



**NEW ENGLAND ASSOCIATION OF SCHOOLS AND COLLEGES
COMMISSION ON INSTITUTIONS OF HIGHER EDUCATION**

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**Policy and Procedures for the
Consideration of Complaints Made Against Affiliated Institutions**

Policy Statement

The Commission on Institutions of Higher Education is concerned with institutional integrity and with performance consistent with its standards and policies. While it cannot intervene in the internal procedures of institutions or perform 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 *Standards for Accreditation* or the *Criteria for Candidacy*.

Complaints are considered only when made in writing and when the complainant is clearly identified. Substantial evidence should be included in support of the allegations that the institution is in violation of Commission *Standards* or *Criteria*. Such evidence should state relevant and provable facts. The complaint should demonstrate that a serious effort has been made to pursue all review procedures provided within the institution.

The Commission does not consider allegations concerning the personal lives of individuals connected with affiliated institutions. It assumes no responsibility for adjudicating isolated individual grievances, nor will it act as a court of appeal in such matters as admission, granting or transfer of academic credit, financial aid, fees, student discipline, collective bargaining, or faculty appointments, promotion, tenure, and dismissals. If the Commission ascertains that a complainant has instituted litigation against the institution, no action will be taken on the complaint while the matter is under judicial consideration.

Complaints must be submitted in a timely manner and refer to current or recent matters at the institution. Except in extraordinary circumstances, the Commission will not consider complaints if the conditions alleged occurred more than three years prior to the filing of the complaint.

Procedures and Time Lines for the Review of Complaints

1. A complaint received by the Commission is acknowledged in writing upon receipt.

2. The complaint is reviewed by the Director of the Commission and within two weeks of its receipt takes one of the following actions:
 - a. if the complaint is found to be not within the scope of Commission policies and/or jurisdiction, the complainant will be so informed and the matter closed;
 - b. if the complaint appears to be within the scope of Commission policies and jurisdiction, and substantially documented, a copy of the complaint will be forwarded to the institution's chief executive officer who is asked to provide the Commission a response to the complaint. The originator of the complaint will be notified of the action at that time.
3. When the complaint is forwarded to the institution, it is asked to provide its response within one month.
4. In cases where no response is received, a second request will be forwarded to the institution, within one week of the original deadline for submission. If no response to the second request is received, the Commission's Director will place the matter on the agenda of the next Commission meeting for its determination as to the future course of action.
5. If the institution acknowledges the complaint is valid, it will advise the Commission in writing of the actions taken to rectify the situation. At its next scheduled meeting, the Commission will consider the institutional response and determine whether the complaint should be investigated further or that the matter should be closed.
6. Should the institution deny that the complaint is valid, it will provide the Commission a response indicating why it believes the allegations made are either untrue or do not represent a breach of the Commission's criteria. Such a response should include supportive documentation where appropriate.

The response will be referred to a committee of two Commissioners for review which will report their findings with a recommendation for further action to the Commission at its next scheduled meeting. The Commission will take action as it deems appropriate. The Commission Chair, at his/her sole discretion, may call a special meeting to act on a complaint when it is believed in the public interest to do so.

7. The complainant will be informed of steps taken by the Commission in reviewing the complaint within a week of each step.
8. The Director will provide to the Commission at each meeting for its review, a report of any complaints received since the previous meeting and the action taken with respect to each.

9. Complaints against institutions accredited by other regional commissions or recognized institutional accrediting bodies will be referred to the appropriate accrediting agency.
10. The Commission will make every effort to adhere to the above time line. In cases where circumstances beyond its control necessitate its modification, the involved parties will be so informed.

Resolved complaints will become part of the institution's file.

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