

## **Delaware Department of Education SARA Student Complaint Policy**

This policy governs student complaints filed against any public or private Institutions of Higher Education in Delaware that have been granted Full Approval status and that are approved by the Delaware Department of Education (DDOE) to participate in the State Authorization Reciprocity Agreements (SARA) (hereinafter “Delaware-approved SARA institutions”) concerning interstate postsecondary distance-education courses or programs of courses offered by such institutions in other SARA Member States. This policy does not govern complaints about a Delaware-approved SARA institution’s operations in Delaware or in any states that are not members of SARA.

In accordance with *SARA Policies and Procedures*, the initial responsibility for the investigation and resolution of complaints resides with the institution against which the complaint is made. If further consideration or resolution is necessary, the DDOE (the SARA State Portal Agency (SPA) for Delaware) is required to investigate and resolve formal written complaints of dishonest or fraudulent activity by a Delaware-approved SARA institution or its agents that harms the student, including providing false or misleading information, pursuant to SARA consumer protection provisions. Complaints may include but are not limited to a Delaware-approved SARA institution’s:

- veracity of recruitment and marketing materials;
- accuracy of job placement data;
- accuracy of information about tuition, fees, and financial aid;
- complete and correct admission requirements for courses and programs of courses;
- accuracy of information about the institution’s accreditation and/or any programmatic/specialized accreditation held by the institution’s programs;
- accuracy of information about whether course work meets any relevant professional licensing requirements or the requirements of specialized accrediting bodies;
- accuracy of information about whether the institution’s course work will transfer to other institutions;
- operation of a distance-education course or program of courses inconsistent with standard practices expected by institutional accreditors; and
- operation of a distance-education course or program of courses inconsistent with standard practices expected by the *Interregional Guidelines for the Evaluation of Distance Educational Programs (Online Learning)* in such a way that harms the student.

This policy does not apply to complaints concerning student grades and student conduct violations, which are governed entirely by institutional policy and the laws of the SARA institution’s home state.

DDOE staff will review complaints that meet the requirements set forth in this policy and work with students enrolled in interstate postsecondary distance education courses or programs of courses offered by such institutions in other SARA Member States and Delaware-approved SARA institutions to:

- ensure compliance with published institutional complaint processes by both the Delaware-approved SARA institution and the student; and
- serve as a final arbitrator in disputes between Delaware-approved SARA institutions and students.

Consistent with this policy and SARA Policies and Standards, the DDOE will not review complaints related to student grades and student conduct violations.

## **SARA Student Complaint Process**

### **Step 1**

A student who has a complaint against a Delaware-approved SARA institution or its agents concerning dishonest or fraudulent activity by that institution or its agents must first follow the Delaware-approved SARA institution's complaint resolution policies and procedures. Information on an institution's complaint resolution policies and procedures usually can be found in the institution's academic catalog, student handbook, or on its website.

If the student is not satisfied with the outcome of the institutional process for resolving complaints, the student may proceed to Step 2 of the DDOE's SARA Student Complaint Process.

### **Step 2**

If the student has followed the Delaware-approved SARA institution's procedures for resolving grievances or complaints and is not satisfied with the outcome of the institutional process for resolving complaints, the student may file a formal complaint with the DDOE using the DDOE SARA Student Complaint Form. A complete formal complaint must be filed within two years of the incident about which the complaint was made.

When a complete formal complaint is received, the DDOE staff will:

- send a copy of the complete complaint to the Delaware-approved SARA institution against which the complaint has been filed and request a response within 30 days; and
- forward the institution's response to the student.

When the institution has filed a response with the DDOE, the DDOE staff will review all written submissions and materials related to the complaint and may request additional information from the Delaware-approved SARA institution and the student in order to:

- determine whether the Delaware-approved SARA institution's complaint resolution policies and procedures have been followed and exhausted by both the institution and the student;
- make a final, binding decision on the matter<sup>1</sup>; and
- inform the Delaware-approved SARA institution and the student of the decision.

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<sup>1</sup> If a complaint involves a violation of Delaware law, there is nothing in SARA Policies and Standards or this policy that preclude the State of Delaware from using its laws of general application to pursue action against an institution that violates those laws.