

GRIEVANCE REDRESSAL MECHANISM AT THE SOUTH ASIAN UNIVERSITY: A STATUS REPORT

About South Asian University

South Asian University (SAU) is an international university based in New Delhi, India. It was established by an international agreement signed by the eight countries of the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) on 4 April 2007. In order to give effect to this international treaty, the Indian Parliament enacted the South Asian University Act, 2008, which came into force on 23 January 2009.

Subsequent to the notification of the said legislation, SAU started its operations in 2010. As an international university, SAU functions in accordance with rules, regulations and bylaws approved/amended by the Governing Body (GB). The GB is the highest decision making body of SAU comprising of representatives of all the eight SAARC countries. Given the international character of SAU, it has adopted and developed its rules, regulations and bylaws taking into account best practices followed in the SAARC nations and international best practices.

To look after all matters pertaining to student welfare; SAU has an office of Student (Dean). It comprises of a Professor acting as Dean of Students and another Professor acting as Associate Dean of Students.

SAU also has constituted two separate committees, in accordance with SAU's bylaws to address grievances/complaints pertaining to sexual harassment and grievances/complaints pertaining to discipline related matters. For these matters, the aggrieved student can directly approach the University Complaints Committee (UCC) for sexual harassment matters and to University Proctor respectively.

The university also has a clinical Psychologist who comes four times a week. Her contact hours are displayed on the University website along with her contact details. The University also has a Medical Officer who can be contacted for emergencies at any time. Her contact details are available on the University website.

The existing Grievance Redressal Mechanism at SAU (other than sexual harassment and discipline related matters)

The current grievance redressal mechanism at SAU is based on the Bylaws on "Grievance Redressal Mechanism for Students" approved by the GB (See Annex 1). According to these bylaws, the university follows the following mechanism to settle grievances that student may have.

FIRST TIER - DEPARTMENT LEVEL GRIEVANCE REDRESSAL MECHANISM

Appointment of Student Mentor – The University has appointed a teacher as a Mentor for each SAU student at the level of every department. These Mentors are the first level of contact for every student for any grievance or problem that they may face.

The Mentors for Master's Students are appointed for two years. For PhD students, the supervisors act as Mentors. The Mentors are required to help the students and address their grievances. The information about Student Mentors are displayed on the university website with their full contact details. If the student feels that the grievance remains unaddressed, then the student may approach the concerned committees depending on the nature of the grievance. The Mentor may also refer the grievance to the appropriate committee if needed.

However, if a student so desires he/she may directly approach the Departmental Grievance Redressal Committee*.

For grievances pertaining to academic matters – these grievances shall be addressed by a Departmental Grievance Redressal Committee at the level of each Department.

*The Departmental Grievance Redressal Committee's composition is as follows:

- a) Dean of the Faculty/Chairperson of the Department to which the student belongs (who will act as the Chairperson of the committee)
- b) Mentor of the Student (who will act as the Member Secretary to take minutes and convene meetings)
- c) Any other Faculty member

One member of this committee shall be a woman Faculty member if the department has one. The committee shall follow the principles of diversity as regards nationality and gender.

The Dean/Chairperson shall ensure that there is no conflict of interest in the working of the committee. If a complaint has been made against the Mentor, then the Mentor shall not be a part of the committee. In such cases, the Dean/Chairperson shall appoint some other faculty member. If the grievance is against the Dean/Chairperson then the, next senior most faculty member shall act as the Chairperson of the committee.

The student should submit his/her grievance to the committee in writing. If the grievance is presented orally, it shall be recorded in writing.

The Department grievance redressal committee shall hear a complaint following principles of natural justice and will address the complaint as expeditiously as possible but no later than 21 working days. The decision of the committee should be communicated to the aggrieved student in writing.

For grievances pertaining to hostel, accounts, scholarship and administration: - the student shall approach the office of Dean (Students)/ Associate Dean (Students), who will form a committee consisting of concerned Department. This committee shall be chaired by the Dean (Students).

SECOND TIER - UNIVERSITY LEVEL GRIEVANCE REDRESSAL MECHANISM

SAU in accordance with its bylaws has constituted a Standing committee for redressal of grievance (SCORG).

Standing Committee for Redressal of Grievance (SCORG) – If any grievance remains unresolved at first tier then the matter they may be referred to SCORG. The matter may be referred to SCORG within a period of 10 working days from the date when the student receives the decision of the concerned grievance redressal committee.

Composition of SCORG – SCORG is a five-member committee nominated for the period of two years by the President. As required by SAU's bylaws, at least one of the members of SCORG is a woman faculty member. Also SCORG, as far as possible, should have members from different SAARC countries.

The five-members of SCORG are:

- a) A Senior Professor (to act as Chairperson)
- b) Dean (Student) or in the absence of Dean (Student), Associate Dean (Student) – ex officio
- c) Another faculty member
- d) A representative of the SAU Administration (to be nominated by the Registrar) to serve as Member Secretary.
- e) A Student Representative – the student representative is picked on the basis of election/nomination from students of SAU. For this purpose, a pool of 7 students – one each from all the Departments has been created keeping gender and nationality in mind elected/nominated every year. One student will be appointed from this pool to serve on SCORG to hear a complaint.

Disposal of complaints: The SCORG shall resolve the grievance as speedily as possible but in no case later than 4 weeks from the date the complaint is lodged in writing to the Committee.

SCORG shall have the power to either uphold the decision given by the concerned committee at the first tier level grievance redressal mechanism or to overturn it or amend/modify it. In either case, SCORG shall give reasons in writing.

APPEALS AGAINST THE DECISION OF SCORG

The President may accept the recommendation of the concerned committee or may refer back the recommendation to the concerned committee for reconsideration or form a new committee comprising of the Chairpersons of the first and the second tier level committees.

COMPLIANCE WITH THE DECISION

The decision given by the grievance redressal committee shall be complied with within a reasonable period.

BYE-LAWS OF THE SOUTH ASIAN UNIVERSITY

GRIEVANCE REDRESSAL MECHANISM FOR STUDENTS

1. That all issues within the University community should be resolved through discussions and negotiations and through the Grievance Redressal Mechanism and that the use of violence, intimidation and coercive methods such as gheraos and dharnas or any other activity which disrupts the normal academic or administrative functioning of the University inside the University buildings, and locking out of the University buildings shall not be resorted to.
2. That all members of the University community have the right to privacy and that residential area of the teachers and staff shall in no case be used as venues of protests and agitations.
3. A student or a group of students who have grievance, should first approach the heads of the concerned departments. These could be Senior warden for hostel related issues, Deans of Faculties for academic issues, Deans of Students for issues related to students cultural or sports activities, Librarian for issues related to library, Director Finance for issues related to the working of the Finance Branch. It is expected in most cases, the grievance is resolved to the satisfaction of the students. Grievances should be submitted to the appropriate body within a reasonable time.
4. If the grievance cannot be resolved at the level of Heads of Departments, the student/students may approach the Standing Committee for Redressal of Grievance (SCORG) for the redressal of grievance.
5. SCORG will be a three member committee that shall be nominated for the period of two years by the President, at least one of the members of SCORG should be a woman faculty member and as far as possible, all members should be from different SAARC countries. SCORG will formulate its own procedure for making enquires and framing its recommendations that will be forwarded to the President.
6. The SCORG should try to resolve the grievance as speedily as possible but in no case later than 4 weeks from the date the complaint is lodged in writing to the Committee.
7. The decision of the SCORG shall be final and binding.