Complaints Regarding Accredited Programs

When CAAHEP accredits a program, it expects the program to remain in compliance with all CAAHEP Standards for accreditation throughout the accreditation period granted. Therefore, one of CAAHEP’s principal concerns when it receives a complaint about an accredited program is whether the program is in compliance with the published Standards. The burden rests with the program and its Sponsor to prove that it is meeting CAAHEP’s Accreditation Standards and policies at all times. In addition, CAAHEP expects programs to monitor and promptly address all complaints they receive through an established student grievance procedure.

Definition of Complaint: A complaint is a written and signed grievance involving an alleged violation of the Accreditation Standards or policies established by CAAHEP and its Committees on Accreditation (CoAs).

A. Required elements of an Accredited Program Complaint:

1. signed
2. names an individual(s) or program over which CAAHEP has authority
3. sets forth allegations related to CAAHEP standards and accreditation policies
4. identifies program volunteers or staff involved in the event
5. describes efforts to resolve the complaint at the program level (if a current student, evidence should include results from the submission of concerns according to the institutional grievance policy)
6. supported by available documentation
7. describes events that occurred within a reasonable period of submitting the complaint, generally within one year, permitting the facts to be ascertained through an investigation by CAAHEP
8. includes the complainant’s consent to this complaint process and permits the disclosure of all information related to the complaint to CAAHEP, its representatives, CAAHEP CoAs, their representatives, and the respondent (program sponsor).

If a complaint is unsigned or the complainant does not consent to the complaint process or disclosures outlined in this Complaint Policy, CAAHEP will review the complaint but may, in its exclusive discretion and with notice to the complainant, elect not to process the complaint.
CAAHEP emphasizes that neither CAAHEP nor its CoAs will intervene in personnel matters nor review an institution’s internal administrative decisions in matters such as admissions, honor code or code of conduct violations, disputes concerning the assignment of grades, or similar issues unless the context of an allegation suggests that unethical or unprofessional conduct or action may have occurred that might call into question the program’s compliance with accreditation Standards or policies.

B. Procedure for Filing a Program Complaint

CAAHEP and its CoAs follow due process procedures when written and signed complaints are received by the Commission alleging that an accredited program is not following CAAHEP Accreditation Standards or policies.

All documents and communication indicated in the complaint procedure are digital unless noted otherwise. The complainant, the Program (and its Sponsor), and CAAHEP must provide an accurate email address and respond to items according to the policy timeline.

Complaints or inquiries about filing complaints are directed to the CAAHEP Executive Director (ED) at:

CAAHEP
9355 – 113t St. N., #7709
Seminole, FL 33775
ExecutiveDirector@caahep.org

1. Complaints must be submitted using the CAAHEP Complaint Form found on the CAAHEP website. If a complaint is not submitted to CAAHEP or the CoA via the Complaint Form, CAAHEP or CoA staff will contact the complainant and request this be done if reasonably possible. The Complaint Policy, forms, and other policy materials are available through the CAAHEP website.

2. The complaint should include a narrative not exceeding ten (10) pages in length with supporting documentation to substantiate the allegations. Every effort should be made to avoid the submission of duplicate information. Complaints that do not contain the required information will be returned to the complainant with an explanation of why the complaint is being returned. Returned complaints may be resubmitted within one year of the events giving rise to the complaint.

3. The signed consent on the Complaint Form authorizes CAAHEP and its CoAs to forward a copy of the complaint, including the identification of the
complainant, to the respondent (program sponsor).

C. CAAHEP Procedure for Review and Action on Program Complaints

1. Once it is determined that the complaint has all the required elements, CAAHEP staff will send a written response to the complainant acknowledging receipt of the complaint and transmit a copy of the complaint and any submitted documentation to the appropriate CoA leadership and staff within five working days. CAAHEP will be included in all communication between the CoA and the program Sponsor regarding the complaint.

2. Following consultation between the CoA and CAAHEP, the CoA will conduct an initial review of the complaint to determine whether it sets forth information or allegations that suggest that a program may not be in compliance with the Standards or accreditation policies established by CAAHEP and its CoAs. If additional information or clarification is required, the CoA will send a request to the complainant. If the requested information is not received within 15 days, the CoA will understand that to mean that the complainant no longer intends to pursue the complaint, and it may not be investigated by the CoA or CAAHEP.

3. If the CoA determines after the initial review of the complaint that the information or allegations do not demonstrate that a program is out of compliance with accreditation Standards or policies established by CAAHEP and its CoAs, the complaint may be closed. The complainant will be notified accordingly within twenty working days after receipt of the complaint by the CoA. A copy of the correspondence will be shared with CAAHEP.

4. Within thirty (30) days of receiving all requested information from the complainant, a Notice of Complaint will be provided from the CoA to the program director and the chief executive officer of the Program Sponsor, summarizing the allegations and requesting a preliminary investigation. During the investigation, the CoA may request information or material relative to the complaint from the complaining party, the program, or other relevant sources. The CoA will provide copies of such correspondence to CAAHEP.

5. The CoA will review the complaint, the results of the investigation, and the program’s compliance with the CAAHEP Standards or accreditation policies.

6. If the CoA concludes that the allegations do not establish that there has been a violation of CAAHEP Standards or accreditation policies, the complaint will be closed, and no further action will be required. The program and complainant will be notified of this decision within ten (10) days of the completion of the investigation.
7. If the CoA concludes that the allegations may establish that there has been a violation of CAAHEP Standards or accreditation policies, the CoA may take one of the following actions, notifying the program and complainant within ten (10) days of its planned course of action:

   a. Postpone the final action on the complaint for a period not to exceed 60 days if there is evidence that the program is progressing toward addressing any violations of CAAHEP Standards or accreditation policies.
   
   b. Notify the program and its Sponsor that, based on the information provided, the CoA has determined that the program is failing to meet CAAHEP Standards or accreditation policies and that the CoA is taking appropriate action. Such action may require the program to take specific corrective action, report to the CoA, or host a special complaint-related (focused) site visit as soon as reasonably feasible, but not more than sixty (60) days following this determination. The complaint-related site visit shall be limited to investigating the complaint and how it affects compliance with the Standards or accreditation policies. The CoA and program shall equally share the travel costs for site visitors for the complaint-related site visit.

A. CoA Determination

Based on the evidence received during the investigation, postponement period, submitted documentation, and/or focused site visit, the CoA may make one of the following determinations:

1. Find the program remains in compliance with the Standards and accreditation policies. The program, its Sponsor, and the complaining party shall be notified of this assessment and include information about the program’s current accreditation status and that it is unaffected by the complaint.

2. Find that the program is not in compliance with the Standards and accreditation policies. The CoA may require a progress report or recommend a change in accreditation status, including probationary accreditation (Section 200 of the CAAHEP Policy Manual). If the CoA submits a recommendation for probationary accreditation to CAAHEP, it must include the complete complaint record, including all information regarding the complaint, a full report of the CoA’s Investigation, and reasons supporting the CoA’s recommendation.

   In all instances, the CoA will notify the complainant and the program regarding their determination within ten (10) days of the CoA decision. Notifications will include any required progress reporting or recommendations to change the program’s accreditation status.

Note: The failure of the institution to provide either a response to the complaint or
any additional information as requested by the CoA or CAAHEP within the specified time frames will be considered a violation of the CAAHEP’s policy on complaints and will be referred to CAAHEP for consideration and action (Section 200 of this Policies and Procedures document).

B. Review by CAAHEP

Either the complainant or the program may request a review of the CoA’s determination of the complaint by submitting a written request for review to the CAAHEP Executive Director. The request for review must specify and document the basis for the request, which may include that the CoA did not follow published procedures or did not consider or give sufficient weight to information provided by the complainant or the program in reaching its final determination. If a review is requested, CAAHEP may request from the CoA a copy of all documents and evidence related to the complaint.

F. Records of Complaints

1. CAAHEP maintains records of all complaints. Complaints against applicants and accredited programs and their resolution are kept for five years, and CAAHEP summaries of complaints are provided to the CoAs associated with the program listed in the complaint upon request. The CoAs may consider the frequency, pattern, and seriousness of complaints about an accredited program in recommending a program’s application for initial or continuing accreditation.

2. A log of complaints filed is tabulated, summarized, and presented at least annually to the CAAHEP Board of Directors. The summary provides an analysis of any unresolved complaints, categories of complaints by nature and source, and any other information the Board of Directors requests regarding complaints received by CAAHEP and its CoAs.