

## **Consumer Protection and Student Complaints**

The Alaska Commission on Postsecondary Education (ACPE) processes complaints alleging violations of state institutional authorization law relative to postsecondary institutions or programs in Alaska, including SARA complaints. The complaint investigation process is described in [AS 14.48.130](#) and [20 AAC 17.130-145](#).

### **Frequently Asked Questions:**

#### **Q: What is the first step to file a complaint?**

A: Students are encouraged to pursue the complaint/grievance process at their institution prior to contacting ACPE. This process is outlined in an institution's catalog. ACPE will not move forward with a complaint unless the student has taken action at the institutional level first.

#### **Q: Can I file a complaint if I am a student at the University of Alaska?**

A: No, ACPE does not authorize the University of Alaska. Please see [UA Board of Regents Policy Chapter 9.03](#) with the exception for State Authorization Reciprocity Agreements (SARA) related complaints.

#### **Q: Can I file a complaint anonymously?**

A: ACPE will file for the record, but take no action on a complaint that is anonymous.

#### **Q: What are other examples that ACPE will file for the record but take no action on?**

A: If a complaint is filed more than six months after the end of the enrollment period to which the complaint refers, more than six months after the date an institution ceases operations, or more than six months after the student last attended, whichever is earliest; or if the matter of the complaint is subject to judicial proceedings. Additionally, the form can only be used for complaints against institutions authorized by ACPE to operate in Alaska. Filing a complaint does not impact the complainant's repayment obligation for any education loan.

\*Students who are submitting a SARA related complaint (except 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.

#### **Q: What if I want to file an equal opportunity complaint?**

A: You may file one with the Alaska State Commission for Human Rights

#### **Q: What are the other places I may file a complaint?**

A: You may file a complaint with the institution's accreditor, regulatory agency, and/or consumer protection agency.

**Q: I have completed the complaint/grievance process at my institution and a resolution was not reached, what can I do now?**

A: To request a complaint form please send an email to: [EED.ACPE-IA@alaska.gov](mailto:EED.ACPE-IA@alaska.gov).

**Q: What will I need to file a complaint?**

A: There are a number of things, including but not limited to:

- A narrative describing the complaint, including a detailed description of all events in the order they happened; the name of witnesses or parties to.
- A description of any attempts to resolve the complaint with the institution, such as a copy of the complaint submitted to the institution and their response, or a written explanation of the attempts to resolve the complaint through the institutions grievance process.
- Copies of the student enrollment contract; course/program outline or brochure; attendance records; correspondence between the complainant and the institution; or any other documents that explain or support the complaint.

**Q: What does the process look like if I file a complaint with ACPE?**

A: First, ACPE reviews the complaint to determine if all of the documentation required is found within the complaint, and whether or not the allegations constitute a violation. If they do not, the case would be closed. If there is a violation, the process would move towards mediation. If mediation is successful, the complaint closes. If mediation is unsuccessful, the complaint moves towards a partial or full investigation. After the investigation, corrective actions or penalties may be imposed.

**Q: What are the possible outcomes from a student complaint?**

A: Possible outcomes from a student complaint can be found under [AS 14.48.130 \(c\)](#):

- Order requiring the institution to cease and desist from the act or practice
- Award the individual or class of individuals named in the complaint full or partial restitution for damage or loss
- Impose civil penalties against an institution
- Impose a civil fine up to \$5,000 to the institution
- Revoke an institutions authorization to operate
- None of the above

**Q: What other resources are available?**

A: If a student has an issue with their Federal Financial Aid, they should communicate to the Federal Student Aid Ombudsman Group of the U.S. Department of Education and/or the [Federal Student Aid Information Center](#) at (800)433-3243 or (800)4FED-AID.

ACPE only has authority to investigate entities regulated by acts administered by ACPE. If a person believes that a college, university, or vocational school has violated state or federal law, they may contact the [Alaska Department of Law Consumer Protection Unit](#).

**Disclaimer: ACPE cannot provide legal advice or act as legal representation.**

For questions or assistance relative to complaints, please contact:

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Revised 2/9/2022