

The Ombuds Office 2012-2013 Annual Report

UNIVERSITY OF IDAHO

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OMBUDS

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History of the University of Idaho Ombuds Office

The Ombuds Office at the University of Idaho is now in its twenty-first year of service. The first University of Idaho ombudsman office was created in 1992 by President Elizabeth Zinser and operated 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. In response to a growing need for staff ombudsman services, Carol Hahn was appointed interim staff ombudsman in 1994, 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 ombudsman. This title was further modified in 2009, once again to more accurately reflect the role and responsibilities of the position, and 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 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
- bringing systemic problems to the forefront
- recommending changes in policy, processes and/or 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

FY 2012-13 was a year of considerable stability. Staffing, facilities and services remained unchanged, while modest revisions to the Ombuds Office policy were approved. Visitors continued to access ombuds services in numbers comparable to the previous year.

Staffing. The Ombuds Office was staffed by a full time professional ombuds throughout the year, and services were available to all university employees and students statewide during regular business hours and during extended hours, when necessary to accommodate work shifts and special needs. The assistant to the faculty secretary provided administrative assistance.

Facilities. Ombuds Office facilities include a private office and a small, adjacent waiting room. Both spaces are adequately furnished. Plans to remodel the adjacent Faculty Lounge were confirmed during the year, and concerns for ombuds visitors' privacy and confidentiality were raised. Special measures to address the possible adverse impacts were included in the final construction plan. These measures include the construction of a secondary wall along the common wall, with added sound-proofing, and installation of a

sound resistant, self-closing door to help preserve privacy for those entering and exiting the ombuds' office.

Ombuds Policy. Faculty Senate approved revisions to the Ombuds Office policy (FSH 3820), which included a modification of staffing criteria, and clarification of the reporting line in order to be consistent with ombuds professional practices. The ombuds now reports directly to the president.

Case Load. For the purpose of reporting, a 'case' is any 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 ombuds-initiated action. Cases vary from a single informational visit to highly complex interventions that involve multiple parties and meetings, and require considerable time. The Ombuds Office addressed 210 cases in 2012-13, sustaining the increased case numbers seen in the previous year (Figure 1). The total number of cases reported in any year is always a conservative figure; since numerous contacts occur informally and spontaneously throughout the natural course of business and as the ombuds' engages in informational sessions and periodic visits across the greater campus. While some of these encounters may result in case entries, others are part of the ombuds' routine function and are not counted.

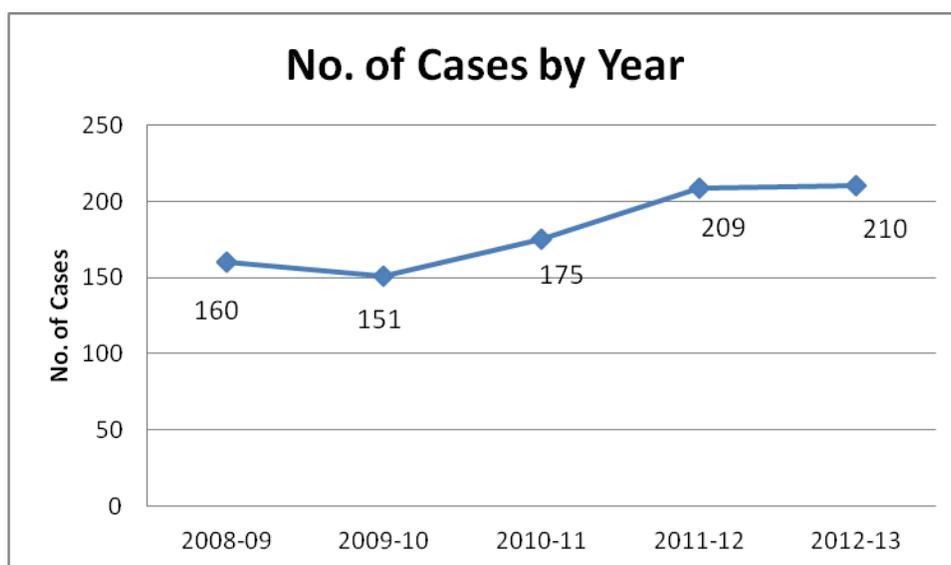


Figure 1: Total number of ombuds cases by year.

Similar to previous years, the number of new cases by month showed modest fluctuations across most months of the year. October and March had the highest numbers of new cases for the year with 27 cases each month. While no particular issues were noted for the high number of cases in October, March coincides with the completion of the annual performance evaluation period, subsequent employment actions and the beginning of nonrenewal decisions and timelines. New cases increased significantly in February rising from 15 cases in 2011-12 to 23 cases in 2012-13. July, which is generally a quieter time for the university and for new cases, also increased over the previous year's six cases with 17 new cases recorded. No obvious reasons for the increases were evident. The lowest number of new cases occurred in January, with nine new cases (Figure 2).

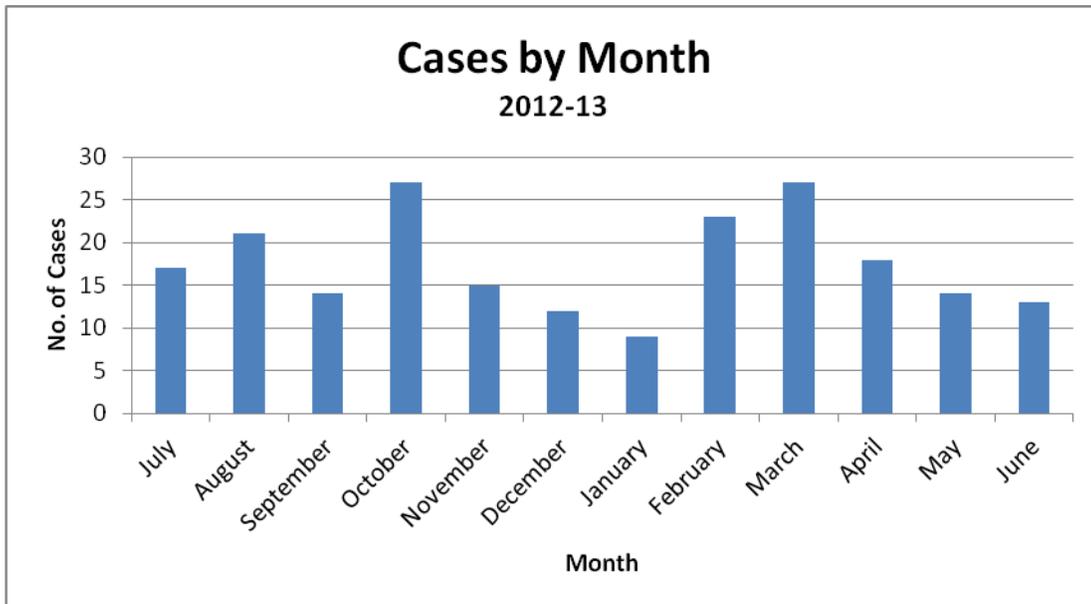


Figure 2: Ombuds cases by month

Nature of Visitors and Contacts. The majority of visitors to the Ombuds Office in 2012-13 were females (67%). This represents a notable increase from 53% in the previous year. Two thirds of visitors (67%) sought ombuds’ assistance on their own initiative, and one third (33%) were referred by others. The modest increase in referrals is best attributed to the campus-wide increase in familiarity with the ombuds’ role and resource as a result of continuing efforts to promote awareness and understanding of the Ombuds Office.

Table 1 shows that the proportion of ombuds services used across all employee categories continues to represent proportions similar to their distribution within the university and remained largely consistent with fluctuations noted in previous years. The largest change was a decrease from last year in the percentage of total cases initiated by tenure-track faculty, bringing percentages back down to those seen in previous years. There was an increase in percentage of cases brought by undergraduate students over the previous year, increasing from 6% in 2011-12 to 9% in 2012-13. The student increase was welcomed, anticipated and likely due to continuing outreach efforts to students and student service providers. No trends or patterns were identified for these fluctuations.

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	2008-09	2009-10	2010-11	2011-12	2012-13
	%	%	%	%	%
Classified Staff	40	35	37	34	34
Faculty (tenure track)	20	18	15	22	14
Faculty (non-tenure track)		3	2	0	1
Administrator	10	15	18	17	11
Exempt	18	9	13	13	18
Graduate Assistants	1	3	2	0	2

Grad Students	1	4	7	4	5
Undergraduates	3	6	3	6	9
Retiree	1	0	1	0	1
Other	6	8	2	3	5

The majority of cases in 2012-13 (80%) directly involved one person; although in *most* cases there was at least one other person of concern. While this represents an increase from the previous year (69%), it was well within the experience of most ombuds' offices. This figure indicates that for these cases no other party was *directly* involved in *addressing* the problem. The remaining cases involved multiple parties who were directly involved in addressing the problem. Among these cases, two-party cases continued to be most common (Table 2).

[Note: When responding to unit or department-wide cases the number of 'parties' counted for reporting purposes was determined by the degree to which the ombuds was *directly* involved with individual parties and does not reflect the actual number of persons within the unit. In many instances, services provided to entire units or departments (such as when serving as a neutral, facilitating or training) involved much larger numbers than included below (ranging from approximately 4-62 persons).]

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

<u>Individuals Involved</u>	<u>No. of Cases</u>	<u>Total Parties</u>
1	169	169
2	29	58
3	5	15
4	3	12
5	1	5
6	2	12
8	1	8
Total Parties/Individuals		279

The most common format for delivering ombuds' services is through face-to-face consultation, and it is encouraged whenever possible. Face-to-face consultations (81%) increased slightly from the previous year (77%), and visitors routinely expressed appreciation for the opportunity to discuss concerns and explore options in a personal, confidential and helpful manner. The use of video call consultation for non-Moscow-based parties increased, and visitors continued 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. This year 14% of cases were addressed through telephone only consultations. Email or other written modes of communication (letters, notes, etc.), although actively discouraged due to confidentiality concerns, still accounted for 5% of cases.

Cases varied significantly in the amount of ombuds involvement needed; this involvement is reported as 'number of contacts.' Twenty-six 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 2012-13 totaled 667 for the year and represent a decrease from the previous year's 769 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
1	55	55
2	55	110
3	39	117
4	21	84
5	10	50
6	11	66
7	5	35
8	3	24
9	5	45
11	2	22
12	1	12
13	1	13
16	1	16
18	1	18
Total Contacts		667

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. 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. Noting the *nature* of problems presented to the Ombuds Office can inform the university of areas requiring attention. Most fluctuations in the number of cases among the problem type categories in 2012-13 were not surprising and did not generally reflect a new pattern or trend, with two exceptions worth noting; these were the 'interpersonal' category and the department/unit function listed in the 'other' category. Figure 3 shows the distribution of problem categories received by the Ombuds Office in 2012-13. Each category is then discussed in further detail.

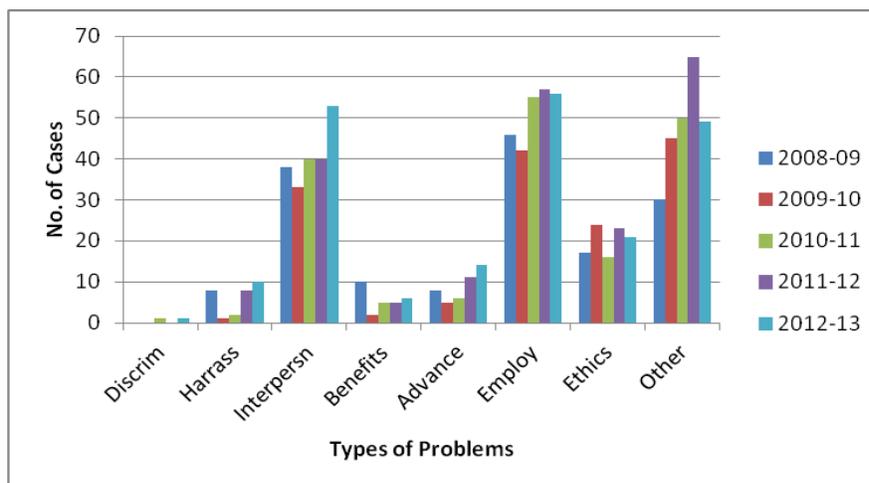


Figure 3: Problem type by year brought to the Ombuds Office

Discrimination: There was one case of sex discrimination brought directly to the Ombuds Office during the 2012-13 year. There were other cases in which individuals were appropriately referred to the Ombuds Office for follow up assistance with non-discrimination issues after their issues were assessed for possible discrimination. Given the low number of discrimination cases brought to the Ombuds Office in recent years, it continues to appear that members of university community are well-informed about the formal channels for addressing discrimination issues. They continue to be less clear about the limitations of those channels and, at times, misattribute the complaint of discrimination to a broader range of problems.

Harassment: Like discrimination, most incidents of harassment perceived as due to age, disability, race/ethnicity/origin, religion and sex made their way to the appropriate formal office. However, whenever visitors did come to the Ombuds Office with these complaints, they were promptly referred to the appropriate formal office. During 2012-13 there were 10 cases of perceived harassment. One case of perceived sexual harassment was brought directly to the ombuds and three cases of perceived religious harassment were received. There were no cases of harassment related to age, disability or race/ethnicity/origin.

There were six 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 always accompanied by very strong emotional intensity, and at times, concerns for personal safety. Harassment issues often produce the most intractable conflicts, in part, because the university lacks a clearly established course of action for dealing with such issues. Individuals experiencing harassment frequently fear retaliation and choose inaction over reporting or actively addressing such behavior. Interpersonal harassment or bullying often involved multiple complaints. In some unresolved cases, employees chose to leave their jobs, and others resulted in formal complaints.

Benefits: There were six cases during the year attributed primarily to benefit issues. Three cases were related to family and medical leave; one case involved sabbatical leave, one involved retirement/insurance; and one other involved tuition waiver. Among these cases, the most distressful issues for all parties related to family and medical leave.

Advancement: Problems related to advancement increased by three cases over the previous year from 11 cases in 2011-12 to 14 cases in 2012-13. Promotion/tenure and non-reappointment issues accounted for nine of these cases, and four cases involved the employee probationary period. While salary compression was the presenting complaint in only one case, salary issues were frequent and contributed to tensions in many of the other categories. Although the total numbers increased in this category, once again, 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 56 cases that fell into this category in 2012-13, which decreased minimally by one case from the previous year. For 2012-13, the most frequent specifier within the employment category, and the specifier with the greatest increase (up seven cases), was management with 11 cases. Complaints about

management are a particularly challenging problem since they frequently involve multiple issues and impact multiple individuals within a unit. Reorganization also presented an area of considerable tension and, like management issues, typically impacts multiple individuals over an extended period of time. Both management effectiveness and reorganization are areas that warrant additional organizational attention. Evaluation, which is ordinarily one of the higher employment problem specifiers, seemed less conflicted than the preceding year, with only nine cases brought to the Ombuds Office, down four cases from the previous year. Although there were shifts in the numbers of cases among other specifiers, they were situation-specific and no trends were observed. 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 56 Cases in ‘Employment’ Category

	<u>Cases</u>	Change from last			<u>Cases</u>	Change from last	
		<u>year</u>				<u>year</u>	
Evaluations	9	-5		Accommodations for Disability	0	0	
Management	11	+7		Assistantship Appointment	1	+1	
Job Description	3	-3		Demotion	0	0	
Reassignment	2	+1		Hiring Interview	0	-1	
Probation (performance)	8	+5		Marital Issues	0	-1	
Working Conditions	2	0		Office Space/Conditions	0	0	
Workload	4	-1		Program Termination	1	+1	
Flex time/Location	0	0		Scheduling	1	0	
Resignation	4	+2		Teaching Load/Course Assign.	1	-1	
Salary Agreement	0	-2		Termination – Layoff	1	+1	
Hiring Process	0	-4		Termination – Performance	0	0	
Reclassification	0	0		Termination – Cause	2	-4	
Reorganization	6	+3					

Interpersonal: Interpersonal conflicts are predictable within any organization, and in 2012-13 they were the second highest category of cases received by the office with 53 cases arising and representing a 33% increase in number of cases over the previous year. Tensions and disputes between individuals in the workplace and in the learning environment ranged from a singular precipitant, to persistent annoyances between individuals, to intensely disruptive and distressful impacts on multiple parties and non-parties (co-workers, supervisors, etc.). The year’s cases involved perceptions of incivility, unfair treatment and, in some cases, intrusion or interference. Interpersonal disputes frequently overlapped with other categories, especially those of ‘general bullying/harassment’, evaluation and ‘disciplinary action.’ However, since cases are counted only 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 disputes between supervisors and supervisees both increased by two cases for the second year in a row and for a total of 22 cases. Interpersonal cases where the other party was a faculty member (in their faculty role) decreased by four cases to seven cases this year. This drop is significant and may reflect several reconciliations within departments and among faculty that occurred in the previous

reporting year. There were four cases of interpersonal disputes involving students and their advisors. This increase is likely due to students' increasing awareness of the ombuds' as a problem solving resource more than any other factor. Also due to rising awareness of the Ombuds Office, those falling into the 'Other' category, including parents, non-enrolled students, and academic and employment applicants, increased by six cases over the absence of cases the previous year. Of the 53 interpersonal dispute cases received, the visitor's dispute involved one or more of the following:

Administrator	3 cases
Advisor	4
Co-worker	9
Supervisor	12
Supervisee	10
Faculty	7
Peers (student)	2
Others	6

Ethical Concerns: There were 21 cases involving ethical concerns during the reporting year. This is a slight decrease of two cases over last year. Consistent with the previous year, concern for health and safety on campus—and the responsibility to bring potential problems to the university's attention--continues to be strongly felt across the university. Eleven such cases involved a range of health and safety concerns, including alcohol and drug use, mental health concerns, threatening, angry and volatile behavior, and unwanted or persistent contact. Of the six cases counted under the 'Other' specifier, worth noting are complaints of supervisors/others inappropriately disclosing confidential information (often with a profound impact) and leaders making disparaging comments about others. There are eight specifiers in the ethical concerns category; actual cases were distributed only in the following areas:

Authorship	1
Fiscal Management	2
Health/safety	11
Records management	1
Other	6

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: Forty-nine cases did not fit into the defined major categories. This represents a decrease from 65 cases recorded the previous year. This decrease is likely due, at least in part, to adding several new specifiers under other problem categories to better identify recurring issues. The most significant change, and again one worth noting, is the decrease in number of cases relating to unit-wide or department function. In 2012-13 only four cases presented with issues relating primarily to this

problem type as compared to 19 cases in the preceding year. Some concerns were brought directly to the Ombuds Office by the unit administrator and involved multiple issues and parties. Others were brought forward by one or more members of a department or unit or on behalf of their unit. Unit-wide cases are often complex, require considerable time to work through, and have a significant impact on the individuals or groups involved. Unit-wide problems are often related to leadership changes, management performance or reorganization/restructuring. While it was not possible to remedy all issues within these groups, efforts resulted in substantial functional improvement and helped prevent further escalation or deterioration. General descriptions within the 'other' category, including requests for meeting or unit facilitation and training (as a response option to a particular problem), along with the number of cases, are shown below.

	Number of Cases	Change
Department/unit function	4	-15
Miscellaneous	12	-1
Committee function	2	+1
Academic issues	16	+2
Department head (misc. problems)	3	-3
Disciplinary action	6	+6
Financial aid	1	+1
Facilitation	3	-1
Training (case-related)	2	-6

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	196	93
Information	119	57
Intercession (e.g., mediation, shuttle diplomacy, facilitation)	42	20
Referrals (e.g., EAP, HR, Human Rights, Access and Inclusion, deans, supervisors, advisors)	90	43

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

Outreach and Other Services. The Ombuds Office contributes in multiple ways to the university's Strategic Plan 2011-2015 under Goal Four: Community and Culture. In addition to providing direct ombuds services, new employees during 2012-13 were introduced to the Ombuds Office role and resources at monthly employee orientation sessions. These presentations served to inform employees about university problem solving and conflict resolution resources, but also introduced and emphasized the university's commitment to providing a safe, respectful and satisfying workplace. In response to the ombuds' invitations to follow up individually, a greater number of new employees sought out the office during their first few months of

employment to report back on their transition into the university workplace. In two cases, emerging problems were identified and addressed. The ombuds was frequently called upon to provide employee professional development and in-service trainings and presentations to academic classes and student organizations. These included various human relations topics and skills addressing civility, interpersonal effectiveness, communication, conflict management, change, collaboration and group work. Throughout the year, the ombuds provided 17 professional development/training sessions totaling 30

Visitor feedback form comments...

- *I appreciated the ombuds office being available on campus and greatly benefitted from having a process to resolve an employment relations issue.*
- *I've never used the ombuds office before. [The ombuds] was very helpful, understanding, and compassionate. I would definitely visit again if needed.*
- *I wish I knew about the ombuds office when I first had my problems – I didn't know this was available until it got too bad. (a student respondent)*
- *... the ombuds office is essential to our department's ability to function.*
- *The outcome was much better than it would have been without ombuds assistance. I am most grateful for this resource.*

presentation hours, helped plan, facilitate or contributed 20 hours towards department/unit retreats, and provided four student sessions or class lectures. The ombuds regularly served as a designated neutral and process monitor at departmental, committee and other 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, and the Professional Development Coordinating Committee.

The ombuds is actively involved with the ongoing development of the organizational ombudsman profession and the International Ombudsman Association (IOA). In 2012-13 the University of Idaho ombuds was especially honored to present the opening keynote address at the International Ombudsman Association (IOA) annual conference in April. She also continued to serve as chair of the International Ombudsman Association (IOA) Membership Committee.

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.

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 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 but is used as an element of reflective practice. The scale attempts to help the ombuds 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 2012-13, the ombuds' self-appraisal of case outcomes placed 84% of case outcomes within a range considered 'resolved satisfactorily.' Fifteen percent fell within the 'neutral' outcome range, and approximately one per cent was considered 'unsatisfactory' outcomes. The sizeable number of cases gauged by the ombuds to be positive outcomes reflects the ombuds' observation that working through an issue or problem with an impartial skilled listener generally contributed 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. The ombuds self-appraisal of cases for 2012-13 is summarized (using rounded numbers, totals will not equal 100%) in Table 6.

Table 6: Self-Appraisal of Outcomes/Impacts Ombuds Cases, 2012-13

Outcome Category	Percentage of Cases (N=210)
Resolved satisfactorily with Ombuds Office assistance	84%
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Agreement/compromise reached through mediation; formal action avoided; visitor given another chance or situation otherwise satisfactorily resolved. 9% • 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. 1% • Information only was provided by Ombuds; and/or helps party to self-advocate; visitor satisfied. 59 % • Action resulted in policy or system modification/improvement 0% • Other 4% 	
Neutral Outcome (Ombuds Office had no direct impact)	15%
<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. 13% • 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 0% 	
Results Unsatisfactory	1%
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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% 	

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 pose known challenges. Among the more common are the individual’s role in the case as well as their expected outcomes (which understandably influences perceptions of satisfaction and success), and characteristically lower than desired evaluation return rates. Despite these and other 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. Prior to the change in reporting structure, completed forms were sent by visitors directly to the Provost Office. After the change in reporting structure, feedback forms were sent to

the Office of the President 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. Feedback summaries are based on the calendar year and not synchronized with the periods covered by the annual report.

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 is always a challenge to do so. It is often hard to identify when a particular case closes (as in the case of protracted conflicts, ongoing departmental tensions and multiple overlapping issues, etc.) and/or when a new one with the same party or parties begins. Some conflicts involve a visitor's immediate separation from the university and no follow-up contact information is available. Additionally, some individuals choose not to participate. Despite these known and common challenges, for the period March 2012 through February 2013, 51 forms were returned. Overall, the responses were strongly positive and consistent with the ombuds outcome self-appraisals; collectively they support the conclusion that ombuds' services continue to be perceived as helpful to individuals who sought assistance.

Areas of Concern

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)

Most concerns or problems brought to the Ombuds Office in any given year are situational, or specific to a set of circumstances or individuals, rather than emerging from systemic problems. However, when issues are specific to a systemic issue within a particular responsibility area, they are brought directly to the attention of the respective administrator for immediate attention. In addition to these efforts, however, there may be areas where additional attention by the greater university is needed and where opportunities for improvement exist. Three areas of concern not specifically addressed in the discussion above were noted for 2012-13.

Employee wellbeing. Although not captured in the data reported above, the ombuds has perceived an increase in employees reporting significant problems of well-being directly related to a variety of wide-ranging and protracted stressors in the workplace. Frequent changes in leadership, ongoing restructuring of positions, responsibilities and processes, together with the normal challenges of balancing professional and personal life (and for many, increasing financial stresses) create a need for the university to pay greater attention and be more proactive and responsive to supporting employee well-being.

Management upward feedback. Some employees feel that they do not have a means by which to constructively and confidentially provide upward feedback or to raise issues regarding their administrator or supervisor's performance. Several issues have contributed to this problem: 1) not all supervisors participate in supervisor evaluation, 2) the small size of many units does not provide for sufficient anonymity, and 3) some administrators have pressured employees to disclose sources of comments. The university has an opportunity and a responsibility to ensure that all employees have a means of evaluating their supervisor candidly and without fear of retaliation.

Workplace culture and climate (repeated issue). While marked improvements in workplace civility and climate within some departments were observed, others continue to exchange incivil behaviors resulting in ongoing strife. There is an opportunity and a need for the university to communicate its expectations for professional conduct and to establish clear processes for responding to breaches. Incivil behaviors that are left unaddressed are inconsistent with the university's expressed values and set an improper standard for the workplace.

The Year Ahead

With the continuous arrival of new employees and students, the office will again actively reach out to new employees, supervisors and administrators, student leadership, residence life staff, and student groups to help inform the university community about ombuds services. Facilitation and group process consultation will continue to be available on request. The Ombuds Office will continue to partner with Professional Development and Learning (PDL) and other departments and groups on campus to provide conflict management and other requested human relations training. Additionally, the Ombuds Office will be available to assist the greater university, as needed, as it works through potential issues arising from the implementation of the new classification system and/or resulting from the program prioritization process. Finally, given its immediate proximity to the Ombuds Office, there will be a need to monitor the impact of the new faculty and staff gathering space (former Faculty Lounge) on ombuds visitors.

Acknowledgements

I want to extend my sincere appreciation to former President M. Duane Nellis and Provost and Executive Vice President Doug Baker for their commitment to and support of the independence, neutrality, informality and confidentiality of the ombuds role, the ombuds and the problem resolution process. Their uncompromising efforts demonstrated great respect for those who sought assistance through the office.

I also want to acknowledge the university's current administration, faculty, staff and students from across all colleges and divisions for their continuing commitment to ensuring a safe, respectful and just workplace and learning community. These commitments, together with their trust, cooperation and constructive efforts made the successful resolution of so many issues throughout the year possible.