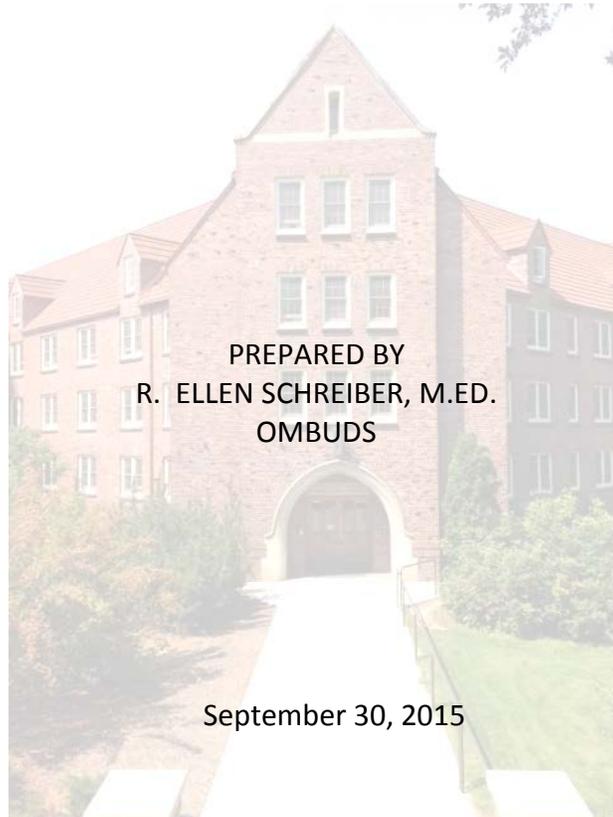


The Ombuds Office 2014-2015 Annual Report

UNIVERSITY OF IDAHO

July 1, 2014 – June 30, 2015



September 30, 2015

Acknowledgement

I want to acknowledge and thank professor emeritus and former ombuds, James Fazio, for originally creating this annual report format, for writing the office history and for writing much of the descriptive text still used in this report. His original report became the template for subsequent reports and has provided a lasting legacy to the Ombuds Office.

Message from the Ombuds



Seventeen years ago as I settled into my office and my new role as ombuds, I wrote a personal mission statement committing my service to supporting and advancing the university as a workplace and learning community that is distinguished by its positive culture. In the years that immediately followed, a series of difficult issues challenged our university, and many became discouraged. Thankfully, we are in a different place today, and we have fresh institutional and personal opportunities to rebuild and continue to build that positive culture. I believe we can make this happen for and by ourselves by refreshing our cultural vision and committing our collective and individual attention and action to it. I am confident that we are up to the task.

Change is a hallmark of university life, and after more than thirty years of service to the university and seventeen years serving as an ombuds, I will be retiring from the university in fall 2015. I want to thank each of you--administrators, faculty, staff and students--from across all colleges and departments for your ongoing commitment, cooperation and constructive efforts that have helped to successfully resolve many challenging issues this past year and over all the years I've served as ombuds.

I also want to extend my appreciation to President Chuck Staben for the ongoing support of the Ombuds Office and for supporting the independence, neutrality, informality and confidentiality of the ombuds role and the problem resolution process. This commitment demonstrates great respect for those who sought and will continue to seek assistance with resolving very challenging issues.

All of your good-faith efforts are helping to make the university a better place to work, learn and live. It has been a great privilege to serve as your ombuds, and I thank each of you for your generous trust and the honor of serving in this capacity.

Sincerely,

R. Ellen Schreiber
Ombuds
1998-2015

The Ombuds Office 2014-2015 Annual Report

UNIVERSITY OF IDAHO

History of the University of Idaho Ombuds Office

The Ombuds Office at the University of Idaho is now in its twenty-third year of service, and both the office and the ombuds' role have evolved significantly over the two-plus decades. The University of Idaho Ombuds Office was first proposed to the Faculty Council in 1988 and discussed by various faculty groups and approved by the Faculty Council in 1991. The office was then officially established in 1992 under 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.

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 approved a request 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 *foster and support a positive and productive working, learning and living environment for faculty, staff and students by promoting mutual respect, ensuring fairness and helping to resolve problems that emerge within the university.*

The primary purpose of the Ombuds Office is to assist members of the university community with resolving their own problems or conflicts informally, and at the lowest level possible, by providing a safe place where they can speak confidentially and candidly about their issues of concern. Visitors receive assistance with clarifying their concerns, understanding applicable policies and procedures, and identifying resources and response options to address their problems. Like so many US academic ombuds offices, the UI Ombuds Office embraces a ‘solutions-focused’ approach to problem solving. While the ombuds may help the visitor to identify possible response options, at all times, the visitor remains empowered to and responsible for selecting his or her own course of action or non-action. The office also serves as an agent of positive change by helping to identify issues of concern, and by providing timely upward feedback.

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

- listening to concerns non-judgmentally
- analyzing problems and exploring possible response options
- providing information about policies and services
- providing individual and group/unit conflict coaching
- facilitating dialogue between individuals and groups
- mediating disputes
- providing leadership consultation
- referring to campus and community resources
- coordinating with other university offices
- 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 and operates by the Standards of Practice and the Code of Ethics established by the International Ombudsman Association and the following tenets:

Independence. To ensure objectivity, the office operates independently of all university entities and reports to the highest possible level of the organization. *An ombuds exercises sole discretion over whether or how to act regarding an individual’s concern, a trend or concerns of multiple individuals over time* (IOA Standards of Practice).

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

Neutrality and Impartiality. An ombuds is a designated neutral on behalf of all members of the university community. As such, the ombuds remains impartial and unaligned. An ombuds does not take sides, serve as an agent, represent or 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 promotes and advocates fairness and justice.

Informality. Consultations are conducted ‘off the record’ and *do not constitute notice to the university* in any way. An ombuds does not become involved in or part of formal institutional processes (such as formal complaints, investigations, appeals, etc.), unless otherwise specified in policy, and then only as a neutral process observer. No personal information is retained or used for subsequent formal

The Ombuds Office adheres to and operates by the Standards of Practice and the Code of Ethics established by the International Ombudsman Association (IOA)

- Confidential*
- Neutral and Impartial
- Informal
- Independent

**Certain limitations apply, e.g., concern for imminent harm or sexual misconduct*

proceedings. An ombuds will not serve as a witness nor offer testimony in any formal proceeding, unless required by law. Individuals using the services of the Ombuds Office retain their rights to all formal procedures ordinarily available to them and are solely responsible for determining their course of action.

Year in Review

Case Load. For the purpose of reporting, a ‘case’ is any new or recurrent issue (after a previous case closure) 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 involving multiple parties and meetings, and requiring considerable time. Visitors accessed ombuds’ services and received assistance in numbers comparable to previous years. In 2014-15 the Ombuds Office addressed 209 cases, a modest decrease from the previous year (Figure 1). The number of cases reported represents a conservative figure since numerous contacts occur informally and spontaneously in the course of doing ombuds business, such as during informational sessions, training workshops, periodic involvement within units (when multiple concerns emerge) and during training and outreach visits. While some of these encounters do result in case entries, numerous others are part of the ombuds’ routine function and are not counted.

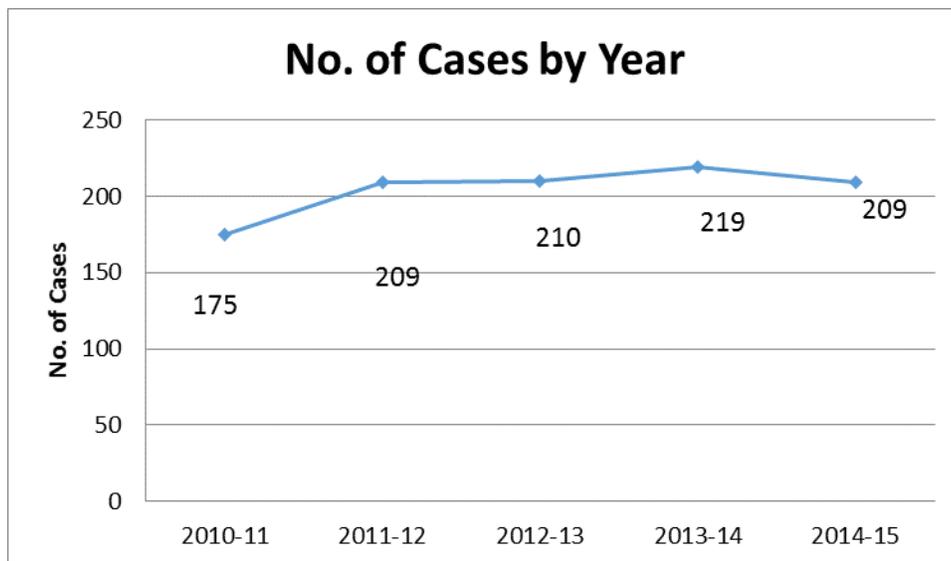


Figure 1: Total number of ombuds cases by year.

November, March and May had the highest numbers of new cases during the year. While the increase in November cases was an anomaly, March cases continued to coincide with the completion of the annual performance evaluation period and subsequent employment actions, such as the beginning of nonrenewal decisions which continued into May, which also coincided with salary/wage decisions. The lowest number of new cases occurred in February, with only 9 new cases (Figure 2).

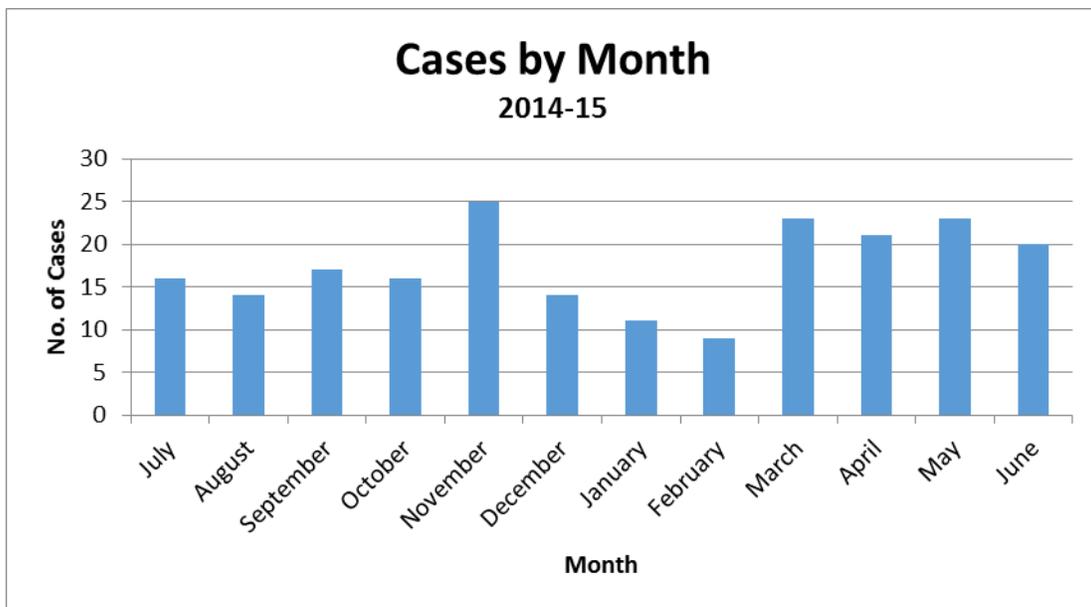


Figure 2: New ombuds cases by month

Nature of Visitors and Contacts. Ombuds offices typically refer to those seeking services as ‘visitors’ rather than clients to avoid any confusion about the informal, non-legal and non-therapeutic nature of the ombuds function. This term also distinguishes ombuds’ services from those that are based on advocacy and alignment with the party or parties involved. The majority of visitors to the Ombuds Office in 2014-15 were female (61%), a significant increase from the previous year (53%). Seventy-two per cent of cases were self-referred and approximately one fourth (28%) were referred by others (administrators, supervisors, advisors, HR and coworkers/peers). Based on visitor comments, the increase in self-referrals appears to be the result of continuous campus-wide efforts to promote awareness and improve understanding of the Ombuds Office.

University Affiliation. The Ombuds Office provides services to all faculty, staff and students of the university with affiliation tied to the party initiating an individual case. The affiliation of all parties within a case is not gathered. The ‘Other’ category includes temporary help (TH), consultants, retirees, former students, parents, employment applicants and campus visitors, as long as an issue pertains to a current experience with the university. Table 1 shows the distribution of cases based on the initiators’ university affiliation. Visitor affiliations continued to represent proportions similar to their respective numbers among employee categories, and they remained largely consistent and within normal fluctuations of previous years. No trends were noted. Student issues included grade disputes, interpersonal upsets between peers, academic teams/group/club function and tensions with faculty and business offices. Graduate and undergraduate student cases combined represented eighteen percent of cases (36 cases), which were up from 10 percent of cases in the previous year (see Table 1).

Table 1: University Affiliation by Percentage of Cases

Affiliation	2010-11	2011-12	2012-13	2013-14	2014-15
	%	%	%	%	%
Classified Staff	37	34	34	37	33
Faculty (tenure track)	15	22	14	20	16
Faculty (non-tenure track)	2	0	1	1	5
Administrator	18	17	11	9	8
Exempt	13	13	18	19	12
Graduate Assistant (TA/RA)	2	0	2	0	2
Graduate Student	7	4	5	3	8
Undergraduate	3	6	9	7	10
Retiree	0	1	0	0	0
Other	8	2	3	4	7

Eighty-one per cent of cases in 2014-15 directly involved one person. This figure indicates that for these cases there were no other parties presenting the concern or who were *directly* involved with addressing the problem, although in most cases there was at least one other person of concern and is typical for most ombuds' offices. The remaining cases involved multiple parties who were directly involved in the problem and problem resolution. Among these cases, two-party cases continued to be most common at 16% (Table 2).

[Note: When responding to unit or department-wide cases the only parties counted for reporting purposes were determined by the degree to which the ombuds was *directly* involved with individual parties and does not reflect the total 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 shown below.]

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

Individuals Involved	No. of Cases	Total Parties
1	170	170
2	33	66
3	2	6
4	2	8
5	1	5
6	1	6
Total Parties/Individuals		261

Mirroring the previous year, 79% of cases were face-to-face consultations and were the preferred contact type for most visitors. Visitors frequently reported that being able to talk openly with an informed, confidential and impartial person about their concern was the most helpful feature of the Ombuds Office. With increased accessibility and familiarity with video call technology, more visitors and parties chose video call consultation whenever an office visit consultation was not feasible or timely. Fourteen percent of cases were addressed through telephone-only consultations; and seven percent of cases used email or other

written modes of communication (letters, notes, etc.), although such communication actively discouraged due to confidentiality concerns.

Cases vary significantly in the amount of ombuds involvement needed; this involvement is reported as ‘number of contacts.’ Twenty-two percent of cases involved only one visit or contact with no further ombuds/visitor/other direct involvement. This single contact may involve several hours of consultation in a single session. The remaining cases involved multiple consultations or contacts, either with the visitor alone (the person bringing the case) and/or with others involved, such as with multi-party mediations or with those who were resources for addressing concerns (e.g., administrators, supervisors, General Counsel, Human Resources, Human Rights, Access and Inclusion, etc.). The number of contacts for 2014-15 was 655. Table 3 shows the distribution of contacts per case.

Table 3: Number of Contacts per Case

<u>No. of Ombuds Contacts</u>	<u>No. of Cases</u>	<u>Total No. Contacts</u>
1	45	45
2	60	120
3	43	135
4	25	100
5	12	60
6	6	36
7	8	56
8	3	24
9	3	27
10	1	10
11	1	11
13	1	13
18	1	18
Total Contacts		655

Nature of Problems. Every organization will have concerns or problems that emerge within the normal process of conducting business, and the University of Idaho provides multiple resources in addition to the Ombuds Office to help members of the community address their issues 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, presenting *issues* are tracked. In noting the *nature* of problems, the Ombuds Office can inform the university of areas requiring attention. The fluctuations in cases among the types of problems in 2014-15 were typical of previous years and did not reflect new patterns or trends. Figure 3 shows the distribution of problem categories received by the Ombuds Office in 2014-15 followed by additional details for each category.

“True peace is not merely the absence of tension: it is the presence of justice.”
 Martin Luther King, Jr.

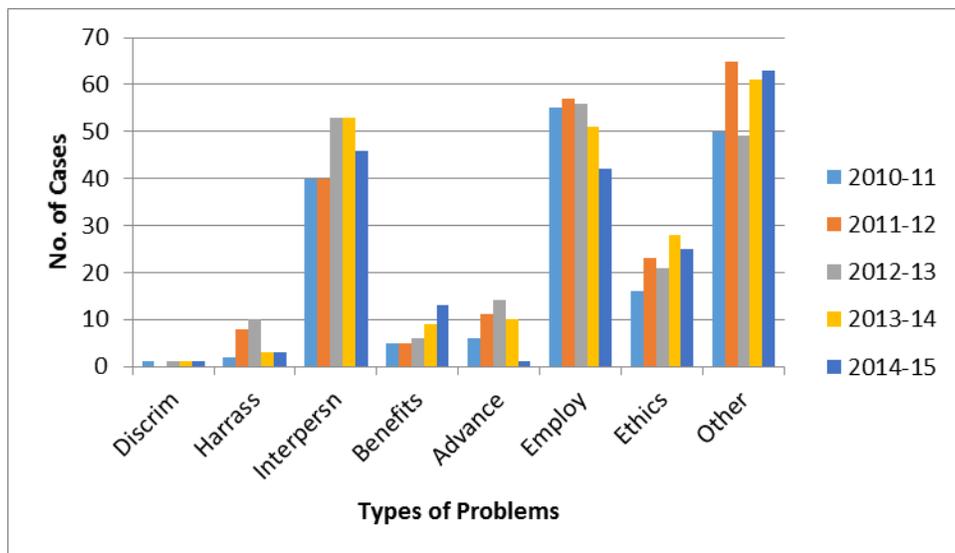


Figure 3: Problem type by year brought to the Ombuds Office

Discrimination: There was one case of age discrimination brought directly to the Ombuds Office during 2014-15. Individuals were again referred to the Ombuds Office for assistance with non-discrimination issues *after* their issues were assessed for discrimination.

Harassment: Three cases of harassment came directly to the Ombuds Office. Two of these cases involved general harassment or perceived bullying and one case involved race/ethnicity harassment and was referred to the appropriate formal office.

Benefits: There were thirteen cases attributed to benefit issues. Six cases related to retirement or health insurance, three cases involved sick/annual leave, two cases related to tuition waivers, and one case each involved family medical leave and training/professional development.

Advancement: There were 16 cases related to advancement, representing an increase of 6 cases from the previous year. Of the 16 cases, 10 cases concerned salary. Increasing perceptions of salary inequities and complaints of significant disparities among similar positions and raises continued to be at the heart of these issues. Tenure and non-reappointment issues accounted for five of the remaining advancement cases, with one additional case related to promotion. Yet again, while salary was the *specified* complaint in these 10 cases, compensation and perceived inequity issues were *frequent and contributed to tensions* in many other categories.

Employment: The employment category has 25 ‘specifiers’ relating to specific areas of concern; it is the largest category of problems brought to the Ombuds Office. There were 42 cases in this category in 2014-15, which decreased moderately from the previous year’s 51 cases. The most frequent specifiers within the employment category concerned the hiring process, with 6 cases received and management, with 6 cases. The only specifier with a significant change—which was *down* by 13 cases—was ‘job description’ with 0 cases during the year. This is likely due to the conclusion of the implementation of the new classification system. Evaluation complaints, which are commonly one of the

higher employment problem specifiers, was down from the preceding year, with five cases. No other trends were noted. The number of cases in each specifier or subcategory is shown in Table 4 along with the change from last year.

Table 4: Types of Cases within ‘Employment’ Category

	Change from last			Change from last	
	Cases	year		Cases	year
Evaluations	5	-3	Accommodations for Disability	1	+1
Management	6	+2	Assistantship Appointment	0	-1
Job Description	0	-13	Demotion	0	-1
Reassignment	1	+1	Hiring Interview	0	0
Probation (performance)	1	-1	Marital Issues	0	0
Working Conditions	4	+2	Office Space/Conditions	0	0
Workload	4	-1	Program Termination	1	+1
Flex time/Location	0	0	Scheduling	1	-1
Resignation	0	-3	Teaching Load/Course Assign.	1	-1
Salary Agreement	2	+1	Termination – Layoff	0	0
Hiring Process	6	+2	Termination – Performance	0	0
Reclassification	3	+3	Termination – Cause	4	+1
Reorganization	2	+2			

Some of the categories listed above show zero; this means they were not stated as the presenting concern. However the topic may have been a contributing factor in a visitor’s reason for using the Ombuds Office.

Interpersonal: There were 46 interpersonal concerns or disputes brought to the Ombuds Office throughout the year. Interpersonal conflicts are natural within any organization and always represent the largest category of concern. However, in 2014-15 they decreased from the previous year’s 53 cases. Complaints once again ranged from singular incidences (email, gossip and other communication offenses, perceived interference, disrespect, etc.), to persistent annoyances and disliking between individuals. Interpersonal disputes between a member of the university and ‘Others’ (visitors, non-students, parents, employee applicants, etc.) decreased by seven cases for a total of 5 cases. Interpersonal cases where the other party was a faculty member (serving in their faculty role) remained the same as last year with nine cases. Of the 46 interpersonal dispute cases received, the visitor’s dispute directly involved one or more individuals in the following categories:

Administrator	6 cases
Co-worker	7
Supervisor	15
Supervisee	1
Faculty	9
Advisee	0
Advisor	2
Student	0

Peers	1
Others	5

(temporary help, non-student, former student, job applicants, parent, etc.)

Ethical Concerns: There were 25 cases involving ethical concerns. This represents a slight decrease from 28 cases the previous year. Although numbers decreased by 4 over last year, health and safety concerns continue to be a significant ethical concern. Health and safety issues included alcohol and drug use, serious mental health concerns, and angry or volatile behavior. Of the nine cases counted as ‘Other’, examples include malicious gossip, inappropriate or disruptive conduct during meetings, and inappropriate disclosure of confidential information. Ethical cases were distributed in the following areas:

Academic honesty	1
Authorship	2
Fiscal management	2
Deception/misrepresentation/theft	2
Health/safety	8
Records management	0
Intellectual property	1
Other	9

Other: The *predominant* or *precipitating* reason for contacting the ombuds is used for data collection purposes. However many contacts with the ombuds involved multiple and intertwined issues. On the other hand, some cases defy placement in *any* of the established categories and are recorded as “*Other*” as shown below.

Sixty-three cases did not fit clearly into any defined category. The most significant change was the doubling in cases relating to academic issues, with 27 cases over the previous year’s 13 cases. Increased student awareness of the Ombuds Office likely accounts for much of the increase since cases represented a wide range of issues and no trends were noted. While it is not possible to remedy all issues within struggling or distressed units, often interventions such as training help to surface issues needing attention, to support the function of the unit and to prevent further escalation or deterioration. Examples of ‘Other’ case issues for 2014-15 include: department-wide tension related to morale/discouragement or pervasive incivility. Other examples included policy questions and leadership coaching. General descriptions within the ‘other’ category, along with the number of cases, are shown below.

	Number of Cases	Change
Department/unit function	7	-4
Committee function	2	0
Academic issues	27	+14
Department head (misc. problems)	4	+1
Disciplinary action	6	-3
Financial aid	2	+1
Facilitation (case-related)	2	+1
Training (case-related)	5	+4
Miscellaneous	8	-12

Resolution of Problems. Ombuds use a variety of processes to assist visitors with addressing concerns, and most cases involve multiple actions, thus the actions categories below are *not* mutually exclusive. Four basic categories of ombuds' actions are summarized in Table 5.

"Out beyond right and wrong, there is a field. I will meet you there."

Rumi

Table 5: Actions Used by Ombuds

Action	Cases	Percentage of Cases*
Problem exploration	196	94
Information	149	71
Intercession (e.g., mediation, shuttle diplomacy, facilitation)	43	21
Referrals (e.g., EAP, HR, Human Rights, Access and Inclusion, deans, supervisors, advisors)	124	59

* Categories are *not* mutually exclusive and therefore exceed 100%.

Outreach and Other Services. The Ombuds Office contributes to the university's 2011-2015 Strategic Plan under Goal Four: Community and Culture by providing direct problem resolution services and outreach activities. Outreach activities help members of the university community become informed about the role of the ombuds and the availability of services as well as provide a venue for meeting the ombuds. It also helps acquaint the ombuds with areas of rising of concern.

New Employee Orientation. Monthly New Employee Orientation sessions were again a highly effective outreach activity that impacted nearly all new Moscow-based employees and some new employees from off-campus locations. These brief presentations highlighted the university's cultural commitment and informed employees about the university problem solving and conflict resolution resources. The ombuds invited new employees to contact the ombuds in the early months following their hire to briefly follow up on their initial experience and progress with the university. As in past years, many employees accepted this invitation and either stopped by the office or engaged the ombuds in conversations on campus or during visits to off-campus sites. In each case, the newer employee expressed appreciation for the opportunity to discuss their experiences and/or bring up any concerns. When necessary, referrals and other appropriate supports were provided. These informal follow-up contacts were not included in the annual data unless they resulted in opening a new case. While these activities do take time, the early opportunity to establish a positive relationship with new employees and address problems early on demonstrated positive impacts. Unfortunately, this activity is no longer available since new employee orientation is now being delivered online; however the Ombuds Office is included in the online video session.

Employee and Student Development. The ombuds again provided employee professional development, departmental in-service trainings, department retreat facilitation, and student leadership, academic classes, and student group presentations. These sessions focused on civility, interpersonal communication, conflict management, change, collaboration and group work and Ombuds Office introductions. Throughout the year, the ombuds provided more than 28 presentation hours that were not specifically case-related (additional sessions were offered as part of case interventions). Additionally, the ombuds served as a neutral/process

observer for multiple specialized processes (post-tenure review, promotion and tenure, and search committees) to support respectful and constructive dialogue and established process.

University Service. The ombuds engaged in service to the broader university through continuing participation on the Benefits Advisory Group, and the Professional Development Coordinating Committee.

Professional Service. The ombuds continued to be actively involved with the development of the organizational ombudsman profession and the International Ombudsman Association (IOA). In 2014-15 the ombuds served on the IOA Board of Directors and Board liaison to the Membership Committee.

Professional Development. The ombuds is committed to continuous professional development and engaged regularly in reflective practice with other experienced academic ombuds through video conferencing, telephonic consultation and on-site review, when opportunities are available. In 2014-15, the ombuds visited the Marquette University Ombuds Office and with the Northern Illinois ombuds to review programs, policies and practices. Additionally, the ombuds participated in three days of professional development during the IOA annual conference. Other professional development included 24 hours of continuing professional counseling education that was relevant and helpful to ombuds practice (ethics, managing suicide risk, transgendered and gender variant, emotionally focused approach, etc.).

Effectiveness of the Ombuds Office. The definition of a successful outcome and ombuds effectiveness cannot be gauged solely by whether a problem is ultimately resolved according to a visitor's satisfaction or an ombuds' preference. Rather, there are multiple descriptors of success:

- Visitor better understands their concern and identifies solution options, was better informed and prepared to self-advocate, act or not act
- A potential problem was avoided
- Further deterioration or escalation of a situation was avoided
- A manifest problem was resolved
- A policy or system problem (and a potential modification) was identified

Helping visitors and all parties to be more effective, constructive, fair and respectful in seeking solutions to their concerns, and reducing harmful tensions or hostility, is considered a successful outcome in the perspective of the Ombuds Office. However, there are many problems where no remedies or resolution options are available. In cases such as termination for cause or performance, intractable disagreement over evaluation ratings, expectations or compensation, and many academic decisions clear processes set out by policy, often leave visitors few options. In these cases, being able to confirm that the relevant policy or action was appropriately or fairly applied, talk about possible next steps, and being heard is crucial to moving forward uneventfully. Being heard and understood is *the most powerful intervention*; and each year this intervention alone has likely lessened the emergence of unnecessary escalation, and even potential violence. Being heard without judgment or fear and being assisted with sorting out issues and response options is the most common and highly appreciated benefit reported to the ombuds.

“It's not the wound that teaches, but the healing.”

Marty Rubin, Author

When assessing impacts of ombuds services, results are difficult to measure since 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.) and confidentiality precludes the use of many of the usual forms of evaluation.

The Ombuds Office uses two methods to assess the outcomes and impacts of services. The first is a voluntary visitor feedback form given to visitors that goes directly to the President's Office and is summarized for the Ombuds evaluation feedback. Second, is an assessment based on the *ombuds' self-analysis of completed cases* using a scale ranging between 'satisfactory', 'neutral' 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 service provided and outcome 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 2014-15, the ombuds' self-appraisal of case outcomes placed 87% of case outcomes within a range considered 'resolved satisfactorily.' Thirteen percent of cases fell within the 'neutral' outcome range (with some falling less neutral than others), and no cases were considered wholly 'unsatisfactory' outcomes at the time of case closing. As in previous years, the greater number of cases gauged to be positive outcomes reflects the ombuds' observation that working through an issue or problem with an impartial skilled listener, developing a broader perspective on the problem, identifying relevant policies and procedures, developing constructive response options and having difficult conversations mediated directly or indirectly, generally contributed to more positive and less negative outcomes for most issues, even when a visitor or the university's irrevocable actions have already occurred. Despite not attaining a full resolution, an adverse situation that stabilizes and does not decline further, may at best be considered a satisfactory or, at the least, a neutral outcome. The ombuds self-appraisal of cases for 2014-15 is summarized in Table 6 (numbers are rounded).

Table 6: Self-Appraisal of Outcomes/Impacts Ombuds Cases, 2014-15

Outcome Category	Percentage of Cases (N=209)
Resolved satisfactorily with Ombuds Office assistance	87%
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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. 16% • 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. 0% • Information only was provided by Ombuds; and/or helps party to self-advocate; visitor satisfied. 63 % • Action resulted in policy or system modification/improvement 1% • Other 3% 	
Neutral Outcome (Ombuds Office had no direct impact)	13%
<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. 9% • Visitor initiated and then canceled or ‘vanished’ after setting appointment or before follow-up action was completed. 0% • Situation ‘unrepairable’ upon arrival (e.g. temporary help, already terminated, tenure was denied for appropriate reason, or visitor resigned). 3% • Other 0% 	
Results Unsatisfactory	0%
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Visitor disgruntled with Ombuds efforts and discontinued visits or contacts. 0% • Visitor disregarded advice/solution and suffered consequences. 0% • Unfair practice or situation not resolved nor corrected due to lack of cooperation. 0% • Other 0% 	

On occasion, problems will resurface or new issues arise with previously served parties. Situations that deteriorate after concluding ombuds involvement are not reflected in the ombuds assessment above.

Ombuds Observations and Comments

Most concerns or problems brought to the Ombuds Office are specific to a set of circumstances or particular individuals. However, when issues appear to be systemic or reflect trends that might warrant further attention, the ombuds may share these directly with the relevant administrator and make recommendations in accordance with the provisions of the *Faculty-Staff Handbook*. Selected ombuds observations and comments for 2014-15 are noted below:

Compensation. Salary and wage disparities continue to be divisive issues among many employees from across employment categories

The ombuds is 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)

and pay ranges, and as mentioned earlier, numerous complaints were received or embedded within other complaints. A frequent issue impacting staff was the inconsistency in the practice of setting compensation, and especially when hiring involves lateral moves within the university. As a result, unnecessary tensions among employees developed, qualified internal candidates have been discouraged from pursuing otherwise desirable opportunities, and employees (some long term) sought employment outside of the university. There is a need for internal employment pathways that recognize and compensate experience and expertise and provide a means of career enrichment and growth for all university employees. It is essential to develop clear policies to ensure that all employees receive fair and equitable opportunities over their career lifespan.

Responsiveness and timeliness. There is an opportunity to improve process and procedural timeliness and communication in areas such as scheduled or formal reviews, entry probationary reviews, appeals, hearings, etc. Attention to established response timelines and continuous communication with parties about unexplained delays would reduce and or prevent unnecessary escalation of tensions.

Workplace culture and climate. As mentioned in the past several annual reports, there is a continuing need--and an opportunity--to address the campus climate and culture. Members of the university community in widely varying venues continue to express a strong desire to see positivity and civility replace the discouragement, negativity and incivility that emerged from the troubled past. I believe there is a readiness to reset our culture. By elevating these desires and addressing them explicitly, we have an opportunity to refresh our culture.

The Year Ahead

The university will be served by a new ombuds in the year ahead and it is my expectation that the office will continue to provide a much needed confidential, informal, impartial and independent resource for all members of the university community to bring concerns and to get assistance with resolving university-related problems. While many problems brought to the ombuds are complex--and some simply defy a full or satisfactory resolution—actively encouraging all parties to engage in respectful and constructive problem solving, and supporting those efforts, helps to ensure a safer, respectful and more satisfying workplace and learning community.

I believe it will be important for the university to revisit its position regarding Title IX and ombuds reporting policy. I recommend that the university consider establishing the Ombuds Office as a fully confidential resource. This would be in keeping with the policies of many, if not most, major colleges and university across the nation, and it would ensure that the office remains a confidential resource for those seeking information and referral assistance.

There are many opportunities for the ombuds to support the university in its commitment to and efforts towards fostering an increasingly respectful and satisfying environment. I encourage the future ombuds to continue to partner with university administration, colleges, units, residence staff and student leadership to provide ongoing Ombuds Office awareness activities, promote civility, and encourage respectful conflict resolution. I also encourage the next ombuds to expand outreach efforts off-campus to the growing number of faculty, staff and students working and learning at our centers, stations and sites located throughout the state.

In Appreciation

In concluding my tenure as ombuds, I wish to express my appreciation for my four former ombuds colleagues with whom I shared the ombuds role, learned and had the pleasure of their support. I also want to thank Anna Thompson, Assistant to Faculty Secretary and Ombuds Office, for her administrative assistance over the years.