

UNIVERSITY GRANTS COMMISSION
BAHADUR SHAH ZAFAR MARG
NEW DELHI – 110 007

Prof. Sukhadeo Thorat
Chairman

D.O.No. F.1-2/2008(XI Plan)

March 2009

Subject : Action Plan for Academic and Administrative Reforms.

Dear Vice Chancellor,

This is in continuation to my D.O. letter of even number dated January 31, 2008 (Copy attached) (**Annexure-I**), wherein I had drawn your attention towards UGC's new initiatives under the Eleventh Five-Year Plan, on speedy and substantive academic and administrative reforms in higher education, for promotion of quality and excellence in university in keeping with the country's long experience with various Academic models and practices.

In response to the UGC's new initiative, a number of universities have responded quite favorably to the recommendations related to Academic reforms. A number of them also informed the UGC that some of the recommended academic practices were already in place.

Above communication had also pointed out that the UGC had set up a committee of experts. Following prolonged and intensive deliberations, the committee has since submitted its report. The committee has also made several important recommendations with regard to Academic Reforms in universities and college system for enhancement of quality and excellence.

Subsequently, based on the report of the above-mentioned committee, an Action Plan for Academic and Administrative Reforms has been developed a copy of which is enclosed (**Annexure-II**). The Action Plan outlines main steps, the central and state universities, colleges and other education institutions of higher education need to consider and adopt in respect of

- Semester system,
- Choice-based credit system,
- Curriculum development
- Admission procedures
- Examination reforms

Contd....2/-

It is recognized that, in quite a few universities and institutions, one or more components of academic and administrative reforms, outlined above, are already in place. Such universities and institutions need only to take a second look, modify 'action plan for academic and administrative reform' in the light of their own experience, and implement the modified plan.

I may mention that the new grant making policy developed by UGC as part of the 11th Plan strategy for improving the quality of higher education involved linking of grant making process with adoption of academic and administrative reforms by the concerned universities and colleges. Therefore the educational institutions are expected to initiate this academic reform at the earliest.

I may reiterate that the higher education system in the country has indeed evolved over a period of time. In the course of this onward journey, the education institutions through their experience have developed academic practices, which they have found useful. Therefore, I would suggest that institutions should undertake suggested reforms keeping in view their own experience with the best practices but within the framework of the UGC's recommendations and guidelines on academic reforms. The UGC expect that the universities, colleges and other institutions to draw a road map with action plan in time bound manner, subject to maximum of two years.

I look forward to your cooperation in this respect.

With regards,

Yours sincerely,

(Sukhadeo Thorat)

All Vice Chancellors

Encl. : As above.

Copy with Enclosure to the Publication Officer, UGC, New Delhi for posting on the UGC website.

(V. K. Jaiswal)
Under Secretary

UNIVERSITY GRANTS COMMISSION
BAHADUR SHAH ZAFAR MARG
NEW DELHI – 110 007

Prof. Sukhadeo Thorat
Chairman

D.O.No.F.1-2/2008 (XI Plan)

January 31, 2008

Subject :- New Initiatives under the 11th Plan - Academic Reform in the Universities

Dear

At the outset let me wish you a very happy and productive new year 2008.

You are aware that the UGC in its 11th Plan proposal and strategies has taken a number of new initiatives which involved steps for reforms in higher education. These include major emphasis on academic reforms in the central and state universities. Emanating from the consensus emerged in the National Conference of Vice-Chancellors, organised by the UGC on 10-11 October, 2007, these reform measures have general consensus and wider acceptability of the academic community.

While the UGC has set up a committee to work out an Action Plan to give effect to the academic reforms in the arena of admission policy, procedure and methods, examination reforms including continuous internal assessment, introduction of credit-based courses, semester system, inter-institutional mobility of students, credit accumulation and credit transfer and that the recommendations of the Committee will be shared with the universities after the submission of the report, it is felt that the Central Universities should take lead in this regard. I, therefore, urge upon you to initiate the process of implementing academic reforms as incorporated in the 11th Plan of the UGC. Some of the important areas that require urgent attention at your end are delineated below:

1. Admission to all courses should be determined by the past academic records of students and/or their performance in the entrance examination conducted by the university, with due provision for the government policy on reservation for Schedule Castes, Scheduled Tribes, Physically Challenged and additional provisions considered appropriate and used by the universities for other disadvantaged groups.
2. The M.Phil and Ph.D programmes need to be made formal. Admission to these programmes should be based on combined merit of entrance examination and interviews conducted by the respective universities. The informal methods currently used in some universities for admission to Ph.D. need to be discontinued and the admission methods to these high

level research courses should be made formal and transparent. There is a need to introduce course work in Ph.D, rather than making it only dissertation/thesis based.

3. The central universities in order to be national in character need to admit students on all-India basis. To this effect they need to advertise their courses and programme such as to have national reach and may hold their admission entrance examination in centres located in various parts of the country. Similarly the staff strength, of these universities should also reflect all-India character. The national and diverse character should be reflected in all India composition of students, faculty and non-teaching staff for which they need to take necessary steps for attracting and retaining talents from all over the country.
4. Annual examination with emphasis on external written examination needs to be reformed. We can make a beginning by introducing Semester system. Similarly we have to gradually move to a system which emphasises on continuous internal assessment and reduces the written examination component to a reasonable level. Duration of the semester, number of contact hour per paper, per semester and relative weightage of continuous internal assessment and semester-end examination needs to be prescribed unambiguously.
5. We also need to move away from marks and division system in evaluation and need to introduce Grading system – preferably on a 9 point scale and Cumulative Grade Point Score (CPGS) in order to make our evaluation system at par with the best practices.
6. Curricular flexibility and students' mobility is another issue that warrants our urgent attention. These can be addressed by introducing credit based courses and credit accumulation. In order to provide with some degree of flexibility to students, we need to provide for course duration in terms of credit hours and also a minimum as well as a maximum permissible span of time in which a course can be completed by a student.
7. Continuous updating and revision of curricula is something which must be deeply ingrained in the academic culture of a university. Each individual university must ensure that the curricula development exercise leading to major revision in course contents and curricula is taken up every three years.
8. Uniform academic calendar across all institutions of higher education has already been urged upon by the UGC. Universities need to streamline their examination process such that the results are declared in a time-bound manner and no student suffers in his/her career mobility and academic progression due to delays in declaration of results and issue of mark sheet.

I hope that you will initiate the process of implementing these reforms on a priority basis and the UGC is committed to extend all the necessary support and assistance to you in this endeavour. You will agree that these reforms are long over due and can not afford further delay.

The UGC would like to reiterate here that universities are autonomous institutions and have necessary freedom to experiment new ideas and adopt practices which they consider appropriate for promoting relevance, quality and excellence and equal access, within the broad framework of the national policy. Thus, while above mentioned reforms be initiated on priority basis, the university may also combine with other best practices which the university has evolved over a period of time and found useful in promotion of relevance, quality, excellence and equal access in higher education.

You may also like to forward your considered views on the above to the UGC so that the same could be considered by the committee constituted by the UGC. The final recommendation of committee would be sent to you shortly to further help you in formulating these reforms.

With regards,

Yours sincerely,


(Sukhadeo Thorat)

UNIVERSITY GRANTS COMMISSION
NEW DELHI-110002

ACTION PLAN

FOR ACADEMIC & ADMINISTRATIVE REFORMS

Earlier on, the Chairman, University Grants Commission (UGC), had addressed a detailed letter (D.O. No. F.1-2/2008-XI Plan dated January 31, 2008) to the heads of central, state and deemed universities and institutions of higher learning in the country, drawing their attention to the pressing need for academic and administrative reforms. As this initiative evoked a highly encouraging response, the UGC had set up a Committee on Academic and Administrative Reforms, with Professor A. Gnanam as convenor, and comprising several eminent educationists from a diverse range of disciplines. The Committee has since submitted a comprehensive and path-breaking report. Based on this document, an action plan has been developed — for the consideration of educational authorities, and for the phase-wise introduction of substantive academic and administrative reforms in the institutions of higher education in the country.

1. Semester System:

For long, educational institutions have had the format of academic session, spread over 10 to 12 months. This format suffers from several limitations, which is why most institutions of higher education in western Europe and North America follow a semester-based system. The semester-system goes far beyond being a ‘time-format’. It enlarges curricular space, and encourages and supports accelerated learning opportunities for all concerned. Further, it has the ability to accommodate diverse choices that dynamic and motivated students may like to have.

In India, too, several professional and technical institutions have adopted semester system. Reportedly, it is working satisfactorily. Given this, it is time that the semester system is made mandatory for all the institutions of higher education in India, and all the universities are asked to switch over to the semester system. The implementation of a semester system calls for several interconnected and coordinated steps that will have to be undertaken by the universities and colleges. These are as follows:

- ⇒ Deliberation and resolution on the *semester system* in appropriate academic bodies of the institution at different levels to develop a time-line.
- ⇒ Decision on the number of student-faculty contact hours during a semester in different programmes, that is, certificate, diploma, undergraduate and postgraduate. M. Phil. and Ph. D. students also to do course work (see Annexure 1).
- ⇒ Re-configuration and revision of curricula (while the quantum of instructional work of faculty members remains about the same, the number of papers or credits would be twice as many).
- ⇒ Determining the amount of work to be completed (or credit points to be earned) by students in undergraduate, postgraduate, M. Phil. and Ph. D.

programmes.

- ⇒ Decision on the time-distribution on class room-work, field-work, laboratory-work, workshop practice and/or other curricular work. Distribution will vary from subject to subject.
- ⇒ The implementation of semester-system may be completed within two calendar years in all the central universities, and within three years in all the state universities.

2. Choice-Based Credit System:

Choice-based credit system (CBCS) has several unique features: Enhanced learning opportunities, ability to match students' scholastic needs and aspirations, inter-institution transferability of students (following the completion of a semester), part-completion of an academic programme in the institution of enrolment and part-completion in a specialised (and recognised) institution, improvement in educational quality and excellence, flexibility for working students to complete the programme over an extended period of time, standardisation and comparability of educational programmes across the country, etc.

The CBCS imminently fits into the emerging socioeconomic milieu, and could effectively respond to the educational and occupational aspirations of the upcoming generations. In view of this, institutions of higher education in India would do well to invest thought and resources into introducing CBCS. Aided by modern communication and information technology, CBCS has a high probability to be operationalised efficiently and effectively — elevating students, institutions and higher education system in the country to newer heights.

It might be added that a large number of universities and institutions in the country are already having their undergraduate and postgraduate 'papers' subdivided into units and sub-units. In switching on to CBCS, the task of such institutions would be relatively easy. In a generalised manner, the sequence of CBCS would be:

Paper ⇒ Unit ⇒ Sub-unit ⇒ Credits

For implementing the CBCS, institutions of higher education need to take the following steps:

- ❖ Review of curricular contents (study papers, term papers, 'assignment', workshop-assignment, experiments, etc.) of certificate, diploma, undergraduate, postgraduate, M. Phil. and Ph. D. programmes.
- ❖ For the sake of clarity of faculty, students and examiners, all the curricular contents are specified, and sub-divided into units and, if need be, into sub-units, which are subsequently assigned numerical values and termed 'credits'.
- ❖ Faculty of the concerned 'department', deliberates and decides on (a) core-credits, and (b) elective or optional credits for different levels of academic programmes.
- ❖ Departmental faculty evaluates and decides on the relative weightage of the core and elective credits.
- ❖ Decision on the 'total' credits to be earned (or completed) by students

undergoing certificate, diploma, undergraduate, postgraduate, M. Phil. or Ph. D. programmes.

- ❖ Generally, core-credits would be unique to the programme, and earning core-credits would be essential for the completion of the programme and eventual certification.
- ❖ On the other hand, elective-credits are likely to overlap with other programmes or disciplines of study (for example, languages, statistics, computer application, etc.).
- ❖ Students enrolled for a particular programme or course would be free to opt and earn elective-credits prescribed under the programme, or under other programmes within the department, faculty, university or even outside recognised university / institution of higher education.

3. Curriculum Development:

A hallmark of vibrant educational institutions and disciplines is their curricular content which evolves continuously. Curricular revision should be an ongoing academic activity involving all the faculty members. Not only does it endow academic programmes with quality but also adds to their contemporariness and relevance.

Available information indicates that universities and institutions of higher education in the country do undertake revision of the syllabi of the programmes offered by them, but priority and periodicity remain somewhat uncertain. The process of revision also varies with disciplines — professional and technical disciplines are comparatively more vigorous in this regard. Nonetheless, substantial thought and attention have to be devoted to curricular development in all disciplines and in all the academic programmes — whether undergraduate, postgraduate, M. Phil. or Ph. D.

In a general way, following steps need to be adopted on priority basis:

- ▶ All the academic programmes (certificate, diploma, undergraduate, postgraduate, M. Phil. or Ph. D.) should be subjected to updation or revision, to a limited extent every academic year (for professional and postgraduate courses), and substantially every three years for all the courses.
- ▶ Updation and revision of the curricula is to be carried out in terms of (a) current knowledge, (b) national and international developments, and (c) relevance of new ideas, concepts and knowledge to the concerned discipline.
- ▶ This important academic function requires ‘curricular transaction’ and the synergies of all faculty members in the Department, School or Centre, and is based on the principle, ‘Teach and update curriculum’.
- ▶ Towards this, faculty members are called upon to be discerning and given to notes-keeping on current knowledge, esp. relating to their teaching assignment.
- ▶ To achieve this, faculty members are to regularly draw upon books and journals — and internet search engines.

- ▶ In this regard, UGC-promoted INFLIBNET, INFONET and E-journal would also make for a good resource.
- ▶ Faculty members would also have the flexibility to develop, for one or more semesters, topical courses falling within their academic interests and in keeping with the thrust of the programme, along with the indication of credit values.
- ▶ All curricular updations are to be reviewed and endorsed by Departmental, School or Committee and other university and college authorities.

4. Admission Procedure:

The process of admission of students to educational institutions is the first and most critical step that should ensure access, inclusion, equity and quality. With the fast-changing sociocultural milieu and growing demand for higher education, the importance of admission process can hardly be over-emphasised. It can no longer be left to ‘well-meaning intentions’ and *ad hoc* decisions. Admissions ought to have objective bases and transparent procedures.

As a part of academic reform, universities and institutions of higher education in the country need to pay very serious attention to the procedures for merit-based admission to their certificate, diploma, undergraduate, postgraduate, M. Phil. and Ph. D. programmes. In this direction, the following points may be taken into consideration:

- ◆ To ensure transparency and credibility in their admission procedure, universities and institutions of higher education need to make a liberal use of ‘notice-board’, print-media, electronic media, web-site, etc. to declare their admission procedures.
- ◆ Institutions and universities need to properly publicise their academic calendar, highlighting the number of seats (in all the courses including M. Phil. and Ph. D. programmes), required qualifications and important dates in the admission procedure for various courses.
- ◆ The candidates’ answer-sheets need to be assigned confidential codes, that is, they are encoded, before being passed on for evaluation / assessment.
- ◆ The candidates for undergraduate, postgraduate or doctoral programmes who have been assessed by recognised national or regional agencies (JET, NET, SET, etc.) may be granted exemption from the written examination.
- ◆ Depending upon the course requirements, candidates may also undergo group-discussion, interview or any other competency examination.
- ◆ The assessment as reflected by marks or grades in written examination, group-discussion, interview and / or any other competency examination, must be treated as strictly confidential, and be known to authorities only on ‘need-to-know’ basis, till results are finally compiled / announced.
- ◆ The marks or grades in written examination, group-discussion, interview and / or any other competency examination must be

communicated, promptly and directly, to tabulators or to the computer-centre, and the successive examiners / evaluators must not be privy to these marks or grades.

- ◆ Relating to Ph. D. programme, appropriate university bodies should decide as to which categories of faculty-members would be eligible to advise or guide doctoral students, and how many doctoral students could be assigned to different categories of faculty-members.
- ◆ University and college authorities, while finalising admissions, would take cognisance of 'reservation provisions' as announced by central and concerned state governments, and would take an affirmative action.
- ◆ Following admission, university and college authorities would initiate measures, depending upon the need-pattern of newly admitted SC, ST, OBC, and minority students, to organise remedial or bridge-courses in language, communication, subject-competency, etc.
- ◆ Following admission, university and college authorities would take proactive action to communicate to newly admitted SC, ST, OBC, minority students, and those from low-income families, regardless of the level of their course, the availability of tuition-waver, free-ships, loans and scholarships available to these categories.

5. Examination Reforms

Higher education in India has thus far been largely examination-centered. Examination only at the end of academic session or year, more often than not, insulates students from the quest of knowledge, the excitement of discovery and joy of learning. Often the annual examination, along with marks, percentages and divisions, leads to insensitive cramming up of superficial information. It is surprising that, in several instances, university-certified degree-holders are subjected to fresh written examination, before they are accepted for jobs in public and private sectors.

Most universities and institutions of higher education in western Europe and North America base the assessment of their students wholly on 'internal evaluation', following the principle, 'those who teach should evaluate'. However, looking to the prevailing conditions in India, an adoption of this approach would be too radical or abrupt. Given these considerations, it may be more prudent that the assessment of student performance be carried out through a combination of internal and external evaluation.

(a) Continuous Internal Evaluation:

Aiming to assess values, skills and knowledge imbibed by students, internal assessment is to be done by the concerned faculty-member, Department, School or the Centre. It would comprise following steps:

- All the certificate, diploma, undergraduate, postgraduate, M. Phil. and Ph. D. courses offered by a university, college or institute are to have specified components for internal evaluation (e.g. essay, tutorials, term-paper, seminar, laboratory work, workshop practice, etc.).

- ❑ Components for internal evaluation are to have a time-frame for completion (by students), and concurrent and continuous evaluation (by faculty-members).
- ❑ The evaluation outcome may be expressed either by pre-determined marks or by grades.
- ❑ The evaluation reports submitted by all the faculty-members are to be reviewed, from time to time, by the Department, School or Centre Committee, in order to ensure transparency, fair-play and accountability.
- ❑ Following the review by the Department, School or Centre Committee, the outcome of internal evaluation is to be announced and displayed on the Notice Board and / or web-site as per the time-frame or academic calendar.

(b) End-of-semester evaluation:

This is to be carried out at the end of each semester, and will aim to assess skills and knowledge acquired by students through class-room, field-work, laboratory-work and workshop practice. The evaluation can be in the form of written examination, laboratory work or workshop assignment. Evaluation process should be verifiable and transparent.

Towards this end, the following steps may be adopted:

- ❑ All the students pursuing certificate, diploma, undergraduate, postgraduate, and research courses have to undergo external evaluation at the end of each semester as per syllabi or credit schedule (for Ph. D. evaluation, see Annexure 1).
- ❑ With regard to practicals and workshop assignment, the internal faculty may associate themselves with the external examiners in the examination process.
- ❑ In the case of written examination, whatever the format (objective-type, essay-type, etc.), test papers could be moderated by committees proficient in the subject.
- ❑ Answer-books or –sheets are to be ‘encoded’ (before being passed on to examiner / evaluator, and decoded (before tabulation).

(c) Integration of Continuous and End-of-semester evaluation:

The following points need to be considered for effecting the integration of continuous and end-of-semester evaluation:

- ❑ The integration procedure should be applicable to all the students pursuing certificate, diploma, undergraduate, postgraduate, M. Phil. and Ph. D. courses.
- ❑ University committees on the recommendations of Department committees and concerned Faculty would discuss and decide on the relational weightage of continuous and end-of-semester evaluations. This weightage could be flexible and could vary from institution to institution.

- ❑ Relational weightage assigned to internal evaluation may range from 25 to 40 percent.
- ❑ Following the integration of internal and external evaluations, the results may be expressed either in marks, grades or both, as per the policy of the university.
- ❑ It will be useful if universities try to go beyond 'marks' and 'divisions' and, in keeping with the global trend, give Cumulative Grade Point Score (CGPS) which would place students into overlapping broad bands.
- ❑ The CGPS may be based on a 5-point or 10-point scale and it could vary from institution to institution.
- ❑ As soon as the integration of internal and external evaluations has been completed, the results should be announced, in keeping with the academic calendar, to facilitate students' academic or occupational pursuits.

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