

July 6, 2016

President Robert Frank
Office of the President
University of New Mexico
MSC05 3300
1 University of New Mexico
Albuquerque, NM 87131

Dear President Frank:

I write this letter to express my concern and frustration with your response to the United States' Department of Justice's (DOJ) Report of its investigation of the University of New Mexico's handling of reports by students of sexual harassment and sexual assault on campus. The DOJ came to UNM after receiving complaints from multiple students alleging that the university did not take incidents of rape and sexual assault seriously, and responded to the documented criminal events with ineffective and insincere efforts, generally approaching reports of sexual assault with skepticism and indifference. The DOJ investigated for 16 months, and in its 37 page report, detailed the basis for harshly criticizing UNM. The report concludes with a list of improvements mandated by federal law.

I was saddened and angered by your response to the lengthy DOJ study. You stated that the DOJ report has a "lack of facts" and the information provided was just "anecdotal". It is clear that you don't really care about the extent of sexual assault and rape at UNM and your administration never intended to make the reduction of sexual assault on campus a priority. Your cavalier and arrogant summary of the DOJ investigation suggests you actually don't care about the "facts".

Recognizing that you are likely deaf to the issues, I still felt it was important to share with you some facts about how I was treated by UNM after I reported being sexually assaulted at a fraternity as a freshman college student:

- UNM Police and UNM administration did not communicate and I was told different things from each of them, resulting in significant confusion and frustration.
- I was told that UNM would not continue with its administrative investigation unless I provided a copy of my medical records – particularly my SANE examination (a confidential medical record documenting the findings by the Sexual Assault Nurse Examiner). UNM then refused to assure me that these records would be maintained in confidence and not disseminated throughout the administration.
- After trying to continue with my school work following the assault, I realized I could not focus and needed to take a medical leave of absence from school. However, it took me months of running the same paperwork from one building to the other to try to get that leave achieved. Nobody at UNM was willing to assist me in this very difficult and emotionally challenging task. Everyone treated me as though I was a bad person, and should not be helped.
- When I was finally able to get the leave of absence done, I was informed that I was cut off from the counseling services that I was receiving from the UNM therapist I was working with after the sexual assault.

- I wanted to speak with President Frank about my frustrations and concerns about this process. I was told I had a meeting with him but found out it was just with his assistant.
- The media person for UNM, Diane Anderson, flatly accused me of being a liar.
- I lost my Lottery Scholarship.

All of the issues with the way that UNM handled the report of my sexual assault fall squarely in line with the findings set forth by the DOJ. Throughout the time immediately following my assault, I went through what seemed like constant humiliation in my interactions with UNM administration which caused me such stress and worry that I could no longer function at school. I had to leave my college life when I had just gotten started.

Since the DOJ released its findings of its investigation of UNM, you have not done what any university leader who truly cared for students would do – apologize. Rather than thank the DOJ for the time and effort spent on analyzing how UNM could be a better and a safer place for everyone on campus, you have instead spent your time discounting the report's findings and complaining about being held to "higher standards."

Your complaints about the DOJ findings underscore your ignorance of campus safety. Contrary to your statements to the media, UNM is not expected to be able to stop each and every perpetrator of sexual assault and harassment. But, having a response process in place that (a) punishes and humiliates the reporting victim; (b) is unfair and inconsistent; (c) does not appropriately appraise reporting victims of their rights and remedies; and (d) does nothing to help heal and move forward, discourages victims from reporting and creates an environment in which perpetrators know they can get away with these offenses.

I always wanted to be a Lobo. When I was admitted to UNM it was a great day for me and my family. But I'm not a Lobo any more. Now I am a survivor. I loved UNM and was excited to be a college student there. Three years ago, I was drugged and raped at a frat party. My life was shattered by the rape and instead of helping me put the pieces back together, the UNM administration treated me like it was my fault and hurt me even more. How could I return there as a student – where a rapist was given more concern than his victim? If UNM really wants to pursue its mission of providing "high quality education, health care and research", then you should realize that none of those goals are attained if its students, faculty and staff are fearful and unsupported.

I sincerely hope that you embrace the findings and mandates to improve the welfare and safety of the campus so that it is not violating the civil rights of its students. However, I do not believe that UNM will be able to make any measurable improvement in its treatment of victims of sexual assault and harassment until there is a change in leadership. That change starts with you.

Sincerely,

Ashlynn Ota