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**Los Alamos National Laboratory  
Ombuds Program**

**Ombuds 2012 Report**



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# **Los Alamos National Laboratory**

## **2012 Ombuds Report**

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# INTRODUCTION

Established in 1996, the Ombuds Office (“Ombuds”) helps individuals explore concerns and weigh options using informal conflict resolution, coaching and enhancement of communication skills. The Ombuds assists visitors through individual consultations, facilitative processes and skills-building presentations. Ombuds is the resource of choice for employees seeking a confidential, informal venue in which to explore their concerns.

The mission of the Ombuds Office is to enhance the overall productivity of the Laboratory workforce by offering assistance in resolving work-related problems informally, confidentially and impartially. It is a unique resource to help visitors identify their options, resolve disputes, and engage in general problem solving. Ombuds enables employees to stay focused and resolve conflict, thereby contributing to a safe, secure, and productive workplace.

## Standards of Practice

The International Ombudsman Association (IOA) provides the foundation for organizational Ombuds work at LANL (IOA *Standards of Practice*, 2009; *Code of Ethics*, 2007.). The four underlying tenets are:

- 1) Neutrality/ Impartiality:** Ombuds, as a designated neutral, remains unaligned and impartial, and does not engage in any situation that would create a conflict of interest or a perception of non-neutrality.
- 2) Independence:** Ombuds operates independently in structure, function, and appearance to the highest degree possible and the office reports to the Laboratory Director.
- 3) Confidentiality:** Ombuds holds in strict confidence all communications with those seeking assistance and does not disclose communications unless given permission to do so. Ombuds protects the identity of visitors and their issues. The only exception is when there appears to be an imminent risk of serious harm to self, others or national security. Ombuds is the resource of choice for employees seeking a confidential venue in which to explore their options.
- 4) Informality:** Ombuds services do not replace the Laboratory’s formal processes; they compliment them, providing a broad range of options in an informal setting. All involvement with the Ombuds Office is strictly voluntary.

# OMBUDS 2012 HIGHLIGHTS

The Ombuds Office served 336 individual visitors in FY12. These are in addition to those employees who attended skills-building presentations self-selectively through UTrain or hosted by their organizations, and managers who engaged in facilitative processes with their employees.

In the past year, Ombuds staff:

- Developed several new communication skills-building presentations. Since 2008, eleven skills-building modules have been developed and successfully presented throughout the workforce.
- Collaborated with HR to offer several of the skills-building presentations through UTrain, beginning in June 2012.
- Initiated, led development of and piloted a presentation on Suicide Awareness in the Workplace in partnership with the Employee Assistance Program.
- Launched an Ombuds Resource Library, which allows any Laboratory worker to borrow books and other media for self-study.
- Updated and printed the Ombuds brochure.
- Created and published Ombuds self-help pamphlets.
- Amended the physical security status of the Ombuds Office to be a General Access Area during working hours, to make the office even more accessible to visitors.
- Maintained active collaborations with other Laboratory organizations including Employee Relations, Occupational Medicine, Equal Opportunity and Diversity, Legal Counsel, Community Programs, Science and Technology Base, Ethics & Audits, and Technology Transfer.

## OMBUDS SERVICES

### Individual Consultations

Ombuds assists visitors through individual consultation, option identification, resource referral and other approaches. Ombuds is often the first-call option for people who do not know where to start or who feel stuck. The initial consult starts either on the phone or in a face-to-face meeting, offering employees the human presence in a sometimes faceless bureaucracy. The consultation leads to the visitor exploring their options, choosing to build their skills through individual coaching sessions, scheduling a presentation for their organization, or choosing to engage in a facilitative process in order to resolve workplace conflict. Referrals to other LANL programs include HR-ER, EA-ECP, OM-EAP, the Small Business Office and Technology Transfer. At times, non-employees request referrals to an internal resource, such as a potential collaborator with questions about the technology transfer program. Other times an external referral may be made if an employee requests help for a loved one.

## Facilitative Processes

**Mediation** is a structured, informal process in which neutral third parties help individuals resolve conflicts. At the Laboratory, mediation is supervised by the Ombuds Office and conducted by trained collateral-duty employees and Ombuds staff. Our roster of mediators includes employees from almost all job series and directorates, as well as several Laboratory retirees. Many of our volunteers apply their mediation skills outside of the Laboratory as well, donating time and skill to conflict resolution programs in neighboring communities. The community involvement leverages the skills and knowledge obtained in Ombuds and mediation work, capitalizing on the Laboratory's investment in these individuals.

**Facilitated discussions** are similar to mediations in that the parties volunteer to resolve disagreements using a neutral facilitator, but the process is less structured. A facilitated discussion is led primarily by the individuals, while the facilitator asks open-ended and forward-looking questions to assist them in resolving issues.

Ombuds processed 6 mediations and 12 facilitated discussions in FY12. As is customary, interpersonal conflict between individuals – peers, subordinates, and supervisors - was the type of concern most often addressed through mediation and facilitated discussions. All Laboratory mediators adhere to the Model Standards of Conduct for Mediators, as approved by the American Bar Association, American Arbitration Association, and the Association for Conflict Resolution.

## Skills-Building

The number of **Ombuds Skills-Building Presentations** developed and offered has increased significantly, with topics including:

- Crucial Conversations
- Decision Making Styles
- Digital Communications
- DiSC Personality Profile
- Live Out Loud
- Meeting Management
- Priority Management

Ombuds staff gave approximately 50 presentations (both at managers' requests for their groups and employees self-selecting through UTrain) in FY12. This represents a greater than 50% increase over the number of skills building presentations given in 2011.

Another skills-building approach is the new **Ombuds Resource Library**, which offers visitors a myriad of work-related self-help books, audio books and videos using an informal lending system. Library topics include communication, conflict resolution, management, negotiation and personal development.

## **Technology Transfer Ombudsman (TTO)**

The **Technology Transfer Ombuds** is an important component of the Laboratory's Technology Transfer program. As TTO, the Ombuds Office helps resolve concerns regarding technology partnerships, patents, and licensing at the Laboratory. Ombuds provides: a focal point for assisting the public, industry and Laboratory employees in resolving disputes with the Laboratory; the use of collaborative dispute resolution techniques such as mediation to facilitate the speedy and low-cost resolution of complaints and disputes, when appropriate; quarterly reports to the DOE/NNSA, concerning the number and nature of complaints and disputes raised, along with their disposition. All TTO data is forwarded at a level of detail which continues to protect sensitive information.

## **Community and Institutional Outreach**

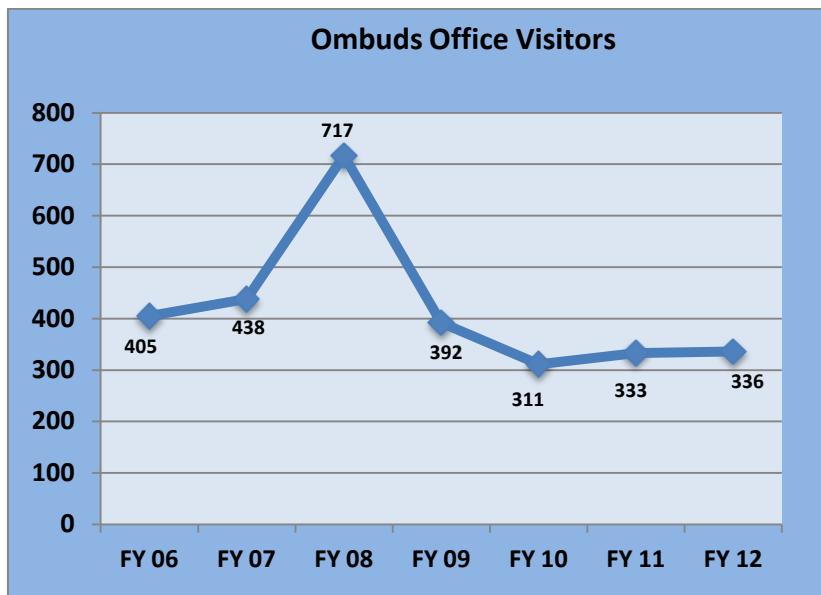
Ombuds staff and volunteer mediators continue to be a resource for important institutional initiatives within the Laboratory and across Northern New Mexico. FY12 outreach activities included:

- Active participation in Lab-wide initiatives, such as Student Programs Advisory Committee (SPAC) and Worker Safety & Security Team (WSST).
- Informational presentations during the weekly New-Hire Orientation and at other venues when requested by managers.
- Implementation of the Ombuds resource library, providing various self-help books, audio books, videos and pamphlets to the workforce.
- Mentoring of new ombudsmen through the International Ombudsman Association.
- Skills-building workshops presented to the Los Alamos County Transportation Department and at the Family Strengths Network.
- Two invited talks at the New Mexico Alternative Dispute Resolution Symposium in October 2012.

## 2006 - 2012 STATISTICAL TRENDS

Ombuds has seen a significant decrease in staffing over the last six years. The office is now staffed with 3 employees, a reduction from six in FY06. Nevertheless, the number of visitors seeking Ombuds' assistance remains steady. Usage numbers have averaged approximately 360 per year from 2006 to 2012. *The exception was 2008, when the Ombuds Office was the primary Laboratory point-of-contact for several hundred individuals who were notified of a potential disclosure of Personally Identifiable Information (PII).* The numbers that year were significantly higher than the previous and following years as a result. [Figure 1].

### Visitor Numbers from FY06 through FY12



[Fig. 1]

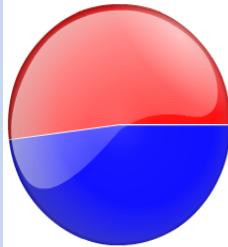
## Dashboard

Ombuds tracks and reports detailed level of effort in the monthly Ombuds Dashboard. The averages include the full spectrum of Ombuds assistance, from anonymous helpline calls that may take 15 minutes through ongoing skills building presentations scheduled for a group over the course of months. The electronic version of the dashboard allows the reader to see more detail, including the components of averages. Dashboard data is available at <http://int.lanl.gov/org/dir/ombuds/dashboard.shtml>.

## Comparison to LANL Data

### Ombuds Visitors

#### Male/Female Distribution



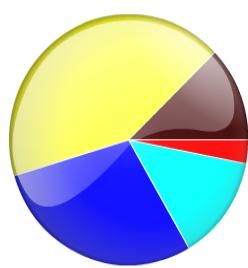
[Fig. 2a]

**Gender Distribution** In 2012, 52% of Ombuds visitors were female. The ratio of females to male indicates that more females are using Ombuds' services, compared to 43% of females coming to Ombuds five years ago (2008). Since Ombuds' inception, the trend has been a higher utilization rate by women relative to the gender distribution in the Laboratory population.

[Figures 2a, 2b].

### Ombuds Visitors

#### Age Distribution

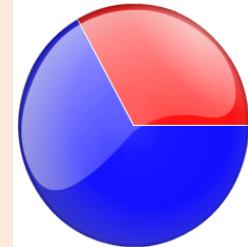


[Fig.3a]

**Age Distribution** There has been a significant shift in the age distribution of Ombuds visitors. Past historical data reveals that the average percentage of visitors aged 51-60 has been about 30% and those 60+ under 10%. In 2012, 42% of visitors were aged 51-60 and those 60+ constituted about 13% of visitors. This increase in utilization by older employees is being discussed with Human Resources. [Figures 3a, 3b].

### Laboratory Employees

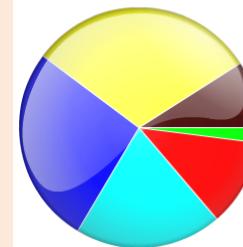
#### Male/Female Distribution



[Fig. 2b]

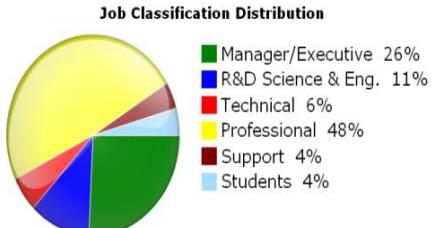
### Laboratory Employees

#### Age Distribution



[Fig.3b]

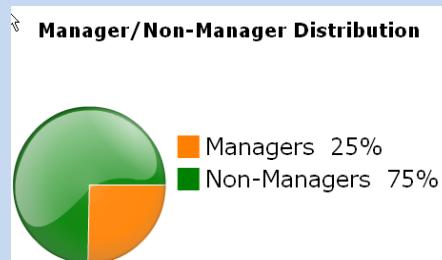
## Ombuds Visitors



[Fig. 4a]

**Job Distribution** Generally, a higher percentage of professionals and managers/ executives use Ombuds relative to other job classifications. The largest discrepancy in utilization rates was with students (10% differential between the percentage of students at LANL versus students who use Ombuds). Historically students have used Ombuds proportional to their representation in the LANL population. This shift has prompted an increase in Ombuds' outreach efforts to students. [Figures 4a, 4b].

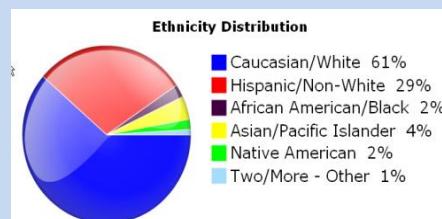
## Ombuds Visitors



[Fig. 5a]

**Manager Distribution**- The percentage of Ombuds visitors who are managers averaged 25% in 2012, consistent with previous years (managers using at a higher than the LANL manager/non-manager distribution rate). [Figures 5a, 5b].

## Ombuds Visitors

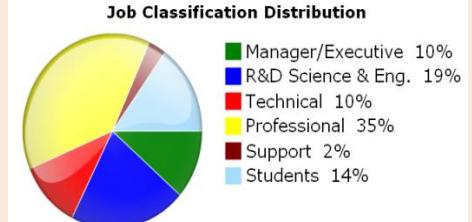


[Fig. 6a]

## Ethnic Distribution-

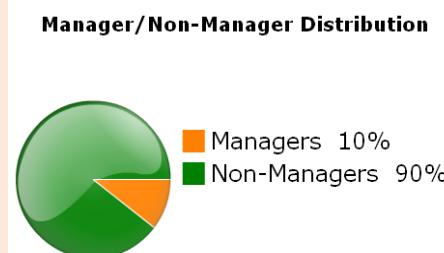
The ethnic distribution of Ombuds' visitors continues to be consistent with the Laboratory distribution. [Figures 6a, 6b].

## Laboratory Employees



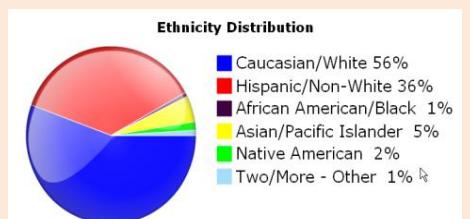
[Fig. 4b]

## Laboratory Employees



[Fig. 5b]

## Laboratory Employees



[Fig. 6b]

## SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

The Ombuds Program is a valuable Laboratory resource. Ombuds remains important to senior management as a venue for informal resolution of potentially high-profile conflicts and providing confidential feedback on relevant workforce concerns and trends. Important functions of the Ombuds Office include indicating when an observable shift in visitor trending patterns occurs, staying abreast of changes in or new policies and procedures, clarifying and making policy-holders aware of potential issues, and providing a safe confidential venue for all employees.

Given the downsizing of the Ombuds Office staffing in the last six years, the office has adapted by offering more outreach activities than ever before. For example, managers can request and schedule skills-building presentations for their divisions, groups and teams. Additionally, many of these presentations are now available for the entire workforce through UTrain. Employees are provided with more opportunities to learn, improve, and build upon communication and other work-related skills through these skills building services. While mediation is still an important and useful conflict resolution tool, there has been a shift in Ombuds visitors choosing facilitated discussions as a less structured approach as well as increased telephone-based coaching.

The Ombuds Office strives to be a “zero barriers” conflict resolution resource, emphasizing peer-to-peer and group-level problem solving. Using “zero barriers” as a guiding principle and enabling more employees to receive Ombuds services, such as through making the Ombuds Office a General Access Area and through more outreach presentations, employee communication is improved and employee conflict mitigated.

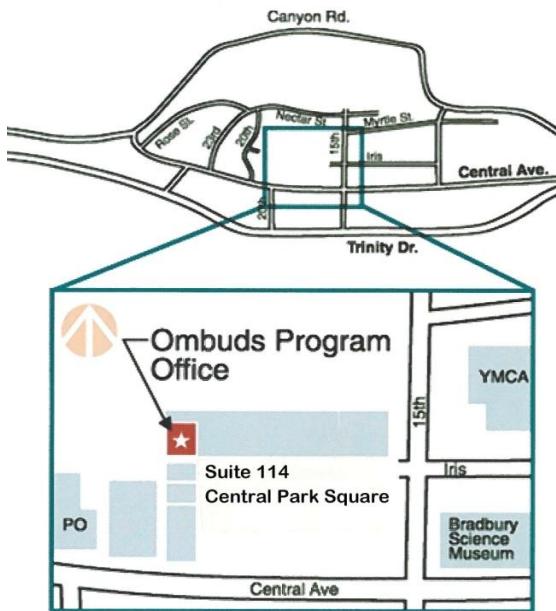
## 2011-2012 Testimonials

*“Thank you for the valuable information and resources!”*

*“I’m very satisfied with the mediation services at Ombuds. They provide a safe, confidential environment and are very skilled in supporting you through difficult and scary conversations to help you find a path forward. They helped me and a colleague work though a 2-year-old conflict which has greatly improved my work life.”*

*“Thank you for coming to us! We had several good comments afterwards about how useful people found your talk... we’d like to ask you to come back for follow-up.”*

## Contact Information



*The Ombuds Office is located at  
114 Central Park Square,  
In downtown Los Alamos*

**Phone:** (505) 665-2837

**Anonymous Help Line:** (505) 667-9370

**Fax:** (505) 667-9370

**E-mail:** [Ombuds@lanl.gov](mailto:Ombuds@lanl.gov)

(non-confidential communications only)

### **Ombuds Staff:**

Mary Beth Stevens, Ombuds Manager  
Elisa Enriquez, Senior Ombuds Specialist  
Evelyn Martinez, Ombuds Specialist

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Los Alamos, NM 87545

# REFERENCES

## Electronic Sources

American Bar Association, American Arbitration Association, & Association for Conflict Resolution (2005).

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International Ombuds Association (2007). *Code of Ethics* [Data File][http://www.ombudsassociation.org/sites/default/files/Code\\_Ethics\\_1-07.pdf](http://www.ombudsassociation.org/sites/default/files/Code_Ethics_1-07.pdf)

International Ombuds Association (2009). *Standards of Practice* [Data File]. Available from [http://www.ombudsassociation.org/sites/default/files/IOA\\_Standards\\_of\\_Practice\\_Oct09.pdf](http://www.ombudsassociation.org/sites/default/files/IOA_Standards_of_Practice_Oct09.pdf)

## Web Sites

[www.lanl.gov/ombuds](http://www.lanl.gov/ombuds)

[www.ombudsassociation.org](http://www.ombudsassociation.org)

[www.mediate.com](http://www.mediate.com)