The purpose of this report is to summarize the activities of the Boulder Faculty Ombuds Program for the academic year 2010-2011. We also summarize the nature of the issues and concerns we dealt with and identify important trends. In our judgment these trends will impact both our future efforts and the health of the university community. The central focus of our office is to assist faculty visitors who seek our help to develop and implement strategies to manage, if not eliminate, unproductive conflict in the workplace. Where appropriate, we also assist by obtaining information on policies or procedures, by conducting facilitated conversations, or by engaging in such activities as shuttle diplomacy and mediation.

During 2010-2011 the total number of contacts with members of the university community was approximately 344. We had 46 cases (individual and group consultations) involving 70 people. This number includes initiators, other participants, and information contacts that were pursued at the request or with the permission of the faculty visitor. Virtually all of our contacts were with individuals who hold faculty rank but we also had contacts with a few students and other members of the university community.

In addition to working with visitors who sought our help, we also engaged with about 274 individuals through our service/outreach activities. These activities included:

1. Reporting on the Faculty Ombuds Program and answering questions at the Boulder Faculty Assembly with approximately 75 faculty present;
2. Providing a briefing on the Faculty Ombuds Program for deans, chairs and program directors on the campus, with approximately 100 people present;
3. Participating in two meetings of the CU Retired Faculty Association’s Executive Board, which involved a total of 23 retired faculty, and reporting at the CURFA business meeting about concerns brought to the ombudsperson; 42 retired faculty were present.
4. Providing information about the Faculty Ombuds program to five new faculty members at the 2010 UCB New Faculty Fair; and
5. Conducting three workshops:
   a. A one-and-a-half hour presentation/discussion for faculty (sponsored by the LEAP program) entitled “Can We Talk: Effectively Managing Difficult Conversations” with 30 faculty members participating in the session;
   b. Two day-long LEAP workshops (in collaboration with Ombuds Director Tom Sebok) for new faculty on conflict management entitled “Dealing with Difficult Conversations”; 10 faculty attended the first symposium and 12 attended the second.

Each of the workshop sessions identified above resulted in a number of intensive conversations with faculty regarding issues typically discussed with visitors in our...
office, which have not been included as individual visitor consultations formally reported above. In short, these contacts in many cases substituted for the need of this faculty member to seek our help in the office and, in general, they served to enhance the visibility and reputation of the Ombuds program and reduce potential conflicts within the university community.

It is significant that most of our visitors this year were concerned about conflicts within evaluative or colleague relationships. Moreover, most brought complex problems, meaning that they involved more than one issue. We define an “issue” as any concern for which we generate possible options for problem management. The following issues were addressed in one-on-one consultations with visitors and in facilitated conversations:

- **Evaluative relationships:** 71 (Included were assignments/schedules; feedback; performance appraisal; departmental climate; supervisory effectiveness; insubordination; equity of treatment; priorities, values, beliefs; respect/treatment; trust/integrity; communication; bullying, mobbing; diversity related; and retaliation).
- **Peer/colleague relationships:** 45 (Included were priorities, values, beliefs; respect/treatment; trust/integrity; communication; bullying/mobbing; diversity related; and retaliation).
- **Career Progression and Development:** 23 (Included were concerns regarding reappointment, tenure, promotion and post tenure reviews; concern about possible or eventual termination; questions about resignation and about transitioning into retirement; and requests for coaching on career development).
- **Values, Ethics, and Standards:** 8 (Included were issues of fairness of organizational values, ethics, and/or standards, for the applications of related policies or procedures).
- **Compensation and Benefits:** 3 (Included were concerns about the inequities or the appropriateness and competitiveness of employee compensation or benefits).
- **Legal concerns:** 3 (Included were issues that may create a legal risk for the organization or its members, if not addressed).
- **Organizational, Strategic, and Mission Related:** 3 (Included were concerns or conflicts that related to the whole or major divisions of a campus organization).
- **Safety, Health and Physical Environment:** 1 (Included was a concern about a safety, health and infrastructure-related issue).
- **Services/Administrative Issues:** 1 (Included was a concern regarding the accessibility, effectiveness or equity of administrative services).

We see three important trends that are worthy of attention:

1. The budget cuts or perceived cuts threaten an increase in the frequency, intensity and complexity of workplace conflict. Such pressure may explain, as noted above, that in 2010-11 proportionately more visitors came to us with conflicts within evaluative or peer relationships.
2. Concern regarding student incivility increased again this year.
(3) As has been true for at least the past five years, conflict avoidant behavior characterized most of the cases; that is, usually the person initiating contact with our office had avoided dealing with the problem until the conflict had escalated significantly (or faced resistance because the individuals involved also adopted an avoidance approach to the conflict).

In conclusion, in our judgment, the Faculty Ombuds Program makes a significant contribution to conflict management on the campus. We believe that when top university leaders demonstrate both an awareness of the issues that are causing conflict and a visible and strong commitment to supporting informal programs provided by professionally trained faculty, the environment is healthier. In short, morale is higher, and formal process and litigious behavior (which is more costly and less effective) is reduced, and members of the community are more productive. Thus, we appreciate your support for this program.