
Policy on ~~Student and Public~~ Complaints Against Member Institutions

~~June 2019~~ June 2023
First Read

Policy

As an institutional accreditor, ACCJC is responsible for assuring the public of the educational quality of institutions it accredits by making sure an institution complies with the Eligibility Requirements, Accreditation Standards, and Commission policies (together Commission's Standards).

The Commission requires each accredited institution to have in place student grievance and public complaint policies and procedures that are reasonable, fairly administered, and well publicized.

ACCJC's complaint process allows students and members of the public to provide information about an institution's ability to meet the Commission's Standards. Accordingly, ACCJC only considers a complaint against member institutions that relates solely to Eligibility Requirements, Accreditation Standards, and Commission Policies.¹ When the Commission does receive a complaint about a candidate or accredited institution, it reviews that information to determine if it is relevant to the compliance of that institution with the Commission's Standards.

Criteria for Review of a Complaint

- Complaint must include a statement of facts supported by evidence of non-compliance with a specific Eligibility Requirement, Standards for Accreditation, Policy, or Procedures, and is not simply an individual grievance.
- Complainant must provide evidence that they have fully completed the institution's formal complaint and/or grievance process.
- Complainant must submit the complaint within 18 months from the date of the alleged occurrence(s) indicating noncompliance with Commission's Standards.
- Complaint must be written and submitted through ACCJC's online complaint form <https://accjc.org/complaint-process>, or mailed in hard copy to the Commission at ACCJC, 428 J Street, Suite 400, Sacramento, CA 95814.
- Complainant must acknowledge awareness that ACCJC may send a copy of the complaint to the Chief Executive Officer of the institution.
- Complaint must include complainant name, reply address, and signature.

¹ § 602.23 (c)(1)(2)

Complaints ACCJC Will Not Review

ACCJC does not accept anonymous complaints. ACCJC is not responsible for resolving disputes between an individual and an institution. ACCJC does not review the outcomes of institutional grievance processes to either uphold or overturn those decisions. ACCJC does not intervene in matters of an individual nature, including, but not limited to, the following:

- Admission
- Granting or transfer of academic credits
- Grades
- Fees
- Financial Aid
- Student discipline
- Faculty appointments, promotion, tenure, dismissals, hiring, or similar matters

Procedures

When ACCJC receives a complaint about a candidate or accredited institution, it reviews that information to determine if it is relevant to the compliance of that institution with the Commission's Standards. If the Commission staff determines the complaint does not pertain to Commission Standards or is not within its scope of review, they will notify the complainant in writing within ten working days.

If the complaint meets the criteria for review and warrants further consideration, ACCJC will notify the complainant and will forward a copy of the complaint, including related documentation as applicable, to the institution for review and response. The institution will generally have 30 working days to respond to the complaint in writing.

ACCJC will review the information provided by the institution within 30 working days of its receipt and make a decision regarding the complaint. If it is determined the institution is in compliance with Eligibility Requirements, Accreditation Standards, and Commission Policies, the complainant and institution will be so notified in writing and the matter will be closed. If, however, ACCJC determines the institution may be out of compliance, the complainant and institution will receive notice, including any additional follow-up required in accordance with Commission policies.

Policy Elements

The Commission at all times reserves the right to request information of an affiliated institution and to visit that institution for purposes of verifying that the institution meets Eligibility Requirements, Accreditation Standards, and Commission Policies. Based on the results of its review of complaints, the Commission may take action, including sanctions and other enforcement actions, in accordance with its *Policy on Actions on Institutions*.

The Commission will keep a record of student and public complaints against member institutions in accordance with ACCJC's protocols for the retention of records.

ACCJC staff will report to the Commission annually regarding the status and resolution of complaints reviewed against member institutions.

Timetable for Complaints Against Member Institutions

<u>Time</u>	<u>Responsible Party</u>	<u>Action</u>
<u>Within 18 months of occurrence</u>	<u>Complainant</u>	<u>Submit information pertaining to non-compliance</u>
<u>Within 10 working days of receipt</u>	<u>ACCJC Staff</u>	<u>Notify complainant whether meets criteria of policy for review; if not meets, then matter closed, if meets criteria, inform institution</u>
<u>Within 30 days after ACCJC notification</u>	<u>Institution</u>	<u>Responds to ACCJC regarding complaint</u>
<u>Within 30 days of receipt of institution information</u>	<u>ACCJC Staff</u>	<u>Determine whether institution is in compliance, if so, send communication to institution and complainant and matter is closed; if not in compliance, determine follow up course of action and communicate with institution and complainant</u>

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Accreditation by the Accrediting Commission of Community and Junior Colleges, Western Association of Schools and Colleges (the Commission) is an expression of confidence that an institution is satisfactorily achieving its mission, and that it meets or exceeds the Commission's Eligibility Requirements, Accreditation Standards and abides by Commission policies. The Commission is concerned with institutional integrity and with performance consistent with Accreditation Standards and policies. While it cannot intervene in the internal procedures of institutions or act as a regulatory body, the Commission can and does respond to complaints regarding allegations of conditions at affiliated institutions that raise significant questions about the institution's compliance with the Accreditation Standards expected of an accredited institution.

The Commission does not consider allegations concerning the personal lives of individuals connected with its affiliated institutions. It assumes no responsibility for adjudicating isolated individual grievances between students, faculty, or members of the public and individual institutions. The Commission will not act as a court of appeal in matters of admission, granting

~~or transfer of academic credit, grades, fees, student financial aid, student discipline, collective bargaining, faculty appointments, promotion, tenure and dismissals or similar matters.~~

~~The Commission requires that each accredited institution have in place student grievance and public complaint policies and procedures that are reasonable, fairly administered, and well publicized. A complainant filing a complaint with the Commission should demonstrate that a serious effort has been made to pursue all review procedures provided by the institution.~~

~~Complaints are considered only when made in writing, when the complainant is clearly identified, and the complainant's address is included. Complaints must be submitted to the Commission within 18 months from the date of the alleged occurrence. Substantial evidence should be included in support of the allegation that the institution is in significant violation of the Eligibility Requirements, Accreditation Standards and Commission policies (together Commission's Standards). Such evidence should state relevant and provable facts.~~

~~When the Commission receives a complaint about a candidate or accredited institution, it reviews that information to determine if it is relevant to the compliance of that institution with the Commission's Standards. If appropriate, such information may be referred to the institution and/or to the visiting team next scheduled to evaluate the institution. The Commission at all times reserves the right to request information of an affiliated institution and to visit that institution for purposes of fact finding, consistent with Commission policy. If Commission investigation yields credible evidence that indicates a systemic problem that calls into question the institution's ability to meet the Commission's Standards, the Commission may invoke the sanctions provided for in policy.~~

Procedures

- ~~1. It is the complainant's responsibility to do the following:
 - a. State the complaint in the clearest possible terms.
 - b. Provide, in writing, a clear description of the evidence upon which the allegation is based.
 - c. Demonstrate that all remedies available at the institution (grievance procedures, appeals, hearings, etc.) have been exhausted. The complainant should describe what has been done in this regard.
 - d. Acknowledge awareness that Commission staff may send a copy of the complaint to the Chief Executive Officer of the institution.
 - e. Include name and address.
 - f. Sign the complaint.~~
- ~~2. Within ten working days of the receipt of a complaint it will be acknowledged in writing and initially reviewed by the staff of the Commission. Individual complaints, whether acted upon or not by the Commission, will be retained in Commission files.~~
- ~~3. If the Commission staff finds the complaint to be not within the scope of Commission policies and jurisdiction, the complainant will be so notified.~~

- ~~4. If the complaint appears to be within the scope of Commission policies and jurisdiction, and is substantially documented, a copy of the complaint will be forwarded to the institution's Chief Executive Officer (and copied to the institution's Accreditation Liaison Officer), who will be asked to respond to the complaint by addressing a letter and any supporting evidence to the appropriate Vice President of the Commission within thirty working days.~~
- ~~5. The Commission's Vice President will review the complaint, the response, and evidence submitted by the institution's president, and will determine one of the following:
 - ~~a. That the complaint will not be processed further. The complainant will be so notified within ten working days.~~
 - ~~b. That the complaint has sufficient substance to warrant further investigation. If the Commission decides to investigate a complaint, it will inform the complainant of its decision to investigate at the same time it informs the institution of its intent to investigate.~~~~
- ~~6. As part of its investigation, the Commission may request information of the institution and may send representatives to visit that institution for purposes of fact-finding. The Commission may also request information of other agencies that accredit the institution or authorize it to operate, and of the U.S. Department of Education. If further investigation is warranted, the time to conduct the investigation may vary considerably depending on the circumstances and the nature of the complaint. Applicable complaints may be provided to the comprehensive review team chair for investigation during the external evaluation site visit.~~
- ~~7. The Commission will prepare a Report of the Findings of the Complaint Investigation. Prior to the Commission's disposition of the complaint, the institution will have an opportunity to respond in writing within thirty working days to the findings of the investigation.~~
- ~~8. The Commission will consider the Complaint, the Report of the Findings of the Complaint Investigation, and any institutional response to the findings of the investigation in reaching a disposition on the Complaint. Although every effort will be made to expedite a decision, it is not possible to guarantee a specific time frame in which the process will be completed.~~
- ~~9. If the Commission's deliberations conclude that there is credible evidence that the institution is not meeting Accreditation Standards or complying with Commission policies, the Commission may (a) provide directives to the institution to take immediate corrective actions, or (b) invoke any of the sanctions provided for in policy. The Commission will also schedule appropriate monitoring of the institution's subsequent response, including calling for Special Reports and visits by Commission representatives.~~
- ~~10. The decision is final and will be communicated by the Vice President of the Commission to the institution and the complainant. If the complaint was referred to the ACGJC by another agency, the Commission will provide that agency with copies of correspondence that state the outcome of the complaint within ten working days of the Commission decision on the disposition of the complaint. The Commission will also provide the U.S. Department of Education notice of the disposition of any complaint that directly or indirectly affects an institution's eligibility for Title IV funds.~~

~~11. The Commission will keep a record of student and public complaints against member institutions. Commission staff will report to the Commission annually regarding the status and resolution of student and public complaints against member institutions.~~

~~Adopted June 1972; Revised January 1984, January 1993; Edited October 1997; Revised June 2001; Edited August 2007; Revised January 2013; Edited April 2013; Revised June 2019~~

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