



Policy Title:	ACAOM Policy Governing Complaints
Approved By:	ACAOM Executive Committee
Document History:	Implementation Date: 2011 Last Updated: 27 November 2018
Related Policies:	ACAOM Eligibility Requirements ; ACAOM Standards and Criteria for Accreditation ; ACAOM Complaint Form ; ACAOM Commission Actions Policy
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.

ACAOM POLICY GOVERNING COMPLAINTS¹

1. INTRODUCTION

The Accreditation Commission for Acupuncture and Oriental Medicine (ACAOM or Commission) is interested in the quality of programs and institutions it accredits and will evaluate all complaints that allege non-compliance with its *Eligibility Requirements, Standards and Criteria for Accreditation*, and/or its required accreditation process/procedure(s). However, ACAOM does not intervene on behalf of individuals, serve as a mediator or act as a court of appeal for individuals in cases of disciplinary action or dismissal. Neither does ACAOM review decisions in such matters as: admission; grade changes; graduation; faculty appointment; promotion or dismissal of faculty, staff or students - unless the context suggests unethical or unprofessional actions that seriously impair or disrupt the educational services of an ACAOM accredited or pre-accredited program or institution.

If you believe an ACAOM accredited or pre-accredited program or institution is not in compliance with ACAOM’s *Eligibility Requirements, Standards and Criteria for Accreditation*, and/or its required accreditation process/procedure(s), you may file a written complaint with ACAOM using [ACAOM’s Complaint Form](#).

For a complaint to be processed by ACAOM, it should include:

1. The basis for any allegation of noncompliance with ACAOM standards/criteria for accreditation and/or its policies/procedures.

¹ For purposes of this policy, ACAOM regards the terms “complaints” and “grievances” as synonymous.

2. All relevant names and dates and a brief description of the actions forming the basis of the complaint.
3. Copies of any documents or materials that support the allegations, when available.

Based on due process considerations, only written and signed complaints will be considered by ACAOM; oral and unsigned complaints will not be considered. ACAOM will take every reasonable precaution to prevent the identity of the Complainant from being revealed to the program/institution; however, ACAOM cannot guarantee the confidentiality of the Complainant.

2. NON-RETALIATION

ACAOM accredited or pre-accredited 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.

3. PROCEDURES:

The following procedures have been established to manage complaints:

A. Inquiries

When an inquiry about filing a complaint is received by the ACAOM office, the inquirer will be directed to the on-line location of ACAOM's *Policy Governing Complaints* and its [Complaint Form](#).

B. Written Complaints

When a complaint is submitted, the following procedure is followed:

- 1) ACAOM will acknowledge receipt of each properly filed complaint about an accredited or pre-accredited Program/Institution generally within fifteen (15) calendar days of receipt.
- 2) The materials submitted are initially reviewed by ACAOM staff. This initial review includes verifying that the complaint is signed, that relevant ACAOM *Eligibility Requirements, Standards and Criteria for Accreditation* and/or its required accreditation process/procedure(s) are implicated, and that supporting documents have been included.
- 3) The chair of the appropriate Commission review committee may be consulted to assist in determining whether there is sufficient information to proceed.
 - a. If the Complainant provides sufficient evidence of non-compliance with ACAOM standards or required accreditation process/procedures, the Complainant is so advised, and the complaint is investigated using the procedures outlined in the following section "*formal complaints.*"
 - b. If the Complainant does not provide sufficient evidence of non-compliance with ACAOM *Eligibility Requirements, Standards and Criteria for Accreditation*, and/or its required accreditation process/procedure(s), the Complainant is so advised. The Complainant may elect:
 - i. to revise and submit sufficient information to pursue a formal complaint, or
 - ii. to not pursue the complaint. In that event, the decision will be so noted, and no further action will be taken. The Complainant may be advised that their complaint should be further pursued through

other local, state or federal agencies and can be referred to the [Complaints FAQ](#) for additional information.

C. Formal Complaints

Formal Complaints are investigated as follows:

- 1) If it is determined that the complaint requires further investigation, the Complainant is informed that ACAOM will investigate the complaint. Additionally, the Complainant is advised that due to confidentiality policies, ACAOM is unable to provide any information to the Complainant regarding either the investigation or resolution of the complaint.
- 2) ACAOM informs the chief executive officer (CEO) of the relevant Program/Institution that ACAOM has received information indicating that the program or institution's compliance with specific *Eligibility Requirements, Standards and Criteria for Accreditation*, and/or its required accreditation process/procedure(s) has been questioned.
- 3) The Program/Institution is asked to report on compliance with the ACAOM *Eligibility Requirements, Standards and Criteria for Accreditation*, and/or its required accreditation process/procedure(s) in question by a specific date, usually within thirty (30) calendar days. Documented evidence that demonstrates compliance is required.
- 4) Receipt of the Program/Institution's written response to the complaint is acknowledged.
- 5) The appropriate Commission committee will review the Program/Institution's written response to the complaint. The action of the committee will be forwarded to the full Commission for review and further action.
- 6) The Commission may act on the compliance question(s) raised by the Complainant by:
 - a. determining that the Program/Institution continues to comply with ACAOM's *Eligibility Requirements, Standards and Criteria for Accreditation*, and/or its required accreditation process/procedure(s) in question and that no further action is required; or
 - b. determining that the Program/Institution does not or may not continue to comply with the ACAOM *Eligibility Requirements, Standards and Criteria for Accreditation*, and/or its required accreditation process/procedure(s) in question.
 - i. If the Program/Institution is permitted to respond by written report, ACAOM will describe the problem and set a compliance deadline and submission date for the report and request documentation to support the corrective action taken by the Program/Institution.
 - ii. If an on-site visit is required, ACAOM will describe the problem and determine, based on the number and seriousness of the identified problems, whether the matter may be reviewed at the next regularly scheduled on-site review or whether a special on-site compliance review will be conducted (at the Program/Institution's expense).
- 7) Generally, within thirty (30) days of its action, ACAOM will also notify the Program/Institution of the results of the complaint investigation.
- 8) Under all circumstances, information related to the current accreditation status of the Program/Institution is reflected in ACAOM's posting of its list of accredited programs and institutions located on the ACAOM [website](http://www.acaom.org) (www.acaom.org).

D. 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, Standards and Criteria for Accreditation*, and the Commission's adherence to its accreditation policies and procedures.

Procedures

All written complaints received regarding ACAOM's *Eligibility Requirements, Standards and Criteria for Accreditation*, and/or the Commission's adherence to its required accreditation process/procedure(s), shall be forwarded within ten (10) calendar days of receipt to the Commission's Executive Committee and Executive Director. The Executive Committee shall review the complaint and determine whether the allegations are relevant to ACAOM's *Eligibility Requirements, Standards and Criteria for Accreditation*, and/or the Commission's adherence to its accreditation process/procedure(s).

The Executive Committee may request, as necessary, additional information from the Complainant, ACAOM staff, or Commissioners.

1. 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.
2. 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 actions consistent with the recommendation or provide specific rationale for variance from the recommendation. The Complainant will be notified in writing generally within thirty (30) calendar 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
170830	Revisions were made to the "Acknowledgment and Resolution" section to clarify timelines and actions available to complaint Review Committees and the full Commission	ACAOM Executive Director
171114	Revised to clarify "calendar" days where relevant	ACAOM Executive Director
181127	Comprehensive Revision and Commission Ratification	Commission