

Responsibilities of Institutions

The *Principles of Accreditation* states:

The institution has adequate procedures for addressing written student complaints and is responsible for demonstrating that it follows those procedures when resolving student complaints. (Federal Requirement 4.5)

In addition, each institution is required to have in place student complaint policies and procedures that are reasonable, fairly administered, and well publicized. SACSCOC also requires, in accord with federal regulations, that each institution maintains a record of complaints received by the institution. This record is made available to SACSCOC upon request. This record will be reviewed and evaluated by SACSCOC as part of the institution's decennial evaluation.

Procedures for Filing a Complaint against an Institution

An individual may make an inquiry regarding complaint procedures or about issues and concerns that could be considered complaints; however, the Commission's response and its obligations to meet the specific timetables outlined in these procedures will begin only after the complainant submits a formal written complaint.

A formal complaint is one that is (1) submitted in writing using the SACSCOC "Complaint against Institutions: Information Sheet and Form," (2) signed, and (3) sent to the attention of the President of SACSCOC by the complainant(s). SACSCOC will neither entertain complaints that are not in writing or which are anonymous, nor will it consider complaints sent electronically or through facsimile transmission. In addition, SACSCOC does not accept voice recordings, such as recordings of meetings and conversations, as evidence in support of a complainant's allegations. To submit information from the voice recordings, the complainant should have the tape transcribed, provide a signature page for the complainant to attest to the accuracy of the transcription, and have the signature page notarized. If a complainant has a demonstrated disability that prevents submission of a formal complaint in accord with the guidelines above, he or she should contact the SACSCOC Coordinator of Communications and External Affairs for assistance.

The "Information Sheet and Form" includes:

- a. A statement describing the complaint in the clearest possible terms.
- b. The section(s) of the *Principles of Accreditation* alleged to have been violated and the time frame in which the significant lack of compliance is alleged to have occurred.
- c. A clear and concise written description of the evidence upon which the allegation is based. (Materials and documentation used to support a complainant's allegations should be limited to and directly related to the reported case.) The evidence should state relevant facts and document and support the allegation that the institution is in significant violation of the standards referenced in the complaint.
- d. A description of the action taken by the institution to date and a copy of the institution's response to the complainant as a result of prescribed procedures.
- e. An acknowledgment that SACSCOC staff may send a copy of the complaint to the president of the institution.
- f. Full disclosure about any other external channels the complainant is pursuing, including legal action.

Once the formal written complaint is submitted, SACSCOC and the complainant are responsible for the following:

1. SACSCOC will acknowledge a formal written complaint within 15 business days of its receipt.
2. Within 60 calendar days after acknowledging receipt of the complaint, SACSCOC staff will review the complaint and its documentation and determine (1) whether it is within the scope of SACSCOC policies and is accreditation related, (2) if there is adequate documentation in support of the allegations, and (3) whether the complaint raises significant questions about the institution's