

COMPLAINT RESOLUTION FOR DISTANCE EDUCATION

Complaint Process

Distance Education students, who have completed the internal institutional grievance process and the applicable state grievance process, may appeal non-instructional complaints to the FL-SARA PRDEC Council by sending an email to FLSARAINfo@fldoe.org.

Florida SARA Complaint Review Policy

In order for a complaint to qualify under the FL-SARA Complaint Review Policy, it must meet the following criteria:

- File within two years of the incident about which the complaint is made.
- Complete the institutional complaint process prior to submission with the Council.
- The complaint must be a formal assertion in writing that the terms of SARA, or of laws, standards or regulations incorporated by SARA, are being violated by a person, institution, state, agency or other organization or entity operating under the terms of SARA.
- You are a student of a Florida SARA Council-approved institution.
- You are not a student, but have a concern about any of the above.

1. The Postsecondary Reciprocal Distance Education Coordinating Council (“Council”) is the portal entity for the Florida State Authorization Reciprocity Agreement (“FL-SARA”). The Commission for Independent Education provides administrative support to the Council and has the responsibility to field complaints to the appropriate sector or report the complaint to the Council if the institution has exhausted the institutional complaint process. The Council has the authority and responsibility to resolve SARA-related complaints.

2. Institutions that apply for participation in FL-SARA agree to establish, publish and enforce policies related to redress of complaints and grievances, and to follow this process for the resolution of complaints for any and all students residing in SARA states. Complaints covered by this process include any violation of the SARA Policies and Standards.

3. An individual who files a complaint (“complainant”) against a FL-SARA member institution must first exhaust the institution’s own procedures for resolution of grievances. The specific process at each institution must be clearly identified and publicly available to individuals via the institution’s website and/or catalog.

4. Complaints regarding student grades or student conduct violations are governed entirely by institutional policy and the laws of the State of Florida.

5. If the complainant is not satisfied with the outcome of the institutional complaint process, the decision (with the exception of complaints about grades or student conduct violations) may be appealed, within two years of the incident about which the complaint is made, to the Council. The Council refers complaints for appellate review as follows:

a. All complaints originating from the State University System schools will be referred to the Board of Governors, according to its designated process.

b. All complaints originating from a Florida State or Community College will be referred to the Florida College System, according to its designated process.

c. All complaints originating from a private, postsecondary institution regulated by the Commission for Independent Education (CIE) will be referred to the CIE, according to its designated process.

d. All complaints originating from a private, non-profit, postsecondary institutions who are members of Independent Colleges and Universities of Florida (ICUF) will be referred to ICUF, as applicable, according to its designated process.

6. If a complainant is not satisfied with the decision of the appellate body, the complainant may submit the complaint for review to the Council. The Council will review the appellate decision to determine if the complaint was reviewed according to the designated processes, including timeliness and lack of conflicts of interest by reviewers. Additionally, the Council will determine if the basis for the complaint demonstrates a material lack of compliance by a member institution where a SARA requirement was violated, applied improperly or failed to be applied. If such a finding is made, the Council may recommend specific corrective actions, and may consider such findings and the member institution's response when reviewing an institution's application for renewal of membership in Florida SARA.

7. The resolution of a SARA complaint by the Council will be considered to be final in all cases. Nothing in this complaint process shall preclude an individual, institution or board from pursuing additional or supplemental action against any person, institution or entity that violates the law.

8. In the event that an institution fails to comply with this complaint process as determined by the findings from the appropriate appellate body or the decision of the Council, or fails to address a material lack of compliance with SARA requirements, its participation in Florida SARA may be withdrawn by the Council and the institution may not be considered for re-application to Florida SARA until outstanding complaints are resolved and material changes in the institution's review process are demonstrated.