



PROCEDURES FOR RESOLVING COMPLAINTS

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AGAINST ACICS INSTITUTIONS

INTRODUCTION

The procedures established for reviewing and resolving complaints are in place to ensure integrity in the grievance process. Complaints will be accepted by the Council from individuals or groups, including students, staff, faculty, members of the general public, governmental agencies, and other institutions or organizations. The Council reviews complaints and acknowledges its responsibility to provide both the complainant and the institution with a reasonable and impartial review.

FILING A COMPLAINT

Whenever possible, the Council expects complainants and institutions to demonstrate genuine effort in resolving disputes directly using the institution's internal grievance procedures. All institutions are required to have a formal grievance procedure for this purpose, which must be published in the institution's catalog and/or student handbook. Complaints will be evaluated, in part, based on whether the complainant has demonstrated an effort to use the appropriate procedures.

The Council does not require a complaint to be in a specific format. To assist the Council staff in evaluating and processing complaints, however, complainants are urged to observe the following guidelines:

1. The complaint should be written and legible;
2. It should include as much detail as possible;
3. It should include appropriate supporting documentation, if available; and
4. It should include the complainant's name and contact information. Anonymous complaints may be investigated, at the Council staff's discretion, if the allegations are serious in nature.

COMPLAINT PROCEDURES

When evaluating complaints, the Council staff will review statements and documentation submitted by the complainant and will decide whether the complaint warrants further investigation. To make this determination, staff will consider the full circumstances of the information received, including (but not limited to) the following:

1. Whether the complaint relates to an institution currently accredited by ACICS, or which has formally applied for ACICS accreditation;
2. Whether the allegations constitute a possible violation of the *Accreditation Criteria* or state/federal law;
3. Whether the institution's published policies provide insight into the issue and/or possible ways to resolve it; and
4. Whether the complainant has made a genuine effort to resolve the problem through the institution's established grievance procedure.

Depending on the outcome of the review, Council staff may decide that ACICS is not in a position to provide assistance in the matter or that the complainant must provide more information before a decision can be made. The complainant will be notified of the determination in writing.

If the Council staff decides that the complaint requires further investigation, a copy of the written complaint will usually be sent to the institution, and the institution will receive written direction to respond to the allegations. The complainant will be notified of any determination in writing. If the complaint has been submitted anonymously, or if the complainant asks not to be identified, Council staff may send either an edited version of the complaint or a summary of the complainant's allegations. ACICS recognizes that anonymous complaints can be difficult for institutions to address but expects institutions to make a genuine effort to do so. When considering the institution's response, Council staff will consider the amount of information made available in the initial complaint.

When the institution's response is received, the Council staff will review it to ensure that the institution has responded to all elements of the allegation(s) made in the complaint. It is expected that the institution will respond in a timely manner and with appropriate documentation. The Council staff may also review the institution's published policies and procedures and will evaluate the institution's compliance with the *Accreditation Criteria*. The historical record of complaints against an institution may be considered when reviewing allegations against an institution.

COUNCIL ACTION

The staff, acting at the direction of the Council, may then direct any of the following actions:

1. Close the complaint and indicate that no determination has been made that the institution has violated the *Accreditation Criteria*;
2. Postpone a final action on the complaint if more information is necessary to make a determination;
3. Postpone a final action on the complaint if there is sufficient evidence that the institution is making progress to rectify the situation; and
4. Notify the institution that, on the basis of the information available, the Council has determined that the institution is failing to meet the accreditation standards. Appropriate action will be taken by the Council to ensure that the institution is in compliance.

Written notice of the above actions will be sent to the institution and the complainant.

TIME FRAMES

Institutions will be allowed a reasonable timeframe, usually 21 days, to respond to a complaint. If the institution's response has not arrived by the assigned response date, a second notice may be sent and a late fee may be imposed. Should the Council staff require additional information to render a decision, the institution and/or complainant will be asked to do so within a reasonable timeframe. Turnaround time is generally around 60 days but can vary based on the thoroughness of the institution's response, the amount of follow-up work required and other circumstances.