

COMMITTEE A MATTERS

Before the First Complaint

Know the Redbook—Know your Faculty Handbook—Make the Redbook Your Handbook

The most important Committee A work you can do begins before you receive your first complaint. Your success in helping your colleagues is directly related to your success in making the Redbook a part of your Faculty Handbook. If you can incorporate references to the Redbook, great! If not, incorporate as much of the language and as many of the policies and procedures as possible.

After a Complaint

Committee A Checklist for Conference and Chapter Officers

This checklist was originally prepared by Donald Wagner, former executive secretary of the Georgia Conference, and subsequently updated and elaborated by John Slosar, former chapter president at Saint Louis University.

1. Always be courteous, professional, and helpful to the extent you can. Listen and ask questions; don't argue. Find out exactly what the problem is and what remedy the faculty member seeks.
2. Take your time. Never allow yourself to be rushed. Make no commitments before checking with the Washington office staff. (Jordan Kurland, Jonathan Knight, Robert Kreiser, Anita Levy, or Eric Combest at 1-800-424-2973).
3. Do not *assume* that the faculty member is always right. Remember, there are always at least two sides to every story, and the complaint may involve other faculty colleagues.
4. Do not *assume* that the AAUP can always help faculty members who believe that they have been mistreated. Our policies do not cover all conceivable circumstances.
5. Remember that, most fundamentally, the AAUP defends policies and principles, not individuals. This should, however, be balanced with the need for and the ability of the local AAUP to assist faculty directly (e.g., through a chapter-assigned advisor, legal assistance, etc.).
6. For your own protection, say at some point in the conversation, "I am not an attorney, and what advice I may give you is not legal advice."
7. Keep a written record of your telephone conversation(s), and retain correspondence, e-mail messages, and other documents on each complaint.
8. Advise any faculty member who calls you to develop and maintain a careful chronological account of what has happened to him or her. The account should include as much detail as possible, e.g., all relevant correspondence, telephone calls, meetings, witnesses, etc. Advise the person to document his or her complaint to the extent possible.

9. Has the person exhausted potential avenues of redress at the campus? What remedies are available? Do they accord with what the AAUP recommends? Find out. Ask for copies of institutional regulations if you do not have them.
10. If you are too busy to attend to the faculty member's concerns, are the least bit uncertain about the issues, or perceive a potential conflict of interest, suggest that the faculty member call the AAUP Washington office and consult with the Committee A staff.
11. Maintain a list of attorneys in your state who are familiar with higher education law. Be sure to indicate that you are providing them with referrals, not recommendations, since you may not be personally acquainted with all the lawyers whose names are in your file. Find law school faculty who might help in legal matters on a *pro-bono* basis.
12. Establish a local standing Legal Defense Fund to help defray the costs of a faculty member's first consultation with an attorney.
13. Consulting with an attorney early could be very important in serious situations, especially when the faculty member's position may be at stake. Institutional policies may determine when an attorney should be brought formally into institutional proceedings.
14. After a complaint has been referred to the Washington office staff, chapter and conference officers can play an important role in providing information and facilitating discussions at the local level.

Keep in mind, however, that it is the Washington office staff, the national Committee A, and ultimately the annual meeting that speak for the Association.
15. At no time should the local chapter or conference "sanction" or "censure" an offending administration! To do so would undermine the authority of the national AAUP. The influence of the AAUP lies in moral and rational persuasion resulting from objective fact finding and rigorous analysis by an impartial national association acting in the best interests of the profession. We can make our greatest contribution by facilitating that process.
16. In communicating directly with an administration, remember that most people do not differentiate between and among various parts of the AAUP. The chapter or conference should be careful to distinguish between its status as a local body of informed academic persons and the status of the national office.