

## Ombuds Office

The MIT [Ombuds Office](#) serves as a neutral, confidential, independent, and informal resource for the diverse MIT community. Ombuds help resolve and manage conflict and encourage productive ways of communicating. The office advocates for a fair and effective conflict management system, recommending and supporting systemic changes to achieve this goal.

During AY2012, the office again received a significant number of anonymous concerns. It handled many groups and more multi-cohort, multi-generation, and multi-ethnic concerns, including very complex concerns that involved several different issues; also issues involving more than one department, laboratory, center, or organization; and many concerns about people who are not at MIT. A few visitors raised concerns about what seemed to them to be malicious harm by others.

The Ombuds Office continued with its longstanding goals of working to improve its effectiveness by communicating its roles and responsibilities more widely, providing support to the MIT conflict management system in collaboration with all the other elements of the system, and helping to improve MIT community members' abilities to prevent and deal with conflict. The office has continued internal and external professional work with various new website materials, several articles, and many workshops and presentations.

The office received almost 800 visitors, including from faculty; support, service, administrative, and research staff; graduate and undergraduate students; postdocs; alumni; and non-MIT individuals. These visitors explored many questions of their own and also presented various concerns relating to nearly 500 other people. They raised more than 3,600 different issues. These issues included academic and research concerns, work and study conditions, performance and supervision conflicts, policies and procedures, personal and interpersonal problems, concerns about various perceived transgressions, layoffs and terminations from MIT, requests for referrals, and many consultations about how to deal with specific situations. A few cases involved dozens of contacts and meetings over a number of months.

The MIT Ombuds Office, like similar entities in other organizations, listened to a wide range of concerns about values and ethics (such as bullying, harassment, and discrimination), academic and research integrity, intellectual property, mentoring, conflicts of interest, retaliation and fear of retaliation, fear of violence, intrusions on privacy, lying, defamation, theft, destruction of personal or research-related property, and stalking. This year has brought continued concerns about stress (in these times of internal reorganization and economic cutbacks) and concerns about diversity and inclusion. We also handled many queries about policies, suggestions for system change, and heard commendations about the service of various MIT faculty, staff, postdocs, and students.

Ombuds staff continued to collaborate with Graduate Student Council and Undergraduate Association members, colleagues in Human Resources, the Office of

the Vice President and General Counsel, MIT Medical (including Mental Health), MIT Police, the Working Group on Support Staff Issues, the Office of the Dean for Graduate Education, the Office of the Dean for Student Life (including the Office of Student Citizenship), the Office of the Dean for Undergraduate Education (including the Office of Minority Education), many MIT compliance offices, and with colleagues at Lincoln Laboratory.

We met regularly with MIT senior officers and administrative and academic department heads as well as with many student groups. We collaborated with department and Institute groups on mentoring, being “active bystanders,” harassment, advisor/advisee relationships, start-up companies and entrepreneurship, research ethics, MIT’s conflict management system, leadership skills, violence against women, Resources for Easing Friction and Stress programs, and with many individual initiatives.

Ombuds facilitated group sessions and provided training in conflict management, negotiation, diversity, and mediation for faculty, department heads, student leaders, affinity groups, and administrators. The sessions provided information on MIT’s support resources and focused on helping managers and supervisors to improve specific conflict management skills. Ombuds staff participated as instructors, panelists, facilitators, and internal consultants at MIT orientations, activity midways, tutor training sessions, freshman seminars, Independent Activities Period courses, retreats, affinity groups, dormitories, and at department, lab, and center meetings. Sessions dealt with the roles and responsibilities of members of the MIT community, including the roles of mentors and of active bystanders, Discussions focused on policies and procedures, issues that may turn into complaints, resources both inside and outside of MIT, and micro-inequities and micro-affirmations.

Externally, Ombuds staff designed and delivered training sessions and participated in panels and teleconferences addressing the role of ombudspersons around the world, sponsored by the International Ombudsman Association and various other universities. The office hosted the East Coast Ombuds Group biannual meetings. Ombuds staff continue to help survey ombuds worldwide, to make reports to the profession on new issues, to mentor new ombuds, to serve on the Journal of the International Ombudsman Association editorial board, to provide guidance to organizations who may wish to establish an ombuds program, and to make occasional presentations at other organizations. Together with colleagues, we wrote about organizational ombudsmanry and about conflict management systems. We continue research on reporting and dealing with unacceptable behavior.

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