

The Ombuds Office 2011-2012 Annual Report

UNIVERSITY OF IDAHO

July 1, 2011 – June 30, 2012

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OMBUDS

September 27, 2012

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History of the University of Idaho Ombuds Office

This annual report marks **two decades** of the Ombuds Office at the University of Idaho. The first University of Idaho ombudsman office was created in 1992 by President Elizabeth Zinser. Under the title of Office of Faculty Ombudsman, the office was originally staffed by a half time faculty member whose sole charge was to serve the faculty. Two years later in 1994, in response to a growing need for staff ombudsman services, Carol Hahn was appointed “interim staff ombudsman” and served for one year. The following year, the faculty ombudsman’s services were formally expanded to include staff. As the case load increased, President Robert Hoover approved the addition of a half-time, non-faculty assistant ombudsman, and Roxanne “Ellen” Schreiber was appointed to the position in 1998.

The University of Idaho Ombudsman Office and the role of the ombudsman continued to evolve over the next decade. In 2000, to more accurately reflect the role and responsibilities of the position, the original title of “assistant” ombudsman was changed to “associate.” This title was further modified in 2009, once again to more accurately reflect the role and responsibilities of the position, when the designation of “associate” was eliminated from the job title. In 2005, in keeping with a growing national trend to emphasize the gender neutrality of the office and ombuds position, the Faculty Senate adopted to change the office name and position titles to Ombuds Office and ombuds. In spring 2009, and consistent with most university ombuds offices across the nation, the Ombuds Office expanded its services to include both undergraduate and graduate students. In January 2010, upon the retirement of then co-Ombuds James Fazio, Ombuds R. Ellen Schreiber was assigned to the Ombuds Office on a full time basis, thus becoming the university’s first full time ombuds.

University of Idaho Ombuds 1992-present:

- David J. Walker, Dept. of Agricultural Economics/Rural Sociology, 1992-1999
- Thomas V. Trotter, Dept. of Counseling and School Psychology, Special Education, and Educational Leadership, 1999-2003
- Charles Morrison, Counseling and Testing Center, 2003-2005
- James R. Fazio, Dept. of Conservation Social Sciences, 2006-2009
- Roxanne “Ellen” Schreiber, 1998-present

Mission, Purpose and Function

The University of Idaho Ombuds Office mission is to support a positive and productive working, learning and living environment for faculty, staff and students by promoting mutual respect, ensuring fairness and resolving problems that emerge within the university. The primary purpose of the Ombuds Office is to resolve issues or conflicts informally and at the lowest possible level. The office also serves as an agent of positive change by helping to prevent problems by identifying and surfacing issues of concern, and by providing timely feedback.

The Ombuds Office mission and purpose are accomplished by the following:

- listening to concerns
- analyzing problems and exploring options
- providing information about policies and services
- facilitating dialogue between individuals and groups
- mediating disputes
- applying conflict resolution and conciliation methods
- coordinating with other offices on campus
- providing training in human relations, communication and conflict resolution
- noting trends and impacts
- recommending changes in policy and/or work procedures

In fulfilling its purpose, the Ombuds Office adheres to the following Standards of Practice and the Code of Ethics established by the International Ombudsman Association:

Independence. To ensure objectivity, the office operates independent of all university entities and reports to the highest possible level of the organization.

Confidentiality. All contacts, conversations and information exchanged with the ombuds remain confidential and are not disclosed without the consent of the parties involved *and* the ombuds. Limits to confidentiality exist when disclosure is necessary to protect someone from harm and when otherwise required by law.

Neutrality. An ombuds does not take sides nor represent nor advocate on behalf of any party or the university. Rather, it is the role of the ombuds to consider the facts, rights, interests, and safety of all parties involved in a search for a fair resolution to a problem. An ombuds advocates only for fairness and justice.

Informality. Consultations are conducted “off the record” and do not constitute notice to the university in any way. No personal information is retained or used for subsequent formal proceedings. An ombuds will not serve as a witness nor offer testimony in any formal proceeding unless required by law. Although the process is informal, individuals using the services of the Ombuds Office retain their rights to all formal procedures ordinarily available to them.

Year in Review

There were no significant changes in services, staffing or physical facilities during FY 2011-12. The adjacent, small ombuds office was cleared, cleaned and rearranged to provide an improved waiting area. This affords privacy for those waiting to speak with the ombuds and private consultation space for visitors during mediations or other multi-party interventions.

Staffing. The Ombuds Office is staffed by a full time professional ombuds. Services were available to all university employees and students during regular business hours throughout the week and during extended hours and weekends, whenever necessary to accommodate work shifts and schedules. Ombuds services were also available throughout the summer. Anna Thompson, assistant to the Faculty Secretary and to the Ombuds Office, provided administrative assistance.

Case Load. For the purpose of reporting, a ‘case’ is a new or recurrent issue that is brought to the ombuds’ attention by one or more individuals seeking assistance. It can also be an issue of which an ombuds becomes aware and takes self-directed action. Cases vary from a single informational visit to highly complex and involved interventions that require multiple parties and meetings, direct intervention and considerable time. The Ombuds Office addressed 209 cases in 2011-12. This represents an increase of 34

cases or approximately 19% compared to the previous year (Figure 1). The total number of cases reported in any year is a conservative figure. Numerous contacts occur informally and spontaneously throughout the natural course of business across the greater campus. While some of these encounters may result in case entries, many others are treated as part of the ombuds' natural function.

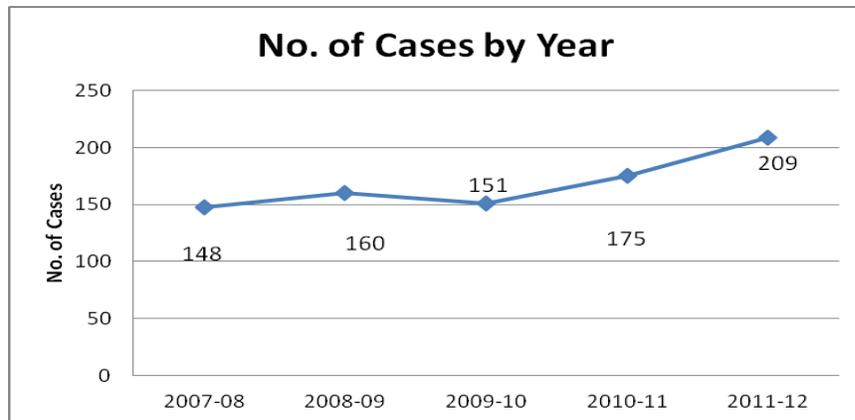


Figure 1: Total number of ombuds cases by year.

Similar to previous years, the number of new cases by month showed modest fluctuations across most months of the year. Surprisingly, October had the highest number of new cases for the year with 24 cases and was a significant increase (85%) over the previous year's 13 cases; however, no clear patterns emerged to account for the rise. The second highest month with 23 new cases occurred in March and coincides with the completion of the annual performance evaluation period, subsequent employment actions and the beginning of nonrenewal decisions and timelines. The start of the academic year proved to be another particularly challenging time with the number of new cases in August increasing approximately 57% over the previous year to 22 in 2011-12. Not surprisingly, the lowest numbers of new cases occurred in July with 11 new cases and September with 12 new cases. July is naturally a 'quieter' time for the university and a time when fewer faculty, staff and students are on campus, and September is when many programs and classes are settling in after the bustling startup period (Figure 2).

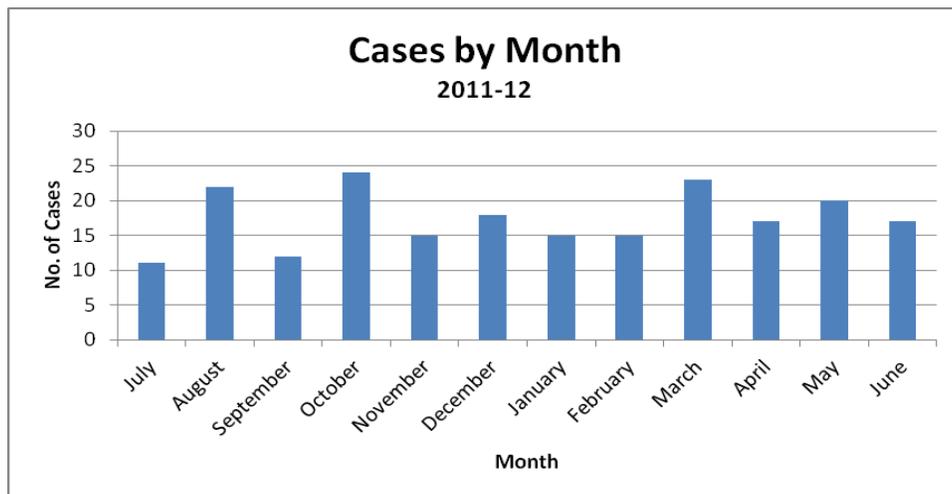


Figure 2: Ombuds cases by month

Nature of Visitors and Contacts. Once again, a slight majority of visitors to the Ombuds Office in 2011-12 were females (53%). This represents a slight decrease (3%) from the previous year and a normal fluctuation for the office. Consistent with most previous years, nearly three quarters of all visitors (71%) sought ombuds' assistance on their own initiative rather than by referral. The seven percent increase in direct referrals is attributed to administrators, supervisors and advisors becoming increasingly familiar with the ombuds' role and resource as a result of enhanced efforts throughout the year to heighten awareness and understanding of the Ombuds Office.

Table 1 shows that use of ombuds services across all employee categories continued to represent proportions similar to their distribution within the university and remained largely consistent with previous years' fluctuations. The largest change was a 7% increase in percentage of total cases that were initiated by tenure-track faculty with 47 cases in 2011-12. There was also a 3% increase in percentage of total cases brought forward by undergraduate students over the previous year (13 cases in 2011-12). Once again, the student increase was anticipated due to enhanced outreach efforts to students and student service providers; and no trends or patterns, other than increasing awareness of the Ombuds Office, were associated within these fluctuations.

As mentioned earlier and common practice in academic settings, case affiliation is tied to the party initiating an individual case. The affiliation of each party within a case is not currently gathered or reported.

Table 1: UI Affiliation by Percentage of Cases

Affiliation	2007-08	2008-09	2009-10	2010-11	2011-12
	%	%	%	%	%
Classified Staff	42	40	35	37	34
Faculty (tenure track)	23	20	18	15	22
Faculty (non-tenure track)	-	-	3	2	0
Administration	12	10	15	18	17
Exempt	16	18	9	13	13
Graduate Assistants	2	1	3	2	0
Grad Students	1	1	4	7	4
Undergraduates	3	3	6	3	6
Retiree	-	1	0	1	0
Other	1	6	8	2	3

Consistent with the previous year and in keeping with the experience of most ombuds' offices, the majority of cases (69%) directly involved one individual; however, in most cases there was at least one other person of concern. This figure indicates that for these cases no other party was directly involved in addressing the problem. The remaining cases involved multiple parties directly involved with the problem; and among these, two-party cases continued to be most common (21%). The actual number of parties served, including single party and multi-party cases (where the parties were directly and/or substantially involved), increased from 294 in the previous year to 393 in 2011-12 (Table 2). The increase in total number of parties is, in part, the result of the overall increase in the number of cases as well as several cases involving significant work with entire units or numerous individuals within a unit. In these cases (i.e., a group of academic majors, academic departments or work units), unit-wide civility concerns, changes in leadership,

unit reorganization and persistent unit-wide tension were the focus of intervention. When counting parties to a case it is always challenging to track where separate cases begin or end from the presenting issues of the unit; however, the practice of the office has been to consider most subsequent individual contacts as follow up to the unit issue.

[The number of “parties” counted in unit-wide cases was determined by the degree to which the ombuds was involved with the parties and does not always reflect the actual number of persons within the unit.]

Table 2: Number of Individuals (Parties) per Ombuds Case

<u>Individuals Involved</u>	<u>No. of Cases</u>	<u>Total Parties</u>
1	144	144
2	43	86
3	4	12
4	4	16
5	1	5
6	6	36
10	4	40
16	2	32
22	1	22
Total Parties/Individuals		393

Face-to-face consultation continues to be the most common format for delivering ombuds’ services, and it is encouraged whenever possible. Visitors regularly express appreciation for the opportunity to discuss concerns and explore options with another person in a confidential and helpful manner. The types of contact shifted only modestly over the previous year with seventy-seven percent of cases involving office or some form of face-to-face visits (including video calls). The use of video call consultation for non-Moscow-based parties is growing increasingly more familiar, more readily available and more reliable; and visitors continue to express appreciation and satisfaction for having this option available. In some instances where video conferencing was unavailable and limited travel funds or time constraints were a factor, telephone consultation was used. Telephone only contacts accounted for 21% of consultations. Email or other written modes of communication (letters, notes, etc.), although actively discouraged due to confidentiality concerns, once again accounted for 2% of contacts. Understandably, some use of email was logistically unavoidable.

Cases varied significantly in the amount of ombuds involvement needed; this involvement is reported as “contacts.” Twenty percent of cases involved only one visit or contact with no further ombuds/visitor/other direct involvement. The remaining cases involved multiple consultations or contacts, either with the visitor alone (the person bringing the case) and/or with others involved or with those who were a resource for addressing the concern (e.g., administrators, supervisors, General Counsel, Human Resources, Human Rights, Access and Inclusion, etc.). Contacts for 2011-12 totaled 769 for the year, and represent a decrease from the previous year’s 886 contacts. Differences in presenting issues and the amount of contacts needed account for normal year-to-year fluctuation. Table 3 shows the distribution of contacts per case.

Table 3: Number of Contacts per Case

No. of Ombuds Contacts	No. of Cases	Total No. Contacts
0	1	1
1	42	42
2	54	108
3	36	108
4	30	120
5	12	60
6	3	18
7	8	56
8	8	64
9	8	36
11	2	22
12	4	48
13	1	13
16	1	16
17	1	17
18	1	18
23	1	23
Total Contacts		769

*An ombuds initiated case may or may not actively involve other individuals (e.g., bringing an observation to attention or reporting a concern); additionally, repeated efforts to follow-up on an inquiry without visitor follow through may result in a case with no contacts.

Nature of Problems. Recognizing that every organization will have concerns or problems that emerge within the normal process of conducting business, the University of Idaho provides multiple resources in addition to the Ombuds Office to help members of the community address their issues and problems constructively. However, it is the confidential, informal and impartial features of the Ombuds Office that most often prompt visitors to seek ombuds' services, especially as an initial resource. While contact with the Ombuds Office is confidential, issues are tracked. The *nature* of problems presented to the Ombuds Office can inform the university of areas requiring attention. Given the overall increase in cases for the year, increases in problems that spread across the categories were not surprising and did not generally reflect a new pattern or trend. Figure 3 shows the distribution of problem categories received by the Ombuds Office in 2011-12. Each category is then discussed in detail.

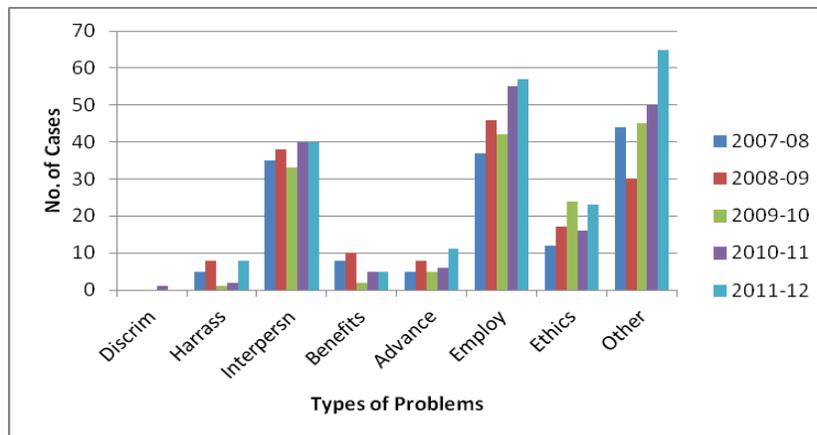


Figure 3: Problem type by year brought to the Ombuds Office

Discrimination: There are no cases of discrimination brought directly to the Ombuds Office during the 2011-12 year. As in previous years, in several cases individuals who originally had discrimination concerns or complaints contacted the Ombuds Office *after* their issues were brought and/or assessed elsewhere and they were appropriately referred to the Ombuds Office for assistance with non-discrimination issues. Members of university community continue to be well-informed about the formal channels for addressing discrimination issues; however they are somewhat less clear about the limitations of those channels (at times applying the complaint of discrimination to a broader range of problems).

Harassment: Incidents of harassment perceived as due to age, disability, race/ethnicity/origin, religion and sex continue to be making their way to the appropriate formal office. However, whenever visitors do come to the ombuds office with these complaints, they are promptly referred to the appropriate formal office. During 2011-12 there were eight cases of perceived harassment. One case of perceived sexual harassment was brought directly to the ombuds and two cases of perceived religious harassment were received. There were no cases of harassment related to age, disability or race/ethnicity/origin.

There were five cases of general harassment or ‘bullying’ brought to the office. In these cases visitors came from across affiliation categories. In cases where the perception of ‘bullying’ was present, it was accompanied by very strong emotional intensity and often produced intractable conflicts. The presence of perceived bullying often led to a series of subsequent complaints—some of which became significant formal complaints.

Benefits: There were once again five cases attributed primarily to issues of benefits during the year. Three cases related to family and medical leave issues and two cases involving sick and annual leave were the only two areas that were sources of problems in this category.

Advancement: There was a notable increase in problems related to advancement over the previous year, increasing from six cases in 2010-11 to 11 cases in 2011-12. Salary and promotion and tenure/non-reappointment issues were the exclusive issues that arose during the year. Although the total numbers increased, no patterns or trends emerged from these cases.

Employment: Employment is the largest problem category with 25 “specifiers” or specific areas of concern; and as such, it continues to be the largest category of problems brought to the Ombuds Office. There were 57 cases that fell into this category, which is a slight increase of two cases over the previous year. Once again, given the overall increase in cases for the year, an increase in this category is not surprising. Of the specifiers, evaluations were again the most frequent source of conflict with 14 cases. This number remains stable. It suggests, and not surprisingly, that the evaluation process continues to be an area of recurring tension. The number of cases in each specifier or subcategory is shown in Table 4 along with the change from last year.

Table 4: Breakdown of 57 Cases in ‘Employment’ Category

	<u>Cases</u>	<u>Change from last year</u>		<u>Cases</u>	<u>Change from last year</u>
Evaluations	14	0	Accommodations for Disability	0	-1
Management	4	+1	Assistantship Appointment	0	0
Job Description	6	+4	Demotion	0	0
Reassignment	1	-3	Hiring Interview	1	+1
Probation (performance)	3	0	Marital Issues	1	-1
Working Conditions	2	-1	Office Space/Conditions	0	-1
Workload	5	0	Program Termination	0	0
Flex time/Location	0	0	Scheduling	1	0
Resignation	2	+1	Teaching Load/Course Assign.	2	0
Salary Agreement	2	0	Termination – Layoff	0	0
Hiring Process	4	+2	Termination – Performance	0	0
Reclassification	0	-1	Termination – Cause	6	-1
Reorganization	3	+2			

Interpersonal: Interpersonal conflicts are predictable within any organization, and in 2011-12 they were once again the third highest category of cases received by the office with 40 cases arising—the same number as those recorded in the previous year. Interpersonal disputes between supervisors and supervisees both increased by two cases. Tensions and disputes between individuals in the workplace and in the learning environment ranged from persistent annoyances between individuals to intensely disruptive, distracting and distressful impacts on multiple parties and non-parties (co-workers, supervisors, etc.). Similar to the previous year, many cases involved perceptions of incivility, disrespectful behavior and/or unfair treatment. Interpersonal disputes frequently overlapped with other categories, especially those of harassment (general bullying/harassment), ethical concerns (safety, fairness, etc.) and the ‘Other’ category (department head, department/unit function). Since cases can only be counted in one category, they are counted as interpersonal when it is the primary focus of the visitor’s attention and the ombuds’ resolution efforts. Interpersonal conflict cases initiated by faculty (in their faculty role) decreased by one case to 11 cases this year after a significant increase from the previous year. While these numbers are small overall, many of these disputes were intense, highly disruptive and persistent; and they often grew to involve or impact multiple parties. Of the 40 interpersonal dispute cases presented, the visitor’s dispute involved one or more of the following:

Administrator	2 cases
Advisor	1
Co-worker	4
Supervisor	10
Supervisee	8
Faculty	11
Peers (student)	4
Others	0

Ethical Concerns: There were 23 cases involving ethical concerns during the reporting year. This is an increase of 7 cases over last year's significant increase. While there are eight specifiers in the ethical concerns category, actual cases were distributed only in the following areas:

Intellectual property	1
Health/safety	10
Records management	1
Others	11

Visits to the Ombuds Office frequently involve multiple issues. Although some of the categories listed above show zero, it does *not* mean that the topic was not part of any visitor's reason for using the Ombuds Office. For data management purposes, only the *predominant* or *precipitating* reason for contact is used. On the other hand, some cases defy placement in *any* of the established categories. These are listed as "*Other*" and are shown below.

Other: Sixty-five cases did not fit into the defined major categories and was an increase of 15 cases from the previous year. Nineteen of these cases involved department or campus unit function. These cases were most often brought to the Ombuds Office by a unit administrator and often involved multiple responses or interventions, on fewer occasions they were brought by one or more members of a department or unit. Unit-wide cases are often complex and involve many different issues, involve multiple parties, require considerable time, and have a significant impact on the individuals or groups involved. While it was not possible to remedy all issues within these groups, most efforts resulted in substantial functional improvement and prevented further deterioration. General descriptions within the 'other' category, including requests for meeting or unit facilitation and training, along with the number of cases, are shown below.

	Number of Cases	Change
Department/unit function	19	+1
Miscellaneous	13	-2
Committee function	1	-2
Academic issues	14	+3
Department head (misc. problems)	6	+3
Disciplinary action	0	0
Financial aid	0	0
Facilitation	4	
Training	8	

Resolution of Problems. Ombuds use a variety of processes to assist visitors with addressing concerns and resolving problems. Most cases involve multiple actions, so categories are *not* mutually exclusive. The types of ombuds' actions taken once again remained fairly consistent with previous years, with the exception of information (providing information on policy, university resources, procedures, etc.), which decreased from the previous year. Four basic categories of ombuds' actions are summarized in Table 5.

Table 5: Actions Used by Ombuds

Action	Cases	Percentage of Cases*
Problem exploration	182	87
Information	51	24
Intercession (e.g., mediation, shuttle diplomacy, facilitation)	67	32
Referrals (e.g., EAP, HR, Human Rights, Access and Inclusion, deans, supervisors, advisors)	70	33

*Most cases involve multiple actions, so categories are *not* mutually exclusive and therefore exceed 100%.

Outreach and Other Services. The Ombuds Office contributes to the university's Strategic Plan 2011-2015 by contributing most directly to the objectives of Goal Four: Community and Culture. At monthly New Employee Orientation, all new employees were introduced to the Ombuds Office role and resources. In response, some new employees sought out the office to let the ombuds know that their transition into the university was going well. The ombuds was frequently called upon to provide employee in-service trainings, presentations to academic classes and student organizations, on a variety of human relations topics and skills including campus civility, conflict management, communication and other topics within the ombuds' expertise. Examples include: Building and Sustaining a Positive Workplace, Creating Campus Culture: Making the Positive Choice, Moving Forward: Appreciation & Change, Working Together in Teams, Managing Difficult Conversations, Managing Change in the Workplace, Building a Community of Professionals and Managing Differences and Conflict. Throughout the year, the ombuds provided 16 training sessions and participated in two supervisor retreat panels, four student sessions or class lectures and facilitated three department retreats. The ombuds was also regularly called upon to serve as a designated neutral and process monitor at official meetings to support respectful and constructive dialogue.

The Ombuds Office provided additional service to the broader university through continuing participation on the Benefits Advisory Group, Campus Emergency Preparedness and Response Team, Threat Assessment Team, Professional Development Coordinating Committee (core competence and conflict management planning groups), and a new LEAN/Continuous Improvement Advisory Board. Additionally, the ombuds contributed at the national and international level to the continuous development of the organizational ombudsman profession by serving as chair of the International Ombudsman Association (IOA) Membership Committee, a member of the Professional Development Committee and as a presenter and facilitator at the IOA annual conference.

Professional Development. To stay abreast of relevant professional issues, the ombuds attended the International Ombudsman Association Annual Conference, participated actively through the ombudsman association list serve, and consulted with (and provided consultation to other) organizational and academic ombuds. Since the ombuds holds licensure and national certification as a professional counselor, she also engaged in continuing professional education that, although crosses professional disciplines, contributes to increasing skills and effectiveness as an ombuds.

Effectiveness of the Ombuds Office. Being heard and understood is a powerful intervention. Visitors to the Ombuds Office frequently report how important it is to them—even when no resolution options or remedies are available—to have a 'safe' place and an impartial person in which to share their concerns. Being able to 'do their thinking out loud' without judgment or fear and being assisted with sorting out issues and response options is the most common and highly appreciated benefit reported directly to the ombuds and in written feedback. When solutions or resolutions are available or achieved, many of those

directly and indirectly involved report that they are better able to resume their focus on work or studies and are relieved to experience improvements in their workplace and learning environments and repaired relationships. It continues to be generally much easier and more satisfying for all parties to resolve issues informally before issues escalate, whenever possible.

Visitor feedback form comments...

- *I'm glad that the program exists on campus and I think it is a great resource.*
- *Great chance to improve a potentially volatile situation.*
- *This office really helps our institution maintain high standards of respect and fairness.*
- *Was very helpful in helping me as well as others in future, resolve an ambiguous policy issue.*
- *Gave me great insights and helped me formulate an excellent resolution to my issue.*
- *It was refreshing to have a truly unbiased opinion.*
- *Has been a great help before and thus returned for a new issue.*
- *An excellent and essential service of the university.*

Assessing benefits and overall effectiveness, impacts and outcomes of ombuds services poses a challenge for ombuds offices. Results are difficult to measure or report since confidentiality precludes the use of many of the usual forms of evaluation, and visitor perceptions of outcomes are often tied to factors outside of an ombuds role (an ombuds cannot reverse decisions, change a grade, or adjudicate complaints, etc.). Helping visitors and all parties to be effective, constructive, fair and respectful in seeking solutions to their concerns, reducing harmful tensions or hostility, and thereby contributing to the overall well-being of the university community, is considered a successful outcome in the perspective of the Ombuds Office.

The Ombuds Office currently uses two evaluation methods to assess the outcomes and impacts of services. The first is based on the ombuds' self-analysis of completed cases using a scale ranging between 'satisfactory' and 'unsatisfactory' resolution of cases; it is not a measure of visitor satisfaction. The scale attempts to evaluate the outcome and impact of each case as objectively as possible. Table 6 describes the outcome identifiers that fall within each range and that are used to guide the ombuds' appraisal.

For 2011-12, the ombuds self-appraisal of case outcomes placed 85% of case outcomes within a range considered 'resolved satisfactorily.' Twelve per cent fell within the 'neutral' outcome range, and approximately three per cent were considered 'unsatisfactory' outcomes. Thinking through an issue or problem with an impartial skilled listener generally contributes to more positive and less destructive outcomes in most issues, even when a visitor or the university's actions have already occurred or been decided. This may account for the sizeable number of cases gauged by the ombuds to be positive outcomes. The ombuds self-appraisal of cases for 2011-12 is summarized (using rounded numbers, totals will not equal 100%) in Table 6.

Table 6: Self-Appraisal of Outcomes/Impacts Ombuds Cases, 2011-12

Outcome Category	Percentage of Cases (N=209)
Resolved satisfactorily with Ombuds Office assistance	85%
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Agreement/compromise reached through mediation; formal action avoided; visitor given another chance or situation otherwise satisfactorily resolved. 8% • Conflict resolved short of mediation; may involve ‘shuttle diplomacy’ or similar intervention, workshops with entire unit, or other techniques; formal action not taken. 11% • Ombuds served, by invitation or suggestion, as neutral observer; may involve role as moderator, but not mediator; party(ies) satisfied with outcome; formal action not taken. 4% • Information only was provided by Ombuds; and/or helps party to self-advocate; visitor satisfied. 57 % • Action resulted in policy or system modification/improvement 1% • Other 3% 	
Neutral Outcome (Ombuds Office had no direct impact)	12%
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ombud’s role was primarily as a neutral listener; little or no ‘coaching’ or additional information was provided. Visitor already had or did not need information, but needed ‘someone to listen;’ may have received confirmation of ideas/plans, but nothing new added by Ombuds. 11% • Visitor initiated and then canceled or ‘vanished’ after setting appointment or before follow-up action was completed. <1% • Situation ‘unrepairable’ upon arrival (e.g. temporary help, already terminated, tenure was denied for appropriate reason, or visitor resigned). 1% • Other <1% 	
Results Unsatisfactory	3%
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Visitor disgruntled with Ombuds efforts and discontinued visits or contacts. 0% • Visitor disregarded advice/solution and suffered consequences. 2% • Unfair practice or situation not resolved nor corrected due to lack of cooperation. <1% • Other <1% 	

The **Ombuds Office Visitor Feedback Form** (Figure 4) provides an opportunity for visitors to provide anonymous feedback on services and outcomes. While the feedback form provides general information on the ombuds effectiveness and visitor satisfaction, the instrument was designed primarily to support the ombuds’ continuous improvement and is not intended as a formal statistical measure. Use of ombuds visitor satisfaction and outcome assessments is known to pose a number of challenges. Among the more common issues are how a party’s role in the case, as well as their desired or expected outcomes, influence perceptions of satisfaction and success and not uncommon, lower than desired evaluation return rates. Despite these and other potential limitations, such feedback is welcome and useful; especially when paired with the ombuds’ self-appraisal of outcomes and impacts, the information contributes to strengthening the delivery of services.

Every effort is made to ensure the anonymity of the responding party, and no identifying information is requested on the feedback form. Completed forms are sent by visitors directly to the Provost’s Office for processing by a staff member assigned to manage administrative evaluations. A feedback summary report

is reviewed with the ombuds as a part of the annual performance evaluation process. As such, feedback summaries (calendar years) are not synchronized with the periods covered by the annual report period (fiscal year).

Figure 4: Ombuds Office Visitor Feedback Form

Thank you for taking a moment to provide feedback on your visit to the Ombuds Office; your responses will help us improve services. Please rate your experience by marking the appropriate boxes below and mail the completed form to Campus Zip 3152.

Please do not include any identifying information (name, position or concern).

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree	Not Applicable
I was able to talk with an ombuds in a timely manner.						
The ombuds explained his/her role and the confidential, neutral, informal (“off the record”), and independent standards of the office.						
The ombuds explained the limitations of confidentiality.						
The ombuds functioned neutrally and did not take sides.						
I was treated respectfully.						
The ombuds helped me to clarify my issue(s) and identify options.						
The ombuds provided helpful information (policies/procedures, communication/conflict resolution skills, and referral).						
The ombuds helped me to address or better manage my concern.						
The ombuds helped me resolve my concern or helped prevent it from deteriorating or escalating unnecessarily.						
I would use the Ombuds Office again, if needed.						
Comments:						
Please mark (X) your university affiliation:	Faculty	Staff	Administrator	Student	Other:	

While the intent is to receive feedback from all initiating case visitors, it can be a challenge to identify when a particular case closes (as in the case of protracted conflicts, ongoing departmental tensions and multiple overlapping issues, etc.), when a new one with the same parties begins or when a conflict involves immediate absence/leave or separations from the university. Additionally, not all individuals choose to provide contact information or to participate in giving feedback. Despite some of these known challenges, for the period March 2011 thru February 2012, 57 forms were returned. Overall, the responses were strongly positive and consistent with the ombuds outcome self-appraisals and support the conclusion that ombuds' services continue to be perceived as helpful to individuals who sought assistance.

Issues and Recommendations

In the spirit of continuous improvement and in accordance with the provisions of the *Faculty-Staff Handbook* FSH 3820 B-6 (FSH), the Ombuds Office identifies those issues that may warrant further attention and offers general recommendations, when appropriate.

The ombuds are encouraged to comment on policies, procedures and processes with an eye to positive future change. These observations should be shared with the administrators and bodies with jurisdiction over those policies, procedures, and processes. (FSH 3820 B-6)

As in previous years, most concerns or problems brought to the Ombuds Office in 2011-12 were situational, or specific to a set of circumstances or individuals, rather than emerging from systemic problems. Whenever issues *were* specific to a particular responsibility area, they were brought directly to the attention of the respective administrator and are not included below. As with all organizations, there are always some areas where additional attention may offer opportunities for improvement and some of these are highlighted below. Issues and recommendations that were addressed in the previous year that continue to pose significant and/or increasing concern are noted by asterisk (*).

***Supervisor effectiveness/workplace climate.** Supervisor effectiveness in setting and maintaining a respectful workplace climate, and in particular, modeling and ensuring respectful interpersonal conduct, is an area that necessitates heightened attention and re-mention due to the continuing frequency of problems arising and their significant impact. Individual employee well-being and productivity, as well as the overall function of the workplace, are deeply affected. Multiple complaints of disrespectful communication were received. These included: *supervisors* and coworkers using raised voices and 'yelling' when addressing problems, the use of profanity and offensive personality or character references, and supervisors communicating performance concerns in the presence of others. Such behaviors are inconsistent with the university's expressed values, have had the impact of intimidation, and set an improper standard for the workplace. **Recommendation:** Provide supervisors *at all organizational levels* with clear expectations regarding the quality of interpersonal communication and conduct, and incorporate civility and respectful workplace training within the new supervisor training series.

***Reorganization and change.** As the university continues to refine its organizational structures and processes, units undergoing significant restructuring, changes in leadership and revised employee responsibilities have experienced heightened workplace stress and conflict. The time involved to process some reorganizations, and the duration of uncertainty and turmoil, have been particularly distressful. **Recommendation:** To the extent possible, be attentive to the length of time reorganization processes are taking and the impacts of protracted processes on employees. Once again, include employee support strategies as a part of the change management process, and provide resources for the natural and predictable period of adjustment.

Social media: There is considerable confusion and increasing conflict related to the use of online social media. Faculty and staff at all organizational levels and students independently and as groups, brought forward complaints regarding social posts. The use of social media to vent upset at the university, supervisors, supervisees and peers is an increasing source of rapidly escalating conflict. **Recommendation:** Provide education and clarification to all employees on the use, potential impacts and cautions when referencing the university workplace or learning environment in social media. Provide students with opportunities to become more informed on the use and cautions associated with social media.

Graduate course grade expectations: Many courses at the graduate level are, by nature, more loosely structured than typical undergraduate courses; and performance expectations are not always clearly defined or stipulated. This can and has led to intense misunderstandings and grading conflicts.

Recommendation: Develop and consistently communicate written expectations and the grading bases/rubric for all credits offered (including pass/fail credits).

Exit interviews: Separating employees, especially those with serious concerns about their work experience, frequently request to see the established procedure for ensuring that feedback from exit interviews is routed to the appropriate level administrator. **Recommendation:** Ensure that a clear and consistent process for transmitting exit feedback is in place and available to exiting employees.

Safety and security information: There is increasing interest in and concern for personal safety and security among faculty and staff; and the faculty and staff have expressed concern about their level of preparedness. **Recommendation:** Continue to enhance current online communication with periodic direct departmental training.

The Year Ahead

Undergraduate and graduate students are making their way to the Ombuds Office with increasing numbers and outreach to students will be a continuing priority in the year ahead. The office will continue to reach out to student leadership, residence life staff, student groups and student services while also relying upon the faculty, student advisors and staff to help inform the student community about the availability of ombuds services. Facilitation and group process consultation also increased over the past year and will continue to be available on request. Partnering with Professional Development and Learning (PDL) and other offices on campus to provide conflict management and other related human relations training was well-received, and the Ombuds Office will continue to contribute employee development workshops through PDL as well as at the request of individual departments and groups.

Acknowledgements

As the Ombuds Office celebrates the conclusion of two decades of service to the university community, I want to extend my sincere appreciation to President M. Duane Nellis and to Provost and Executive Vice President Doug Baker for their continued commitment to supporting the independence, neutrality, informality and confidentiality of the ombuds process. Further, I want to acknowledge that the work of the Ombuds Office could not succeed without the continuing commitment and support of university administration at all levels and across all colleges and divisions. These fundamental commitments, together with the trust, cooperation and constructive efforts of the many the faculty, staff, students and administrators who were served through the office, led to the successful resolution of numerous issues throughout the year.