



University of Sri Jayewardenepura

Policy Title – Policy on Grievance Handling for Students

Policy Number – 23

Functional Area – University Staff and Students

Effective date – 27.04.2023

Approving Authority: The Council, University of Sri Jayewardenepura

Administrative Responsibility: Vice-Chancellor, Deans, Heads of Departments/Units

Rationale & Purpose:

A high level of commitment and satisfaction among students is vital for the effective functioning of a university system and the achievement of its objectives. Grievances may arise among students due to unfair treatment, discrimination, misapplication or misinterpretation of the policies, regulations, rules, or procedures. The University of Sri Jayewardenepura (hereinafter referred to as “the University”) aims to ensure that the grievances of students are redressed fairly and impartially.

It is imperative to maintain standard procedures in the university for grievance handling. The purpose of this policy is to provide a process for an impartial review of the grievances of students and to ensure that the concerns of the grievant are properly and impartially addressed and remedied. The policy provides guidelines to students who believe that they have been unfairly or improperly treated or adversely affected in their academic and/or personal capacity. Further, this policy describes the procedure that should be adopted in handling the grievances of students at the University.

All the University community are bound by this policy and the relevant decisions taken by the committees appointed under this policy.

Scope –

- Any student can complain due to a grievance that may have occurred by the University.
- The Policy on Grievance Handling for Students cannot be adopted or applied to challenge the policies and procedures that have been laid down for the betterment of the University.

- Issues related to academic assessments and any acts that violate the rules, regulations and standards that are set out in the Faculty Prospectus, Student Handbook, relevant rules and regulations on student discipline, Examination By-laws, or any relevant law in the time being, are not considered grievances.
- Complaints relating to disputes arising among students from matters not related to the affairs of the University, disciplinary decisions administered by external sources, and decisions made by or acts of individuals not employed by the University shall not be considered under this policy.

1. Policy Aims

The Policy aims to:

- 1.1 Develop a culture that views grievances as an opportunity to improve the University and its internal functioning
- 1.2 Set in place a consistent, student-focused grievance handling procedure and prevent grievances from recurring
- 1.3 Ensure that grievances are resolved promptly, objectively and in complete confidentiality
- 1.4 Handle the grievances in a professional, fair, objective, and transparent manner
- 1.5 Ensure that the views of each complainant and respondent are respected and that any party to a grievance is not discriminated against nor victimized

2. Policy Principles

The principle of this policy is to ensure fair and equitable treatment for all students. Resolution of student complaints, regardless of the outcome, can improve students' progress toward completion of a course or degree and ultimately success at the institution. Moreover, the University considers these instances as opportunities to improve its internal systems to make it an exemplary and responsive organization.

3. Policy Statement

Any physical, psychological, academic, or other problem related to university life, if considered a grievance, shall be informed to the Office of the Grievance Handling Committee (GHC) by any means of communication. The GHC will coordinate the arrangements with the relevant parties to redress the issue.

3.1 Grievance Handling Committee (GHC)

The GHC will consist of the following members.

1. Chairperson: A Dean of a Faculty (appointed by the Senate and approved by the Council with the agreement of the GHC). Based on the grievance, the Chairperson will be selected from a faculty other than the faculty of concern
2. Registrar of the University (or a permanent representative)

3. University Legal Officer
4. One representative from each faculty – appointed by the respective Faculty Board
5. An outside member (an Attorney at Law) with the Senate and Council approval
6. One or two independent members from the University with expertise in the particular concern/area, appointed by the Senate, as the case may be

3.2 Special Circumstances

In an instance where the complaint relates directly or indirectly to a member of the GHC, the Chairperson of the GHC shall make necessary changes to the composition of the GHC to maintain the impartiality of the conduct of the particular investigation/inquiry.

In a case where the complaint relates directly or indirectly to the Chairperson of the GHC, the Vice-chancellor shall make necessary changes to the composition of the GHC.

3.3 The Formal Process for handling the Grievances of Students

- 3.3.1 If a student feels that he/she has a grievance related to any issue falling within the parameters stated in Section 5 of this policy, he/she has the right to make a complaint using the communication methods stated on the relevant web page.
- 3.3.2 A representative of a student can also make a complaint with the consent of the student. If a representative is making the complaint, a designated form must be used to make the complaint.
- 3.3.3 The details stated in Section 3.4 of this policy should be provided when making a complaint.
- 3.3.4 Concerns/grievances that had taken place before one month or more shall not be entertained unless otherwise there are special circumstances.
- 3.3.5 A designated person shall acknowledge the receipt of the complaint and inform the GHC about the complaint within three working days of the receipt of the complaint to have an investigation or an inquiry into the matter.
- 3.3.6 Applications are treated on a first come-first serve basis unless otherwise urgent, decided by the Registrar of the University based on the prima facie evidence.
- 3.3.7 The GHC must initiate the process to redress the issue immediately for urgent cases. In the case of issues that are not urgent, the GHC must initiate the grievance-handling process within fourteen (14) days of the receipt of the complaint.

- 3.3.8 The GHC may communicate with the relevant parties including but not limited to the academic staff, non-academic staff, and students whenever necessary during the investigation process to obtain evidence and gather information.
- 3.3.9 The GHC, upon investigation, will provide a report to the Vice-chancellor with suitable remedial action that should be taken.
- 3.3.10 The action/s taken by the Vice-chancellor based on the recommendations made by the GHC will be informed to the grievant/complainant and the GHC.
- 3.3.11 The GHC should obtain feedback from the complainant on the solution offered, protecting the privacy of the complainant.
- 3.3.12 If a grievant/complainant or the representative is not satisfied with the action/s taken, he/she could make an in-detail appeal to the GHC within fourteen (14) days (excluding public holidays and Sundays) using the Grievance Appeal Form.
- 3.3.13 The GHC, based on the action taken, can make recommendations to the Vice-chancellor to take appropriate action
- 3.3.14 The GHC should keep records of the initial receipt, to whom it was referred, the type of the issue, and the remedial actions with the date and time.
- 3.3.15 A summary report of complaints and their remedial measures must be sent to the Director/CQA once every six months for recording purposes.

3.4 Information that should accompany a Formal Complaint

It is the responsibility of the complainant to provide the following information to facilitate a fruitful formal investigation.

1. Name of the complainant
2. Relationship of the representative to the grievant party (if applicable)
3. Student Registration Number of the complainant
4. A caption that summarizes the nature of the complaint
5. Date, time, and place if the complaint is related to a specific incident
6. Date and time of notifications (if any) if the complaint is related to the continuation of a violation
7. A descriptive account of the complaint
8. Evidence of consent of the grievant party (if applicable)
9. How the incident/issue impacts the complainant's academic pursuits at the University during his/her studentship
10. Any supporting evidence by way of information/witness(es) or any circumstantial evidence

Anonymous complaints sent, transmitted, forwarded, lodged, or conveyed in any other manner shall not be entertained.

3.5 Confidentiality of Information revealed at Grievance Handling Processes

- 3.5.1 All information revealed/intimated/transpired/transmitted at all grievance handling processes will be treated with the utmost confidentiality.
- 3.5.2 All material recorded/documented during the investigations will be treated as highly confidential, filed separately, and maintained in total confidentiality under the personal custody of the Chairperson of the GHC. At the completion of the investigation, all material should be preserved under the custody of the Registrar of the University.
- 3.5.3 Members of the GHC are duty-bound to maintain total privacy and confidentiality of proceedings of the investigations/inquiries.

3.6 Appeal Handling Procedure

- 3.6.1 In an instance where the grievant/complainant or the representative is not satisfied with the action/s taken, he/she may appeal to the Vice-chancellor within fourteen (14) days (excluding public holidays and Sundays) using the Grievance Appeal Form. In a case where the complaint relates directly or indirectly to the Vice-chancellor, the Council will take a collective decision on the proceedings of the appeal.
- 3.6.2 The Vice-chancellor shall place appeal/s before the next immediate meeting of the Council. The Council shall appoint an Appeals Committee consisting of three of its members for this purpose. The Appeals Committee shall elect its Chairman. The Registrar of the University shall be the Secretary to the Appeals Committee.
- 3.6.3 In an instance where the complaint relates directly or indirectly to a member of the Appeals Committee, the Council shall make necessary changes to the composition of the Appeals Committee to maintain the impartiality of the conduct of the particular investigation/inquiry.
- 3.6.4 The Appeals Committee shall consider all appeals and submit a report to the Council within two weeks from the receipt of the appeal by the Committee.
- 3.6.5 The members of the GHC relating to the appeal in question, shall not participate in the proceedings of the Council (if they are members of the Council) when it considers the report of the Appeals Committee.
- 3.6.6 The Council shall have the power to vary the decision taken on the actions based on the recommendation of the Appeals Committee. The decision of the Council on the appeal shall be final.

3.6.7 The Vice-chancellor shall communicate the decision of the Council to the appellant student/s under the registered post. The decision so communicated shall be final and conclusive.

4. Policy Implementation

4.1 Strategies

4.1.1 The policy shall be made available to all students and staff by publishing it in the Student Handbook and the University website.

4.1.2 Students shall also be informed about the policy during the orientation programme.

4.2 Responsibilities

Responsibility regarding the implementation of this policy lies with all members of the university in their respective capacities.

5. Definitions

Grievance: A grievance is defined as an individual's expression of dissatisfaction that may have occurred by the University. Parameters for grievance can be due to any of the following, but not limited to:

1. Deficiency in the enrolment and/or orientation process
2. Academic, non-academic, or administrative issues
3. Deficiencies in the handling of personal information and access to personal records
4. Deficiencies in facilities and/or services provided by the University
5. Deficiencies in the application process and the resultant outcomes
6. Failure to apply an administrative or academic process
7. Unfair treatment by a member of the University
8. Discrimination against the University's values and policies
9. Violation of an existing policy
10. Grievances related to evaluations/assessments shall be forwarded to the relevant authorities (under Examination Rules and Regulations).

University: Within this policy, University means academic, administrative, and non-academic or supportive/assistance or any other entity representing the University.

Student: Within this policy, Student means any internal or external student registered at the University to follow any academic programmes

Titles of related Policies, Procedures, Forms, and Guidelines –

<http://cqa.sjp.ac.lk/policies/>

Bibliography

The Student Handbook (2020). University of Sri Jayewardenepura.

Student Grievances Handling Policy, Postgraduate Institute of Management, University of Sri Jayewardenepura.

Terms of Reference (TOR) – Student Grievances Committee, Faculty of Medical Sciences, University of Sri Jayewardenepura.

Student Grievance Handling Procedure, Department of Human Resource Management, Faculty of Management Studies and Commerce, University of Sri Jayewardenepura.

The Cambridge Dictionary. URL: <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/grievance>