

# **The Ombuds Office Annual Report**

**University of Idaho**

July 1, 2007 – June 30, 2008

James R. Fazio, Ph.D.  
Ombuds

Roxanne E. Schreiber, M. Ed.  
Associate Ombuds

## History

The ombuds function as a method of informal conflict resolution dates back to 1809 when the Swedish legislature created an office to receive complaints relative to government actions. The idea spread to several other nations, then to companies, local governments, international organizations and other public and private entities.

Universities began appointing ombuds (alternatively referred to as ombudsmen or ombudspeople) in the 1960s. According to the International Ombudsman Association, by 1968 there were 20-30 colleges and universities with Ombuds Offices, largely in reaction to campus turmoil associated with the civil rights, free speech and anti-war movements. In most cases, the offices were created on behalf of students more than for faculty or staff.

At the University of Idaho, the Ombuds Office was not created until 1992. At that time, the “Office of Faculty Ombudsman” was created by President Elisabeth A. Zinser and staffed part time by a faculty member. Ironically, it was created to serve faculty only. In 1994, an “interim staff ombudsman” was appointed for a one-year term, and was filled by Carol Hahn. During the following year, 1995, the services of the faculty ombuds were expanded to include cases from staff. As the case load increased, President Hoover approved the addition of a half-time “assistant ombudsman” in 1998. This position was to be filled from staff personnel with Roxanne Schreiber being selected for the job.

In 2000, the title of “assistant” was changed to “associate” to more accurately reflect the role and responsibilities of the position. This position continues to be held by Roxanne Schreiber who is also the university’s Work/Life Specialist. At some point after 1997 the title of “faculty ombuds” was shortened to “ombuds,” but the requirement of being filled only by a tenured faculty member remained, as it does today. Those holding this position have been:

- 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 – present).

A change to the current name – The Ombuds Office – was adopted by Faculty Council in 2005 to reflect gender-neutrality of the role and office.

During the past year (2007-08), discussions were initiated to make the following two policy amendments as the nature of the ombuds function grows and changes with the complexity of cases and needs of the university community. Specifically, in the coming year, a request to Faculty Council will be introduced to: (1) eliminate the designation of “associate” and provide for two half-time ombuds, one from faculty ranks and one in a staff, or exempt, position, and (2) expand the services of the office to include students.

## **Purpose and Function**

The primary purpose of the Ombuds Office is to resolve conflicts at the lowest possible level in the university's administrative structure. The office is also intended to prevent problems by being an agent of positive change. These services are provided to faculty, staff and administrators throughout the entire state and are accomplished through:

- ♦ listening to concerns and responding to complaints
- ♦ analyzing problems and exploring options
- ♦ providing information about policies and available services
- ♦ applying conflict resolution and conciliation methods
- ♦ coordinating with other offices on campus such as Human Resources, Risk Management, Human Rights Compliance, Work & Life, Disability Support Services, and others
- ♦ noting trends and recommending changes in policy and/or work procedures

The Ombuds Office adheres to four Standards of Practice and a code of ethics promulgated by the International Ombudsman Association. Specifically, the standards are:

### ***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. An exception is 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 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.

Current UI policy regarding the Ombuds Office is found in FSH 3820.

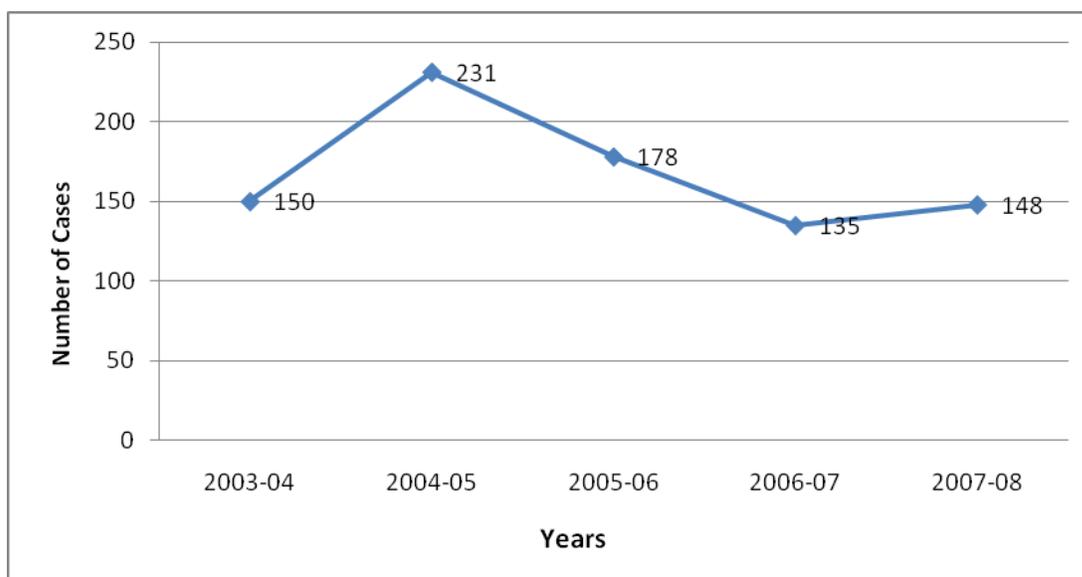
## The Year in Review

### *Staffing and Case Load*

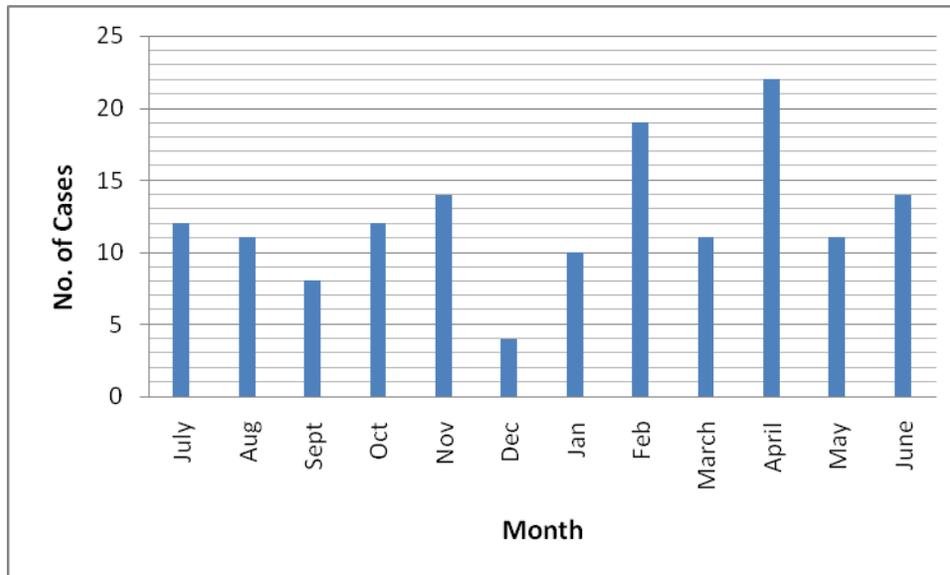
Over the past year, the Ombuds Office was fully staffed. This provided service to university employees eight hours a day, five days a week. Each day during the school year was split roughly with Schreiber working mornings and Fazio working afternoons. During summer recess, the office was staffed by Schreiber with Fazio on unpaid ‘on call’ status as needed. Administrative assistance was provided by Ann Thompson who works jointly for the Faculty Secretary and the Ombuds Office.

Total cases increased, ending a two-year decline (Figure 1). The total number of cases reported is again a conservative figure in that it does not account for the numerous informal contacts initiated by individuals outside the office during the course of other business or casual encounters on campus. In addition, several cases, including at least two that are continuing into the new academic year, are highly complex and one involves a large number of individuals.

There are no explainable trends or patterns in cases by month (Figure 2). Only July, August and October were consistent from last year to this year. All others changed to some degree, some dramatically. For example, cases in September, January, March and May dropped significantly, while they rose considerably in February, April and June.



**Figure 1: Total number of ombuds cases by year.**



**Figure 2: Ombuds cases by month**

### *Nature of the Visitors and Contacts*

A slight majority of visitors to the Ombuds Office were again females (57%), with exactly the same proportion as the previous year. Again this year, most visitors who came to the office did so on their own initiative (71%), rather than by referral. However, the latter statistic could possibly represent an important change from the previous year in that *referrals* to the office increased from 19% to 29%. This may mean that more supervisors and/or others who have used the office have gained enough confidence in it to recommend that others try its services.

Table 1 shows that all categories of employees are using the services of the office. Numbers generally follow the proportions of employees in each category and are virtually unchanged from the previous year. An exception is an increase in use by students. There were a total of 6 student cases, compared with only 2 the previous year. In all cases, faculty or staff were involved in the problem that students faced, so use of the Ombuds Office seemed appropriate despite UI policy restricting the office to faculty and staff.

**Table 1: UI Affiliation by Percentage of Cases**

<u>Affiliation</u>	<u>2003-04</u>	<u>2004-05</u>	<u>2005-06</u>	<u>2006-07</u>	<u>2007-08</u>
	%	%	%	%	%
Classified Staff	43	43	41	44	42
Faculty	19	17	23	19	23
Administration	12	23	13	13	12
Non-faculty Exempt	14	9	13	15	16
Graduate Assistants	2	5	3	1	2
Other Grad Students	2	1	1	1	1
Undergraduates	0	0	0	0	3
Retiree	-	-	1	1	-
Exempt Staff	4	1	0	1	See Non-Fac Empt
Other	4	2	5	1	1
Missing data	0	0	0	4	-

In the great majority of cases (76%) only one individual was involved in the case. Of course most cases involved one or more others with whom the visitor was having problems, but they were not contacted in any way. With multi-party cases, the number of employees directly involved through contact with the ombuds totaled 92 (Table 2). Most contacts involved office visits (74%), with 21% being phone conversations only and 5% using email or letter only.

Table 3 shows the number of contacts made between an ombuds and the visitor(s) or, in some cases, parties who provided input (e.g. Human Resources, Dean of Students, Human Rights Compliance Office, General Counsel, etc.). Contacts totaled 521 for the year.

**Table 2: Number of Individuals Per Ombuds Case**

<u>Individuals Involved</u>	<u>No. of Cases</u>	<u>Percentage of Cases</u>
		%
1	113	76
2	25	17
3	9	6
15	1	1
Totals	205	148
		100

**Table 3: Number of Contacts Per Case**

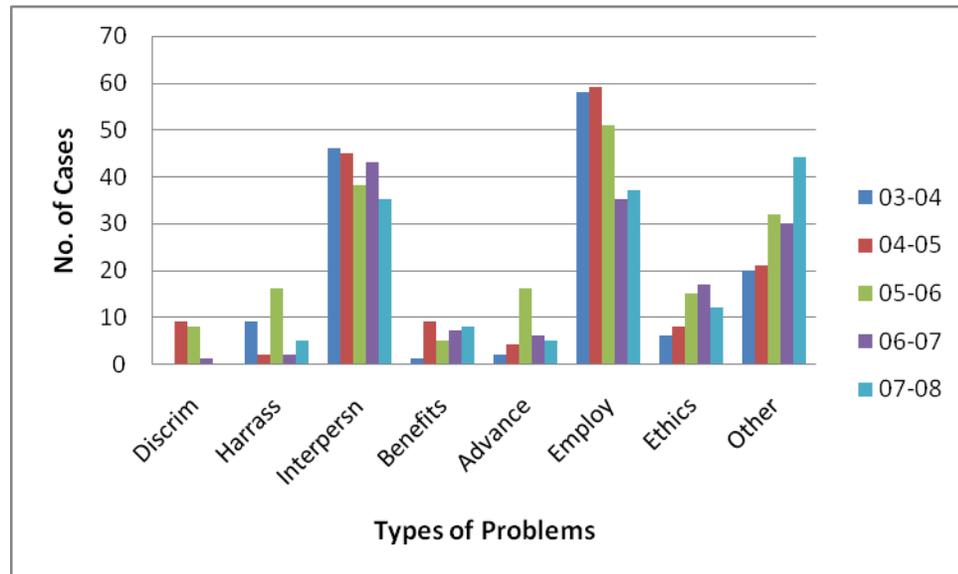
<u>No. of Contacts</u>	<u>Cases</u>	<u>Percentage of Cases</u> %
1	40	27
2	34	23
3	24	16
4	16	11
5	12	8
6	5	3
7	3	2
8	5	3
9	3	2
11	1	1
12	1	1
13	1	1
14	1	1
18	1	1

Seventeen visitors (11%) only sought and were provided with information. For example, this might involve an explanation of policy, or who would be best to contact in a particular issue. Twenty-seven (18%) came to the Ombuds Office with an issue that the ombuds determined to be best handled through some other office on campus. Such referrals were to Human Resources, Human Rights Compliance, the vice provost for academic affairs, etc. Intervention of some kind (e.g. mediation, shuttle diplomacy) was needed for 49 visitors (33%), up 7 percentage points from last year. Most cases (109, or 74%) involved in-depth problem exploration which, of course, accounts for these categories not being mutually exclusive.

### *Nature of the Problems*

Always of foremost interest are the kinds of problems that are brought by employees to the Ombuds Office. These can suggest where greater emphasis is needed for information, training, or other means of preventing problems in the future, and might represent any related trends. Figure 3 is used to show change in the general problem categories during the past five years. Each is then discussed in more detail.

**Figure 3: Problem Type by Year**



**Discrimination:** Discrimination complaints have been consistently low. These went from one age-related case in 06-07 to no reported cases of any kind last year. Hopefully we can claim this is a credit to the climate that is promoted here at the UI, although it could also be that employees are aware enough of the Human Rights Compliance Office that cases are taken directly there.

**Harassment:** Like discrimination, harassment problems appear to be few at the University of Idaho. This year, 5 were reported to the ombuds; 2 were sexual harassment and 3 involved general harassment or ‘bullying.’

**Interpersonal Disputes:** Conflicts between individuals in the workplace occupied the bulk of the ombuds' attention last year, as in preceding years. Almost all cases involved perceptions of incivility, disrespect and/or unfair treatment. In a small number of cases, the issues rose to the level of potentially dangerous situations and/or threats to security. In every case, the problem was taken very seriously. The 35 cases reported once again underscore the need for greater civility among our employees at all levels. Of the 35 cases, 11 visitors were in conflict with supervisors, 10 with co-workers (usually meant to be workers of equal rank), 6 with supervisees, 4 with faculty, and 4 fell into other categories.

**Benefits:** Activities within this classification included leave, retirement, travel, training, etc. Eight cases came under this heading, six of them related to retirement and insurance issues (more than double from the previous year). The other two involved leave – one medical and one professional/sabbatical.

**Advancement:** Five cases came under this category. Three involved tenure or non-appointment, and 2 were issues during a probationary period. However, it is difficult to separate cases regarding 'advancement' from those shown under 'evaluation' as a subcategory of employment (See Table 4). This is discussed below.

**Employment:** 'Employment' is a large, 'catch all' category and registered 37 cases. Of 25 subcategories, "evaluations" headed the list of complaints with 11, or nearly 1/3 of the cases – up one from the previous year. This makes it one of the highest individual complaint categories and is therefore addressed on page 18 in our Concerns and Recommendations section. The closely-related 'management' category was second in number with 7 cases. 'Termination – for cause' had 4 cases, 3 each were working conditions and reorganization of the unit, and the remaining 12 were spread evenly over a wide range of issues. These are ranked in Table 4 along with the change from last year. Special note might be made of those categories with *no* cases.

**Table 4: Detailed breakdown of 37 cases within the employment category**

	Change			Change	
Evaluations	11	+1	Demotion	0	-1
Management	7	+6	Flex Time/Location	0	0
Termination – For cause	4	+3	Hiring Interview	0	0
Working Conditions	3	-1	Marital Issues	0	0
Reorganization	3	+3	Office Space/Conditions	0	0
Hiring Process	2	+1	Probation (performance)	0	0
Job Description	2	0	Program Termination	0	0
Reclassification	2	0	Reassignment	0	0
Resignation	1	0	Scheduling	0	0
Salary Agreement	1	-1	Teaching Load/Course Assign.	0	-1
Workload	1	0	Termination – Layoff	0	-1
Accommodations for Disability	0	-2	Termination – Performance	0	-1
Assistantship Appointment	0	0			

Ethical Concerns: There were 12 cases classified in this way, a decrease from 17 last year. ‘Health/safety’ issues again topped the list represented as the cause of 3 cases. Other concerns with 1 case each were fiscal management, intellectual property, and records management. Six others fell into the ‘other’ category and *no* cases involved either ‘academic dishonesty’ or ‘authorship.’

It is important to note that although some of the case 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. Quite frequently the visit actually was due to numerous causes. The nature of our data management requires that we select the *predominant* reason. For example, an employee might be having a difficult time getting along with his supervisor. The reasons for the incompatibility are numerous and continuous, including disputes about taking leave, perceived mis-management of the budget, and alleged ethical lapses by the boss and unfair treatment between employees. This case would probably be classified only as an ‘interpersonal dispute’ between the visitor and his supervisor even though it touches upon several kinds of issues.

On the other hand, some cases defy placement in *any* of the established categories. These are shown below.

Others:

Forty-four cases did not fit the established case categories. Significantly, 12 of the 44 involved entire departments or other work units. In most of these cases, the units were/are so dysfunctional that there is no other way to classify the situation. These cases were brought to the Ombuds Office by various kinds of employees – sometimes a frustrated administrator, sometimes one or two faculty, or sometimes someone from the staff. These are the kind of complex cases that are far more time-consuming and significant than are reflected in mere data summaries. When such a situation is resolved or kept from deteriorating further, it has a significant positive impact on individuals and productivity or effectiveness.

General descriptions, when possible, within the ‘other’ category and number of cases are shown below:

	Number of cases	Change from last year
Miscellaneous	14	+5
Department/unit function	12	+2
Department head (misc. problems)	8	+7
Disciplinary action	5	0
Academic issues	2	2
Training	2	+1
Facilitation	1	0
Committee function	0	-1
Financial aid	0	0

## **Other Services Provided**

The Ombuds Office once again provided employee in-service training and academic presentations on various communication and human relations skills, civility and conflict management. In addition, service was provided as group facilitators and as designated neutrals and process monitors. A unique service this past year, and continuing into the current one, was assistance to Boise State University in establishing the university's first ombuds position.

During the past year, the following presentations were made, primarily by the associate ombuds:

- Working Together in Teams and Groups (Class lectures)
- Building a Positive Workplace (Various departments and campus groups)
- Successful Supervisor Skills (Class lecture)
- Dealing with Differences and Managing Conflict (Class lecture)
- Managing Conflict (Campus groups)
- Managing High Emotions and Intense Interactions (Department on campus)
- Working From the Inside Out – A Values-based Approach to Work (Department retreat)

## **Committee Service and Professional Development**

Engagement beyond the defined role of the Ombuds Office is considered an important and expected contribution to the campus community. Accordingly, this year the associate ombuds was a member of the following committees:

- Whistleblower Policy Group (with work that led to changes in the FSH)
- Goal 4 Implementation Team: Organization, Culture and Climate
- Athletic Eligibility Task Force
- Emergency Response Team
- UI Campus Day
- Benefits Advisory Group

Professionals also have an obligation to participate and provide leadership in their professional organizations. Both ombuds are members of the International Ombudsman Association and are regularly provided with continuing education through publications and Internet discussions. In addition the associate ombuds participated in the Professional Development Committee of the IOA and was elected to its board of directors. She also took advantage of the following professional development opportunities:

- Ethics in Human Services (Gritman Medical Center and Idaho Mental Health Counseling Association)
- Emergency Preparedness Communication (Webcast)
- The Skilled Facilitator Workshop and attendance at the IOA Annual Conference
- Motivational Interviewing (Professional Education Systems, Inc.)
- Employment Law (Skilsoft)

## Effectiveness of the Ombuds Office

Those of us in the Ombuds Office are always concerned about the *quality* of the services we provide. The quantity and nature of cases are one measure of accountability, but of even greater importance is – what are the impacts or outcomes of the cases that are handled in the Ombuds Office? Do these accrue savings to the university or provide other benefits commensurate with the inputs?

Unfortunately, these benefits are difficult to measure or report. Confidentiality precludes the use of user satisfaction surveys or the description of specific cases. Perhaps the best we can do is to ask rhetorically: What is the worth of having a place where a distraught employee can find a willing listener? When conflicts are resolved, what is the value of the time thereafter devoted to more productive work? Or the value of preventing a difficult situation from escalating into a formal grievance procedure, litigation, or violence? If a single law suit is prevented, what savings result? If information is provided or employees are directed to the people and offices that can help them solve a problem, what is the value to morale, job satisfaction and a healthier workplace environment?

We can say with certainty and in general terms that all of the above scenarios have played out in the Ombuds Office over the past year.

Another general indicator of impact may be reflected in the unsolicited comments that are often received from individuals who have come to the Ombuds Office. These have never been routinely recorded, but it occurred to us just after Spring Break last year that they might be of some value in our annual report. They by no means include all that are received, but are more akin to a sample. Another indicator is that no complaints have been registered against the office and no negative comments have come to our attention. The impromptu compilation of positive reactions is shown on page 14.

*“If my work can free up even a fraction of the time and emotional energy that unproductive conflict consumes, the faculty members whose work defines the character of the university will enjoy both increased productivity and increased satisfaction with their working lives.”*

-- John P. Frazee, Director of Faculty Relations,  
University of Colorado  
in *Chronicle of Higher Education*, April 1, 2008

**A Sampling of Unsolicited Comments Received by Ombuds  
March – June, 2008**

I want to thank you very much for lending support and helping to resolve this matter, especially at a very crucial and difficult time for me. Without your help, things probably would not have turned out this way.

-- March 23, 2008

Hi, Just a note to let you know that I will be promoted to associate professor with tenure! Thanks for your advice earlier this year . . . it was good.

-- March 31, 2008

I'm sorry you couldn't work the miracles I had hoped for, but thank you for being there for me.

-- April 23, 2008 (from a terminated employee)

**“I feel much better having talked with you.”**

-- April 24, 2008 (Employee about to lose his/her job)

**I just want to let you know that I got a very good offer to transfer...and I did accept it...and I like it. Thank you for all your help.**

-- April 28, 2008

I don't know if you remember me, but I came into the Ombudsman Office a few weeks ago. I just wanted to let you know that I took your advice and approached our director and things are looking much better...

-- May 5, 2008

**“Thank you for all your help. Things went a lot better than without it. I should have come to you sooner.”**

-- Phone message, June 16, 2008

During the 2006-2007 academic year, we initiated an attempt at measuring 'outcomes' or 'impacts,' based on self-analysis of completed cases. We did this by creating a scale of what the ombuds consider a range between 'satisfactory' and 'unsatisfactory' of cases. Several versions of the scale were informally tested until both ombuds were reasonably able to classify the majority of their cases into specific categories. The results of the experimental scale were applied to 65 cases and included in last year's annual report. This year, the scale was applied to all 148 cases that were handled in the Ombuds Office.

It should be emphasized that this represents a self-assessment of outcomes and is not intended to attempt measuring visitor satisfaction. The latter is fraught with problems as has been found by other members of the International Ombudsman Association who from time to time have attempted that kind of assessment. The two main reasons are: (1) attempting to collect post-case data while preserving confidentiality is almost impossible, and (2) visitor perceptions of "successful" is usually biased by their role in the case. That is, if the results of even the fairest, most skillfully handled problem are not favorable to the individual, he/she is likely to view the outcome as unsuccessful. The role of an ombuds is not to 'win' cases for a visitor, but to assure fairness in some means of resolution (which sometimes is not supportive of the visitor's perception of the issue).

Application of the outcomes/impacts scale to 144\* cases in 2006-07 resulted in 78% of the cases being resolved 'satisfactorily,' 21% having a 'neutral' outcome (i.e. involvement of the Ombuds Office had little or no significance on the case one way or the other), and 1% were judged to be 'unsatisfactorily' resolved (e.g. ombuds advice was disregarded, with negative consequences).

\*Data for four cases were inadvertently omitted on summary forms.

**Table 5: Self-Appraisal of Outcomes/Impacts Ombuds Cases, 2007-08**

Outcome Category	Percentage of Cases (N=144)
<b>I. Resolved satisfactorily with Ombuds Office assistance 78%</b>	
Agreement/compromise reached through mediation; formal action avoided; visitor given another chance or situation otherwise satisfactorily resolved.	4%
Conflict resolved short of mediation; may involve 'shuttle diplomacy' or similar intervention, workshops with entire unit, or other techniques; formal action not taken.	13%
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.	1%
Information only was provided by Ombuds; and/or helps party to self-advocate; visitor satisfied.	50%
Action resulted in policy or system modification/improvement	4%
Other	6%
<b>Neutral Outcome (Ombuds Office had no significant impact) 21%</b>	
Ombuds role was primarily a neutral listener; little or no 'coaching' or additional information 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.	8%
Visitor initiated and then canceled or 'vanished' after setting appointment or before follow-up action was completed.	1%
Situation 'unrepairable' upon arrival (e.g. T.H. already is terminated, tenure is denied for good reason, or visitor resigned).	10%
Other	1%
<b>Results Unsatisfactory 1%</b>	
Visitor disgruntled with Ombuds efforts and discontinued visits or contacts.	0
Visitor disregarded advice/solution and suffered consequences.	1%
Unfair practice or situation not resolved nor corrected due to lack of cooperation.	0
Other	0

## Concerns and Recommendations

*The ombuds and associate 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)*

One function of an Ombuds Office is to use its unique perspectives and insights to help facilitate positive change in the campus community. In turn, this will help prevent future problems and contribute to the achievement of Objective A of the university's Organization, Culture and Climate Goal: *Sustain and enhance a positive work climate to enhance the quality of university life*. It is in the spirit of this responsibility that the following concerns and recommendations are offered.

### **1. *Getting Greater Impact from the Annual Report of the Ombuds Office***

A report of this nature does little good if it is written and submitted only to fulfill the requirements of faculty policy. It is therefore recommended that the following items be forwarded by the provost to the units involved, and/or all campus administrators.

### **2. *Supervisory Skill Improvement***

Once again, a large number of the issues that came to the Ombuds Office in 2007-08 could have been prevented by better supervisory skills and improved relationships between supervisors and the employees who report to them. Specifically, we recommend:

- a. Training for supervisors at all levels, including deans, department heads, and staff in leadership roles. Training should be a priority in the office of Human Resources in cooperation with the Ombuds Office.
- b. Orientation for *all* new employees in what is expected in their conduct, or 'organizational citizenship.' Such training will 'set the tone' for the workplace, and include problem solving, civility, and how to respond acceptably to differences.
- c. Use of the job classification "Temporary Help" only for positions that are truly temporary. Greater attention needs to be placed on the spirit of FSH 3090 that advises: "If the temporary services are expected to exceed 1,385 hours in any one year, the department administrator should consider establishing a temporary or continuing board appointed position." There are cases of employees working at the UI in continuing positions (including some that are essential to the operation of the university) over long periods of time, but being classified as TH and not subject to the benefits or grievance procedures they deserve.

### 3. *Evaluations*

A large and increasing number of concerns have been registered related to faculty and staff evaluations. The crux of the problem seems to be on application of the administration's directives to adjust the evaluation scale more toward the middle of the scale values using the following:

Faculty	Staff
5 = Exceptional performance	4 = Outstanding
4 = Above expectations	3 = Exceeds expectations
3 = Meets expectations	2 = Satisfactory
2 = Below expectations	1 = Needs improvement
1 = Unacceptable performance	0 = Unsatisfactory

The idea, we understand, is to re-center the scale. That is, to restore the meaning of 4 and 5 on the faculty scale and 3 and 4 on the staff scale as being truly reflective of exceptional performance, such as an "A" or "B" grade, and 3 to be more equivalent to the grade of "C," or theoretically the average. In an ideal world, this would distribute employees across a bell-shaped curve and salary raises could be fairly allocated accordingly.

The problem seems to arise in the interpretation or use of "meets expectations" and "satisfactory." To illustrate, the hiring process at the University of Idaho is designed to attract excellence in its faculty and professional staff. If such a person then routinely teaches, conducts research and/or brings in external funds with excellence, it can be said (and is in some cases being done) that the employee is simply "meeting expectations." This is having a demoralizing effect on outstanding people at our institution. In a sense, it is like rating all the horses in the Kentucky Derby. Certainly, the winner could be labeled as "exceptional," but does this make the others, even the slowest, something less than excellent? They could not have made it to that race without rising far above others in the horse population.

An even worse application of the faculty scale is to apply the "meets expectations" to someone who is known to be, how shall we put it – less than a standout – but is working up to his or her limited capabilities. The expectations are lower, but this person is rated as "meeting expectations" along with truly outstanding individuals as described above.

We do not have a suggestion about how to remedy the problem. We do know that some of our most distressing cases involved employees – some long-term members of our campus community, and some that are newer – that were hurt by the application of this evaluation method. We do suggest that when a re-centering occurs that affects someone who is doing a good job and there have been no changes in performance, that it be noted on the individual's record that the change in evaluation score is due to the application of a change in the scale, not performance.

**Note:** The following suggestions do not necessarily stem from cases brought to the Ombuds Office. The ombuds are given latitude to make independent observations and include these as part of the annual report recommendations.

#### 4. *Keeping Service Foremost*

It is no secret that many salaries and wages at the University of Idaho are not as rewarding as they might be at other universities or sectors of society. This makes it doubly important that we reward employees in other ways and re-emphasize the university's tradition of service to students as our *raison d'être*. Here are some suggestions:

- a. Strive even harder than at present to make 'heroes and heroines' out of staff and faculty that win honors off or on campus. For example, Fulbright winners deserve special attention and publicity, not simply mention in the *Register*.
- b. Mail services should reverse their policy that has brought unnecessary inconvenience to faculty, researchers and other employees by eliminating the pick-up of stamped mail. The elimination of using recycled manila envelopes should also be re-thought for a number of reasons.
- c. Campus units such as academic departments, and those related to student health, various employee services, etc., should maintain hours and live phone contact during all regular business hours.
- d. In that students are required to purchase health insurance, and if we are to encourage distance learning and/or enrollment at off-campus sites, it is essential to provide more 'in-network' providers throughout the state.
- e. In all actions by university officials, including law enforcement, audits, or adverse personnel actions, an extremely high level of respect, civility and compassion should be clearly demonstrated. (Conversely, there is a need for all employees to be counseled about mutual respect and civility when they are the subject of investigations or adverse actions.)

#### 5. *Enforcement of Smoking Policy*

Reasonable policies exist that provide for smoke-free buildings (See APM 35.28). These include a prohibition of smoking within 25' of building entrances and air intakes. Policy provides that: "The administrator or other employee with responsibility for a building, vehicle, or work area is responsible for enforcing this policy in his or her building or work area." However, the policy is not being adequately enforced and those responsible for building administration need to be reminded of this duty, or an alternative means of enforcement is needed.

## **6. FSH Policy Amendment**

An internal policy of University Residences is in need of a small amendment that would make it less vague and fairer to students or their family members who smoke.

### Current policy:

**“Smoking is not allowed in any of our units. Residents must smoke 25 feet from any entrance and *must comply with request of neighbors* or University Officials if asked *to smoke elsewhere*.”** (Italics added)

### Recommended policy:

Residents must smoke 25 feet from any entrance and must comply with University Officials if asked to smoke elsewhere. Requests of neighbors as well as the safety of smokers will be taken into consideration by University Officials when assigning smoking areas beyond the 25-foot limit.

The current policy provides unreasonable authority to neighbors who can use this policy to prohibit smoking anywhere in the vicinity or to consign smokers to unsafe or other inappropriate locations.

## **Acknowledgements**

The Ombuds Office could not operate or be effective without the cooperation of staff, faculty and administrators with whom we work in trying to resolve conflicts and find equitable solutions to problems. We also appreciate the support of the President and Provost’s Office in making the services of the Ombuds Office available to the UI community.