

# NWCCU POLICIES | COMPLAINTS REGARDING MEMBER OR CANDIDATE INSTITUTIONS

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Accreditation by the Northwest Commission on Colleges and Universities (NWCCU) signifies that an institution of higher education is substantially in compliance with NWCCU's eligibility requirements, standards for accreditation, and policies. NWCCU will consider a Complaint against one of its member institutions that relates solely to eligibility requirements, standards for accreditation, or policies. NWCCU does not, however, provide dispute resolution or appeal services.

## CRITERIA FOR CONSIDERATION OF A COMPLAINT

To be considered by NWCCU, a Complaint must:

- Provide a statement of facts supported by evidence of non-compliance with a specific eligibility requirement, standards for accreditation, or policy and is not simply an individual grievance.
- Absent extraordinary circumstances, demonstrate that the complainant has first complied with any grievance process of the institution.
- Be submitted by the complainant, or an attorney for the complainant, within one year of completion of the institution's grievance process.
- Disclose whether litigation is also being pursued by the complainant.
- Provide a summary of the relief requested from NWCCU.
- Be signed by the complainant and served upon NWCCU by mail, common carrier, or electronically.

## PROCESS FOR THE REVIEW OF A COMPLAINT

Upon receipt of a Complaint, NWCCU will initiate the following process of review:

- Within 10 business days, NWCCU staff will acknowledge receipt of the Complaint.
- Within 30 days, the NWCCU President will make a decision on whether the Complaint relates to NWCCU's eligibility requirements, standards for accreditation, or policies. If the NWCCU President determines that it does not, the complainant will be notified in writing and the matter will be closed.
- If the NWCCU President determines that a Complaint meets the criteria under this Policy, the President or Chief Executive Officer of the subject institution will receive written notice from NWCCU within 45 days of the receipt of the Complaint. In most cases, the complainant will be identified to the receiving institutions unless good cause is shown to keep their identity confidential. The notice will include a copy of the Complaint, supporting documents and request a written Response from the institution within 45 days. Upon receipt of the institution's Response, NWCCU staff may, at their discretion, request a Reply from the complainant.
- Within 30 days of receipt of the Response and any Reply, the NWCCU President will make a preliminary decision. If it is determined that the institution is in compliance with NWCCU's eligibility requirements, standards for accreditation, and policies, the complainant and institution

will be so notified in writing and the matter will be closed. If, however, the NWCCU President determines that the institution may be out of compliance, the complainant and institution will receive notice that the matter will be referred to NWCCU for a decision at its next Commission meeting.

- Within 30 days following the NWCCU Commission meeting, the complainant and the institution will be notified of NWCCU's decision, which may:
  - dismiss the Complaint;
  - make recommendations to the institution suggesting areas for improvement; or
  - determine that the institution is out of compliance with NWCCU's eligibility requirements, standards for accreditation, and policies and require corrective action within a specified time and/or require a site visit by an ad hoc committee to review areas of non-compliance.

#### RECORD OF COMPLAINTS

NWCCU shall maintain a record of all Complaints that meet the criteria of this Policy. If NWCCU receives three or more such Complaints within the institution's accreditation cycle, NWCCU will provide a summary of those Complaints to the chair of the institution's evaluation team for consideration during the next evaluation.

Please refer to the Policy on Receipt of Unsolicited Information for unsolicited complaints.

Adopted 1982; Revised 1984, 1994, 1998, 2002, 2008, 2012, 2014, 2016, June 2019