

***Iowa State University
Ombuds Office
Annual Report
for FY 2012***

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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The Iowa State University Ombuds Office completed its fourth year of operation at the close of FY 2012, and it appears that the University community continues to embrace its services.

This year's data indicates that the number of visitors to the Ombuds Office increased substantially from FY 2011, although the main issues visitors bring to the office have remained constant (i.e., interpersonal conflict). The increased usage is most noticeable for graduate/professional students and faculty. Professional and Scientific employees continue to be the most frequent visitors to the Ombuds Office, comprising almost 43% of all visitors this year. Once again this year women visitors outnumber the men in excess of their percentage of population in almost every group. It is most striking for professional and scientific employees this year, where 80% of all P&S visitors are women.

This year the number of visitors to the Ombuds Office who appeared to be or self-identified as a member of a protected class has declined from 21.5% to 10.5%. Likewise the number of cases that included a diversity-related component declined from 15% to 10.5%. Interestingly, in the online *Ombuds Office Resource Guide*, the diversity-related web pages were some of the most frequently viewed by users of the Guide.

One substantial change in Ombuds Office business this year is that the number of cases that involving either shuttle diplomacy or facilitated conversation has more than doubled: from 10% last year to 23% this year. It appears that parties involved in a conflict are beginning to feel more comfortable discussing their situation face-to-face when they have the support of the Ombuds Officer in doing so.

During FY 2012 the Ombuds Office continued to do outreach presentations and provide extensive online resources about conflict management and the Ombuds Office, which may be contributing to the increased comfort level that the University community feels towards the Ombuds Office.

Finally, according to a survey of visitors who have received services from the Ombuds Office, they are very satisfied with the services they have received and are likely to refer others to the office.

OMBUDS OFFICE ANNUAL REPORT FOR FISCAL YEAR 2012

The Ombuds Office at Iowa State University

The Iowa State University Ombuds Office serves as a confidential and informal resource that assists faculty, professional and scientific staff, confidential and supervisory employees, graduate/professional students and post-doctoral employees with concerns or conflicts that arise on campus or at their worksite. The University's Ombuds Officer, who reports to the President's office, is neither an investigator nor a decision-maker. Instead the Ombuds Officer is independent, and she serves as a neutral party who tries to help people involved in a dispute respectfully discuss their concerns and work together to reach an appropriate and mutually acceptable solution. She also can help individuals navigate through University policies, procedures, or organizational structures with an eye towards opening lines of communication that seem to be closed. The office is staffed as a .6 F.T.E. by Elaine Newell, Ombuds Officer, and it is open Tuesdays, Wednesdays and Thursdays from 8 a.m. until 5 p.m.

Data Collection at the Ombuds Office

Type of Data reported. A goal of this annual report is to review the overall activity of the Ombuds Office, while at the same time maintaining the confidentiality of the visitors to the office and the issues they presented. Therefore, this report provides general data about the number of cases, the type of visitors who sought assistance from the Ombuds Office, and the variety of issues the visitors to the office discussed.

Scope of Data Reported. This Annual Report for FY 2012 discusses twelve months of Ombuds Office activity and data, from July 1, 2011 through June 30, 2012. References within in this Annual Report to FY 2010 and FY 2011 cover those full fiscal years, but references to FY 2009 only cover September 2008 through June 30, 2009.

A Record Number of New Visitors During FY 2012

As illustrated by the chart on the following page, the total number of new visitors to the Ombuds Office during FY 2012 increased substantially compared to FY 2011. In FY 2011 there were a total of 79 visitors to the Ombuds Office, but in FY 2012 there were 104 visitors to the office. This surpassed the previous record of 103 visitors that was set during FY 2010.

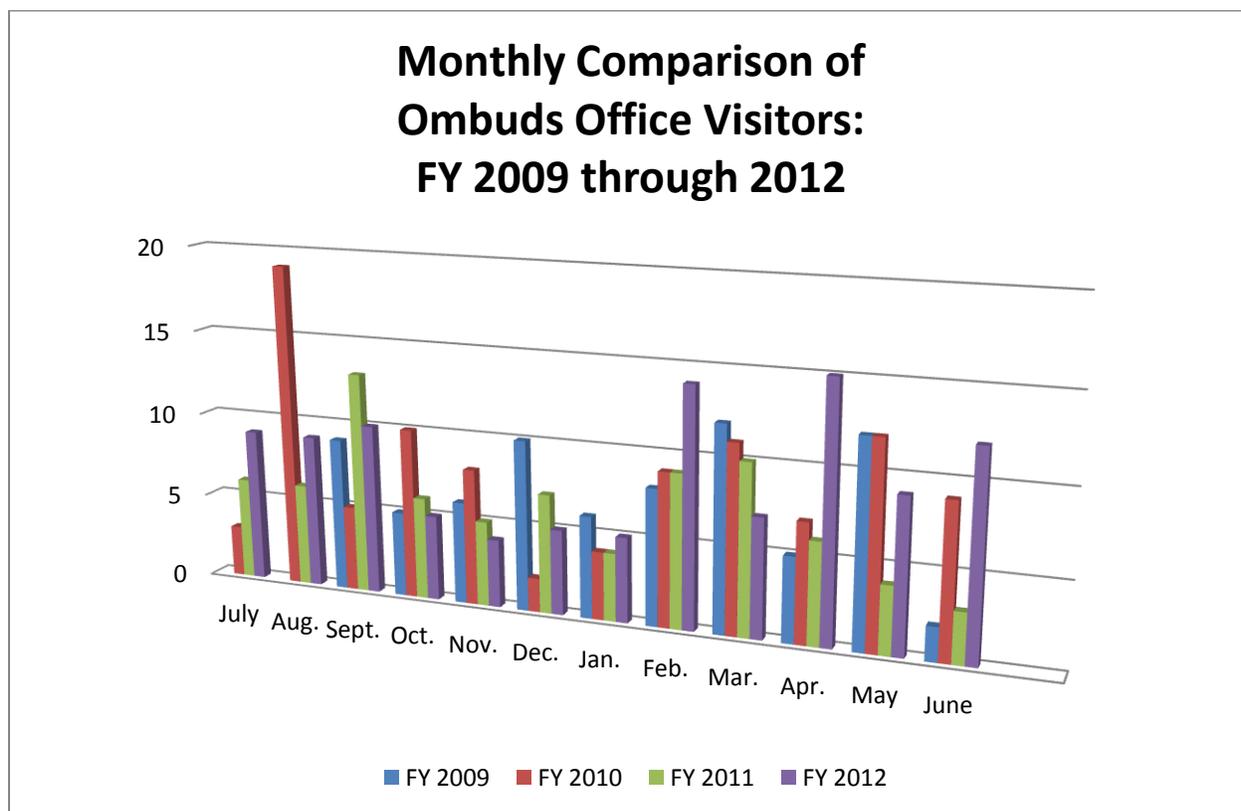
Graphics on the following page illustrate who is visiting the Ombuds Office, and when they visit. The number of new visitors in each group is shown for each fiscal year since the office officially opened.

Annual Comparison: New Visitors by Group

	<i>FY 2009</i>	<i>FY 2010</i>	<i>FY 2011</i>	<i>FY 2012</i>
Faculty	22	22	23	33
Profl. & Scientific	32	61	38	44
Confid. & Supervsy	3	4	1	2
Grad./Profl. Student	12	6	3	14
Post Docs	0	1	1	0
Other	11	9	13	11
TOTAL	80	103	79	104

NOTE: "Other" refers to visitors who are not served by the Ombuds Office, such as undergraduate students, or merit employees not covered by the AFSCME contract.

After four years of tracking Ombuds Office visitors it now appears that there is no consistent pattern of activity related to the time of the year. While the timing of the University's midyear budget reversion in FY 2010 did spark an increase in visitors, no other events seem to consistently correlate to increases or decreases in Ombud Office activity, as noted below:



Issues Presented by Visitors During FY 2012

As was the case last year, the top issues presented by new visitors to the Ombuds Office in FY2012 all dealt with interpersonal conflict. In order of popularity, the predominant issues of concern were as follows:

For Faculty (33 visitors):

- Conflict with supervisor (27% of all faculty visitors presented this issue)
- Conflict with colleague/subordinate (tied at 18%)
- "Other" issues, i.e., issues that don't fit into a category (24%)
- Issues related to diversity (12%)

Last year 39% of all faculty visitors spoke of conflict with their supervisors, so that issue is less frequent this year. Also compared to last year, this year's percentages for conflict with colleague(s) and diversity-related conflict are both relatively stable.

For Professional and Scientific (44 visitors):

- Conflict with supervisor (59% of all P&S visitors presented this issue)
- Conflict with colleague (23%)
- Conflict with subordinate (16%)

The percentage of Professional and Scientific employees who complained about a conflict with their supervisor was relatively unchanged this year, as was the percentage of conflicts with a colleague.

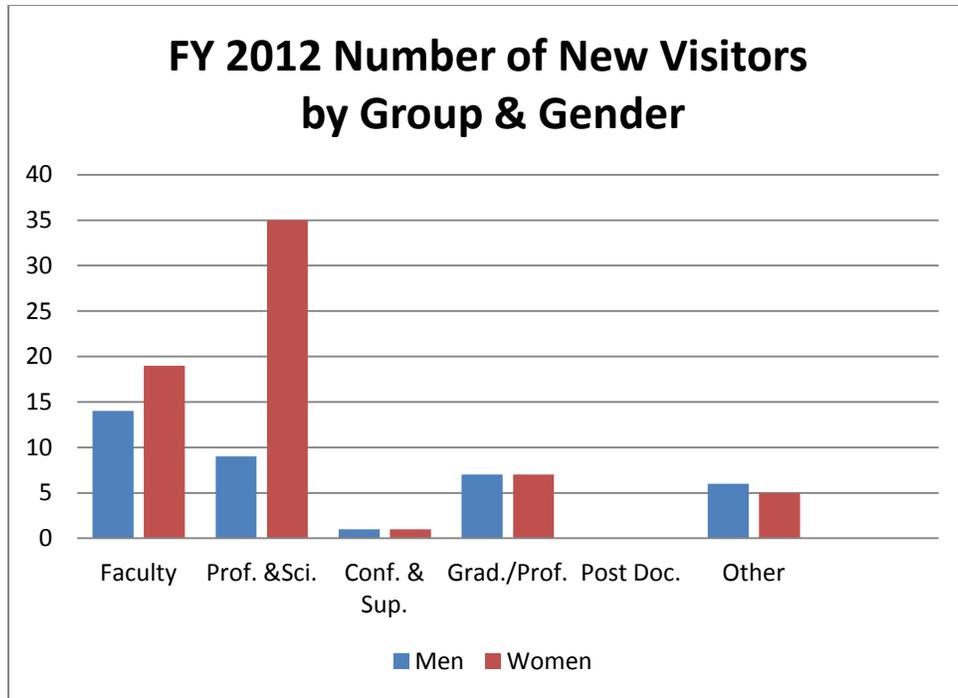
For Graduate/Professional Students (14 visitors):

- Conflict with major professor (55% presented this issue)
- Financial issues (27% presented this issue)

Conflict with their major professor continues to predominate as the main concern for this group of visitors.

The Ombuds Office and Diversity-related Service

At this point the Ombuds Office is not currently collecting any documents in which visitors voluntarily report protected class status. However visitor gender is observed and tracked, as noted in the chart on the following page.



It is interesting to note that this year the data shows a little more even distribution of visitors by gender – except for Professional and Scientific employees, where women outnumber the men by almost 4 to 1. This year almost 80% of all Professional and Scientific visitors were women – even though they only make up 55 % of the general Professional and Scientific employee population.

In last year’s Annual Report, the Ombuds Office suggested that “it could be beneficial to provide more opportunities for women in the University community to obtain professional development in conflict management.” It is clear that this trend is not going away. Women remain overrepresented compared to their general population in the faculty and P&S groups. The value of professional development opportunities is certainly worth exploring. As the Ombuds Office looks toward the new fiscal year, it may consider a closer, more specific tracking of the concerns that that women visitors are presenting in the hope of identifying any specific causes or effects related to this trend.

	% of Females In each service group (Source: ISU Factbook FY2011)	% of Ombuds Office Visitors who are female			
		2009	2010	2011	2012
Faculty	37%	45%	59%	60.8%	58%
Prof. & Scientific	55%	46%	73.7%	63%	80%
Graduate/Profl.	45%	58%	50%	66%	50%

In addition to monitoring visitor gender, the Ombuds Officer observed that 10.5% of all new visitors to the Ombuds Office during FY 2012 were persons of color, or identified themselves as LGBT or as having a disability. In previous years the percentage of visitors in a protected class ranged from 21.5% (in FY 2011) to 14.5% (in FY 2009).

It is also interesting to note that about 10.5% of all FY 2012 cases included a diversity-related component. More specifically:

- 4 of the 33 faculty cases included a diversity-related component (12%)
- 6 of the 44 professional and scientific employee cases included a diversity-related component (14%)
- 2 of the 14 graduate/professional student cases included a diversity-related component (14%)

Thus the percentage of cases that included a diversity-related component declined a bit in FY 2012 – down to 10.5% from the usual 14 – 15% of prior years. (“Diversity-related component” means that the visitor believed that diversity may have played a part in the concern that was discussed.) Visitors who mention a diversity-related concern are always provided with referral information for the University’s Office of Equal Opportunity and Compliance and other relevant organizations. This year it appears that, once again, there are no discernible trends with regard to conflict at the University and persons of diverse backgrounds.

Cases Involving Communication Facilitation Have More than Doubled

Generally the Ombuds Officer meets one-on-one with a single individual to discuss their situation and develop some options. Those options might include the Ombuds Officer providing neutral facilitation of meetings between the individuals who are in conflict, or even ‘shuttle diplomacy’ in which the Ombuds communicates individually between the parties who are in conflict. Last year ten percent of all Ombuds Office cases included either shuttle diplomacy or meeting facilitation, which was the highest percentage thus far. This year that figure jumped to 23%. It appears that the Ombuds Office is developing a reputation as a place where people can get help talking in a constructive fashion about difficult topics.

In addition, the Ombuds Officer facilitated a group discussion about conflict management that was customized to the educational needs of the unit that had requested it. In another instance, the Ombuds facilitated a discussion for a unit that was trying to improve its own communication and effectiveness. Both of those events took about two hours of each group’s time, and the supervisors of both units reported that the outcomes were very positive.

Outreach & Collaboration Continues to Build Ombuds Office Visibility

During FY 2012 the Ombuds Office continued to build its visibility with a concerted effort to make personal contacts with a variety of administrators and organizations. This resulted in opportunities to speak at the following events:

- a faculty workshop sponsored by the Executive Vice President and Provost’s office

- the Department Chairs Cabinet meeting
- an Open Forum sponsored by the Professional and Scientific Council
- the Emerging Leaders Academy
- a CELT training session on conflict management

The Ombuds Office had considered developing a ‘baseline’ package of training material that could then be customized for each presentation. However because each invitation to speak is so unique in its objectives and its audience, the ‘baseline’ package was simply not useful because so much subsequent customization was necessary for each presentation. It is now more efficient to simply create presentations on an ad hoc basis and incorporate relevant pre-existing material whenever possible.

In addition to outreach within the University community, the Ombuds Officer was invited by South Dakota State University to spend a day on their campus in Brookings, South Dakota. That institution is in the process of developing its own ombuds office and was interested in hearing about ISU’s experience starting an office ‘from scratch.’ Information was shared with a broad range of SDSU stakeholders, from faculty and staff committee members to vice presidents, deans, and even the President of the university.

Finally, while working on visitor concerns during FY 2012 the ISU Ombuds Officer was fortunate to receive assistance from individuals in organizations on campus such as:

Human Resource Services	Office of University Counsel
Office of Equal Opportunity and Compliance	Policy Library Advisory Committee
Graduate College	International Students & Scholars
Student Assistance Office	Student Counseling Center
Department of Residence	Accounts Receivable
Faculty Senate	Professional & Scientific Counsel

Ombuds Online Resources Offer ‘Self Help’ Information

In February, 2011 the Ombuds Office Resource Guide debuted as an online tool for ‘one stop shopping’ in conflict management resources. In its first eleven months of operation, it generated almost 2000 hits. Clearly ISU employees and students are interested in easy-to-use resources on conflict management that are convenient and discrete. Interestingly, the most popular sites within the Guide deal with culture, diversity and conflict; gossip in the workplace; and formal resolution processes.

Likewise, last year’s extensive makeover of the Ombuds Office website appears to have helped explain to new visitors how the office works. Many visitors have commented that they found the information that they needed either through the office’s website or the Resource Guide. The Ombuds Office will continue to invest the time needed to maintain and update its web presence and online tools on conflict management.

Survey Results Show Visitors are Very Satisfied

In an effort to determine whether its visitors are satisfied with the service they receive, the Ombuds Office began during the spring of 2011 to survey visitors and inquire about various aspects of their Ombuds Office service. Individuals whose cases have been closed are sent a paper survey and invited to respond to a series of statements about the office by using a range of numbers: “5” means “strongly agree” and “1” means “strongly disagree.” The individuals who returned surveys indicate a high level of satisfaction with almost every aspect of the Ombuds Office, as noted below:

	Avg. Response 5 (agree) – 1 (disagree)
1. The physical location of the Ombuds Office (in Physics Hall) is suitably discrete.	4.5
2. The Ombuds Officer understood my situation.	4.5
3. The Ombuds Officer suggested options or helped me develop strategies that applied to my situation.	4.4
4. The Ombuds Officer told me about relevant University policies, procedures, and services.	4.5
5. The Ombuds Office felt like a safe environment for me to discuss my concern.	4.7
6. The Ombuds Officer was neutral.	4.8
7. The Ombuds Office will protect the confidentiality of my information.	4.8
8. Regardless of the outcome of my situation, my overall experience with the Ombuds Office has been positive.	4.6
9. I would refer others to the Ombuds Office.	4.8

Thus far 27 surveys have been returned from the 63 individuals who have been sent a survey, which is a return rate of 43%. According to discussion in the national ombuds community about office assessment surveys, this is an excellent return rate. The returned surveys indicate that they were almost evenly split between faculty respondents and professional and scientific staff respondents.

Summary of FY 2012: The Ombuds Office Matures into a Respected Resource

Since opening its doors in mid-2008 after the completion its two-year pilot project, the Iowa State University Ombuds Office supported the University community through budget crunches and layoffs, reorganizations, and new administrations. As the number of its visitors continued to climb this fiscal year, the first instinct is to think “Oh, no! What’s wrong?” However the evidence appears to indicate that there are just *more* visitors coming to the Ombuds Office. So rather than asking “*What’s wrong at ISU?*” perhaps a better question might be: “*What’s right at the Ombuds Office?*”

Since September, 2008 the Ombuds Office has served over 360 visitors – the vast majority of whom want to talk about interpersonal conflict and who, afterwards, appear to be very satisfied with the service they received. Arguably the word of mouth from former visitors, plus the extensive outreach efforts and improved online presence of the Ombuds Office has helped it develop and establish an increasing level of visibility in the ISU community at large. In addition, more and more visitors are willing to participate in facilitated communications that often help ease tensions in difficult relationships and make for a more productive workplace and educational environment. More and more visitors now come to the Ombuds Office to ask “Can you help me/help us do XXX” because they recognize the office is a unique resource on campus – confidential, informal, impartial, and independent. The Iowa State University Ombuds Office continues to offer customized assistance in a supportive environment so people can work out their own problems without having to resort to grievances, appeals, or litigation.

And there’s nothing wrong with that.