



The UNM HSC
Learning Environment Office Presents

Closing the Loop:

A Toolkit for Helping Supervisors Balance Providing
Transparency with Protecting Privacy

What is closing the loop?

After someone raises a concern to you, they often want to know that their concern was addressed, what happened, and the timeline for when things are going to improve.

This circle-back communication is often called “closing the loop,” because that’s what allows the person with the concern to understand that the process has concluded and learn what happened and what they can expect for the future.

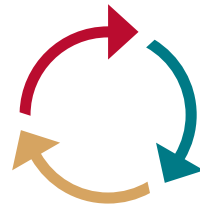
What is challenging about this?

The reporter’s desire can sometimes be at odds with what you can share with them due to the privacy rights of other(s) involved. However, despite these privacy rights, it is still essential for you to close the loop with the reporter in a professional, timely, empathetic, and responsible manner to ensure that they know that you took action, and their concerns did not get swept under the rug.

Failing to do so can have very significant consequences for the reporter’s trust in their learning environment and in you and can snowball into other issues.

This toolkit will help you navigate
closing the loop when you need to.

WHY DOES CLOSING THE LOOP MATTER?



Closing the loop may not seem like a big deal, but in fact, failing to close the loop can cause institutional betrayal, and closing the loop effectively can demonstrate institutional courage. Both of these things can dramatically impact someone's experiences at UNM and their ability to move forward as a thriving part of the UNM community.

WHAT IS INSTITUTIONAL BETRAYAL?



First coined by psychologist, Dr. Jennifer Freyd, institutional betrayal is described as “wrongdoings perpetrated by an institution upon individuals dependent on that institution, including failure to prevent or respond supportively to wrongdoings by individuals committed within the context of the institution.”

WHAT IS INSTITUTIONAL COURAGE?



The opposite of institutional betrayal is institutional courage, which is a concept that includes accountability, transparency, and support for those who have been harmed.

Closing the loop — even when we cannot be specific with actions taken — can increase UNM's institutional courage and build a sense of trust and belonging in the institution from faculty, staff, students, and university leaders.



WHAT SITUATIONS REQUIRE CLOSING THE LOOP?

1

When someone has reported or shared a concern with someone they perceive to be in a leadership, power-holding position, or a position of authority over the situation such as a faculty member, mentor, or trusted administrator.

2

When you know who the reporter is. You cannot close the loop on a concern that was raised anonymously; however, if there is a process enhancement that could benefit a whole group, you can implement that even without knowing who raised the original concern.

- *Remember:* You can also provide feedback to a group when issues are severe or harmful enough to the broader environment that addressing the larger group is in the best interest of everyone in the environment.

3

You should close the loop for **all concerns raised to you**, whether they concern a person or people, a physical space, and/or a learning/working environment.

- *For example:* Concerns about a physical space or accessibility also require you to close the loop with the reporter.

WHAT IS CHALLENGING ABOUT CLOSING THE LOOP?



If you don't close the loop with the reporter, they will likely assume nothing happened due to lack of will or negligence. They will likely **not** assume that you are unable to share with them due to university policy, or that you have worked diligently behind the scenes to resolve their issue(s). They may even assume you have something to hide. **If you don't close the loop with the reporter, your work is not done.**



Only **disciplinary actions** are confidential; however, a best practice is not to share everything about non-disciplinary actions either.



Some challenges raised cannot be resolved overnight or even in a matter of months. This does not make them less important or mean your actions are less relevant. **Managing expectations is key**—if you suspect it's going to take several months, tell them that so they aren't stuck wondering why it's taking so long.



The biggest challenge is that the parties involved may have different or **competing priorities**, which you have to manage.

- **The person who raised the concern** is looking for demonstrable and measurable action to be taken.
- **The person who the concern is about** has a right to privacy and likely does not want information about this complaint or any response to it to be made public.
- These are often seen as competing priorities that cannot both be met. However, **they can both be met with proper attention and by setting expectations in advance.**

EXPECTATIONS TO CONSIDER



Different stakeholders in a university environment often have different relevant timelines for improvements or addressing concerns. This is why it's essential to set expectations in advance, especially with possible timelines, because if you say something vague like "soon" or "we'll work on it," their expectations of what that means might be very different from yours.

While each person is unique, in general:



Students rotating through different environments or classes are only in a particular environment for a few weeks or months. They may expect issues they raise to be demonstrably improved in that timeline, typically within a few **weeks**.



Trainees are, on average, in their training programs for 1-5 years. They are expecting issues to be demonstrably improved within a series of **months**, or in no more than a year.



Faculty and staff are often in their positions for many years, and often expect concerns to be demonstrably improved within 1-3 **years**.



Administrators and university leaders typically address problems in **decades**, or even longer. Consider "UNM 2040," which will not come to fruition until several generations of trainees, students, and even most faculty and staff are no longer affiliated with UNM.

THINGS TO KEEP IN MIND AFTER YOU HAVE RAISED A CONCERN



Expect that the loop will be closed with you, but that they may not be able to share a lot of specifics.



Expect that an improvement will occur, but that it might not be something noticeable during your time in this environment, especially if you're not going to be there for much longer.



Expect that the process of responding to your complaint might be very long, especially if it involves complicated allegations or needs several offices to work together. LEO has had cases that have taken over a year to be resolved. Remember you can always check in to ask about the status of a complaint, and you should expect to be treated kindly when you do so.



Ask what they will be able to share with you and when, if they have not done so. If they don't know, you can encourage them to consult with LEO, or provide them with a copy of this toolkit.

DO'S AND DON'TS FOR CLOSING THE LOOP

Do

- ✓ Care. They see you as a trusted supporter.
- ✓ Listen with a supportive and empathetic ear. Put yourself in their shoes. Think about a time when you felt powerless about a concern you had.
- ✓ Thank them for sharing with you. It takes courage to broker power dynamics by raising concerns, and remember that they may be very worried about retaliation for having raised this concern.
- ✓ Manage expectations at the earliest point possible, and no later than the first communication about concerns raised. This means telling them how you hope to address the concerns, and explicitly stating what you will and won't be able to share with them at the end.

Don't

- ✗ Tell them off the bat you can fix the situation. You likely do not have all the facts about the situation at this point.
- ✗ Forget to close the loop regardless of how small the issue seems or your action feels. If you were not able to take actions you wanted to, you may be reluctant to close the loop because you don't want to disappoint them. However, **remember that not telling them is always worse.**
- ✗ Forget to use UNM resources (such as LEO, CEEO, HR, Faculty Affairs, Student Affairs). Don't forget about main campus resources either!
- ✗ Assume that they will believe that you did the best thing possible for them and their complaint, even if they never hear from you again.
- ✗ Explain why their complaint does not matter and should not be impacting them in the way it is.
- ✗ Tell them anything you do not have permission to share. Anything that is "just between us" is something you should not share. Simply say you do not have permission to share that info, and you are hopeful your actions address their concerns.



SAMPLE STATEMENTS & RESPONSES

When the concern is raised:

- “Thank you for sharing this/these concerns with me. I am glad you see me as a trusted resource. I am also sorry to hear you are navigating this. I can help in the following ways: [state what you plan to do].
- “Please be advised that due to University policy and laws around confidentiality and privacy, I may not be able to share specific actions with you, but I will share general information about how I/we best addressed your concerns.
- “I will check back in with you about my progress in [reasonable amount of time].”

After you have addressed the concern:

- “I am following up with you about the concern you shared with me. I have taken the following steps: [general statement of what you did]. We believe that appropriate actions have been taken, and are hopeful that this outcome will help improve the situation [OR] ensure a more supportive, respectful, and inclusive environment moving forward.
- As of the sending of this email, I am now considering this matter to be closed, but if you have any questions, additional concerns arise, or you or feel retaliated against in any way for raising this concern, please let me know as soon as possible.”