The development of UNM’s Compliance Office continues as a number of compliance officials from different University departments have assembled to create a committee.

The office’s Compliance Committee includes officials who oversee compliance processes of departments such as Athletics, enrollment management and contracts and grants. The committee met for the first time two weeks ago, and will officially kick off monthly meetings later in July.

UNM’s Chief Compliance Officer Helen Gonzales said the formation of the committee was part of the recommendations UNM President Robert Frank received regarding the formation of a compliance office. She said the committee allows University officials who already take care of their own departments’ compliance processes to work together.

“What we did was just cast a wide net to bring them all together,” she said. “Individuals in these areas can get together and start talking about things that might overlap. It creates better communication across campus.”

The committee is made up of 19 members who take care of compliance processes of various University departments, Gonzales said. She said there will also be advisers from the Health Sciences Center and from the Internal Audit Department, and that she will serve as its chair.

Gonzales said that through the committee, University officials would be able to educate others about each of their compliance areas and to suggest solutions to other areas’ issues. She said reports from the committee will go to her office for final evaluations.

“The main role is determining ways to share and disseminate information together,” she said. “A lot of federal regulations cross over to different areas. It’s virtually impossible for one office to oversee all those areas. So these compliance partners are each responsible for all those areas … but they’re also reporting to the central compliance office.”

Gonzales said the committee allows officials to work in a decentralized manner.

“It’s always helpful to get input from these different areas about how we get information out,” she said. “Rather than me sitting in an office thinking how I get everyone to figure this out, I can ask the compliance committee what ideas everyone has and how they can help out.”

Athletics’ Senior Associate Director Janice Ruggiero, a member of the committee, said she would mainly discuss matters regarding National Collegiate Athletic Association rules in committee. But she said she expects suggestions for solutions from other committee members.
“It’s like an extra set of eyes that look into your particular area,” she said. “Most people on that committee will bring their expertise from their own area when it’s addressed.”

But Ruggiero said that although other committee members will be able to make suggestions on other departments’ issues, the final decision still rests with each department’s own representative.

Ruggiero said she expects the committee to make more people aware about UNM’s compliance processes and to increase the University’s transparency.

“Everybody else is now talking about it,” she said. “We’re all in a group looking at different things. I just enjoy meeting with other compliance officers and finding out what they do. This gives an opportunity to people to educate others about what they do.”

Associate Vice President of Research Administration Carlos Rey Romero said he would oversee compliance processes regarding UNM’s contracts and grants in committee. He said the committee’s communal environment would make each department’s compliance processes more efficient.

“I don’t see the committee doing the work of compliance,” he said. “Every one of these individuals has done a process to ensure that the University is compliant with rules, regulations and laws. So you can ensure best practices and areas of collaboration. I see it as an efficiency committee.”

Romero said the committee will allow the University community to check the status of UNM’s compliance through the Compliance Office’s website. He said that within the next year, the committee will also develop compliance training programs for all UNM employees.

“It’s going to take a little while to get there, but the only way to do that is through a committee like this,” he said.

Gonzales said the committee is a critical initiative for UNM. “It’s really important … to ensure that people are doing the right thing,” she said. “In that standpoint, it’s a very important endeavor.”