



December 17, 2013

**VIA E-MAIL**

Steve J. Bernas  
President, Chief Executive Officer  
BBB of Chicago & Northern Illinois  
330 N. Wabash, Suite 2006  
Chicago, IL 60611-7621  
[sbernas@chicago.bbb.org](mailto:sbernas@chicago.bbb.org)

Re: BBB's A+ Rating of the TEFL Institute

Dear Mr. Bernas:

I am writing to you on behalf of Truth in Advertising, Inc. (TINA.org), a nonprofit consumer advocacy organization dedicated to protecting consumers from deceptive advertising. I write to inform you of a false and deceptive marketing issue concerning the TEFL Institute Corporation, an Illinois company selling "Teaching English as a Foreign Language" training and certification to consumers looking for future employment in the education sector.

On its website, the company claims to be accredited by NATEFLAC, a "leading TEFL accrediting organization based in the United States." *See* [http://www.teflinstitute.com/tefl\\_institute\\_difference.php](http://www.teflinstitute.com/tefl_institute_difference.php), last visited on Dec. 17, 2013 (a copy of this webpage is attached hereto as Exhibit A). Based on a consumer complaint, TINA.org investigated this statement and was unable to find any organization by the name of NATEFLAC (there is no listing for NATEFLAC on any search engine and the links provided on the TEFL Institute's website for the organization do not connect to any such organization). In fact, to TINA.org's knowledge, there are currently no U.S.-based agencies that specifically accredit independent short-term TEFL certificate programs. *See* e-mail from J. Segota of the TESOL International Association to F. Silverman, dated Nov. 22, 2013 (attached hereto as Exhibit B).

Further, when TINA.org contacted the TEFL Institute to inquire about the accreditation statement on its website, the TEFL Institute's President, Ti Ron Gibbs, informed TINA.org that "TEFL is undergoing accreditation" and that the

“information on [its] final accreditation will be made public once it is done. Please check back within two months.” See e-mail from T. Gibbs to F. Silverman, dated Nov. 21, 2013 (attached hereto as Exhibit C). Mr. Gibbs did not provide any information about NATEFLAC and stated during a telephone conversation with TINA.org’s editor on November 21, 2013 that he would delete all references to NATEFLAC and its alleged accreditation of the TEFL Institute on its website.

When such a deletion did not occur, TINA.org sent Mr. Gibbs a formal letter informing him that his company was violating Illinois’s Uniform Deceptive Trade Practices Act (815 Ill. Comp. Stat., 510/2) by posting false and deceptive information on its website regarding its alleged accreditation, and requesting that it correct the representation by December 16, 2013. See letter from L. Smith to T. Gibbs, dated Dec. 5, 2013 (attached hereto as Exhibit D).

To date, the TEFL Institute has not corrected the false and deceptive accreditation information on its website, which continues to state that it is accredited by the apparently fictional NATEFLAC. For this reason, TINA.org has sent a complaint letter to the Illinois Attorney General urging her office to take action.

As the BBB is surely aware, the use of false accreditation programs as a way to market companies that sell educational training is unfortunately all too common. The effect is to give the deceptive impression that the company is well regarded and more legitimate than it really is, and to take advantage of unsuspecting consumers who are seeking to further their education.

In addition to the TEFL Institute’s deceptive marketing, the Better Business Bureau has awarded the company an A+ rating, giving consumers the mistaken impression that the company is honest and trustworthy when, quite simply, it is not being straightforward about its accreditation. See <http://www.bbb.org/chicago/business-reviews/schools-business-and-vocational/tefl-institute-in-chicago-il-88346622>, last visited on Dec. 17, 2013 (a copy of this webpage is attached hereto as Exhibit E). Such a positive rating by the BBB only adds to the deception.

In light of the BBB’s commitment to sound advertising and creating a community of trustworthy businesses, we trust the BBB will re-evaluate its rating of the TEFL Institute and do whatever else is necessary to dispel the notion that the BBB fully supports the TEFL Institute’s marketing practices.

If you have any questions or would like additional information, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "L. Smith". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Laura Smith, Esq.  
Legal Director  
Truth in Advertising, Inc.