



**Faculty Ombuds Program
Annual Report 2019-2020**

**Prepared by
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February 2021

Summary

- During the 2019-2020 academic year forty-six (46) total contacts were made with the Faculty Ombuds Program (FOP) representing thirty-one (31) unique individuals. The total number of visitors to the FOP decreased from 2018-2019 (47) as did the number of unique visitors (from 39 to 31). Of the 46 total visits, 44 were faculty, with two “unknowns”.
- The 2019-2020 total faculty contacts was over the long-term average (since fall 2013) of 41.
- The largest category of visitors were faculty (94%), comparable to the 2018-2019 percentage of 89%. However, the distribution of faculty changed from 2018-2019 (45% tenure/tenure track and 55% non-tenure track) to 2019-2020’s 52% and 39%, respectively.
- Evaluative Relationships were the most common presenting concern brought to the Program. This contrasts with all other previous years where Peer and Colleague Relationships were the largest concern.
- Individual consultation was the primary intervention. In most cases, problem-solving strategies or clarification of university policies were the main forms of service offered (56%). These numbers are similar to those in previous Annual Reports.

History of the Faculty Ombudsman Program at Northern Arizona University

Academic year 2019-2020 marks the continuation of services provided to faculty through the services of an Ombudsman. Northern Arizona University has offered these services to various constituencies for over twenty years. The initial program served faculty only but over time, the Ombudsman Office expanded to provide services to all segments of the university community. The scope of services offered eventually reached its apex during the 1999-2000 academic year when nearly 700 contacts were made with the office, which was staffed by two full-time ombudsmen, one full-time staff member, and a cadre of faculty volunteers who were trained in mediation techniques and who were assigned to mediate faculty disputes. During this time services were available to faculty, classified staff, students, and outside parties in their dealings with university personnel. Due to budgetary and other concerns, funding to the Ombuds program was reduced which resulted in staff reductions and limits on the scope of services. Ombuds services were not offered at all from 2004-2006. The Faculty Ombuds Program in its present form was re-established in 2006 with a half-time position under the direction of Dr. Gary Buckley. The Faculty Ombuds Program (FOP) is funded through the Provost's Office. Dr. Phoebe Morgan served as the Coordinator of the program from 2008-2011, succeeded by Dr. Michael Ketterer who served as coordinator from 2011-2013. Dr. Eugene Moan, assumed the coordinator position in the summer of 2013 and served through the 2017-2018 academic year. Beginning with the start of the Fall 2018 semester Dr. Bruce Fox took over the role of Coordinator of the FOP.

Present Status of the Faculty Ombuds Program

The coordinator's position continues as a half-time appointment. Services are available to all full-time and part-time faculty whether based on the Mountain Campus or at other locations. The program office is located in room 230 of Peterson Hall, a private location outside of the main flow of university traffic. With Dr. Moan's retirement in 2018, Dr. Bruce Fox became coordinator of the program. Dr. Fox is a tenured full professor in the School of Forestry in the College of Forestry, Environment, and Natural Sciences and has been employed in various teaching, administrative, and service roles at NAU since 1985. Dr. Fox has served in multiple administrative and service positions during his time at NAU. Previously held include chair of the School of Forestry, Director of the Honors Program, and Director of the Master of Administration Program. He has been a member of the Faculty Senate and served as president of the group from 2015-2017. He is a current member of the Commission on the Status of Women. He has previous training in mediation and completed Ombudsman training through the International Ombudsman Association in the summer of 2018. He left the position during the Summer of 2020.

Services of the Faculty Ombuds Program continue to be offered under the Standards of Practice of the International Ombudsman Association (IOA). These services follow the IOA tenets of:

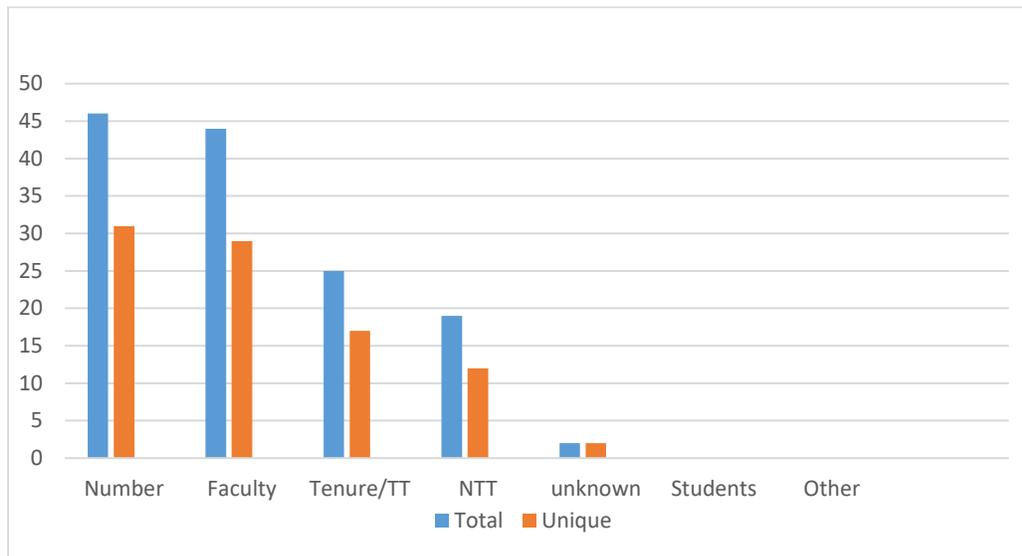
- **Neutrality.** Not advocating for a person or outcome but rather advocating for a fair process in all situations
- **Informality.** Concerns addressed outside of other processes of record (such as the Equity and Access office, etc.)
- **Confidentiality.** Unless waived by the party seeking services or if an eminent threat exists that would disrupt the safety of the university community, confidentiality is maintained.
- **Independence.** The Coordinator functions outside of the usual university administrative channels

Recipients of services through the FOP come voluntarily. The Coordinator has no power to demand that any party participate in services offered. The FOP is not an office of record and no written notes concerning the issues presented by any visitor to the office are kept. The Annual Report is the only documentation of services provided through the FOP during a given academic year.

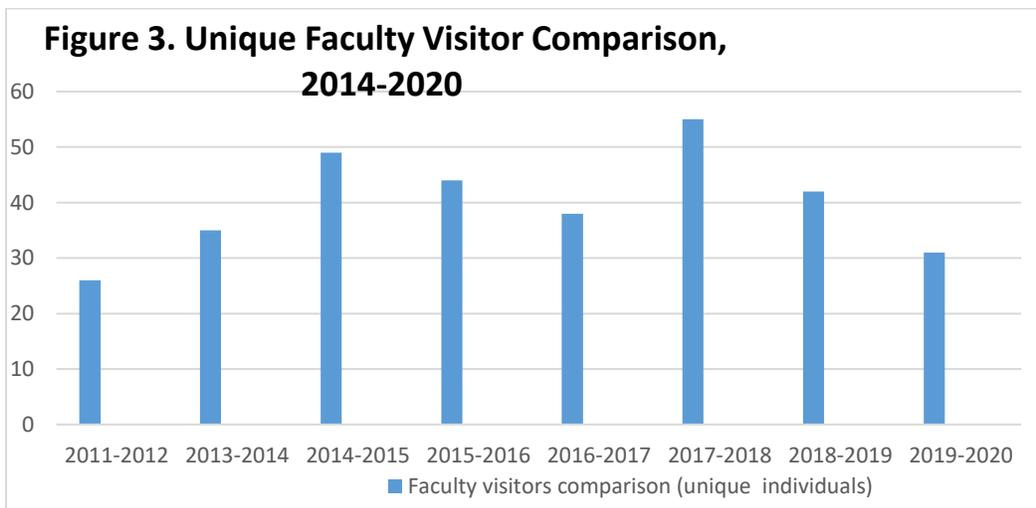
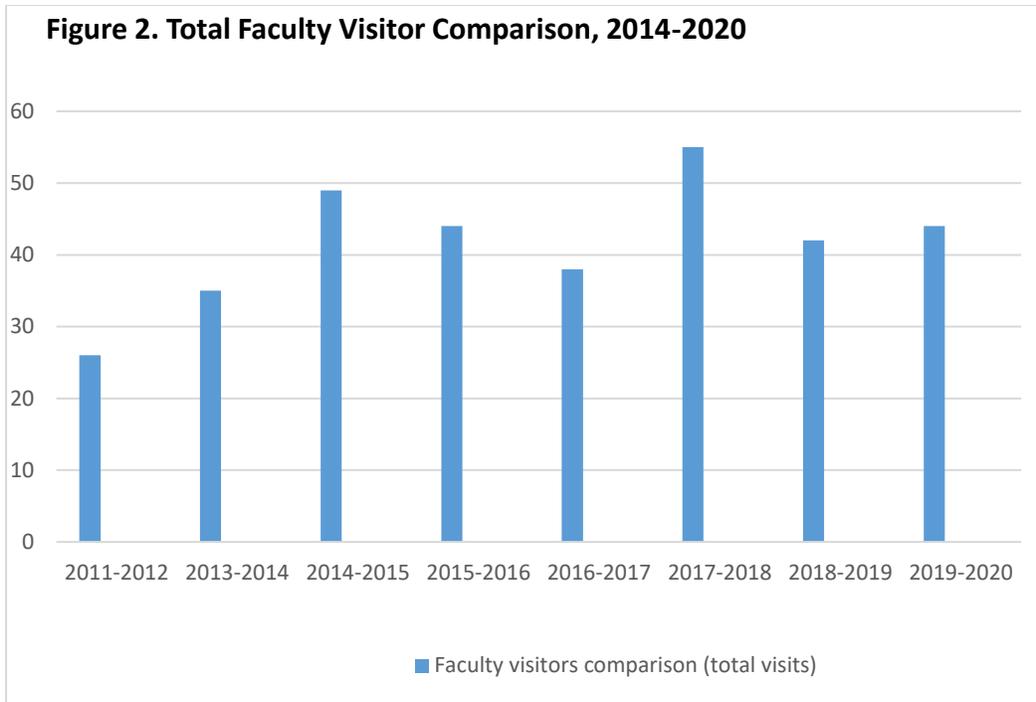
Faculty Ombuds Office Activities 2019-2020

During the Fall 2019 and first part of the Spring 2020 semester I kept regular office hours at the Programs' office in Peterson Hall but during the latter half of the Spring 2020 semester regular office hours were not held there due to the great uncertainty associated with the Covid-19 outbreak. Instead, inquiries were directed thru the Ombuds telephone number and e-mail that I monitored on a regular basis with the goal of returning all inquiries within one business day. During both semesters individual appointments were made. During the spring most such appointments were held in my office in forestry. Although not ideal, the arrangement seemed to work. Over the course of the 2019-2020 academic year, forty-six (46) total contacts were made with the FOP representing thirty (31) unique individuals (Figure 1). All but two visitors were faculty members with approximately 52% tenured/tenure track faculty and non-tenured track 39%.

Figure 1. Total Faculty Ombuds Visitors, 2019-2020



Total visitation and total faculty visitation fell between 2018-2019 and 2019-2020. Total visitation dropped from 47 to 46 but faculty visitation increased slightly from 42 to 44 (Figure 2). However, total visitation was over the long-term average (41) of all other previous years. The number of unique faculty visitors followed similar trends (Figure 3). The onset of the Covid-19 pandemic essentially put a halt to the operation of the Ombuds office starting in March 2020 as faculty focused on the “pivot” for course delivery. In addition, in the previous two years some 30% of the visitation to the office occurred during the months of May-August. The Ombuds position was unoccupied during this May-August 2020 period and thus the comparable numbers are based on different time periods. No attempts have been made here to extrapolate the available 2019-2020 data to a full calendar year basis.



In 2019-2020 approximately 52% of the total visits were from tenured/tenure track faculty, with 39% from non-tenured faculty. This is a reverse of the percentages from 2018-2019 when approximately 45% of the visits were from tenured/tenure track faculty, with the remaining 55% from non-tenured faculty

Although services are not provided to parties other than faculty, contacts continue to be made with the FOP from various concerned parties. This is consistent with observations made in previous annual reports. In cases of contact from persons who were not faculty, the concerns of the visitor were noted and referrals to other resources made. Nonfaculty (and or unknown) visits totaled two during 2019-2020.

Comparison to Other Institutions

Information regarding the scope of ombuds services and utilization patterns at other academic institutions is difficult to obtain. Such information may be contained in the annual reports of the Ombuds offices but direct comparisons are difficult to make due to a number of variables. Some university Ombuds offices serve only faculty while others serve the entire university community. Some offices operate on a full-time basis and have multiple staff while others such as ours at NAU have only one part-time ombudsman.

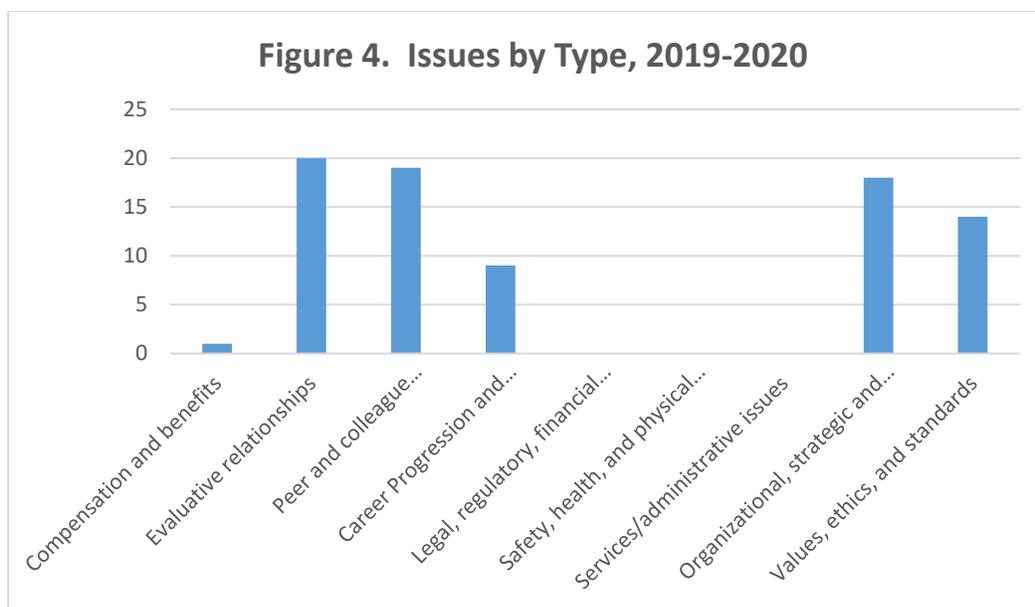
Despite these limitations, the Ombudsman's Office of the University of South Carolina has conducted an informal survey of ombuds programs at Carnegie Foundation Tier I institutions for the past ten years. This report states that in a sample of thirty-six schools, the number of faculty visitors per year to the ombuds offices averages 53.7. (University Ombudsman Annual Report-University of South Carolina. Retrieved February 7, 2021 at: [University of South Carolina Ombuds Annual report 2017-2018](#)). NAU data for the 2014-2020 period reveals an average of forty-one (41) visitors per year, a number lower than Ombuds office visitation compared to other institutions.

Issues of Diversity

Nearly all initial contacts with the FOP are made by telephone and a portion of these visitors were only provided services (including follow-up) through telephonic communications. No demographic information or any other form of written record is made of their contact with the FOP. Therefore, no data exists. This is in keeping with the confidential provisions of the Standards of Practice of the International Ombudsman Association (IOA). Individuals are only asked about their status as a faculty member to ensure that those receiving services fall within the charge of the program.

Presenting Issues

The presenting issues of faculty and administrators who made contact with the FOP were identified and recorded using the standardized classification system of the International Ombudsman Association. A comparison of presenting concerns is seen in Figure 4. The numbers in this chart exceed the total number of visitors because many visitors mention multiple concerns during the contact with the office.

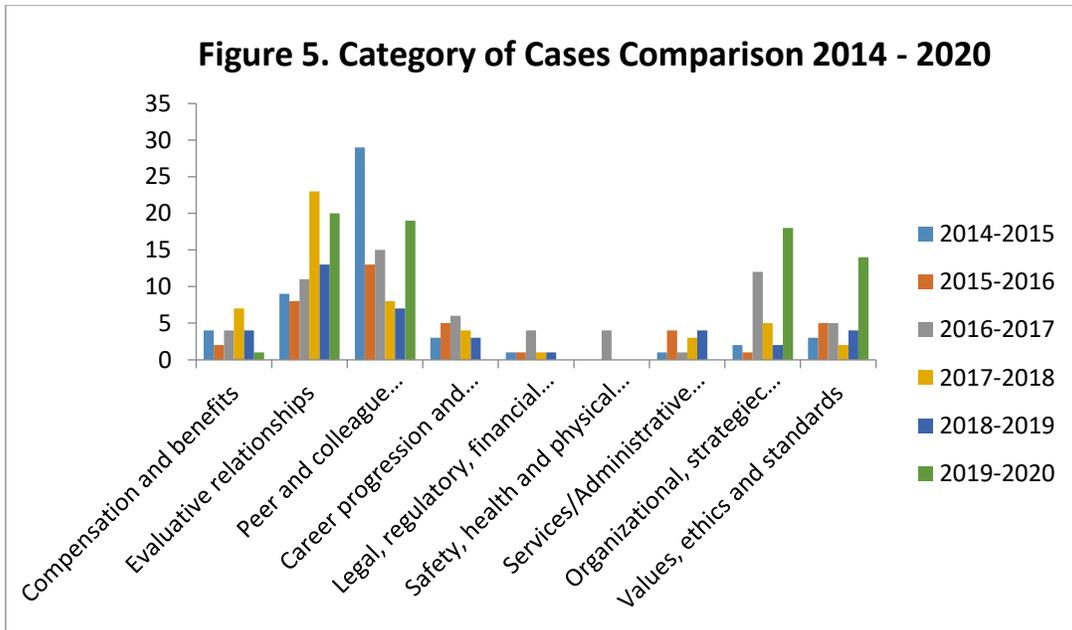


The largest category of concern continues to involve “Evaluative Processes and Relationships,” closely followed by “Peer and Colleague Interactions”. In the first category, the majority of the concerns involved the visitor’s perception of them receiving unfair treatment in terms of course assignments, compensation, and promotion and tenure evaluations. Resolution of these cases generally involved clarifying personnel policies and procedures.

With respect to “Peer and Colleague Interactions”, the majority of the concerns involved visitor perception that they were being treated in an uncivil manner by another member of the university community (faculty, staff, or administrators). Here, the concerns were usually addressed by either a problem-solving session involving the visitor who could then decide on a course of action or with a facilitated conversation with the affected parties.

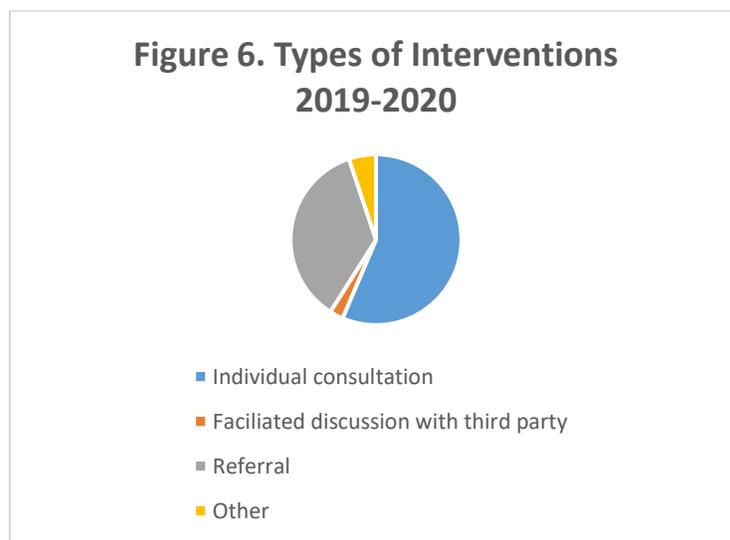
This past year found a marked increase in concerns related to “Organizational, Strategic, and Mission” and even more so for “Values, Ethics, and Standards”.

Although with some variation across the years, since the 2014-2015 academic year, “Evaluative Relationships” and “Peer and Colleague Relationships” have consistently been the areas where most of the visitors concerns focused (Figure 5). However, as noted above concerns related to “Organizational, Strategic, and Mission” and even more so for “Values, Ethics, and Standards” increased markedly this past year. For former, the 2019-2020 values reflect a 4-fold increase over the average for the previous 5 years, and for the latter, the 2019-2020 values reflect over 3.5 times the average for the previous 5 years.

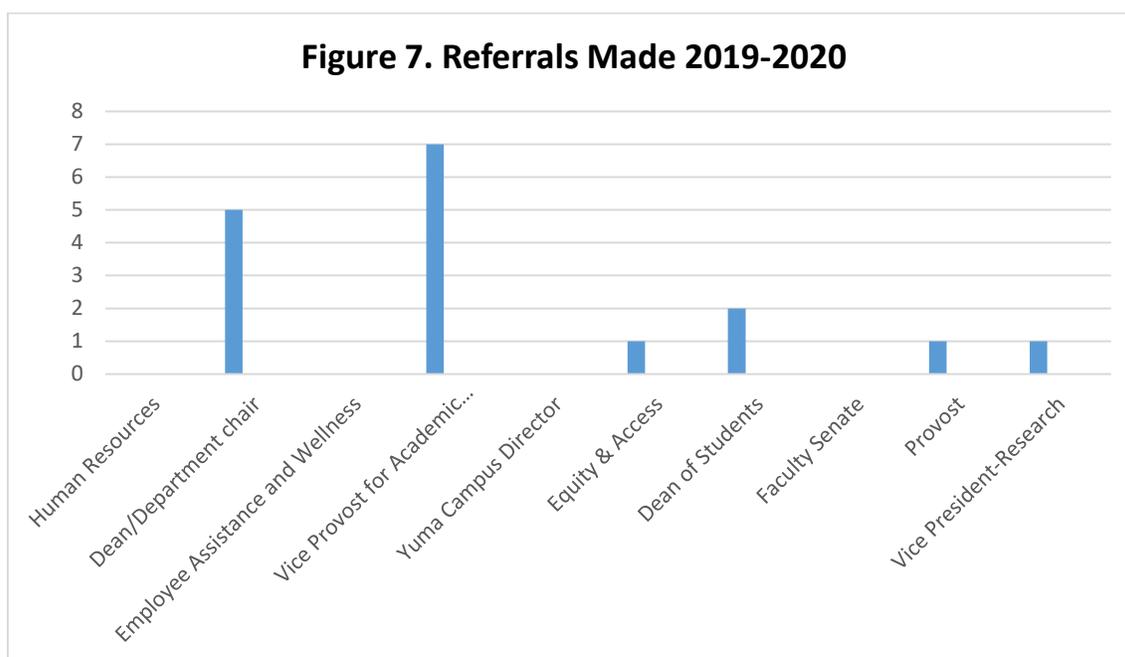


Interventions

The FOP provides a variety of strategies and assistance for visitors. During 2019-2020 “Individual Consultations” and “Referrals” were the most frequently used strategies (Figure 6). Oftentimes visitors needed an opportunity to “think out loud” with a neutral party and then then some direction and assistance in find resources that would help them address the issues at hand.



Referral to other campus resources was recommended in seventeen (17) cases (Figure 7). The most common referrals were to Chair/Dean and the Vice Provost for Academic Personnel.



Trends and Implications

As has been the case for the past seven years, the majority of visitor concerns focus on issues that involve interactions with others in the work setting, including evaluative relationships. This includes both peers and those to whom the faculty member reports such as department chairs and deans of colleges.

The issue of career progression had been an increasingly cited reason for faculty visitors to seek services of the FOP. However, not this year. Instead, the concerns related to Organizational/Strategic/Mission oriented concerns and those related to Values, Ethics, and Standards took dramatic increases. No speculation here about the causes of these increases is offered here.

Non-faculty members of the university community continue to contact the Program, but in small numbers. In these cases, referral to other appropriate offices is made. Follow-up appointments are not provided. These contacts point to the need for a centralized point of contact to help all members of the university community find the appropriate resources to address their concerns.

In previous years, contacts with the Program occurred outside of the academic year. In 2018-2019 approximately 30% of the visits happened outside the academic year. These contacts should not be ignored as they represent issues that faculty want to address before too much

time has passed. During the immediate past summer, the Ombuds Coordinator position was unoccupied and thus no record of visitation was made.

The FOP continues to be a valuable resource to the university. Utilization of the services of the program has risen moderately but consistently over the past several years. The majority of the faculty visitors are full-time faculty.

Goals for 2019-2020

- Continue to provide high quality services to members of the NAU faculty. Return all messages left with the Office within 24 hours except on weekends and holidays.
- Update the FOP website as necessary.
- Expand outreach activities to inform faculty about the services of the FOP. Regular activities will include a presentation to the Faculty Senate, distribution of this report as appropriate and posting of the report on the Ombuds homepage, brown bag presentations on issues of importance to faculty at least once each semester, and continued coordination with other campus resources to ensure effective referral to the FOP when an appropriate service can be provided. Outreach efforts were the biggest source of disappointment for me. This needs to be a higher priority of my work for this coming year.
- Increased workshop presentations, in part through collaboration with the Office of Faculty Development and the New Beginnings program, will be conducted during the coming year. The goal is to have at least two workshop presentations during each semester of the coming year.
- Achieve better outreach to NAUYuma and other faculty not located on the Mountain Campus (*e.g.* the Phoenix Biomedical Campus).
- Continued involvement with both the statewide Ombuds group and the International Ombuds Association (AOI) will provide for networking, consultation, and support from Ombudsmen at other institutions. This is especially important to the operation of the NAU Faculty Ombuds Program since there is no direct colleague or associate in the present organizational structure of the FOP.
- Improve the format and timeliness of the progress report.

Summary

It was my honor and pleasure to serve as the coordinator of the FOP for the 2019-2020 academic year. Having the opportunity to assist faculty in finding solutions to complex problems is a challenging and rewarding task. As coordinator, I appreciate the cooperation and support of faculty leaders in the university who have participated in discussions of issues brought to their attention.