

***Iowa State University  
Ombuds Office  
Annual Report  
for FY 2013***

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***EXECUTIVE SUMMARY***  
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The Iowa State University Ombuds Office recently completed its fifth year of operation in FY 2013, and it continues to be successful. Although the total number of visitors during FY 2013 was 91, and was down slightly from FY 2012, that number (91) is also the average for total visitors across all five years.

**The major accomplishment of the Ombuds Office during FY 2013 was the development and ratification of an Ombuds Office Charter**, which defines the purpose, scope, and authority of the office. The Charter also serves as a formal statement that Iowa State University supports the Ombuds Office as a resource for early and informal efforts at conflict management and resolution.

A review of the data during FY 2013, plus the past 5 fiscal years reveals the following:

- Faculty and P&S staff visitors were almost equal during FY 2013, but faculty visitors appear to be trending up, while P&S visitors appear to be trending down.
- Graduate/professional student visitors were at an all-time high, and appear to be trending up.
- Women visitors continue to outnumber men in all categories of visitors, and are overrepresented in proportion to their populations on campus.
- The main issues of concern continue to be interpersonal conflict with a supervisor, colleague or subordinate.

Results of the visitor survey done by the Ombuds Office indicate that satisfaction with the services provided by the office is generally increasing compared to FY 2012. **Survey results also show that if they hadn't gone to the Ombuds Office, almost 10% of all visitors would've filed grievances/appeals or consulted with an attorney.**

Based on the growth of its business and the success of the Ombuds Office over the past five years, it would be ideal to expand the services that it is providing to the University community. However, the office is currently established as a .6 F.T.E. and the ability to provide additional services (such as additional training in conflict management) is limited by that fact.

## ***Introduction: What is the Ombuds Office?***

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.

The University's Ombuds, who reports to the President's office, is neither an investigator nor a decision-maker. Instead the Ombuds is independent and serves as a neutral party who tries to help people find appropriate resolutions to their concerns – whether it be about their workplace or their experience at the University as a graduate student or a post doc. She can help individuals navigate through University policies, procedures, or organizational structures with an eye towards opening lines of communication that seem to be closed. She can also help parties who are involved in a dispute respectfully discuss their concerns and work together to reach a mutually acceptable outcome. In addition to helping individual visitors, 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 she represent University management. Rather, the Ombuds is an advocate for respectful dialogue, fair practices, and mutual understanding.

The Ombuds Office is staffed as a .6 F.T.E., and it is open on Tuesdays, Wednesdays and Thursdays from 8 a.m. until 5 p.m. The I.S.U. Ombuds is a member of the International Ombuds Association, and the I.S.U. Ombuds Office practices in accordance with I.O.A. professional standards and its Code of Ethics. Presently Elaine Newell serves as the Iowa State University Ombuds.

## ***New This Year: The Ombuds Office Charter***

The major accomplishment of the Ombuds Office during FY 2013 was the development and implementation of the Iowa State University Ombuds Office Charter. The Ombuds Office Charter serves as a formal statement, ratified and signed by President Leath, that Iowa State University supports early and informal efforts at conflict management and resolution, and is providing a confidential, neutral and independent ombuds office in furtherance of that goal. In addition, the Charter defines:

- the purpose and scope of the University's Ombuds Office;
- the standards of practice and code of ethics followed by the office; and
- the authority of the Ombuds Office, and limitations on that authority.

Implementation of a charter is considered a 'best practice' of the International Ombuds Association ("I.O.A."), and implementation of the ISU Ombuds Office charter was recognized in "The Ombuds Blog", a respected and popular online source of information about the organizational ombuds profession. The blog commented that "[T]he charter is unique in its references to applicable state and federal laws and regulations." Implementation of the new

charter was publicized locally by an announcement to the University community in “Inside Iowa State.”

### **Who Visits the Ombuds Office and What are the Issues?**

Over the past five years, the Iowa State University Ombuds Office has provided service to almost 500 visitors. In an effort to provide a thorough look at the office, this year’s annual report will review the data from FY 2013 and also compare it to preceding fiscal years.

#### **Visitors During FY 2013**

The following chart summarizes the flow of visitor traffic through the Ombuds Office throughout FY 2013. Items that are worth noting:

- The number of faculty visitors and professional and scientific visitors was almost equal.
- For faculty visitors, the number of males and females was equal.
- There were a record high number of graduate/professional student visitors this year.
- This is the first year without any confidential & supervisory staff visitors.

	<b>Total</b>	<b>Faculty</b>	<b>P&amp;S</b>	<b>C&amp;S</b>	<b>Grad./Prof</b>	<b>Post Doc</b>	<b>Other*</b>
<b>July</b>	5	3 (3F)	1 (1M)		1 (1M)		
<b>August</b>	6	2 (1F, 1M)	3 (3F)				1 (1M)
<b>September</b>	2		1 (1F)		1 (1M)		
<b>October</b>	10	2 (2M)	1 (1M)		5 (3F, 2M)		2 (1F, 1M)
<b>November</b>	7	3 (2F, 1M)	4 (3F, 1M)				
<b>December</b>	6	1 (1M)	2 (1F, 1M)		2 (2F)		1 (1F)
<b>January</b>	7	4 (2F, 2M)	2 (2F)		1 (1F)		
<b>February</b>	12	5 (4F, 1M)	2 (1F,1M)		1F	3 (2F,1M)	1 (1F)
<b>March</b>	11	2 (2M)	6 (4F, 2M)				3 (1F, 2M)
<b>April</b>	9	1 (1M)	1 (1M)		4 (2F, 2M)		3 (2F, 1M)
<b>May</b>	4	1 (1F)	3 (3F)				
<b>June</b>	12	4 (1F, 3M)	4 (3F, 1M)		3 (3F)		1 (1F)
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>91</b>	28 (14F,14M)	30 (21F, 9M)	0	18 (12F,6M)	3 (2F, 1M)	12 (7F, 5M)
<b>%</b>	<b>100%</b>	30.7%	32.9%	0%	19.7%	3%	13%

\* “Other” = visitors who are not eligible for Ombuds services (e.g., undergrads, merit employees, etc.)  
 “F” = females & “M” = males

## Visitors to the Ombuds Office: A Five-Year Comparison

The chart below summarizes the visitor traffic through the Ombuds Office over the past five years for the three main groups of employees/students who use the office. It appears to reflect a gradual but steady growth in total visitors.

- Total visitors during FY2013 was 91, which is also the 5-year average for total visitors.
- The number of faculty and graduate student visitors appears to be trending upward.
- The number of P&S visitors appears to be trending downward, yet P&S employees still comprised over one-third of all visitors to the Ombuds Office during FY 2013 and have been the majority of all visitors for every year.

	<b>Total Visitors</b>	<b>Total Faculty Visitors</b>	<b>Total P&amp;S Visitors</b>	<b>Total Grad./Prof. student visitors</b>
<b>FY 2013</b>	<b>91</b>	<b>28</b> (14F, 14M) 30.7% of all visitors	<b>30</b> (21F, 9M) 32.9% of all visitors	<b>18</b> (12F, 6M) 19.7% of all visitors
<b>FY 2012</b>	<b>104</b>	<b>33</b> (19F, 14M) 31.9% of all visitors	<b>44</b> (35F, 9M) 42.7% of all visitors	<b>14</b> (7F, 7M) 13% of all visitors
<b>FY 2011</b>	<b>79</b>	<b>23</b> (14F, 9M) 29% of all visitors	<b>38</b> (24F, 14M) 48% of all visitors	<b>3</b> (2F, 1M) 3.7% of all visitors
<b>FY 2010</b>	<b>103</b>	<b>22</b> (13F, 9M) 21.3% of all visitors	<b>61</b> (45F, 16M) 59.2% of all visitors	<b>6</b> (3F, 3M) 5.8%
<b>FY 2009</b>	<b>80</b>	<b>22</b> (10F, 12M) 27.5% of all visitors	<b>32</b> (16F, 16M) 40% of all visitors	<b>12</b> (7F, 5M) 15% of all visitors

The rise in faculty and graduate/professional student visitors to the Ombuds Office may be due to several things. Over time the Ombuds has had the opportunity to develop good working relationships with personnel in the Provost's office and the Graduate College, which has led to more referrals from both of those units. In addition, outreach via presentations at faculty workshops, the Emerging Leaders Academy, and a dean's cabinet meeting have increased Ombuds Office visibility to department chairs and other faculty administrators – many of whom have begun either directly consulting the Ombuds Office for assistance or referring their faculty members or students to the office.

### What Were the Issues During FY 2013?

Interpersonal conflict continues to be the underlying concern of the vast majority of visitors to the Ombuds Office. Depending on the individual visitor, the conflict might be with a supervisor, a major professor, a colleague or a subordinate.

The following table reflects, for each group of visitors to the Ombuds Office, how many visitors were concerned with each type of issue. Some visitors identified a single issue, while others identified multiple issues. As seen below, conflict with either a supervisor or a major professor leads the list by a margin of almost two to one. It is also interesting to note that while P&S employees identified conflict with a supervisor as their main concern, faculty members cited their main concern was conflict with a subordinate.

	<i>Totals</i>	<i>Faculty</i>	<i>P&amp;S Staff</i>	<i>Grad. or Professional Student</i>	<i>Post Doc</i>
<i>Conflict w/Supervisor ( or Major Professor)</i>	33	5	19	7	2
<i>Conflict w/Colleague</i>	15	5	8	2	0
<i>Conflict w/Subordinate</i>	17	14	3	0	0
<i>Employment Duties</i>	10	3	4	1	2
<i>Financial Issues</i>	12	4	4	2	2
<i>Discipline</i>	0	0	0	0	0
<i>Policy Issue</i>	16	4	8	4	0
<i>Working Conditions</i>	0	0	0	0	0
<i>Promotion &amp; Tenure</i>	0	0	n/a	n/a	n/a
<i>Other</i>	12	4	2	5	1

**Visitors’ Issues: A Five-Year Comparison**

Over the past five years graduate/professional students have consistently cited the same issue as their main concern: conflict with their major professor. The top concerns cited by faculty and P&S staff during the past five years are shown in the following chart in order of popularity. For both groups it almost always involved some type of interpersonal conflict – usually with a supervisor. Occasionally the top concerns included issues related to University policy, financial issues, employment duties, etc.

	<b><i>Most Prevalent Issues Raised By Faculty</i></b>	<b><i>Most prevalent Issues Raised By P&amp;S Staff</i></b>
<b><i>FY 2013</i></b>	Conflict with subordinate Conflict w/supervisor/colleague * Financial Issues/Policy issue	Conflict with supervisor Conflict w/colleague/policy issue * Employment Duties/Financial Issue
<b><i>FY 2012</i></b>	Conflict with supervisor “Other” Conflict w/colleague/subordinate *	Conflict with supervisor Conflict w/colleague Conflict w/subordinate
<b><i>FY 2011</i></b>	Conflict with supervisor Conflict w/colleague/subordinate *	Conflict with supervisor Employment Duties/Conflict w/colleague *
<b><i>FY 2010</i></b>	Conflict with supervisor Conflict w/colleague Diversity-related conflict	Conflict with supervisor Conflict w/colleague Conflict w/subordinate
<b><i>FY 2009</i></b>	Conflict with supervisor Promotion & tenure	Conflict with supervisor Disciplinary action

\* These issues were tied.

**Five-Year Overview: Diversity and the Ombuds Office**

Visitors to the Ombuds Office over the past five years have belonged to variety of protected classes related to their national origin, race, disability, marital status, sexual orientation. The Ombuds Office also tracks the percentage of cases in which the visitor has indicated they feel that their concern may be in some way related to diversity.<sup>1</sup> The protected class status of visitors to the Ombuds Office is informally monitored via observation or voluntary self-

<sup>1</sup> All visitors who raise this concern are referred to the University’s Office of Equal Opportunity and Compliance as well as the Iowa Civil Rights Commission and relevant federal agencies, such as the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission.

identification; visitors are not asked to self-identify.<sup>2</sup> The chart below provides data regarding observed or reported protected class status of visitors and the frequency with which visitors reported concerns related to diversity over the past five fiscal years.

	<b>Total # Visitors</b>	<b>Females</b>	<b>Males</b>	<b>Protected Class</b>	<b>Diversity Related</b>
<b>FY 2013</b>	91	61.5%	38%	25%	8.7%
<b>FY 2012</b>	104	64%	35.5%	20%	12.5%
<b>FY 2011</b>	79	59%	40.5%	21.5%	16%
<b>FY 2010</b>	103	65%	34.9%	15.5%	14.5%
<b>FY 2009</b>	80	51%	49%	17.5%	18.7%

One continuing trend is that for the fifth year in a row, the women visitors to the Ombuds Office outnumber the men, and the women visitors continue to be overrepresented when compared to their general populations on campus. This applies not only to the total number of women visitors, but also to each group served by the Ombuds Office (faculty, P&S, etc.).

### ***Outreach Efforts Continue to Raise Ombuds Office Profile***

As more people at the University take advantage of the Ombuds Office, more managers and organizations turn to the office as a free local resource for professional development on how to manage conflict. During FY 2013 the Ombuds participated in a variety of outreach events. She gave a presentation at a Faculty Workshop sponsored by the Provost’s office and also served as the local ‘host’ for a department chairs’ webinar on conflict management that was also sponsored by the Provost’s office. After giving a presentation about the Ombuds Office to a group of new employees at ISU Extension, the Ombuds then worked with Extension organizational staff to get access to their Vimeo of the presentation and place a link to it on the Ombuds Office website – a ‘win-win’ collaboration for both Extension and the Ombuds Office. The Ombuds also provided requested trainings to a group of department chairs in one of the colleges, and a group of P&S managers in a large administrative unit. These types of large-group presentations inevitably result in one or more individuals who were in the audience coming to the Ombuds Office to discuss their own individual concerns. And in a more personal approach, the Ombuds Officer sent personal emails to 264 new employees of the University that welcomed them to I.S.U. and informed them about the Ombuds Office. This project is the

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<sup>2</sup> Age (as a protected class) is not tracked because it would require guessing a visitor’s age.



result of a collaboration with University Human Resources, which now includes the Ombuds Office on its distribution list of offices that are informed about the names and starting dates of every newly-hired employee.

In terms of external outreach, the I.S.U. ombuds continued to meet with other ombuds throughout the state of Iowa to share ideas about best practices in the profession. She also continued to serve as a resource for personnel at South Dakota State University who are involved in establishing an Ombuds Office at that institution.

### ***High Satisfaction Levels & Success in its Mission***

During FY 2013, 53 visitors to the Ombuds Office whose cases had been closed were mailed paper surveys and invited to comment on various aspects of the service that they received. Twenty-four visitors returned a completed survey (return rate: 45%).

For the second year in a row, the former visitors who returned surveys indicated a high level of satisfaction with almost every aspect of the Ombuds Office, as noted below:

<b><i>Survey Question</i></b> 5 = strongly agree; 1 = strongly disagree	<b><i>FY 2013</i></b>	<b><i>FY 2012</i></b>
<b><i>1. The physical location of the Ombuds Office (in Physics Hall) is suitably discrete.</i></b>	4.8	4.5
<b><i>2. The Ombuds Officer understood my situation.</i></b>	4.5	4.5
<b><i>3. The Ombuds Officer suggested options or helped me develop strategies that applied to my situation.</i></b>	4.5	4.4
<b><i>4. The Ombuds Officer told me about relevant University policies, procedures, and services.</i></b>	4.6	4.5
<b><i>5. The Ombuds Office felt like a safe environment for me to discuss my concern.</i></b>	4.8	4.7
<b><i>6. The Ombuds Officer was neutral.</i></b>	4.4	4.8
<b><i>7. The Ombuds Office will protect the confidentiality of my information.</i></b>	4.8	4.8
<b><i>8. Regardless of the outcome of my situation, my overall experience with the Ombuds Office has been positive.</i></b>	4.8	4.6
<b><i>9. I would refer others to the Ombuds Office.</i></b>	4.8	4.8

### **Documented Success: Survey Results Show Ombuds Visitors Forego Grievances**

Visitors are also asked on the survey to indicate what they would have done if they had not used the Ombuds Office. **Almost 10% of all ombuds visitors in FY 2013 would've filed a grievance or consulted an attorney if they had not used the Ombuds Office.**

	<b>FY 2013</b>	<b>FY 2012</b>
<b><i>Filed an appeal/grievance/formal complaint</i></b>	6	2
<b><i>Consulted with an attorney about my legal rights</i></b>	2	1
<b><i>Looked for another position, or quit</i></b>	6	8
<b><i>Remained in my situation, but been personally/professionally distracted by it.</i></b>	14	13

Out of 91 visitors, 6 of them reported on their surveys that if they hadn't used the Ombuds Office, they would have filed an appeal/grievance or formal complaint, and 2 of them would have consulted with an attorney about their legal rights. In addition, 6 of them would've looked for another position or quit. And a full 15% of visitors reported that they would've stayed in their situation but would've been either personally or professionally distracted by it.

These simple numbers don't reflect the real value of having the Ombuds Office at Iowa State University. By not having to respond to six appeals, grievances, or formal complaints:

- the managers up those employees' chain of command have not had to spend time drafting written response to their employee's grievance/appeal;
- committees have not had to have been formed, and then been taken away from their duties while they investigated the grievance/appeal, considered the evidence, and wrote their decision;
- upper level administrators have not had to consider and decide the appeals and then write their decisions;
- the Board of Regents and their staff have not had to consider and decide final appeals;

By not having to replace six unhappy employees who quit their jobs at the University:

- hiring managers have not had to scramble to cover duties of the employee who quit;
- colleagues have not had to take on extra duties to cover the work of the employee who quit – nor have there been the related work delays and morale problems;
- the hiring departments have not incurred the expense of external job advertisements;
- search committees have not been taken away from their duties to interview and consider the credentials of replacement candidates;

- managers and administrative support staff have not spent time processing the new hire through University Human Resources systems;
- managers and colleagues have not had to spend time training the newly-hired employees, or dealing with the questions/mistakes/etc. that often come with newly-hired employees.

And by having somewhere where they could go to get help with their conflicts, the lives of 14 Ombuds Office visitors were not unpleasantly distracted from their work, or their school, or their family.

### ***The Ombuds Office: Looking Ahead***

Certainly the Ombuds Officer will continue to build relationships across campus and improve the visibility of the Ombuds Office. She will also continue to improve her skills via professional development opportunities through International Ombuds Association, the Iowa State Bar, and other resources.

It is clear from comments from Ombuds Office visitors and from audience members at outreach presentations that people at Iowa State University want to learn how to do a better job at managing conflict. Ideally the Ombuds Office could begin to design and create tools that people can use for managing their conflicts. For example, people in a conflict generally spend hours and hours thinking and worrying about their conflict. Would it be possible to develop some tools or exercises that can help people structure their thinking about their own individual conflict in a more constructive fashion? The goal would be to help the person experience less stress about the conflict and more progress in managing or resolving it. If such tools could be developed they could be put online in the already-existing Ombuds Office Resource Guide.

Another beneficial service would be for the Ombuds Office to design and offer to the entire University community a regular series of training sessions on conflict management. For example, the sessions could offer a different topic each quarter, they could be promoted and presented at a central location like Memorial Union, and open to anyone.

Yet the challenge is this: How do you build on additional conflict management services for the University community *plus* continue to serve and administrate the cases of a steadily growing flow of visitors who want conflict management advice -- all in one-person office that is limited to a 24-hour work week?

Despite the fact that more and more people in the University community see the value of informal conflict management and want to learn how to manage their own conflicts, the existing .6 F.T.E. allotment currently limits the time that is available to grow the success that has been occurring in the Ombuds Office. However if the F.T.E. capacity of the Ombuds Office is increased, then the opportunity for additional success will likewise increase – no doubt to the benefit of the entire University community.