Complaints Regarding Member or Candidate Institutions

The Commission considers complaints regarding member or candidate institutions only when the reported conditions are substantially documented and are related to the eligibility requirements, standards, and policies of the Northwest Commission on Colleges and Universities. Complaints are to be submitted in writing (on paper), including the original inked signature of each complainant, to the President of the Northwest Commission on Colleges and Universities. Electronic submissions are not acceptable. The Commission assumes no responsibility for adjudicating isolated individual grievances; however, it may investigate individual complaints and reports to determine whether they reflect conditions within an institution that affect the quality of its programs or are detrimental to the general welfare. Except in extraordinary circumstances, the Commission will not consider complaints if two years or more have passed since the complainant initiated the institution’s grievance procedure. The Northwest Commission on Colleges and Universities shall maintain an up-to-date record of all student complaints received by the Commission.

Procedures for Handling Complaints

a. When an oral complaint regarding a member institution is received, the person is advised of the policy statement and requested to submit the complaint in writing with substantial documentation, including the date when the institutional grievance procedure was initiated, to the President of the Northwest Commission on Colleges and Universities.

b. When a written complaint regarding a member institution is received, the President acknowledges receipt of the complaint in writing within 15 business days.

c. After acknowledging receipt of the complaint, the President and/or his or her designee analyzes it to determine if there is adequate documentation and if, where appropriate, institutional appeals procedures have been utilized. In case adequate documentation is not provided, the complainant is notified, in writing, within 10 business days that complaints can be considered only when reported conditions are substantially documented and are such as to jeopardize the quality of the educational program or the general welfare of the institution. In case institutional appeal procedures have not been utilized, the complainant is required to do so first.

d. When the complaint is substantially documented, or a pattern or practice appears to be present when considering past complaints received against the institution, the chief executive officer of the institution is notified, in writing, by the President within 15 business days after acknowledging the complaint. The complaint is reported to the institution or a copy of the complaint is enclosed, and a written response is requested, normally within 20 business days.

e. The response from the chief executive officer of the institution is analyzed to determine institutional compliance with the Commission’s standards for accreditation.

f. If the President, on behalf of the Commission, judges the institution to be in compliance with the Commission’s standards for accreditation, the complainant and institution are so notified. If the President determines that the institution may be out of compliance
with the Commission’s standards for accreditation, the matter is referred to the Commission for consideration and action at its next regularly scheduled meeting. Both the complainant and institution are notified of the referral.

g. In taking action on the complaint, the Commission may
   1) Dismiss the complaint;
   2) meet in executive sessions with complainant and institutional representatives in an attempt to resolve the complaint;
   3) make recommendations to the institution suggesting areas for improvement including changes in procedures related to standards and policies of the Commission;
   4) determine that the institution is out of compliance with the Commission’s standards for accreditation and require corrective action by the institution within a specified period of time; or
   5) request a visit to the institution by an ad hoc committee of the Commission to review situations.

h. Complaints that are substantially documented and are judged by the Commission to be related to the eligibility requirements, standards, and policies of the Northwest Commission on Colleges and Universities will be made available to the chair of the evaluation committee (evaluator, in the case of a single-person visit) for consideration as part of the next regularly scheduled institutional evaluation.