

Iowa State University
Ombuds Office
Annual Report
For FY 2017
(July 1 2016 to June 30, 2017)

As reported by
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Ombuds Office Annual Report for FY 2016-2017

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 94 people who contacted the Ombuds Office for assistance during FY 2017.
- ✓ KEY ISSUES: interpersonal conflict, concerns/questions about policies, and availability of resources.
- ✓ The number of faculty visitors and Professional & Scientific visitors to the Ombuds Office this year was: 27 faculty and 38 Professional and Scientific Staff (P&S).
- ✓ The number of graduate, professional students and Post Doc visitors to the Ombuds Office this year was: 20 Graduate/Professional and 3 Post Doc. 6 other individuals not eligible for the Ombuds services contacted the office and were referred to other resources.
- ✓ A total of 58 female and 36 male visitors contacted the Ombuds Office.
- ✓ 28% of all Ombuds Office visitors appeared to be members of a protected class.
- ✓ 21% of all Ombuds Office visitors expressed concerns about an issue related to diversity.
- ✓ The primary issue that brings most visitors to the Ombuds Office continues to be some sort of interpersonal conflict with a supervisor, academic advisor or colleague, and many visitors also express concerns regarding “lack of respect.”
- ✓ The second highest issue that brings visitors to the Ombuds Office relates to general inquiries regarding such things as employment duties, personnel matters other than supervisory, and requests for resources to assist in addressing a concern.

Who Visited the Ombuds Office in FY 2017?

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	11	5 (4F, 1M)	2 (2F)	0	3 (1F, 2M)	0	1 (1F)
August	8	3 (2F, 1M)	5 (3F, 2M)	0	0	0	0
September	9	3 (2F, 1M)	3 (3F)	0	0	0	3 (1F, 2M)
October	10	3 (3F)	5 (2F, 3M)	0	1 (1F)	1 (1M)	0
November	6	1 (1F)	3 (3F)	0	2 (1F, 1M)	0	0
December	11	2 (2F)	4 (1F, 3M)	0	4 (4M)	1 (1M)	0
Sub Total	55	17 (14F, 3M)	22 (14F, 8M)	0	10 (3F, 7M)	2 (2M)	4 (2F, 2M)
January	4	2 (1F, 1M)	1 (1F)	0	1 (1F)	0	0
February	8	2 (2F)	3 (2F, 1M)	0	1 (1F)	0	2 (1F, 1M)
March	5	1 (1F)	3 (3F)	0	1 (1M)	0	0
April	8	2 (2M)	4 (3F, 1M)	0	1 (1F)	1 (1M)	0
May	6	3 (2F, 1M)	1 (1F)	0	2 (2M)	0	0
June	8	0	4 (2F, 2M)	0	4 (3F, 1M)	0	0
Sub Total	39	10 (6F, 4M)	16 (12F, 4M)	0	10 (6F, 4M)	1(1M)	2(1F, 1M)
TOTALS	94	27 (20F, 7M)	38 (26F, 12M)	0	20 (9F, 11M)	3 (3M)	6 (3F, 3M)
% of Total	100%	29%	41%	0%	21%	3%	6%

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. /Prof." -- 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 2017 there were 27 Faculty, 38 Professional and Scientific (P&S) staff, 20 Graduate/professional students, 3 Post Doc's and 6 other visitors to the Ombuds Office

Of the 6 "Other" visitors during FY 2017 who contacted the Ombuds Office but could not receive direct service, 4 were either undergraduate students or the parents of undergraduates; 1 was a former graduate student; and 1 was a former faculty member.

Number of Ombuds Visitors Trend

The following multi-year summary of Ombuds Office visitor data illustrates the total number of annual visitors to the office.

Five-Year Comparison of Visitors to the Ombuds Office

	Total Visitors	Total Faculty Visitors	Total P&S Visitors	Total Grad. /Prof. student visitors
FY 2017	94	27 (20F, 7M) 29% of all visitors	38 (26F, 12M) 41% of all visitors	20 (9F, 11M) 21% of all visitors
FY 2016	128	40 (29F, 11M) 31% of all visitors	49 (34F, 15M) 38% of all visitors	23 (11F, 11M) 17% of all visitors
FY 2015	153	33 (26F, 7M) 21.5% of all visitors	76 (60F, 16M) 49.7% of all visitors	24 (17F, 7M) 15.7% of all 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

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 2017 the Ombuds Office continued to track 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 2017. (See the Appendix to this report for more information about the generic types of concerns that the Ombuds Office tracks.)

“Conflict with Supervisor” and “Conflict with Major Professor” Remain Key Concerns of Most Visitors

The top issues mentioned by each group of visitors during FY 2017 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:

47 out of 94 total visitors reported conflict with their supervisor or major professor – **50%**. The primary complaint codes for each type of visitor population are listed below:

Faculty:

1.	Conflict with supervisor	41%
2.	Conflict with a subordinate	22%
3.	Interpretation/Implementation of policy	15%
4.	Financial issues	07%
5.	Other	22%

Professional and Scientific Staff:

1.	Conflict with supervisor	63%
2.	Conflict with colleague	13%
3.	Employment duties	08%
4.	Interpretation/Implementation of policy	05%
5.	Other	18%

Graduate and Professional Students:

1.	Conflict with major professor	60%
2.	Conflict with colleague	26%
3.	Interpretation/Implementation of policy	10%
4.	Other	20%

It is not surprising that almost half of all visitors to the Ombuds Office during FY 2017 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.

Diversity and the Ombuds Office

This percentage of visitors who either self-reported or appeared to be a member of a protected class decreased slightly from 23% in FY16 to 21% in FY17. The number of women visitors to the Ombuds Office continued to substantially outnumber the men.

	Total # Visitors	Females	Males	Protected Class⁺	Diversity Related
FY 2017	94	62%	38%	28%	21%
FY 2016	128	66%*	33%*	23%	13%
FY 2015	153	75.8%	24%	17%	20%
FY 2014	121	66%	34%	21%	17%
FY 2013	91	61.5%	38%	25%	8.7%

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

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

High Number of Women Visitors; Common Concerns

During FY 2017 sixty-two percent 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.

	I.S.U. Headcount*		# of Ombuds Visitors	
	# of females	# of males	# of females	# of males
Faculty	776	1195	20	7
P&S	1709	1297	26	12
Grad/Prof	2564	3118	9	11

*2016 data from The I.S.U. Fact Book

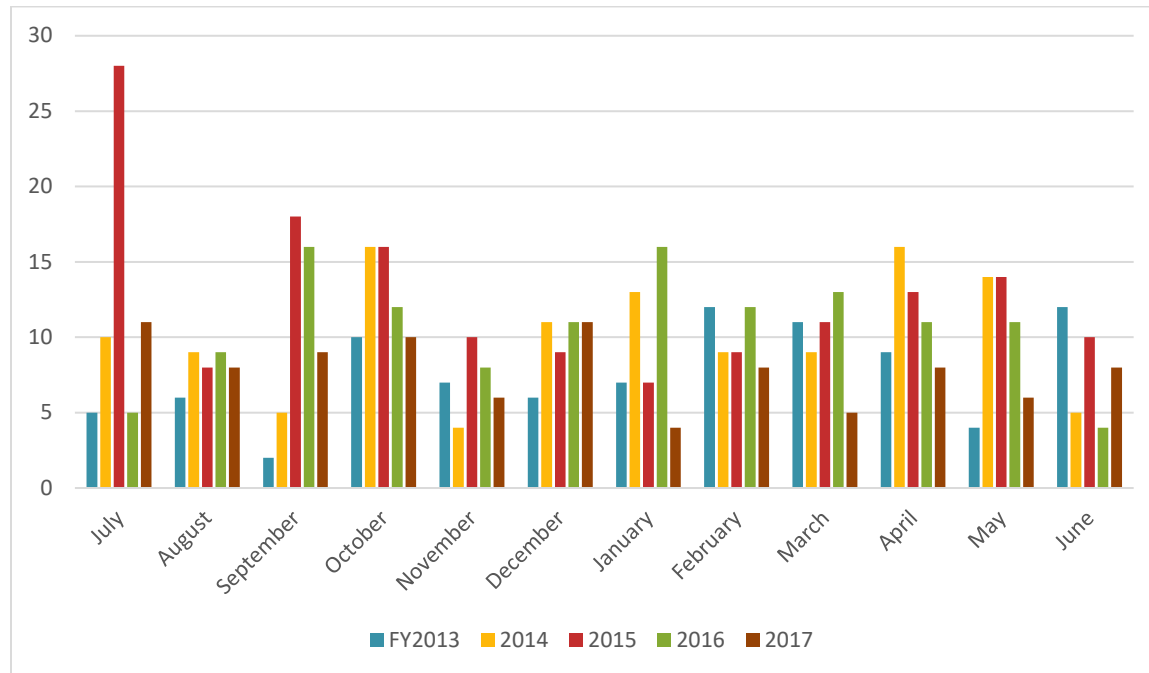
Some of the common concerns women discussed at the Ombuds Office in FY 2017:

- Perceived lack of respect – usually from their supervisor or department chair
- Perceived inequality in work assignments or salary
- Perceived gender bias
- Perceived lack of communication

There was one month during which male visitors to the office outnumbered females (December). The number of male graduate/professional student visitors' outnumbered females: 11 males and 9 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.



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 22% of all Ombuds visitors in FY 2017 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 five 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

Efforts were invested in outreach and education about the Ombuds Office during FY 2017. 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 various events this past fiscal year, including, among others:

- ✓ The P&S Professional Development 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 staff in Employee & Labor Relations

Finally, the I.S.U. Ombuds Office was again consulted by individuals from outside organizations 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.

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.

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 and lack of leadership, 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.