

***Iowa State University  
Ombuds Office  
Annual Report  
For FY 2016***

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## ***Ombuds Office Annual Report for FY 2015-2016*** ***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*

- ✓ There were 128 people who contacted the Ombuds Office for assistance during FY 2016.
- ✓ KEY ISSUES: interpersonal conflict, perceived lack of respect, concerns/questions about policies, and matters related to work-life balance
- ✓ The number of faculty visitors and Professional & Scientific visitors to the Ombuds Office this year was almost equal: 40 faculty and 49 P&S.
- ✓ Once again female employees who visited the Ombuds Office outnumbered the male employees who visited, this year by two to one. On the other hand, the number of male and female graduate/professional student visitors was almost equal.
- ✓ 23% of all Ombuds Office visitors appeared to be members of a protected class, which is a 6% increase from FY 2015.
- ✓ The percentage of visitors who expressed concerns about an issue related to diversity decreased from 20% to 13%.
- ✓ The main issue of most visitors continues to be some sort of interpersonal conflict, but many visitors also expressed concerns regarding “lack of respect.”
- ✓ Results from the Ombuds Office satisfaction survey continue to show that visitors are satisfied with the services they receive and would recommend the office to others.
- ✓ Survey results also indicate that visitors’ use of the Ombuds Office continues to prevent turnover, grievances and litigation.
- ✓ The Ombuds Officer made a record number of outreach or training presentations during FY 2016, and sent almost 600 individual emails to new employees of the University, reminding them about Ombuds Office services.

## Who Visited the Ombuds Office in FY 2016?

The following table indicates the number of visitors who sought assistance from the Ombuds Office each month during FY 2016, the service group to which they belonged, and their gender.

MONTH	TOTAL	FACULTY	P&S	C&S	GRAD/PROFL	POST DOC	OTHER
July	5	0	5 (5F)	0	0	0	0
August	9	1 (1F)	4 (2F, 2M)	0	3 (1F, 2M)	0	1 (1F)
September	16	5 (5F)	7 (6F, 1M)	0	2 (1F, 1M)	1 (1M)	1 (1F)
October	12	7 (6F, 1M)	1 (1F)	0	1 (1M)	0	3 (3F)
November	8	1 (1M)	3 (1F, 2M)	0	1 (1M)	0	3 (2F, 1M)
December	11	3 (1F, 2M)	3 (2F, 1M)	0	3 (2F, 1M)	0	2 (1F, 1M)
<b>Sub Total</b>	<b>61</b>	<b>17 (13F, 4M)</b>	<b>23 (17F, 6M)</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>10 (4F, 6M)</b>	<b>1 (1M)</b>	<b>10 (8F, 2M)</b>
January	16	6 (5F, 1M)	6 (4F, 2M)	0	3 (2F, 1M)	0	1 (anon.)
February	12	3 (3F)	6 (4F, 2M)	0	2 (1F, 1M)	0	1 (1M)
March	13	7 (2F, 5M)	3 (2F, 1M)	0	1 (1F)	1 (1M)	1 (1F)
April	11	5 (5F)	2 (1F, 1M)	0	3 (3F)	0	1 (1F)
May	11	1 (1F)	6 (3F, 3M)	0	3 (3M)	0	1 (1F)
June	4	1 (1M)	3 (3F)	0	0	0	0
<b>TOTALS</b>	<b>128</b>	<b>40 (29F, 11M)</b>	<b>49 (34F, 15M)</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>22 (11F, 11M)</b>	<b>2 (2M)</b>	<b>15 (11F, 3M)</b>
% of Total	100%	31%	38%	0%	18%	1.5%	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 (non-covered merit)

"Grad./Profl." -- Graduate or Professional students

"Post Doc" -- Post doctoral scholars

"\*Other" -- visitors outside the scope of the Ombuds Office's service

(e.g., undergraduates, merit employees, former employees, etc.)

During FY 2016 there were 40 faculty visitors to the Ombuds Office, which is a 21% increase over FY 2015. On the other hand, the 49 P&S visitors this year was significantly fewer than last year's record-high total of 76 P&S visitors. However it should be noted that 49 P&S visitors is much more in line with the five-year average for P&S visitors (noted on the chart on the following page).

This year the number of graduate/professional student visitors to the Ombuds Office -- 22-- was about the same as it was in FY 2015 -- when it was 24.

Interestingly, out of the 15 “Other” visitors during FY 2016 who contacted the Ombuds Office but could not receive direct service, 9 were either undergraduate students or the parents of undergraduates. Most “other” visitors indicated that they contacted the Ombuds Office for assistance after seeing the office listed on the University’s website directory.

***Number of Ombuds Visitors Continues Upward Trend***

The following multi-year summary of Ombuds Office visitor data illustrates how the total number of annual visitors to the office generally seems to be trending upward.

**Five-Year Comparison of Visitors to the Ombuds Office**

	<b><i>Total Visitors</i></b>	<b><i>Total Faculty Visitors</i></b>	<b><i>Total P&amp;S Visitors</i></b>	<b><i>Total Grad./Profl. student visitors</i></b>
FY 2016	<b>128</b>	<b>40</b> (29F, 11M) <b>31% of all visitors</b>	<b>49</b> (34F, 15M) <b>38% of all visitors</b>	<b>23</b> (11F, 11M) <b>17% of all visitors</b>
FY 2015	<b>153</b>	<b>33</b> (26F, 7M) 21.5% of all visitors	<b>76</b> (60F, 16M) 49.7% of all visitors	<b>24</b> (17F, 7M) 15.7% of all visitors
FY 2014	<b>121</b>	<b>33</b> (19F, 14M) 27% of all visitors	<b>50</b> (36F, 14M) 41% of all visitors	<b>19</b> (10F, 9M) 16% of all visitors
FY 2013	<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
FY 2012	<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

***Issue Tracking Identifies Common Concerns***

The Ombuds Office never keeps permanent records about who visits the office for service, but, in the interest of possibly identifying problematic trends that could be addressed, the office does generically track the types of concerns that visitors discuss. During FY 2016 the Ombuds Office continued to track six new types of concerns it first started tracking in FY 2015 in an attempt to determine various sources of interpersonal conflict. One of these newer concerns, “Lack of Respect” was again a frequent concern raised by visitors in FY 2016. (See the Appendix to this report for more information about the generic types of concerns that the Ombuds Office tracks.)

## ***“Conflict with Supervisor” and “Lack of Respect” Remain Key Concerns of Most Visitors***

The top issues mentioned by each group of visitors during FY 2016 are noted below, as well as the number and percentage of visitors in each group who raised that concern. (Note that visitors often raise more than one concern when they visit the Ombuds Office.)

### ***Overall:***

56 out of 128 total visitors reported conflict with their supervisor or major professor – **44%**  
33 out of 128 total visitors reported feeling a lack of respect – **28%**

### ***Faculty:***

1. Conflict with supervisor (20) **[50% of all faculty visitors raised this issue.]**
2. Lack of respect (14) **[35%]**
3. Conflict with colleague (13) **[33%]**

### ***Professional and Scientific Staff:***

1. Conflict with supervisor (28) **[57% of all P&S visitors raised this issue.]**
2. Lack of respect (17) **[35%]**
3. Conflict with colleague (11) **[22%]**

### ***Graduate and Professional Students:***

1. Concern/question related to policies (10) **[42% of all student visitors raised this issue.]**
2. Conflict with major professor (8) **[36%]**

It is not surprising that almost half of all visitors to the Ombuds Office during FY 2016 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. It was somewhat surprising to see that almost a third of all visitors reported a concern that involved lack of respect. Visitors with this concern usually reported that they perceived a lack of professional respect, e.g., the visitors didn't feel like they were respected for the quality of the work they were doing, or for their professional expertise.

Verbally appreciating someone's work or skills is easy to do, it costs nothing, and can have a major impact on an individual's morale and commitment to the task at hand. An analysis of data collected by the Gallup organization indicated that employees who receive regular recognition or praise for their work increase their productivity, their engagement with their colleagues, and are more likely to remain employed with that employer.<sup>1</sup> Thus it appears that if individuals more frequently shared some praise, encouragement or thanks with a student, a subordinate, a colleague, or even a supervisor, it could have a very positive impact on the I.S.U. community.

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<sup>1</sup> See *12, the Elements of Great Managing* by Rodd Wagner and James K. Harter; Gallup Press, 2006; pp. 49-61, 211-212.

## Diversity and the Ombuds Office

This fiscal year the percentage of visitors who either self-reported or appeared to be a member of a protected class increased slightly, from 17% to 23%. Yet the percentage of visitors who discussed at least one concern that was related to diversity decreased by 7%. The number of women visitors to the Ombuds Office continued to substantially outnumber the men.

	<b>Total # Visitors</b>	<b>Females</b>	<b>Males</b>	<b>Protected Class<sup>+</sup></b>	<b>Diversity Related</b>
<b>FY 2016</b>	<b>128</b>	<b>66%*</b>	<b>33%*</b>	<b>23%</b>	<b>13%</b>
FY 2015	153	75.8%	24%	17%	20%
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%

(\*Gender percentages do not total 100% because one email visitor remained anonymous.)

(+“Protected Class” includes all protected classes *except* gender, which is tracked separately.)

When broken down by service group, the number of visitors whose concern included an issue related to diversity is as follows:

- 8 faculty visitors out of 40 raised a concern related to diversity [20%]
- 5 P&S staff visitors out of 49 [9%]
- 3 grad/professional student visitors out of 22 [14%]

## High Number of Women Visitors; Common Concerns

During FY 2016 the percentage of women visitors to the Ombuds Office in each service group continued to far exceed the percentage of women in that segment of the university population:

	<b>I.S.U. Headcount*</b>		<b># of Ombuds Visitors</b>	
	<b># of females</b>	<b># of males</b>	<b># of females</b>	<b># of males</b>
<b>Faculty</b>	784 (40%)	1189 (60%)	29 (72%)	11 (28%)
<b>P&amp;S</b>	1606 (55%)	1302 (45%)	34 (69%)	15 (31%)
<b>Grad/Profl</b>	2140 (42%)	2956 (58%)	11 (50%)	11 (50%)

\*2015 data from The I.S.U. Fact Book

During FY 2016 approximately two-thirds of all visitors to the office were women. This trend of more women faculty and staff using the Ombuds Office continues, as it has for almost every year. Another important component in this year’s data is that, out of the 61 ombuds visitors who mentioned “Lack of Respect” as an issue, 48 of those visitors were women – almost 80%.

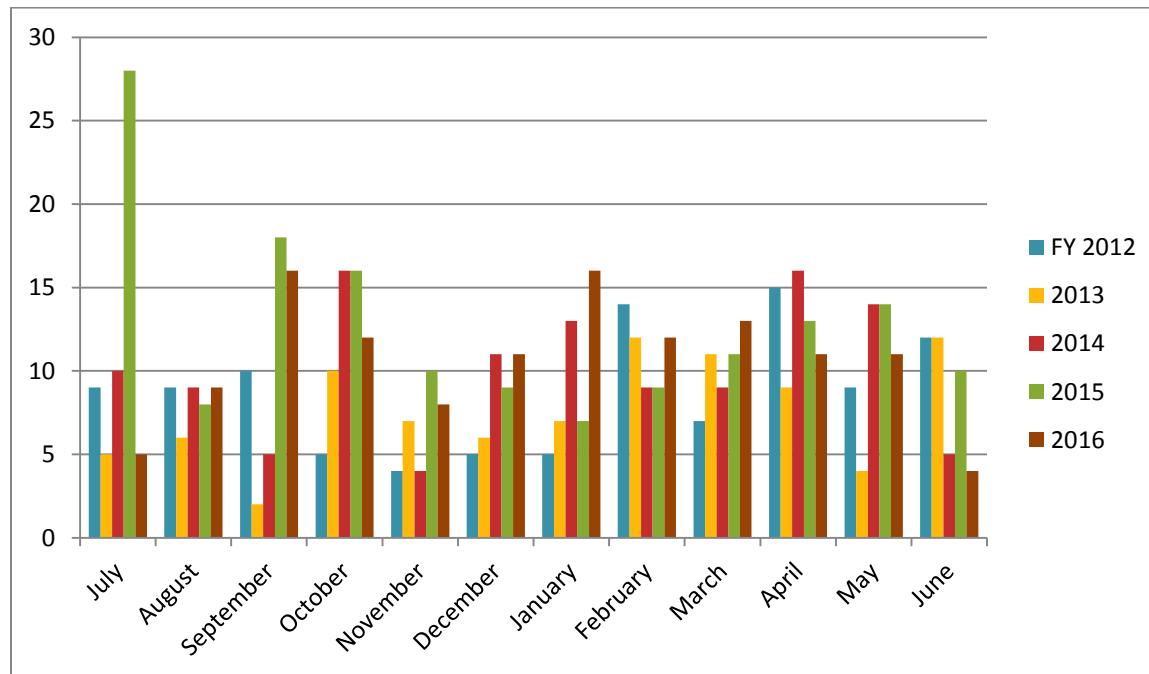
Some of the common concerns women discussed at the Ombuds Office in FY 2016:

- lack of a clear maternity leave policy
- issues related to a lack of work/life balance (also a popular issue in FY 2015)
- perceived lack of respect – usually from their supervisor or department chair
- perceived inequality in work assignments or salary

There were three months during which male visitors to the office outnumbered females (November, March, and May). And the number of male and female graduate/professional student visitors was evenly split: 11 males and 11 females. This raises a question as to why male *students* are more inclined to use the Ombuds Office than male *faculty* or *staff*.

***The Monthly Frequency of Ombuds Visitors is Unpredictable***

Occasionally people ask what are the “busy months” or “slow months” in the Ombuds Office. Reviewing data from the past five years reveals that the number of Ombuds visitors during any given month probably can’t be predicted with any certainty (except for perhaps August). Every other month appears to have been either busy or slow during one year or another.



### ***Other Useful Services: Shuttle Diplomacy & Meeting Facilitation***

While most Ombuds Office visitors usually want to discuss communication strategies or relevant policies, quite a few visitors this year wanted help with a more active approach to managing their conflict. Almost 15% of all ombuds visitors in FY 2016 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 seven visitors. In facilitated meetings, the Ombuds meets with the parties in a neutral space and uses mediation techniques to help them discuss their conflict in a respectful, productive conversation.

### ***Outreach & Education Raises Awareness about the Ombuds Office***

Extensive efforts were invested in outreach and education about the Ombuds Office during FY 2016. Almost 600 university employees who were either new or transferring to a new position received an email from the Ombuds Office, reminding them about the services it offered. In addition, the Ombuds gave presentations at 37 different events this past fiscal year, including, among others:

- ✓ The P&S Professional Development Conference
- ✓ A P&S Council seminar
- ✓ The I.S.U. Extension Annual Conference
- ✓ Emerging Leaders trainings for faculty, staff and graduate students
- ✓ 12+ Leadership training classes
- ✓ Invited presentations for many departments, colleges, and administrative units
- ✓ ‘Meet & greet’ meetings with some of the newly-hired senior administrators at I.S.U.
- ✓ “An introduction to the Ombuds Office” for new staff in Employee & Labor Relations

Finally, the I.S.U. Ombuds Office was again consulted by individuals from outside organizations (the Iowa Student Aid Commission, the Ombuds Committee at North Carolina State University) for information or advice related to providing ombuds services.

### ***Collaboration with I.S.U. Bookstore & University Human Resources***

In order to better serve the I.S.U. community, the Ombuds Office has been working with the I.S.U. Bookstore, which has graciously agreed to stock recommended books on civility and conflict management. This enables the Ombuds to recommend the books during outreach presentations or visitor meetings, and then visitors can easily purchase the books on campus.

Another collaborative effort involves University Human Resources’ Learning and Development unit (“HR/LD”). That unit and the Ombuds Office regularly share resources for their respective audiences, and the Ombuds often speaks at HR/LD classes and panel discussions. Currently the Ombuds and HR/LD are working together to develop a new class on effective workplace communication skills, to be introduced during FY 2017.



### ***Professional Development Included Building Skills to Serve a Diverse Community***

The Ombuds began professional development during FY 2016 by attending Mental Health First Aid training, an 8-hour course offered by the I.S.U. Counseling Center. Next, the annual conference of the Association for Conflict Resolution was an excellent opportunity to build skills in conflict management. Throughout the rest of FY 2016, the Ombuds also attended continuing legal education seminars on:

- discrimination
- cultural awareness
- accessibility of electronic technology for people with disabilities
- free speech on campus
- new regulations under the Fair Labor Standards Act

The Ombuds also attended a training session presented by the Dan Beebe Group regarding Title IX, and took I.S.U.'s two online training classes: "Unlawful Harassment Prevention for Higher Education Staff" and "Preventing Discrimination and Sexual Violence: Title IX, VAWA and Clery Act for Faculty and Staff." Finally, the Ombuds invested a substantial amount of self-study time developing a knowledge base on civility in the workplace in general, and the interplay of civility and academic freedom on college campuses – both of which were often requested topics for outreach presentations during FY 2016.

### ***Survey Shows Visitors Remain Satisfied by Ombuds Service***

The Ombuds Office tracks visitor satisfaction by surveying the visitors who have met with the Ombuds and completed their work with her. Visitors respond to survey questions using a scale from 1 ("Strongly disagree") through 5 ("Strongly agree"). During FY 2016, seventy-three visitors were sent a survey about their experience with the Ombuds Office, and twenty of them returned a completed survey (return rate: 27%). The table on the following page reflects that visitors to the office continue to be satisfied with the service they receive and are willing to refer others to the ombuds office.

## Ombuds Office Survey Results for FY 2016

KEY 1: "strongly disagree"    5: "strongly agree"	Avg. Response
1. <i>The physical location of the Ombuds Office (in Physics Hall) is suitably discrete.</i>	4.4
2. <i>The Ombuds Officer understood my situation.</i>	4.4
3. <i>The Ombuds Officer suggested options or helped me develop strategies that applied to my situation.</i>	4.3
4. <i>The Ombuds Officer told me about relevant University policies, procedures, and services.</i>	4.6
5. <i>The Ombuds Office felt like a safe environment for me to discuss my concern.</i>	4.5
6. <i>The Ombuds Officer was neutral.</i>	4.3
7. <i>The Ombuds Office will protect the confidentiality of my information.</i>	4.5
8. <i>Regardless of the outcome of my situation, my overall experience with the Ombuds Office has been positive.</i>	4.4
9. <i>I would refer others to the Ombuds Office.</i>	4.3

### ***The Ombuds Office Continues to Prevent Turnover, Grievances and Litigation***

The Ombuds Office Survey process also asks individuals what they would have done if they had *not* contacted the Ombuds Office. This enables the University to identify potential financial benefits that accrue when an individual decides to forgo resignation, a grievance or a lawsuit as a result of visiting the Ombuds Office. During FY 2016 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: 2*
- *Remained in my situation, but been personally/professionally distracted by it: 12*
- *Looked for another position or quit: 6*
- *Filed a appeal/grievance/formal complaint: 3*
- *Consulted with an attorney or taken legal action: 3*

### ***Moving Forward into FY 2017***

As Iowa State University continues to grow and build on its stature as a world-class institution, no doubt conflicts will continue to arise. Recent reorganization of major administrative units and new leadership will bring in new ideas and result in some changes. New regulations under the Fair Labor Standards Act mean that some employees may soon have to do their work differently from the way they're used to doing it – again, more change. Dealing with new people and new processes can sometimes be frustrating (to say the least). Finally, on top of all this change, the cultural complexity found at I.S.U. can be both wonderful, and challenging as different people from different backgrounds try to learn from one another. Rest assured that the Iowa State University community can rely on the Ombuds Office to provide it with the help and resources it needs to manage the conflicts that can naturally arise when hard-working people come together to create, share, and apply knowledge to make Iowa and the world a better place.

## 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 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 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 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 w/a supervisor (includes job performance issues, but not faculty promotion/tenure disputes, which are tracked separately)
- Conflict w/a colleague (including research credit, etc.)
- Conflict w/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 re: 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 is 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)
- Other (when the concern is not encompassed by any of the above)

By tracking the number of times each of the above concerns is presented by visitors, the Ombuds Office can determine if or when a particular situation may merit additional review by a supervisor or unit head.