

Report on the National Symposium:

Accreditation and Ranking: A Pathway to Excellence

The Internal Quality Assurance Cell (IQAC) of Sri Guru Gobind Singh College of Commerce, University of Delhi, organized a National Symposium on '*Accreditation and Ranking: A Pathway to Excellence*,' in association with the National Assessment and Accreditation Council (NAAC), on 26th September, 2019. The event witnessed participation of many dignitaries, faculty members from various central and private universities, industry professionals and students. Introducing the vision of the symposium, the IQAC Director, Dr. Sangeeta Dodrajka proposed the need to scrutinize the parameters on which the current accreditation and ranking systems are based. She further emphasized that quality assurance is not only crucial for improving the higher education sector but indispensable for nurturing institutes as hubs of innovation and critical thinking.

In his inaugural address, the Principal of the college, Dr. Jatinder Bir Singh highlighted the dearth of quality educational institutes in India, which makes the quest for leadership in higher education a contingent issue. He also underscored the need for India to become an attractive international education hub by strengthening the pillars of knowledge, pedagogy and infrastructure qualitatively. Dr. Singh added that the college has always endeavored to understand various facets of 'quality' in order to impart global level skills and values to the students. He proposed that the present symposium should seek to examine whether the current parameters of the ranking systems are actually ensuring continuous improvement and excellence in the education system.

The chief guest, Prof. C. Raj Kumar, Vice Chancellor, O.P. Jindal Global University, emphasized the need to recognize 'quality' as a culture of institution building. He identified five main principles for determining quality in higher education. Primarily, he regarded academic intellect, student experiences and good infrastructure as prerequisites for achieving institutional excellence. Secondly, he underlined the need for the faculty to take up leadership goals and invest in innovative pedagogical approaches in the classroom. The education system should encourage bright and meritorious students to get into academia by appealing to their intellectual imagination. He lamented that the current university system falls short of providing experiential learning opportunities to the students. Next, he added that research and innovation should not be limited to the universities, the culture of research should be promoted at the undergraduate level itself. Thereafter, he re-iterated the classic dilemma about ranking and accreditation and the need to revamp these mechanisms to bring greater transparency and creativity to impact the lives of the stakeholders positively. Lastly, he

expressed confidence in 'internationalization' through student and faculty exchange programs to tap the shared intellectual capital.

The guest of honor, Prof. Alok Pandey, Director, IMS Ghaziabad, stressed upon the need to break away from the bureaucratic framework of ranking and accreditation in India. For this, he suggested that independent and creative thinking should be promoted among the students and a parallel assurance system should be put in place to enable the youth to work towards better employability. The education system should gear towards bringing an affirmative social change. He advocated a shift from an accreditation framework based on quantity towards one that focuses on quality.

The keynote speaker, Prof. Kavita Sharma, President, South Asian University, asserted that 'substance' is more important than 'form' in the classic substance v/s form debate. Accordingly, the current ranking systems should be revised routinely to ensure that the parameters are able to gauge substance. She articulated the need for a more realistic view of accreditation as against the current passionate advocacy for rankings. According to her, the ranking systems have entered a vacuum created by information deficit and have only ended up intensifying competition. She deconstructed various parameters involved in most national accreditation systems - accountability, governance, student-teacher ratio, research impact and resource allocation, to name a few. She demonstrated how each of these parameters is inadequate to completely understand the real classroom experience for students, teachers and administrators. These parameters fail to take into account the historical, socio-economic and political context of the learners and institutions. Prof. Kavita Sharma warned that the blind chase of these milestones can rather prove to be detrimental for the individual and the value of the institution. She added that these indicators overlook the diversity and distinctiveness of the colleges/universities; and ignore the problem of academic corruption, which is a pressing concern in most higher education institutions. Conclusively, she suggested that regular and honest internal quality assurance is fundamentally more important.

Dr. Jatinder Bir Singh extended the vote of thanks to all the speakers and participants for the insightful inaugural session. He concluded the session by reiterating the key idea that the developing knowledge economies, like India, should have their own system of accreditation, which can understand their cultures more sensitively.

PANEL DISCUSSION

In the second session of the symposium, a panel discussion was held to deliberate upon the online framework of 'Assessment & Accreditation Methodology'. The moderator of the discussion, Prof. M.L. Singla, Former Dean, FMS, University of Delhi, commenced the session with an edifying presentation and articulated that 'excellence itself is a pathway,' a thought

that was echoed throughout the discussion by the entire panel. He stated that for the purpose of ranking the institutions in India, there are various national level agencies like National Assessment and Accreditation Council (NAAC), National Institutional Ranking Framework (NIRF) and Institute of Eminence. The most influential global rankings for higher education include Academic Ranking of World Universities (ARWU), Times Higher Education (THE) and Quacquarelli Symonds World University Rankings (QS). He discussed various criteria taken into consideration for different international rankings and their respective weightage in the final score. He apprised the house about the institutions which are judged on criteria like academic reputation, faculty-student ratio, employer reputation, international students & faculty, as well as research & citations.

Prof. Singla informed the audience that University of Delhi has improved its ranking by 13 places and has been ranked 474 in QS World University Rankings 2020. It scores highly on 'Employer Reputation' and 'Academic Reputation'. University of Delhi has triumphantly maintained its position at the top in the country as per the Centre for World University Ranking (CWUR) and secured the 8th rank in the National Institutional Ranking Framework.

The first panelist, Mr. Anand Prakash Mishra, Director of Law Admissions, Asst. Dean and Asst. Professor, O.P. Jindal Global University, expressed the view that both public and private institutions need national as well as international assessment and accreditation. He proudly informed the audience that O.P. Jindal Global University holds a rank between 750-800 slot in QS World University Rankings and aspires to be among the top 500 universities in the near future. He explained how to compete globally in a healthy way, in order to reach the zenith. He emphasized the fact that building a strong alumni network is a crucial parameter for achieving better rankings. Former students from University of Delhi are a significant part of reputed institutes and organizations across the globe and this can be strategically utilized by the University to foster its ranking globally. He also advocated research contributions and publications both by the faculty and the students, especially in SCOPUS indexed journals and other journals of repute, and suggested incentivizing research activities. He emphasized that scientific and regular recording of data and information is of utmost importance. Many institutes suffer in rankings as they fail to provide the right and complete information due to lack of adequate data. Lastly, he accentuated the internationalization of institutions with due reference to the appointment of foreign faculty and admission of international students.

The second speaker, Dr. Bijayalaxmi Nanda, Principal (Acting), Miranda House, University of Delhi, shared the initiatives adopted by Miranda House which helped the college in securing the top position in India in 2019 NIRF rankings. She appreciated the efforts of Dr. Pratibha Jolly, former Principal of Miranda House, for inculcating the aptitude for research and publication among undergraduate students, which in turn helps them to develop better perspectives in

their areas of interest. She pointed out that students are the major stakeholders of any institute and the rankings are very important to them for making informed decisions while applying to national and international universities. Dr. Nanda asserted the importance of documentation, collecting and collating data, recording crucial conversations with the students and developing outreach centers. She also suggested the benefits of the faculty mentoring the students and the senior faculty mentoring the junior faculty, which helps in emulsion learning, going beyond the classroom experience. She explained the importance of collaboration not only with international educational institutes but local institutes as well. Miranda House promotes piecemeal social engineering and the college has undertaken various projects with the local bodies, including underprivileged sections, for social outreach. Lastly, Dr. Nanda discussed the importance of neutral and objective feedback from the students, as they are a major part of this system.

Prof. Sanjay Dhamija, International Management Institute, New Delhi, re-iterated the need for accreditation and rankings in Business Schools in particular. He discussed the rankings by organizations like Association of MBAs (AMBA), European Quality Assurance System (EQAS) and Accreditation Service for Certifying Bodies (Europe) Ltd. (ASCB), which focus on rigorous follow up for more than three years. He stated that B-school students give importance to the rankings and accreditation before considering the options for admissions. Concurring with Dr. A.P. Mishra and Dr. Nanda, he also laid emphasis on the promotion of joint research projects and incentivizing the efforts of faculty and students. He highlighted the need for a strong connection between institutions and industry and suggested that industry advisors should contribute in shaping the curriculum.

In the concluding remarks, Prof. Singla highlighted the importance of research and publication in reputed journals, collaborative projects at national and international levels, student feedback, incentivizing research, mentorship programs and building industry connect for continuous improvement of higher education institutions.

TECHNICAL SESSION

The concluding session of the symposium had two eminent speakers. The first speaker of the session, Dr. Mahima Thakur, Associate Professor, FMS, University of Delhi, presented an engaging lecture on 'Accreditation and Ranking'. She highlighted the fact that with mass-ification, internationalization and commodification of higher education, along with globalization of professions, educational institutions have been facing stiff competition. They are being propelled to deliver qualifications recognized in the international labor market and enforced to

establish comparable educational standards with quality assurance systems. She suggested that Triple Loop Learning would help in this situation. Single Loop Learning is about making adjustments to correct a mistake or a problem. It is focused on doing things correctly. Triple Loop Learning goes even deeper to explore our values and the reasons why we even have our systems, processes and desired results in the first place. It is about trying to ascertain an understanding of how we make decisions that frame our work. She used the EFQM - European Foundation for Quality Management of Systems - for the education system and described 5 enablers - people, leadership, policy & strategy, partnership & resources and processes to match up with 4 results - people results, employability results, society results and key performance results. She discussed the areas, which still need our intervention such as sustainability, social credits of programs, value-laden education and character building. She concluded by stating that the educational institutions need to create a place for themselves.

The last speaker of the symposium, Dr. S. K. Garg, Director General, Maharaja Agarsen Institute of Management Sciences, elaborated upon the requirements of quality for 'pathway to excellence' in every field for 'accreditation and ranking'. He affirmed that the survival of higher education depends primarily on the maintenance of quality. During his discourse, Dr. Garg explained the process of maintaining the quality of education prescribed in the University Calendar (The Red Book) of University of Delhi. He lamented that for several years the measures of quality control proved to be ineffective due to the rigid time frame and impractical conditions. He revealed that the prescribed standards were also diluted to some extent because of the democratization process. To improve the situation, the government came up with the idea of NAAC and its system of rankings. NAAC stipulates the process of affiliation, powers of the governing bodies, staff, committees, administration and finance. Accreditation has helped in streamlining all the processes in educational institutions, as it lays down the process for teaching, learning and evaluation. NAAC and NIRF Rankings promote healthy competition among institutions, which leads to improvement in the quality of teaching, research and publishing, sensitizing students towards social issues and providing motivation towards perception building. Dr. Garg explained that the Block Grants, which have replaced the Plan Grants, include four components for basic assistance: quality assurance, sports, infrastructure development and faculty development programs. UGC extends the grant for basic assistance while other grants are provided on the basis of performance. Other benefits include motivating stakeholders to improve infrastructure, maintaining a track of the progression of students and certification of quality. He emphasized the requirement of the pyramid system to maintain quality in institutes of higher education and affirmed that the teachers can play a crucial role in determining quality in the education system.

The intense and interesting deliberations on the role of 'Accreditation and Ranking as a Pathway to Excellence for Higher Education Institutions' concluded with Dr. Harpreet Kaur, the Co-Convener of the symposium, proposing the vote of thanks on behalf of the Internal Quality Assurance Cell, Sri Guru Gobind Singh College of Commerce. She said that the symposium provided a forum for discussing the various parameters used in accreditation and ranking of higher education institutes and thanked NAAC for the financial assistance provided for the symposium. She also thanked all the speakers of the day, the College Governing Body, the Principal, the members of IQAC, the teaching faculty, the non-teaching staff and the students for their support.