**15. Complaints** ..... 75
15.1. Complaints against accredited programs and institutions ..... 75
15.2. Investigation of complaints ..... 75
15.3. Complaints against CEA ..... 79

# 15. Complaints

## 15.1. Complaints against accredited programs and institutions

Accredited programs and language institutions are expected to continue to meet the *CEA Standards* during the term of accreditation. A student, faculty or staff member, or any individual outside the program or institution who may have knowledge of an accredited program or institution's alleged failure to maintain the *CEA Standards* may file a complaint with CEA. In reviewing a complaint, CEA's policies intend to provide judicious review of the complainant's concern regarding compliance with the *CEA Standards* while ensuring due process for the site.

### 15.1.1. Notice requirements

Each accredited program or institution is required to post the *CEA Standards* in a public place accessible to all students, faculty, staff, and the public. In addition, CEA requires the site to post the procedures for filing a complaint, which are provided by CEA. The document includes information on why a complaint may be filed, who may file, how to file, and how complaints are adjudicated.

### 15.1.2. Failure to report substantive change

If an accredited program or institution is delinquent in reporting a substantive change, a complaint may be filed. Such complaints may be filed by anyone who believes the site has failed to report such a substantive change regardless of whether this change has resulted in noncompliance with the *CEA Standards*. Such complaints should explain how, in process or content, the program or institution has substantively changed since it was accredited, as well as the nature of any alleged failure to maintain the *CEA Standards* as a result of this change. Any available documents showing the changes should be included.

## 15.2. Investigation of complaints

### 15.2.1. Informal or undocumented information or complaints

Upon receipt of anonymous or undocumented information or complaint, the executive director will promptly provide a copy of the CEA complaints policy to the sender, if contact information is available. Depending on the nature of the information, the executive director may inform the site of the information and undertake investigation of the matter through a written information request to the site. If the basis of the information warrants, the executive director will inform the Executive Committee (EC), which will decide whether to advance the information to complaint status and to the Standards Compliance Committee (SCC) for further action. The SCC will act within the policies stated in these *Policies and Procedures*. The executive director can initiate a special site visit based on information received by any means.

### 15.2.2. Formal complaints

A formal complaint must be written, must not be anonymous, must refer to a specific standard(s), and must document the nature of the noncompliance. If submitted by mail, the complainant's signature, address, and phone number must be submitted on a separate piece of paper. If submitted by secure electronic means, the complainant's name, address, and contact information must be available with the submission.

Upon receipt of a complaint, the executive director reviews the complaint in a timely manner in order to establish that it is actionable under the *CEA Policies and Procedures*, and specifically that it:

a. relates to compliance with *CEA Standards* or adherence to the *CEA Policies and Procedures*
b. is appropriately addressed to CEA rather than another agency
c. is not capricious, frivolous, or inappropriate for action by CEA
d. is not based on personal or other grievance or commercial disputes, but rather on an alleged violation of the *CEA Standards*
e. relates to activities that have occurred while the site has been accredited by CEA
f. relates to events or practices that are sufficiently recent to support investigation, and
g. is appropriately documented.

### 15.2.3. Review of formal complaints

The executive director may review the complaint with the chair in making a determination whether the complaint is actionable. The executive director will inform the complainant in writing of whether the complaint is actionable.

a. If the complaint is not actionable, the executive director will provide a written explanation to the complainant of the reasons.
b. If the complaint is actionable as a formal complaint, the following steps are taken:
    i. The executive director will send the original copy of the complaint, in which the sender is de-identified, to the contact person for the program or institution with a copy of the *CEA Policies and Procedures*, and invite a written response to be submitted within 30 days of receipt by the contact person.
    ii. Within 30 days after the program or institution receives the complaint, the reply, along with any accompanying documentation, must be received by CEA.
    iii. In a timely manner upon receipt of the response, a true copy of the complaint and the response will be forwarded to the Standards Compliance Committee (SCC).
    iv. The SCC will review the material and make a recommendation to the Executive Committee (EC) in a timely manner.
    v. Upon receipt of the recommendation from the SCC, the EC will act on the recommendation.

15.2.4. Possible Standards Compliance Committee (SCC) recommendations

a. The SCC may recommend any of the following actions to the Executive Committee (EC):

   i. Recommend dismissal of the complaint without reporting requirements if it determines that the program or institution remains in compliance with the *CEA Standards* and there has been no violation of the *Standards*.

   ii. Recommend dismissal of the complaint with reporting requirements and/or recommendations if it determines that the program or institution remains in adequate compliance with the *CEA Standards* but with minor standards-related deficiencies, which will be addressed in the reporting requirements and/or recommendations.

   iii. Recommend additional investigation if it determines that more information is required to verify that the program or institution is in compliance with the *CEA Standards.* The SCC will specify what matters require investigation and indicate the additional investigation recommended (e.g., conducting a site visit, requiring additional documentation, meeting with personnel, meeting with the complainant, or other action).

b. Upon receipt of the SCC's recommendation, the EC may take any of the following actions:

   i. Approve the recommendation for dismissal, with or without reporting requirements and/or recommendations. In this case, CEA will notify the program or institution and the complainant of the decision; the action is over.

   ii. Approve the recommendation for additional investigation.

   iii. If the EC does not approve the SCC's recommendation, it may order a different form of investigation, dismiss the action, or order other appropriate action.

15.2.5. Additional investigation of the complaint

If the Executive Committee (EC) approves a Standards Compliance Committee (SCC) recommendation for further investigation or orders a different form of investigation, it will allocate resources appropriate for the investigation. The executive director may conduct the investigation in any reasonable manner, including in-person or virtual interviews, announced or unannounced site visits, additional factual research, or other steps to adequately investigate the matter. The SCC may consult with legal counsel. The investigation will be carried out expeditiously.

a. The investigation will be conducted and the findings of the investigation as determined by the executive director will be provided to the SCC. The SCC will review the findings and prepare a written report of the results.

b. The written report of the investigation will be sent to the program or institution, which will be given an opportunity to respond to the written report and must respond within 30 days of receipt of the report.

c. Based on its review of the report of the investigation and the response from the program or institution, the SCC may recommend any of the following actions to the EC:

    i. Recommend dismissal of the complaint without reporting requirements if it determines that the program or institution remains in compliance with the *CEA Standards* and that there has been no violation of the Standards

    ii. Recommend dismissal of the complaint with reporting requirements and/or recommendations if it determines that the program or institution remains in adequate compliance with the *CEA Standards* but with minor standards-related deficiencies, which will be addressed in the reporting requirements and/or recommendations.

    iii. Recommend review by the full Commission for specific action.

d. Upon receipt of the SCC's recommendation following the additional investigation, the EC may take any of the following actions:

    i. Approve the recommendation for dismissal, with or without reporting requirements and/or recommendations. In this case, CEA will notify the program or institution and the complainant of the decision, in which case the action is considered to be complete.

    ii. If the SCC recommends a specific action, the EC will review and approve the recommendation for review by the full Commission.

        1. The review by the full Commission will be scheduled for the next regular meeting of the Commission.
        2. The full Commission may rely on the SCC and the prior investigation or may conduct a de novo review to consider the entire complaint record, including the original complaint, the response of the site, and any materials developed as a result of investigation, including the responses of the site.
        3. The full Commission will then vote on a specific action to be taken. Actions may include dismissal of the complaint with or without reporting requirements, or placing the site on warning with a time frame for taking specific corrective actions.
        4. If a warning is issued and the conditions are not met within the stated time frame, the site may be subject to probation, show cause, and withdrawal of accreditation.
        5. In the case of withdrawal of accreditation, a program or institution has the right to appeal, as described in Section 13: Appeals.

15.2.6. Time frame

Complaints may be filed at any time. CEA will investigate complaints according to the procedures outlined. The resolution of a complaint may take several months, depending on whether a site visit is required and when the complaint is filed in relation to the next scheduled Commission meeting.

Notice of the Commission's decision with regard to a complaint will be made to the program or institution in writing and in accordance with the rules regarding accreditation decisions.

## 15.3. Complaints against CEA

Formal complaints about CEA's performance in relation to its own procedures and policies may be forwarded to the executive director. Complaints must be in writing, relate to a specific policy or procedure, include appropriate documentation, and be signed by the complainant. Complaints may be filed at any time.

The CEA executive director will seek to resolve the matter with the complainant.

a. If a complaint cannot be satisfactorily resolved within a reasonable period of time, the executive director will forward the complaint to the voting members of the EC.
b. The chair, on behalf of the voting members of the EC, will investigate and respond to the complainant.
c. Should the complainant seek further redress, the record of the complaint, including the initial written complaint and any follow-up by the executive director or the voting members of the EC, will be forwarded to the full Commission at its next regularly scheduled meeting.
d. The complainant will receive a response to the complaint within 30 working days following that meeting.

If the complainant is not satisfied with the resolution, CEA will provide contact information for the U.S. Department of Education's Accreditation Group. CEA maintains complete records of any complaints against itself, as well as their resolution. Records are available for inspection at the CEA office upon request.