

***Iowa State University
Ombuds Office
Annual Report
For FY 2014***

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Ombuds Office Annual Report for FY 2013-2014 ***Executive Summary***

“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 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.”

Iowa State University Ombuds Office Charter

- ✓ The Ombuds Office served 121 visitors in FY 2014 – a 30% increase over FY 2013, and well beyond its five-year average of 91 annual visitors.
- ✓ It appears that the total annual number of Ombuds visitors is gradually increasing.
- ✓ 41% of the visitors this year were P&S employees, 27% were faculty, and 16% were graduate/professional students.
- ✓ Women visitors continue to outnumber men by almost two to one.
- ✓ 21% of the FY 2014 visitors were in a protected class.
- ✓ The main visitor issue continues to be some sort of interpersonal conflict.
- ✓ Results from the Ombuds Office satisfaction survey indicate that visitors continue to be happy with the services they receive.
- ✓ Survey results also indicate that use of the Ombuds Office continues to prevent turnover, grievances and litigation.
- ✓ Outreach and education efforts by the Ombuds Officer have directly resulted in more visitors for the office.
- ✓ In the coming year the Ombuds Office will increase its service to four days a week instead of three, and use some of that time to
 - track the sources of visitor conflict with more specificity, and
 - update and enhance its online presence to better serve visitors’ needs.

History of the ISU 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 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 in the early 1990s.

In December, 2005, an article in *Inside Iowa State* announced that “ISU 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 service expanded to include post doctoral scholars. Beginning July 1, 2014, the ombuds office expanded its service once again, and it is now open four days a week to accommodate increasing visitor demand.

Ombuds Office Charter Describes its Role and Authority

On February 27, 2013 the Charter for the Iowa State University Ombuds Office, was signed by both President Steven Leath and Ombuds Officer Elaine Newell. The Charter officially establishes the office as an independent unit within the President’s office and defines the authority and responsibilities of the office as a confidential, neutral resource that can help with conflict management.

As noted in the Charter:

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.

The Charter explains that the Ombuds Office is responsible for

- providing confidential services to eligible constituents;
- informing University leadership about trends or systemic problems in a manner that protects confidentiality;
- providing outreach and education for the campus community about its services as well as about conflict management and resolution;
- developing and maintaining administrative procedures for efficient operation of the Ombuds Office.

The Charter confirms that “[t]he University fully supports the confidentiality of the Ombuds Office. It encourages parties to come forward, confidentially share their concerns, and attempt early and collaborative resolution instead of resorting to prolonged appeals or litigation.” (Charter, p. 3) Yet it also states that “[w]hile the Ombuds Office can provide visitors with information and assistance in conflict management, visitors are solely responsible for deciding what action they wish to take and for managing their own conflicts.” (Charter, p. 5)

Summary of Key Accomplishments During FY 2014

1. The biggest accomplishment of the Ombuds Office during FY 2014 is that it served 30% more visitors to the office than it did during FY 2013. Last year the Ombuds Office had 91 visitors. This year the office served 121 visitors -- well beyond its five-year average of 91 annual visitors, and even exceeding the previous all-time high of 104 visitors in FY 2012. No single event on campus triggered this jump in visitors. Anecdotal reports from visitors indicate that more and more members of the campus community have heard of the Ombuds Office and are willing to try using it.
2. Survey results (both numerical data and individual comments) continue to demonstrate that visitors have a high level of satisfaction with the services they receive from the Ombuds Office. Seven percent of all visitors indicated on their surveys that if they hadn’t used the Ombuds Office, they would’ve filed a grievance, consulted an attorney or taken legal action. And six percent indicated that they would’ve looked for another job or quit. More detailed information about the satisfaction survey and this year’s results may be found on page 9.
3. Despite a 30% increase in the number of visitors who were served this year, the Ombuds Officer still made 15 education/outreach presentations, sent individual emails to 354 new employees, attended 4 professional development events, and oversaw the relocation and refurbishment of the Ombuds Office in an entirely new space.

Breakdown of Ombuds Office Visitor Data from FY 2014

The following table indicates the number of visitors who sought assistance from the Ombuds Office each month during FY 2014, the service group to which they belonged, and their gender. An explanatory key that may aid in understanding the data is included below.

Visitors to the Ombuds Office During FY 2014

Month	Total	Faculty	P&S	C&S	Grad./Prof.	Post Doc	Other
July	10	2 (1F, 1M)	6 (5F, 1M)		2 (2F)		
August	9	2 (2F)	4 (3F, 1M)	1 (1M)			2 (1F, 1M)
September	5	3 (3F)	2 (2M)				
October	16	6 (2F, 4M)	6 (4F, 2M)		1 (1F)		3 (2F, 1M)
November	4	2 (1F, 1M)	2 (2F)				
December	11	3 (1F, 2M)	4 (3F, 1M)		4 (4M)		
MIDYEAR	55	18 (10F, 8M)	24 (17F, 7M)	1 (1M)	7 (3F, 4M)		5 (3F, 2M)
January	13	4 (1F, 3M)	3 (3F)	1 (1F)	1 (1M)		4 (4F)
February	9	0	6 (5F, 1M)		2 (2F)		1 (1F)
March	9	1 (1F)	5 (2F, 3M)		1 (1F)		2 (2F)
April	16	6 (4F, 2M)	4 (3F, 1M)		4 (2F, 2M)	1 (1F)	1 (1F)
May	14	3 (2F, 1M)	5 (3F, 2M)	1 (1F)	3 (2F, 1M)	1 (1F)	1 (1M)
June	5	1 (1F)	3 (3F)		1 (1M)		
TOTAL	121	33 (19F,14M)	50 (36F,14M)	3(2F,1M)	19 (10F, 9M)	2 (2F)	14 (11F,3M)
Final %s	100%	27%	41%	2%	16%	2%	12%

KEY:

“TOTAL” -- the total number of new visitors for the month, midyear, or entire year

“F” or “M” -- female or male

“2(1F, 1M)” means there were 2 visitors that month: 1 female and 1 male

“P&S” -- Professional and Scientific employees

“C&S” -- Confidential or Supervisory employees

“Grad./Prof.” -- Graduate or Professional students

“Post Doc” -- Post doctoral scholars

“Other” -- visitors who are ineligible for ombuds service (undergraduates, covered merit, etc.)

Considering the FY2014 data within the context of the following multi-year summary of visitor data seems to indicate an ongoing increase in the number of visitors to the Ombuds Office. This year there was a dramatic increase in the number of Professional and Scientific visitors, although Faculty and Graduate/Professional Student visitors also show some increases. No other patterns are immediately apparent, although women continue to be the most frequent visitors to the Ombuds Office.

Five-Year Comparison of Main Visitors to the Ombuds Office

	Total Visitors	Total Faculty Visitors	Total P&S Visitors	Total Grad./Prof. student visitors
FY 2014	121	33 (19F, 14M) 27% of all visitors	50 (36F, 14M) 41% of all visitors	19 (10F, 9M) 16% of all visitors
FY 2013	91	28 (14F, 14M) 30.7% of all visitors	30 (21F, 9M) 32.9% of all visitors	18 (12F, 6M) 19.7% of all visitors
FY 2012	104	33 (19F, 14M) 31.9% of all visitors	44 (35F, 9M) 42.7% of all visitors	14 (7F, 7M) 13% of all visitors
FY 2011	79	23 (14F, 9M) 29% of all visitors	38 (24F, 14M) 48% of all visitors	3 (2F, 1M) 3.7% of all visitors
FY 2010	103	22 (13F, 9M) 21.3% of all visitors	61 (45F, 16M) 59.2% of all visitors	6 (3F, 3M) 5.8% of all visitors

Interpersonal Conflict Continues to be Visitors’ Top Concern

It is no surprise that interpersonal conflict remains the most frequent issue for faculty, staff and student visitors to the Ombuds Office. The top concerns for each group are noted below:

Faculty:

- 1) Conflict with supervisor (10 out of 33 faculty visitors raised this issue)
- 2) Conflict with subordinate (8/33)
- 3) Diversity-related conflict (5/33)

Professional and Scientific staff:

- 1) Conflict with supervisor (32 out of 50 P&S staff visitors raised this issue)
- 2) Conflict related to policy (12/50)
- 3) Conflict with a colleague (9/50)

Graduate/Professional Student:

- 1) Conflict with major professor (11 out of 19 students visitors raised this issue)
- 2) Diversity-related conflict (5/19)

When issues are compared across all service groups, they rank in order of frequency as follows:

1. Conflict with supervisor (or major professor)
2. Conflict related to policy
3. Conflict with a colleague and diversity-related conflict (these two categories were tied)
4. Conflict with a subordinate
5. Conflict related to employment duties
6. Conflict related to promotion and tenure

The Ombuds Office is planning to track the reasons for interpersonal conflict in slightly more detail during data collection in FY 2015. This plan is explained in more detail on page 11.

Although discussion with individual visitors about their conflict is always the most common service provided by the Ombuds Office, this year thirteen visitors (about 10%) asked the Ombuds Office to provide either meeting facilitation or shuttle diplomacy between the parties. This number is on par with the number of those requests made in previous years.

Diversity and the Ombuds Office

While the number of visitors to the Ombuds Office greatly increased during FY 2014, the diversity of the visitors themselves was relatively unchanged. Women continued to outnumber men by approximately two to one, and about 21% of visitors either self-reported or appeared to be a member of a protected class. The number of visitors who discussed at least one concern related to a diversity issue almost doubled during FY 2014 to 17%. However, when the number of visitors who discussed diversity-related concerns is compared across the past six years, it appears that last year's 8.7% was actually somewhat of an anomaly.

	Total # Visitors	Females	Males	Protected Class*	Diversity Related
FY 2014	121	66%	34%	21%	17%
FY 2013	91	61.5%	38%	25%	8.7%
FY 2012	104	64%	35.5%	20%	12.5%
FY 2011	79	59%	40.5%	21.5%	16%
FY 2010	103	65%	34.9%	15.5%	14.5%
FY 2009	80	51%	49%	17.5%	18.7%

("Protected Class" includes race, color, national origin, religion, sexual orientation, and disability.)

In an effort to gain a better understanding of some of the different communities on campus, this year the Ombuds Officer attended the Safe Zone training offered by the ISU Office of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Student Services, as well as a subsequent Safe Zone Out2Lunch event entitled "Safety Community & You." She also attended "Creating an Inclusive

Classroom: What Men of Color Have to Say” that was co-sponsored by the Center for Excellence in Learning and Teacher and the Center for the Integration of Teaching and Learning. Participating in these events provided an excellent opportunity to learn new perspectives and share information, and the Ombuds Officer hopes to continue to attend these types of activities as whenever possible.

Outreach & Education Raises Awareness about the Office

During FY 2014 the Ombuds Officer made eight major presentations to large groups, including high visibility events like the Emerging Leaders Academies and the 12+ Leadership trainings. She also made seven personal presentations to incoming administrators, organizational leaders or small groups such as the new Associate Vice President for Human Resources, the presidents of the Faculty Senate and P&S Council, and the P&S Peer Advisory Committee. In addition to these events, the Ombuds Officer sent an individual email to 354 new employees of the University welcoming them and introducing them to the Ombuds Office. Quite a few visitors to the Ombuds Office during FY 2014 mentioned either this personal email or an Ombuds Office presentation they had attended.

Professional Development Builds Community and Skillset

This year the Ombuds Officer took advantage of professional development opportunities both on and off campus. As noted above, she attended the Safe Zone training, one of its Out2Lunch events, and “Creating an Inclusive Classroom: What Men of Color Have to Say.” She also attended the annual conference of the International Ombuds Association in Denver, Colorado. Each event resulted in new insights that were brought back to the Ombuds Office and incorporated into its day-to-day operation.

Survey Results Continue to Show Visitors' Satisfaction

The Ombuds Office tracks visitor satisfaction by surveying its visitors. For a visitor to receive a survey, 1) the visitor must have met with the ombuds and discussed a concern; 2) the visitor's case must be closed, and 3) the ombuds must have a current address for that visitor. During FY 2014, sixty visitors were sent a survey inviting their feedback about their experience with the Ombuds Office. Twenty-two of these visitors returned a completed survey (return rate: 37%). Results from the Ombuds Office satisfaction surveys indicate that visitors continue to be happy with the services they receive.

	Avg. Response
1. The physical location of the Ombuds Office (in Physics Hall) is suitably discrete.	4.5
2. The Ombuds Officer understood my situation.	4.4
3. The Ombuds Officer suggested options or helped me develop strategies that applied to my situation.	4.3
4. The Ombuds Officer told me about relevant University policies, procedures, and services.	4.4
5. The Ombuds Office felt like a safe environment for me to discuss my concern.	4.7
6. The Ombuds Officer was neutral.	4.4
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.	4.5
9. I would refer others to the Ombuds Office.	4.7

KEY

- 1: Strongly disagree
- 2: Disagree
- 3: Neutral
- 4: Agree
- 5: Strongly agree

A Sample of Visitors' Survey Comments

- *"The Ombuds Office is an ESSENTIAL resource for staff, and the current person (Elaine Newell) performs this role very well."*
- *"This is a great resource for ISU. Thank you for a listening ear."*
- *"I took your suggestions for books I could read & have signed up for suggested training."*
- *"A very useful resource – safe & confidential"*
- *"Elaine listened to my concerns and offered an objective perspective. She offered to facilitate difficult conversations, told me about university policies and resources available, and helped me see my difficult situation more clearly."*

The Ombuds Office Continues to Prevent Turnover, Grievances and Litigation

Another value of the Ombuds Office Survey process is that it reveals what individuals would have done if they had not contacted the Ombuds Office. This is particularly important because it can identify potential financial benefits that accrue when individuals choose to forgo resignation, grievances or litigation as a result of visiting the Ombuds Office. During FY 2014 Ombuds Office visitors indicated the following on their survey responses:

“If you had not used the Ombuds Office, what would you have done instead?”

- *Nothing: 4*
- *Remained in my situation, but been personally/professionally distracted by it: 9*
- *Looked for another position or quit: 7*
- *Filed a appeal/grievance/formal complaint: 5*
- *Consulted with an attorney or taken legal action: 4*

Collaborative Efforts Result in New Office Location

After spending six years in Physics Hall room 69, the Ombuds Office moved to a new location in that building so the Physics Department could use room 69 to store lab equipment closer to its teaching labs. Both parties are satisfied with the final outcome, as the new Ombuds Office space (room 37) is still discreet and comfortable for Ombuds visitors, and the Physics Department can now more efficiently store and transport its teaching lab equipment. The relative ease with which the office move took place was a result of thoughtful collaboration between not just the Physics Department and Ombuds Office, but also the Dean’s office in the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences and Facilities Planning and Management. The new Ombuds Office is slightly smaller, but it still contains a work desk, filing cabinets and bookcases, plus a conference table and sitting area. Work is facilitated by a desk top computer, color printer/copier, and a laptop computer (used mainly for outreach presentations).

ISU Near Top of its Peer Group in Scope of Ombuds Service

It appears that Iowa State University may be one of the leaders in its peer group with regard to the scope of the ombuds service it provides to its university community. It has a dedicated part-time ombuds officer who provides ombuds service to all faculty, most of the staff, all graduate/professional students, and all post-doctorate scholars. Within the ISU peer group (identified in the ISU Fact Book for 2013-2014), it appears that only two institutions offer a more extensive Ombuds service. The University of California at Davis has a full time ombuds and administrative assistant who serve all members of its university community, including its hospital system. The University of Arizona also serves all the members of its university community, but through an ombuds committee, which comprises 20+ volunteer faculty and staff members plus a full-time director. Of the eight other members of the ISU peer group, two institutions do not appear to offer any ombuds service, while the other six either serve a more limited audience, offer their service through part-time ombuds appointments or emeritus

personnel, or some combination of both of these. Details about ombuds services offered by ISU peers may found in the Appendix on page 12.

Plans for FY 2015

Ever since the Ombuds Office first began using codes¹ in 2008 to anonymously track the types of conflict about which visitors had concerns, it has consistently reported that interpersonal conflict is the most common issue that visitors brought to the office – whether it was with a supervisor, a colleague, a subordinate, or a major professor. Yet it has become apparent that information is not very helpful because is just too vague and all-encompassing.

In an effort to uncover data that might be more specific and helpful at identifying trends that can actually be addressed, this year the Ombuds Office will continue to use its existing coding system but add on an additional six codes:

- LOC: Lack of communication
- LOR: Lack of respect (individuals perceive they are not being treated with respect by their colleagues/faculty)
- FTM: Failure to manage (a subordinate feels their supervisor is ignoring a problem/avoiding a decision)
- FTP: Failure to produce (an individual has failed to produce expected outcomes)
- GOS: Gossip (a workplace is unpleasant due to gossip about the visitor and/or others)
- EMC: Conflict has either arisen or escalated as a result of email exchanges

These issues regularly come up during conversations with Ombuds Office visitors. By using these codes, the Ombuds Office hopes to anonymously collect data that drills down on the frequency of various sources of interpersonal conflict. If specific (and negative) behavioral trends can be identified, it is possible they could then be addressed via professional development opportunities that address those specific behaviors. For example, if the data starts to show that numerous faculty visitors are complaining about failures to manage, that could reflect that department chairs need more guidance or support in that area.

Another goal of the Ombuds Office during FY 2015 is to significantly update and enhance its online presence. This is somewhat overdue, and visitor comments over the past year have made it clear that they use the website and appreciate the availability of self-help materials.

Finally, as noted earlier in this report, the Ombuds Office has expanded its service and is now open four days a week from 8:00 a.m. until 5:00 p.m. Early indication is that visitor traffic to the office remains above-average, and that extra day of ombuds availability will not go to waste.

¹ A copy of the current Complaint Codes is found in the Appendix.

APPENDIX

Ombuds Service Offered by ISU Peer Institutions

University of Arizona -- The University of Arizona Ombuds Committee (20+ members, plus a director) includes employees from all University areas, nominated by their peers and appointed by the President; they serve faculty, academic professionals, administrative and classified staff, students and members of the public.

University of California, Davis -- One full-time ombuds plus an administrative assistant serves all members of the University community [including the hospital system].

University of Illinois, Urbana- Champaign -- Unable to identify any ombuds service at this campus.

Michigan State University -- The University Ombudsperson is a senior faculty member appointed by the president. Staff of three: Ombudsperson, Assistant Ombudsperson and Office Manager. Seventy-five percent of its contacts are with students, and 70% of its work involves academic concerns. There is also a separate student ombudsperson in the M.S.U. College of Human Medicine.

University of Minnesota -- Student Conflict Resolution Center within the office of the Vice Provost of Student Affairs and staffed by an Ombudsman and Assistant Director/Ombudsman. Assists students in resolving campus-based problems and concerns. Appears to also provide some level of service to faculty and staff who are involved in conflicts regarding students.

North Carolina State University -- Does not appear to have any ombuds position at this time.

Ohio State University -- Faculty Ombuds position, currently filled by an emeritus professor who reports to the Faculty Council and Office of Academic Affairs. No apparent ombuds service for staff or students.

Purdue University -- A half-time faculty ombuds reports to the Provost and University Senate Chair and serves a two-year appointment. On Purdue's main campus the Department of Biological Sciences appears to offer ombuds service via an emeritus professor.

Texas A&M University -- Faculty ombuds officer located in the office of the provost, a faculty ombuds officer in the college of engineering, an ombudsperson for graduate education, and an undergraduate student ombudsperson. It appears that these ombuds positions are not within a single office, are part-time and often jointly serve with other assigned responsibilities (e.g., the faculty ombuds officer is also associate vice president for diversity). Unclear if ombuds service is available for staff.

University of Wisconsin – Madison -- Four emeritus faculty and staff work part-time and share ombuds duties for faculty and staff. There is also a separate full-time ombuds in the School of Medicine and Public Health who provides ombuds services for faculty, staff and students.

ISU Ombuds Office Complaint Codes

Faculty (F)

F1	Conflict w/supervisor (includes job performance, <i>but see</i> code F9 and use that when appropriate)
F2	Conflict w/colleague (including research credit, etc.)
F3	Conflict w/subordinate
F4	Employment duties (including teaching or committee assignments. etc.)
F5	Financial issues (including compensation, reimbursement, benefits, etc.)
F6	Disciplinary action (includes actual threat/implementation of disciplinary action)
F7	Interpretation/implementation of policy
F8	Concern re: physical environment (i.e., work conditions, not personal violence)
F9	Promotion & tenure; non renewal of contract (use F9 when these are the main issues in a case, even though interpersonal conflicts, financial issues, or policy questions may be involved)
F00	Other
FDR	Diversity related (includes adverse treatment related to group membership)

Professional and Scientific employees (PS)

PS1	Conflict w/supervisor (includes job performance issues)
PS2	Conflict w/colleague
PS3	Conflict w/subordinate
PS4	Employment duties (including position classification)
PS5	Financial issues (including compensation, reimbursement, benefits, etc.)
PS6	Disciplinary action (includes actual threat/implementation of disciplinary action or formal review)
PS7	Interpretation/implementation of policy
PS8	Concern re: physical environment (i.e., work conditions, not personal violence)
PS00	Other
PSDR	Diversity related (includes adverse treatment related to group membership)

Supervisory & Confidential employees (SC)

SC1	Conflict w/supervisor (includes job performance issues)
SC2	Conflict w/colleague
SC3	Conflict w/subordinate
SC4	Employment duties (including position classification)
SC5	Financial issues (including compensation, reimbursement, benefits, etc.)
SC6	Disciplinary action (includes actual threat/implementation of disciplinary action or formal review)
SC7	Interpretation/implementation of policy
SC8	Concern re: physical environment (i.e., work conditions, not personal violence)
SC00	Other
SCDR	Diversity related (includes adverse treatment related to group membership)

Graduate & Professional students (GPS)

GP1	Conflict w/ major professor (academic or employment)
GP2	Conflict w/colleague
GP3	Conflict w/staff, etc.
GP4	Employment-related conflict, not involving major professor
GP5	Financial issues (including tuition, financial aid, fees & costs)
GP6	Disciplinary action (related to academics or employment)
GP7	Interpretation/implementation of policy
GP8	Concern re: physical environment (i.e., work conditions, not personal violence)
GP00	Other
GPDR	Diversity related related (includes adverse treatment related to group membership)