V. B. PROCEDURE FOR COMPLAINTS

POLICY FOR COMPLAINTS AGAINST EDUCATIONAL PROGRAMS

The Accreditation Council for Occupational Therapy Education (ACOTE®) follows established procedures when complaints are received by ACOTE indicating that accredited programs or programs seeking accreditation may not be in compliance with the *Accreditation Standards for a Doctoral-Degree-Level Educational Program for the Occupational Therapist*, *Accreditation Standards for a Master's-Degree-Level Educational Program for the Occupational Therapist*, or *Accreditation Standards for an Educational Program for the Occupational Therapy Assistant*, or may not be following established accreditation policies or procedures. Actions taken by other accrediting agencies do not preclude ACOTE from investigating a complaint against the same institution or program.

Unless the complaint of conduct potentially constitutes a violation of the *Standards* or established accreditation policies or procedures, ACOTE will not intervene on behalf of individuals or act as a court of appeal for faculty members or students in matters of admission, appointment, promotion, or dismissal. A copy of the *Standards* may be obtained through the ACOTE Web site (www.acoteonline.org) or by contacting Accreditation Department staff at the American Occupational Therapy Association (AOTA).

PROCEDURES FOR COMPLAINTS AGAINST EDUCATIONAL PROGRAMS

1. To receive formal consideration, all complaints must be submitted in writing to the ACOTE Chairperson, c/o the AOTA Accreditation Department, at the following address:

   ACOTE Chairperson
   c/o the AOTA Accreditation Department
   4720 Montgomery Lane, Suite 200
   Bethesda, MD 20814-3425

   A complaint against a program subject to ACOTE accreditation may be filed by completing the printable complaint form, "Complaint against a Program Subject to ACOTE Accreditation". Completed forms must be signed and forwarded to the above address. A complaint against an educational program must:
   a. describe the nature of the complaint and the related accreditation *Standards* or accreditation policies or procedures that the complainant believes are not being met by the program, including any evidence or documents that might substantiate the complaint;
   b. document that the complainant has made reasonable efforts to resolve the complaint, or alternatively that such efforts would be unavailing; and
   c. be signed by the complainant. (The confidentiality of the complaining party is protected by AOTA Accreditation staff unless release of identity has been authorized, or disclosure is required by legal action.)

2. Complaints that do not meet all of the above requirements will be returned to the complainant with an explanation. Complaints meeting the above requirements are transmitted by AOTA Accreditation staff to the ACOTE Chairperson for consideration. The identity of the complainant is concealed.

3. The ACOTE Chairperson will determine whether, in fact, the complaint relates to the manner in which the program complies with the *Standards* or follows established accreditation policies or procedures.

   a. If the complaint does not relate to the *Standards* or to established policies or procedures, the person initiating the complaint will be notified accordingly by the ACOTE Chairperson.

b. If the complaint is judged to relate to program compliance with the *Standards* or to accreditation policies or procedures, the following procedures will be followed:

(1) AOTA Accreditation staff will acknowledge receipt of the complaint and share with the filing party a description of the process and policies that pertain to handling such complaints.

(2) AOTA Accreditation staff will notify the program director and the chief executive officer of the sponsoring institution of the substance of the complaint and will request the institution/program to provide a preliminary investigation and report on the findings within 30 days of the sponsoring institution's receipt of the letter of notice. The identity of the complaining party is not revealed unless release of identity has been authorized by the complainant or disclosure is required by legal action.

(3) At the request of the ACOTE Chairperson, AOTA Accreditation staff may request further information or material relative to the complaint from the complaining party, the institution, or other relevant sources.

4. On receipt of the responses referred to in 3.b.(2) and (3) above, or at its next scheduled meeting, the ACOTE reviewers for the program in question will consider the complaint and all relevant information obtained in the course of investigation and formulate an appropriate action to present to ACOTE at its next scheduled meeting according to the following guidelines:

a. If the complaint is determined to be unsubstantiated or unrelated to the *Standards* or established accreditation policies or procedures, the complaining party, officials of the program in question, and the appropriate official of the sponsoring institution will be so notified.

b. If the investigation reveals that the program may not be or may not have been in compliance with the *Standards* or may not be or may not have been following the established accreditation policies or procedures, one of two options will be taken.

(1) The program may be requested to submit a report and documentation that the substantiated complaint has been corrected. Should ACOTE be satisfied with this response, the program, its sponsoring institution, and the party filing the complaint will be notified of ACOTE's satisfaction with the resolution of the matter and notice that the program's accreditation status remains unaffected by the complaint.

(2) Should ACOTE judge the program or sponsoring institution's response to the complaint inadequate and lacking in evidence of the program's continuing compliance with the *Standards* or adherence to accreditation policies or procedures, ACOTE may request that the program submit additional information or may arrange for a fact-finding visit to the program. The cost of the visit will be divided equally between ACOTE and the educational program.

(a) If ACOTE, on the basis of the evidence before it, determines that the program is in compliance with the *Standards* and is adhering to accreditation policies and procedures, the program, its sponsoring institution, and the complaining party will be notified of this assessment and the fact that the program's current accreditation status remains unaffected by the complaint.

(b) If ACOTE, on the basis of the evidence before it, determines that the complaint is valid and that the program is not in compliance with one or more Standards, areas of noncompliance will be cited and a Plan of Correction will be required.

If ACOTE, on the basis of the evidence before it, determines that the program is not in substantial compliance with the *Standards*, areas of noncompliance will be cited, a Plan of Correction will be required, and the program's accreditation status will be changed to Probationary Accreditation.

The program, its sponsoring institution, the complaining party, and the U.S. Department of Education will be advised of ACOTE's action to change

accreditation status to Probationary Accreditation. Final decisions to place a program on probationary accreditation will be publicly disclosed via a posting on the ACOTE Web site within 24 hours of confirmation that the program has received notification of ACOTE's decision to place the program on Probationary Accreditation.

5. The AOTA Accreditation Department maintains a file of all complaints received by ACOTE.

POLICY FOR COMPLAINTS AGAINST ACOTE

ACOTE is dedicated to providing a sustained quality of program evaluation and review. Established procedures are followed when complaints are received alleging that ACOTE has not complied with established accreditation practices, including noncompliance with its own policies and procedures, exceeding its scope as defined by the *Standards*, the behavior of its on-site evaluation team members, or noncompliance with the recognition criteria of the U.S. Department of Education (USDE) or the recognition standards of the Council for Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA).

ACOTE will not consider complaints that include matters pertaining to an adverse accreditation action or citing of areas of noncompliance. If a program wishes to appeal an adverse action, it should refer to the ACOTE Appeals Process in Section IV.D. of the ACOTE Accreditation Manual.

No institution or person who, in good faith, makes a complaint against ACOTE, its members, agents, or its staff will be subject to harassment, retaliation, or adverse accreditation decisions by virtue of having lodged the complaint.

PROCEDURES FOR COMPLAINTS AGAINST ACOTE

1. A complaint against ACOTE may be filed by completing the printable complaint form, "Complaint against ACOTE". Completed forms must be signed and forwarded address below:

   ACOTE Chairperson
   c/o the AOTA Accreditation Department
   4720 Montgomery Lane, Suite 200
   Bethesda, MD 20814-3425

   The complaint against ACOTE must:
   a. describe the nature of the complaint in detail;
   b. list the established accreditation practices that the complainant believes are not being met by ACOTE or ACOTE accreditation evaluators; and
   c. be signed by the complainant.

2. Within one week of the receipt of the complaint, the Accreditation Department staff will acknowledge receipt of the complaint and attach a copy of the procedure for handling complaints against ACOTE. The complaint will be copied to the ACOTE Chairperson.

3. The ACOTE Chairperson will appoint a 3-person complaint panel consisting of former ACOTE members currently serving on the Roster of Accreditation Evaluators (RAE) or as an ACOTE Emeriti (former ACOTE member). One of the panelists will be appointed as chairperson of the complaint panel by the ACOTE Chairperson. The ACOTE Chairperson will request that the complaint panel investigate the complaint and report its findings to the complainant and ACOTE within 30 days.

4. The complaint panel will review complaints that relate to ACOTE's compliance with established accreditation practices and take the following action:

   a. The complaint panel chairperson may request further information or material relative to the complaint from the complaining party.

   b. The complaint panel will consider the complaint and all relevant information obtained in the course of investigation and formulate an appropriate action according to the following guidelines:

(1) If the complaint is determined to be unsubstantiated or unrelated to ACOTE compliance with established accreditation policies or procedures, the complainant and ACOTE Chairperson will be so notified in writing.

(2) If the investigation reveals that ACOTE may not be or may not have followed established accreditation policies or procedures, ACOTE will be so notified in writing by the complaint panel chairperson. ACOTE, at its next meeting, must review its noncompliant practices and policies and either make necessary modifications to comply with its established accreditation policies or procedures, or revise/develop policies or procedures appropriate to reflect accepted accreditation practice.

(3) The complaint panel and the complainant will be notified in writing of ACOTE's final resolution of the complaint.

5. The AOTA Accreditation Department maintains a file of all complaints filed against ACOTE.