



BLACKBOARD

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Excellence through disruption

What can institutions do to provide students a holistic learning experience?

Many educationists are suggesting that the education system is crumbling. Schools are running half empty, faculty are not available. Spending from the Central and the State funds is dismally inadequate. Reports indicate that many of the students are unemployable. One of the causes is the inadequacy of educational institutions to keep pace with the dynamic changes that are taking place in the industrial world. Discussions with faculty and the heads of the institutions also indicate that the fault appears, perhaps, with the students themselves, who do not wish to apply themselves to education and want a quick fix solution to everything. Higher education institutions must understand the transformations that are taking place and also the needs of the various stakeholders. Students are demanding a “Value-Add” in terms of knowledge, that is, something more than what is available in books or online portals. Parents are hoping that the students are able to obtain holistic development and develop themselves as global citizens. The issue is — what should institutions of higher learning do? Disruptive education, perhaps, is the key. Disruptions do not necessarily mean a radical or breakthrough process or innovations. Disruptions, in fact, would mean any process that replaces a complicated service with a simple, affordable solution. Some of the disruptions that can be adopted by institutions are listed below.

Use of LMS (Learning Management Systems): This system enables students, faculty and the institute to be on the same platform. In the West, LMS is compulsory and all student and faculty evaluations are done through it.

Guest lectures and live projects: This would enable students to understand the various aspects of a business. Guest lectures can be arranged even for undergraduate students.

Industrial visits: It helps students bond with each other and learn how to work as a team. It provides them a firsthand impression of how an industrial unit works.

Innovative teaching techniques (reverse learning, group learning and presentations): Students could be asked to come to the institution for, say, two days in a week, work on a project for two to three days and make presentations on the same the week after.

Fewer subjects: It is essential that the number of subjects per semester be reduced and students encouraged to learn from home.

Optimal classroom use: Institutions should think in terms of having flexible classrooms, wherein the same classroom can be used for different programmes and for different groups of students. It might also be possible to use the open spaces for teaching — something similar to the Gurukool concept.

Ethical values: With so much negativity all round, it is imperative that students are made aware of ethical values, character building, different ideas of political science, importance of governance, and transparency issues, among other things.

Field visits: A one-week visit to a village / rural area for students in urban areas and a one-week visit to an urban centre for students in rural areas can be organised.

Cluster-type conferences: Many faculty have lamented that it is difficult to hold conferences and call credible speakers from the

industry. Colleges in a neighbourhood could jointly organise these conferences and share the cost.

Compulsory ICT use: Students and faculty must optimally utilise digital tools. Students must be encouraged to refer to various Web resources for their work.

Work-life balance: The rule laid down by the statutory authorities regarding spending fixed number of hours in the college, such as requiring faculty to be in the institution for approximately 40 hours per week, should be waived off.

Tenure of faculty: All faculty members should be appointed on a fixed salary basis. Regular increments should be given. The faculty should be tenured for around three years or so. During this time, their performance should be measured on the basis of feedback from the students, number of research papers published in high-impact journals, number of research projects undertaken, and so on. There should be transparency in the method of evaluation.

Accreditation: Accreditation is a must. The accreditation process should be transparent, reasons for awarding different marks / grades for the various parameters should be recorded and made available. Accreditation should be evaluated by personnel with integrity and creditworthiness.

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