

## 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 AY2011, the office received an increasing number of anonymous concerns; many groups; more multi-cohort, multi-generation, multi-ethnic, multi-issue concerns; issues involving more than one department, laboratory or center, or organization; and many concerns involving people who are not at MIT.

The Ombuds Office continued with longstanding goals: 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 other elements of the system, and helping to improve MIT community members' abilities to prevent and deal with conflict. We have continued internal and external professional work with various new web site materials, several articles, and many workshops and presentations.

The office received almost 1,000 visitors, including faculty; support, service, administrative, and research staff; graduate and undergraduate students; postdocs; alumni; and non-MIT individuals. These visitors presented various concerns relating to nearly 600 people, and raised well over 5,000 different issues. Their issues included academic and research concerns, work and study conditions, performance and supervision, 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.

The MIT Ombuds Office, like ombuds offices in other organizations, listened to concerns about values and ethics, such as bullying, harassment, and discrimination; academic and research integrity; mentoring; conflicts of interest; fear of retaliation and retaliation; fear of violence; intrusions on privacy; lying; defamation; theft; and stalking. Every year has brought more concerns about stress in these times of internal reorganization and economic cutbacks, and more concerns about diversity and inclusion in staff and faculty ranks. We also handled many queries about policies.

Ombuds staff continued to work 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), and Lincoln Laboratory. We collaborated with department and Institute groups on mentoring, "active bystanders," harassment, advisor/advisee relationships, research ethics, leadership skills, violence against women, Resources for Easing Friction and Stress programs, and with networks including Conexión.

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 helping resources and focused on supporting managers and supervisors to improve their conflict management skills. Ombuds staff participated as instructors, panelists, facilitators, and internal consultants at MIT orientations, activity midways (including an event for MIT employees offered in conjunction with the celebration of MIT's 150th anniversary), tutor training sessions, freshman seminars, Independent Activities Period courses, retreats, affinity groups, and dormitories, as well as 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; discussion of policies and procedures; issues that may become a complaint; resources inside and outside MIT; and micro-inequities and micro-affirmations.

Externally, Ombuds staff designed and delivered training, and participated in panels and teleconferences addressing the role of ombudspersons around the world sponsored by the International Ombudsman Association and various universities. The office continues to host the East Coast Ombuds Group biannual meetings. Ombuds staff continues to 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, and to provide guidance to organizations contemplating the establishment of an ombuds program. We continue writing, with colleagues, about organizational ombudsmanry and about conflict management systems. We continue research on dealing with and reporting unacceptable behavior.

**Toni P. Robinson, Ombudsperson**

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