

***Iowa State University
Ombuds Office
Annual Report
For FY 2020
(July 1, 2019 to June 30, 2020)***

***As reported by MWI
on behalf of
Deanna Clingan-Fischer, JD
Ombuds Officer***

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Message from The Ombuds Team at MWI

Please find the FY2020 (July 1, 2019 and June 30, 2020) Ombuds Office Annual Report for your review. This report provides a summary of visitors, the concerns they raised, the action taken by the Ombuds Officer, and recommendations based the year's activities and findings.

MWI compiled the FY2020 Ombuds Office Annual Report based on data provided by ISU's previous Ombuds Officer, Deanna Clingan-Fischer, who conducted all ombuds activities and collected all data during FY2020. This report reflects her interactions with ISU visitors, descriptions of those interactions, and examples of cases brought to the Ombuds Office.

When relying on data provided by a past ombuds, there are certain limitations created by the ombuds' confidentiality requirements and data collection methods. All information shared in this report is based on the data that was provided to MWI, which we cannot independently verify. If MWI was unable to resolve inconsistencies or missing information in the data set, such data was not included in the report to maintain the integrity of the overall report. MWI also did not have any evaluation data to share nor a way to collect such data due to the confidentiality of all visitors' contact information.

This report is structured in line with Ombuds Officer Deanna Clingan-Fischer's past reports to ensure consistency and reliability.

Any questions should be directed to Chuck Doran, MWI Ombuds and Executive Director, at cdoran@mwi.org. Thank you.

Chuck Doran & The Ombuds Team
MWI

Brief History

The ISU Ombuds Office opened on August 15, 2006 as a pilot program which offered independent, neutral, informal, and confidential help to faculty, staff and graduate and professional students who had work-related problems. The pilot Ombuds Office proved to be successful and was made permanent in 2008 with a year-round appointment of a three-fifths time (24 hours per week) Ombuds Officer. In 2014, the appointment changed to a four-fifths time (32 hours a week) year-round appointment. In 2017, the Ombuds Officer position evolved into a full-time year-round appointment.

Standards and Practice of Code Ethics

The Ombuds Officer follows the standards of practice and code of ethics established by the International Ombuds Association and as outlined in the Iowa State University Charter. The core principles are:

- Confidentiality
- Independence
- Informality
- Neutrality
- Impartiality

The Ombuds Officer listens to concerns, helps clarify the relevant issues, develops communication strategies, provides resources, policies, referrals, and options, as well as facilitates difficult or uncomfortable conversations with another individual.

The Ombuds Officer is not a personal advocate and cannot provide legal advice, waive university policies, conduct formal investigations, or issue formal decisions.

Executive Summary

- There were 561 **distinct visitors** who contacted the Ombuds Office for assistance during FY2020 as recorded by Deanna Clingan-Fischer:
 - 171 Faculty members
 - 251 Professional & Scientific (P&S) staff
 - 59 Merit staff
 - 71 Graduate and/or Professional Students
 - 7 Post Doctorate scholars
 - 359 female and 200 male and 2 gender non-binary visitors
- The primary four referral sources of visitors to the Ombuds Office are colleagues/coworkers, supervisors, dean or chair, and previous visits.
- The **primary issues** that bring most visitors to the Ombuds Office are conflict with a supervisor, conflict with a colleague, interpretation of policy, and lack of respect

Summary of Key Activities and Accomplishments

- Listened to visitors' concerns and discussed options to help them move forward effectively
- Conducted trainings to help with brainstorming and team building
- Conducted several facilitations to help colleagues manage and resolve conflicts
- Discussed strategies for leadership training and attended leadership meetings
- Assisted visitors in understanding university policies, rules, and pay assignments
- Guided visitors through the appeals process
- Set up and managed roundtable discussions within departments
- Saw an increase in the number of visitors from 528 in FY2019 to 561 in FY2020

Visitor Information

The following table indicates the number of visitors who sought assistance from the Ombuds Office each month during FY2020, the service group to which they belonged, and their gender. Visitors were allowed to self-select their own service group.

Month	# of distinct visitors	Faculty	P&S	Merit	Grad/Prof.	Post Doc	Other *	Total F	Total M	Total NB
July	38	16(9F 7M)	13(11F 2M)	5(4F 1M)	4(1F 3M)	0	0	25	13	0
Aug	48	21(11F 10M)	21(15F 6M)	3(2F 1M)	3(1F 2M)	0	0	29	19	0
Sep	51	22(12F 10M)	18(17F 1M)	4(3F 1M)	6(2F 4M)	1(M)	0	34	17	0
Oct	47	12(3F 9M)	26(22F 4M)	4(3F 1M)	4(M)	1(M)	0	28	19	0
Nov	49	12(8F 4M)	24(17F 7M)	7(5F 2M)	6(3F 3M)	0	0	33	16	0
Dec	55	11(6F 5M)	24(15F 9M)	4(2F 2M)	15(8F 7M)	1(M)	0	31	24	0
SUB TOTAL	288	94(49F 45M)	126(97F 29M)	27(19F 8M)	38(15F 23M)	3(M)	0	180	108	0
Jan	45	11(6F 5M)	25(20F 4M 1NB)	4(3F 1M)	4(2F 2M)	0	1(F)	32	12	1
Feb	49	11(6F 5M)	25(18F 6M 1NB)	6(5F 1M)	6(1F 5M)	0	1(F)	31	17	1
Mar	51	9(4F 5M)	23(17F 6M)	8(7F 1M)	11(7F 4M)	0	0	35	16	0
Apr	41	13(7F 6M)	13(10F 3M)	5(F)	7(3F 4M)	3(1F 2M)	0	26	15	0
May	43	18(10F 8M)	19(12F 7M)	4(F)	2(1F 1M)	0	0	27	16	0
June	44	15(9F 6M)	20(12F 8M)	5(F)	3(1F 2M)	1(F)	0	28	16	0
TOTAL	561	171 (91F 80M)	251 (186F 63M 2NB)	59 (48F 11M)	71 (30F 41M)	7 (2F 5M)	2 (2F)	359	200	2

KEY:

"TOTAL" - the total number of distinct visitors for the month, midyear, or entire year

"F", "M" or "NB" - female, male, or non-binary

"2(1F 1M)" - means there were 2 visitors that month: 1 female and 1 male

"P&S" - Professional and Scientific Employees

"Grad/Prof." - Graduate or Professional students

"Post Doc." - Post-doctorate scholars

"Other" - visitors outside the scope of the Ombuds Office's service (e.g. undergraduates, former employees, etc.)

Visitor Trends

Of the 561 distinct visitors for FY2020, 359 identified as female, 200 identified as male, and 2 identified as gender non-binary. The following chart shows the breakdown of the self-identified genders for the past five years.

	Total # Visitors	Females	Males	Anonymous / Non-Binary
FY 2020	561	359	200	2 (non-binary)
FY 2019	528	324	204	--
FY 2018	310	195	115	--
FY 2017	94	58	36	--
FY 2016	128	85	42	1 (anonymous)

Visitor Five-Year Comparison

The following multi-year summary of Ombuds Office visitor data illustrates the total number of Faculty, P&S, Grad/Prof., Merit, S&C, Post Doc. Visitors to the office.

	Total Visitors	Total Faculty Visitors	Total P&S Visitors	Total Grad./Prof. Student Visitors	Total Merit Visitors	Total S&C Visitors	Total Post Doctorate Visitors	Total Other Visitors
FY 2020	561	171 (91F, 80M) 30%	251 (186F, 63M, 2NB) 45%	71 (30F, 41M) 13%	59 (48F, 11M) 10%	-	-7 (2F, 5M) 1%	2 (2F, 0M) .4%
FY 2019	528	188 (90F, 98M) 36%	239 (187F, 52M) 45%	58 (26F, 32M) 11%	31 (21F, 10M) 6%	--	--	--
FY 2018	310	106 (56F, 50M) 34%	102 (73F, 29M) 33%	31 (15F, 16M) 10%	20 (18F, 2M) 6%	41 (24F, 17M) 13%	--	--
FY 2017	94	27 (20F, 7M) 29%	38 (26F, 12M) 41%	20 (9F, 11M) 21%	--	--	--	--
FY 2016	128	40 (29F, 11M) 31%	49 (34F, 15M) 38%	23 (11F, 11M) 17%	--	--	--	--

Visitors Compared to University Population

	ISU Headcount*			Ombuds Visitors		
	% of females	% of males	% of anonymous	% of females	% of males	% of anonymous
Faculty	40%	59.90%	.05%	57.4%	42.6%	--
P&S	57.7%	42%	.3%	72.6%	26.9%	.5%
Merit	55.24%	44.68%	.08%	80.8%	19.2%	--
Grad/Profl	41.4%	55.7%	2.9%	42.7%	57.3%	--
Post Doc	40.7%	58.6%	.7%	18.2%	81.8%	--
S&C**	--	--	--	100%	--	--
Other**	--	--	--	100%	--	--

*Data from the ISU Fact Book

**Categories not included in the Fact Book

Systemic Issues and Concerns Identified by Visitors

The most common concern visitors presented to the Ombuds Office was conflict with a supervisor. This represents a five-year trend. Since 2016, concerns with a supervisor or major professor have been the most common concern among visitors to the Ombuds Office. In fact, the Ombuds Office noted in their FY2017 report:

It is not surprising that almost half of all visitors to the Ombuds Office during FY2017 shared a concern about conflict with their supervisor or their major professor, since that has been a fairly common complaint since the office first opened.

The second most common concern, conflict with a colleague, also reflects a growing trend. Since FY2018, conflict with a colleague has been the second most common concerns among visitors to the Ombuds Office, and “lack of respect” was a common concern several years prior as well.

The primary complaint codes for each type of visitor category are listed below:

Faculty:

- | | |
|------------------------------|-------|
| 1. Conflict with Supervisor | 22% |
| 2. Interpretation of Policy | 19.5% |
| 3. Conflict with Colleague | 11.5% |
| 4. Lack of Respect | 10% |
| 5. Conflict with Subordinate | 8.9% |

Professional and Scientific Staff:

- | | |
|-----------------------------|-------|
| 1. Conflict with Supervisor | 22.3 |
| 2. Conflict with Colleague | 18.2% |
| 3. Physical Environment | 10% |
| 4. Interpretation of Policy | 9.7% |
| 5. Lack of Respect | 9.2% |

Merit Staff:

1. Conflict with Colleague	39.4%
2. Conflict with Supervisor	17%
3. Lack of Respect	15%
4. Employment Duties	7.4%
4. Interpretation of Policy	7.4%
4. Physical Environment	7.4%

Supervisory and Confidential Staff:

1. Conflict with Colleague	66.7%
2. Lack of Respect	33.3%

Graduate and Professional Students:

1. Conflict with Supervisor	38.8%
2. Interpretation of Policy	11.6%
3. Physical Environment	11.6%
4. Financial Issues	7.8%
4. Disciplinary Action	7.8%
4. Lack of Respect	7.8%

Post-Doctoral Scholar:

1. Interpretation of Policy	45.5%
2. Employment Duties	27.3%
3. Conflict with Supervisor	9%
3. Other	9%
3. Diversity Related	9%

Other:

1. Conflict with Supervisor	100%
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The primary complaint codes for each type of visitor gender are listed below:

Female: all categories

1. Conflict with Supervisor	23.7%
2. Conflict with Colleague	19.8%
3. Lack of Respect	11.6%
4. Interpretation of Policy	11.5%
5. Physical Environment	8%

Male: all categories

1. Conflict with Supervisor	22.4%
2. Interpretation of Policy	16.6%
3. Conflict with Colleague	11.4%
4. Conflict with Subordinate	8.6%
4. Physical Environment	8.6%

Gender Non-Binary: all categories

1. Conflict with Supervisor	100%
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Other Useful Services

While most Ombuds Office visitors usually want to discuss communication strategies to address their issues or discover relevant policies and other resources, quite a few visitors this year wanted help with a more active approach to managing their conflict. These visitors requested the Ombuds to do shuttle diplomacy, i.e., the Ombuds contacted someone else involved in the conflict, in the interest of trying to share information or obtain information in a non-threatening fashion. The Ombuds also provided meeting facilitation at the request of several visitors. In facilitated meetings, the Ombuds meets with the parties in a neutral space and uses mediation type techniques to help them discuss their conflict in a respectful, productive conversation.

Outreach, Education & Training

Efforts were invested in developing partnerships as well as providing outreach and education about the Ombuds Office. The Ombuds Officer provided training on such topics as conflict management, civility, and communication skills. University employees who were either new or transferring to a new position received an email from the Ombuds Office, informing them about the services offered.

Examples of specific issues of concern brought forward to the Ombuds Office

1. Visitors expressed concern and confusion about conflicts with supervisors around work expectations, work flexibility, and job delegation, as well as frustration with a lack of supervisor response to the grievances that are brought to them.
2. Conflicts with coworkers. Some visitors described experiences in negative, toxic, or unsupportive work environments. These concerns included personal disagreements and an overall concern for departmental and University culture.
3. Concerns with the University's academic programing and structure, including a fear of lack of research integrity among supervisors.
4. Questions regarding the Ombuds process, University policy, the appeals process, as well as HR processes and policy.
5. Equity in salary and advancement opportunities in relation to race and gender.
6. COVID-19 related concerns regarding the safety of work environment, the personal safety of their colleagues, concerns regarding the transition to remote work, and possible technical, as well as safety complications that COVID-19 introduces into university lab environments. Additionally, Ombuds Office visitors expressed confusion and concern surrounding the University's COVID-19 policies and protections.

Recommendations from MWI

While the past ombuds did not leave us with any of her own recommendations, MWI recommends the following based on our review of the FY2020 data and our work with ISU in FY2021.

- *Provide skills training for supervisors and major professors:* Concerns with supervisors and major professors represent a long-standing trend from visitors to the Ombuds Office. ISU can proactively mitigate certain supervisory concerns by investing in supervisors' and major professors' managerial and communication skills. MWI recommends focusing on the following areas for skills improvement:
 - Communication and collaboration
 - Employment review standards and practice
 - Providing and receiving feedback
 - Managing internal conflict among team members
 - Promoting diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging
- *Expand demographic data collection:* Currently, the Ombuds Office provides a demographic breakdown of visitors based solely on gender. While this is an important demographic indicator to report on to understand systemic issues, it is also important that ISU collect other demographic information from visitors to reflect a more diverse understanding of demographic systemic concerns that may exist. This may include race, age, and years of service at ISU. Best practices for current ombuds reporting should be investigated and implemented.
- *Eliminate "contact" reporting:* The past ombuds collected data on the number of "contacts" made with the Ombuds Office – calculating all emails, phone calls, and conversations with eligible and non-eligible visitors throughout the year. While reporting on all contacts made during the year provides a certain data point about the ombuds' breadth of work, it does not provide ISU with a meaningful understanding of the ombuds overall work, impact, and recommendations. Moreover, it does not reflect the depth or quality of each contact. MWI recommends discontinuing the practice, which we started in FY2021.
- *Improve ombuds reporting structure and narrative data collection:* The current ombuds reporting structure leans heavily on quantitative data collection and reporting. This could be balanced with more detailed, qualitative data that provides examples and depth. For instance, ISU reports have consistently shown that visitors' most common concern is with their supervisors. To better understand what is driving these supervisory concerns, the ombuds could report upon case studies or provide narrative vignettes. Such qualitative data can be anonymized and disaggregated from any specific visitor information to ensure confidentiality.

APPENDIX

History of the I.S.U. Ombuds Office

A proposal to establish a faculty Ombuds office was approved by the Iowa State University Faculty Senate in early 2002. Several months later the Professional and Scientific Council passed a motion asking University administrators to include Professional and Scientific staff in discussions regarding the development of an Ombuds Office. According to reports published in *Inside Iowa State* at that time, the first discussions about the possibility of an Ombuds Office at the University actually began as far back as the early 1990s.

In December, 2005, an article in *Inside Iowa State* announced that “I.S.U. faculty, staff and graduate students will soon have a new place to turn for help with problems or disputes – the Ombuds Office.” The following August (2006) the office finally opened as a two-year pilot project and it was staffed by two part-time Ombuds who shared a single .5 F.T.E. position. At the conclusion of the pilot project, the office began operating on a permanent basis in July, 2008. A single part-time Ombuds officer was hired to provide Ombuds service three days a week to faculty, Professional and Scientific staff, Confidential and Supervisory staff, and graduate and professional students. Soon thereafter, the service expanded to include Merit staff and post-doctoral scholars.

Ombuds Office Charter Establishes its Services and Authority

In 2013 President Steven Leath and Ombuds Officer Elaine Newell signed the Charter that officially established the Iowa State University Ombuds Office as an independent unit within the President’s office and defined the authority and responsibilities of the office as a confidential, neutral resource that can help students and employees with conflict management. As noted in the charter (which is available on the office’s website):

The primary mission of the Iowa State University Ombuds Office is to provide confidential and impartial assistance that enables individuals to manage their own conflicts early, informally, and at the lowest levels possible without the need to pursue more formal grievance processes or litigation. In addition, the Ombuds Office may alert University officials about systemic problems or general trends that merit further review or consideration for the good of the University community. The Ombuds is neither an advocate for its visitors nor does it represent University management. Rather, the Ombuds is an advocate for respectful dialogue, fair practices, and mutual understanding.

Tracking Visitor Concerns

One of the challenges faced by the Ombuds Office is how to maintain the confidentiality of each visitor while also identifying trends or problematic areas that may be ripe for some administrative review or consideration. For most of the visitors who come to the Ombuds Office, their concern usually encompasses one (or more) of the following:

- Conflict with a supervisor (includes job performance issues and lack of leadership, but not faculty promotion/tenure disputes which are tracked separately)
- Conflict with a colleague (including research credit, etc.)
- Conflict with a subordinate
- Employment duties (including teaching or committee assignments, etc.)
- Financial issues (including compensation, reimbursement, benefits, etc.)
- Disciplinary action (includes actual or threat/implementation of disciplinary action)
- Interpretation/implementation of policy
- Concern regarding physical environment (i.e., work conditions, not personal violence)
- Promotion & tenure, or non-renewal of a contract related to faculty duties
- Issues related to diversity (includes adverse treatment related to protected class status)
- Lack of respect (visitor perceives that he/she/they are not being respected)
- Lack of communication
- Failure to manage (i.e., their supervisor is ignoring a problem)
- Failure to produce (i.e., an employee or student isn't meeting expectations)
- Gossip (the workplace is unpleasant due to excessive gossip)
- Email (a conflict has arisen/escalated from unpleasant email exchanges)
- Talking behind back
- Other (when concern is not encompassed by any of the above)