

12.4 Student complaints

The institution (a) publishes appropriate and clear procedures for addressing written student complaints, (b) demonstrates that it follows the procedures when resolving them, and (c) maintains a record of student complaints that can be accessed upon request by SACSCOC.

Compliance Judgment: In Compliance

Rationale

Published procedures for student complaints. The University of South Carolina Aiken (USC Aiken) has a written [Student Grievance Policy](#) ^[1] that provides a formal, standardized method by which students can seek a resolution to interactions or situations where treatment by a faculty and/or staff is considered unjust or improper. These complaints are categorized as 1) academic grievances relating to violation of teaching responsibilities, and 2) non-academic grievances dealing with conditions that disadvantage a student unnecessarily such as abuse of authority, discrimination, harassment, and wrongful assessment of fees. Each of these types of complaints has a specific process for review, including identification of an individual or office responsible for the process and maintenance of the records. The Student Grievance and Student Complaint Policies can be found in the USC Aiken Student Handbook which is available online at the [Student Affairs website](#). ^[2]

Grievances Policy. The philosophy at USC Aiken is to resolve complaints through informal discussions in the early stages, if possible. In an effort to resolve issues informally, the University provides an Ombuds to provide students with an informal, confidential, impartial and independent resource to address interpersonal issues or questions openly and without fear of reprisal. The [Ombuds Office](#) ^[3] provides a venue for complaints, conflicts, or concerns that students may not know how to

address through other official University channels. These might include interpersonal conflicts or questions about University policies, practices, or services.

Formal grievance processes exist for instances when informal processes do not result in a resolution. The purpose of the student grievance processes are to furnish a student enrolled at USC Aiken, whether as a full-time or part-time student and regardless of course mode of delivery (face-to-face or distance education), with a formal, standardized method for seeking a resolution when the student believes he or she has been treated unjustly or improperly by a faculty or staff member. Students seeking a redress of grievances may do so without fear of reprisal.

As stipulated in the Student Handbook, students who are enrolled in one of USC Aiken's completion programs at a USC regional campus are entitled to relief from an academic complaint or grievance through the student grievance procedure established in the appropriate USC Regional Campus Student Handbook. After a judgement has been rendered on that campus, an appeal to the Executive Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs at USC Aiken and a subsequent appeal to the USC Aiken Chancellor may be made. To date, there have been no formal grievance related to programs offered at remote sites.

Academic grievances are addressed through the Academic Affairs Office. In most cases, the student must first meet with the instructor, and then, if necessary, with the department chair or program coordinator, and subsequently with the Executive Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs (EVCAA) or his designee. The grievance may be referred to the USC Aiken Judicial Board only if these options have been exhausted. The Academic Affairs office is responsible for overseeing and ensuring a record of these complaints is created, the steps taken, and the outcome of the review. As stipulated in the USC Aiken Student Handbook, copies of all grievances are securely stored in the Human Resources Department. The process is the same regardless of the method of course delivery. There have been no formal academic grievances filed at USC Aiken over the past 10 years. Non-academic grievances are filed with the Vice

Chancellor for Student Affairs. There have been no formal non-academic grievances filed at USC Aiken over the past 10 years.

Complaints to the South Carolina Commission on Higher Education (SCCHE). The SCCHE has [procedures for Handling Complaints including a Student Complaint Form](#) ^[4] that USC Aiken makes available to students and the public via a [Complaint Website](#).^[5] The State Commission on Higher Education oversees the State Authorization Reciprocity Agreement (SARA) and serves as the final authority for an SARA related complaint from out-of-state students enrolled in distance education classes. There have been no complaints filed with the State Commission on Higher Education.

Complaints to the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges (SACSCOC). Although no complaints involving SACSCOC have been received to date, they would be routed through the Academic Affairs office. For student complaints regarding USC Aiken accreditation, the SACSCOC contact information is published in the [Academic Bulletin](#) ^[6] and in the [Student Handbook](#).^[7]

Supporting Documents

1. [Student Handbook: Student Grievance Process](#)
2. [Student Affairs Website Access to Student Handbook](#)
3. [Ombuds Office Website](#)
4. [South Carolina Commission on Higher Education Complaint Form](#)
5. [USC Aiken Student Complaint Website](#)
6. [SACSCOC Contact Information for Complaints in the Academic Bulletin](#)
7. [SACSCOC Contact Information for Complaints in the Student Handbook](#)