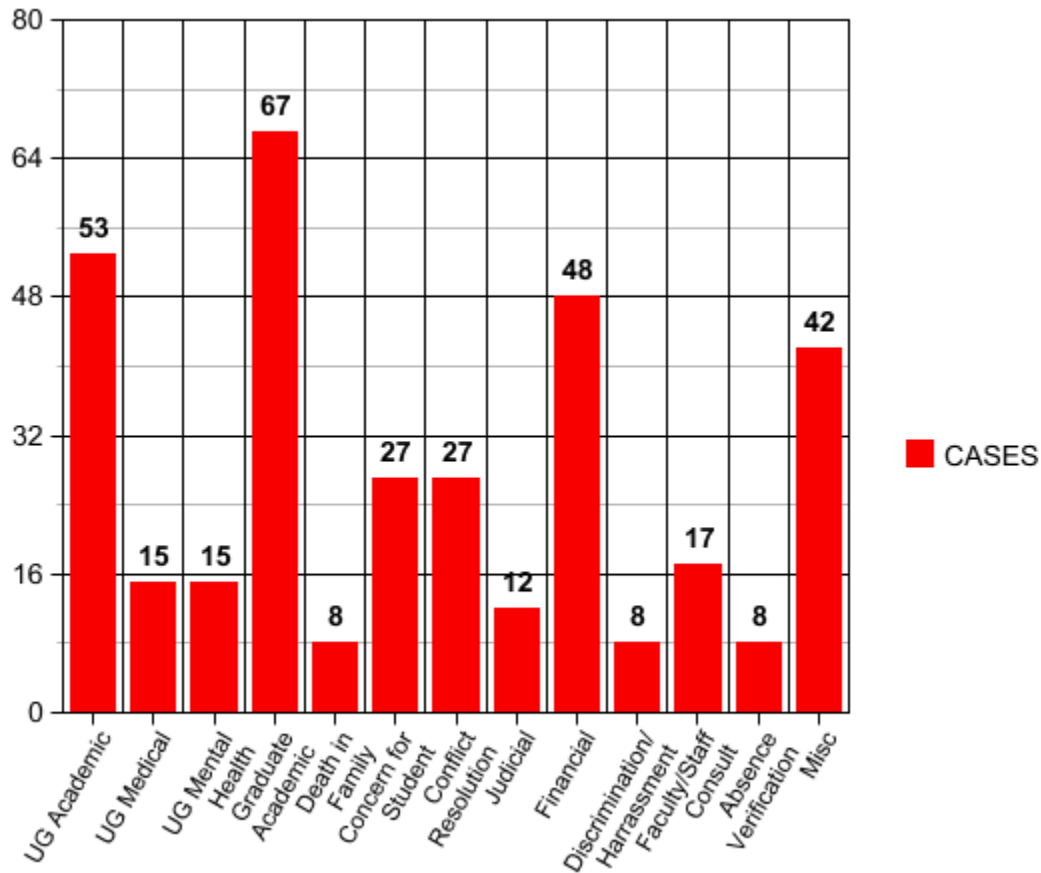
Student Ombuds Cases (since inception)



- 393% increase in cases over 2018-19.
 - NOTE: Includes significant number of Pack Essential applications submitted in response to COVID-19 and includes cases responded to by the additional staff trained to assist.
- 53% increase in number of contacts over 2018-19.
 - NOTE: Only includes contacts made by the Student Ombuds and does not include contacts made by additional staff who assisted with Pack Essential applications during COVID-19

Note: Each visitor to the office constitutes a unique case (If there are multiple students involved in the same situation, collectively they are recorded as one case). A contact refers to each interaction with a visitor and any contacts made on their behalf to a campus entity.

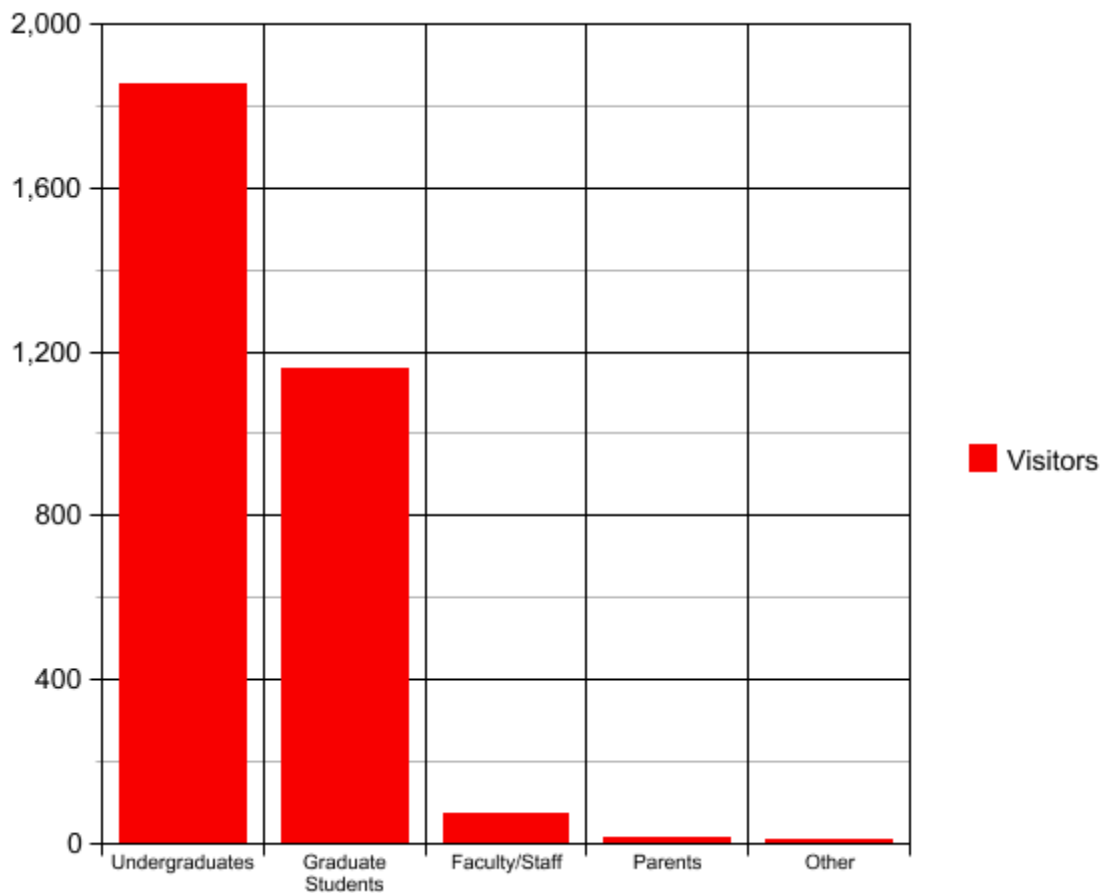
Types of Cases



- NOTE: Graph does not include Pack Essentials applications.
- General Academic Concerns include grade disputes, concerns regarding treatment by professors and related academic policies.
- UG Academic (medical) often involved requests for assistance after some traumatic medical incident (car accident, difficult diagnosis, etc.)
- UG Academic (mental health) often involved requests for assistance during or after psychological distress (stress, hospitalization, etc.) and often times involved parents.
- Most judicial cases involved students wanting to understand their rights within the student judicial process and possible consequences should they be found responsible for a violation of the code of conduct. Academic integrity cases continue to be the largest number of these cases.
- Most absence verification cases were handled by the AV Officer. Cases handled by SOS typically involved more complicated cases that required additional follow-up or support.

- Increases in mental health, graduate academic, financial (includes food/housing insecurity), off-campus housing concerns and faculty/staff consultations on student issues as compared to 2018-19.

Visitor Status



- Significant increase in graduate students utilizing Student Ombuds this year, representing 37% of all visitors.
- Most contacts from faculty/staff were to consult on a student related issue or share a concern about a student.

Selected Cases & Recommendations

Recommendations shared with units, departments, colleges and administrators on an ongoing basis. *(Note: This is a partial list and efforts have been made to maintain*

confidentiality for the visitor. More specific issues and concerns are shared with the appropriate administrators per the Student Ombuds' charter).

- Met with NC State/UNC colleagues to discuss best practices in absence verification.
- Surfaced concern from alum about department presenting a "certificate" for taking a series of classes without formal recognition as a certificate program by the university.
- Provided feedback to Financial Aid that some students did not realize they could take out a smaller loan than what was offered.
- Surfaced concern about graduate departments pulling funding from students who appear to be doing well academically to provide to new admitted students.
- Shared concern that some department heads/PIs shared they do not receive the training to handle some personnel issues and conflict resolution.
- Shared concern that off campus entity was using NC State trademarks in a way that was confusing students to think they are associated with the university.
- Provided Pack Essentials data to colleges whose students were disproportionately utilizing the resources.
- Provided mediation support for several cases where students were having a contract/roommate dispute.
- Shared concerns parents had with protocol for involuntary commitments, especially the use of handcuffs and not contacting parents.
- Surfaced concern about possible FERPA violation with regard to student's DRO accommodations listed in Moodle where other students could see.
- Surfaced several cases of students being concerned about sexist, homophobic, and/or inappropriate comments by faculty in the classroom.
- Worked with OIS & Global Engagement to support international students impacted by COVID-19.
- Surfaced concerns about policies that require students with documented medical excuse to take an exam or receive a zero (and then add to the final exam grade).
- Surfaced concern that some on-line instructors were not maintaining their office hours and/or responding to students emails.
- Surfaced student concern about doing community based research during a pandemic - administration had previously sent out appropriate communication.
- Surfaced several concerns about possible FERPA violations after COVID-19, with student's progress posted on webpage.
- Provided support for student living in public spaces and helped identify transitional housing until student could move in permanent assignment.

- Facilitated discussions between graduate student and PI to help open the lines of communication and address concerns.
- Met with Office of Student Conduct, Division of Academic and Student Affairs and Graduate School to share feedback and discuss student trends.
- Facilitated discussion between several groups of graduate students who were experiencing conflicts.
- Assisted graduate student extorted with on-line video by someone overseas.
- Shared concern with appropriate campus leaders about graduate student stipends and impact on students' food/housing security.
- Provided consultation to campus department that was having an issue with a student employee.

Assessment:

- Based on a survey of visitors to Student Ombuds Services:
 - 91% indicated that scheduling was easy and convenient
 - 91% reported being able to meet in a timely manner
 - 93% said the Ombuds was courteous and helpful
 - 91% indicated Ombuds was objective throughout interactions
 - 91% reported the Ombuds was knowledgeable of institutional policies and procedures.
 - 93% trust the Ombuds to maintain confidentiality
 - 88% would refer others to Student Ombuds Services
 - Selected comments from the survey included:
 - "I walked in frustrated and ready to share my awful experience and I walked away feeling like I was heard and supported"
 - "Student Ombuds was the easiest office to interact with at State. They were quick, understanding and offered further help should I need it. Mike was so kind and understanding to my situation"
 - "I agree that his service is as described, but maybe it's due to the nature of my problem, that he wasn't able to provide a new perspective/solution"
 - "Very professional, skilled, and sincere. Helps students' voices be heard when they are otherwise being ignored"
 - "...very objective and focused on solving the issue. It was extremely useful to see the issue from different perspectives and to be presented

with strategies and possible outcomes without directly pushing me to take a decision”

- “Waste of time”
- “Excellent experience! Mike was knowledgeable, attentive, and seemed to genuinely care about me and my concerns”
- “Mr Giancola was extremely supportive and understanding. I benefitted greatly from the Ombuds during a rough period in graduate school”
- “I am a faculty [member] and the Ombuds worked to mediate discussion with a student on a sensitive issue. Their role was clearly stated and they served as an excellent mediator”

Pack Essentials:

- Based on a survey of students who completed a Pack Essentials application:
 - 93% indicated Ombuds followed up within 24 hours
 - 93% felt concerns were listened to and treated with respect
 - 92% felt comfortable talking to the Ombuds
 - 93% felt Ombuds was knowledgeable about campus and community resources
 - 92% felt Ombuds provided options and appropriate resources
 - 88% felt support was helpful and allowed them to focus on their success
- Selected comments from the survey included:
 - “...I felt genuinely heard and respected...Ombuds truly understood that there were a lot of overlapping and complex conditions and obstacles in my life that made my academic life and personal life hard to manage”
 - “I felt like just another number who fell through the cracks”
 - “I felt like I was heard and the resources given are part of the reason I was able to actually finish out my final semester and not have to leave”
 - “Efficient. Respectful. Confidential. Could feel the genuine and supportive atmosphere”
 - “I was shocked at how fast the process worked. I think I got a call the same day I submitted information”
 - “it is a great program but it is far too limited in financial resources to help anyone”
 - “...I had been homeless and living in my car in my final year of school, and help I got from Student Ombuds undoubtedly gave me peace of mind, and saved my college career...I wouldn’t have graduated this year without [him].”