



Policy Title:	ACAOM Complaint Review Policy
Approved By:	ACAOM Executive Committee
Document History:	Implementation Date: 2011 Last Updated: 30 October 2016
Related Policies:	ACAOM <i>Eligibility Requirements</i> ; ACAOM <i>Standards and Criteria for Accreditation</i> ; ACAOM <i>Complaint Form</i>
References:	34 CFR Part 602; 20 U.S. Code § 1099(b)
Responsible Official:	ACAOM Executive Director

Policy Summary: This guidance outlines the Accreditation Commission for Acupuncture and Oriental Medicine’s (ACAOM or Commission) policy for accepting and reviewing complaints about ACAOM-accredited, pre-accredited (“Candidate”), or approved programs from students, faculty, staff, other programs/institutions, and member(s) of the public that allege violations of ACAOM’s *Eligibility Requirements, Standards and Criteria for Accreditation*, policies or procedures.

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Types of Complaints

Complaints Against Programs/Institutions

ACAOM’s complaint policy is not a mechanism for adjudication of disputes between individuals and programs. As such, the Commission will only consider complaints that allege violations of ACAOM’s *Eligibility Requirements, Standards and Criteria for Accreditation*, policies or procedures. The Commission cannot, for instance, direct a program to change a grade, re-admit a student, or reinstate a faculty member. The Commission shall only entertain a complaint when it believes that the program’s/institution’s policies, procedures or practices may be noncompliant with ACAOM’s *Eligibility Requirements, Standards and Criteria for Accreditation*, or its policies and procedures.

Procedures

The Commission normally requires that the complaining party (“Complainant”) exhaust institutional grievance and review mechanisms available to the Complainant within the program/institution prior to submitting a complaint to the Commission. To be

processed, a complaint must be submitted on an official ACAOM *Complaint Form* (available on ACAOM's website or by request made to ACAOM's Executive Office) that provides the following information:

1. The identity, authorized signature (paper or electronic), and complete contact information of the Complainant;
2. Evidence that the Complainant has exhausted all internal institutional grievance and review mechanisms that were available to the Complainant. For example, a student who is enrolled in a program, would need to show s/he exhausted all grievance procedures at his/her school without a satisfactory conclusion, before initiating a complaint with ACAOM.
3. A specific description of the allegation(s) that may constitute a violation of one or more of ACAOM's *Eligibility Requirements, Standards and Criteria for Accreditation*, policies, or procedures;
4. A description of the status of legal action, if any, related to the complaint.

Confidentiality

The complaining party may request confidentiality by selecting the appropriate box on the ACAOM *Complaint Form*. Accordingly, the identity of the Complainant shall be maintained as confidential unless such disclosure:

1. Is necessary to afford the program/institution due process in responding to the complaint;
2. Is required by law including, but not limited to, a legally valid subpoena, regulatory inquiry, US Department of Education regulations, or other legal process.

In instances where a Complainant's identity must be divulged to afford the program/institution due process in responding to a complaint, ACAOM staff will contact the Complainant who requested confidentiality to ask for a written release of his/her identity. Unless the Complainant submits a written release to the Commission the complaint will be dismissed.

Programs/institutions are explicitly prohibited from retaliating against individuals or entities filing complaints with the Commission. Such retaliation constitutes grounds for the Commission to initiate adverse action against the program/institution.

Acknowledgment and Resolution

ACAOM will acknowledge receipt of each properly filed complaint received about an accredited, candidate, or approved program generally within 15 days of receipt. The complaint will be reviewed for a determination of relevancy to ACAOM *Eligibility Requirements, Standards and Criteria for Accreditation*, policies or procedures. If the complaint, or any part of it is found to be relevant, ACAOM will inform the Chief Executive Officer of the program/institution of the relevant aspects of the complaint generally within 30 days, and will request that the program/institution submit a written response within 30 days following the notification.

After receipt of the institution's written response, ACAOM may seek an informal resolution without formal action by the Commission. Upon any informal resolution, the complaint will be closed, documented with a copy placed in the Program's/institution's file, and appropriate notice sent to the affected parties.

Absent an informal resolution, the complaint record is forwarded to an ACAOM Review Committee to consider the complaint. At its discretion, the review committee may:

1. Seek additional information from the Complainant or the program/institution;
2. Dismiss the complaint as not establishing a violation of ACAOM *Eligibility Requirements, Standards and Criteria for Accreditation*, policies or procedures.
3. Determine that the complaint record establishes a violation of ACAOM *Eligibility Requirements, Standards and Criteria for Accreditation*, policies or procedures. Accordingly, the Commission will require the program/institution to take corrective action and document its actions in a follow-up report or in a subsequent site visit. Corrective action may include but is not limited to: an earlier comprehensive review process with a complete Self-Study Report and site visit, additional report(s) addressing the Commission findings, a focused site visit, or a Show Cause letter to the institution as to why the Commission should not take adverse action.

4. Place the complaint on the meeting agenda for full Commission action.

ACAOM will notify the Chief Executive Officer of the program/institution and the Complainant of a final decision on a complaint generally within 30 days of the decision.

Complaints will normally be addressed within 120 calendar days from the date of the notification to the subject of the complaint.

Complaints Against ACAOM

The Commission will evaluate complaints made against it, including those that relate to its monitoring of program/institutional compliance with ACAOM's *Eligibility Requirements*, its *Standards and Criteria for Accreditation*, and the Commission's adherence to the accreditation policies and procedures.

Procedures

1. All written complaints received regarding ACAOM's *Eligibility Requirements*, its *Standards and Criteria for Accreditation*, and the Commission's adherence to the accreditation policies and procedures, shall be forwarded within ten (10) days of receipt to the Commission's Executive Committee and Executive Director. The Executive Committee shall review the complaint and determine whether or not the allegations are relevant to ACAOM's *Eligibility Requirements*, its *Standards and Criteria for Accreditation*, and the Commission's adherence to the accreditation policies and procedures. The Executive Committee may request, as necessary, additional information from the complainant, ACAOM staff, or Commissioners.
2. For a relevant complaint, the Chair will appoint a special committee of at least three (3) members to study the matter and summarize its findings for recommendation to and action by the Commission at its next regularly scheduled meeting. The members of the special committee must not have a conflict of interest, and may or may not include individuals other than Commissioners. ACAOM will conduct a training session with the special committee to orient them to their role and responsibilities.
3. The Commission will consider the recommendation of the Special Committee as substantive and will take action consistent with the recommendation, or provide specific rationale for variance from the recommendation. The complainant will be notified in writing generally within 30 days of the Commission meeting of any action taken by the Commission in response to the complaint.

Revision History

Date Revised	Summary of Revisions	Approved By
161030	Refreshed and Reformatted	ACAOM Executive Director