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Happy September Everyone! [1]

September 11, 2020 by erika.swain@cu.edu [2]

Happy September, everyone!
I know many of you are incredibly busy with students back on campus, both physically and virtually, and classes in full swing, so I'll keep this "short!"

Student Complaints, Distance Education, Federal Requirements, and SARA Requirements
I have a feeling we're all going to see an increase in student complaints, partly due to the shift to online learning for most classes because of COVID. As a reminder, both the Department of Education and NC-SARA require that institutions have mechanisms in place for students participating in distance education or correspondence education to submit complaints. Additionally, information on how to submit a complaint must be readily available on a public-facing website (such as under Student Right to Know). The management of student complaints is reviewed during your accreditation process (HLC) and during your SARA review/reauthorization.

As with many university policies, the specific policy your institution uses to handle complaints is up to your discretion—there is no single definition of what constitutes a complaint. Your institution's process should be tailored to fit the needs of your university and student population, and the types of complaints may vary from institution to institution. In general, your university should encourage students to first address complaints or grievances related to academics, consumer protection, or other university policies with the individuals or units most directly connected to the issue. However, exceptions can be made for students who wish to maintain anonymity, or for other valid reasons.

For students located outside of Colorado who have complaints involving distance learning, the process begins with the student seeking resolution through your university's internal channels. If the student is not satisfied with the outcome of the university's internal process, they may file a complaint with the university's SARA portal, which in Colorado is the Colorado Department of Higher Education [3].

Examples of student complaints that can be brought to the SARA portal include issues such as the accuracy of recruitment and marketing materials, job placement data, tuition, fees, and financial aid information, as well as course transfer details. However, complaints and appeals related to grades or student conduct violations will not be reviewed by the SARA portal entity.

In general, you should be able to easily locate a description of your university's policies and processes for handling student complaints, including details such as who administers them, how often they are reviewed, and how complaints are tracked. To that end, do you know where to find the following at your university?

- Policy/policies on student complaints

- Procedures for the timely handling of student complaints
- Public location of student complaints policies and processes

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