



Report of Committee A, 1978-79

During the last three years Committee A and the leaders of the Assembly of State Conferences have been discussing appropriate practice concerning conference participation in Committee A work, and over the past year and a half several drafts of the separate statements of each group have been prepared. Although whole sections of the two statements were almost if not wholly identical, some differences of perception remained; and in the late spring members of the Association's staff, seeking a clear definition of current practice, asked Committee A to come to a decision on this matter. Committee A accordingly approved the following, which it had prepared in the course of its discussions with ASC leaders:

CONFERENCE PARTICIPATION IN COMMITTEE A WORK

The current volume of Committee A complaints registered with the Association is very large and shows no sign of diminishing. For some time a small fraction of all complaints has been shared between the national staff and conferences' representatives; certain conferences participate actively and continually, the participation of others varies from moderate to little, and still others take practically no part in this area of activity. In most instances of joint effort between conferences' representatives and the national staff there is full consultation: the facts and issues involved in a particular complaint are discussed and a course of action is decided. Typically, constructive joint involvement rests upon an understanding that responsibility within the Association for implemen-

tation of its principles and policies resides with the national staff under the General Secretary. The issue, therefore, is not if the conferences should participate in this work. It is, rather, how best to enlarge the conferences' contribution and assure its high quality.

The conferences' contribution can be enhanced in several ways. In the interest of full development of relevant issues and facts and to insure uniform interpretation of the Association's principles and policies, conferences' representatives and national-staff members should consult closely with one another about complaints. Second, the participation of conferences' representatives in advising complainants and, in cooperation with the national staff, in fact-finding and mediation can and should be extended. The national staff should increase the amount and quality of its assistance to and collaboration with participating conferences. Steps taken along that line should include: (a) conference-staff consultation for purposes of identifying persons in each state willing and able to handle Committee A work; and (b) national-staff sponsorship of a substantive program of guidance in the techniques of the work, above and beyond *ad hoc* conversations or an occasional brief workshop.

A significant step in the processing of complaints is a decision to "open a case" with an institutional administration. A case is opened when the General Secretary (or his authorized representative), with the consent of the complainant, approaches the administration of the institution concerned. Typically, this presentation includes the following: (a) the fact that a request for assistance has been received from one or more identified members of the institution's academic professional staff; (b) the essential nature of the complaint; (c) the issues of concern to the Association under its principles and procedural standards; (d) an invitation to the administration to comment on the situation and to provide any significant information which would add to the Association's understanding of it; and (e) tentative recommendations for resolving the issues and/or an offer to enter into discussion for the purpose of achieving their resolution.

The opening of a case constitutes a formal expression from the national Association that the evidence suggests the complaint poses serious issues under the Association's standards. A case is opened on behalf of the General Secretary, who as the Association's chief executive officer is responsible for whatever positions are taken and recommendations made. Similarly, entrance into or participation in litigation on a matter involving the Association's policy requires the concurrence of the General Secretary. Administrative officers generally understand that the

opening of a case on behalf of the General Secretary has the authority of the Association behind it. So that the ability of the Association to speak authoritatively and effectively on a specific case will not be diminished, conferences' representatives should take pains to make it clear that responsibility for the opening and pursuit of a case rests with the national Association and they should not take a position on a case in process without consulting first with the national staff. It is understood that communications between Association representatives and a college or university administration do not always constitute the "opening" or subsequent processing of a case. There will be occasions on which the communication is for the purpose of gathering information, with the decision on opening a case yet to be reached in accordance with the procedures set forth above. These less formal communications, as other techniques for dealing with a complaint, will often involve close staff-conference consultation.

While conferences' representatives do not assume direct responsibility for the handling of specific cases that have been opened on behalf of the General Secretary, their efforts can nonetheless be very useful in contributing to their successful outcome. Working in conjunction with the national staff, they can provide informed counsel to one principal party or the other, or to faculty bodies charged with making assessments. They can procure information that is more easily obtainable locally than from the national or a regional office. They can consult with administrative officers and explain the Association's recommended standards and the Association's own internal procedures. They can explore the possibility of interest in mediation looking towards a mutually acceptable

resolution. They can be especially useful, in those severe cases that have resulted in report and censure, in laying the groundwork for the removal of censure.

The development and employment of conference efforts in the Committee A area can surely strengthen the Association's overall effectiveness, but only if we can assure unity rather than inconsistency in our assessments and approaches. Adequate communication between the national staff and active conference representatives is utterly vital to the endeavor. Staff members must inform a conference's representative when cases are being opened (or litigation is being entered) and when significant subsequent developments occur. Conferences' representatives must inform the staff of their interest in particular complaints and cases and of their activities in relation to them.

If a difference between the General Secretary and a conference emerges with respect to case-opening or litigation, and it cannot be resolved through direct discussion, the General Secretary will, at the request of the conference, ask the Chairman of Committee A to appoint an experienced current or former member of that Committee to review the matter and advise as to its resolution.