

## Complaint Resolution for Postsecondary Education

To comply with US Department of Education regulations related to eligibility for federal student financial aid programs, the Vermont Agency of Education provides this information.

Are you a parent, faculty member or student seeking an outlet for a complaint about a condition or incident involving a postsecondary school operating in Vermont? These guidelines are provided to help you. Basically, there are three avenues to pursue: the institution's established complaint resolution procedures, the Vermont Attorney General's office or the institution's accrediting agency. The vast majority of complaints should be resolved with the school itself.

**The number one source of successful resolution is the school itself.**

The Vermont Agency of Education does not intervene in the internal procedures of colleges and universities. Federal law, 34 CFR Subpart D, §668.43(b), requires institutions to make available to students information about how to file a complaint. Postsecondary schools participating in federal student financial aid programs are required to have formal grievance procedures. The school's student handbook usually describes the steps you must make to begin a grievance process. Often schools have both formal and informal processes to resolve complaints. The procedures should include steps to ensure that your concerns will be heard fully and fairly, and the procedures must provide for the prompt and equitable resolution of complaints.

When approaching the institution, you should be specific in describing the nature of the complaint and relevant information: the name of the parties involved, including witnesses, dates, the policy or procedure violated (if known), the course/program, and your contact information. In addition, it is important to include any supporting material that substantiates your complaint.

Sometimes violations of federal or state laws are alleged. In the case of discrimination, the appropriate course is the Office of Civil Rights. In the case of suspected consumer fraud, such as false advertising or violation of a state law, the state Attorney General is the appropriate contact for filing a grievance.

Rarely, the appropriate place for a complaint is with the institution's accrediting body. The institution will tell you if they are accredited and by which accrediting agency. For schools accredited by New England Association Commission of Higher Education (NECHE), consult the policy and procedures for Public Comments or the policy on Consideration of Complaints Against Affiliated Institutions, available through the [NECHE website](http://www.necche.org). For guidance on filing a complaint, email [info@necche.org](mailto:info@necche.org) or call (781) 425-7785 to be in touch with NECHE.

Pursuant to 16 V.S.A. § 176, the Vermont Agency of Education, as the entity charged with oversight of the State Authorization Reciprocity Agreement (SARA) in the State of Vermont, is responsible for investigating any complaints related to Vermont institutions participating in a recognized interstate reciprocity agreement, such as the State Authorization Reciprocity Agreement (SARA). An aggrieved student must first go through the institution's own

procedures and may appeal, within two years of the incident, to the Vermont Agency of Education. Questions may be directed to

Cassandra Ryan, Director of Regulatory Compliance & Risk Management  
Vermont Agency of Education  
1 National Life Drive, Davis 5  
Montpelier, VT 05620-2501  
(802) 828-5535  
[cassandra.ryan@vermont.gov](mailto:cassandra.ryan@vermont.gov)

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