

Ombuds Office

The MIT Ombuds Office serves as a neutral, confidential, independent, and informal resource to the diverse MIT community. The Ombuds Office helps in resolving and managing conflict and encourages productive ways of communicating. The office advocates for a fair and effective conflict management system, and recommends and supports systemic changes to achieve this goal.

The Ombuds Office continues to play a special role in helping members of the community come forward anonymously about serious problems.

During AY2005, the Ombuds Office updated its Operations Plan. Goals of the office include:

- Continuing to improve the effectiveness of the Ombuds Office in delivering services to the MIT community
- Clearly communicating the roles and responsibilities of the Ombuds Office
- Providing support to the MIT conflict management system in collaboration with the other elements of the system
- Helping to improve the abilities of members of the MIT community to prevent and manage conflict

The Ombuds Office received nearly 900 callers and visitors. These included faculty members; support, service, administrative, and research staff; graduate and undergraduate students; postdocs; alumni and some non-MIT people. Common issues included academic concerns, conditions of work and study, performance and supervision, policies and procedures, personal and interpersonal concerns, concerns about various perceived transgressions, separations and terminations from MIT, requests for referrals, and consultations about how to deal with a specific concern.

The MIT Ombuds Office, like those in many other organizations, received a number of concerns about issues of values and ethics. Issues discussed by our visitors included bullying, harassment and discrimination, academic honesty, conflicts of interest, fear of retaliation and retaliation, threats of violence, intrusions on privacy, lying, defamation, theft, misuse of alcohol, and other concerns.

Ombuds staff participated in further planning of the MIT Conflict Management System. We worked with Human Resources and the Senior Counsel's Office to conduct training for supervisors who handle complaints of harassment. We participated intensively with a Graduate Student Council initiative on advisor-advisee relationships and research ethics. We have in addition collaborated with other task groups working on issues of academic ethics.

In addition to facilitating several large group sessions, ombuds staff provided training in conflict management, negotiation, diversity, and mediation for faculty, department heads, student leaders, and administrators. The sessions provided up-to-date

information on MIT's resources and focused on helping managers and supervisors improve their complaint handling skills. Ombuds staff participated as instructors, panelists, facilitators, and internal consultants at MIT orientations, midways, tutor training sessions, freshman seminars, IAP courses, retreats, affinity group and DLC meetings. Sessions included the roles and responsibilities of members of the MIT community, issues that may rise to the level of a complaint, discussion of policies and procedures, resources available inside and outside the Institute, and improving conflict management skills.

Externally, ombuds staff designed and delivered training and participated in panel discussions about the role of an organizational ombuds in North America—through the Ombudsman Association, the University and College Ombuds Association, and as invited speakers in other forums. Some sessions focused on enhancing the effectiveness of an organization by providing a means for individuals to raise and resolve issues very early. Ombuds staff continued to survey ombuds worldwide for best practices. We are working with other ombuds to develop methods to evaluate the ombuds function. We are continuing research about “Dealing with—and reporting—unacceptable behavior.”

Toni P. Robinson, Ombudsperson

Mary P. Rowe, Ombudsperson and Special Assistant to the President

More information about the Ombuds Office can be found online at <http://web.mit.edu/ombud/>.