

**Faculty Ombuds Program  
Annual Report 2021-2022**

Prepared by  
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Faculty Ombuds

**August 6th, 2022**

**NORTHERN ARIZONA UNIVERSITY**  
**Faculty Ombuds Program**  
**Annual Report**  
**2021-2022**

## **Highlights**

- During the 2021-2022 academic year, there were 109 visits with the Faculty Ombuds, representing 83 unique visitors. This represents a 45.3% increase in contacts and a 66% increase in unique visitors from the previous academic year.
- The total number of unique visitors in 2021-2022 represents the highest utilization of the services provided by the Faculty Ombuds Program during the last five years and represents a 207.407% increase since 2017-2018. This also represents the highest number of total contacts since 2011-2012.
- 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 (often referred to in the field as "shuttle diplomacy"), referral, 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 the Faculty Senate.
- Visitors to the Faculty Ombuds brought diverse concerns. The most common concern under the International Ombuds Association (IOA) uniform reporting categories was "Evaluative Relationships" followed closely by "Peer and Colleague Relationships" and "Career Progression and Development." Other areas of note were related to "Values, Ethics, and Standards." Notably, there was a significant increase in concerns related to "Legal, Regulatory, Financial, and Compliance" issues. Many visitors' concerns and conflicts crossed more than one category.
- During the 2021-22 Academic Year, the Faculty Ombuds offered five formal workshops, to various constituencies, on topics such as conflict and communication, understanding

bias, and conflict and resolution. Additionally, the Faculty Ombuds presented during New Academic Leader Training and New Faculty Orientation in August 2021.

- Throughout AY 2021-2022, the Faculty Ombuds held one-on-one meetings with key stakeholders on campus, to build relationships, introduce the Faculty Ombuds Program as a resource, and to further her knowledge of grievance procedures, policy, and conflict resolution at NAU.
- The Faculty Ombuds met monthly with the Interim Vice-Provost of Faculty Affairs to discuss general issues and trends having a systemic impact on faculty and campus climate at NAU.
- In addition to being active in the International Ombuds Association and the Southwest Ombuds Group, the Faculty Ombuds met regularly with her IOA mentor in support of her continued professional growth.

## **Faculty Ombuds Program: History and Context**

The Faculty Ombuds Program is uniquely situated on campus to support faculty 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)<sup>1</sup>

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 2021-2022 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.

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<sup>1</sup> <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.<sup>2</sup>

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 term in 2021-2022 was a ten-month appointment.

## **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. Dr. Brown has continued to provide ombuds services, uninterrupted, in Summer 2022. From 8/6/21- 8/6/22, the total number of unique visitors represents the highest utilization of services provided by the Faculty Ombuds Program during the last five years and represents a 207.407% increase from what was reported for 2017-2018.

In Fall 2021, with the support of the Office of the Provost, the program office moved to a new, accessible location in HLC 4101. This move allowed for a removal of barriers for people with disabilities. In 2021-2022, in-person meetings took place in the Faculty Ombuds Program office at other locations in HLC. The majority of visits took place virtually and at a distance via Zoom,

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<sup>2</sup> 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.

Facetime, telephone calls, texts, and emails, in large part due to COVID-19 concerns and faculty interest.

Services of the Faculty Ombuds Program are offered under 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 funded 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.

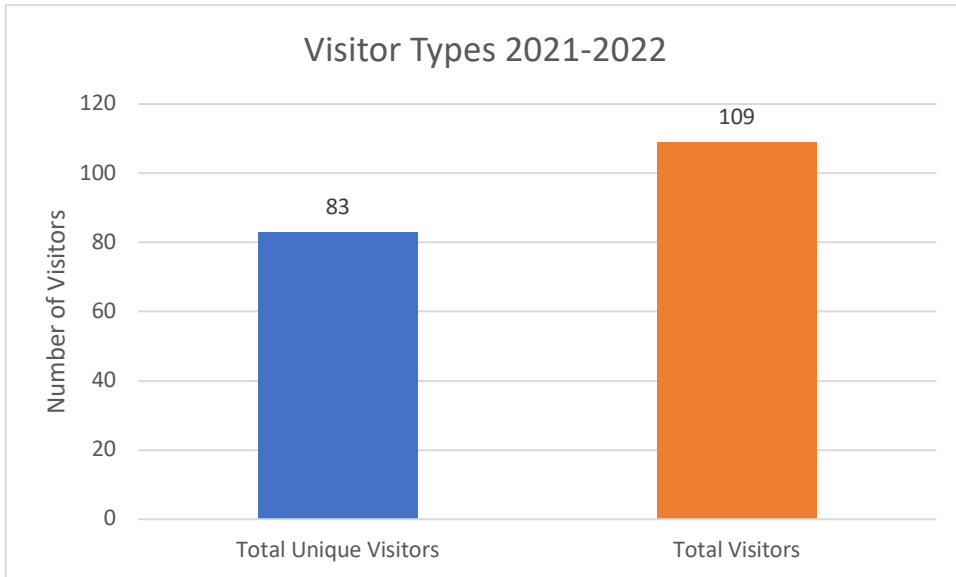
## **Faculty Ombuds' Activities**

The following represents activities taking place between August 6, 2021 and August 6, 2022.

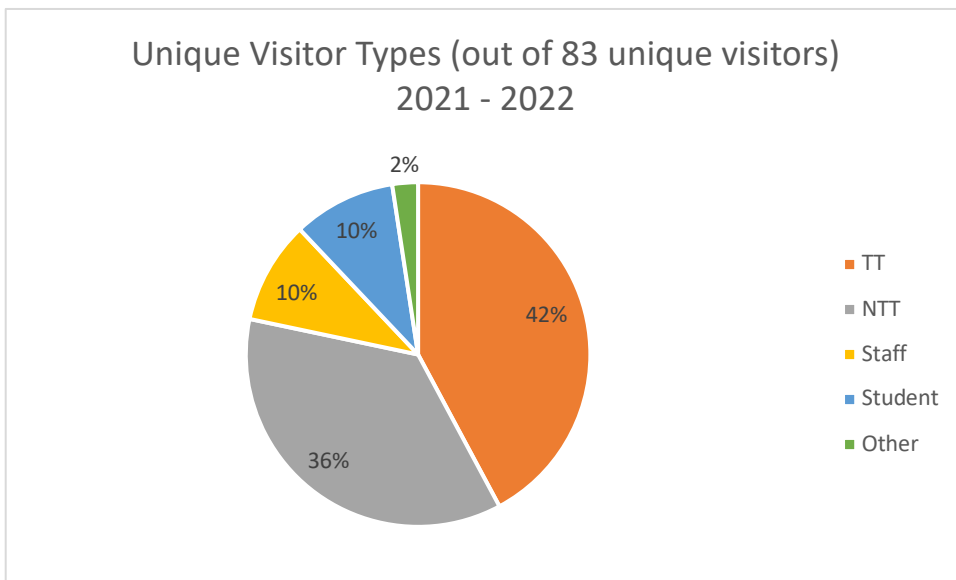
### **Visitors**

As highlighted above, there were 109 contacts with the Faculty Ombuds, representing 83 unique visitors (See Figure 1). This represents a 45.3% increase in total contacts and a 66% increase in unique visitors from the previous academic year. This also represents the highest number of total contacts since 2011-2012. Of the total 83 unique visitors, 35 were tenure-track; 30 were non-tenure track; 8 were staff; 8 were students; and 2 were "other" (See Figures 2 & 3).

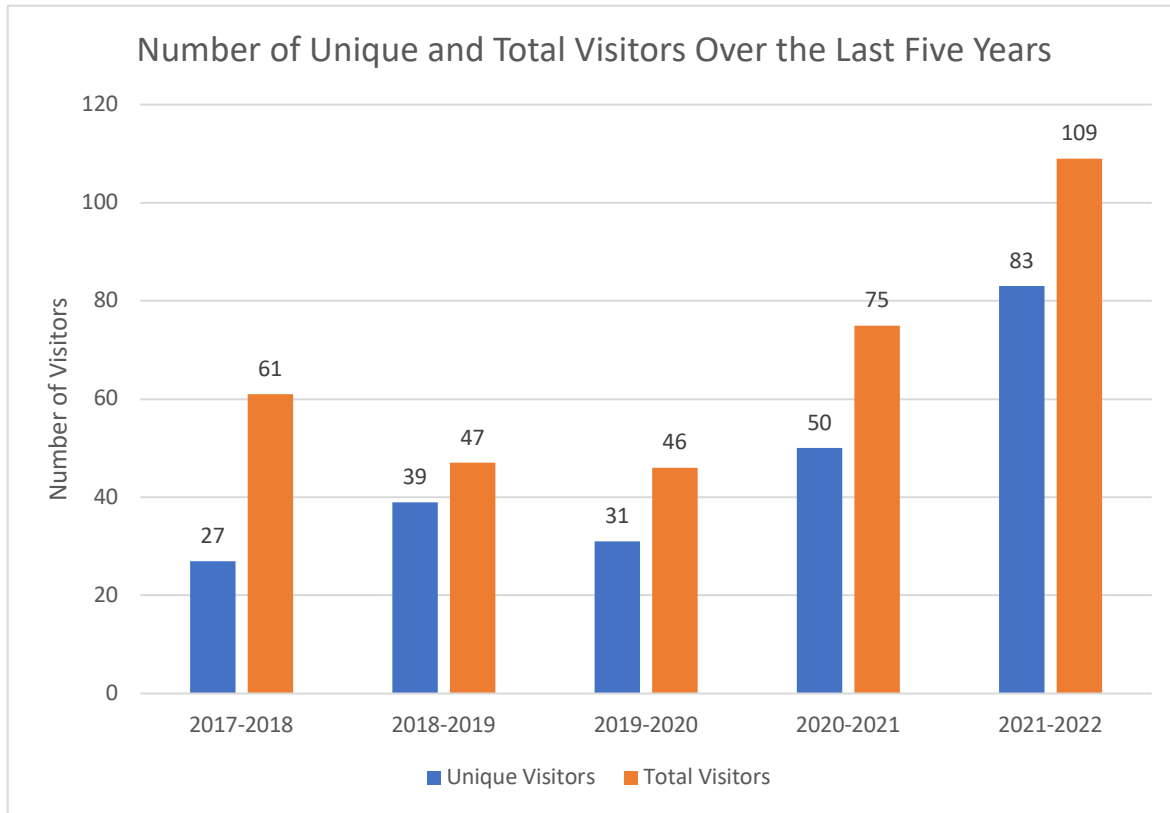
These numbers do not represent contacts made with faculty and faculty administrators via workshop attendance, new academic leader training, new faculty orientation, informal conversations, or the Q & A sessions following Faculty Ombuds introductory presentations to groups across campus. Also not included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



**Figure 1**



**Figure 2**



**Figure 3**

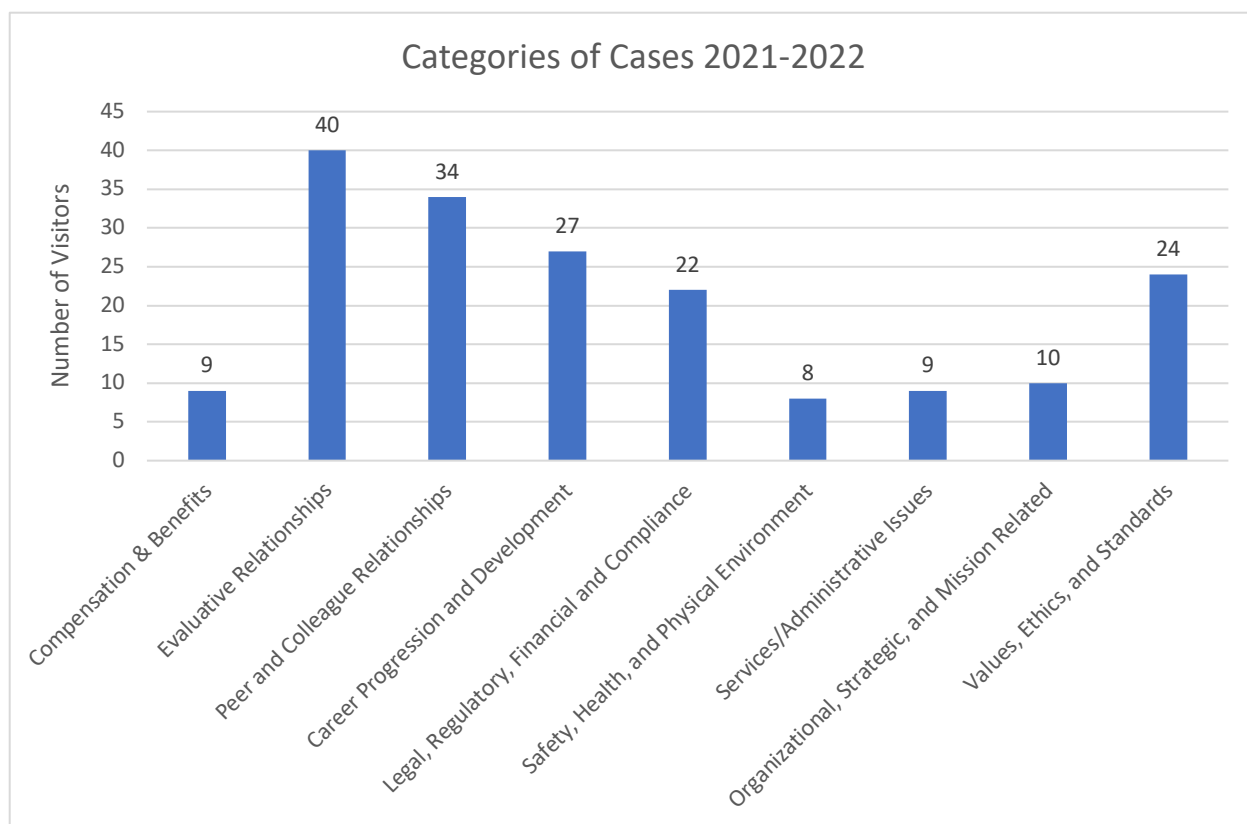
Overall, in 2021-2022 the total number of unique visitors represents the highest utilization of the services provided by the Faculty Ombuds Program during the last five years and represents a 207.407% increase since 2017-2018.

**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 Relationship 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” issues as they intersected with Standards of Conduct and the NAU mission (See Figure 4).

Notably, there was a significant increase in concerns related to “Legal, Regulatory, Financial, and Compliance” issues. This category covered issues such as research ethics, compliance around disability accommodations, understanding of non-discrimination and harassment policies, Title IX, mandatory reporting, etc.





**Figure 4**

### **Other Activities of the Faculty Ombuds**

The Faculty Ombuds met monthly with the Interim Vice-Provost of Faculty Affairs, Dr. Astrid Klocke, to address general trends, and the myriad ways the university leadership and the Faculty Ombuds Program can support faculty and the larger NAU community in the creation of a positive work environment.

The effective operation of an Ombuds program involves collaboration and referral to other resources on campus, therefore effort is placed on establishing and maintaining direct personal contact with key persons at NAU. It is important to build relationships and trust with the many organizational stakeholders. The Faculty Ombuds met with The Provost, The Dean of Graduate Students, The VP for Equity and Access, the President of the Faculty Senate, and other campus leaders, including deans, chairs, and directors.

The Faculty Ombuds facilitated/mediated several conversations, including among members of a department.

In Fall 2021, The Faculty Ombuds participated in New Academic Leader Training in August 2021, offering a Conflict and Communication Workshop, as well as a presentation/introduction to the Faculty Ombuds Program. Additionally, the Faculty Ombuds offered a Conflict and Communication Workshop for IMQ staff, presented at The Faculty Senate, New Faculty Orientation, and as part of the Productive Beginnings series.

In Spring 2022, the Faculty Ombuds began attending Academic Leadership Council and Summit meetings, participated in the planning of the Academic Leadership Summit focused on creating inclusive environments.

In Spring 2022, The Faculty Ombuds offered the following workshops to the general faculty, which led to productive discussions among colleagues.

### **Conflict and Communication Workshop**

This workshop is open to all full and part-time faculty, faculty administrators, and academic personnel. This workshop will focus on understanding conflict and developing communication skills in support of de-escalation, resolution, and a positive work environment. We will also talk about the role of empathy, respect, bias, and trust in interest-based solutions to conflict.

### **A Conversation about Bias:**

This workshop is open to all full and part-time faculty, faculty administrators, and academic personnel. What is the benefit of acknowledging bias? What's the difference between explicit and implicit bias? How might bias affect our work in academia, from teaching to interpersonal relationships? This discussion-based workshop explores the ways self-examination around bias might support more effective communication and justice-oriented educational work.

In addition to being active in the International Ombuds Association and the Southwest Ombuds Group, the Faculty Ombuds met regularly with her IOA mentor (an active University Ombuds with 30 years' experience) in support of her continued professional growth.

## **Trends and Implications**

The 2021-2022 year brought continued challenges to faculty and academic professionals working amid a global COVID-19 pandemic and the stress of increasing instructional pressures. It also brought a change of leadership and feelings of optimism and anticipation with the appointment of Dr. Jose Luis Cruz-Rivera, as the 17<sup>th</sup> President of Northern Arizona University.

The significant increase in number of visits to the Faculty Ombuds may be read as a sign of: continuing challenges faced by faculty; a lessening of fear of reprisals for reaching out in relation to diversity, equity and inclusion issues (such as discrimination and microaggressions); and the commitment to conflict resolution in a way that supports their mental health and the health of the institution.

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 trends in 2021-2022 were as follows:

1. One trend that continued from the previous year was faculty expressing a lack of clear understanding of promotion and tenure requirements for tenure-track faculty. There continues to be an impression of shifting sands in the form of inconsistently applied criteria and expectations or changing metrics and criteria from year-to-year. Another frequently voiced concern was the need for mentorship through the promotion process at the department- and college-levels.
2. There was a significant increase in concerns related to “Legal, Regulatory, Financial, and Compliance” issues. The majority of concerns in this category covered issues such as research ethics, non-discrimination and harassment policies, mandatory reporting, etc., with intersections across many of the IOA’s reporting categories—especially “Evaluative Relationships” and “Peer and Colleague Relationships.”

There were perceptions of disrespect, discrimination and/or harassment based upon a legally- or policy-protected status such as race, color, religion, sex, national origin, age, disability, veteran status, sexual orientation, gender identity and expression.

Of significant note: when referred to either the Equity and Access Office, Human Resources, or up their supervisory chain, underrepresented faculty (in particular) often expressed distrust and/or frustration, based on their perceptions of a) lack of clarity around investigational processes at Equity and Access; b) the lack of diverse staff and supervisors; c) bias; and d) the lack of concrete actions (as opposed to rhetoric) in support of institutional change.

3. Another significant trend was an increase in graduate-students wishing to consult with the Faculty Ombuds and faculty wishing to discuss graduate student-related concerns. Several faculty contacted the office with concerns for graduate students who they perceived were being mistreated by their PIs, in classes, and/or as research assistants, etc.

When students contacted the office, the Faculty Ombuds would meet once for referral purposes, directing students to appropriate offices, including: The Equity and Access Office; The Office of Inclusion: Multicultural & LGBTQIA Student Services (IMQ); the Dean of Graduate students; NAU Counseling Services; graduate student coordinators; chairs; deans, etc. BIPOC graduate students, and female graduate students in STEM fields, made up the majority of these visitors, as well as faculty concerned about BIPOC and female students in STEM fields.

Graduate Students, dependent on PIs and faculty for career progression, publication, and letters of recommendations are a particularly vulnerable group on campus. The current Faculty Ombuds perceives a clear need for NAU graduate students to have ombuds services, where they can seek independent, neutral, confidential, and informal assistance.

## **Goals and Vision for the 2021-2022 Academic Year**

- With the support of the Office of the Provost, continue to raise the profile of the office and expand services offered, most urgently to include graduate students, in order to better support the vision, mission, and values of Northern Arizona University.
- Continue to 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.
- Continue to 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.
- Continue to develop and improve workshops given to 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 webinars, ongoing mentoring, courses, and/or conferences.
- Continue active participation in the International Ombuds Association and the Southwest Ombuds Group.