

***Iowa State University***  
***Ombuds Office***  
***Annual Report for FY 2010***

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### ***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 can 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. One 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 2010 discusses twelve months of Ombuds Office activity and data, from July 1, 2009 through June 30, 2010. However, any reference to the office's activity during FY 2009 only includes nine months of data: from September, 2008 (when this Ombuds Officer began the position) through June, 2009.

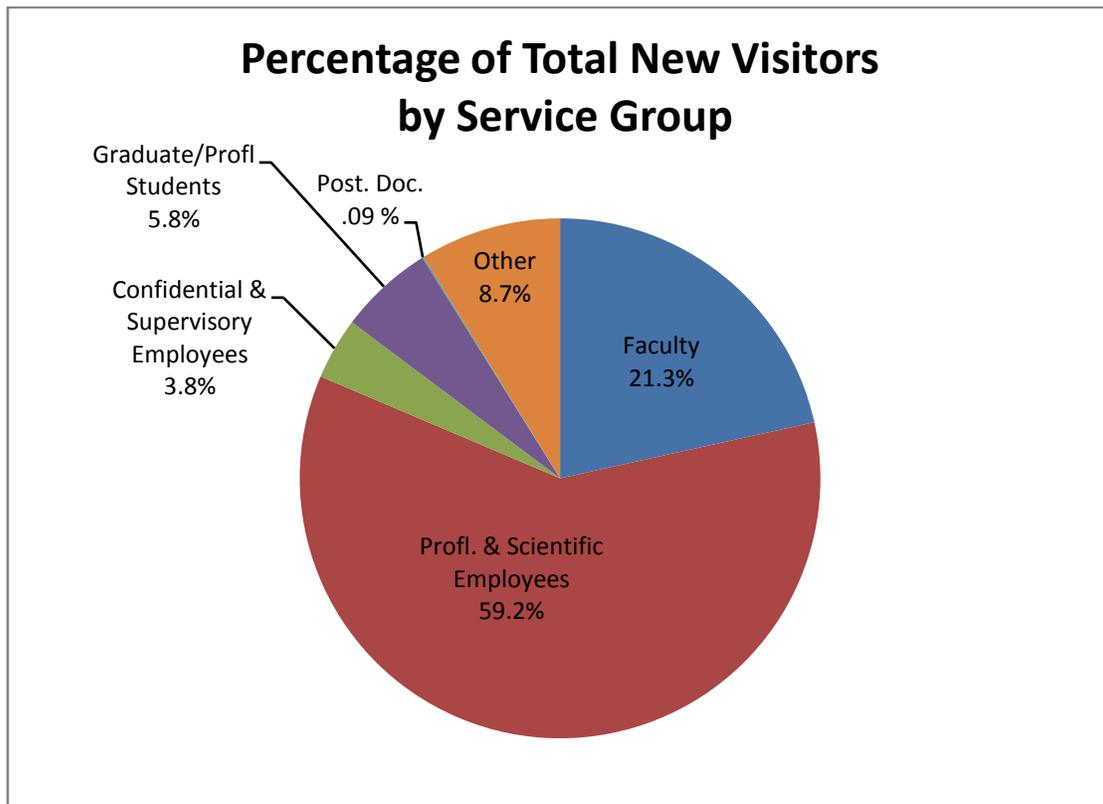
### ***New Ombuds Office Visitors during FY 2010***

As illustrated by the chart on the following page, the total number of new visitors to the Ombuds Office increased between FY 2009 and FY 2010. Also there were noticeable increases and decreases in the number of visitors in several of the service groups. Specifically, the increase in the number of professional and scientific employees and the decrease in the number of graduate/professional students who visited the Ombuds Office is quite noticeable.

#### ***Annual Comparison: New Visitors by Group***

	<i>FY 2009</i>	<i>FY 2010</i>
Faculty	22	22
Prof. & Scientific	32	61
Confid. & Supervisy	3	4
Grad./Prof. Student	12	6
Post Docs	0	1
Other	11	9
TOTAL	80	103

A comparison of the number of new visitors in each group during FY 2010 is shown below:



NOTE: In the two preceding graphics, “Other” refers to a visitor who requested service but did not belong to one of the five service groups (e.g., a merit employee covered by the collective bargaining agreement) or to a surrogate visitor (who did not have any problem of their own but instead approached the Ombuds Office on behalf of someone else).

#### ***Issues Presented by Visitors During 2010***

As was the case last year, the top issues presented by new visitors to the Ombuds Office in FY2010 all deal with interpersonal conflict. In order of popularity, the predominant issues of concern were:

- Conflict with supervisor (40% of all visitors said this was an issue of concern)
- Conflict with colleague(s) (24.2%)
- Conflict with or among subordinates (14.5%)
- Conflict involving an issue related to diversity (13.5%) (see page 5 for more details)
- Interpretation or implementation of policy (9.7%)
- Conflict regarding employment duties (8.7%)
- Concern regarding assigned duties or working conditions (5.8%)

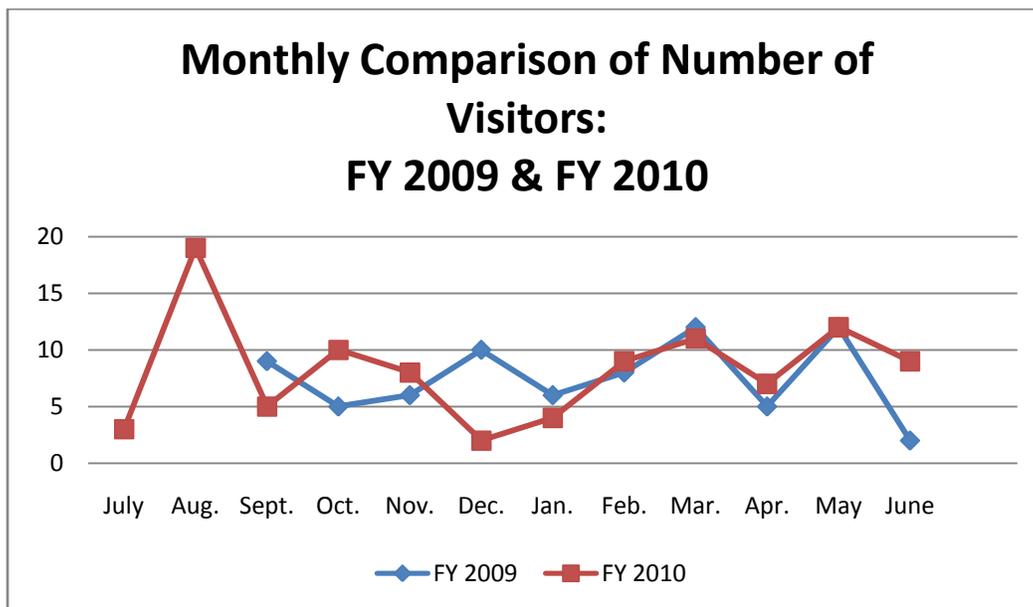
Although there were only seven new cases from graduate/professional students or post-doctoral employees during FY2010, 'conflict with major professor' was the main issue in four of those seven cases had (57%).

### ***Analysis of the Past Year***

While a variety of data is generated by the number and type of new visitors who come to the Ombuds Office, it can be somewhat challenging to try and analyze what it all means. Several trends of note appeared when reviewing what happened at the Ombuds Office this year as opposed to last year:

- visits by graduate/professional students declined significantly, but over half of those new visitors were concerned about conflict with their major professor
- visits by professional and scientific staff increased significantly
- visits by faculty remained steady
- the top issue presented by all types of visitors involve interpersonal conflicts

It appears that the average number of new visitors to the Ombuds Office generally averages around eight or nine people per month. However the following chart shows that the ebb and flow of new visitors to the Ombuds Office is somewhat unpredictable.

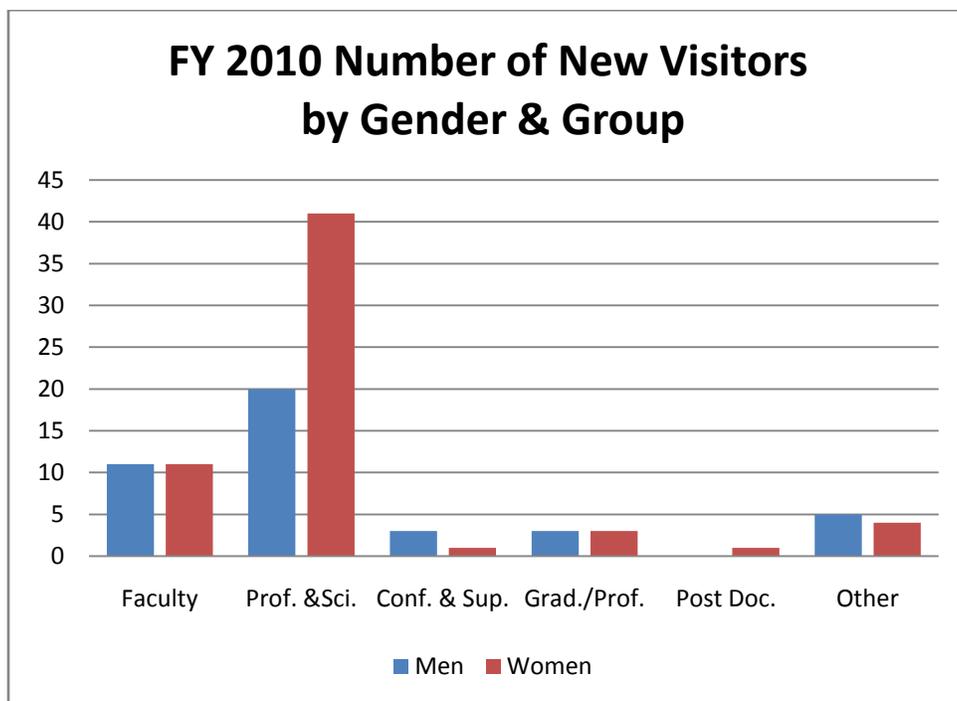


An interesting point of comparison is the October-November-December periods in both years. In FY 2009, the number of visitors during that time frame was increasing, while in FY 2010 it was decreasing. Recall that it was during this past October that the University announced a mid-year \$24.5 million reduction in University funding from the state, and discussions began related to furloughs, layoffs, reduced benefits, etc. One might speculate that this year's increase in professional and scientific visitors may be related to a perception that

they feel more vulnerable in a budget crisis because they don't have the protection of either tenure or the bargaining unit contract. Similarly, one could speculate that graduate/professional students, who frequently feel vulnerable anyway, felt even less inclined to 'rock the boat' by seeking assistance for their concerns. In fact, a number of visitors expressed that they were very unhappy in their present situation but had a real fear of losing their job or their educational opportunities if they spoke up about it. Regardless of the underlying issue that brought them to the Ombuds Office, visitors are clearly worried about the University's budget situation and mention it in some way in almost every conversation.

***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, as noted below:



In addition to monitoring visitor gender, 13.5% of all new visitors to the Ombuds Office during FY 2010 were observed to be a person of color, or identified themselves as LGBT or as having a disability. Diversity was never the main issue in any of the Ombuds Office cases this year, however:

- five faculty cases (out of 22 total cases) included a diversity-related component.
- four professional and scientific employee cases (out of 61 total cases) included a diversity-related component.

- two graduate/professional student or post-doc employee cases (out of 7 total cases) included a diversity-related component.
- one supervisory and confidential employee case (out of 4 total cases) included a diversity-related component.

“Diversity-related component” means that the visitor believed that diversity may have played a part in the concern or conflict 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 Diversity.)

### ***Mediation/Meeting Facilitation***

The most common type of interaction with the Ombuds Office involves the Ombuds Officer meeting one-on-one with a single individual to discuss a situation. However this year the Ombuds Office has continued to expand its services by facilitating meetings of individuals who are in conflict when they discuss difficult topics that are contributing to their conflict. These types of meetings have been successful in resolving conflicts between individuals in the same unit as well as conflicts between different administrative units.

### ***Office Outreach and Education***

During FY 2010 the Ombuds Officer continued to participate in outreach events that introduced the Ombuds function to members of the University community and beyond. Perhaps the most relevant outreach involved the Ombuds Officer’s work as a member of the University’s “Difficult Dialogs” team. The purpose of “Difficult Dialogs” is to provide University faculty, staff and students with the opportunity to learn how to engage in meaningful conversations that involve difficult subjects like race, religion, etc. The Difficult Dialogues team attended four days of training at the University of Missouri during June, 2009, and is now in the process of implementing on the ISU campus the skills they learned at the Missouri training.

Another interesting outreach opportunity arose when the Ombuds Officer was contacted by members of a study committee from Grinnell University to participate in a panel discussion on the role of the Ombuds on a university campus. Grinnell is currently considering whether to develop an ombuds position on their campus, and this forum allowed the Grinnell audience to learn about the ombuds function and ask questions. The ISU Ombuds Officer continues to stay in contact with the Grinnell study committee and encourage them in their efforts.

Other outreach by the Ombuds Officer included more traditional events like:

- presenting at the P&S Council’s Open Forum on the Role of the Ombuds Office;
- moderating the P&S Council’s Open Forum on its budget survey results;
- teaching graduate students about the Ombuds function in “Professional Practices in Research,” a graduate class taught by Dr. Charlotte Bronson, Associate Vice President for Research and Economic Development;

- presenting two sessions on conflict management strategies at the Engineering Leadership Networking Symposium.

Finally, to provide a little levity to the normally-somber topic of conflict management, on International Conflict Resolution Day (October 15), the Ombuds Office decorated its office door with conflict resolution “Fun Facts,” set out a large bowl of Tootsie Rolls and invited passersby to “Have a *peace* of candy.”

### ***Professional Development***

As a result of some generous financial support from the Office of University Counsel, the Ombuds Officer was able to attend five days of mediation training sponsored by the Iowa Mediation Service. This training has been invaluable to the work done in the Ombuds Office and provided the Ombuds Officer with additional skills that are used on almost a daily basis.

In addition to the mediation training, the Ombuds Officer has enjoyed the benefit of training offered by the University’s Human Resource Services in the new Performance Management system and also in the services offered by the new Employee Assistance Program vendor. Both of these topics are areas that are frequently discussed with visitors to the Ombuds Office.

Finally, the Ombuds Officer continues to take advantage of the excellent selection of books in Parks Library that deal with conflict management and resolution, mediation, and communication skills in the workplace. Having this wonderful resource right on campus also provides ombuds office visitors with a ‘self help’ option that is frequently overlooked but often appreciated when they are facing conflict in their workplace.

### ***Office Administration***

This year efforts were made to develop and implement standardized office procedures in the Ombuds Office. This subsequently brought an increased awareness of the amount of administrative time it takes to run the Ombuds Office. While the administrative tasks are not difficult, over the course of the day or the month they do take a fair amount of time because of the care that is taken to ensure that visitors receive the service they need in a manner that ensures their confidentiality is strictly protected. For each new visitor, a new case file must be created and appropriately protected. At the end of each week case the status of each case is reviewed and the database must be updated. At the end of the month those end-of-week tasks are performed, plus

- follow up calls are made to inactive cases
- cases are closed
- old closed case documents are shredded
- old intake forms are shredded
- miscellaneous notes, phone messages, etc. are shredded
- old emails are purged

Generally the routine, end-of-week administration takes about an hour to complete, while the end-of-month administration takes three to four hours. All in all, it is not uncommon for the Ombuds Officer to spend at least eight hours a month on routine weekly and monthly administrative work. Other periodic administrative tasks include reconciling Ombuds Office telephone bills, obtaining office supplies, and preparing mid-year, annual and diversity reports on Ombuds Office activity. So even though the Ombuds Office is only staffed about 12 or 13 days each month, the Ombuds Officer spends the equivalent of about one day per month on administration.

### **Substantial Growth of the Office in Less Than Two Years**

When this Ombuds Officer arrived in September, 2008, she started work with a furnished office, a phone, and a computer. There were no files, records, or operating procedures in place. Since that time, the Ombuds Officer has accomplished the following at the I.S.U. Ombuds Office:

- provided 183 visitors with assistance;
- designed and implemented a coding system for generically tracking visitor issues;
- developed and implemented a complete system of office procedures for use, and documented them in an Ombuds Office Procedure Manual;
- established a confidential filing system for visitor cases, and designed a confidential computerized database that is now in the testing phase;
- wrote and had professionally produced three pieces of promotional literature for the office, as well as an informal "Welcome to the Office" handout for new visitors
- created a basic Ombuds Office website, and have begun to develop a new, substantially enhanced website
- provided a wide variety of educational outreach presentations both on and off campus

Due to the procedures that are now in place, the I.S.U. Ombuds Office has been accepted as a full member of the International Ombuds Association, certifying that the office operates according to the approved standards of the organizational ombuds profession.

### ***Goals for the Coming Year***

The past year has been an opportunity for the Ombuds Office to 'get settled in' and establish office routines and procedures that enable it to function as a one-person office with relative efficiency and effectiveness. However that effort to get the office settled may have come at the expense of limited visibility of the office in the University community. The decline in the number of graduate students visiting the Ombuds Office is particularly troubling. In the coming year additional time spent on both general outreach and outreach to targeted groups like graduate students could remind people of the existence of the Ombuds Office and its value as a resource for them.

As the Ombuds Officer continues to connect with the other members of the Ombuds profession through membership in the International Ombuds Association, she has been able to learn more effective techniques for running an ombuds office. Another goal for the coming year is to

obtain additional professional development specific to the ombuds profession, and to continue to refine and develop the ISU Ombuds Office so that it provides its services according to not just professional standards but also the best practices of the ombuds profession.

Finally, there is no doubt that the coming year will provide challenging times as University employees and students cope with the anxiety and the change that is inevitable given the financial situation now and in the near future. The Ombuds Officer would like to continue to provide compassionate service that is responsive to the needs of this community and to help people continue to work together for the good of the University.