

Iowa State University

Ombuds Office

Annual Report

For FY 2018

(July 1 2017 to June 30, 2018)

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Message from the Ombuds

It is a pleasure to share this annual report from the Iowa State University Ombuds Office. This fiscal year was a transitional year for the Ombuds Office. The Ombuds Officer position changed from a part-time interim position to a permanent full-time position. A big thank you to Jessica Stolee for serving as the Interim Ombuds Officer from January through July, 2017. As the new full-time Ombuds Officer, I began my duties on August 7, 2017.

Other changes include the expansion of Ombuds Office services to all Merit based employees as well as a revision to data collection for reporting purposes. Prior to the data collection change, only the total number of distinct visitor's data was captured. This gap tended to leave out a bulk of the Ombuds Office work with follow up appointments as well as outreach conducted in an effort to bring about resolution or obtain additional information. This report will now include this additional information.

I am honored to serve as the Iowa State University Ombuds Officer and to serve as a confidential and neutral resource available for faculty, professional and scientific staff, merit staff, graduate and professional students as well as for post-doctoral scholars. I am thankful to those individuals who place their trust in this office and for the support provided by the president and administrators.

This report is intended to serve as a summary of the activities and accomplishments of the Ombuds Office this fiscal year, as well as identify recommendations to address many of the concerns brought forward this past reporting year.

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Brief History:

The Ombuds Office opened on August 15, 2006 as a pilot program which offered impartial and confidential help to faculty, staff and graduate and professional students who had work-related problems. The pilot Ombuds Office proved to be successful and was made permanent in 2008 with a year round appointment of a three-fifths time (24 hours per week) Ombuds Officer. In 2014, the appointment changed to a four-fifths time (32 hours a week) year round appointment. In 2017, the Ombuds Officer position evolved into a full-time year-round appointment.

Report Content:

This annual Report of the Ombuds Office provides data on the volume and characteristics of the visitors who have utilized the office, as well as detailed information on the types of issues raised by those visitors.

The report also describes systemic issues and patterns which were shared by multiple visitors to the Ombuds Office during fiscal year 2018 as well as recommendations for addressing these issues.

Standards of Practice and Code of Ethics:

The Ombuds Officer follows the standards of practice and code of ethics established by the International Ombudsman Association and as outlined in the Iowa State University charter. The core principles are:

- Confidentiality
- Independence
- Informality
- Neutrality and Impartiality

The Ombuds Officer listens to concerns, helps clarify the relevant issues, develops communication strategies, provides resources, policies, referrals, and options, as well as facilitates difficult or uncomfortable conversations with another individual.

The Ombuds Officer is not a personal advocate and cannot provide legal advice, waive university policies, conduct formal investigations, or issue formal decisions.

Executive Summary
Ombuds Office Annual Report for FY 2018
(July 1, 2017 to June 30, 2018)

- There were **310 distinct visitors** who contacted the Ombuds Office for assistance during FY 2018
- Those 310 visitors reached out to the Ombuds Office **1,534 times**—with follow up questions, appointments and/or updates
- To address issues raised by those 310 visitors, the Ombuds Officer reached out to an additional **343 individuals or offices** to obtain further information for the visitor
- **106** of the visitors were Faculty members
- **102** of the visitors were Professional & Scientific (P&S) staff
- **20** of the visitors were Merit staff
- **41** of the visitors considered themselves to be of a Supervisor/Confidential classification
- **31** of the visitors were Graduate and/or Professional students
- **8** of the visitors were Post Doctorate scholars
- **2** other individuals not eligible for the Ombuds Office services contacted the office and were referred to other resources
- A total of **195** female and **115** male visitors contacted the Ombuds Office
- The Ombuds Office conducted outreach efforts to educate and provide training to members of the university community in a minimum of **151** instances
- The primary three referral sources of visitors to the Ombuds Office are: previous visitors, colleagues, and administrators such as the dean or chair
- The **primary issues** that bring most visitors to the Ombuds Office continue to be some sort of interpersonal conflict with a supervisor or academic advisor and many visitors also express concerns regarding “lack of respect”

Summary of Key Accomplishments:

- Establishment of a full-time Ombuds Officer position and hire in August 2017
- Expansion of the Ombuds Office services to Merit employees
- Development of partnerships and collaboration with stakeholders in an effort to provide responses to visitors
- Completion of the Foundations of Organizational Ombudsman Practice course through the International Ombudsman Association
- Completion of training courses to further meet the needs of visitors
- Development of an electronic satisfaction survey and revision from a paper survey model
- Revision of data format and collection procedures
- Creation of an “ Ombuds Office introduction letter” that is sent to all new employees
- Increase in the number of visitors from a total of 94 in FY 2017 to 310 in FY 2018
- Development of information and outreach to the university community through presentations, meetings and discussions to increase knowledge about the Ombuds Office role
- Review of and updates made to the Ombuds Office website

Visitor Information:

The following table indicates the number of visitors who sought assistance from the Ombuds Office each month during FY 2018, the service group to which they belonged, and their gender.

(NOTE: No activity was recorded for July 2017 as the current Ombuds began her duties in August 2017)

<i>MONTH</i>	<i>TOTAL</i>	<i>FACULTY</i>	<i>P&S</i>	<i>Merit</i>	<i>S&C</i>	<i>GRAD/ PROFL</i>	<i>POST DOC</i>	<i>OTHER</i>
July	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
August	8	1 (1M)	3 (2F, 1M)	1 (F)	0	3 (1F 2M)	0	0
September	13	3 (2F, 1M)	5 (3F 2M)	1 (F)	0	3 (1F 2M)	0	1 (F)
October	25	7 (4F 3M)	10 (F)	2 (F)	3 (F)	1 (F)	1 (1M)	1 (M)
November	28	12 (6F 6M)	7 (5F 2M)	2 (1F 1M)	5 (1F 4M)	2 (1F 1M)	0	0
December	26	10 (7F 3M)	6 (4F, 2M)	1 (F)	4 (2F 2M)	4 (2F 2M)	1 (1M)	0
Sub Total	100	33	31	7	12	13	2	2
January	23	11 (3F, 8M)	4 (3F 1M)	0	5 (2F 3M)	2(M)	1(F)	0
February	40	10 (5F 5M)	12 (8F 4M)	5 (F)	8 (6F 2M)	3 (2F 1M)	2(F)	0
March	32	10 (7F 3M)	12 (8F 4M)	4 (F)	1(F)	3 (3M)	2(F)	0
April	42	14 (8F 6M)	17(14F, 3M)	1 (F)	4 (1F 3M)	5 (4F 1M)	1 (1M)	0
May	45	17 (8F, 9M)	14 (10F 4M)	2 (1F 1M)	8 (6F 2M)	4 (3F 1M)	0	0
June	28	11 (6F 5M)	12 (6F, 6M)	1(F)	3 (2F 1M)	1 (M)	0	0
Sub Total	210	73	71	13	29	18	6	0
TOTALS	310	106	102	20	41	31	8	2
% of Total	100%	34%	33%	6%	13%	10%	3%	1%

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

"S&C" -- Supervisory or Confidential 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, former employees, etc.)

During FY 2018 there were 106 Faculty, 102 P&S staff, 20 Merit staff, 41 S&C employees, 31 Grad/Profl students, 8 Post Doc and 2 Other visitors to the Ombuds Office. Note: Visitors were allowed to self-select their service group.

Visitor Contacts and Outreach

Some of the 310 visitors had multiple contacts with the Ombuds Office. These contacts included additional visits, calls and/or emails. For some of those visitors additional outreach to third parties was necessary in an effort to obtain information or develop resolutions on behalf of the visitor. The chart below indicates the totals of these efforts

Month	Total Distinct Visitors	Total Contacts	Outreach Conducted
July	0	0	0
August	8	45	9
September	13	75	20
October	25	83	18
November	28	127	27
December	26	121	24
January	23	126	23
February	40	182	58
March	32	200	41
April	42	194	41
May	45	243	57
June	28	138	25
Total	310	1534	343

Visitor Trends

Of the 310 distinct visitors, for FY 2018, 195 were female and 115 were male. The following chart shows the breakdown of self-identified genders for the past five years.

	<i>Total # Visitors</i>	<i>Females</i>	<i>Males</i>	<i>Anonymous</i>
<i>FY 2018</i>	310	195	115	
<i>FY 2017</i>	94	58	36	
<i>FY 2016</i>	128	85	42	1
<i>FY 2015</i>	153	116	37	
<i>FY 2014</i>	121	80	41	

Visitors Five-Year Comparison

The following multi-year summary of Ombuds Office visitor data illustrates the total number of faculty, P&S and Graduate/Professional student annual visitors to the office.*

For FY 2018, Merit staff have been added as a visitor group now eligible for Ombuds Office services. In addition, S&C staff numbers increased due to individuals identifying themselves as that category of visitor. This number will likely change for next fiscal year with a refinement of the definition within the Ombuds Office.

Five-Year Comparison of Visitors to the Ombuds Office

	Total Visitors	Total Faculty Visitors	Total P&S Visitors	Total Grad. /Prof. student visitors	Merit	S&C
FY 2018	310	106 (56F, 50M) 34%	102 (73F, 29M) 33%	31 (15F 16M) 10%	20 (18F 2M) 6%	41 (24F 17M) 13%
FY 2017	94	27 (20F, 7M) 29%	38 (26F, 12M) 41%	20 (9F, 11M) 21%		
FY 2016	128	40 (29F, 11M) 31%	49 (34F, 15M) 38%	23 (11F, 11M) 17%		
FY 2015	153	33 (26F, 7M) 21.5%	76 (60F, 16M) 49.7%	24 (17F, 7M) 15.7%		
FY 2014	121	33 (19F, 14M) 27%	50 (36F, 14M) 41%	19 (10F, 9M) 16%		

*not included are post-doctoral scholars and other categories.

Visitors Compared to the University Population

	<i>ISU Headcount*</i>		<i>Ombuds Visitors</i>	
	<i>% of females</i>	<i>% of males</i>	<i>% of females</i>	<i>% of males</i>
Faculty	39%	61%	53%	47%
P&S	57%	43%	72%	28%
Merit	56%	44%	90%	10%
Grad/Profl	45%	55%	48%	52%
Post Doc	34%	66%	100%	0%

*2017 data from The ISU Fact Book
Not included are the S&C and Other visitor categories

Systemic Issues and Concerns Identified by Visitors

Overall:

The most common concerns visitors presented to the Ombuds Office we related to their “evaluative relationships”—relationships with either supervisors, supervisees/subordinate or major professors where a power dynamic exists. For example, in FY 2018, if all forms of this type of conflict (with supervisor, major professor, and/or subordinate) are totaled, the overall figure is 152 individual complaints of the 523 total complaints. This is 30% of all complaints reported to the Ombuds Office. If all forms of conflict complaints are reviewed, (including the above categories as well as conflict with colleagues), the total becomes 210 of 523 complaints or 40% of all complaints.

The highest overall individual category of complaint received related to conflict with a supervisor and/or major professor at 98 of 523 total. The second-most common category of concerns related to lack of respect at 60 of 523 total complaints.

Most visitors often raise more than one concern when they visit the Ombuds Office.

(See the Appendix of this report for the FY 2018 Issues Comparison Chart which outlines all complaint categories and actual number of complaints received per category as well as by type of visitor.)

The primary complaint codes for each type of visitor population are listed below:

Faculty:

Conflict with colleague	18%
Conflict with a subordinate-tied	13%
Conflict with supervisor-tied	13%
Lack of respect-tied	10%
Employment duties-tied	10%

Professional and Scientific Staff:

Conflict with supervisor	29%
Lack of respect	17%
Lack of communication	10%
Employment duties	09%
Physical environment	07%

Merit Staff:

Conflict with supervisor-tied	26%
Conflict with a colleague-tied	26%
Lack of respect	12%
Employment duties	12%

Supervisory and Confidential staff:

Conflict with subordinate	45%
Discipline-tied	13%
Employee duties-tied	13%
Other-tied	13%

Graduate and Professional Students:

Interpretation/Implementation of policy-tied	20%
Employment duties-tied	20%
Conflict with major professor	13%

Post-Doctoral Scholar:

Policy Interpretation	27%
Physical environment-tied	20%
Lack of communication-tied	20%

Other Useful Services: Shuttle Diplomacy & Meeting Facilitation

While most Ombuds Office visitors usually want to discuss communication strategies to address their issues or discover relevant policies and other resources, quite a few visitors this year wanted help with a more active approach to managing their conflict. These visitors 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 several visitors. In facilitated meetings, the Ombuds meets with the parties in a neutral space and uses mediation type techniques to help them discuss their conflict in a respectful, productive conversation.

Outreach, Education & Training

Efforts were invested in developing partnerships as well as providing outreach and education about the Ombuds Office. The Ombuds Officer provided training on such topics as conflict management, civility, and communication skills. University employees who were either new or transferring to a new position received an email from the Ombuds Office, informing them about the services offered. In addition, the Ombuds Officer gave presentations or trainings at various events, including, but not limited to:

- ✓ Human Capital Partners
- ✓ The P&S Professional Peer Advocacy Committee
- ✓ P&S Council meeting
- ✓ Faculty Senate meeting
- ✓ Chairs Cabinet
- ✓ Council of Deans
- ✓ Extension Leadership Council
- ✓ Provost's Office New Administrator training
- ✓ Emerging Leaders trainings
- ✓ 12+ Leadership training classes
- ✓ To many departments, colleges, and administrative units
- ✓ 'Meet & greet' meetings with leadership at ISU
- ✓ "An introduction to the Ombuds Office" for staff in Employee & Labor Relations
- ✓ Peer Ombuds grant committee
- ✓ Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats (SWOT) facilitation
- ✓ Handling Difficult Behaviors presentation
- ✓ Civility presentations
- ✓ Effective Communication presentations

Evaluation

In an effort to determine whether the responses and services provided to visitors and partners met their expectations, the Ombuds Office continued the protocol of sending a survey out throughout the year requesting feedback. In the past, this survey was a paper survey that evaluated a series of statements based on a rating scale of 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). During FY 2018, the survey was reformatted and then sent electronically. The survey was responded to by 67 of 157 visitors and/or partners that were sent the survey. Note: not all visitors received the survey as some were not eligible for services, some had left the university and/or no longer had a valid email address.

The following questions were asked and responses given were:

1. Did the Ombudsperson respond to your initial inquiry promptly? 100% stated yes
2. Did you feel welcomed by and listened to by the Ombudsperson? 100% stated yes
3. Did the Ombuds Office feel like a safe and confidential environment for you to discuss your concerns? 97% stated yes; 3% stated no
4. Did the Ombudsperson offer assistance, suggestions, and/or possible options to help address your concerns? 96% stated yes; 3% stated no; and 1% stated not applicable
5. If you need assistance in the future, would you contact the Ombuds Office? 96% stated yes; 4% stated no
6. Would you refer others to the Ombuds Office for assistance? 94% stated yes; 6% stated no
7. How would you rate your overall satisfaction with the Ombuds Office? 90% extremely satisfied; 4% moderately satisfied; 4% neither-satisfied-or-dissatisfied; 2% slightly dissatisfied; and 0% extremely dissatisfied
8. If you had not contacted the Ombuds Office, what would you have done?

The top 3 answers were: 22 would complain to family and friends; 20 would look for other programs or positions within the university; and 17 would have brought the issue to a formal channel such as a grievance

9. What could the Ombuds Office have done differently to serve you better? Sample comments include:

- Nothing—she was wonderful to talk to. She helped me immensely; Service is always amazing
- At this point, just listening was good
- I cannot think of anything
- The service far exceeded my expectation
- For my case, I really hoped that the Ombuds office open an investigation
- Nothing different—this was an uncomfortable situation and I was made to feel validated and work to find a positive resolution. Thank you
- The response was ideal for the situation
- The Ombuds was very understanding and supportive
- I was satisfied with the effort
- I am so happy I decided to talk to the Ombuds. She gave me insight into my situation that I had not considered before. She followed up with me and provided multiple resources. I learned a lot and felt very supported
- The Ombuds was excellent. She listened carefully and sympathetically, helped us see our situation and issues more clearly, and helped us identify multiple options and strategies for dealing with the situation. I've never taken advantage of the Ombuds office before. I didn't quite frankly know what Ombuds officers did. But knowing there is an independent resource on campus to help troubleshoot issues and serious concerns was invaluable
- The Ombuds was great to work with; very positive; great ideas
- The power of the Ombuds office is limited. Sometimes that can be frustrating
- This university resource should be promoted, supported and utilized more, especially now that Merit staff can make use of its services

Recommendations for Addressing Concerns

In an effort to address some of the prevalent concerns that have been brought to the attention of the Ombuds Officer, it may be worthwhile for university leadership to discuss the following issues or concepts:

1. Refine policies regarding hostile work environments, harassment or harassing behavior exhibited by a supervisor or colleague that is not related to protected class.
2. Educate employees on “informal” investigation or complaint processes. Many visitors would like to be respected, heard and acknowledged when they have concerns without going through a formal process.
3. Convene discussion groups surrounding the treatment of graduate and professional students. Many feel valued but some of these visitors have frustrations with the way they are treated and would like to see standards of behavior implemented.
4. Provide interactive training for those individuals placed in a supervisory position. In several situations, education on how to address personnel matters, how to communicate effectively with employees so they feel valued, and how to respond to inappropriate employee behavior would have resolved many conflicts that came to the Ombuds Office.
5. Provide more transparency in communications and information sharing so employees are empowered to be part of the solution and provide feedback which can benefit their organization.

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 with a supervisor (includes job performance issues and lack of leadership, but not faculty promotion/tenure disputes, which are tracked separately)
- Conflict with a colleague (including research credit, etc.)
- Conflict with 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 regarding 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)
- Talking Behind Back
- 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.

FY 2018 Issues Comparison Chart (August 2017 to June 2018)

Complaint Category	Faculty	P&S	Merit	S&C	Graduate/ Professional	Post Doc	Other Total	Total visitors	TOTAL Complaints by Category
<i>Total visitors by category</i>	106	102	20	41	31	8	2	<u>310</u>	
1: Conflict with Supervisor/ Major Professor	25	55	9	1	6	2			98
2: Conflict with Colleague	33	11	9	1	3	1			58
3: Conflict with Subordinate	25	6	0	22	1	0			54
4: Employment duties	18	18	4	6	9	1			56
5: Financial issues	5	0	0	0	3	0			8
6: Discipline	9	9	0	6	3	0			27
7: Policy interpretation	16	7	2	0	9	4			38
8: Physical environment	9	14	1	3	2	3			32
9: Promotion and Tenure	7								7
00: Other	7	7	0	6	4	0			24
DR: Diversity Related	1	4	0	0	2	0			7
LOR: Lack of Respect	18	33	4	3	1	1			60
FTM: Failure to Manage	0	4	2	0	0	0			6
LOC: Lack of Communication	10	19	2	0	3	3			37
FTP: Failure to Produce	0	0	0	0	0	0			0
EC: Email Conflict	3	0	0	0	0	0			3
TBB: Talking Behind Back	0	4	1	1	0	0			6
Referral							2		2
Totals	186	191	34	49	46	15	2		523
%	36%	37%	7%	9%	9%	2%	0%	100%	