

***Iowa State University  
Ombuds Office  
Annual Report  
for FY 2011***

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## ***EXECUTIVE SUMMARY***

### ***August, 2011***

As the Ombuds Office completes its third year of full operation, it continues to serve the Iowa State University community as a confidential and comprehensive resource for conflict management.

Last year (FY 2010) the University faced significant challenges due to budgetary limitations that were imposed on state government agencies. As a result, layoffs and reorganizations across the University community led to high use of the Ombuds Office during FY 2010. This year (FY 2011) the University has not faced the same drastic level of financial challenges. Consequently there was some decline in the total number of visitors to the Ombuds Office. Professional and Scientific employees again were the most frequent visitors to the Ombuds Office this year, but also there was an increase in the number of faculty visitors. Use of the Ombuds Office by Graduate and Professional students continued to decline. And for the third year in a row, interpersonal conflict was the most common issue that visitors presented during office visits.

Almost nineteen percent of all Ombuds Office visitors appeared to be members of a protected class or identified themselves as such. Twelve percent of all visitors raised an issue in their case that related to diversity. Both of these statistics show an increase from previous years. It appears that issues related to diversity tend to exacerbate an existing conflict rather than serve as its underlying cause. Women visitors to the Ombuds Office continue to be overrepresented in proportion to their population in each group at the University (faculty, P&S staff, etc.).

In an effort to provide additional assistance in conflict management for the University community, the Ombuds Office has increased its outreach efforts by making more presentations, greatly enhancing the office's website, and producing the *Ombuds Office Resource Guide*. The *Guide*, developed in collaboration with Parks Library, is a first-of-its-kind, comprehensive online tool that provides individuals with 'self-help' options and information regarding conflict management.

The Ombuds Office continues to develop procedures to ensure it complies with University policy, runs efficiently, and adheres to the Code of Ethics and Standards of Practice of the International Ombuds Association. The Office's Procedure Guide has been updated to reflect current office practices, and its physical security has been enhanced. Also during the past fiscal year the Ombuds Officer participated in professional development to develop skill sets that would enhance the services she provides in her role at the University.

As the Ombuds Office grows, it hopes to do so in a manner that best serves the University community. It now surveys Ombuds Office visitors to determine if they are satisfied with the services they received or if they have any suggestions for improvement. Early survey returns show that visitors are very satisfied with the Ombuds Office and appreciate having it as a resource.

## **OMBUDS OFFICE ANNUAL REPORT FOR FISCAL YEAR 2011**

### ***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. 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 2011 discusses twelve months of Ombuds Office activity and data, from July 1, 2010 through June 30, 2011. References within in this Annual Report to FY 2010 cover that full fiscal year, but references to FY 2009 only cover September 2008 through June 30, 2009.

### ***Number of New Visitors Declined Slightly During FY 2011***

As illustrated by the chart on the following page, the total number of new visitors to the Ombuds Office during FY 2011 decreased from FY 2010 – most likely because the University's budget did not suffer the same level of reduction as it did in FY 2010. Last year there appeared to be a correlation between budget cuts and the high number of Professional and Scientific visitors to the Ombuds Office, many of whom sought service related to layoff or reorganization. This fiscal year there were 24 fewer visitors to the Ombuds Office overall – and 23 fewer P&S visitors. This year also showed an increase in the number of faculty visitors to the Ombuds Office, but graduate/professional student visitors declined for the third year in a row.

With regard to the frequency of visitors to the office, it appears that summers (July and August) tend to be slow, but the spring semesters seem to consistently show a steady increase in traffic after the start of the new year. The volume of work during the fall semester has not followed any consistent pattern.

Graphics on the following page illustrate who is visiting the Ombuds Office, and when they visit.

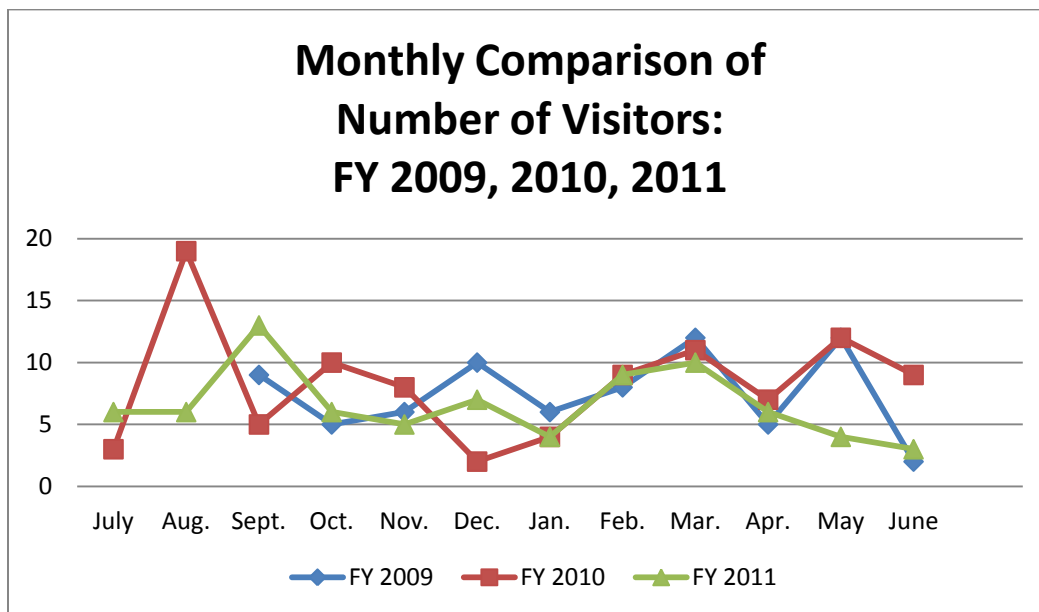
The number of new visitors in each group during the past three years is shown below:

### Annual Comparison: New Visitors by Group

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

NOTE: "Other" refers to a visitor who requested service but was either an undergraduate student or a merit employee covered by the collective bargaining agreement.

The monthly total number of new visitors during the past three years is shown below:



It is interesting to note the consistent pattern of visitors during Spring semester.

**Issues Presented by Visitors During 2011**

As was the case last year, the top issues presented by new visitors to the Ombuds Office in FY2011 all deal with interpersonal conflict. In order of popularity, the predominant issues of concern were:

For Faculty:

- Conflict with supervisor (39% of all faculty visitors presented this issue)
- Conflict with colleague(s) (17%)
- Conflict with or among subordinates (17%)

For Professional & Scientific:

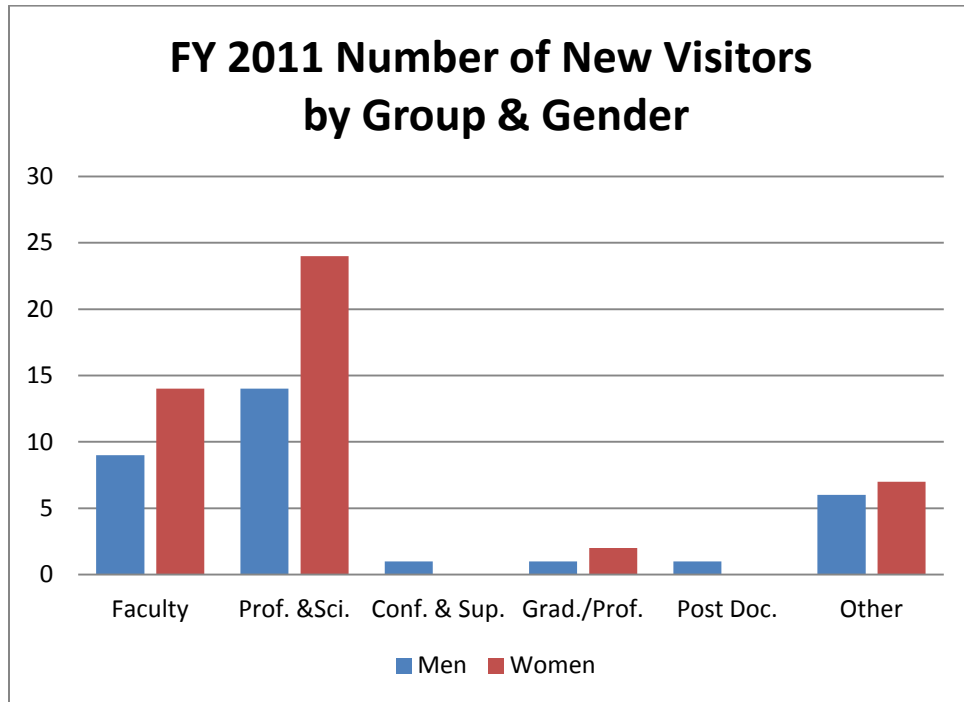
- Conflict with supervisor (63% of all P&S visitors presented this issue)
- Employment duties; conflict with colleague (tied at 18%)
- Financial issues; Interpretation or implementation of policy (tied at 10.5%)

For Graduate/Professional Students and Post Docs:

- Conflict with major professor (66% presented this issue)

**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:



As was true in previous years, women visitors to the office outnumber men in every service group except one (Confidential and Supervisory). When the number of women visitors to the

Ombuds office is compared to the total number of women at the University in each of these service categories, the women visitors to the Ombuds Office appear to be overrepresented compared to their total population in each group.

	% of Females In each service group  (Source: ISU Factbook FY2010)	% of Ombuds Office Visitors who are female		
		2009	2010	2011
Faculty	35.8%	45%	59%	60.8%
Prof. & Scientific	54%	46%	73.7%	63%
Graduate/Profl.	44%	58%	50%	66%

This trend may suggest that it could be beneficial to provide more opportunities for women in the University community to obtain professional development in conflict management.

In addition to monitoring visitor gender, the Ombuds Officer observed that 18.9% of all new visitors to the Ombuds Office during FY 2011 were persons 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:

- four faculty cases (out of 23 total cases) included a diversity-related component.
- five professional and scientific employee cases (out of 38 total cases) included a diversity-related component.
- one graduate/professional student or post-doc employee cases (out of 3 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 Compliance and other relevant organizations.) With regard to conflict at the University and persons of diverse backgrounds – whether it was color, national origin, disability, or sexual orientation – there is no clear trend apparent. The issues presented at the Ombuds Office this year cannot be neatly assigned labels like ‘caucasian vs. person of color’ or ‘straight vs. gay.’ More often a cultural component appeared to have exacerbated a conflict rather than being the underlying issue or cause. In other words, once the conflict arose, it appeared to magnify differences that were already present.

***Ten Percent of All Cases Included Some Communication Facilitation***

The most common type of interaction in the Ombuds Office involves the Ombuds Officer meeting one-on-one with a single individual to discuss their situation and develop options for that person. However the Ombuds Officer also provides neutral facilitation of meetings involving individuals who are in conflict. She also offers ‘shuttle diplomacy’ by communicating

individually between parties who are in conflict. This year ten percent of all Ombuds Office cases involved either shuttle diplomacy or meeting facilitation.

### ***Increased Outreach Enhances Awareness of Ombuds Office***

This year the Ombuds Officer made a concerted effort to ‘spread the word’ about conflict management and the Ombuds Office to a variety of groups in the University Community. She gave presentations to eight different groups, including the Graduate and Professional Student Senate, the University Committee on Women, and groups of academic advisors and faculty, respectively. She also was invited to provide conflict management training to the entire staff at one unit of the University, and she has begun to participate in the Organization Fair at each new employee orientation presented by Human Resource Services.

### ***Ombuds Office Resource Guide Provides ‘Self Help’***

In an effort to provide the University community with a comprehensive ‘self-help’ resource on conflict management, the Ombuds Office collaborated with Jeff Kushkowski, the Business Subject Matter Librarian at Parks Library, to produce the *Ombuds Office Resource Guide*. The *Resource Guide* is available as a link from the Ombuds Office website as well as from the Parks Library’s website. The *Resource Guide* introduces viewers to the Ombuds Office and provides information and quick links to the following resources:

- the University Policy Library, as well as frequently used policies
- campus resources and community service agencies
- information about formal conflict resolution procedures
- information about diversity and conflict management
- books, videos and websites that visitors can use to learn conflict management skills

The *Resource Guide* appears to be the first of its kind developed through the collaboration of a university ombuds office and a university library and using an educational software platform designed for libraries. Happily, the Resource Guide has been very successful and has received publicity both on campus and in the national newsletter and main blog of ombuds professionals. In addition, it has quickly gained many users since it debuted on February 1, 2011, garnering over 930 hits in just three months. It has already climbed to the “Top Ten” list of Parks Library’s most-frequently-accessed library guides (out of over 200 guides that are online), averaging well over 200 hits per month.

### ***Ombuds Office Website Makeover***

Since late 2008 the Ombuds Office has had a single page website with a bare bones explanation of the office. That changed during the summer of 2011 as a new multi-page website for the Ombuds Office was designed with assistance from the University Relations staff. The new site provides viewers with more in-depth information about the Ombuds Office and the types of services it offers, plus frequently asked questions and contact information – all in an attractive, easy to use design.

### ***Ombuds Office Satisfaction Survey***

As the Ombuds Office continues to evolve, it hopes to do so in a manner that best serves the University community. In an effort to assess whether the Ombuds Office is providing services that are useful to its visitors, the office has designed and begun to distribute an anonymous survey to measure visitor satisfaction. The first surveys were sent out in late March, and they will continue to be sent to all visitors whose cases have been opened and closed since January 1, 2011 and for whom a current mailing address is available. The Office's intake procedure has been revised so that visitors are now informed about the survey at their initial visit, and they are invited to provide the address at which they wish to receive the survey (either home or campus). According to discussion in the national ombuds community about office assessment surveys, survey return rates tend to be fairly low, but thus far the return rate for the I.S.U. Ombuds Office survey is well over 30%. The individuals who returned surveys indicate a high level of satisfaction with the Ombuds Office. A copy of the survey form is attached to the end of this report.

### ***Ongoing Professional Development Builds Skills***

During the summer of 2010 the Ombuds Officer attended one day of training at the New Ombuds Workshop, followed by a one day conference at the Meeting of Midwest Ombuds, both sponsored by the University of Northern Illinois. Recently the Ombuds Officer also attended "Crucial Conversations" training in Chicago on communication facilitation. Finally, she continues to attend local continuing legal education seminars – most recently addressing topics on employment law and on mediation in the local court system.

### ***Difficult Dialogues: A Period of Transition***

The Ombuds Officer was fortunate to be able to attend the recent "Crucial Conversations" training because it was funded through a grant related to the University's Difficult Dialogues initiative. However, the overall work of the Difficult Dialogues initiative has waned somewhat due to personnel transitions on the Difficult Dialogues team. About half of the members of the Difficult Dialogues team have either retired this year or taken positions at other institutions. At this point no decisions have been made as to the future of this project, which itself has moved from the leadership of former Associate Provost Susan Carlson to Associate Provost Dawn Bratsch-Prince.

### ***Office Administration Supports Ombuds Professional Standards***

This year the Ombuds Officer worked with the University Counsel and the ISU Policy Administrator to develop a records retention policy for the office that complies with International Ombuds Association Standards of Practice and University policy. The Office Procedure Guide was then updated to reflect the new policy as well as procedures for the newly implemented Visitor Satisfaction Survey. The Ombuds Officer also worked with the campus locksmith this year to enhance the physical security of the Ombuds Office and its filing system.



### ***Development of Conflict Management Training Material Underway***

One project still underway in the Ombuds Office this fiscal year is preparation of a flexible package of training material on conflict management. The goal is to develop a 'baseline' presentation that could be used as a starting point, and then customized to meet the needs of various types of audiences who invite the Ombuds Officer to make a presentation. It is anticipated that this project will be completed during the fall of 2011.

### ***Moving Forward in Support of the University Community and its Mission***

The Ombuds Office continues to be a well used and well thought of resource at the University, as evidenced by its steady stream of visitors and their positive feedback about the service they have received. Expanding outreach efforts throughout the University will be a key task for the coming year, since visitor traffic through the Ombuds Office frequently seems to be tied to outreach efforts. The data from FY 2011 seems to indicate that outreach and education specifically targeted toward graduate and professional students and women may be a good starting point. Ideally the Ombuds Office will continue to develop and provide a wide array of tools and resources related to conflict management that can be used by the entire University community.

As part of its new mission statement, the University has acknowledged: "To share knowledge, Iowa State's faculty, staff, and students must be able to communicate with and learn from diverse populations." Members of the University community seem genuinely eager to work and collaborate together. Likewise, they seem to genuinely regret when conflicts arise. By helping people learn how to successfully deal with the conflict they face, the Ombuds Office supports the University's mission and teaches members of the University community that Iowa State *is* a diverse and respectful place for all people to learn, work and grow.

**PLEASE TELL US ABOUT YOUR VISIT TO THE I.S.U. OMBUDS OFFICE**

The Ombuds Office welcomes your feedback and suggestions for how service can be improved. Please complete this survey, add any suggestions or comments you might have and return to the Ombuds Office at 69 Physics Hall.

	Strongly Agree (5)	Agree (4)	Neutral (3)	Disagree (2)	Strongly Disagree (1)	Not Applicable (N/A)
1. The physical location of the Ombuds Office (in Physics Hall) is suitably discrete.						
2. The Ombuds Officer understood my situation.						
3. The Ombuds Officer suggested options or helped me develop strategies that applied to my situation.						
4. The Ombuds Officer told me about relevant University policies, procedures, and services.						
5. The Ombuds Office felt like a safe environment for me to discuss my concern.						
6. The Ombuds Officer was neutral.						
7. The Ombuds Office will protect the confidentiality of my information.						
8. Regardless of the outcome of my situation, my overall experience with the Ombuds Office has been positive.						
9. I would refer others to the Ombuds Office.						
10. If you had not used the Ombuds Office, what would you have done instead (check all that apply): <input type="checkbox"/> nothing <input type="checkbox"/> remained in my situation, but probably been personally/professionally distracted by it <input type="checkbox"/> looked for another position or quit <input type="checkbox"/> filed an appeal/grievance/formal complaint <input type="checkbox"/> consulted with an attorney about my legal rights <input type="checkbox"/> other (please identify) _____						

Are you:    \_\_\_ Faculty    \_\_\_ Professional and Scientific    \_\_\_ Confidential and Supervisory  
                  \_\_\_ Graduate/Professional Student    \_\_\_ Post doctoral student

Please feel free to add any additional comments you have: