ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Dedicated, knowledgeable, and well-trained staff members are invaluable in any office or department and no less so in this office. During the past academic year the Ombudsman was blessed to have three competent and diligent individuals helping him to serve our community. Providing much more than mere administrative support, these staff members served the Ombudsman as sounding boards, marketing consultants, problem solvers, reminders of the institutional history and culture, and as a reality check into the culture of today’s students. Special acknowledgment goes to our graduate assistants, Demetra Christopoulos and Will Petsche, for providing direct consultation with those contacting the office for assistance and for their contributions to our outreach and marketing efforts. Also making an invaluable contribution was Program Services Specialist Mary Ann Erickson who once again managed our resources, supervised the graduate assistants, and made sure that all office activities were coordinated and completed in a timely and professional manner. The unique and critical contributions of these three individuals are very much appreciated.

In addition, many individual members of the NIU helped us to help others this year. They referred folks to our office for assistance, took care of those we referred to them, or served as advocates for consultees who needed that type of support and assistance to successfully engage their options. Unfortunately space, and in some instances confidentiality, preclude our naming you all here. However, please know that we are deeply appreciative of your efforts.

Finally, thanks to those of you who cooperated in our efforts to present workshops and seminars designed to reduce future problems and issues, either by scheduling us for your program or attending a session. It is through proactive efforts such as these that our institutional community can be constantly improved in ways that reduce the number of future problems and concerns that arise.
INTRODUCTION

The Office of the Ombudsman is the only NIU campus resource that is confidential, neutral, and serves all constituencies and members of the campus community who have any type of university-related concern. Some people contact the Office after attempting unsuccessfully to resolve their concern while others contact us before deciding whether and how to take action to address their situation. The Office of the Ombudsman provides assistance to people in both situations.

The staff in the Office empathically listens to whatever concern is being expressed. We often provide a “reality check” by discussing the situation in light of what is common practice at the university. Applicable policies and procedures are identified to assist in this process and to help develop available options to address the situation or resolve the concern. Available options usually include both informal and formal actions designed specifically to address the unique situation and individual(s) involved. If options involve making contact with others, the Office of the Ombudsman staff provides names, titles, and contact information for those individuals and/or offices. The staff often suggests the best contact method and message to achieve the desired outcome.

Community members who consult with staff in the Office can do so with assurance that their contact will remain entirely confidential. The Office of the Ombudsman is not an “office of notice.” No one will know they contacted the office unless there is a necessity for the office to act in order to prevent imminent personal harm. Also, given that the Office of the Ombudsman is independent of the NIU administrative structure, consultees can be assured that staff in the office can assist them from an entirely neutral perspective.

With an eye toward improving the organization, the Ombudsman informs university administrators and governance bodies of broad trends in the types of issues and concerns raised within the community and recommends changes in institutional policies and procedures. He also conducts training sessions for departments and at large. Through these activities we hope to reduce the number of people experiencing barriers to their academic and professional success in the future.

The Office of the Ombudsman convened and hosted the first Annual Summer Meeting of College and University Ombudspersons in 2003. Since that time, this meeting has become the preeminent annual conference devoted solely to meeting the professional development and support needs of college and university ombudspersons in the world. As of this writing, the NIU Office of the Ombudsman has just finished convening and hosting the eighth annual meeting of this group.

At the 2010 annual International ombudsman Association (IOA) conference, the ombudsman coordinated and presented a pre-conference workshop and also presented, by invitation, at three regular conference sessions. He also contributed to the profession this past year by submitting a solicited article to the IOA newsletter.
Northern Illinois University has recently become more acutely aware and concerned with institutional factors related to undergraduate student retention. New administrative positions have been established and filled that go beyond mere recruitment to also include responsibility for enrollment management and retention. Extensive NIU studies have been conducted to determine the reasons that undergraduate students in good academic standing leave the institution.

**Culture of Respect and Welcomeness**

One reason for leaving the institution that is frequently cited by departing NIU students in these studies is the inattentive or uncivil treatment received from staff and faculty. Former students reported that they simply did not feel welcomed by some of these individuals.

In addition, a nationally-normed survey was recently conducted to assess the perceptions of current NIU undergraduates. The National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) was administered to thousands of our undergraduate students in the Fall 2009 semester. Results of this study affirmed what the Ombudsman and consultee data in the Office of the Ombudsman annual report have indicated for years—efforts are needed to intentionally develop and maintain a campus culture with greater emphasis on mutual respect and civility.

According to the executive summary issued by the NSSE office, first-year students who completed the NSSE reported that they perceived only 30 percent of our administrative personnel and offices to be “helpful, considerate, and flexible.” Only 38 percent of the students indicated that their faculty were “available, helpful and sympathetic.” Given these findings, it is not surprising that a large number of first-year students choose to not return to NIU for their sophomore year.

If we wish to better retain our students and also improve the recruitment and retention of staff and faculty, we must better attend to the manner in which we interact with each other. We need to better communicate the expectation that members of our campus community will behave in a civil, respectful, welcoming and helpful manner to all. Personnel evaluations must include third-party assessment of interactions with others for both supervisors and those working directly with students and the public. Failure to achieve acceptable standards in this area must result in remedial training and, if necessary, disciplinary actions.

Taking such measures to transform our campus culture into one of mutual respect and welcomeness is the only way in which we can make our community one that is truly welcoming. It is also the least we can do for our students, our visitors, and ourselves.
**Student Finances**

As the State of Illinois continues to appropriate and deliver funding to our public institutions of higher education in a manner that fails to keep pace with the costs of providing services, state universities have raised tuition substantially for several consecutive years. In the absence of similarly increased amounts of available scholarships and loans, it has become more and more difficult for students and their families to afford the cost of a college education. NIU has responded to this phenomenon through a multitude of cost-saving measures and the administration deserves commendation for their effective responses to the institution’s fiscal dilemma. To date they have been able to avoid layoffs, furloughs, department closures, and a significant reduction in classes and campus supports for students.

Despite these and other cost-saving measures taken by the university, the fiscal situation has become increasingly dire. Curtailed spending on travel accounts has required faculty and staff to expend more of their personal funds in order to attend the conferences which keep them current on developments in their fields. A hiring freeze has resulted in increased workloads for many employees across campus. Budget reductions have also required a deferment of expenditures for everything from the replacement of obsolete equipment to the maintenance and renovation of physical facilities.

Student jobs funded by federal work study funding have also been reduced. It was only a couple of years ago that, for the first time ever, the Office of the Ombudsman began to hear from students who qualified for federal work-study funding but were unable to secure campus employment. That claim has become more prevalent, unfortunately, among students (and their parents) who contact our office when they are seeking additional financial resources to continue their education. At a time when more and more students’ families are facing great financial challenges, the loss of opportunity for campus student employment can create a financial obstacle that is impossible for some students to overcome.

For decades, an important part of our institutional mission has been to offer first-generation college students an opportunity to earn a degree. These students disproportionately come from families with limited financial resources and are highly reliant on campus jobs to help pay for the increasingly high cost of college. It is becoming increasingly evident that as we reduce the number of job opportunities for them, we consequently reduce the degree to which we can achieve and honor this noble mission.
SPIRITUALITY AND RELIGION

Our institution needs to take a more active role in the development and provision of opportunities for spiritual exploration and growth in our students. If we are to meet the needs of our students and our society we must do a much better job of facilitating both curricular and co-curricular opportunities for our students to engage such issues.

• Studies, such as those cited later in this report, show that our students expect our institution to make such opportunities available in both curricular and co-curricular formats.

• The broader society expects that we will provide our students with the ability to reason and act morally and ethically. Moral and ethical reasoning is strongly predicated on cultural and spiritual values.

• The broad education of our students beyond the mere rote memorization of facts is a stated portion of our mission.

• If we are preparing our students to live and work in a world community, we need to make them aware of the fundamental values of people who come from cultures based on religious values other than Christianity.

• Virtually every educational and developmental psychologist recognizes spiritual development as a vital component of adult maturity and psychological health.

• In a recent administration of the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) NIU students report that our institution does a poorer job of facilitating the development of a “deepened sense of spirituality” than it does in any other diversity category. In fact, more than half said that NIU contributed to this aspect of development “very little” or “not at all”.

• In recent research performed for the Foundations of Excellence project, NIU students said that our institution does a poorer job of exposing them to different world religions than it does in exposing them to any other dimension of diversity.

• According to U.S. Department of Education data (as reported in the Chronicle of Higher Education, March 5, 2010), “Religion and Religious Studies” has been the fastest growing undergraduate major for the past twenty years.

In terms of curricular programming, not a single course at NIU is offered for general education credit with primary content on spirituality or world religions. This is in stark contrast with other public institutions of higher education including the University of Illinois, the University of Wisconsin, the University of Indiana, the University of Iowa, Illinois State University, as well as other Mid-American Conference schools such as Western Michigan University and the University of Toledo. The only NIU class in world religions is offered through the Philosophy Department, and it is not offered for general
education credit. Nonetheless, each time the course has been offered in recent years it has filled completely, even though enrollment has been capped at well over 100. Despite this high demand, the course has been offered on our campus only one semester in the past three years.

In the area of co-curricular programming, student response and attendance to the few such religious or spiritual events recently offered clearly indicates a high level of student interest in such activities. Relying solely on religious and spiritual entities that are not formally a part of our institution does not effectively meet this need. The institution needs a diverse but intentional and coordinated approach. If we are to approach this challenge with any hope of even minimal success, an NIU staff programmer must be charged with this responsibility and provided with the necessary resources.

For these reasons (and more) we need to increase the frequency and diversity of programs offered both in collaboration with the Association of Campus Religious Organizations as well as unilaterally. If we are serious about the moral/ethical development of our students, preparing them for future careers in an international world, and meeting their expressed needs, we must both establish a general education course on world religions and provide the resources necessary to significantly increase co-curricular programming in this area.

**DATA TABLES**

When interpreting the data displayed throughout the following pages, it is crucial to keep the following points in mind in order to place the data in the proper context.

1. These data represent the largely unsubstantiated and uninvestigated allegations of individuals contacting the Office of the Ombudsman for assistance. They are, at best, honest singular perceptions, not the objective judgments of uninvolved parties.

2. These data are not the result of a poll or random survey of members of the university community. Rather, the incidents reflected in the data represent concerns presented by 1,169 self-selected individuals who chose to contact our office for advice and assistance.

Questions or comments regarding this report are welcome and may be directed to the Ombudsman, Dr. Tim Griffin, at 815-753-1414.
Table 1
Office Contacts by NIU Constituency Group Populations in 2009-10

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Undergraduate Students</th>
<th>Graduate Students</th>
<th>Faculty</th>
<th>Supportive Professional Staff</th>
<th>Operating Staff</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
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<td>NIU Population</td>
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<td>6,147</td>
<td>1,257</td>
<td>963</td>
<td>1714</td>
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<td>25</td>
</tr>
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<td>2.41%</td>
<td>1.25%</td>
<td>5.57%</td>
<td>3.63%</td>
<td>1.46%</td>
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### Table 2

#### Status, Gender and Ethnicity of Office Contacts in 2009-10

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<th>Latino/a</th>
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<tbody>
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<td>Undergraduate</td>
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<td>Graduate</td>
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* unable to determine via phone or email communications

**does not include participants in workshops, presentations by members of the office staff, or consultations with external entities
# Table 3

Primary Issues Presented by Campus Constituencies in 2009-10*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Types of Concerns</th>
<th>Students</th>
<th>Faculty</th>
<th>Supportive Staff</th>
<th>Operating Staff</th>
<th>Family</th>
<th>Policy</th>
<th>Other</th>
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<td>1</td>
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<td>Student Conduct</td>
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<td>2</td>
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<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
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<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
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<td>Miscellaneous Concerns</td>
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<td>21</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>207</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>518</strong></td>
<td><strong>70</strong></td>
<td><strong>35</strong></td>
<td><strong>25</strong></td>
<td><strong>55</strong></td>
<td><strong>37</strong></td>
<td><strong>34</strong></td>
<td><strong>774</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*These data represent only allegations and should not be interpreted as confirmed incidents.
Table 4
774 Primary Issues Presented in 2009-10*

110 Financial Concerns: Contracts(8), emergency funding(1), encumbrances(24), fees(6), financial aid(20), fines(5), independent status(1), insurance(6), leases(2), parking tickets(2), refunds(18), tuition(1), tuition waiver(4), other(7), policy issue(5)

169 Academic Status Issues: Academic advising(22), academic probation/dismissal(36), add/drop(6), admission(5), class scheduling(2), clinical/student teaching course(12), closed classes(2), credit transfer(3), degree/graduation requirements(16), hardship withdrawals(1), incompletes(4), medical withdrawal(7), program admission(2), program dismissal(1), registration(7), reinstatement(4), repeat courses(1), residency status(1), SAP(5), staffing/performance review(4), thesis/dissertation(4), transcripts(1), withdrawals(12), other(3), policy issue(8)

75 Student Conduct Concerns: Academic misconduct(13), alcohol(3), battery(2), classroom disruption(5), deceitfulness(1), discrimination(1), harassment(8), judicial system(18), residence hall misconduct(8), roommate disputes(4), sanctions(3), theft(4), other(1), policy issue(4)

88 Classroom Instruction Matters: Attendance(4), course syllabus(5), discriminatory grading(1), final exams(5), grade appeals(33), grade change(8), grading standards(5), make-up work(12), personality conflicts(1), quality of instruction(8), other(4), policy issue(2)

73 Faculty/Staff Performance Concerns: Deceitfulness(3), derogatory comments(4), discrimination(8), harassment(11), inaccurate advising(6), inattentiveness(9), incompetence(9), intimidation(8), retaliation(1), retention of tests/papers(1), rudeness(10), unprofessionalism(3)

52 Employment Issues: Academic freedom(2), disciplinary action(5), grievance(3), harassment(3), hearing(1), hiring process(6), job duties(3), performance evaluation(2), personality conflicts(1), poor supervisory skills(2), probation(1), promotion(2), salary/benefits(3), student employment(1), tenure(3), termination(9), work schedule(1), work load(1), other(1), policy issue(2)

207 Miscellaneous: Career advising(10), disability accommodations(8), environmental issues(5), ethical considerations(10), FERPA(1), health concerns(11), immigration issues(2), interpersonal problems(6), legal issues(15), off-campus housing(9), off-campus problems(28), on-campus housing(26), parking issues(10), privacy issues(5), records retention(1), safety issues(7), shared governance(1), other(18), policy development(31), policy issues(3)

*These data represent only allegations and should not be interpreted as confirmed incidents.
### Table 5

**All Issues (Primary and Secondary) Presented in 2009-10 Sorted by Constituency***

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Types of Concerns</th>
<th>Students</th>
<th>Faculty</th>
<th>Supportive Professional Staff</th>
<th>Operating Staff</th>
<th>Family</th>
<th>Policy</th>
<th>Other</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Financial Concerns</td>
<td>313</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student Academic Status</td>
<td>622</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student Conduct</td>
<td>272</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Classroom Instruction</td>
<td>336</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Faculty/Staff Performance</td>
<td>450</td>
<td>107</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>92</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employment Issues</td>
<td>101</td>
<td>131</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>94</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Miscellaneous Concerns</td>
<td>393</td>
<td>91</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*These data represent only allegations and should not be interpreted as confirmed incidents.
### Table 6

**All Issues (Primary and Secondary) Presented in 2009-10**

**Financial Concerns:** Contracts(31), emergency funding(4), encumbrances(42), evictions(2), fees(21), financial aid(69), fines(13), independent status(5), insurance(17), leases(12), parking tickets(9), paycheck(2), refunds(45), scholarship(25), tuition(19), tuition waiver(17), other(16), policy issue(29)

**Academic:** Academic advising(112), academic probation/dismissal(65), add/drop(28), admission(19), certification(3), class permits(6), class scheduling(22), clinical/student teaching course(22), closed classes(9), comprehensive exams(2), credit transfer(22), degree/graduation requirements(71), hardship withdrawal(13), incompletes(24), medical withdrawal(32), placement testing(1), program admission(9), program dismissal(10), registration(52), reinstatement(20), repeat courses(52), residency status(2), SAP(10), staffing/performance review(7), thesis/dissertation(4), transcripts(19), withdrawals(44), other(11), policy issue(40)

**Student Conduct:** Academic misconduct(23), alcohol(14), assault(18), battery(9), classroom disruption(10), deceitfulness(10), discrimination(3), due process(25), harassment(28), intimidation(22), judicial system(69), residence hall misconduct(32), roommate disputes(15), sanctions(47), theft(8), other(4), policy issue(16)

**Classroom Instruction:** Attendance(42), course syllabus(54), discriminatory grading(29), faculty absences(6), faculty office hours(6), final exams(12), grade appeals(68), grade change(34), grading standards(37), make-up work(36), personality conflicts(31), quality of instruction(34), teacher fluency(1), tutoring(10), other(6), policy issue(27)

**Faculty/Staff Performance:** Deceitfulness(65), derogatory comments(88), discrimination(41), favoritism(43), harassment(36), inaccurate advising(73), inattentiveness(129), incompetence(61), intimidation(63), retaliation(56), retention of tests/papers(17), rudeness(89), unprofessionalism(29), other(2)

**Employment:** Academic freedom(6), disciplinary action(23), discrimination(10), grievance(20), harassment(23), hearing(1), hiring process(16), inadequate staffing(4), insubordination(5), job classification(13), job description(8), job duties(23), layoff(1), morale(15), performance evaluation(28), personality conflicts(33), poor supervisory skills(35), probation(1), promotion(8), retirement(1), salary/benefits(8), separation(6), student employment(20), supervisor/employee relations(34), tenure(6), termination(19), union(1), work schedule(6), working conditions(6), work load(10), other(3), policy issue(23)

**Miscellaneous:** Athletics(7), career advising(24), disability accommodations(31), environmental issues(8), ethical considerations(59), FERPA(6), health concerns(69), immigration issues(7), interpersonal problems(39), legal issues(132), off-campus housing(34), off-campus problems(82), on-campus housing(60), parking issues(14), privacy issues(34), records retention(9), safety issues(25), shared governance(9), other(29), policy development(42), policy issue(13)

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Appendix A

Ombuds Staff Outreach, Service, and Support Activities of 2009-10

**Presentations by Ombudsman or Staff**
- CHANCE Orientation (9)
- DeKalb County “Women in Management” Organization
- Faculty Development Workshop (2)
- Graduate Council
- Graduate School Orientation
- International Student Orientation Panel
- “Mid-Semester Check” (2)
- Presidential Commission on the Status of Women
- Presentation to Residence Hall Floor Group (2)
- Supportive Professional Staff Council Grievance Committee
- Supportive Professional Staff Council Workshop
- Teaching Assistant Orientation
- Theatre Department Workshop
- University 101 and Other Classes (16)
- Veterans Affairs Task Force

**Office Outreach Activities**
- Benefits Choice Fair
- Employee Wellness Fair
- Facebook
- Housing Programming Fair
- Move-In Day
- New Faculty Forum
- New International Students Welcome Fair
- New Minority Student Reception
- Northern Neighborhood (new student orientation) (23)
- Orientation Resource Fair
- Office Flyers Posted on Campus Bulletin Boards and in Buses
- Table Tents in Residence Hall Cafeterias (2)
- Table Tents in Holmes Student Center Café
- Veterans Benefits Fair
- Holmes Student Center Window Display (2)

**Training Sessions Provided by Ombudsman**
- CAHC 211 Instructor Training (4)
- Housing Community Advisors Training
- Northern Star Staff Training (2)
- Orientation Leader Training
- Teaching Assistant Training
- Teaching Effectiveness Institute (2)
- UNIV-101 Instructor Training
- UNIV-101 Instructor Mentor Program
- UNIV-101 Syllabus Workshop

**Ombudsman Service/Committees**
- Advisor, Huskie Hockey Club
- Affirmative Action/Diversity Resources Advisory Committee
- Baccalaureate Review Committee
- Committee on the Undergraduate Academic Environment
- Faculty Senate
- First-Year Connections Advisory Board
- Foundations of Excellence Philosophy Committee
- Judicial Affairs Task Force
- Operating Staff Council
- Presidential Commission on Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity
- Presidential Commission on Sexual Orientation & Gender Identity Campus Services Committee
- Presidential Commission on the Status of Minorities
- Supportive Professional Staff Council
- Supportive Professional Staff Council Workplace Issues Committee
- University Council