Student Compliant Process for Distance Education Programs
SARA Complaint Process at Northeastern Illinois University

Northeastern Illinois University participates in the National Council for State Authorization Reciprocity Agreements, commonly known as NC-SARA. Through SARA, NEIU is authorized to offer distance education courses and programs to students located in other SARA member states, subject to SARA policies and applicable state and federal requirements.

NEIU is committed to supporting students and resolving concerns in a fair, timely, and transparent manner. Students are encouraged to seek resolution first through the appropriate University office and established University process.

What is SARA?

The State Authorization Reciprocity Agreement (SARA) is a national agreement that helps colleges and universities provide distance education across state lines. SARA establishes a common framework for state authorization and student complaint resolution for participating institutions and states.
SARA applies to certain distance education activities, including online courses and programs offered to students located outside Illinois in another SARA member state.

Who Should Use This Process?

This process applies to students who:

- Are enrolled in or taking NEIU courses under SARA provisions;
- Are located outside Illinois in a SARA member state while participating in distance education; and
- Have a complaint related to NEIU's distance education activities that has not been resolved through NEIU's internal complaint or grievance procedures.

Students with questions about whether their concern falls within SARA may contact the Academic Affairs office (acadaff@neiu.edu, attention: Associate Provost) for guidance before filing a complaint.

Step 1: Attempt to Resolve the Concern Informally
Students are encouraged to begin by discussing the concern directly with the appropriate faculty member, staff member, department, or office. Many concerns can be resolved quickly through informal communication.
Depending on the nature of the concern, students may contact offices such as:

- The academic department or instructor for course-related concerns;

- The appropriate college or academic dean's office;
- Student Affairs;
- Enrollment Services, Records, Registration, or Financial Aid;
- Student Disability Services;
- Equal Opportunity / Title IX, where applicable;
- Technology support for online learning or system access concerns.

Step 2: Use NEIU's Internal Complaint or Grievance Procedures
If the concern cannot be resolved informally, students should follow NEIU's applicable formal complaint, appeal, or grievance process. See Complaints and Grievances and the NEIU Student Handbook for details. Under SARA policy, complaints against an institution operating under SARA must first go through the institution's own procedures for resolving grievances. Initial responsibility for investigation and resolution rests with the institution against which the complaint is made.

Examples of concerns that may have separate University processes include:

Academic or Grade Concerns
Complaints regarding grades or academic evaluation are governed by NEIU policy and the laws of Illinois, NEIU's home state. Students should follow the applicable academic appeal or departmental grievance process as detailed in the Student Handbook.

Student Conduct Matters
Complaints or appeals related to student conduct are governed by NEIU's student conduct policies and applicable Illinois law.

Discrimination, Harassment, or Title IX Concerns
Concerns involving discrimination, harassment, sexual misconduct, or retaliation should be directed to the appropriate NEIU office responsible for equal opportunity, nondiscrimination, and Title IX compliance.

Disability Access Concerns
Concerns regarding accommodations or disability access should be directed to the NEIU office responsible for student disability services and accessibility.
Financial Aid, Registration, Records, or Student Account Concerns
Students should contact the appropriate administrative office and follow any applicable appeal or review process.

Step 3: If the Complaint Is Not Resolved at NEIU
If a complaint is not resolved through NEIU's internal procedures, a student may submit the unresolved complaint to the Illinois Board of Higher Education (IBHE), which serves as the Illinois SARA State Portal Entity.

Illinois Board of Higher Education Complaint System
Students may file unresolved complaints through the IBHE online complaint system: https://complaints.ibhe.org/

As NEIU's home-state SARA portal entity, IBHE is responsible for reviewing unresolved SARA-related complaints involving NEIU, except for matters that SARA policy reserves to institutional procedures, such as grades and student conduct violations.

Step 4: Complaints Involving Students Located Outside Illinois
Students who are located in another SARA member state may also contact the SARA portal agency in their state of location for information and guidance. However, under SARA policy, oversight of distance education delivered by a SARA-participating institution is centralized in the institution's home state.
For NEIU, the home state is Illinois, and the Illinois SARA portal agency is the Illinois Board of Higher Education. NC-SARA and the regional compacts may also facilitate reporting of student complaints related to state authorization and SARA policy to the student's home state. NC-SARA does not collect individually identifiable student data and complies with FERPA.

Complaints Not Covered by SARA

Some matters are outside the scope of SARA or are handled through other processes.

Grade Appeals and Student Conduct
Under SARA policy, complaints regarding student grades or student conduct violations are governed entirely by institutional policy and the laws of the SARA institution's home state.

Criminal Conduct or General Consumer Protection Issues
Allegations of criminal offenses or violations of general-purpose state laws may be made directly to the appropriate state agencies. SARA does not prevent a state from using its general-purpose criminal or consumer protection laws against an institution that violates those laws.

Accreditation Complaints
Students may also contact NEIU's institutional accreditor, the Higher Learning Commission, if the complaint falls within the accreditor's complaint process.

Professional Licensure and Certification Programs
Students who are located outside Illinois and are enrolled in or considering a program that may lead to professional licensure, certification, endorsement, or other

credentialing should review NEIU's professional licensure disclosures and consult the appropriate licensing board in the state where they intend to work.
State requirements may vary, and completion of an NEIU program may not automatically satisfy licensure or certification requirements in another state.

Student Location
Students participating in distance education are responsible for keeping their current physical location up to date with the University. Student location may affect state authorization, professional licensure disclosures, and complaint-resolution options. Students residing in states other than in Illinois can find the SARA portal Agency for their state through this link.