

The Ombuds Office 2010-2011 Annual Report

UNIVERSITY OF IDAHO

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Prepared by
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Ombuds

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History of the University of Idaho Ombuds Office

The first University of Idaho ombudsman office was created in 1992 by President Elizabeth Zinser. Under the title of Office of Faculty Ombudsman, the office was originally staffed by a half time faculty member whose sole charge was to serve the faculty. Two years later in 1994, in response to a growing need for staff ombudsman services, Carol Hahn was appointed “interim staff ombudsman” in 1994 and served for one year. The following year, the faculty ombudsman’s services were formally expanded to include staff. As the case load increased, President Robert Hoover approved the addition of a half-time, non-faculty assistant ombudsman, and Roxanne “Ellen” Schreiber was appointed to the position in 1998.

The University of Idaho Ombudsman Office and the role of the ombudsman continued to evolve over the next decade. In 2000, to more accurately reflect the role and responsibilities of the position, the original title of “assistant” ombudsman was changed to “associate.” This title was further modified in 2009, when the designation of “associate” was eliminated from the job title. In 2005, in keeping with a growing national trend to emphasize the gender neutrality of the office and ombuds position, the Faculty Senate adopted to change the office name and position titles to Ombuds Office and the ombuds. In spring 2009, and consistent with most university ombuds offices across the nation, the Ombuds Office expanded its services to include both undergraduate and graduate students. In January 2010, upon the retirement of then co-Ombuds James Fazio, Ombuds R. Ellen Schreiber was assigned to the Ombuds Office on a full time basis, thus becoming the university’s first full time ombuds.

Those who have held or hold University of Idaho ombuds positions are

- David J. Walker, Dept. of Agricultural Economics/Rural Sociology, 1992-1999
- Thomas V. Trotter, Dept. of Counseling and School Psychology, Special Education, and Educational Leadership, 1999-2003
- Charles Morrison, Counseling and Testing Center, 2003-2005
- James R. Fazio, Dept. of Conservation Social Sciences, 2006-2009
- Roxanne “Ellen” Schreiber, 1998-present.

Mission, Purpose and Function

The University of Idaho Ombuds Office mission is to support a positive and productive working, learning and living environment for faculty, staff and students by promoting mutual respect, ensuring fairness and resolving problems that emerge within the university. The primary purpose of the Ombuds Office is to resolve issues or conflicts informally and at the lowest possible level. The office also serves as an agent of

positive change by helping to prevent problems by identifying and surfacing issues of concern, and by providing timely feedback.

The Ombuds Office mission and purpose are accomplished by the following:

- listening to concerns
- analyzing problems and exploring options
- providing information about policies and services
- facilitating dialogue between individuals and groups
- mediating disputes
- applying conflict resolution and conciliation methods
- coordinating with other offices on campus
- providing training in human relations, communication and conflict resolution
- noting trends and impacts
- recommending changes in policy and/or work procedures

In fulfilling its purpose, the Ombuds Office adheres to the following Standards of Practice and the Code of Ethics established by the International Ombudsman Association:

Independence. To ensure objectivity, the office operates independent of all university entities and reports to the highest possible level of the organization.

Confidentiality. All contacts, conversations and information exchanged with the ombuds remain confidential and are not disclosed without the consent of the parties involved *and* the ombuds. Limits to confidentiality exist when disclosure is necessary to protect someone from harm and when otherwise required by law.

Neutrality. An ombuds does not take sides nor represent nor advocate on behalf of any party or the university. Rather, it is the role of the ombuds to consider the facts, rights, interests, and safety of all parties involved in a search for a fair resolution to a problem. An ombuds advocates only for fairness and justice.

Informality. Consultations are conducted “off the record” and do not constitute notice to the university in any way. No personal information is retained or used for subsequent formal proceedings. An ombuds will not serve as a witness nor offer testimony in any formal proceeding unless required by law. Although the process is informal, individuals using the services of the Ombuds Office retain their rights to all formal procedures ordinarily available to them.

Year in Review

There were no changes in staffing or services during FY 2010-11. However, as a result of a major building renovation project, the Ombuds Office physical facilities were substantially improved with the replacement of all windows and the addition of new air conditioning in each office. The improved ability to regulate

room temperature provides a more comfortable working, interviewing and conciliation environment for staff and visitors.

Staffing. The Ombuds Office continues to be staffed by a full time professional ombuds. Services were available to all university employees and students during regular business hours throughout the week and during extended hours and weekends, as necessary to accommodate varying work shifts and schedules. As in previous years, ombuds services were also available throughout the summer. Ann Thompson, assistant to the Faculty Secretary and the Ombuds Office, continued to provide administrative assistance.

Case Load. For the purpose of reporting, a ‘case’ is a new or recurrent issue that is brought to the ombuds’ attention by one or more individuals seeking assistance. It can also be an issue of which an ombuds becomes aware and takes self-directed action. Cases vary from a single informational visit to highly complex and involved interventions that require multiple parties and meetings, direct intervention and considerable time. The Ombuds Office addressed 175 cases in FY2010-11. This represents an increase of 24 cases or approximately 16% compared to the previous year (Figure 1). It is again important to note that the total number of cases reported in any year is always a conservative figure given that there are numerous contacts that occur informally and spontaneously throughout the course of conducting business. While some of these encounters may result in case entries, others are treated as part of the ombuds’ natural function.

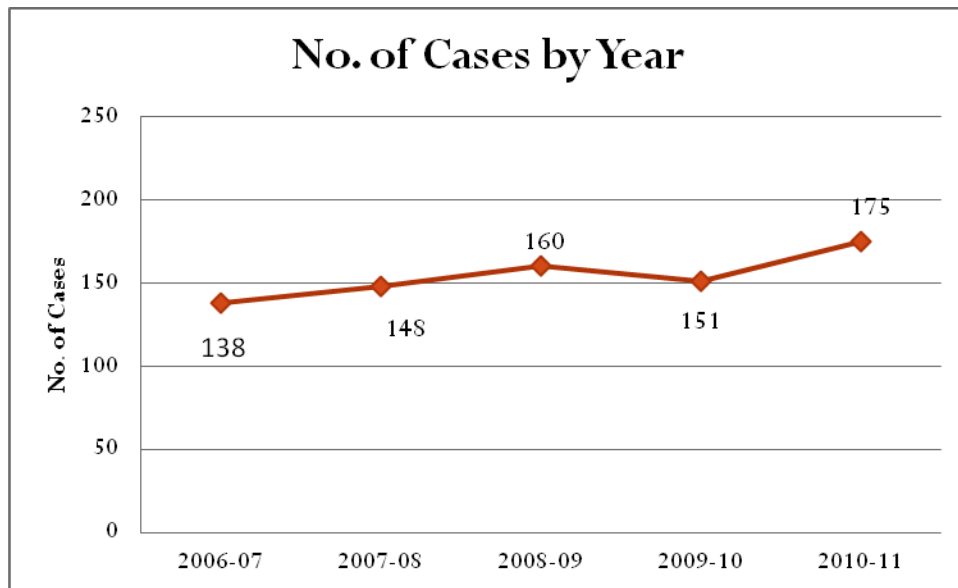


Figure 1: Total number of ombuds cases by year.

Similar to previous years, the number of new cases by month showed modest fluctuations for most months with the highest months for new cases typically coinciding with the annual performance evaluation period and subsequent employment actions. With a heightened emphasis on completing performance evaluations within the specified time frame, new cases in January increased moderately by five cases and increased by

six cases in February. Not surprisingly, and paralleling the near completion of the evaluation period, there were corresponding decreases in new cases in March and April. June showed the greatest change in number of new cases with a significant increase of 18 cases over the previous year. While many of these cases arose out of continuing evaluation issues and employment actions, no other clear trends or patterns emerged to account for the size of the increase (Figure 2).

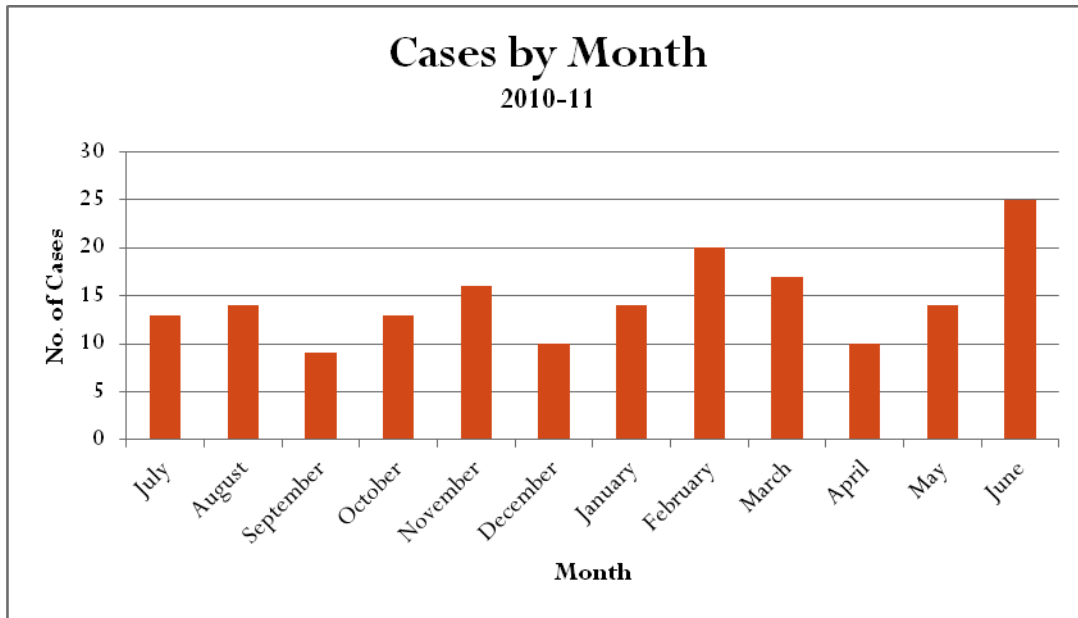


Figure 2: Ombuds cases by month

Nature of Visitors and Contacts. A slight majority of visitors to the Ombuds Office in 2010-11 were females (56%). This represents an 8% increase from the previous year. These figures reflect a normal fluctuation for the office. Consistent with the previous year, slightly more than three quarters of all visitors (78%) sought ombuds’ assistance on their own initiative rather than by referral. Enhanced efforts taken throughout the year to increase employee and student awareness and understanding of the Ombuds Office and function may account for the 5% increase in self-referrals.

Table 1 shows that all categories of employees continued to use ombuds services in similar proportions to their distribution within the university. There was a slight increase of 2% in the percentage of cases initiated by classified staff; while at the same time, the percentage of cases of exempt employees also increased by 4%. The percentage of cases initiated by faculty (tenured/tenure track and non-tenure track) declined only slightly from the previous year by three and one percent respectively. Additionally, there was a 3% increase in percentage of cases brought forward by administrators over the previous year. There was the same number of total students who sought ombuds’ assistance as in the past year; however, the distribution between graduate and undergraduate students was reversed in the current year with more graduate students

seeking assistance. This figure does not include graduate assistants, who are counted separately. Once again, no trends or patterns were associated with these subtle fluctuations.

Table 1: UI Affiliation by Percentage of Cases

Affiliation	2006-07	2007-08	2008-09	2009-10	2010-11
	%	%	%	%	%
Classified Staff	44	42	40	35	37
Faculty (tenured)	19	23	20	18	15
Faculty (non-tenured)	-	-	-	3	2
Administration	13	12	10	15	18
Exempt	15	16	18	9	13
Graduate Assistants	1	2	1	3	2
Grad Students	1	1	1	4	7
Undergraduates	0	3	3	6	3
Retiree	1	-	1	0	1
Other	1	1	6	8	2
Missing data	4	-	-	-	-

Similar to previous years and in keeping with the experience of many ombuds offices, the majority of cases (66%) directly involved only one individual. While in most cases there was at least one other person of concern, this figure indicates that no other party was contacted or involved in addressing the problem. There was a 22% increase in cases involving multiple parties over the previous year. The actual number of parties served, including single party and multi-party cases (where the parties were directly and substantially involved), increased from 240 the previous year to 294 in 2010-11 (Table 2). This increase is, in part, the result of several cases involving significant work with an entire unit or numerous individuals within a unit. The increase in multi-party cases had a measurable impact on the Ombuds Office workload. It is particularly challenging to capture this impact as it hard to track where separate cases begin or end from the presenting issues of the unit.

[The number of “parties” counted in unit-wide cases was determined by the degree to which the ombuds was directly involved with the parties and does not always reflect the actual number of persons within the unit. Unit-wide services to a large unit were not included in the data shown in Table 2.]

Table 2: Number of Individuals (Parties) per Ombuds Case

<u>Individuals Involved</u>	<u>No. of Cases</u>	<u>Total Parties</u>
1	115	115
2	46	92
3	5	15
4	2	8
5	1	5
6	1	6
7	1	7
10	2	20
12	1	12
14	1	14
Total Individuals	294	

Large scale involvement/unit/department

58	1
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It is not surprising that face-to-face consultation continues to be the most common format for ombuds consultation and it is encouraged whenever possible. Visitors frequently expressed appreciation--and relief—at the opportunity to discuss concerns and explore options with another person in a confidential and helpful manner. Eighty-one per cent of cases involved office or some form of face-to-face visits (including video calls). The use of video call consultation is growing increasingly more familiar, more readily available and more reliable; and visitors have expressed appreciation for having this option available. Telephone only contacts accounted for 17% of consultations. Although actively discouraged due to confidentiality concerns, email or other written modes of communication (letters, notes, etc.) once again accounted for 2% of contacts (some of which are logistically unavoidable).

Cases varied significantly in the amount of ombuds involvement needed; this involvement is reported as “contacts.” Relatively few cases (13%) involved only one visit or contact with no further ombuds/visitor direct involvement. However, the great majority involved multiple consultations or contacts with the visitor (or person bringing the case) and with others involved or who were a resource for addressing the concern (e.g., administrators, supervisors, General Counsel, Human Resources, Human Rights, Access and Inclusion, etc.). Contacts for 2010-11 totaled 886 for the year, and represent a substantial increase from the previous year’s 629 contacts. The increase in cases over the previous year probably accounts for a large part of this increase. Table 3 shows the distribution of contacts per case.

Table 3: Number of Contacts per Case

<u>No. of Contacts</u>	<u>Cases</u>	<u>Percentage of Cases</u>
		%
0	1	1
1	22	13
2	35	20
3	23	13
4	33	19
5	9	5
6	8	5
7	9	5
8	8	5
9	8	5
11	2	1
12	1	1
13	4	2
14	5	3
17	2	1
18	1	1
19	1	1
22	1	1
23	1	1
28	1	1
Total Contacts		886

*An ombuds initiated case may or may not actively involve other individuals (e.g., bringing an observation to attention or reporting a concern); additionally, repeated efforts to follow up on an inquiry without visitor follow through may result in a case with no contacts.

Nature of Problems. Every organization will have areas of concerns or problems that emerge within the normal process of conducting business, and the University of Idaho has multiple resources in addition to the Ombuds Office that are available to help members of the community address issues and problems constructively. It is the confidential, informal and impartial features of the Ombuds Office that most often prompt visitors to seek ombuds' services. Tracking the *nature* of problems presented to the Ombuds Office can potentially inform the university of areas and issues that may need attention. Given the overall increase in cases for the year, the increases in problems that spread across the categories were not surprising and did not generally reflect a pattern or trend. Figure 3 shows the distribution of problem categories received by the Ombuds Office in 2010-11. Each category is then discussed in detail.

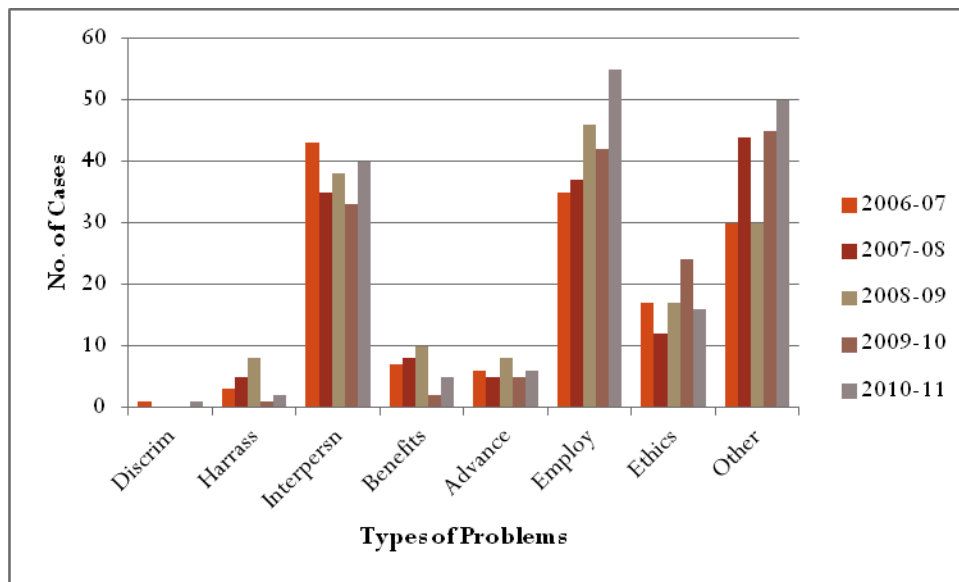


Figure 3: Problem type by year brought to the Ombuds Office

Discrimination: There was only one concern of discrimination brought directly to the Ombuds Office during the 2010-11 year. In other cases, individuals who had discrimination concerns or complaints contacted the Ombuds Office *after* their issues were assessed elsewhere or they were referred to the Ombuds Office for assistance with non-discrimination issues. While it appears that members of university community continue to be well-informed about the formal channels for addressing discrimination issues, they are less clear about the limitations of those channels.

Harassment: Like discrimination, incidents of harassment perceived as due to age, disability, race, religion and sex seem to be making their way to the appropriate formal offices. However, when visitors whose complaints do involve or include discrimination, harassment perceived as due to age, disability, race, religion and sex do come to the ombuds attention, they are promptly referred to the appropriate formal office.

During 2010-11, only two cases of perceived sexual harassment were brought by visitors and represented an increase of only one case over the previous year. There were no other cases presented with harassment-only issues.

Interpersonal: Interpersonal conflicts were the third highest category of cases received by the office. Tensions and disputes between individuals in the workplace and in the learning environment are often intensely disruptive, distracting and distressing for all parties and non-parties (co-workers, supervisors, etc.). Similar to previous years, many cases involved perceptions of incivility, disrespectful behavior and/or unfair treatment; in some cases interpersonal disputes overlap with the harassment category (general bullying/harassment), but could only be counted in one category. Interpersonal conflict involving faculty showed the greatest increase with 12 cases this year, representing an increase of six from the previous year. Many of these disputes were intense, highly disruptive, persistent, and had grown to involve more than one other party. Of the 40 interpersonal dispute cases presented, the visitor was in conflict with one or more of the following:

Administrator	3 cases
Advisor	1
Co-worker	2
Supervisor	8
Supervisee	6
Faculty	12
Peers (student)	4
Others	4

Benefits: There were five cases attributed primarily to issues of benefits during the year. This is an increase of two from the previous year. Leave issues and partner benefits were two areas that were sources of problems in this category.

Advancement: Problems related to advancement increased by one case in 2010-11 and accounted for six cases. Problems were distributed equally among the probationary period and promotion and tenure/non-reappointment. No patterns or trends emerged from these cases.

Employment: Employment is the largest problem category with 25 “specifiers” or specific areas of concern; and as such, it continues to be the largest category of problems brought to the Ombuds Office. There were 55 cases that fell into this category, which is an

increase of 13 cases over the previous year. Once again, given the overall increase in cases for the year, an increase in this category is not surprising. Of the specifiers, evaluations were again the most frequent source of conflict with 14 cases. This is an increase over last year's nine cases and suggests that the evaluation process continues to be an area of recurring tension. The number of cases in each specifier or subcategory is shown in Table 4 along with the change from last year.

Table 4: Breakdown of 55 Cases in 'Employment' Category

	Change from last year		Change from last year
Evaluations	14 +5	Accommodations for Disability	1 0
Management	3 -1	Assistantship Appointment	0 0
Job Description	2 +1	Demotion	0 0
Reassignment	4 +1	Hiring Interview	0 0
Probation (performance)	3 +2	Marital Issues	2 +2
Working Conditions	3 -1	Office Space/Conditions	1 +1
Workload	5 +3	Program Termination	0 0
Flex Time/Location	0 0	Scheduling	1 +1
Resignation	1 0	Teaching Load/Course Assign.	2 -1
Salary Agreement	2 +1	Termination – Layoff	0 -3
Hiring Process	2 -1	Termination – Performance	0 0
Reclassification	1 -1	Termination – Cause	7 +5
Reorganization	1 -1		

Ethical Concerns: There were 16 cases involving ethical concerns during the reporting year. This is a significant decrease of 8 cases over last year which was an unusually high year for ethical concerns. Cases were distributed as follows:

Intellectual property	1
Health/safety	6
Others	9

Visits to the Ombuds Office frequently involve multiple issues. Although some of the categories listed above show zero, it does *not* mean that the topic was not part of any visitor's reason for using the Ombuds Office. For data management purposes, only the *predominant* or *precipitating* reason for contact is used. On the other hand, some cases defy placement in *any* of the established categories. These are listed as "*other*" and are shown below.

Other: Fifty cases did not fit into the defined major categories and was an increase of only five from the previous year. Eighteen of these cases involved department or campus unit function. These cases were often brought to the Ombuds Office by a unit administrator and may involve multiple responses or interventions (facilitation and training was not included in the data below) or they were brought by one or more members of a department or unit. Typically, these are complex cases that involve many different issues, involve multiple parties, require considerable time, and have a significant impact on the individuals or groups involved. While it was not always possible to remedy all of issues that emerged within these groups, some efforts resulted in substantial functional improvement and some prevented further deterioration. General descriptions within the ‘other’ category, along with the number of cases, are shown below.

	Number of Cases	Change
Department/unit function	18	+8
Miscellaneous	15	+6
Committee function	3	+2
Academic issues	11	+2
Department head (misc. problems)	3	-2
Disciplinary action	0	+7
Financial aid	0	+2

Resolution of Problems. Ombuds use a variety of processes to assist visitors with addressing concerns and resolving problems. Most cases involve multiple actions, so categories are *not* mutually exclusive. The types of ombuds’ actions taken once again remained fairly consistent with previous years. The number of cases involving intercession or active intervention decreased slightly by three percent. Not captured by the data below, was an increase in the number of cases involving a larger number of parties, a complexity of issues and multiple intercessions. This is important to note as these interventions require considerably more ombuds’ time and attention. Four basic categories of ombuds’ actions are summarized in Table 5 below.

Table 5: Actions Used by Ombuds

Action	Cases	Percentage of Cases
Problem exploration	154	88%
Information	76	43
Intercession (e.g., mediation, shuttle diplomacy, facilitation)	62	35
Referrals (e.g., EAP, HR, Human Rights, Access and Inclusion, deans, supervisors, advisors)	71	41

* Most cases involve multiple actions, so categories are *not* mutually exclusive and therefore exceed 100%.

Other Services. The Ombuds Office provided a number of employee in-service trainings and academic presentations on various human relations skills, including civility, conflict management, communication and other topics within the ombuds' expertise. Facilitation services for college/department/unit retreats and special meetings were also provided. As in previous years, the ombuds was regularly called upon to serve as a designated neutral observer and process monitor at formal meetings and to assist with anticipated difficult conversations. The following presentations and selected services were provided:

Training, In-service Presentations and Facilitations

- New Employee Orientation, Introduction to the Ombuds Office, brief monthly sessions
- Choosing the Right Channel, Communication at Work, department in-service workshop
- Respectful Communication at Work, department in-service workshop
- Working Together in Teams: Essentials for Successful Group Work, class lecture
- The Ombuds Office: A Campus Resource for Students and the University Community, residence life professional staff presentation
- Building a Positive Workplace Culture, department staff in-service workshop
- Handling Difficult Conversations, Professional Development and Learning workshop
- Managing Change at Work, Professional Development and Learning workshop
- College faculty retreat planning and facilitation
- Departmental faculty retreat planning
- The Ombuds Office: A Campus Resource for Students and the University Community, ASUI LEADS and ASUI Pre-session presentations (2 sessions)
- Self-stewardship & the Sustainable Professional, department retreat session

Campus Committees/Service

University Service

- Campus Emergency Preparedness and Response Team
- Threat Assessment Team
- Benefits Advisory Group (BAG)
- Professional Development Coordinating Committee
- Professional Development and Learning Core Competency Committee
- Conflict Resolution Planning Group
- Women's Leadership Planning Committee
- UI incident recovery support (two incidences)

Professional Service

- International Ombudsman Association (IOA), Professional Development Committee (Strategic Planning and Distance Learning Task groups)
- Palouse Continuing Education Committee, planning committee member

Professional Presentations

- Drawing the Line and Choosing Sides: A Tool for Helping Visitors Remain Constructive, conference session, International Ombudsman Association Annual Conference, Portland

Public/Community Service

- Disaster mental health counselor, Disaster Action Team, Greater Idaho, American Red Cross
- Palouse Continuing Education Consortium committee member, continuing professional development for regional behavioral and mental health professionals

Professional Development. During the past year, the ombuds engaged in an array of professional development activities in addition to participating actively in the International Ombudsman Association list serve and consulting with and providing consultation to other ombuds. The ombuds holds licensure and national certification as a professional counselor and met all continuing professional education requirements (CEU's). The ombuds participated in the following continuing education activities:

- Threat Assessment in Higher Education, 6 CEU's, provided by UI safety grant, Seattle, WA
- Students with Psychological Disabilities, university-hosted webinar, Moscow, ID
- Ethics and Confidentiality, Idaho Mental Health Association, 3 CEUs, Gritman Medical Center, Moscow, ID
- Emotional Manipulation: Understanding Manipulators and Helping Their Victims, 6 CEU's, Spokane, WA
- Motivational Interviewing, 6.25 CEU's, Spokane, WA
- Distress and Dangerous Students, webinar, Washington State University, Pullman, WA
- Professional Ethics, IMHCA, 3 CEU's, Gritman Medical Center, Moscow, ID
- Disaster Sheltering Simulation, training and table top exercise, UI and American Red Cross, Moscow, ID
- Anxiety Disorders and OCD Syndromes, 4 CEU's, UI/WSU, Pullman Memorial Hospital, Pullman, WA
- Personality Disorders: Understanding the Hidden Agenda, 5.75 CEU's, Spokane, WA

Effectiveness of the Ombuds Office. Visitors frequently report how important it is to them to be heard and understood, and how much more productive and satisfying it is to experience an improved workplace environment or a repaired student/faculty or supervisor/supervisee relationship. When normal and predictable tensions or problems do arise, ombuds know that it is generally much easier and more satisfying for all parties to resolve issues informally and at the lowest level possible. However, assessing such benefits and the overall effectiveness, impacts and outcomes of ombuds services poses a challenge for nearly all ombuds offices. These results are difficult to measure or report since confidentiality precludes the use of many of the usual forms of evaluation.

The Ombuds Office currently uses two evaluation methods to assess the outcomes and impacts of services. The first is based on the ombuds' self-analysis of completed cases using a scale ranging between 'satisfactory' and 'unsatisfactory' resolution of cases; it is not a measure of visitor satisfaction. The scale attempts to evaluate the outcome and impact of each case as objectively as possible. Table 5 describes the outcome identifiers that fall within each range and that are used to guide the ombuds' appraisal.

For 2010-11, the ombuds self-appraisal of case outcomes placed 87% of case outcomes within a range considered 'resolved satisfactorily.' Eleven per cent fell within the 'neutral' outcome range, and approximately two per cent were considered 'unsatisfactory' outcomes. Thinking through an issue or problem with an impartial skilled listener generally contributes to more positive and less destructive outcomes in most issues, even when a visitor or the university's actions have already occurred or been decided. This may account for the sizeable number of cases gauged by the ombuds to be positive outcomes. The ombuds self-appraisal of cases for 20010-11 is summarized (using rounded numbers, totals will not equal 100%) in Table 5.

Table 5: Self-Appraisal of Outcomes/Impacts Ombuds Cases, 2009-10

Outcome Category	Percentage of Cases (N=175)
Resolved satisfactorily with Ombuds Office assistance	87%
Agreement/compromise reached through mediation; formal action avoided; visitor given another chance or situation otherwise satisfactorily resolved.	10%
Conflict resolved short of mediation; may involve ‘shuttle diplomacy’ or similar intervention, workshops with entire unit, or other techniques; formal action not taken.	13%
Ombuds served, by invitation or suggestion, as neutral observer; may involve role as moderator, but not mediator; party(ies) satisfied with outcome; formal action not taken.	6%
Information only was provided by Ombuds; and/or helps party to self-advocate; visitor satisfied.	54%
Action resulted in policy or system modification/improvement	2%
Other	2%
Neutral Outcome (Ombuds Office had no direct impact)	11%
Ombud’s role was primarily as a neutral listener; little or no ‘coaching’ or additional Information was provided. Visitor already had or did not need information, but needed ‘someone to listen;’ may have received confirmation of ideas/plans, but nothing new added by Ombuds.	4%
Visitor initiated and then canceled or ‘vanished’ after setting appointment or before follow-up action was completed.	2%
Situation ‘unrepairable’ upon arrival (e.g. temporary help. already is terminated, tenure was denied for appropriate reason, or visitor resigned).	5%
Other	<1%
Results Unsatisfactory	2%
Visitor disgruntled with Ombuds efforts and discontinued visits or contacts.	0%
Visitor disregarded advice/solution and suffered consequences.	2%
Unfair practice or situation not resolved nor corrected due to lack of cooperation.	<1%
Other	0%

The Ombuds Office Visitor Feedback Form (Figure 4) provides an opportunity for visitors to provide anonymous feedback on services and outcomes. The instrument was designed primarily to support the ombuds' continuous improvement and is not intended as a formal statistical measure. Use of ombuds visitor satisfaction and outcome assessments is known to pose a number of challenges. Among the more common issues are how a party's role in the case, as well as their desired or expected outcomes, influences their perceptions of satisfaction and success. The low evaluation return rates (commonly experienced by ombuds offices) are also limiting. Despite these and other potential limitations, when the information gathered is paired with the ombuds' self-appraisal of outcomes and impacts, this brief instrument contributes to strengthening the delivery of services.

Every effort is made to ensure the anonymity of the responding party, and no identifying information is requested on the feedback form. Completed forms are sent by visitors directly to the Provost's Office for processing by a staff member assigned to manage administrative evaluations. A summary report is provided to the ombuds annually. Of note, this year's summary was not completely synchronized to the period covered by this annual report period and covers a 10-month period from May 2010-February 2011.

While the intent is to receive feedback from all initiating case visitors, it is often a challenge to identify when a particular case closes (as in the case of protracted conflicts, ongoing departmental tensions and multiple overlapping issues, etc.), when a new one with the same parties begins or when a conflict involves immediate absence/leave or separations from the university. Additionally, not all individuals choose to provide contact information or to participate in giving feedback. Despite some of these known challenges, for the 10-month period of May 2010 through February 2011, 37 forms were returned. Overall, the responses were positive and consistent with the ombuds outcome self-appraisals and support the conclusion that ombuds' services were positively received and perceived as helpful to individuals who sought assistance with difficult issues.

Visitor comments...

- *Excellent resource.*
- *Thanks for helping me sort through my options and make the best choice.*
- *I appreciated having somewhere to turn with my concern.*
- *Helped me develop a clear thoughtful, professional plan and approach to a range of alternatives.*
- *I am on the way to a high quality outcome for me and for UI.*
- *Did not tell me what I wanted to hear, she told me what action would address my concern and it did!*

Figure 4: Ombuds Office Visitor Feedback Form

Thank you for taking a moment to provide feedback on your visit to the Ombuds Office; your responses will help us improve services. Please rate your experience by marking the appropriate boxes below and mail the completed form to Campus Zip 3152.

Please do not include any identifying information (name, position or concern).

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree	Not Applicable
I was able to talk with an ombuds in a timely manner.						
The ombuds explained his/her role and the confidential, neutral, informal (“off the record”), and independent standards of the office.						
The ombuds explained the limitations of confidentiality.						
The ombuds functioned neutrally and did not take sides.						
I was treated respectfully.						
The ombuds helped me to clarify my issue(s) and identify options.						
The ombuds provided helpful information (policies/procedures, communication/conflict resolution skills, and referral).						
The ombuds helped me to address or better manage my concern.						
The ombuds helped me resolve my concern or helped prevent it from deteriorating or escalating unnecessarily.						
I would use the Ombuds Office again, if needed.						
Comments:						
Please mark (X) your university affiliation:	Faculty	Staff	Administrator	Student	Other:	

Issues and Recommendations

The Ombuds Office supports the university community and culture by helping to foster and sustain a working, learning and living community that is “characterized by openness and trust” and that is “committed to civility and respect” (Strategic Plan 2011-2015). In the spirit of continuous improvement and in accordance with the provisions of the *Faculty-Staff Handbook* FSH 3820 B-6 (FSH), the Ombuds Office identifies those issues that may warrant further attention and offers general recommendations, when appropriate.

The ombuds are encouraged to comment on policies, procedures and processes with an eye to positive future change. These observations should be shared with the administrators and bodies with jurisdiction over those policies, procedures, and processes. (FSH 3820 B-6)

As in previous years, most concerns or problems brought to the Ombuds Office were situational, or specific to a set of circumstances or individuals, rather than emerging from systemic problems. Where issues were specific to a particular responsibility area, they were brought directly to the attention of the respective administrator and are not included below. However, there were several areas of concern, gleaned directly from the year’s cases or through the ombuds’ direct observation, that deserve additional comment. Included among these are those issues and recommendations from previous years that continue to pose opportunities for improvement.

Interpersonal conduct. There is a continuing and an increasing need to address the quality of interpersonal conduct in the workplace and in the educational environment. Problems with interpersonal behavior—respectful behavior in particular—are the *most* common complaints across *all* organizational levels and university affiliations. At times, these issues have impeded formal processes, disrupted entire organizational units, impacted individual well-being, and led some to depart the university prematurely.

Recommendation: All members of the university community, with the support of leadership at all levels, are encouraged to actively work together to establish norms for respectful behavior in the conduct of university life. Consider developing initiatives that take an affirmative approach to promoting respectful behavior at all organizational levels and across the statewide university. Support positive behavioral expectations with opportunities for interpersonal effectiveness training/coaching and development; and recognize distinguished university citizenship. Lastly, provide for accountability across all employment categories, taking care to ensure that high performance in professional areas does not supersede the need to address problem interpersonal behaviors, when they are present.

Review committee processes and practices. Increasingly, concerns about review committee processes and conduct have been noted. Specific concerns include perceived inconsistencies in process, disclosures of confidential discussions and decisions, and, in some instances, perceived inappropriate efforts to influence. When these issues surface, the integrity of the process is compromised and relationships are harmed. **Recommendation:** 1) Given the critical importance of these processes, consider establishing a formal statement on review committee expectations and conduct; 2) encourage committee chairs to provide a committee ‘orientation’ at the initial meeting of each new committee (e.g., reviewing the committee charge, relevant bylaws and the process, decisional criteria and confidentiality expectations);

and 3) encourage the review of confidentiality expectations at subsequent meetings and decisional criteria prior to voting.

Use of personalized email “signatures” and “tag lines” on university-related business communications. The use of highly personalized “signatures” and “tag lines” (both text and images) in the conduct of university business has raised concerns about appropriate usage of a university or state resource. **Recommendation:** Review relevant state and university policies as they apply to this issue and establish and communicate guidelines, as indicated.

Diversity, inclusion and same-sex partner benefits. The issue of equal access to employee benefits is a recurring and increasing concern. This issue surfaces as both a benefits issue and, more frequently, as an ethical concern. While recognizing that state law currently restricts the use of state funds for same-sex partner benefits, employees and students have asked the university to work actively to fulfill its expressed commitment to diversity and inclusion by actively seeking a solution to provide full and equal access to employee benefits. Consider establishing a task force or work group to explore possible funding and policy alternatives that would address the problem and be consistent with state law.

Follow up with employment applicants. Follow up communication with job applicants about their selection status or the hiring process has been inconsistent across the university. There are recurring complaints from job applicants about the absence of communication regarding the status of a hiring process. This discourages potential applicants from re-seeking employment with the university and poses potential reputational impacts. Consider including an in-progress or final communication (often a non-selection letter) as systematic, planned part of the university’s hiring process.

Hiring terms and conditions. Informal discussions between hiring authorities and job candidates about future intentions or ‘soft commitments’ (e.g., ‘down –the-road’ changes in title or employment classification, advancement, salary increases, additional compensation for moving expenses, benefit offsets, support resources, etc.) carry a high potential for serious misunderstanding and conflict.

Recommendation: Advise those with hiring responsibility to be particularly cautious with discussions about future intentions in the areas mentioned above. Ensure that all commitments discussed with job candidates are specified in writing and carefully reviewed and discussed with candidates prior finalizing employment (especially for non-contracted employees).

Communication about academic program modifications or discontinuation. Communication to students in programs undergoing significant changes (e.g., major curriculum revision, loss of accreditation or discontinuation) has been inconsistent or insufficient in some academic units. In the past year, several students were significantly impacted by confusing or absent communication regarding significant changes in curriculum or the status of their academic program. **Recommendation:** Ensure that college and departmental communication plans for notifying students potentially impacted by such changes are in place and are being implemented.

Workload, working conditions and performance stress. A large and growing number of employee visitors and responding employee parties at all organizational levels, report unacceptable levels of stress related to expanded duties, increasingly complex and time-consuming processes, excessive multi-tasking, increasing demands, and reduced support. A significant percentage of employees bringing concerns to the Ombuds Office attribute at least a portion of their issues either being in part the result of or

exacerbated by overstress in the workplace. **Recommendation:** There are no easy answers to this challenge. However, it is essential to be attentive to the impact of any substantial change (and cumulative small changes) in job tasks and duties on time, attention and energy. There is a shared responsibility between supervisor and supervisee to ensure that workloads are appropriate and conducive to both achievement and sustainability. Supervisors and supervisees are advised to periodically review and discuss workloads. Consider reinvigorating a university-wide effort to streamline processes, monitor current and changing workloads and their subsequent impacts on personnel.

Reorganization and change.* Employees in units undergoing significant restructuring, revised responsibilities or reassignment and/or a significant change in leadership face increased workplace stress and conflict. **Recommendation:** Include employee support strategies as a part of the change planning process, and provide resources for the natural and predictable period of adjustment.

Supervisor effectiveness.* Problems continue to emerge in large numbers as a result of supervisor effectiveness. Continuing areas of concern are managing workloads and fair workload distribution, maintaining a respectful workplace climate, responding appropriately to FMLA or ADA requests, providing constructive and timely feedback on performance concerns, using performance evaluation constructively, and modeling appropriate workplace behaviors (e.g., interpersonal conduct, punctuality/attendance, communication, etc.). **Recommendations:** Consider requiring supervisor skills training and mentoring for all new or minimally experienced supervisors, and encourage continuing supervisor development. Provide advisory sheets to all supervisors with supervisees requesting special leaves or ADA accommodations. Review exit interview comments to address units of concern.

*These are continuing and/or escalating issues carried forward from the previous year.

The Year Ahead

While both undergraduate and graduate students are making their way to the office, outreach to students is a priority in the year ahead. In addition to outreach presentations to student leadership, residence life staff, student groups and services, the Ombuds Office will call upon faculty, student advisors and staff to help inform the student community about ombuds services. The Ombuds Office will continue to partner with Professional Development and Learning and other offices on campus to provide conflict management and other related human relations training. Group facilitation and process consultation will also be areas of expansion.

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I want to extend my appreciation to President M. Duane Nellis and to Provost Doug Baker for supporting the work of the Ombuds Office and for their commitment to the independence, neutrality, informality and confidentiality of the ombuds process. It is that commitment, together with the trust, cooperation and good faith efforts of the many faculty, staff, students and administrators who were willing to listen to concerns and to join in seeking creative and constructive solutions, that that led to the resolution of numerous challenging issues throughout the year.