

Student Ombuds Services 2020-21 Annual Report

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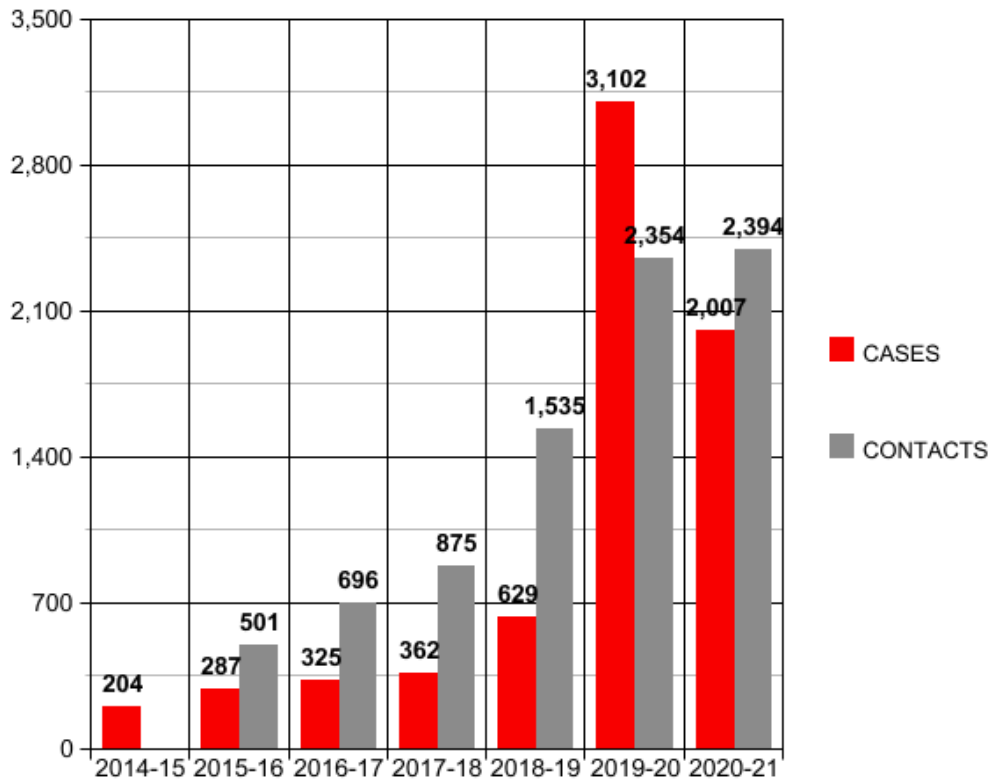
- Demand for Student Ombuds Services continues to increase. The Student Ombuds handled 2007 cases during the 2020-21 academic year resulting in 2394 total contacts. This represents a 219% increase in cases and a 56% increase in contacts as compared to pre-COVID numbers (2018-19), largely in part to responding to Pack Essentials applications.
- Student Ombuds Services program review was completed in Spring 2021 and response report was submitted and reviewed with university leadership. Key recommendations and course of action include:
 - Evaluate Dual Role and Office Structure (Student Ombuds and Pack Essentials) - Further study is needed before acting on this recommendation. Having more data on what post-COVID caseloads will look like as well as assessing how the GA position fits into the future direction of the office will be helpful.
 - Develop appropriate infrastructure to support Pack Essentials to be sustainable long term. - The Pack Essentials process was developed with a lot of consultation with campus partners and I have engaged in on-going assessment of the process and resources available to students over the past four years. The assessment data reflects the effectiveness of the process and donors have consistently shown confidence in the approach by their increasing levels of financial support. The tension within the system is that while Pack Essentials was developed to respond to unexpected student emergencies and unforeseen circumstances, high levels of systemic poverty within our student body has only been exacerbated by COVID and put stress on the Pack Essentials process. As we reflect on the long-term sustainability of Pack Essentials, an emphasis should be placed on preventative interventions such as increasing the amount of financial aid provided to students and increasing the value of stipends for graduate students.
 - Create a working group to examine university priorities surrounding ombuds services for all stakeholders – A work group will be created in collaboration with the faculty/staff ombuds to assess whether there is a desire to pursue a comprehensive approach to ombuds services for students, faculty and staff.
 - Update the Student Ombuds Terms of Reference, specifically clarifying the role is no longer designated as a responsible employee under Title IX. – In process.
 - Provide Student Ombuds with additional human resources. – Graduate assistant will be hired to support Pack Essentials initiative with an emphasis on preventative interventions.
- Mike Giancola received recognition from the GLBT Center for his support of students.

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.
- The Student Ombuds continues to serve as the first point of contact for students experiencing food, housing and/or financial insecurity.
 - 1622 Pack Essentials applications were submitted in 2020-21
 - 837 grants were provided from the Student Emergency Fund totaling \$333,475
 - 18 meal scholarships were provided totaling \$23,931
 - 1055 meal share meals were provided for students to eat in the dining halls
- Students continued to experience higher rates of food and housing insecurity due to COVID. From March 2020 through May 2021:
 - 4161 Pack Essentials applications received
 - 2876 grants provided from the Student Emergency Fund totaling \$1,254,034
- Significant funds raised in support of Pack Essentials resources in partnership with DASA Development and other campus development offices:
 - Approximately \$984,000 was raised in support of the Student Emergency Fund and Endowment, Meal and Housing Scholarships, and Feed the Pack Food Pantry during the 2020-21 academic year.
- The Housing Scholarship program was created to provide grants to assist students experiencing housing insecurity. Lead donors have provided \$50,000 in gifts and pledges. The first scholarship was provided in May 2021 to a PhD student working to complete dissertation while dealing with impacts from COVID.
- Student Government and the Graduate Student Association have approved \$66K over three years to support the hiring of a graduate assistant for Pack Essentials starting in the 2021-22 academic year.
- Worked with Office of International Services & Global Engagement to support international students impacted by COVID-19 and helped identify international students in need to nominate for various outside funding opportunities.
- Consulted with Office of International Scholars and the Community College Collaboration (C3) on their respective student emergency funds and applicable processes to match those used by the Pack Essentials emergency fund.

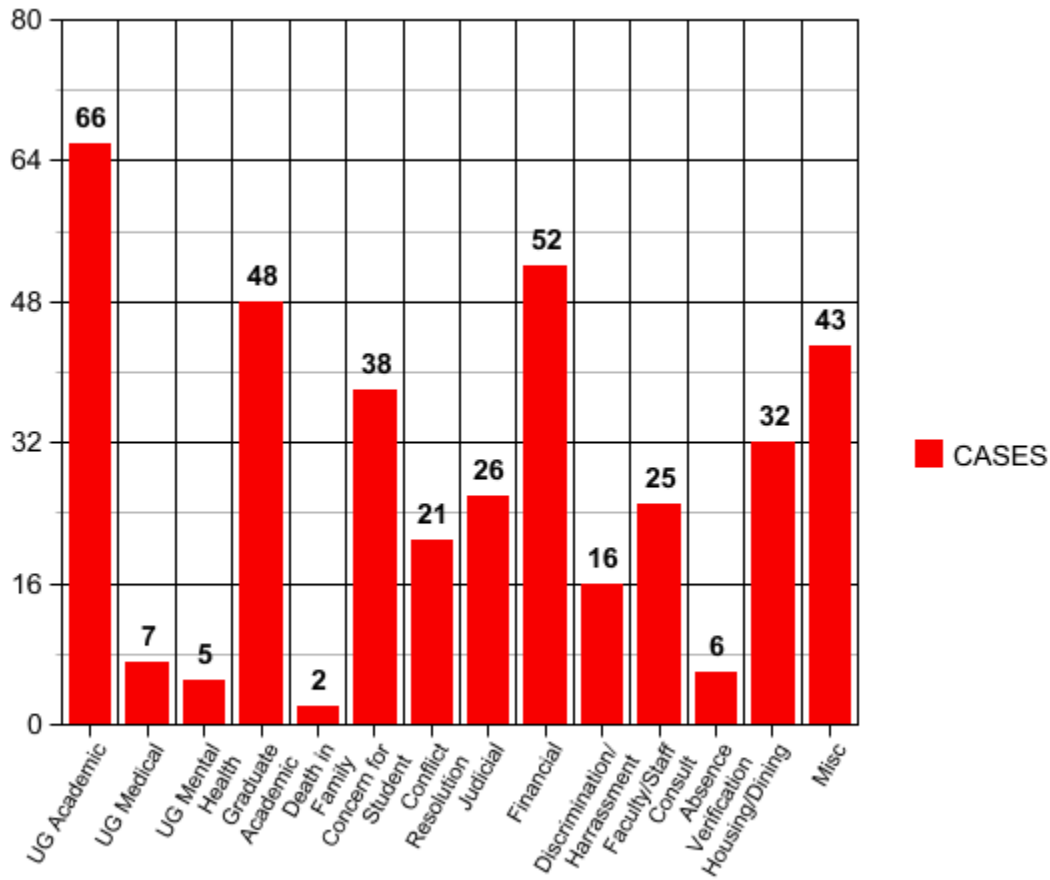
- Coordinated with Community Kickstand, a local NGO, to provide bikes for students in need of transportation support.
- Served as primary point of contact for students after off campus apartment fire and connected them to food, housing and other financial resources.
- Worked with the Library staff to advise on technology lending process and reviewed applications from students requesting hotspots for Wi-Fi access.
- Mike Giancola and Melissa Green presented Pack Essentials: Food and Housing Insecurity Before, During and After a Pandemic to UNC system-wide Behavioral Health Convening.
- Assisted several students who were victims of fraud and helped connect them to appropriate resources.

Student Ombuds Cases (since inception)



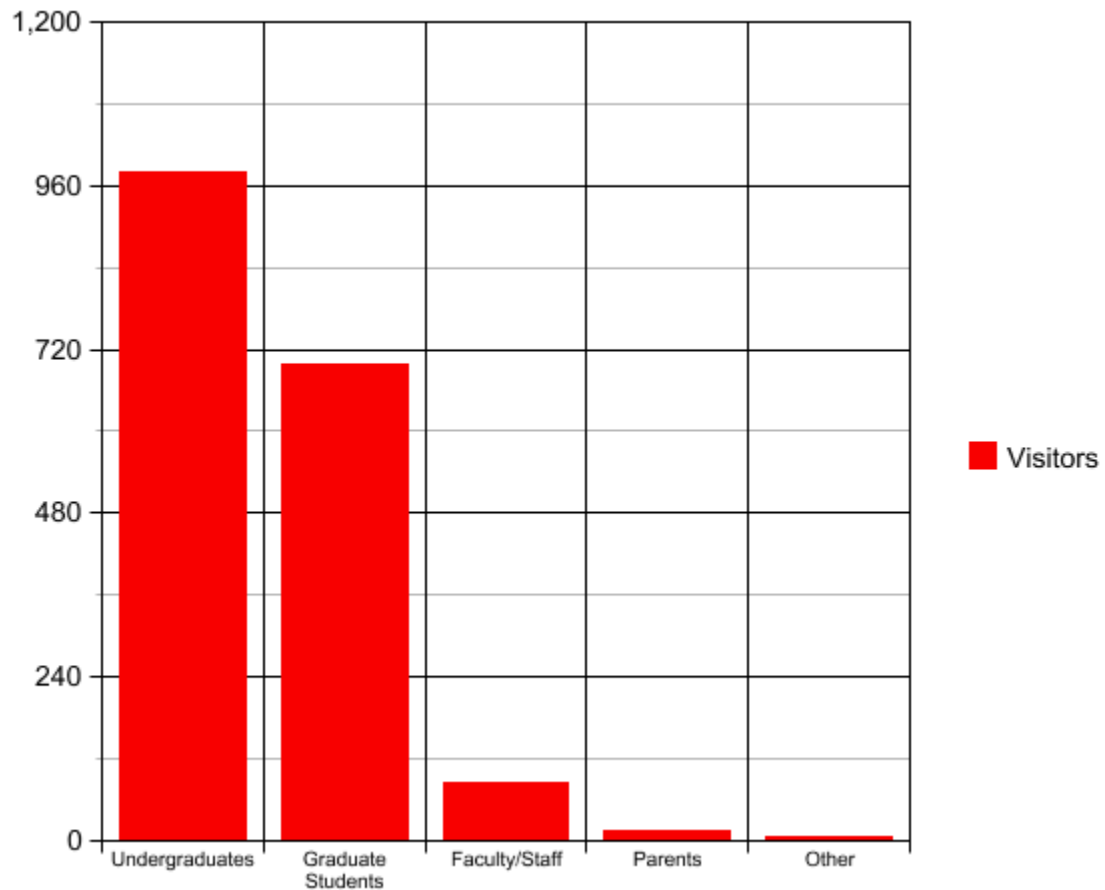
- 219% increase in cases and a 56% increase in contacts as compared to pre-COVID numbers (2018-19), largely in part to responding to Pack Essentials applications.
 - NOTE: Includes significant number of Pack Essential applications submitted in response to COVID-19 and includes cases responded to by the additional staff trained to assist. 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 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 judicial process, specifically after an academic integrity charge.
- Most absence verification cases were handled by the AV Officer. Cases handled by SOS typically involved more complicated cases that required additional follow-up.
- There were increases in undergraduate academic, concern for students, judicial (academic integrity), financial (includes food/housing insecurity), on and off-campus housing concerns, faculty/staff consultations on student issues, and discrimination and harassment cases as compared to 2019-20.

Visitor Status



- Graduate students utilizing Student Ombuds continues to rise, representing 39% 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 are 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).*

- Provided conflict resolution strategies for COVID-19 issues to faculty and campus community.

- Surfaced concerns about transitioning to on-line learning environment and made recommendations about classroom issues such as camera use, classroom flexibility, etc.
- Provided feedback to University Housing and Student Health Services on quarantine letter that went to students.
- Advised an increasing number of students on the judicial process, specifically academic integrity cases which spiked during COVID.
- Assisted on several cases where graduate students had not received their benefits per their contracts.
- Conducted listening sessions with undergraduate students at the request of the department head to respond to students' concerns with curriculum and focus of program.
- Collaborated with Prevention Services to provide support after racial tensions related to national court cases involving police officers.
- Surfaced concerns from trans-identified students regarding use of preferred name in scheduling system and other university systems.
- Shared concern that some department heads/PIs shared they do not receive the training to handle some personnel issues and conflict resolution.
- Provided mediation support for several cases where students were having a contract/roommate dispute. Increased number of cases this year dealt with financial conflicts in which students left their apartments without taking responsibility for their financial obligations.
- Surfaced several cases of students being concerned about sexist, homophobic, and/or inappropriate comments by faculty in the classroom.
- Facilitated discussions between graduate student and PI to help open the lines of communication and address concerns.
- Connected with CARES team and Office of Institutional Equity and Diversity on an increasing number of cases.
- Increasingly provided leadership coaching to faculty, staff and administration on student life and personnel issues.
- 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.
- Shared concern with appropriate campus leaders about graduate student stipends and impact on students' food/housing security.

Assessment:

- Based on a survey of visitors to Student Ombuds Services:
 - 100% indicated that scheduling was easy and convenient
 - 100% reported being able to meet in a timely manner
 - 99% said Ombuds was courteous and respectful
 - 95% indicated Ombuds was objective throughout interactions
 - 98% reported Ombuds was knowledgeable of institutional policies and procedures.
 - 96% trust Ombuds to maintain confidentiality
 - 96% indicated Ombuds helped identify and evaluate options
 - 96% would refer others to Student Ombuds Services

- Selected comments from the survey included:
 - “Student Ombuds Services helped me to resolve my issue quickly.”
 - “The Ombudsman was very professional, neutral and informative”
 - “It was an ok meeting though I felt he pushed back on my views a little bit too much, bordering on not being impartial.”
 - “Mike helped me see the situation clearly and recover my self-worth”
 - “My apartment building caught fire...Student Ombuds reached out very quickly to make sure we had everything we needed...They made a very stressful situation a little easier to process”
 - “...resolves issues on an individual level without the power to advocate for students when the issues are systemic...”
 - “I am very comfortable talking with Mike about my concerns because I know he is listening without any judgements and he understands what I am going through.”
 - “Fast, reliable, and effective support for student success.”
 - “Useless”
 - “Mike was instrumental in helping me through a very traumatic experience.”
 - “This was one of the best resources I’ve accessed at NCSU, but many others I’ve spoken about it do not know what the Ombuds does!”

Pack Essentials:

- Based on a survey of students who completed a Pack Essentials application:
 - 98% indicated Ombuds followed up within 24 hours
 - 100% felt concerns were listened to and treated with respect

- 98% felt comfortable talking to the Ombuds
- 100% felt Ombuds was knowledgeable about campus and community resources
- 95% felt Ombuds provided options and appropriate resources
- 97% felt support was helpful and allowed them to focus on their success
- 100% said it was important to them that Ombuds was a confidential resource

- Selected comments from the survey included:
 - “The person who called me regarding my situation really took the time to hear my unique situation...I really appreciate the care and compassion”
 - “The website is very accessible and easy to use”
 - “The one time emergency fund should be bigger than just \$500”
 - “Great services especially during a pandemic”
 - “...went above and beyond to help our situation and provided excellent service during a very difficult time. He made such a great difference in making that experience less stressful and ensuring...a positive outcome”
 - “I feel they offer valuable aid to those who are struggling financially and thus academically. It is the human face of the university...”
 - “Pack Essentials is a great resource that helps so many students be able to thrive, strive and grow.”
 - “I was able to relocate out of a dangerous housing situation...because of financial assistance from the Ombuds services...I’m incredibly grateful-I feel safe in my home again.”