

# Tips and Guidelines to Avoid Citations in SACSCOC Interim Reports

Sample Narrative from AUD's 5<sup>th</sup> Year Interim  
Report for Group 4

12.4 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. (*Student complaints*)

  X   Compliance

       Non-Compliance

## Overview

Since its founding in 1995, the American University in Dubai has ensured the implementation of formal procedures to provide students with support systems that address their concerns in an efficient and equitable manner. These policies and systems have been periodically reviewed for continuous improvement, enhancement and on-going compliance with Requirement 12.4.

The following imperatives characterize AUD’s approach to student complaint handling:

- Providing students with a single reference point (i.e., person, committee or department) to ensure accountability and responsibility for “moving the process along;”
- Ensuring system effectiveness with a persistent focus on communication; and complaint tracking, recording and resolution – in accordance with university policies, procedures and values; and,
- Ensuring alignment to the university’s mission in supporting students’ “academic, personal and professional success.”

## Student Complaint and Appeals Categories

In fulfillment of the previously mentioned imperatives, AUD has a formal system to provide streamlined access by students for the filing of their complaints and appeals. This system ensures transparency and safeguard students’ rights to due process. Consistent follow-up until resolution is central to this system which includes

the following categories:

### Academic and General Student Complaints

The process is facilitated through an online portal: <https://complaints.aud.edu>. This portal is designed to facilitate all complaints except for those related to appeals of decisions resulting from poor academic standing; grades; and conduct and honor council verdicts. The types of complaints under this category deal with a wide range of subjects, such as classroom and course management, parking, issues concerning treatment by faculty and other instructor-related behavior, AUD's dress code, facilities, resources, safety, instructor's evaluative criteria and classroom assessments, textbooks, student housing, university policies, library, bookstore, cafeteria food quality, conflict with members of the university community, bias and harassment. These types of complaints are monitored and facilitated by the office of institutional effectiveness.

### Grade and Academic Standing-related Appeals

This portal is accessible on line through the Registrar's web link <https://registrar.aud.edu>. The Registrar's Office monitors this system for adherence to timelines established by university policies.

### Honor and Conduct Council Appeals

These are also handled through formal written communications. Conduct violations and appeals are managed by the office of student services through the university's conduct council. Honor code violations and appeals and related issues are handled by the university's honor council.

## Publication of Appropriate and Clear Procedures

The university’s complaint-related policies and procedures cover the previously mentioned categories of student complaints. Ensuring awareness of this system and student access are demonstrated by publication of appropriate and clear procedures to address written student complaints, and institution-wide dissemination through staff, faculty and student orientations. This communication provides clear and comprehensive guidelines for implementation of the university’s policies and procedures. As demonstrated later in this narrative, the university’s consistent implementation of student complaint policies reflects strict adherence to these guidelines and procedures as detailed in university publications. These appear accordingly:

**Table 1 –Publication: Written Complaint Process Location**

Publication (2017-2018)	Academic and General Complaints (pages[s])	Academic Standing-related Appeals (pages[s])	Grade Appeal (pages[s])	Honor Appeal (pages[s])	Conduct Appeal (pages[s])
<i>Undergraduate Catalog</i>	63-64	82	79-80	80	61-62
<i>Graduate Catalog</i>	50-52	62-63	60-61	61	61
<i>Student Handbook</i>	36-37	85-86	15 and 83	78-81	24
<i>Faculty Handbook</i>	76-77	-	63-64	-	-

Information pertaining to these processes is also disseminated during student orientations. For example, the university provides a USB of the *Student Handbook* to all new students during orientations held at the beginning of the fall and spring semesters. During freshmen orientation, the orientation leaders review the *Handbook* with students to highlight key sections (including those related to complaints). They also review the AUD Honor Code and Pledge, as stated in the *2017-2018 AUD Student Handbook* (pp.75-76), which students are asked to read and acknowledge. The university’s procedures are clearly established to ensure transparency and protection of students’ right to due process during investigation of disciplinary and integrity-related offenses. These procedures are published in the *2017-2018 AUD Student Handbook*, pp.16-17; 23-24; 78-81. The *Student Handbook* is updated

annually and posted, along with all related publications, on the university website:  
[http://aud.edu/about\\_aud/en/page/2282/aud-publications-?sub=17640&show\\_title=1](http://aud.edu/about_aud/en/page/2282/aud-publications-?sub=17640&show_title=1)

As these publications are posted on the website, all faculty and staff have access to them throughout the academic year. Early in the year, the president of the university sends a campus-wide memo requesting that faculty and staff familiarize themselves with the contents of these publications and emphasizing AUD's "zero tolerance" policy with regard to inaccuracies. See [Appendix 1](#) for the President's email of fall, 2017.

The university's communication of clear policies and procedures regarding written student complaints also involves communicating students' rights and responsibilities. AUD believes that awareness of students' rights provides a safeguard against potential violations which may trigger student complaints. Statements regarding student rights are published in the *2017- 2018 AUD Student Handbook* and the *Graduate and Undergraduate Catalogs*. A full section in the *Student Handbook* is dedicated to student rights and responsibilities and begins with the following statement:

AUD believes all students should have equal access to all of its facilities, programs, activities, and sports without regard to age, color, religion, national origin, marital status, gender, or handicap. All students are granted certain rights and have certain shared responsibilities as members of the AUD community. AUD encourages students to make their own decisions and assume full responsibility for all consequences of their actions. Students are expected to adhere to federal and local laws of the United Arab Emirates. The rights and the responsibilities outline a system designed to safeguard and protect the rights, safety, and property of all members of the university population, which ensures a fully operative and well-managed community of learning.

The 2017-2018 edition of the *AUD Student Handbook* details areas of student rights and responsibilities, as presented in Table 2:

**Table 2 – Statements of Student Rights and Responsibilities**

Statement	<i>Student Handbook</i> (pages[s])
Artwork Material Property Waiver Form	14
AUD Surveys	24-25
Clubs and Organizations	56-62
Code of Student Conduct	18-23
Conduct Council	23-24
Conflict of Interest Clause	26
Disclosure	13
Freedom of Assembly	12
Freedom of Expression	12
General Statement of Philosophy on Student Conduct	16
Grievance Process	36-37
Intellectual Property	13-14
Principles Governing Student Access to Quizzes/Examinations	14-15
Student Forum	71
Student Records Access and Release	13-14
Student's Role in Institutional Decision Making	13
Students with Special Needs/Disabilities	26
Violations of Conduct	21-22

## **Demonstration of Policy Adherence and Resolution**

### Academic/General Complaints

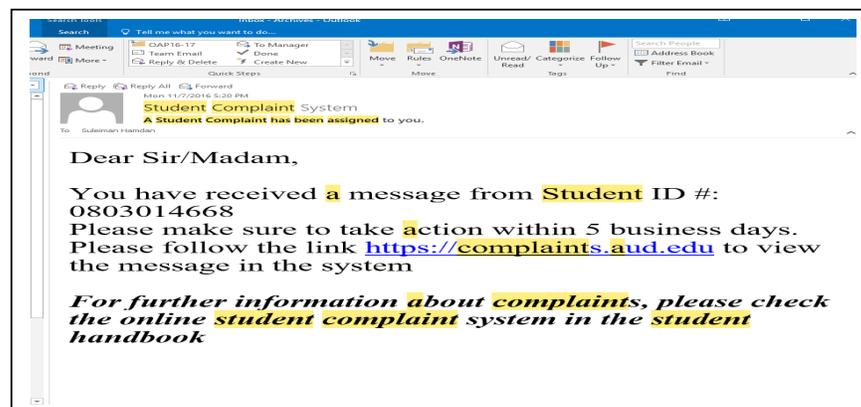
To encourage early intervention, AUD urges students first to communicate directly with the person or department with which they have a complaint to seek a solution. For example, the following message is displayed once a student logs online <https://complaints.aud.edu/> to file a complaint:

AUD values your contributions to the quality of our learning community and the overall university life. Accordingly, we encourage you to communicate any concerns or complaints directly to the person/department/office with whom you have a complaint. If the complaint remains unresolved, you have a right to formalize the complaint with the relevant Dean of the School, Department Chair, or the administrative Director via this online complaint system. For

a formal complaint, please login to start the process. You will receive an update on the status of your complaint via email within five working days.

The institutional effectiveness office (OIE) monitors and facilitates all complaints from initial filing by students through the final stage of resolution. Students select the intended recipient of the complaint from a prepopulated menu on the system that contains all administrative offices, senior leadership and academic units. Students receive an immediate acknowledgement confirming receipt of their complaint and an update on its status via email within five working days. As shown in Figure 1, the following is an image of an email that is automatically triggered and sent to the complaint recipient upon the submission of an online complaint by a student:

**Figure 1 – Email Notification to Complaint Recipient**



The daily monitoring involves checking the system for any outstanding issues and ensuring that complaint recipients are working on resolution until reached. Formal written replies, in accordance with university policies and procedures, are issued. Thus, the complaint system is designed to generate reminders to recipients to take the necessary action (see Appendix 2 for a reminder alert). Reports are generated and submitted monthly to the senior administration (Appendix 3). See also Appendix 4 containing samples of student complaints, the date on which they were received and resolved and the resolution itself. Appendix 5 details a student’s complaint regarding an instructor’s grading scheme and the instructor’s response. The university ensures

timely resolution and response to all student complaints. Table 3 provides a tally of all complaints that have been filed by students between January and September, 2017 and the period of time it took to provide a final resolution. We note that some cases took longer than usual to resolve, as they involved issues requiring significant investigation, such as a complaint of purported racially-biased remarks by a professor.

**Table 3 – Summary of Cases and Resolution Timeline**

Complaint	Date Filed by Student	Date Resolved or Updated	No. of Days to Final Resolution
1	1/15/2017	1/15/2017	same day
2	1/24/2017	1/30/2017	6
3	1/24/2017	1/30/2017	6
4	1/24/2017	2/28/2017	35
5	1/26/2017	1/29/2017	3
6	2/27/2017	3/14/2017	15
7	3/28/2017	4/12/2017	15
8	3/28/2017	4/12/2017	15
9	3/28/2017	4/12/2017	15
10	3/29/2017	4/12/2017	14
11	3/29/2017	4/12/2017	14
12	3/29/2017	4/12/2017	14
13	4/06/2017	4/12/2017	6
14	5/14/2017	6/11/2017	28
15	5/29/2017	5/30/2017	1
16	9/05/2017	9/06/2017	1
17	9/19/2017	9/19/2017	same day

Students are provided other venues to seek further action if they deem the proposed solution unsatisfactory or where there was inaction or a lack of progress in resolving the complaint. Under such circumstances, students may seek council from the AUD Grievance Officer. The grievance process is detailed in the *2017-2018 AUD Undergraduate Catalog* (pp. 63-64) and *2017-2018 AUD Student Handbook* (pp. 36-37). In the event that a grievance has not yielded a satisfactory resolution, the grievant may ultimately appeal to the university’s president. There has been no case in recent years where a written student complaint has reached the level of a grievance. AUD believes the effectiveness of the online student complaint and appeal system in facilitating a fair and timely resolution, together with strict adherence to university policies, has contributed to this success.

## Grade and Academic Standing-related Appeals

Appeals related to action taken due to poor academic standing (i.e., suspension or dismissal) and grade appeals are handled through an online portal accessible to all university students and staff. The online portal, <https://registrar.aud.edu>, is supported and monitored through the registrar's office to ensure compliance with university policies, procedures and timelines.

### Grade Appeals

Grade appeal procedures accord students the right to appeal a grade within one month following the assignment of the grade. Instructors must provide an opportunity to students to discuss their grade concerns and complaints. Students are provided full access to their graded work and the evaluative criteria used in assigning the grade. [Appendix 6](#) provides a sample of five cases of grade appeal and the formal university action at various levels, including the response by the instructor of record and the dean. To demonstrate the university's adherence to its own policies and procedures as they relate to grade appeals, see [Appendix 7](#), which provides the complete list of student grade appeals and university action during spring and summer, 2017. The samples on Table 4 below represent a summary of grade appeal cases in spring and summer, 2017.

**Table 4 – Spring and Summer, 2017 Grade Appeals**

Student Number	Term	Action by	Course Code and Section	Date Requested	Letter Grade	Num. Grade	Status
1509027995	Spring 2017	Chair	ECVL433 A	2017-05-11 19:02:57.337	F	56.47	Approved
1312024319	Spring 2017	Chair	BUSI211 C	2017-07-01 21:57:10.410	D+	65.00	Rejected
1312024331	Spring 2017	Provost	PSPK101 G	2017-07-02 15:35:49.203	F	59.00	Approved
1305023357	Summer I 2017	Chair	PSYC201 A	2017-06-28 17:02:55.107	F	54.00	Rejected
1505027143	Summer I 2017	Chair	ARCH202 A	2017-07-01 19:24:13.177	F	54.95	Approved
1702030212	Summer I 2017	Dean	PHYS201 C	2017-07-10 13:29:03.443	C-	66.94	Rejected
1403024863	Summer I 2017	Chair	ENGL103 C	2017-07-17 01:27:52.023	F	38.00	Rejected

1407025793	Summer I 2017	Chair	BUSI101 B	2017-07-23 16:48:43.350	F	47.00	Rejected
1601028310	Summer I 2017	Chair	ENGL100 B	2017-07-27 22:54:43.370	F*	65.40	Rejected
1607029384	Summer I 2017	Chair	ENGL100 A	2017-08-04 01:01:51.110	F*	69.30	Approved
1205021719	Summer I 2017	Chair	PSPK101 C	2017-08-28 15:33:46.457	F	59.13	Rejected
1703030260	Summer I 2017	Chair	PHYS201 C	2017-09-03 11:51:36.217	D+	63.58	Rejected
1202021279	Summer I 2017	Dean	BUSI101 B	2017-09-11 18:24:31.627	D+	63.50	Rejected
1406025505	Summer II 2017	Chair	BUSI331 A	2017-09-06 15:21:55.760	B+	85.65	Rejected

### Academic Standing-related Appeals

As in the cases of grade appeals, academic standing-related appeals are also handled through the registrar's office via the online portal <https://registrar.aud.edu>. Students who fail to maintain consistently satisfactory academic performance become subject to various measures, including suspension and dismissal. However, students may appeal to have a suspension or dismissal reversed. This appeal must be filed online by the date specified on the academic calendar. [Appendix 8](#) provides examples of three cases of academic standing appeal related to suspension and dismissal. The referenced examples include the student's appeal and the responses of various parties involved in acting on the appeal (i.e., office of student retention and success, dean/chair, provost and registrar).

Regarding termination from a graduate program, a student can appeal in writing for readmission within fifteen days of notification to the school in which the program is housed. If the appeal is denied, the student has the right to submit a final appeal of the decision to the provost or eventually, the president. See [Appendix 9](#) for a graduate student appeal and the dean's response.

## Honor and Conduct Code Appeals

The university honor and conduct councils are the two main judicial bodies that investigate various offenses related to academic integrity or conduct. Students have the right to appeal decisions made by either of these two entities, all the way up to the president of the university.

### Honor Council Appeals

Once a student receives the university honor council (UHC) decision in writing, he or she is reminded of their right to appeal. The student is informed that the appeal must be filed in writing with the provost within three working days from receipt of the decision notification. See [Appendix 10](#) which contains a formal honor council decision and notification to a student found in violation of AUD's honor code. Should the student file an appeal, the provost reviews it, along with any supporting documentation before delivering a final decision. See [Appendix 11](#) for a response to a student appeal from the university provost. If the honor council decision is overturned, and the appeal is granted by the provost, a new letter indicating the provost's decision is sent to the student and copied to the honor council members, the instructor of the course in which the violation took or was suspected to have taken place, the president, the registrar and, if appropriate, other concerned parties. The provost, who may uphold or overturn the UHC decisions, communicates his decision directly to the student in writing. Finally, the student has the right to appeal in writing to the president. See [Appendix 12](#) for student appeal case to the president and his decision.

### Conduct Council Appeals

Once a student receives a conduct council decision in writing, he or she is reminded of the code of student conduct as described on [pp. 18-23](#) of the *2017-2018 AUD Student Handbook* and his or her right to appeal the decision in writing, within 72 hours from receipt of the letter, to the president. [Appendix 13](#) contains examples of

formal council decisions and communications to students who had committed a violation of the university conduct code.

The president reviews all appeals that are made to his office, along with any supporting documentation, before rendering a final decision. See [Appendix 14](#) for the president’s response to a student appeal in which he commuted the penalty imposed by the conduct council. See also [Appendix 15](#) for the president’s denial of a student appeal.

### Maintenance and Access

AUD ensures that appropriate measures are taken to maintain all records pertaining to written student complaints and appeals. These records include documentation, such as meeting minutes where formal actions have been decided, communication of honor and conduct council decisions, student responses, appeal (if any) and response to appeal. The records, which are organized to be readily accessible, are archived electronically in the office of the registrar. In the case of honor and conduct council appeals, a hard copy of the record is also filed in locked cabinets located in the offices of the honor council chair and dean of student services, respectively. Table 5 shows the location where the records of written student complaints and appeals are maintained and how they can be accessed. Access to records is governed by the AUD Student Records Access and Release Policy ([Appendix 16](#)), written to be in compliance with FERPA.

**Table 5 – Written Complaint Maintenance and Access**

Nature of Complaint	Maintenance	Access*
Academic and General Complaints	Office of Institutional Effectiveness (electronic)	Formal written request to the institutional effectiveness office
• Case A: <a href="#">Appendix 17</a>		
• Case B: <a href="#">Appendix 18</a>		
• Case C: <a href="#">Appendix 19</a>		
Grade Appeal	Registrar’s Office (electronic)	Formal written request to the Registrar’s Office
• Case A: <a href="#">Appendix 20</a>		
• Case B: <a href="#">Appendix 21</a>		
• Case C: <a href="#">Appendix 22</a>		
Academic Standing-related Appeal	Registrar’s Office (electronic)	Formal written request to the Registrar’s Office

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Case A: <a href="#">Appendix 23</a></i></li> <li>• <i>Case B: <a href="#">Appendix 24</a></i></li> <li>• <i>Case C: <a href="#">Appendix 25</a></i></li> </ul>				
Honor Appeal	Honor Council (soft) and the Registrar's Office (electronic)	Formal written request to the Registrar's Office		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Case A: <a href="#">Appendix 26</a></i></li> <li>• <i>Case B: <a href="#">Appendix 27</a></i></li> <li>• <i>Case C: <a href="#">Appendix 28</a></i></li> </ul>				
Conduct Appeal			Office of Student Services (soft) and the Registrar's Office (electronic)	Formal written request to the Registrar's Office
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Case A: <a href="#">Appendix 29</a></i></li> <li>• <i>Case B: <a href="#">Appendix 30</a></i></li> <li>• <i>Case C: <a href="#">Appendix 31</a></i></li> </ul>				

\*always by an authorized party

Obviously, within this context, AUD's records of written student complaints can be easily accessed upon request by SACSCOC.

The safety of all records of written student complaints is ensured through adherence with the AUD Student Retention and Storage Policy ([Appendix 32](#)). The Information Technology Services Office is responsible for backing up all university records. Active, inactive and archived records are backed up daily and stored in a secure, protected location (Data Center – C-Building, 401). Once weekly, stored files are transferred to a secured vault at a remote location managed by a reputable storage firm (InfoFort) with whom AUD has collaborated since 2007. See [Appendix 33](#) for an InfoFort company profile and the AUD-InfoFort agreement specifying the weekly pick-up and transfer of electronic records.

As demonstrated by the preceding, AUD is in compliance with Requirement 12.4 on *student complaints*.

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**Supporting Documentation and Evidence:**

- Appendix 1      President's email related to university publications
- Appendix 2      Complaint automatic alert to recipient
- Appendix 3      Online system complaint report to senior administration
- Appendix 4      Samples of student complaints and resolutions
- Appendix 5      Student complaint and professor response re: grading scheme/approach

Appendix 6	Sample cases of grade appeals and university action
Appendix 7	Listing (report) grade appeal cases and action
Appendix 8	Sample cases of academic standing-related appeal
Appendix 9	Graduate student appeal and dean's decision
Appendix 10	Formal honor council decision communication
Appendix 11	Provost response to student appeal (honor)
Appendix 12	Student appeal cases to president and decision communication (honor)
Appendix 13	Conduct council decisions communication
Appendix 14	University president response to an appeal (Commuted)
Appendix 15	University president response to an appeal (Denied)
Appendix 16	<i>Student Records Access and Release Policy</i>
Appendix 17	Academic and general complaints - case A
Appendix 18	Academic and general complaints - case B
Appendix 19	Academic and general complaints - case C
Appendix 20	Grade appeal case A
Appendix 21	Grade appeal case B
Appendix 22	Grade appeal case C
Appendix 23	Academic standing-related appeal case A
Appendix 24	Academic standing-related appeal case B
Appendix 25	Academic standing-related appeal case C
Appendix 26	Appeal: Honor - case A
Appendix 27	Appeal: Honor - case B
Appendix 28	Appeal: Honor - case C
Appendix 29	Appeal: Conduct - case A
Appendix 30	Appeal: Conduct - case B
Appendix 31	Appeal: Conduct - case C
Appendix 32	<i>Student Records Retention and Storage Policy</i>
Appendix 33	InfoFort Company Profile and Agreement

Reference

FR 4.5 Student Complaints in the 2012 Principles

The U.S. Secretary of Education recognizes accreditation by SACS Commission on Colleges in establishing the eligibility of higher education institutions to participate in programs authorized under Title IV of the *Higher Education Act*, as amended, and other federal programs. Through its periodic review of institutions of higher education, the Commission assures the public that it is a reliable authority on the quality of education provided by its member institutions.

The federal statute includes mandates that the Commission review an institution in accordance with criteria outlined in the federal regulations developed by the U.S. Department of Education. As part of the review process, institutions are required to document compliance with those criteria and the Commission is obligated to consider such compliance when the institution is reviewed for initial membership or continued accreditation.

Implicit in every Federal Requirement mandating a policy or procedure is the expectation that the policy or procedure is in writing and has been approved through appropriate institutional processes, published in appropriate institutional documents accessible to those affected by the policy or procedure, and implemented and enforced by the institution.

- 4.1** The institution evaluates success with respect to student achievement consistent with its mission. Criteria may include: enrollment data; retention, graduation, course completion, and job placement rates; state licensing examinations; student portfolios; or other means of demonstrating achievement of goals. **(Student achievement)**
- 4.2** The institution's curriculum is directly related and appropriate to the mission and goals of the institution and the diplomas, certificates, or degrees awarded. **(Program curriculum)**
- 4.3** The institution makes available to students and the public current academic calendars, grading policies, and refund policies. **(Publication of policies)**
- 4.4** Program length is appropriate for each of the institution's educational programs. **(Program length)**
- 4.5** The institution has adequate procedures for addressing written student complaints and is responsible for demonstrating that it follows those procedures when resolving student complaints. *(See Commission policy "Complaint Procedures against the Commission or its Accredited Institutions.")* **(Student complaints)**