Northwestern | STUDENT AFFAIRS
Office of Community Standards

Recognized Student Organizations and Groups Guide to the University Hearing and Appeals System (UHAS)

Link: *2026-27 Student Handbook*

Link: *2026-27 Student Handbook Appendix: University Hearing and Appeals System (UHAS)*

Receiving a letter from the Office of Community Standards (OCS) as a representative of a student group may prompt a range of emotions, concerns, and questions. Common questions include: (1) how a report was submitted, (2) what the reported allegations and potential charges mean, (3) what to expect throughout the student conduct process, and (4) what outcomes may result if the student group is found responsible for a policy violation.

This document is intended to help student groups (hereby referred to as groups) and their representatives navigate Northwestern's student conduct process, formally known as the University Hearing and Appeals System (UHAS). It provides an overview of key procedures, expectations, and resources available throughout the process. OCS staff are also available to answer questions and offer additional guidance and support as needed.

Receiving a Letter from OCS

Why am I receiving formal notice on behalf of my group?

When a group is reported for a potential violation of the Student Code of Conduct, OCS will ask the leader(s) of the group, most commonly the President(s), to serve as the group's *Representative*. This designation helps OCS streamline communication by working with one or two individuals who can then share relevant information with the broader group. The representative is responsible for formally meeting with OCS to review the report and discuss the allegations that the group may have violated one or more Student Code of Conduct policies.

Are other members of the group involved in the process?

Executive board members or general members may be asked to meet with OCS as *Persons with Information* or *Witnesses (collectively referred to as Witnesses)*. This is typically due to their formal or informal roles within the group or their potential connection to the matter under review.

Examples include, but are not limited to:

- OCS meets with a Social Chair after receiving a report that the group hosted an event with alcohol.
- OCS meets with a new member after receiving a report of alleged hazing involving that member's new class.

When OCS requests to meet with a witness, it should not be interpreted as an assumption that the witness individually violated the Student Code of Conduct, nor does the meeting itself result in individual allegations or

charges. OCS recommends witnesses review information about participating in the UHAS process in "good faith," located in the UHAS Appendix (*p. 7*).

Representatives are encouraged to speak with group members about participating in the UHAS process if they receive outreach from OCS. However, representatives are strongly discouraged from coaching, influencing, guiding, or directing members regarding questions they may be asked by OCS or what they should or should not discuss during meeting with OCS.

Further, neither representatives nor individual members may engage in conduct that attempts to retaliate against, intimidate, threaten, coerce, discriminate against, or improperly influence any person from reporting alleged policy violations or concern for the health or safety of the Northwestern community. Such conduct would be a violation of the Student Code of Conduct (*Misconduct within the Student Conduct Process (D)*) and could result in additional allegations against both the group and individual members involved in such conduct.

What is included in the Notice Letter/ Initial Appointment Letter?

The Notice Letter or Initial Appointment Letter will be sent to the group's representative and will include:

- A summary of the allegation(s) as reported to OCS;
- The alleged Student Code of Conduct related violation(s) associated with those allegations;
- Group Interim Action (if applicable)*;
- Whether the matter is being viewed as a non-separation-level or separation-level case;
- The assigned Case Resolution Coordinator(s) (CRC(s)) or Investigator(s); and
- Meeting logistics and scheduling information.

If the representative has questions regarding their group's Notice/Appointment Letter, they may contact the assigned CRC or Investigator listed under the **Scheduled Meeting** section.

**Interim Action:* Upon receipt of a report but prior to the resolution of an allegation of misconduct, Community Standards or designee may take interim action to ensure the safety and security of the University community, individual community members, or University property, interim action may be implemented. Information regarding interim action language can be found in the Notice Letter following the listed allegations and before the scheduled meeting details. Additional information about Interim Action can be found in the UHAS Appendix (*p. 8-9*).

Why is the allegation toward the organization and not its individual members involved?

OCS uses 11 factors (*Student Handbook, p. 10-11*) when determining whether responsibility should be attributed to a group, its individual members(s), or both when reviewing reported allegations.

OCS will not disclose an individual member's conduct review with the group's representative.

What is the role of a Student Representative?

OCS recruits and trains students every year to serve as Student Representatives (hereafter referred to simply as *student reps*) who assist OCS as co-Case Resolution Coordinators (co-CRCs) for non-separation level group cases.

Student Reps are trained to adjudicate group misconduct cases in partnership with a full-time OCS staff member in a fair, impartial, and confidential manner. The group's representative will receive the name of the assigned Student Rep in the Notice/Appointment Letter or in a subsequent email if the assignment occurs after the letter is sent.

Prior to meeting with OCS, representatives are encouraged to notify the Director of Community Standards at community-standards@northwestern.edu if they have concerns regarding a Student Rep's ability to participate impartially in the UHAS process. After reviewing the concern, the Director will determine whether the Student Rep should remain assigned to the case, be replaced with another Student Rep, or whether the matter should proceed without the inclusion of a Student Rep.

In cases where a Student Rep cannot be assigned due to availability constraints or the time of year (e.g. summer quarter), OCS may offer the group's representative the option to either proceed without a Student Rep's involved or postpone adjudication until a Student Rep can be assigned.

Preparing for the Meeting

What should I have prepared for the meeting with OCS?

Representatives are encouraged to review the allegation(s) in full and prepare to discuss their knowledge of the matter(s) under review. This may include confirming relevant dates, times, locations, and the identities of individuals who may have been involved or witnessed the reported incident(s) prior to attending the meeting.

Please note that OCS discourages any representative, group member, and advisors from conducting their own investigation of the matter (e.g. going to each member of one's group and questioning them for information). Representatives and other individuals should also refrain from falsifying, altering, or tampering with information, or coaching potential witnesses, as such conduct may have the potential to violate the student code of conduct (*Misconduct within the Student Conduct Process (B) and (D)*).

Instead, OCS asks representatives to identify and disclose individuals who may have additional information relevant to the matter so that OCS can determine whether outreach is appropriate.

Should I tell my group's advisor about the meeting with OCS?

Representatives are encouraged to meet with their group's Northwestern advisor regarding the alleged misconduct and OCS outreach prior to their scheduled meeting with OCS.

If the representative is acting on behalf of a Northwestern fraternity or sorority, OCS also encourages the representative to connect with their group's Office of Fraternity and Sorority Life (FSL) *Chapter Coach*.

In some cases, OCS may also contact the group's advisor to gather additional information relevant to the matter under review.

Should I tell my group's Inter/National Headquarters about the meeting with OCS?

When a group has a governing body (i.e. an inter/national headquarters), OCS or a designated campus partner will typically contact the governing body to inform appropriate staff that the local (Northwestern) group is participating in the OCS process.

Representatives are encouraged to proactively communicate with their group's inter/national headquarters when applicable.

Although OCS does not conduct joint investigations with external governing bodies, OCS may coordinate and share information with these governing bodies when appropriate and permitted by University policy and applicable privacy laws. This may include notifying an inter/national headquarters when information is relevant to its oversight

responsibilities, including situations in which individual group members fail or decline to participate in the OCS process.

Can I have someone attend the meeting with me for support?
Representatives may have one individual accompany them to their meeting with OCS as an *Advisor*.

Advisors must be a Northwestern community member (faculty, staff, or student) and may not be a family member, attorney. or a party or witness in the matter under review.

Staff within FSL or Student Organizations and Activities (SOA) will not serve as Advisors in the OCS process.
Advisors are intended to provide emotional and process support for representatives navigating the process. Advisors are not permitted to:

- Represent the Representative or the organization throughout the process, including, but not limited to, answering questions, providing evidence, communicating with the OCS, or submitting documentation; or
- Create undue delay to the OCS process.

Meeting with OCS

So what OCS process is my group going through?
When a representative receives their group's notice letter, they are informed that they will be engaging with OCS in one of two processes: a non-separation-level process called a ***community standards meeting*** or a separation-level process called an ***investigation***. More information on the two processes is provided below.

Community Standards Meeting (Non-Separation Level): Cases involving non-separation-level allegations, meaning allegations that if a responsibility finding is made **will not result** in group suspension or dissolution, are typically resolved through a community standards meeting facilitated by a CRC and Student Rep in OCS. If your group's case is being resolved through a community standards meeting, your group's notice letter will indicate the following under the list of charges.

> The alleged violation(s) as currently stated are not in alignment with University policy and expectations and require University response but will not result in separation (group suspension or group dissolution) from the University.

Within this process, a group's representative may choose to accept responsibility for some or all of the allegation(s) and charge(s) in lieu of a completing a full community standards meeting process by submitting an *Acceptance of Responsibility (AOR)* form linked in the original notice letter.

When a group engaged in a non-separation-level process accepts responsibility for some or all of the violations, the case may be resolved collaboratively with university staff via a Collaborative Resolution Meeting (CRM) rather than through the formal process.

Representatives may submit an AOR any time after receiving the initial notice and before the final outcome letter is issued.

More information on the non-separation-level and AOR processes can be found in the *UHAS Appendix (p. 12-15)*.

Investigation (Separation-Level): Cases involving separation-level allegations, meaning allegations that if a responsibility finding is made **could result** in group suspension or dissolution, including housing removal if

applicable, will typically be resolved through an investigation facilitated by one or two OCS staff members or trained designees serving as *Investigators*. If your group's case is being resolved through an investigation, your group's notice letter will indicate the following under the *Preparing for Your Meeting* section.

> **Preparing for Your Meeting**
> First, review the allegations provided above, utilizing the Student Handbook for further review. Please note during our meeting, we will be discussing the alleged violation(s) that have the potential to result in separation (suspension or group dissolution, including housing removal if applicable) from the University, as well at the investigation process and hearing options.

Within this process, a group's representative(s) may choose to accept responsibility for some or all of the allegation(s) and charge(s) via the *Acceptance of Responsibility (AOR)* form linked in the original notice letter.

Following submission of an AOR, the Investigators will review the information provided and determine whether additional investigation is necessary. If no further investigation is needed, the Investigators will issue a Final Investigative Report (FIR), and the case will proceed to a sanctioning panel for outcome deliberations.

More information on the separation-level and AOR processes can be found in the *UHAS Appendix (p. 15-21)*.

Outcome Letter and Beyond

What outcomes can come from a case and how am I notified of them?

Following the end of a community standards meeting or investigation, and if a finding of responsibility is made, the CRC or Sanctioning Panel Coordinator will send the Representative an outcome letter. The outcome letter will outline sanctions the group is to complete before the matter is officially closed. Sanctions are determined based off 10 sanctioning factors listed here:

- The nature, context, and severity of the incident.
- The level of accountability and responsibility taken by the student/student organization.
- The need to stop the misconduct and prevent its recurrence.
- The impact of the conduct on the reporter when one exists.
- The impact of the conduct on the community or the University.
- The need to remedy and address the impact or effects of the conduct on others.
- The disciplinary history of the student /student organization. [2]
- The developmental needs of the student/student organization.
- The best interests of the University community.
- Any other aggravating, mitigating, or relevant factors.

2. For student organizations, the deciding sanctioning body will review the group's history for the 30 months prior to the incident date.

Based on the sanctioning factors, the CRC or Sanctioning Panelists will determine appropriate disciplinary, educational, and restrictive outcomes to assign the group. For non-separation-level cases, disciplinary sanctions can range from as low as a warning to disciplinary probation, while separation-level cases can range from warning to group dissolution. More regarding the sanctioning factors and sanctions can be found in the Student Handbook *(p. 25-30)*.

Can the group challenge findings and/or outcomes?

Yes. Following the group's retrieval of the outcome letter, there is the opportunity to appeal findings, sanctions, or both via a written appeal submission. Appeals must be submitted within three (3) business days from receiving the outcome letter and are limited to 15 pages, including any attachments. Appeals will only be considered under four (4) grounds, which are:

- New information discovered after resolution of the case that could not have reasonably been available at the time of resolution that could materially change the outcome
- Procedural errors within the resolution process that may have substantially affected the fairness of the process
- The individuals who made the determination had a conflict of interest or bias for or against the reporter or respondent generally or the individual reporter or respondent that would change the outcome
- The sanction is disproportionate with the violation

If a group appeals findings, outcomes, or both stemming from an investigation, the appeal may move to an Appellate Panel for review. More on the appeals process can be found in the UHAS Appendix (*Non-Separation p. 15, Separation, p. 20-21)*.

Are outcomes of a case shared with the NU community?

For group cases where a responsibility finding is made and sanctions are assigned, OCS will share relevant information of the case to the larger NU community via the Student Organization Conduct Status Report page on the OCS website. Cases that involve a responsibility finding for hazing will also be included in an annual Campus Hazing Transparency Report under the federal Stop Campus Hazing Act. Information involving individual student records will not be shared.