

Complaint Policy

The Accrediting Association of Seventh-day Adventist Schools, Colleges & Universities (Adventist Accrediting Association or AAA)

1. Purpose

- a. The Accrediting Association of Seventh-day Adventist Schools, Colleges & Universities (“Adventist Accrediting Association” or “AAA”) recognizes the value of information provided by students, employees, and others in determining whether an institution’s performance is consistent with AAA standards and expectations for accreditation.
- b. Any school accepted into the initial accreditation process or currently accredited by AAA is expected to have a complaint policy and procedure for the purposes of responding to, addressing, and redressing as appropriate, complaints made by an eligible party. The complaint policy and procedure should be published on the institution’s website and in its bulletin.
- c. AAA’s complaint procedures are created to address non-compliance with AAA’s or the institution’s standards, policies, or procedures. Complaint procedures are not intended to be used to involve AAA in disputes between individuals and affiliated institutions, or to cause AAA to interpose itself as a reviewing authority in individual matters of admission, grades, granting or transferability of credits, application of academic policies, fees or other financial matters, disciplinary matters, contractual rights and obligations, personnel decisions, or similar matters. Nor does AAA seek any type of compensation, damages, readmission, or any other redress on an individual’s behalf.

2. Parties Who May File a Complaint

A complaint may be filed by any party who has good reason to believe that an accredited school or an initial applicant school is not in compliance with AAA standards or requirements, including but not limited to students and former students of the school, prospective students, governmental agencies, members of the public, and other accredited schools.

3. Filing and Content of a Complaint

- a. Individuals may submit at any time information regarding an institution’s compliance with AAA eligibility requirements, standards, or policies or regarding an institution’s compliance with its own policies or procedures. Complainants are encouraged first to avail themselves of the school’s complaint procedures.
- b. Individuals interested in submitting information regarding an institution’s suitability for accreditation to be considered during an upcoming accreditation review should follow the policy on Third-Party Comment. AAA reserves the right to review information under either policy as it determines to be appropriate under the circumstances.

Comment [ADT1]: Where is this policy? Is it found in this document? If so, that is not clear. If not, need to tell them where to find it.

Comment [LB2]: AAA needs to develop a Third-Party Comment policy, but does not yet have one.

- c. Aggrieved individuals must submit complaints in writing (e-mail is not acceptable) and address them directly to the Accrediting Association of Seventh-day Adventist Schools, Colleges & Universities. Such written complaints must also contain a return postal address. AAA also will not act on complaints which are anonymous, submitted on behalf of another individual or complaints which are forwarded to AAA.
- d. AAA does not respond to, or take action on, any complaint or allegation that is defamatory, hostile, or contains profanity.
- ~~e. The AAA also will not act on complaints which are submitted on behalf of another individual or complaints which are forwarded to the AAA.~~
- e. Because of the need for information to be current, except in extraordinary circumstances, AAA will not consider complaints if two years or more have passed since the complainant initiated the institution's grievance procedure.
- g. Therefore, AAA's practice is not to consider a complaint which is currently in administrative proceedings, including institutional proceedings, or in litigation.
- h. In order for a complaint to be processed, the complaint should contain:
 - i. The basis for any allegation of noncompliance, including the specific standards or fundamental elements, policies, or procedures which have been allegedly violated. Reference AAA standards for accreditation, available on the web at:
http://adventistaccreditingassociation.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=49&Itemid=71;
 - ii. All relevant names and dates and a brief description of the actions forming the basis of the complaint;
 - iii. Copies of any documents or materials that support the allegations, when available;
 - iv. Information regarding any steps already taken to resolve the complaint within the process provided for by the institution.
 - iii. Written permission for disclosure from the complainant(s) authorizing AAA to forward a copy of the complaint, including the identity of the complainant.¹

4. Processing a Complaint

- a. AAA will acknowledge receipt of all complaints. AAA recognizes the importance of timely resolution of complaints as promptly as feasible, consistent with fairness to the complainant and the institution;
- b. AAA will conduct an initial review of the complaint to determine whether the complaint sets forth information or allegations that reasonably suggest that a

Comment [ADT3]: What about anonymous complaints? May need a statement to clarify here. Something like: Complainants must identify themselves. If we delete "f" we need to delete the final sentence here, too.

Comment [JLG4]: I am not certain we can say this. I believe an agency is supposed to consider all complaints. Even anonymous ones.

Comment [JLG5]: The regulations say an agency must consider all complaints—they don't say they must ACT on all complaints. We do allow anonymous and confidential complaints—the Commission determines if the complaint has merit and will forward to the school if deemed appropriate. In some instances it is forwarded to the school for informational purposes only—no response required by the school. See footnote below.

Comment [ADT6]: I agree with Juanita. If it is common policy to allow forwarded, third party and anonymous complaints, we should do so as well.

Comment [JLG7]: Again—not sure we can say this. We usually consider the complaint if it is under our scope – just don't close the complaint until a final decision is made on the litigation.

Comment [JLG8]: Is there an easier way to get to the standards? They should have an easy link on the AAA website so all we would need to reference is the main website.

Comment [JLG9]: May need to delete

Comment [ADT10]: Need to make certain this is consistent with other sections of this document. How to File a Complaint will have to agree with this whichever way we go.

¹ If written permission for disclosure is not provided, AAA will review the complaint but, at its discretion, may not be able to process the complaint in accordance with the Complaint Policy.

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- school may not be in compliance with AAA standards or requirements;
- c. If AAA staff determines the complaint is not within the purview of AAA, the staff will notify the complainant. If it is not clear whether the complaint appears to be within the purview of AAA, the complainant will be contacted for further information or documentation in order to determine the status of the complaint.
 - d. AAA staff will forward a copy of the complaint to the principal administrative officer of the institution and request an institutional response, with a copy to the respective Division Department of Education. The institution is asked to respond to AAA regarding the complaint within 60 days after AAA mails a copy of the complaint and related materials to the institution. In consideration of the circumstances of, or issues raised in the complaint, AAA may, on occasion, request a response within a shorter period.
 - e. If AAA staff determines that the institutional response satisfactorily addresses the issue(s) raised in the complaint, or if AAA is otherwise satisfied upon its own review that no violation of AAA's accreditation standards or its eligibility requirements has occurred, or that no violation of policies or procedures of AAA or the institution has occurred, the matter will be considered closed.
 - f. If an institutional response is not received by AAA within the requested time period, or if AAA staff does not consider the institutional response to have satisfactorily resolved the issue or issues raised in the complaint, or if AAA otherwise concludes that a violation of AAA's standards, eligibility requirements or procedures may have occurred, AAA may initiate further proceedings as the circumstances warrant, including the initiation of proceedings which may result in an adverse accreditation action.
 - g. In the case of (f) above, the AAA Board chair places the matter on the agenda of the Board for its determination as to the future course of action. If a complaint prompts action by the Board, it is placed in the institution's file in the AAA office and is shared with the next evaluation team. If the complaint points to an egregious violation, more immediate action might be taken. All complaint records are maintained in the office of the Adventist Accrediting Association of Schools, Colleges and Universities.
 - h. AAA will inform complainants periodically of the status of pending complaints as well as the final resolution by AAA. AAA will send a letter describing the conclusion to the complainant and to the school. AAA maintains a record of each complaint in the school's file at the AAA office in accordance with established record-keeping policies.

Comment [ADT11]: If we send a copy to the Division Department of Education, then any release form that the complainant signs should tell them that as well.

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Source documents:

Middle States Commission on Higher Education complaints policy
<http://www.msche.org/documents/How-to-File-a-Complaint-with-the-Commission.pdf>

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Accrediting Commission of Career Schools and Colleges (*Section VI, Rules of Process and Procedure, Standards of Accreditation*)