

## MIT Ombuds Office

The MIT Ombuds Office serves as a neutral, confidential, independent, and informal resource to the diverse MIT community. The 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 office continued to play a strong role in helping people come forward anonymously about serious problems. Also, staff conducted an unusual number of mediations with both groups and individuals.

During AY2006, the Ombuds Office continued with the goals of its operations plan: (1) continuing to improve the effectiveness of the office, (2) clearly communicating the roles and responsibilities of the office, (3) providing support to the MIT conflict management system in collaboration with the other elements of the system, and (4) helping to improve the abilities of members of the MIT community to prevent and manage conflict. We have worked with Information Services and Technology to rebuild our website and review our outreach materials.

The Ombuds Office received nearly 900 callers and visitors, including faculty members; support, service, administrative, and research staff; graduate and undergraduate students; postdocs; alumni; and some non-MIT people. Common issues included academic concerns, work and study conditions, 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 visitors with concerns about values and ethics. Issues discussed included bullying, harassment and discrimination, academic integrity, mentoring, conflicts of interest, fear of retaliation and retaliation, threats of violence, intrusions on privacy, lying, defamation, theft, and misuse of alcohol. We continue to hear more concerns each year about the emotional and mental health of those who come to MIT.

Ombuds staff participated with Human Resources and the Senior Counsel's Office to conduct training for supervisors who handle complaints of harassment. We continued to work with Graduate Student Council officers on advisor-advisee relationships, research ethics, and leadership skills. We collaborated with many colleagues on the Violence Against Women task force, the freshman orientation diversity initiatives, the Latino mentoring group Connexion, and many intradepartmental mediation programs.

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 current 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 meetings, and department, laboratory, and center meetings. Session topics 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 around the world, both through the International Ombudsman 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 serious issues very early. Ombuds staff continued to survey ombuds worldwide for best practices. We continue to work with other ombuds to develop methods to evaluate the ombuds function. We are continuing research on 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/>.*