Policy Title:	**FEPAC Governing Complaints Policy**
Approved By:	FEPAC Commission
Document History:	Policy Implementation Date: August 9, 2003 Last Updated: February 9, 2026
Related Commission Document:	FEPAC Complaint Submission Form FEPAC Commission Actions
References:	
Responsible Official:	Operations, Policy and Procedure Committee

POLICY SUMMARY

This guidance outlines the Forensic Science Education Programs Accreditation Commission's (FEPAC or Commission) policy for accepting and reviewing complaints.

INTRODUCTION

The Forensic Science Education Programs Accreditation Commission (FEPAC or Commission) is interested in the quality of educational services offered by programs it accredits. Complaints that reasonably allege instances of non-compliance with FEPAC's *Standards, Policies and Procedures* and/or its *Code of Conduct* are investigated in a fair, equitable and timely manner and appropriate action taken based on the results of its review.

For purposes of this policy, a *complaint* is defined as notification to FEPAC by any individual person or entity (including, but not limited to, any individual student, faculty member, or staff member of a FEPAC-accredited program; any individual member of the general public; any representative of a state, federal, or local government; and any individual member of any institution or organization) that sets forth reasonable and credible information that a FEPAC-accredited program is not in compliance with FEPAC's *Standards, Policies and Procedures* and/or its *Code of Conduct.*

FEPAC takes all complaints seriously. When processing complaints, FEPAC must apply its due process responsibilities and confidentiality obligations equally to complainants and the programs it accredits. For these reasons, FEPAC only accepts and processes complaints submitted by individual complainants, or by an authorized representative for and on behalf of a school, program, or other entity. This does not preclude complaint submissions by those with the same or similar concerns or allegations; however, each must complete, sign, and submit their own separate complaint.

When FEPAC receives a complaint, it maintains an investigative role in which the burden of proof rests with the FEPAC-accredited program to demonstrate that all FEPAC's requirements are being met. FEPAC **does not** serve as an ombudsperson, referee, mediator or engage in dispute resolution, or act as a court of appeals. Similarly, FEPAC **does not** intervene in personnel issues, admissions decisions, grading or academic dishonesty matters, dismissals, graduations, or similar institutional decisions. Exceptions may apply only if the context of the complaint suggests unethical or unprofessional behavior that substantially disrupts the educational services of

an FEPAC-accredited program. FEPAC's accreditation standards require programs it accredits to have their own internal procedures for effectively and promptly resolving complaints.

LEGAL COMPLIANCE

FEPAC's standards also require programs it accredits to comply with all applicable federal, state, and local laws and regulations, and comply with recognized state approval agencies in matters of degree, diploma, and certificate awarding (collectively, "laws"). Examples of laws include (but are not limited to):

- Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA)
- Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA)
- Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA)
- Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964
- Title IV of the Higher Education Act
- Occupational Safety and Health Act (OSHA)
- State labor laws, local zoning ordinances, etc.

FEPAC does not investigate compliance with these laws directly. That responsibility lies with the relevant regulatory or enforcement agency. However, if FEPAC becomes aware that a program has been found non-compliant by the appropriate authority, it will take appropriate action in accordance with its *Commission Actions Policy.*

ENTIRE CONTROVERSY

While FEPAC recognizes that circumstances giving rise to a complaint may be evolving, supplemental information will not be accepted after an initial complaint submission unless FEPAC finds, in its sole discretion, that exceptional or unforeseen circumstances warrant consideration of new allegations and/or material not previously available to the complainant.

Similarly, complainants are barred from bringing subsequent complaints with allegations that were or could have been raised in a prior complaint proceeding involving the same FEPAC-accredited program.

COMPLAINT REQUIREMENTS

To be considered by FEPAC, a complaint must:

1. **Be in writing** – see **FEPAC Complaint Submission Form.**
2. **Be signed** by the complainant. Anonymous complaints are generally not investigated, unless FEPAC determines the identity of the complainant is not essential to assess non-compliance.
3. **Identify the complainant's relationship** with the program.
4. **Describe the specific actions** forming the basis of the complaint **and how they relate** to:
   - FEPAC's *Standards,*
   - *FEPAC Policies and Procedures,* and/or its
   - *Code of Conduct* and include supporting documentation as applicable.

5. **Show efforts to resolve the issue internally** through the program's grievance process or explain why this wasn't possible or why continuing the internal process efforts would be futile.
6. **Be submitted within 180 calendar days** of the last relevant event.
7. **Include a signed release** allowing FEPAC to share the complaint with the program (subject to any confidentiality request).

To ensure that the written submission contains all required information, signatures and an appropriate release, utilize the *FEPAC Complaint Submission Form***.**

Complainants may request that FEPAC withhold their identity from a program named in the complaint. Under these circumstances, FEPAC will review the complaint, but in its discretion may determine that the complaint will not be investigated where the identity of the complainant is a material fact necessary to determine whether non-compliance has occurred or is needed for the program to have a fair opportunity to respond. Additionally, while FEPAC will take every reasonable precaution to prevent the identity of the complainant from being revealed to the program, FEPAC **cannot** guarantee the confidentiality of the complainant.

NON-RETALIATION

FEPAC and its accredited programs are explicitly prohibited from retaliating against individuals or entities filing complaints with the Commission. Such retaliation constitutes grounds for the Commission to take appropriate action, including adverse action against the program.

COMPLAINT PROCEDURES

1. **Inquiries**

   When an inquiry about filing a complaint is received by FEPAC, the inquirer will be directed to the on-line location of FEPAC's *Governing Complaints Policy* and FEPAC's *Complaint Submission Form.*

2. **Written Complaints**

   When a written complaint against an FEPAC-accredited program is received, the following procedures are followed:

   a) FEPAC will acknowledge receipt of a complaint about an FEPAC-accredited program in writing to the complainant generally within fifteen (15) calendar days of receipt.
   b) The complaint and supporting materials submitted are initially reviewed by FEPAC's Accreditation and Outreach Manager. This initial review includes verifying that the complaint was received on a completed FEPAC *Complaint Submission Form*, was signed, timely submitted and includes sufficient documentation to support allegations of non-compliance with relevant FEPAC's *Standards, Policies and Procedures* and/or its *Code of Conduct*. A complaint meeting these requirements is forwarded to FEPAC's Executive Committee which will appoint a Complaint Review Committee[1] for further review and action as defined herein.

[1] The members of the *Complaint Review Committee* must not have a conflict of interest.

c) If additional information or documentation is needed from the complainant, FEPAC's Complaint Review Committee will so request. If the complainant's supplemental response to a request for additional information is not received within fourteen (14) calendar days, the complaint will be closed with notification to the complainant that their complaint may be refiled with the requested information at a later time for *de novo* review.

3. **Complaint Investigation Procedures**

Generally, within fifteen (15) calendar days of receiving the complaint the Complaint Review Committee will evaluate if the complaint meets the "Complaint Requirements" set forth in this policy. If it is determined the complaint meets the requirements, the Complaint Review Committee, working with the Accreditation and Outreach Manager, will provide a copy of the complaint (respecting any requests for confidentiality) to the Program Director of the FEPAC-Accredited program or to the Chief Academic Officer of the relevant FEPAC-accredited program with a summary of the allegations and the corresponding FEPAC's *Standards, Policies and Procedures* and/or its *Code of Conduct* implicated. A response to the allegations, including a written narrative and evidence supporting the program's position must be submitted by the program to FEPAC within thirty (30) calendar days of receipt.

a) FEPAC will acknowledge receipt of the program's written response to the complaint.
b) The Complaint Review Committee will review the complainant's allegations and the program's written response to the complaint (Complaint Record) and forward its review and recommendations to the full Commission for final review and action.

4. **Decisions Available to the Commission**

a) If the Commission determines that there is insufficient evidence to support the complaint allegations, then the complaint is closed.
b) If the Commission determines the program has successfully refuted all the complainant's allegations and demonstrates full compliance with FEPAC's *Standards, Policies and Procedures* and/or its *Code of Conduct,* the complaint will be closed.
c) If the Commission determines there are outstanding concerns about compliance with FEPAC's *Standards, Policies and Procedures* and/or its *Code of Conduct,* the Commission may:
    a) Require an on-site review to more fully investigate the complaint allegations in a special review or as part of an on-going accreditation review.
    b) Require the program to take corrective action to be documented in a written report to FEPAC within a timeframe to be determined by the Commission considering the scope and seriousness of the complaint and required response;
    c) Take actions consistent with FEPAC's Commission Actions Policy.

Decision Notification

Within thirty (30) calendar days of its final action, the Commission will notify the program and the complainant of the status of its investigation.

Decision Retention

A record of the complaint, all documenting materials, and the Commission's corresponding Action Letter(s) will be kept in accordance with *FEPAC's Records Maintenance Policy.*

COMPLAINTS AGAINST FEPAC

The Commission will evaluate complaints made against it, including those that relate to its monitoring of an institution/program's compliance with FEPAC's *Standards*, and the Commission's adherence to its *Policies and Procedures* and/or its *Code of Conduct*.

1. All written complaints received regarding FEPAC or the Commission's adherence to its FEPAC's *Standards, Policies and Procedures* and/or its *Code of Conduct* shall be forwarded within ten (10) calendar days of receipt to the Commission's Executive Committee and FEPAC's Accreditation and Outreach Manager.

2. Within fifteen (15) calendar days of receipt of such a complaint, the Chair of the Commission will send written communication to the complainant acknowledging receipt of the complaint.

3. The Executive Committee shall review the complaint allegations and determine whether relevant laws and/or FEPAC's *Standards, Policies and Procedures* and/or its *Code of Conduct* are implicated, and that supporting documents have been included. The Executive Committee may request, as necessary, additional information from the complainant, FEPAC staff, or Commissioners.

4. When the Executive Committee determines a complaint is relevant, the Commission's Chair will appoint a *Special Committee* of at least three (3) members to study the allegation(s) and summarize its findings for recommendation to and action by the full Commission. The members of the *Special Committee* must not have a conflict of interest and may include individuals other than Commissioners. These individuals may be former Commissioners, on-site evaluators, or other similarly qualified individuals.

5. FEPAC's Accreditation and Outreach Manager and the Commission's Chair will conduct a training session with the *Special Committee* to orient them to their role and responsibilities as outlined in this and other relevant FEPAC policies.

6. The Commission will consider the recommendation of the *Special Committee* as substantive and will take actions consistent with its recommendation(s) or provide specific rationale for variance from the recommendation(s).

7. The complainant will be notified in writing generally within thirty (30) calendar days of any action taken by the Commission in response to the complaint.

Revision History

Date Revised	Summary of Revisions	Approved By