

**Faculty Ombuds Program
Annual Report 2022-2023**

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Faculty Ombuds

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NORTHERN ARIZONA UNIVERSITY
Faculty Ombuds Program
Annual Report
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Highlights

- During the 2022-2023 academic year, there were 75 visits with the Faculty Ombuds, representing 51 unique visitors between August 6, 2022, and June 6, 2023. Note that this data reflects a 9-month period, rather than the 12-month period documented in the 2021-2022 Faculty Ombuds Report.
- The Faculty Ombuds worked with faculty from The NAU Mountain Campus, as well as NAU-Yuma, and NAU-Phoenix.
- Individual consultation was a large part of the Faculty Ombuds' work, including but not limited to, empathic listening, option generation, policy clarification, resource connection, issue framing and reframing, goal clarification, and research.
- In addition to individual consultation, third-party intervention, referral, navigational assistance, and facilitated conversation were utilized to support visitors.
- When appropriate, referrals were made to offices or persons on campus, such as: Equity and Access, Disability Resources, Human Resources, the Vice-Provost of Faculty Affairs, chairs, directors, individual college deans and Faculty Senate leadership.
- Visitors to the Faculty Ombuds brought diverse concerns. The most common concerns under the International Ombuds Association (IOA) uniform reporting categories were "Evaluative Relationships" and "Peer and Colleague Relationships." Other areas of note were related to "Career Progression and Development," "Values, Ethics, and Standards," and "Legal, Regulatory, Financial, and Compliance" issues. Many visitors' concerns and conflicts crossed more than one reporting category.
- During the 2022-2023 Academic Year, the Faculty Ombuds offered **five** formal workshops by invitation to various constituencies on topics such as: Conflict, Communication, and De-escalation; Understanding Bias; and Communicating through Conflict: Productive Written Communication. Additionally, the Faculty Ombuds presented during New Faculty Orientation in August 2022 and to the Council on Academic Professionals.

- The Faculty Ombuds attended the Southwest Ombuds Symposium in August 2022, a highlight of which was attending a talk and workshop on Navajo peacemaking by the Honorable Chief Justice Emeritus of the Navajo Nation, Robert Yazzie.
- In Spring 2023, the Faculty Ombuds presented the 2021-2022 Annual Report to the Faculty Senate Executive Committee, the Academic Chairs and Directors Council, and the Deans Council.
- The Faculty Ombuds met with various academic leaders and organizational stakeholders during the year to address general trends, and the myriad ways the university leadership and the Faculty Ombuds Program can support a positive campus climate for faculty and the larger NAU community.

Faculty Ombuds Program: History and Context

The Faculty Ombuds Program is uniquely situated on campus to support faculty and academic professionals as they navigate conflicts and challenges. The office supports de-escalation and informal dispute resolution, as highlighted in the Conditions of Faculty Service: “There are two options for informal dispute resolution: discussion with administrators in the chain of command and consultation with a member of the Faculty Ombuds Program.” (A.3.1)¹

In order to understand the role and significance of the Faculty Ombuds, one must be aware of the history of the program—its value and its precarity.

Academic year 2022-2023 marks the continuation of services provided to faculty at Northern Arizona University through the services of an ombuds. The first University Ombuds, Dr. Earl L. Backman, was appointed in 1993. The initial program served only faculty, but soon the Ombuds Office expanded to provide services to all segments of the university community. In 1998, a tenured faculty member, Dr. Gary Buckley, was appointed to direct the University Ombuds Program, and it further expanded to include two additional ombuds and a full-time administrative assistant. For three years, this four-person staff served 600-700 visitors on an annual basis and facilitated 20-30 outreach events each year that included leadership trainings, workgroup retreat functions, interpersonal communication workshops and supervisory training. During this time, services were available to faculty, classified staff, students, and outside parties in their dealings with university personnel.

¹ <https://nau.edu/wp-content/uploads/sites/26/NAU-Conditions-of-Faculty-Service-DOCUMENT.pdf>

Due to budgetary concerns, funding to the Ombuds program was reduced in 2003, which resulted in staff cuts and limits on the scope of services. The University Ombuds Program was eliminated in March 2004. Services were not offered at all from 2004-2006.²

In 2005, an Academic Chairs Council Task Force assessed the value of, and reaffirmed the need for, ombuds services on campus, recommending the restoration of an ombuds program that served all members of the NAU community. The Faculty Ombuds Program in its present form was re-established in 2006 with Dr. Gary Buckley in a half-time position, with services offered only to faculty. The new Faculty Ombuds Program (FOP) moved from the Office of the President to the Office of the Provost, where it remains.

In 2007, The Classified Staff Advisory and the Service Professional Advisory councils formed a joint taskforce to assess the need for a campus-wide alternative dispute resolution program, and recommended opening ombuds services for staff that could include mediation and supervisor training. Due to budgetary concerns, their recommendations were not implemented.

After Dr. Buckley retired, Dr. Phoebe Morgan served as the Faculty Ombuds from 2008-2011, succeeded by Dr. Michael Ketterer who served as Faculty Ombuds from 2011-2013. Dr. Eugene Moan assumed the position in the summer of 2013 and served through the 2017-2018 academic year. Beginning in Fall 2018, Dr. Bruce Fox took over the role of Faculty Ombuds, serving until May 2020. The position was vacant through Summer 2020.

In September 2020, Dr. Monica Brown was named Faculty Ombuds. Her first term was an official nine-month appointment. Based on recommendations provided in the 2020-2021 Faculty Ombuds Report, her second and third terms in 2021-2022 & 2022-2023 were ten-month appointments. Services were offered year-round from Fall 2021 to the present.

Present Status of the Faculty Ombuds Program

Ombuds services are available to all full-time and part-time faculty and academic professionals whether based on the Mountain Campus or at other locations. Dr. Monica Brown serves as Faculty Ombuds in a ten-month, half-time appointment. The total number of unique visitors between August 6, 2022, and June 6, 2023, represents an 88.9% increase from what was reported for the twelve-month period between 2017-2018.

The program office is located in HLC 4101. In 2022-2023, in-person meetings mainly took place in the Faculty Ombuds Program office. Other meetings and communications with faculty took place virtually and at a distance via Zoom, Facetime, telephone calls, texts, and, of course, emails, in part due to lingering COVID-19 concerns and faculty interest. All facilitated conversations took place in person, as well as four out of the five workshops delivered.

² For an excellent, in-depth analysis of the closure of the University Ombuds Office at Northern Arizona University, see Buckley, Gary J., "When the Worst Happens: Lessons of an Ombuds Office Closure," *The Journal*, vol. 6, no. 1, pp. 29-34.

Services of the Faculty Ombuds Program are offered under the Code of Ethics and Standards of Practice of the International Ombudsman Association (IOA), of which Dr. Brown is a member in good standing. These services, as noted in the NAU FOP Charter, follow the IOA principles of:

Independence

The Faculty Ombuds is independent in structure, function, and appearance to the highest degree possible within the organization and functions outside usual university channels. This means that in the legitimate performance of their duties, the Faculty Ombuds shall be free from interference, retaliation, or the control of others outside the Faculty Ombuds Program.

Neutrality and Impartiality

The Ombuds, as a designated neutral, strives for impartiality, fairness and objectivity in the treatment of people and the consideration of issues. The Faculty Ombuds does not serve as an advocate for an individual or for the university. Rather, the Faculty Ombuds strives to uphold workplace principles (such as a fair process) in the resolution of problems. Upholding an important workplace principle may mean that suggestions are made to the Provost (or other appropriate university administrators) for considering change to university processes or procedures.

Confidentiality

The Ombuds holds all communications with those seeking assistance in strict confidence and does not disclose confidential communications unless given permission to do so. Exceptions to the principle of confidentiality include when an ombuds a) believes there is a reasonable risk of serious personal injury to anyone or future criminal activity, b) has knowledge of past criminal activity, or c) where information is legally required to be disclosed.

Informality

Communications with an ombuds and the Faculty Ombuds Program are informal and off-the-record. They do not constitute formal “notice” to Northern Arizona University of alleged, actual, or perceived inappropriate behavior by NAU employees. Other channels exist within the University for such notice to be given and will be discussed by an ombuds as appropriate or when requested.

The Ombuds, as an informal resource, does not participate in any formal adjudicative or administrative procedure related to concerns brought to their attention, nor do they keep formal written records. All visitors to the Faculty Ombuds come voluntarily.

Faculty Ombuds

Dr. Brown is a full professor in the Department of English where she teaches Latinx, African American, and U.S. Multi-Ethnic literature. She is the author of a scholarly book on Puerto Rican, Chicano, and Chicana narratives (U of Minnesota P) and scholarly articles/book chapters

in her field. She is also the author of over thirty books written for children. Dr. Brown is a former Co-chair of NAU's Commission on Ethnic Diversity and has served on the Ethnic Studies Steering Committee, the Women and Gender Studies Steering Committee, and The Commission for Disability Access and Design. Dr. Brown has formal training in mediation, bias, and bystander intervention. In addition to her collaborative work in academic contexts, Dr. Brown brings to the role of Faculty Ombuds a wealth of experience working within the publishing world, where contract negotiations, complex relationships, and power differentials are at play. She has worked in the role of author, mentor, and advocate for underrepresented writers.

Nationally and internationally, Dr. Brown has worked with the Freedom to Read Foundation, Latinx in Publishing, and Las Musas Writer's Collective, where she served on the Community Standards Committee and helped develop a Standards of Conduct document for this rapidly growing organization. She has served as visiting specialist for the U.S. State Department via the U.S. Embassies in Panama, Peru, and Chile, and is the recipient of a Rockefeller Foundation Fellowship for Chicano Cultural Literacies, a Valle del Sol Award, a Victoria Foundation Award, two Américas Awards, and Christopher Award, among others. Most recently Dr. Brown served as Co-PI on two grants, the A.P. Sloan-funded "Multi-Institutional Transformation and Graduate Student Support Initiative (MITSI): Building Bridges and Transforming Institutions to Support Graduate STEM Education for Indigenous and Latinx Students" (Propper, Antoninka, Castagno, and Brown) and "Priming the STEM PhD Pathway: Equity-centered faculty as key stakeholders in BIPOC graduate student success initiatives" (Castagno, Brown, Antoninka, and Propper) funded by Genentech. She co-developed and led the inaugural Anti-racist Equity-oriented Community of Practice for STEM educators at NAU and has served as a new faculty mentor for Faculty Development.

Faculty Ombuds' Activities

The following represents activities taking place between August 6, 2022, and June 6, 2023:

Visitors

As highlighted above, there were 75 contacts with the Faculty Ombuds, representing 51 unique visitors during a nine-month period (August 2022-June 2023) (See Figure 1). This represents a 31.2 % decrease in total contacts and a 38.6 % decrease in unique visitors from the previous twelve-month period over the last academic year (2021-2022). The decrease in visitors to the Faculty Ombuds office, could be attributed in significant part to the statistics representing a period of 9 months rather than the 12-month period represented in the 2021-2022 report.

Also worth noting in relation to utilization of services: the Faculty Ombuds did not present to the full Faculty Senate in Fall 2022, as she did the previous year, due to a full senate agenda and the delayed public release of the 2021-2022 Faculty Ombuds Report. In addition, due to the period of transition in the Vice-Provost's Office, the faculty Ombuds was not scheduled to participate in the new academic leader orientation, as she was during the previous year. Both of these factors may have impacted outreach and the visibility of the office.

On a positive note, even accounting for the shorter data collection period, the Faculty Ombuds notes that this slight decrease in visitors may be part of an overall positive trend in the campus climate, with faculty members seeking numerous avenues for support via mentors, formal and informal communities of practice, Employee Assistance and Wellness, and other campus resources, as well as a decreased fear of retaliation for sharing concerns with their academic leaders.

Of the total 51 unique visitors, 29 were tenure-track; 13 were career-track; 6 were staff; 2 were students; and 1 was “other” (See Figure 2).

These numbers do **not** represent contacts made with faculty and faculty administrators via workshop attendance, new academic leader training, new faculty orientation, informal conversations, or the Q & A sessions following Faculty Ombuds introductory presentations to groups across campus. Also not included in total contacts are conversations and third-party interventions with key campus leaders in response to concerns (shared with permission) and/or trends.

Overall, in 2022-2023 the total number of unique visitors represents a high utilization of services provided by the Faculty Ombuds Program and represents an 88.9% increase since 2017-2018 (See Figure 3).

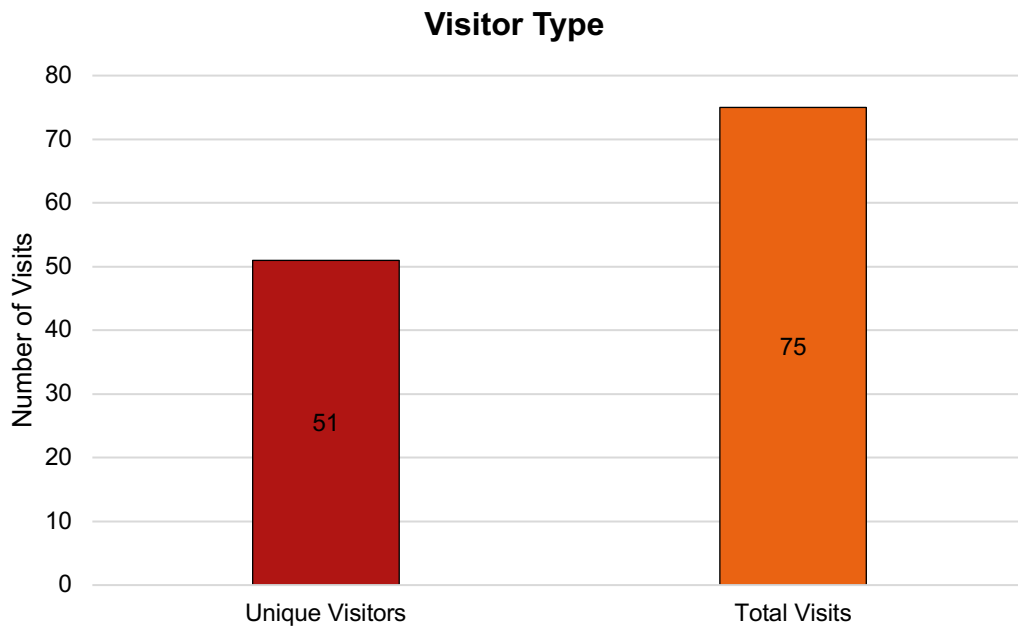


Figure 1. Visitor Types (2022-2023)

Unique Visitor Types

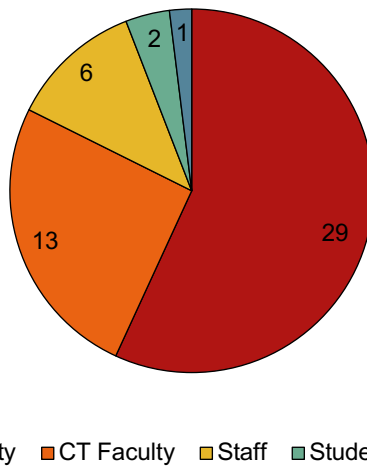
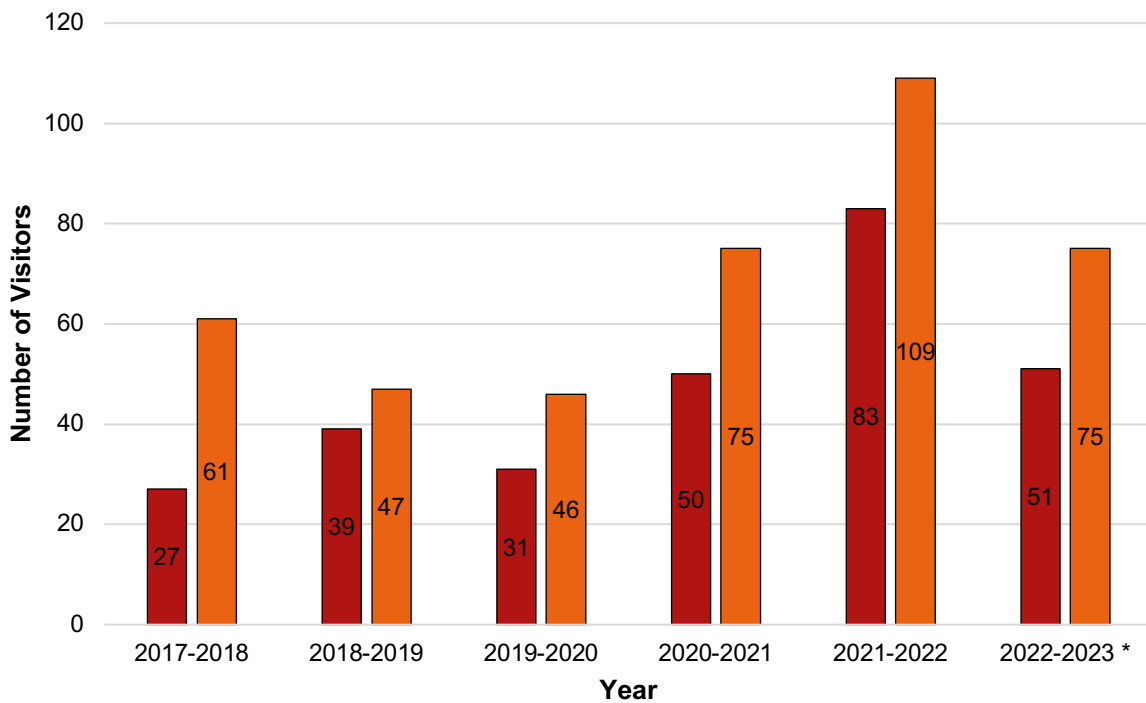


Figure 2. Unique Visitor Category Breakdown (2022-2023)

Number of Unique and Total Visitors Over the Last Six Years



*Please Note: The data displayed for the 2022-2023 academic year is the number of visits over a nine-month period, and the data demonstrated from 2017-2022 is over a 12-month period.

■ Unique Visitors ■ Total Visitors

Figure 3. Visitors Over the Last Six Years

Presenting Issues

There was great overlap in several of the International Ombudsman Association (IOA) Uniform Reporting Categories. For example, it was rare for someone to bring forth a concern about “Career Progression and Development” without discussing “Evaluative Relationships.” Additionally, issues related to diversity, equity, and inclusion have contributed to conflict that falls under multiple categories. Using IOA Uniform Reporting Categories, “diversity-related issues” are located in “Evaluative Relationships” and “Peer and Colleague Relationships” categories, but where appropriate, they were included in “Organizational, Strategic, and Mission Related” as well as “Values, Ethics, and Standards,” and “Legal, Regulatory, Financial, and Compliance.” (See Figure 4).

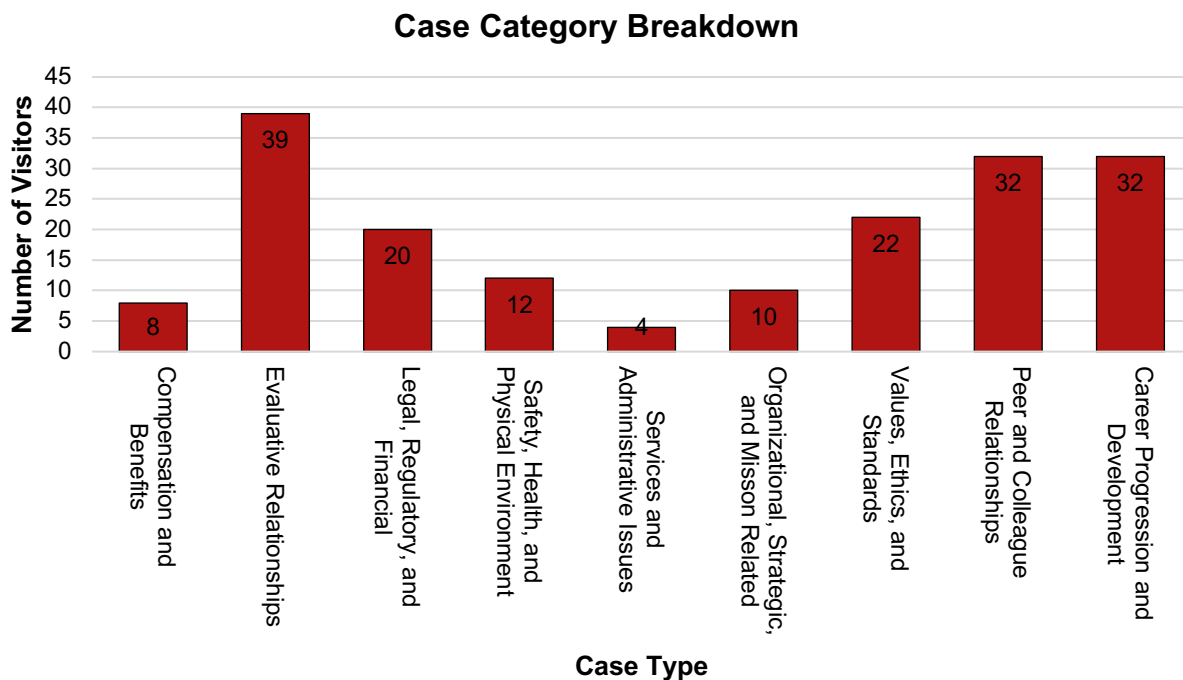


Figure 4. Case Category Breakdown

Other Activities of the Faculty Ombuds

The Faculty Ombuds offered **five** workshops during AY 2022-23, by invitation: she facilitated a **Conflict, Communication and De-escalation Workshop** for the NAU Center for Volunteerism state leadership team; a **Conflict and Communication Workshop** to the School of Nursing Faculty; an **Understanding Bias Workshop** to NAU Intramural Grants Committee; a **Communicating through Conflict: Productive Written Communication** to new faculty in Productive Beginnings; and a **Conflict and Communication Workshop** to the Academic Operations and Technology Team. Additionally, the Faculty Ombuds presented during New

Faculty Orientation in Fall 2022 and to the FSEC, Deans Council, and Academic Chairs and Directors Council in Spring 2023.

The Faculty Ombuds was a member of the International Ombuds Association and the Southwest Ombuds Group, and in support of further professional development, attended the Southwest Ombuds Symposium in August 2022. This symposium included a talk and workshop on Navajo peacemaking by the Honorable Chief Justice Emeritus of the Navajo Nation, Robert Yazzie. In addition, the symposium was an excellent opportunity to learn from, and dialogue with, other university ombuds from across the Southwest.

During AY 2022-2023, the Faculty Ombuds held meetings with key stakeholders on campus, including Provost Pugliesi, Vice-Provost Watwood, and Vice-Provost Bounds, among others, to discuss general issues and trends having a systemic impact on campus climate at NAU. In addition, the Faculty Ombuds attended the Academic Leadership Council and Summit meetings on a regular basis.

Trends and Implications

2022-2023 was a period of dynamism and change on the NAU campus. Our faculty sought empowering solutions to problems and expressed the desire to create a positive workplace environment to better serve NAU's students, and in support of their own research, scholarship, creative output, and service. Some visitors sought coaching to handle a sensitive issue, some were considering filing a formal complaint, some felt bullied or harassed, most felt unfairly treated, and all wanted a safe place to talk through their concerns, generate informal solutions, and understand the options available to them.

The most significant trend in 2022-2023 was as follows:

Faculty continued to bring "Legal, Regulatory, Financial, and Compliance" and "Peer and Colleague Relationships" issues to the Faculty Ombuds. These concerns included non-discrimination and harassment policies, mandatory reporting questions, policy concerns, and equity issues in relation to colleagues, supervisors, and students (especially graduate students). Issues related to perceptions of discrimination, harassment, or bullying often intersected with other IOA's reporting categories such as "Evaluative Relationships." Faculty and academic leaders continued to seek clarity and navigational assistance in terms of referral, university policies, and grievance processes at various offices on campus, such as Equity and Access, Human Resources, and the supervisory chain.

Goals and Vision for the 2023-2024 Academic Year

Upon completion of her three-year commitment, Monica Brown is stepping down from the position to take her first sabbatical in a decade. She has been deeply honored to serve her community of twenty-four years and her primary goal is to support a positive and productive transition for the new Faculty Ombuds, when named. It is her hope that the new Faculty Ombuds

can build upon the work of the last few years, continue to raise the profile of the office, and to expand services offered, most immediately to include graduate students. She hopes that the Faculty Ombuds Program will continue to be a safe space that welcomes faculty (and in the near future, students, and staff) from a diversity of backgrounds, as the work of the Faculty Ombuds directly supports the vision, mission, and values of Northern Arizona University.

General goals for AY 2023-2024 in keeping with the NAU Ombuds Program Charter might include:

- Provide timely and high-quality service to members of the NAU faculty and academic professionals in support of informal conflict resolution through individual consultations, facilitated conversations, referral, and/or third-party intervention.
- Provide a neutral, confidential, informal, and independent safe space for faculty and faculty administrators to talk through their concerns, clarify their goals, explore their options, referrals, and support interest-based solutions to conflicts.
- Support university leadership in proactively addressing issues that extend beyond individual visitors, and that have a broad, systemic, and negative impact on the NAU community.
- Develop workshops for faculty and faculty administrators, in support of cultivating stronger communication and conflict-resolution skills. Work to advance an inclusive campus community with a culture of cooperative problem-solving.
- Pursue professional development and education as an Ombuds, through the International Ombuds Association, webinars, ongoing mentoring, courses, and/or conferences.
- Elevate awareness about the Faculty Ombuds Program as a resource available to all full- and part-time faculty and academic professionals across all NAU campuses and programs.
- Continue to uphold and work under the IOA Standards of Practice and Code of Ethics <https://www.ombudsassociation.org/standards-of-practice-code-of-ethics>.