

The Process for Resolving Complaints Relative to Online Education

From Section 4.5 "Process for Resolving Complaints:

- a. Complaints against an institution operating under SARA go first through the institution's own procedures for resolution of grievances.
- b. Complaints regarding student grades or student conduct violations are governed entirely by institutional policy and the laws of the SARA institution's Home State.
- c. If a person bringing a complaint is not satisfied with the outcome of the institutional process for handling complaints, the complaint (except for complaints about grades or student conduct violations) may be appealed, within two years of the incident about which the complaint is made, to the SARA Portal Entity in the Home State of the institution against which the complaint has been lodged. That entity shall notify the SARA Portal Entity for the state in which the student is located of receipt of that appealed complaint. The resolution of the complaint by the institution's Home State SARA Portal Entity, through its SARA complaint resolution process, will be final, except for complaints that fall under the provision "g" below.
- d. While the final resolution of the complaint rests with the SARA Portal Entity in the Home State of the institution against which the complaint has been lodged, the Portal Entity in the complainant's location state may assist as needed. The final disposition of a complaint resolved by the Home State shall be communicated to the Portal Entity in the state where the student lived at the time of the incident leading to the complaint, if known.
- e. While final resolution of complaints (for purposes of adjudication of the complaint and enforcement of any resultant remedies or redress) resides in certain cases with institutions (complaints about grades or student conduct violations), or more generally with the relevant institution's Home State SARA Portal Entity (all other complaints), the regional compact(s) administering SARA may consider a disputed complaint as a "case file" if concerns are raised against a participating state with regard to whether that state is abiding by SARA Policies, as promulgated in the SARA Manual. The regional compact may review such complaints in determining whether a state under its purview is abiding by the SARA Policies. Similarly, a complaint "case file" may also be reviewed by NC-SARA in considering whether a regional compact is ensuring that its member states are abiding by the SARA Policies required for their participation in the Agreement.
- f. SARA portal entities shall report quarterly to NC-SARA the number and disposition of appealed complaints that are not resolved at the institutional level. NC-SARA shall make that information on its website. Such data will create transparency and can be used in determining whether a regional compact is ensuring that its SARA member states and those states' institutions are abiding by the policies required for participation in the Agreement.
- g. *Nothing in the SARA Manual precludes a state from using its laws of general application to pursue action against an institution that violates those laws."*