

Short-term Exchange Programmes and Study India Programmes in Indian Universities

K. B. Powar

(Association of Indian Universities, New Delhi 110 002)

aiu@del2.vsnl.net.in

Introduction

Internationalisation of higher education is a response to the phenomenon of globalisation that swept the world in the nineties of the last century following the breakdown of political barriers in Europe-Asia and the advent of free-market economy. Its most visible manifestation is the mobility of students. Many developed countries have shown a substantial increase in the number of students coming in for degree programmes or venturing out for short periods of about a semester or trimester. Today, a fair number of universities in the western world expect their students to have the experience of an international exposure, and many students do spend time abroad. For example, in the United States during 1998-99 9.3%, a total of 129,770, enrolled in 'Study Abroad' programmes (Schukoske, 2001). India has not been able to take advantage of this development. The Indian universities can benefit considerably, both academically and economically, if they develop and offer short term courses that meet the requirements of the 'Study Abroad' programmes implemented in many western universities essentially for undergraduate students, who are interested in India, its culture and its socio-economic status. This paper looks into the possibilities of India participating in international student-exchange programmes, and/or attracting international students to India by developing 'Study India Programmes' (SIP).

Student Mobility

International student mobility needs to be encouraged for a variety of reasons including the following identified (for internationalisation) by the American Council of Education (1995):

- Graduates need to understand the dynamics of different global systems.
- Students need an exposure to peoples, languages and cultures of other countries.
- Understanding of cultural diversities abroad encourages greater cultural harmony at home.

Student mobility can be facilitated through various mechanisms including:

- Exchange programmes established under the aegis of inter-governmental agencies such as European Action Scheme for the Mobility of University Students (ERASMUS), University Mobility in Asia and the Pacific (UMAP).
- Study Abroad programmes developed by home universities, or a group of universities, for exposure of their students to specific areas-related programmes.
- Specific programmes, like the Study India programme developed by host universities for foreign universities under bilateral or multilateral agreements.

It should be possible to implement student mobility programmes in Indian universities without much difficulty after introducing some changes in the academic framework. The programmes could be established within the framework of two different scenarios:

- The first scenario is the one in which the international student is given a place in the regular academic programme of the host university. The latter provides the usual facilities and is not required to make additional or special efforts for the student. However, it is necessary for the partner universities to come to an understanding regarding equivalence of academic curriculum (on the basis of mutually accepted benchmarks), and also regarding grading and credit transfer. A commonality in the grading schemes of the partner universities provides an ideal situation. If this is not present then there has to be an agreed mechanism for conversion of host-institution grades to home-institution grades. Such credit transfer schemes exist for the European programmes (the European Credit

Transfer Scheme - ECTS) and for UMAP (UMAP Credit Transfer Scheme - UCTS), the later being essentially an adoption of the former. The same scheme is likely to be adopted by University Mobility in Indian Ocean Region (UMIOR) also.

- The second scenario is one in which special academic programmes are developed for international students and can be offered to a group of students from a single foreign university, or from a consortium of universities that have identical examination and grading systems. The curricula may be modified, if necessary, according to the requirements of the home university and its assessment and grading pattern adopted by the host university for the special programme/s. This may require a small orientation exercise for the Indian teachers. The 'Study India Programmes' (see later section) conducted by some universities in India fit into this scenario.

Exchange Programmes

Indian universities have not been very enthusiastic about participation in student exchange programmes because of a few inherent constraints. These are:

- *Lack of Funds:* Most student exchange programmes require that there be a waiver of fees with travel and living costs being borne by the student or supporting agency. This precludes any financial gains for the host university. The Indian students when they go out have to bear the travel and living expenses as there are presently no funds available for this purpose. Under these conditions the exchange programmes are limited to the students from the more affluent families, a situation not in consonance with national policy or psyche.
- *Inflexible Academic Structure:* The academic structure of most Indian universities is inflexible with little choice of subjects. In most cases the undergraduate students are evaluated on the basis of an annual end-of-term examination. For effective participation in international student exchange programmes it will be necessary for the universities to introduce a choice-based credit system, with grades instead of marks; and also to formulate credit-transfer mechanisms. If the credits earned abroad are not considered by the home (Indian) university the Indian student going abroad on a short-term exchange programme will find that his visit has been unproductive so far as academic credit is concerned. Other requirements are that the curricula will have to be in accordance with

international standards, and that there has to be academic and administrative discipline with the teaching commencing and proceeding according to a pre-announced schedule.

- *Inadequate Infrastructure and Facilities:* The infrastructure and facilities in Indian universities is often not up to the mark. Indian universities participating in international exchange programmes will be expected to provide, classroom, library, residential- and medical facilities that are not too short of international standards. This may require the creation of special infrastructure and the setting up of special administration mechanisms (like single-window operations) for international students.

Internationalisation through Short-term Programmes

Keeping in view the above difficulties, and in order to ascertain the preparedness of Indian universities to participate in student-exchange programmes, the AIU circulated in July, 2001 a questionnaire to 39 universities that had shown an interest in admitting international students. The questionnaire asked for information considered relevant for the promotion of student mobility through short-term exchange programmes. It related to the type of examinations conducted, grading system adopted, provision for credit transfer and other related aspects. The salient findings are:

Three universities (all conventional) have only annual type of examination, 12 have both annual and semester examinations, and 10 (including all technical institutions) have only semester examinations, and one has both semester and trimester.

In the case of 17 universities the evaluation of candidates was done in terms of marks. Three universities awarded both marks and grades, while eight universities (including all technical universities) awarded grades only.

Out of the 11 universities that awarded grades, 10 adopted a 10 point grading system while one (Bharathiar University) adopted a 7 point grading system.

Only six universities (Indian Institute of Technology Chennai, Manipal Academy of Higher Education, Birla Institute of Technology and Science, Pondicherry University, Rajasthan Vidyapeeth, and University of Pune) have a provision for transfer of credit. Out of the 20 other

universities that do not have a provision for transfer of credit 17 are willing to consider introduction of this provision.

Ten universities were willing to receive students for a semester, 12 for both a semester and a year, 3 for a year only, and one as per GOI norms.

Twenty two universities have indicated that if required it will be possible for them to evaluate students according to the pattern and requirements of the visiting universities.

Twenty three universities indicated that they would endorse the evaluation of students that was done by their faculty

Twenty four universities agreed to arrange for appropriate facilities for the stay of visiting students.

Twenty three universities have agreed to accept the grades awarded (to Indian students) by foreign universities.

All except one of the 26 universities that responded indicated their willingness to participate in UMIOR programme. However, at the time the questionnaire was circulated it had not been clarified that the participating universities would have to grant a waiver of fees for the visiting students.

Study India Programmes

Many western universities offer Study Abroad programmes for undergraduate students that enable them to travel abroad and gain an insight into the lives of foreign peoples, societies and cultures. These have often generated in the students an interest in the country visited and encouraged them to enter area study programmes that occur only as islands in the vast sea of humanities and social sciences. As a part of the study area programmes, for over fifty years now, students from the developed world, mainly the United States of America, have been visiting India to learn more about the country. A few years back the United States Educational Foundation in India took the initiative in promoting the development of 'Study India Programmes' (SIP) in Indian universities that would provide an introduction to foreign students to India - the land, its people, and their traditions, history and culture. Also added are programmes dealing with aspects of science, technology and medicine in which India has special aptitude and expertise. Universities that have already introduced SIP programmes, are the University of Hyderabad, Hyderabad, Goa University, Goa, Visva Bharati,

Santiniketan, the Manipal Academy of Higher Education, Manipal and the University of Mysore, Mysore.

The Association of Indian Universities (AIU) organised in February 2001, a Roundtable at the University of Mysore, Mysore on 'Internationalisation of Indian Higher Education'. One of the recommendations incorporated in the 'Mysore Statement' issued at the end of the Roundtable called upon AIU to assist universities to develop SIP and coordinate with international agencies in the matter of placement of international students in Indian universities. Subsequently, the AIU organised a consultative meeting of representatives of select universities to consider this matter. The meeting, amongst other things, compiled a list of short-term courses (including those already on offer at a few universities) for the consideration of Indian universities. This is given in Annexure I. The list is only illustrative and should help universities to identify and develop courses depending upon the expertise available in the university and the interest of the faculty members.

Conclusion

In order to promote the internationalisation of Indian higher education it is necessary that Indian universities take every opportunity of hosting international students on their campuses. They must take advantage of the fact that many universities in the developed countries consider international experience to be an important component of under-graduate education. This can be done through student exchange programmes, like the UMIOR, or through the offering of short-term programmes like SIP. In view of financial constraints it may take some time before exchange programmes become popular. Indian universities are perennially short of funds and an important motivation for internationalisation is the possibility of fund-generation. Hence, some of the universities that have better infrastructure and facilities will be interested in offering short-term programmes, like SIP, that will be financially rewarding.

References

- American Council of Education, (1995), *Educating Americans for a World in Flux*, ACE, Washington, 16 pp.
- de Wit, H., (1996), European Internationalization Programs, *International Higher Education*, 4: 5-6.
- Schukoske, J. E., (2001), Academic Exchange 'Global Literacy' and U.S. Higher Education, in K.B.Powar (Editor), *Internationalisation of Indian Higher Education*, pp 20-31, AIU, New Delhi.