



Office of the University Ombuds

2023-2024 Annual Report

Presented by

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and

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Executive Summary: Highlights and Accomplishments

- The Ombuds Office expanded to offer services to **staff and graduate students**, in addition to faculty, starting 2023-2024.
- There were **209 appointments** made with the Ombuds Office comprised of faculty, staff, and graduate students.
 - 86 faculty (70 faculty and 16 faculty administrators/supervisors) (41.15%)
 - 84 staff members (69 staff and 15 supervisory staff) (40.2%)
 - 35 graduate students (16.75%)
 - 4 visitors whose title did not correspond to the main categories (e.g., parent, outside NAU entity, etc.) (1.9%)
- The largest concern brought to the office involved **evaluative relationships (N=526, 70%)** followed by **peer relationships (N=71, 10%)**.
- The Ombuds Office **expanded its physical space** to include a conference room (Health and Learning Center, room 4102) to accommodate larger groups of visitors. Visitors can now meet in rooms 4101 and 4102.
- The Ombuds Office conducted **4 formal mediations / facilitated conversations** with parties / offices interested in improving internal relations.
- The Ombuds Office conducted **5 consensus-building workshops** using the Technology of Participation (ToP) facilitation method for departments on campus.
- **New marketing materials** were produced and distributed regarding services offered by the Ombuds Office. These materials were created in collaboration with the NAU Visual Design Lab (VDL) in the School of Communication.
- The Ombuds **held over 15 presentations about the office to college, department or institute** groups on campus, and met with numerous individuals across campus.
- The Ombuds provided **conflict and communication workshops** within existing programs (e.g., ASCEND and Employee Development Days) as well as individual and/or department requests for training.
- Dr. Umphrey attended the International Ombuds Association conference in Atlanta, GA in March 2024 and **presented a workshop** entitled, *“Defensive Communication and Threats to Identity: Reshaping Our Communication Choices.”* There were over 200 Ombuds in the audience.

Introduction

The purpose and mission of the NAU University Ombuds Program is to enhance an ethical, supportive, and responsive culture for faculty, staff, and graduate students by providing confidential, independent, impartial, and informal conflict resolution coaching services, mediation and group facilitation services, and tailored instructional workshops to address concerns affecting their work, life, or study at NAU.

The NAU Ombuds Program follows the [Standards of Practice](#) and the [IOA Code of Ethics](#) of the [International Ombuds Association](#).

NAU Ombuds Program History and Context

The academic year 2023-2024 marks a renewed commitment by the Office of the Provost to expand the services and capacities of the Ombuds Office. In July 2023, Dr. Laura Umphrey (Professor, School of Communication) was appointed as Director of the Office of the University Ombuds (University Ombuds Office) with a 60% administrative assignment. Dr. KT Thompson (Associate Professor, English) was appointed as Assistant Director at 40%. They provide faculty, staff, and graduate students across NAU, including Flagstaff Mountain and all remote campuses, *confidential, informal, impartial, and independent* conflict resolution services.

History

Since the inception of the Ombuds at NAU in 1993, the office has contracted and expanded as needs and budgets are assessed. Dr. Earl L. Backman was appointed as the university's first ombuds in 1993, serving faculty. Beginning in 1996, services were extended to students, with the appointment of Julie French-Bloomfield and Mary Marceau. Marceau served as Ombuds for *The Lumberjack*, while French-Bloomfield worked with students more broadly. As French-Bloomfield writes in the February 12-18, 1997 issue of *The Lumberjack*, "All the other college and university ombuds offices we know of serve students. We thought it was time to get on board." In 1996, Pam Heinonen joined the Ombuds Office, and along with Dr. Backman, worked primarily with faculty and staff. Heinonen also developed a mediation program that ran from 1997-2003. From 1998-2004, Dr. Gary Buckley (Political Science) directed the Ombuds Office, with a four-person staff that served between 600-700 visitors each year, and facilitated 20-30 outreach events, including leadership trainings, retreats, interpersonal communication workshops, and supervisory training. Dr. Buckley describes the office in the journal of the California Caucus of College and University Ombuds: "The Ombuds Office was provided with a suite of modern offices in the university's refurbished Old Main Building. While the offices were

centrally located and easily accessible to all, the location was in a part of the building which allowed for discreet entry and departure of visitors.”^[1]

After a robust and active period, the Ombuds Office was closed from 2004-2006 for budget reasons. In 2005, an Academic Chairs Council Task Force reaffirmed the need for an office, and Provost Liz Grobsmith appointed Dr. Buckley to once again direct the office in the Fall of 2006. Six faculty facilitators were hired to assist: Matt Casado of the School of Hotel and Restaurant Management; Laurie Dickson of the Department of Psychology; Jack Dustman of the College of Business Administration; Lynn Jones of the Department of Criminal Justice; Catherine Medina of the Department of Educational Specialties, and Lon Owen of the Department of Biological Sciences. At this point, the Faculty Ombuds Program moved from the Office of the President to the Office of the Provost, where it still resides. From 2008-2011, Dr. Phoebe Morgan served as the Faculty Ombuds, succeeded by Dr. Michael Ketterer who served 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. Dr. Monica Brown, Professor of English, was then appointed Faculty Ombuds and began her term in September 2020. In addition to providing regular and ongoing support for faculty, even and especially through the COVID-19 pandemic’s interruptions of daily and professional life, she held workshops, and moved the physical location of the Ombuds Office to the fourth floor of the Health & Learning Center (HLC), room 4101. This move was crucial to better serving the mission of the Office, because the building is accessible, and the Ombuds Office resides close to formal resources that may be useful for visitors, such as physical and mental health services, Employee Assistance and Wellness, and Disability Resources.

In 2023-2024, Dr. Laura Umphrey was appointed the Director and Dr. KT Thompson, Assistant Director of the office and services were expanded to serve faculty, staff and graduate students. In addition, the office expanded services to include individual consultations, mediation/facilitated conversations, and consensus building workshops to departments. The office expanded to include the adjacent conference room (room 4102, see photo) to allow for meetings with larger groups.

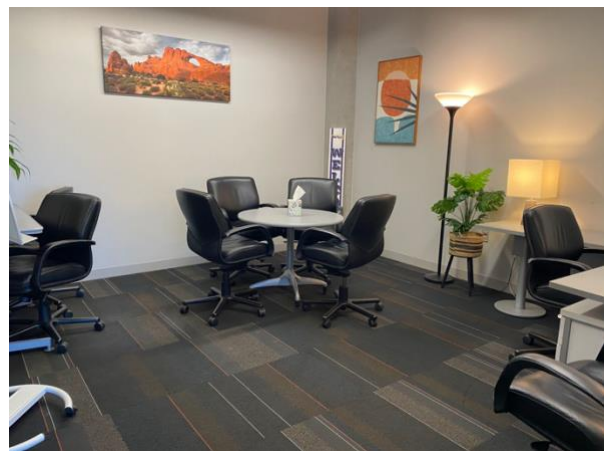


Table 1 Chronological Summary of the NAU Ombuds Program

Academic Year	Ombuds
July 1994 – 1997	Dr. Earl L. Backman (former Dean, Social and Behavior Sciences)
1998 – 2004	Dr. Gary Buckley (Political Science) Also serving in this period: Julie French-Bloomfield, Pam Heinonen, Mary Marceau, and Marcia Warden
2006	Dr. Gary Buckley (Political Science), Program Coordinator with six faculty facilitators .
2008-2011	Dr. Phoebe Morgan , (Criminology and Criminal Justice), CO-OP Certified in 2011
2011-2013	Dr. Michael Ketterer (Chemistry & Biochemistry)
2013-2018	Dr. Gene Moan (Educational Psychology).
2018-2020	Dr. Bruce Fox (Forestry)
2020-2023	Dr. Monica Brown (English)
2023-present	Dr. Laura Umphrey, Director (Communication) & Dr. KT Thompson, Assistant Director (English)

NAU Ombuds Bios

Laura Umphrey, Ph.D., Director

Laura Umphrey has been at Northern Arizona University for 22 years. She is a Professor of Communication, former Director of the School of Communication and former Associate Dean for the College of Health and Human Services. Her Ph.D. is in Communication with a minor in Public Health from the University of Arizona. While pursuing her doctorate, she served as a mediator for the Community Relations Section of the Arizona Attorney General’s Office in Tucson. She has mediated both civil and victim-offender mediation cases. Dr. Umphrey has taught courses in Conflict and Mediation, Interpersonal Communication, Communication Ethics, Teams and Leadership, and Public Speaking, among other courses. She participated in the University Leadership Program (ULP) in 2020-2021. She is a MISS Foundation online parental bereavement support group facilitator. Dr. Umphrey is passionate about helping others and is honored to help faculty, staff and graduate students clarify concerns and identify viable options for resolving issues through constructive dialogue.

KT Thompson, Ph.D., Assistant Director

KT Thompson joined the faculty at NAU in 2018 with a desire to serve students in the complex borderlands of what is presently known as Arizona. Dr. Thompson holds a Ph.D. in English from the University of California, Davis, is the author of *Blanket* (Bloomsbury, 2018) and articles and essays on art and culture and serves as Editor of Creative Nonfiction

for *ISLE (Interdisciplinary Studies in Literature and Environment)*. As Associate Professor of English, Thompson teaches courses in creative nonfiction, literary theory, and the environmental humanities, and is deeply engaged with research-driven, interdisciplinary humanities scholarship and writing that forward expansive commitments to equity and inclusion. Dr. Thompson was selected to be in the inaugural class of NAU's Inclusive Excellence Fellows and is thrilled to serve as Assistant Director for the Office of the University Ombuds, where they can support faculty, students, and staff with active and empathic listening, and direct visitors to resources and structures that will help them thrive at NAU.

Ombuds Professional Development Activities

During 2023-2024, the Ombuds engaged in the following professional activities:

- Both Dr. Umphrey and Dr. Thompson are active members of the International Ombuds Association (IOA).
- Dr. Umphrey and Dr. Thompson completed the *International Ombuds Association Foundations Course*.
- Dr. Umphrey attended the *United States Ombuds Association* conference in Atlanta, GA; September 11-15, 2023, and completed the pre-conference *New Ombudsman training*.
- Dr. Umphrey attended the *International Ombuds Association conference* in Indianapolis, IN in March 2024 and presented a workshop entitled, "*Defensive Communication and Threats to Identity: Reshaping Our Communication Choices*." There were over 200 Ombuds in the audience.
- Dr. Umphrey completed a 16-hour training November 28 – December 1, 2023 to be able to provide structured group facilitation services to Northern Arizona University. The training was presented by the Institute of Cultural Affairs on the *Technology of Participation (ToP)* facilitation methods including: (a) focused conversations, (b) consensus workshops and (c) action planning.
- Dr. Thompson attended webinars offered by the International Ombuds Association, including "What You May Not Know About the Effects of Workplace Bullying & How to Use it for Intervention to Recommend in the Workplace"; "Resilience Coaching: Tools to Help Visitors Build Resilience and Combat Burnout" & "Transforming Visitor Conversations from an [Inclusive] Lens"
- Dr. Thompson attended the 2023 IOA Virtual September Symposium.
- Dr. Umphrey serves as a *reviewer* for the Journal of the International Ombuds Association (JIOA) and published a *book review* for the journal in 2024.

NAU Ombuds Activities

Visitor One-on-One Meetings

The Ombuds met in person with faculty (tenure-track and career track), graduate students, and staff in the HLC, room 4102. This room is accessible yet offers privacy and discretion. They also met with visitors on Zoom or by phone, if visitors requested to do so. These virtual meetings are necessary for visitors who work outside the Flagstaff Mountain campus, but also offer an additional option for Flagstaff employees and graduate students. Most meetings lasted between one-to-two hours. Please see [Visitor Trends](#) for a confidential and broad overview of visitor characteristics.

Facilitated Conversations / Mediation

When two or more individuals who work together are willing to talk, have a desire for a “reset” and want third party help, the Ombuds Office offers mediation or facilitated conversation services. Dr. Laura Umphrey facilitated **four (4) mediations during 2023-2024**. These sessions last between 2-3 hours and are structured to explore issues and develop a collective plan to work together going forward.

Trainings / Workshops

A variety of Conflict and Communication workshops were offered during 2023-2024.

- **ASCEND training** – Dr. Umphrey provided over 12 hours of training on communication and conflict resolution for cohort participants in this program.
- **Employee Development Days** – Dr. Umphrey offered two trainings (face-to-face and virtual) in May 2024 on “Are We Conflating Conduct with Conflict?”
- One staff college-wide “Conflict and Communication” training in January 2024.
- One graduate class on “Conflict and Communication” in January 2024.
- One Institute training on “Conflict and Communication” in March 2024.

Team / Departmental Facilitations

In January 2024, Dr. Umphrey started offering **structured facilitation workshops for departmental groups** wanting to achieve specific program goals. In 2023-2024 there were **five (5) departmental facilitations** that took place. As a facilitator, Dr. Umphrey’s job is to plan (with the chair or director) and manage the process so participants focus on ideas



and content. Each facilitation involves an introduction, brief activity and discussion about the value and importance of generating a collective vision and a guided facilitation using the Technology of Participation (ToP) consensus-building facilitation method along with using a “sticky wall” which allows for the easy sorting of ideas and the generation of themes (see side photo).

Outreach

As new Ombuds, one of our goals was to increase awareness about the Ombuds Office and its newly expanded services to staff and graduate students. The Ombuds gave **15 presentations** about the office to colleges, departments and institutes across campus.

On Ombuds Day (October 12, 2023), Drs. Umphrey and Thompson walked through campus buildings and informally introduced themselves and described the office to campus individuals while offering an assortment of candy with conversation.

To align with Ombuds Day (October 12, 2023), a **Fit It in a Minute** appeared in the [NAU Review](#) to help educate the NAU community about the Ombuds Office.

Meetings Attended (Non-Voting)

In addition to offering services, the Ombuds attended the following committee meetings regularly during the year to understand current issues across campus.

- Academic Leadership Collaborative
- Academic Leadership Summit
- Faculty Senate
- Staff Advisory Council Meetings
- Campus Inclusion Team monthly meeting
- Professional Development Calendar Advisory Group
- Faculty Senate Executive Committee on Code of Conduct revisions
- Military Connected Advisory Committee

Marketing Materials

Starting in August 2023, the Ombuds worked closely with Professor Patricia Murphey and students in the Visual Design Lab (VDL) to develop **new marketing and outreach materials** for the office. Through a series of iterations, the Ombuds received professional promotional material designs to print (please see Appendix A), including a bookmark and a poster for distribution across campus.

FY 2023-2024 Visitor Trends

This report includes data that was collected about visitors to the Ombuds Office between July 1, 2023 through June 30, 2024.

Number of Visitors / Repeat Visitors

For AY23-24 there were 209 visits to the Ombuds Office. There were 144 initial visits (68.9%) and 65 (31.1%) follow-up visits.

- 91 visitors from July 1, 2023 through December 31, 2023
- 118 visitors from January 1, 2024 through June 30, 2024

Table 2: Distribution of Visits by Month

Time of Year	Number of Visitors	Percentage
July 2023	4	1.9%
August 2023	7	3.3%
September 2023	18	8.6%
October 2023	28	13.4%
November 2023	20	9.6%
December 2023	14	6.7%
January 2024	27	12.9%
February 2024	24	11.5%
March 2024	26	12.4%
April 2024	20	9.6%
May 2024	15	7.2%
June 2024	6	2.9%
July 2023- June 2024	209	100%

Type of Visitors

The Ombuds met with a range of visitors—faculty, staff, and graduate students. Most visitors reside at the Flagstaff Mountain campus, but we also had virtual meetings with faculty, staff, and graduate students from NAU campuses across the state.

- 86 faculty (70 faculty and 16 faculty administrators/supervisors)
- 84 staff members (69 staff and 15 supervisory staff)
- 35 graduate students
- 4 visitors whose title did not correspond to the main categories (e.g., parent, outside NAU entity, etc.)

The number of staff visitors was almost equal to all faculty, which is noteworthy given this is the first time in several years that the Ombuds Office has been an available informal resource for staff and graduate students.

Table 3: Type of Visitor

Type of Visitor	Number	Percentage
Faculty	86	41.15%
Staff	84	40.2%
Graduate Students	35	16.75%
Other	4	1.9%
	209	100%

Nature of Concerns

The International Ombuds Association (IOA) provides standard Uniform Data Reporting Categories for Ombuds Offices (see Table 4 for those broad categories). This document lists those broad categories and subcategories of common visitor concerns. After each meeting with visitor(s), the Ombuds tracks the concerns brought forward to identify trends in requests for services. Often, visitors expressed multiple concerns during our conversations and each individual concern was reported. For example, a visitor might bring up “departmental climate” and “communication” as issues of concern in the same visit. Therefore, each individual topic was recorded for each visit.

The largest broad concern brought to the office involved **evaluative relationships (N=526, 70%)**. In terms of **sub-categories** within this category (Table 5), visitors most often expressed feeling a lack of respect by their supervisor or supervisee. Communication was the second most common concern discussed followed by issues with the departmental climate. Other categories included differences in priorities or values, a lack of trust or integrity, perceptions of ineffectiveness, discrepancies in one’s assignment or schedule, inequity of treatment, bullying, diversity-related concerns, a desire for help in dealing with an issue or person and concerns about feedback received.

The second largest broad concern brought to the Ombuds Office involved **peer relationships**. (N=71, 9%). Specific sub-concerns expressed were **Respect/Treatment** (demonstrations of inappropriate regard for people, not listening, rudeness, crudeness, etc., N=23, 11%), **Communication** (quality and/or quantity of communication, N=19, 9.1%).

Table 4: IOA Uniform Data Reporting Category Frequency and Percentage

CATEGORY	DESCRIPTION	N	%
(1) Evaluative Relationships (See Table 5 for a breakdown of these ratings)	Questions, concerns, issues, or inquiries arising between people in evaluative relationships (i.e., supervisors, chairs or directors, deans, etc.).	526	70%
(2) Career Progression and Development	Questions, concerns, issues or inquiries about administrative processes and decisions regarding entering and leaving a job, or what it entails, (i.e., recruitment, nature and place of assignment, job security, and separation).	23	3%
(3) Peer and Colleague Relationships	Questions, concerns, issues, or inquiries involving peers or colleagues who do not have a direct supervisory relationship (e.g., two faculty members within the same department or conflict involving faculty members of the same college or unit).	71	10%
(4) Legal, Regulatory, Financial and Compliance	Questions, concerns, issues, or inquiries that may create a legal risk (financial, sanction etc.) for the organization or its members if not addressed, including issues related to waste, fraud, or abuse.	23	3%
(5) Compensation & Benefits	Questions, concerns, issues or inquiries about the equity, appropriateness and competitiveness of employee compensation, benefits, and other benefit programs.	22	3%
(6) Values, Ethics, and Standards	Questions, concerns, issues, or inquiries about the fairness of organizational values, ethics, and/or standards, the application of related policies and/or procedures, or the need for creation or revision of policies, and/or standards.	17	2%
(7) Safety, Health, and Physical Environment	Questions, concerns, issues or inquiries about Safety, Health, and Infrastructure	15	2%
(8) Services / Administrative Issues	Questions, concerns, issues or inquiries about services or administrative offices.	12	2%
(9) Organizational, Strategic, and Mission Related	Questions, concerns, issues, or inquiries that relate to the whole or some part of an organization.	35	5%
		744	100%

Table 5: Frequency and Percent of Evaluative Relationship Sub-Categories Reported by Visitors

Evaluative Relationship Sub-Categories	N	% of the 209 visitors reporting in the category
Respect or Treatment (Demonstrations of inappropriate regard for people, not listening, rudeness, crudeness, etc.)	91	43.5%
Communication (Quality and/or quantity of communication)	86	41.1%
Departmental Climate (prevailing behaviors, norms, or attitudes within a department for which supervisors or faculty have responsibility)	43	20.6%
Priorities, Values and Beliefs (Differences about what should be considered important; often rooted in ethical or moral beliefs)	35	16.7%
Trust / Integrity (Suspicion that others are not being honest, whether or to what extent one wishes to be honest, etc)	35	16.7%
Supervisory Effectiveness (management of department or classroom, failure to address issues)	35	16.7%
Assignments/Schedules (appropriateness or fairness of tasks, expected volume of work)	34	16.3%
Equity of Treatment (favoritism, one or more individuals receive preferential treatment)	31	14.8%
Bullying, Mobbing (abusive, threatening, and/or coercive behaviors)	23	11%
Retaliation (punitive behaviors for previous actions or comments, whistleblower)	21	10%
Diversity-Related (comments or behaviors perceived to be insensitive, offensive or intolerant on the basis of an identity-related difference such as race, gender, nationality, sexual orientation)	21	10%
Consultation (requests for help in dealing with issues between two or more individuals they supervise/teach or with other unusual situations in evaluative relationships)	17	8.1%
Feedback (feedback or recognition given, or responses to feedback received)	16	7.7%
Performance Appraisal (job performance in formal or informal evaluation)	13	6.2%
Other (any other evaluative relationship not described by the other sub-categories)	8	3.8%
Reputation (possible impact of rumors and/or gossip about professional or personal matters)	7	3.3%
Insubordination (refusal to do what is asked)	7	3.3%
Physical Violence (actual or threats of bodily harm to another)	3	1.4%
	526	

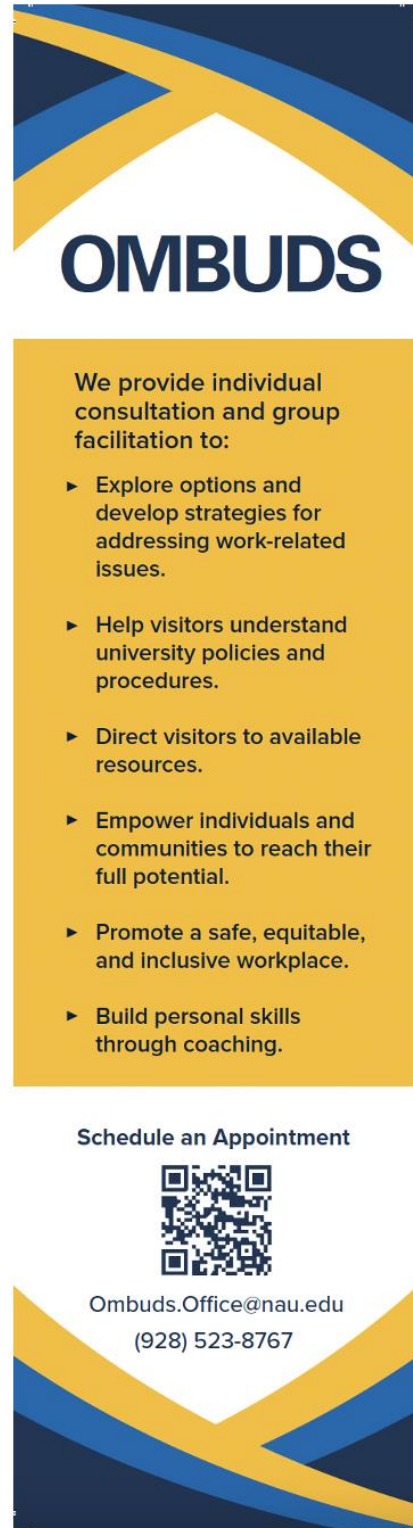
Goals and Vision for 2024-2025

There are several Ombuds Office goals that will help guide our practices for 2024-2025.

- Engage in efforts to further **increase awareness** about our services, especially for staff and graduate students.
- Now that we have a better understanding of topics that our constituents want to learn about, we will offer **regularly-scheduled training** for the general NAU community.
- Create a more **streamlined method for visitors to schedule appointments** with the Ombuds.
- **Increase awareness about our specialized workshops** and other services offered by the Ombuds Office, particularly **mediation/facilitated conversations** and **consensus-building facilitations** for departments and groups.
- Explore the possibility of having at least a **part-time staff Ombuds**, given that many visitors were NAU staff.
- Dr. Thompson will attend 20 hours of **Conflict Resolution Training** with the Arizona Attorney General's Office.
- Both Drs. Umphrey and Thompson will continue to enhance their own **professional development** through the International Ombuds Association offerings to effectively serve the NAU community.

Appendix A: Marketing Materials

Bookmark (front and back)



Posters for Distribution



The poster features a decorative top border with overlapping yellow and blue curved shapes. The word "OMBUDS" is prominently displayed in a large, bold, dark blue font. Below it, the words "Confidential, Impartial, Informal, Independent" are written in a smaller, dark blue font. A horizontal line separates the introductory text from the list of services. The list is contained within a yellow rectangular box with a blue border. At the bottom, there is a QR code, contact information, and the Northern Arizona University logo.

OMBUDS

Confidential, Impartial, Informal, Independent

We offer a non-judgmental, off-the-record, safe environment for collaborative problem-solving and coaching in challenging situations.

We are conflict-resolution specialists who provide guidance for faculty, staff, and graduate students to navigate workplace conflicts and issues.

We provide individual consultation and group facilitation to:

- ▶ Explore options and develop strategies for addressing work-related issues.
- ▶ Help visitors understand university policies and procedures.
- ▶ Direct visitors to available resources.
- ▶ Empower individuals and communities to reach their full potential.
- ▶ Promote a safe, equitable, and inclusive workplace.
- ▶ Build personal skills through coaching.

Schedule a Confidential Appointment

 Ombuds.office@nau.edu
(928) 523-8767

NAU NORTHERN ARIZONA
UNIVERSITY
Office of the University Ombuds