

SAO Spring 2023: A Semester In Review



Table of Contents

SAO Spring 2023: A Semester In Review

1

[Introduction](#)

[Division Casework Statistics](#)

[Academic Casework](#)

[Conduct Casework](#)

[Grievance Casework](#)

[Financial Aid Casework](#)

[Division Policy](#)

[Academic Policy](#)

[Conduct Policy](#)

[Financial Aid Policy](#)

[Grievance Policy](#)

[Cross-Divisional Policy](#)

Introduction

The Berkeley Student Advocate's Office is a free, non-partisan, confidential resource within the ASUC that supports students through casework services in academic, conduct, grievance, and financial aid issues. From our casework services, SAO analyzes major trends and crafts policies to address these issues with the goal of eliminating inequities within the University.

The purpose of this document is to summarize the major casework trends observed in the Spring 23 semester (January of 2023 to May 2023), and the policy projects created to address these issues. The document includes information related to our casework statistics and policy work, broken down by division type. Our goal is that by demonstrating our strengths and weaknesses as an Office, we can reflect on our future path and maintain transparency to the student population of UC Berkeley, who we ultimately want all of our work to be tailored to.

Authors of this document include:

Ariana Kretz, External Chief of Staff
Leah Totsubo, Academic Division Director
Vivian Feng, Conduct Division Director
Lauren Gonzalez, Conduct Division Director
Erin Hamill, Grievance Division Director
Amelia Monsour, Academic Policy Coordinator
Sam Cinelli, PR Manager
Antonio Caceres, Conduct Policy Coordinator
Cynthia Hernandez, Conduct Policy Coordinator
George Song, Financial Aid Policy Coordinator
Jordyn Gleaton, Grievance Policy Coordinator
Grace Summerhill, Grievance Policy Coordinator

If you have any questions or concerns regarding the content of this document, please follow up with Ariana Kretz at advocate@berkeleysao.org

Division Casework Statistics

Academic Casework

From May 15, 2022 to May 5, 2023, the academic division saw 274 cases. In this same time period, 237 academic cases were resolved. This includes cases that were open prior to May 15, 2023. 36 of these cases were cross-divisional with our conduct division and 41 were cross-divisional with our grievance division.

December 2022 and April 2023 were the busiest months, with 32 cases opened during each. September 2022 was also relatively busy, with 30 cases opened. These months correspond

to the end and beginning of the semesters, respectively. Historically, academic casework has been in highest demand during these months, as students are starting or finishing their classes and addressing academic issues in these intervals.

During this academic year, Academic saw 44 cases related to grade appeals and 56 cases related to academic misconduct. 19 cases were related to the Fall 2022 UAW strike.

Conduct Casework

From May 19, 2022 to May 21, 2023, the conduct division saw 111 cases. In the same period of these cases that we opened, 45 of them were academic misconduct. During that period we closed 68 cases and have 52 ongoing cases that are still open with the division. Our division had 18 caseworkers with two people on the Director's & Chiefs Team who did not take as many cases as other caseworkers; we also had two Policy Coordinators and one caseworker on the PR team.

Grievance Casework

The Grievance division had a total of 154 cases between the end of Spring semester last year, May 2022, and the end of this semester May 2023. 30 of those cases were from summer 2022, 59 were from fall 2022, and 65 cases were from spring 2023. We currently have 71 cases ongoing and open within the grievance division, divided among our divisions 15 caseworkers, including cases opened prior to summer 2022. 21 of the cases we received during the spring semester have been closed. Our busiest month receiving cases from the entire year was September 2022 where we opened 20 new cases, the second busiest month was April 2023 with 19 new cases. We also received a relatively high amount in both May 2022 and December 2022, as the semesters drew to a close.

Of the cases opened during the fall semester, 33 were cross divisional cases with 19 cases overlapping with our Academic division, 17 overlapping with our Financial Aid division, and 6 overlapping with our Conduct division. In the spring semester, of our 65 cases, 36 were cross divisional. Grievance had 20 cases overlap with the Academic division, 12 with the Financial Aid division, and 7 with the Conduct division.

We received fewer SVSH cases than last semester. The grievance division takes cases involving both complainants and respondents of SVSH incidents. Our SVSH complaints this semester ranged from academic accommodations to housing. We received a higher volume of complaints regarding harassment and discrimination than the previous semester. We saw 6 complaints about harassment, and 11 instances where students felt they were being discriminated against. A trend we saw in discrimination cases was students feeling they were experiencing disparate treatment in the classroom for speaking English as a second language. We also had an irregularly high volume of cases involving housing concerns this semester including many instances where students felt unsafe with their living situation, roommate concerns, and non traditional student housing concerns.

The majority of our casework this semester were disability related concerns. 23 of our cases this semester had disability related concerns as their central issue. Some of the recurring trends we found in DSP casework included: student facing difficulty getting an accommodation from a professor (including remote accommodation cases), housing concerns related to disability, students being accused of academic misconduct at least in part a result of bias against their disability, students receiving accommodations too late for them to be effective, students feeling they were being treated in a biased manner by their peers, difficulty accommodating grief absence, and disability exacerbations.

Some of the recurring departments in our casework this semester included the College of Engineering, College of Natural Resources, Chemistry, Film, Music, Psychology, Political Economy, Political Science, R1A, R1B, and R4B courses, Korean Language, Cognitive Science, Statistics, EECS, and the Graduate School of information.

The Grievance division received a number of new, unique types of grievances this semester with different campus bodies including: RSOs, the Financial Aid Office, Cal Student Central, Parking and Transportation, Residence Halls, Athletics Department, Cal Dining, and Berkeley Student Coops. Grievance will continue to take whatever cases we can that fall outside of the traditional complaint resolution pathways on this campus, to assist the students of this university. Many of our nontraditional cases have raised new issues to our office and turned into Grievance Policy projects. We hope that our casework will continue to inform our policy work in the coming year.

Financial Aid Casework

Between May 18, 2022 and May 28, 2023, the Financial Aid division received 182 cases. For the Spring semester specifically, 75 cases were opened. In those cases, the division supported students in financial aid appeal processes, housing disputes, residency appeals and applications, emergency housing, withdrawals and readmission, billing issues, and more.

The financial aid division also gained 3 new caseworkers to assist with new intakes and take on challenging cases. Following case trends, the division's peak month within the Spring semester was April with 28 cases received.

The Financial Aid division was presented with a high frequency of housing dispute cases specifically related to UVA (University Village, Albany) housing during the Spring semester. Since May 15, 2022, the office has seen 42 cases related to housing. Of those 42 cases, 11 were directly linked to housing disputes and UVA housing. These UVA cases typically involved evictions, appealing housing contracts, ADA accessibility disputes, and problems with exchange program housing.

Division Policy Work

Academic

College Head Department Outreach

The College Head Department Outreach project completed outreach with the academic departments such as MCB, Econ, and History as well L&S Advising and the Academic Senate. Through our various communications, we are able to set up standing meetings for the upcoming semester, discuss commonly seen case trends, and pitch various project ideas (i.e. strike letter of support, restorative justice in academic misconduct). Many department heads brought up interesting ideas and concerns that we hope to address in our future policy proposals. For instance, the department of MCB was concerned about the lack of regulations for independent research projects while the department of History was worried about students who are in limbo waiting for DSP accommodations.

GBO Outreach

The GBO Outreach project aimed to connect and partner with New Student Services (NSS) and more specifically, the Golden Bear Orientation (GBO) team, in order to update and revise content related to students' rights and information regarding our office in their Bcourses modules. Furthermore, the project aimed to communicate with GBO and NSS regarding potential SAO tabling/outreach during GBO week. We were able to establish communication with NSS, which allowed us to design a page of information about SAO that will be added to the GBO Bcourses modules for the incoming class this summer. Our updated page includes an updated description of SAO, an accessible infographic describing our four divisions, a short video depicting how to access our office, other campus resources, and financial aid information. We will also be tabling at the Resource Fair during GBO Week on August 18. We hope that these projects will increase student knowledge of our services and of students' rights.

Grief Absence Policy

The Grief Absence Policy was proposed to the Academic Senate this past semester. From the Academic Senate, it was recommended that we identify a university department that can take point on securing accommodations for students who are experiencing grief. From there, SAO met with the Center for Support and Intervention who were able to provide additional guidance on existing University grief absence policies and provided further feedback. SAO will begin incorporating this feedback and re-propose GAPS to the Academic Senate in the Fall 23 semester.

Extension Accommodations Form

A policy proposal was crafted for the Extension Accommodations Form in hopes of more classes adopting the forms. Faculty members who have large lower division classes were receptive to the idea of an extension accommodation form, although some expressed concerns about such an accommodation form for certain courses that release answers on the next day.

Some faculty members have expressed the need for more outreach towards the professors of specific larger lower division classes instead of undergraduate deans. We hope to continue these efforts next semester to see the accommodation form be implemented in more classes.

Conduct

REPAIR Implementation and Expansion

Restorative justice advocacy has been a cornerstone of SAO Conduct policy work for years. Our office has already been successful in working alongside the Center for Student Conduct to implement a restorative justice pathway for behavioral misconduct. This project was created to continue these efforts and advocate for the further implementation of restorative justice practices within university conduct processes. The REPAIR Taskforce researched already existing restorative justice models on campus, outreached to various faculty members, and is drafting a proposal for a new pathway for academic misconduct.

Project members worked closely with the Residential Conduct Team to research their RJ practices. Their Restorative Community Dialogues are conducted through a circle model in which an open dialogue is held between the student and the community to repair harm. The community is often represented by surrogates who are trained actors able to describe the impact of the students actions. Over an hour long conversation, the participants discuss the incident and the next steps in order to restore this relationship. This model has been incredibly successful and most students who participate often do not commit the same violation again.

The REPAIR Taskforce also conducted meetings with UC Berkeley faculty to assess their needs and opinions on how academic misconduct is adjudicated. These discussions provided greater insight into the perspectives of faculty members regarding these violations. When an instance of academic misconduct takes place, it is the professor who is harmed by the students actions. They often related feelings of broken trust or lack of respect for their teaching. While there was not a unanimous consensus, professors expressed openness to alternative adjudication methods to resolve these incidents that would benefit both the student and faculty member.

The restorative justice proposal that is currently being drafted will be informed by this information. It will include a description of the Residential Community Dialogues as well as an overview of responses gathered from faculty related to a new RJ pathway for academic misconduct. This pathway would be structured on a surrogate system similar to the RCDs in which trained actors would be able to represent faculty in a circle discussion with the student. This discussion would focus on repairing the harm caused by academic misconduct as an alternative to the traditional Center for Student Conduct process.

Appeals

This project was created to help advise and inform both caseworkers and clients about appeals processes on campus. Existing information about how to appeal during a conduct process is limited which makes it difficult for clients who are interested in writing a letter of appeal. The grounds of appeal are similarly vague and do not provide guidance on what a successful appeal letter would look like. This project has produced two resource guides relating

to the appeals process within the Center for Student Conduct as well specific to Residential Conduct.

During this project, our team was able to find out in depth information about the various grounds of appeals and how to write a successful appeal letter. These resource guides include a detailed explanation of the different processes and also provide guiding questions for clients to consider when writing their letter of appeal. This project also sought access to statistics related to appeals and was able to find out some information about Residential Conduct and are still looking into data relating to appeals within the CSC process. This fall, SAO's conduct division will also be having a training with Kristi Patrickus, a student advocacy attorney at UOregon, about how to advise clients on writing a successful appeal letter.

UCPD

During the Fall 2022 semester, our conduct division saw many instances in which students who shoplifted from Golden Bear Cafe were improperly given citations by UCPD rather than having their cases be transferred to the Center for Student Conduct. This project sought to research the relationship between UCPD and our university's conduct processes. Through various outreach efforts and research our team found out that UCPD has incredible amounts of discretion when deciding whether a case should be transferred to the CSC or the criminal justice system. UCPD does not appear to have any standing meetings or direct relationship with the CSC. The SLS and CSC were only able to outreach about these shoplifting cases after many students were improperly given criminal citations.

This project sought to research university accountability measures for UCPD and how SAO can be more involved in these efforts to prevent being blindsided by these case trends again. SAO is currently exploring taking over the seat on the Chancellor's Independent Advisory Board on Police Accountability and Community Safety (IAB). Sitting on the IAB would allow SAO to have greater influence in decisions regarding UCPD accountability. SAO is also interested in taking an active role in supporting the creation of a UCPD Complaint Oversight Board that the university has committed to implementing. SAO's participation on this board would allow our office to advocate for student concerns in regards to policing on campus directly.

Financial Aid

Comparative Housing Brief

In our casework and policy work, there were many situations where students did not have stable housing during Winter and Summer Breaks, had trouble securing on-campus housing, or could not afford housing in Berkeley. This project aimed to find where UC Berkeley Housing lies amongst other California schools. We intended for our comparisons to provide empirical evidence and relevant context for future housing security and affordability initiatives.

We aimed to find three things:

1. What peer institutions do better (or worse) than Berkeley
2. What programs or university policies we may want to implement at Cal

3. Any unique aspects of peer institutions that led to housing differences between UCB and them

We collected information on all the UC campuses, as well as a few CSU schools. We found programs at UCSC and UCLA that addressed housing issues during school breaks. We found that UC Berkeley stood at the bottom end of housing in terms of percentage of students on campus, but found that Berkeley was not the most expensive UC to live at. UC Berkeley stands in the middle of the pack, with two glaring shortfalls in the lack of emergency housing programs during breaks, and the lack of housing guarantees for students (until this semester, UCB did not guarantee housing for freshman students). Our work was limited by a short timeline and difficulty narrowing down a specific set of housing quality criteria to look at. We intend for our work to be background information and supporting evidence for efforts to increase housing affordability and availability at UCB, which include forming a housing committee with students and administrators.

Student Advisory Committee on Housing

The Student Advocate's Office collaborated with the External Affairs Vice President to create a housing memo listing suggestions for improvements in on-campus housing resources. A concern highlighted was a lack of support for new students navigating on-campus housing. SAO received a case where a transfer student was not fully informed of the on-campus housing application process and needed to defer enrollment. SAO also has received cases where students face extenuating circumstances and without on-campus housing as a safety net, have difficulty finding feasible housing options. To address this and other student housing concerns, this memo suggested the formation of a student committee, focused on making housing programs with administrators. Currently, we are working with the Basic Needs Center and the EAVP to solidify a list of parties that should be involved, and meeting frequency / structure.

Grievance

SAO Exposure In Greek Life

The Exposure in Greek Life Policy aims to make the Student Advocate's Office (SAO) and our work known and accessible to more students. Led by the Grievance Policy Coordinators, this policy project has mainly been centered around publicizing how SAO supports survivors of Sexual Violence and Sexual Harassment (SVSH)—particularly in Greek Life. This semester we have presented to three campus fraternities and have established partnerships with the Disabled Students Advocacy Project and the Graduate Assembly. In order to make scheduling presentations easier in the future, the Exposure in Greek Life Policy Team has created a google form where student-led organizations, Greek-life, faculty, staff and other on-campus communities can request workshops from the Student Advocate's Office. Furthermore, the Exposure in Greek Life team has created a tracker that includes all affiliated greek life registered at UC Berkeley as well as professional fraternities, and identity-based organizations that includes their

contact information. This tracker includes up to 125+ organizations that we can reach out to in the future. We hope that with this tracker, the process of reaching out to organizations for partnerships and presentations about our office will become easier next year.

Student Survivor Accommodations

The Student Survivor Accommodations policy project aimed to compile information about the accommodations that are accessible to students who are survivors on campus. Beyond the scope of creating a presentation with Bears that Care (BTC), we also hoped that this information would better inform SAO caseworkers in their casework and in their support for survivors. Throughout the semester, this policy project team has met with Be Well At Work to discuss work accommodation, Cal Housing Accommodations to discuss on-campus housing accommodations available to survivors as well as Path to Care to discuss academic accommodations. From these meetings, our team has found that there is not a truly formalized process to acquiring work, academic or housing accommodations for student survivors. However, we have been informed on new resources and strategies that could be used to acquire these accommodations for survivors informally, that can be extremely helpful and insightful for our casework.

UC Title IX Policy

This policy project was created to track developments with changes to the University's Title IX policy as well as accumulate all information regarding Title IX and resources for survivors so it can be synthesized into something more accessible and understandable. Previously, this project was focusing on the addition of the Clery Act to campus policy which requires the University to report crime data which would have implications for survivors. The university is currently eager to comply with the Department of Education because of previous events so it is probable that if there was a policy change, that it would be implemented swiftly by the University. National Partners around the U.S. have been meeting over the last couple months to plan for these upcoming changes and possibly make amendments. The team on this project has been looking into the national partners to see if they have posted or publicized their responses to the upcoming changes so that we can gather all relevant information. Additionally, the SVSH UCOP policy was analyzed and annotated. This project has shifted into an addition / part of the Survivors Resources Guide (SRG). The information we have collected from Fall'22 has been organized and summarized as part of the internal section for case worker reference in the SRG.

Survivor Resources

This handbook is both for external and internal use and serves as a compiled list of resources where Survivors can seek support and assistance at UC Berkeley and in the Bay Area. This handbook is comprised of confidential resources, non-confidential resources, conflict

resolution resources, 24/7 Urgent Help resources and more. It will also function as a reference for caseworkers to use with their clients that include all options and pathways as well as detailed steps for each path.

Currently, this team is working with PATH to Care to complete the SVSH Living Toolkit which is a detailed list of all on and off campus resources with the attached relevant information pertaining to each one. This is an active project that will likely extend into the summer and possibly next semester. Once the SVSH Living Toolkit is complete that information will be added to the internal guide, crafted for caseworker and office reference.

Cross Divisional

Antiracism Audit

This semester the Antiracism Audit brought forth a horizontal approach to the audit's projects. This meant caseworkers could propose their individual projects and pursue their projects with support from other members within the audit. This approach led to the proposal of projects such as the Emotional Deescalation Training, Anti-Discrimination Policy Training, the creation of the REPAIR Taskforce, and the Accountability Plan. The Anti-Discrimination Policy Training was the audit's second office-wide presentation, in which the audit presented the new Anti-Discrimination Statement that will be recited to clients, in order to identify at the start of the caseworking process whether or not clients are facing discrimination. This training informed caseworkers the best method to support clients facing discrimination. The REPAIR Task Force focused on the implementation of the CSC's new restorative justice pathway for disciplinary misconduct, REPAIR. This project is continuous as REPAIR it to be implemented July 1st. The Accountability Plan was proposed for resolving conflict between caseworkers and leadership with restorative justice structures throughout the plan. This project will be continued for the following semester.

In addition, the audit has conducted critical discussions regarding topics such as the Anti-Discrimination Policy by UCOP, Clery Act Policy, and an African American Student Development Partnership. In the Anti-Discrimination Policy by UCOP and Clery Act Policy, the audit reviewed, discussed, and submitted suggestions, or have gained a more nuanced perspective, regarding the policies. The objective of submitting suggestions is to ensure the policies empower our clients, and that the policies upon which we conduct our casework uplift rather than stifle. The audit discussed potential options to expand upon the AASD x SAO partnership to ensure SAO's support for Black students. This discussion and development of the partnership will continue into the following semester.

The audit was also able to internally contribute to the office: adding identity-centered resources to the SAO Mental Health Handbook, collecting topics for an office-facing Anti-Racist/Anti-Discrimination educational speaker series which will hopefully occur next semester as the audit continues to gain traction, and recruiting a Restorative Justice Liaison to bolster the effectiveness of SAO's casework and offer more opportunities for healing and growth.

The following semester, the audit plans to continue a horizontal approach to any and all projects and to the audit's structure itself. There are many projects and enterprising ideas from this semester left to be continued that will surely surface as the audit expands.

SAO x BIO Guide to Casework with International Students

This semester, the Guide to Casework with International Students was created in collaboration with Erin Skelly from the UC Berkeley International Office (aka BIO) in order to help caseworkers better support international students. This handbook is for internal use by caseworkers working with international students. This casework guide allows caseworkers to provide students with some background information about BIO services and consider the challenges that international students are faced with in the context of SAO casework. The Guide to Casework with International Students is not a substitute for BIO support. SAO caseworkers should strongly encourage international students to consult with BIO student services. We will continue to update the casework guide as BIO policies change.

Undocumented Student Accessibility

This semester, the Undocumented Student Accessibility Project was able to enhance our internal caseworker training for undocumented students. In particular, our Office had our first ever caseworker wide training on USP related issues from the student leaders of the Undocumented Students Program. Furthermore, SAO has begun to revamp the internal training resources for the financial aid division to update the information with resources for undocumented students, and financial aid processes for undocumented students.

Next year, we will be continuing to host a USP fellow in our office. In future semesters, we hope to build a formalized referral process pathway between USP and SAO, and to expand our training resources to our academic, conduct, and grievance divisions.

Multilingualism

This policy project is aimed at further committing to our office's commitment to support and defend all Berkeley students in both our casework and policy initiatives. A gap was located in our services when it came to their accessibility to multilingual students. How can we attempt to assist *all* students throughout our office's services if a large portion of UCB's student body cannot get the quality of aid that they deserve? The Multilingualism initiative is a response to this guiding question/concern to focus on the improvement of our office's accessibility through a multilingual lens.

This semester, we broke off into three separate teams to focus on three areas that were isolated as areas with the most priority for improvement. These three teams would focus on their respective tasks of an internal audit of the office, the translation of office-wide resources, and outreach to multiethnic/multicultural groups. The internal audit group has collected data and questions from last year's questionnaire and is working on improving and expanding its scope to focus on multilingual casework and translation capacities of caseworkers, which will be sent out after the admission of the Fall '23 hiring class. The translation team was tasked with creating an itemized list of internal documents and external resources that demand translation,

in a prioritized order to identify more essential/timely translations. Now, the group has transitioned into translating. Next, the outreach task force has received a list of all existing and working partnerships on campus, and is isolating specific groups relevant to the multilingualism initiative to prioritize outreach to those who would best benefit from collaboration with our project. It is so exciting to see this project become revitalized and come to fruition, and we are excited to see where each of these teams go from here. The teams have voted to continue to work through summer following finals, which will resume at the beginning of June.