

Guide for Witnesses Participating in the UHAS Process

Office of Community Standards

Northwestern University

About the Office of Community Standards. The Office of Community Standards (OCS) is responsible for reviewing and investigating cases involving violation(s) of the [Northwestern University Student Code of Conduct](#) (p. 14-42). Investigations can include meeting with alleged complainants, respondents, and witnesses. [More information about the University Hearing and Appeals System can be found here.](#)

What is a Witness?

Witnesses are defined in the 2024-2025 Student Handbook Appendix as “people who have indirect or direct knowledge related to specific aspects of a conduct case.” Witnesses can be identified through Northwestern reporting channels, group association, event attendance, proximity, and disclosure from those within an investigation process.

I have been identified as a as a Witness, what happens next?

You will receive email outreach from a Case Resolution Coordinator (CRC) or Investigator to schedule a meeting. Outreach could include a request to meet in-person or via a video platform (e.g., Zoom) or to provide a written response regarding a specific incident. In serving as a witness, you are not acting for or against the party/parties/organization(s) involved in the investigation.

As a witness, do I have to engage with the process?

Witness participation is not mandatory or required but highly recommended. If you are a witness for a student group or organization investigation, participation and cooperation with the process is important.

I am meeting with a CRC/Investigator, what do I need to prepare?

Witnesses are not expected to prepare statements or materials for their meetings with CRCs/investigators. If a particular case requires a witness to prepare a statement and/or materials prior to meeting with the CRC/investigator, the CRC/investigator will inform the witness prior to meeting.

What if my role as a witness includes my own action(s) violating the Student Code of Conduct?

Witnesses participating in an investigation will not receive disciplinary action by the University if they acknowledge their own involvement in misconduct or policy violation relative to the matter in question. This approach may be forfeited by the University if a witness acknowledges involvement in violations deemed serious and/or that placed the health and safety of self or others at significant risk.

What will I be asked during my meeting with the CRC/investigator?

Discussions will vary by case. However, you will discuss; 1) the incident/report being investigated; 2) questions related to your knowledge and or/involvement in the incident/report. You are expected to be truthful and transparent with the information you share in the meeting. Additionally, witnesses may be asked for authorization to record their interview for transcription purposes.

I met with a(n) CRC/investigator, what next?

We ask that your meeting with the CRC/investigator remain confidential, including questions asked and information shared. A CRC/Investigator will use relevant information shared by the witness(es) for an Administrative Hearing or Investigation.

Can you promise the information I share will remain anonymous?

The OCS will seek to keep relevant information shared and included in an Administrative Hearing or Investigation anonymous if the witness(es) choose(s) this option. However, anonymity cannot be guaranteed. It is important that witnesses understand that certain information shared may easily be identified by the party/parties involved.

Additionally, the OCS does not offer anonymity for those witnesses involved in group/organization investigations who hold leadership positions within the group/organization being investigated.

- Example: A Social Chair who ran the event shares specific details of their role in planning. The OCS would not offer information shared to remain anonymous. Further, if labeled as anonymous, this information may only be relevant to that one person who would be easily identifiable by the organization being investigated.

What if I experience retaliation due to my involvement as a witness in the process?

While the OCS' knowledge of retaliation occurring for witnesses is rare, it is a common concern. Please note that Northwestern has a robust [Non-Retaliation Policy](#) and will investigate any reports of retaliation. Simply, "Northwestern strictly prohibits retaliation against any member of its community for reporting a violation of university policy, or for participating, in any manner, in the UHAS process. The University considers such actions to be protected activities in which all members of the Northwestern community may freely engage." If you believe you are being retaliated against for engaging in the UHAS process, please contact the OCS at community-standards@northwestern.edu.

Thank you for your willingness to serve as a witness in the UHAS process. If there are additional questions about your participation, please contact the CRC or Investigator who initiated the outreach.