The purpose of this report is to summarize the activities of the Boulder Faculty Ombuds Program for the academic year 2009-2010. 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 help faculty visitors, who seek our help, 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 2009-2010 the total number of contacts with members of the university community was approximately 300. We had 57 cases (individual and group consultations) involving 87 people. This number includes initiators, other participants, and information contacts that were pursued at the request or 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 members of the community.

In addition to working with visitors who sought our help, we also engaged with 215 individuals through our service/outreach activities. These activities included:

1. Reviewing and discussing the Faculty Ombuds Program with the Boulder Faculty Assembly Executive Committee, with 10 faculty present;
2. Providing a briefing on the Faculty Ombuds Program for deans, chairs and program directors on the campus, with approximately 125 people present;
3. Participating in two meetings of the CU Retired Faculty Association’s Executive Board, which involved a total of 20 retired faculty;
4. Providing information about the Faculty Ombuds program to 14 new faculty members at the 2009 UCB New Faculty Fair; and
5. Conducting three workshops:
   a. Two 1-1/2 hour presentation/discussion sessions for faculty (sponsored by the Leadership Education for Advancement and Promotion program (LEAP)), “Bullying in the Academic Workplace” and “Promoting Civility in Professor-Student Relations,” with a total of 30 faculty attending;
   b. A day-long LEAP workshop (in collaboration with Ombuds Director Tom Sebok) for new faculty on conflict management entitled “Dealing with Difficult Conversations,” with 12 faculty present.

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 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.
The following issues were addressed in one-on-one consultations with visitors and in facilitated conversations:

- **Evaluative relationships**: 41
  (Included were: assignments/schedules; performance appraisal; departmental climate; supervisory effectiveness; insubordination; equity of treatment; respect/treatment; trust/integrity; communication; bullying, mobbing; diversity related; and disruptive behavior.)

- **Career progression and development**: 26
  (Included were: concerns regarding reappointment, tenure, promotion and post tenure reviews; concern about possible or eventual termination; and questions about transitioning into retirement.)

- **Peer/colleague relationships**: 11
  (Included were: conflicts or issues involving peers or colleagues who do not have a supervisor-employee relationship.)

- **Compensation and benefits**: 10
  (Included were: concerns about the inequities or the appropriateness and competitiveness of employee compensation or benefits.)

- **Legal concerns**: 9
  (Included were: issues that may create a legal risk for the organization or its members, if not addressed.)

- **Values, ethics, and standards**: 3
  (Included were: issues of fairness of organizational values, ethics, and/or standards, for the applications of related policies or procedures.)

- **Safety, health and physical environment**: 3
  (Included were: concerns about safety, health and infrastructure related issues.)

- **Services/Administrative Issues**: 2
  (Included were: concerns regarding the accessibility, effectiveness or equity of administrative services.)

- **Organizational, strategic, and mission related**: 1
  (Included was: a concern or conflict that related to the whole or major divisions of a campus organization.)

We see six 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. The data above reflects this in a number of ways, including more instances of conflict within evaluative relationships, more concerns about career development, and more conflict arising from increased peer competitiveness.
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).

Termination of employment was used more frequently as a means of problem solving.

Concern regarding student incivility increased.

Concern about legal issues increased (from one last year to nine this year).

Conflict situations involving instructors and senior instructors have increased.

In last year’s report we identified the following three initiatives:

1. To conduct a marketing study to see that our resources are being most effectively utilized;
2. To do outreach to the Boulder Faculty Assembly leadership in order to consider steps that might be productively taken; and
3. To do outreach to associate deans and department chairs.

We have made significant progress on each of the above but more needs to be done. We are committed to the continuation and/or completion of these efforts.

In conclusion, in our judgment the Faculty Ombuds Program makes a significant contribution to conflict management on the campus. There is a large body of research on conflict management in university environments. One of the most robust findings is 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, formal process and litigiousness (which is more costly and less effective) is reduced and members of the community are more productive. Thus, we are delighted to have these opportunities to report on our activities and to have your support for this program. We want you to know that we are always available to consider ways in which we can be helpful.