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ENSURING PARTICIPATORY GOVERNANCE IN THE UNIVERSITY EXAMINATION AND EVALUATION SYS- TEM

Prologue

Participatory governance has been the central philosophy of University Examination system. For the last two decades, the concept of participation has been widely used in the development discourse. Participation of the stake holders in governance and development has become increasingly relevant in recent years in view of the paradigmatic shift in the role of the development institution of the developing countries following both the structural and post-structural Adjustment Programmes. The University as a principal development Institution needs enhanced participation of the stake holders to realize its greater social objectives. The World Bank Learning Group on Participation defines participation "as a process through which the stake holders influence and share control over development initiatives and the decisions and resources which affect them." In the case of University Examination governance the objectives of participation include effectiveness, efficiency, responsibility, accountability capacity building, neutrality, objective, quality judgement, commitment, responsiveness, transparency, sense of time and overall empowerment. The term 'governance' in the caption is viewed as an activity that guides the process by which results are reached. While applying governance to University Examination System, it presupposes both the process and performance of the University Institution in the field of Examination.



The context that necessitated the Practice

The University of North Bengal has to cater for a huge locational pluralities of the affiliated Colleges diversely situated in the Districts of Himalayan Region and three Districts of Eastern Plains Region of the State of West Bengal. In addition, the University has to serve all the Under Graduate Colleges situated in the State of Sikkim. Altogether, nine Colleges of the State of Sikkim (situated in the Eastern District and the Southern District of Sikkim) and the sixty nine Colleges situated in the six districts of Northern Region of the State of West Bengal such as Cooch Behar, Jalpaiguri, Darjeeling, Uttar Dinajpur, Dakshin Dinajpur and Malda. Nearly sixty thousand examinees / students of affiliated Colleges appear at University Examination every year.

The University of North Bengal had to experience tremendous co-ordination problems in dealing with Pre-Publication and Post-Publication processes of University Examination. Resultantly, there had been chaos in conducting the Examination System which caused considerable delay in the publication of Examination results. Altogether, the problem relating to Examination administration proved institutional inability which registered social disenchantment. In order to prevent growing discontent and to bring good governance into the University Examination Management System, the University policy makers had to pay adequate attention to the issues. By way of overhauling the structural and functional management system of Examination, the University of North Bengal has brought about unprecedented changes in the whole system. Over the last six years the inabilities of the Examination management system have given way to the abilities of the System. Enabling empowerment has been the principal feature of the University Examination System alive to a process of learning continuum. In short, the University of North Bengal over the last six years has proved to be a model for managing the Examination System both effectively and efficiently. Governing Examination system as pursued by the University has proved to be one of the best practices.

Objectives of the Practice

The objectives of the practice are:-

- a) Ensuring effective participation of all the stake holders of the University Examination System.
- b) De-centralizing University Examination administration system.
- c) Sensitizing the stake holders by making them aware of the Rules and Regulations, norms and practices of Examinations.



- d) Establishing confidentiality of Examination process as and when required.
- e) Ensuring fairness in the Examination System and combating any kind of malpractice.
- f) Assuring the confidence the examinees in the System.
- g) Making examiners responsible.
- h) Assuring regularity in the publication of results of all Examinations conducted by the University within a reasonable time frame of 45-85 days.
- i) Establishing transparency of the System as possible and required.
- j) Ensuring all other principles of good governance.
- k) Strengthening commitment, efficacy, responsibility and responsiveness of the personnel engaged in the management of Examination System.
- l) Assuring justice, equity and natural treatment.
- m) Assuring democratization of education as and when required and possible in tune with the principle of confidentiality and sacredness of Examination.

The Practice

The Practice relating to the management of University Examination System to be summed up here has proved to be an effective practice for over the last six years. The Examination management practice has been formulated in tune with the objectives already laid down. The practice has been established on the basis of mutual collaboration and continuous deliberation between all the stake holders of the University Examination System. The practice has two distinctive parts: (a)Pre-Examination Process and (b)Post Examination Process. To make both the processes effective, a continuous process of mutual interaction on the basis of a scientific networking has been brought to practice. The following are some of the important areas related to the conducting of the University Examination.

a) De-centering Examination administration System: Keeping in view the post modernist argument of de-centering through representation, the University of North Bengal has compartmentalized all the affiliated Colleges under nine Zonal Nodal Centres situated at different sub-regions of the Districts of Northern Region of the State of West Bengal and the Districts of the State of Sikkim. Keeping in mind the Nodal college concept, each of the nine Nodal Centres is headed by the Principal of the Nodal College of the respective sub-region and the members of the



Nodal Centres are drawn from the Colleges situated in the sub-region, Principals of all the Colleges under a particular Nodal Centre, teachers' and employees' representatives for the Court, Under Graduate Council, Faculty Council of the University of North Bengal from the region where the Colleges are situated. The Nodal Centres are the extended arms of the University performing following different kinds of functions relating to Examinations:

- i) Coordinating University examinations at the College Centres.
- ii) Playing the observer's role and sending visiting teams to different College Centres of University Examination.
- iii) Networking with the Colleges by way of sending circulars and notices to the Colleges as sent by the University from time to time.
- iv) Playing the role of distribution Centre of University Examination scripts for the examiners of the Colleges under the respective Nodal Centre.
- v) Coordinating with the evaluators/examiners for proper and timely evaluation and helping them to send back the evaluated scripts to the Head Examiners/Coordinators of examinations in different subjects.
- vi) Organizing training and awareness programme for the teachers and employees relating to University Examination matters,
- vii) Coordinating with the teacher members of the Colleges under the Nodal Centre representing Board of Studies of different subjects.
- viii) Updating the list of teachers and employees of the Colleges under the Nodal Centre and sending such lists to the University.
- ix) Establishing contact and required liaison with the local administration for free and fair Examination in the Colleges under the Nodal Centre.
- x) Receiving College-wise University Examination Result Sheets and Mark sheets from the University and distributing them to the Colleges located under the Nodal Centre.
- xi) Maintaining continuous links with the University to keep the Nodal Centre update relating to University Examination, and disseminating such updated knowledge amongst the Colleges under the Nodal Centre.

b) Sensitizing personnel engaged in University Examination System

- i) Ensuring continuous in-house training of the personnel of the University Examination Department by way of continuous formal and informal interaction.
- ii) Lessening hiatus between the Officers and the employees by augmenting their self confidence, ensuring responsibility with the Of-

ficers and required works with the Employees (experience suggests that this principle has brought a positive and congenial work atmosphere and culture in the whole structure of Examination Management System.

iii) Adoption of down top approach in place of top down approach in the management system of the University Examination.

iv) The entire Examination Management structure has been sub divided into different sections. Each section is identified with a working leader along with a required number of employees. The job responsibility of every section is defined. Different activities under the jobs have been minutely specified. The advantage of the office of the Controller of Examinations is that a considerable number of employees is Computer enabled. Time schedule for each activity for every job is strictly maintained. In the absence due to leave of any employee, other employees of the section share the responsibility. The words like 'excuse', 'plea', 'blaming others' or 'shifting of responsibility' have been almost misnomers in every section. The Deputy Controller of Examinations, Assistant Controller of Examinations and Office Superintendents are vested with the specified responsibility of different sections of the University Examination Management structure. The Controller of Examinations, as the principal Authority of the University Examination Management System, supervises the whole affairs and takes the entire responsibility on behalf of his fellow Officers and employees of the Examination Management structure. The Controller of Examinations is principally responsible for each and every failure of the Examination Management System and shares the sense of success, if any, along with his team. The Controller of Examinations plans the entire Examination calendar of the year, identifies the issues in tune with SWOT (Strength, Weakness, Opportunity and Threat) analysis and helps formulating the highest policies relating to University Examination system.

v) Ensuring team work and collective work culture.

c) Networking with the Authorities: The University Examination Management System needs a continuous support from different authorities of the University such as Office of the Registrar, Office of the Finance Officer, Offices of both the Post Graduate Faculty Council and Under Graduate Council, Zonal Nodal Centres, University Academic Departments and affiliated Colleges. Such a huge and complicated networking is extremely required for the Examination Department to cater for the 'end function' and to serve the 'end products' of the University. Error free objective judgement has to be ensured by the office of the Controller



of Examinations while serving both the end function and end products. Recommendations on syllabi, Question Bank, lists of Examiners, Re-examiners, Scrutinizers, Paper Setters and Moderators are made by the respective Councils and are to be approved by the Vice Chancellor. The respective section of Examination Department functions on the basis of the Recommendations. Registration numbers of each student of the University are to be obtained from the Office of the Registrar to fulfill the pre-condition of becoming an examinee. Minimum 75% attendance of each examinee is to be ensured for being eligible to become an examinee. All the percentage related information is to be brought from the Academic Departments and Colleges. The Rules, Regulations, Statutes and Ordinances are strictly adhered to in conducting the University Examinations.

d) Establishing links with External Agencies: The University always remains alert about complying with the rules and regulations as framed by the external control agencies like UGC, NCTE, AICTE, FCI, MCI, Bar Council of India, NAAC, etc.

e) Continuous communication with Zonal Nodal Centres: Networking with the Zonal Nodal Centres for conducting the University Examination by way of involving all the stake holders of the University Examination System. The Examination Department has to maintain a continuous and steady communication network throughout the year.

f) Organizing Spot evaluation: Spot evaluations of the University Examination scripts with a stipulated scientific time frame have been assured. Required planning for organizing Spot evaluation at the University level for accommodating teachers of different subjects and examiners of different Examinations has been a regular feature of every year to expedite the process of Publication of Result in a regular manner and within a reasonable time frame.

g) Computerizing the entire process of Examination: The adoption of technology in processing pre-and post-Examination has brought about qualitative changes in the entire system. Electronic gadgets have been used for the retrieval of all confidential archival documents relating to Examinations. Abolition of manual method has made the process of examination almost error free.

h) Developing physical infrastructure of the Examination Department: The University has developed nearly fifteen thousand square feet carpet areas for the Examination Department which altogether includes two wire houses, one big hall for spot evaluation, and one confidential room for moderation and other spaces for offices. The University can accommodate nearly eighty teachers in the University Guest Houses.



i) Assuring honorarium to the Teachers on the Spot: In collaboration with the Finance Department, the Examination Department arranges payment of honorarium to the teachers for performing different types of Examination works immediately after the assigned responsibility is performed. Such practice has reduced all kinds of discontents for not getting payment in due time. Involvement and enthusiasm of the teachers have been enhanced as a result. Getting honorarium for examination assignments of any kind right on the spot has geared up the whole system with a tremendous moralizing effect.

j) Developing Question Bank: The University has made it possible to develop question banks for all possible Under Graduate subjects to ensure transparency and philosophy of student-centric education.

To adumbrate, the practice the University of North Bengal pursued in the field of Examination Management is totally based on team work, collective sharing of responsibility in both failures and successes. This sense of belonging together with a sense of work has created a congenial work culture based on the sense of identity and mutual sense of self-respect. Making sense of governance can only become worthy by its worth only when individual agenda would take a back seat and collective agenda reign. This, infact, is the principal philosophy behind the best practice so far adopted by the University in managing and governing examination system.

Obstacles faced, if any, and strategies to overcome them

Whenever there is an attempt to overhaul a system, there would automatically be resistances to change. A long practiced course of operation always develops a kind of paradigm from which any major shift is always attempted with counter arguments. The newly adopted reform proposals, when considered for implementation to bring in major changes in the Examination System, received strong resentments from every possible corner. Teachers who are habituated to follow a kind of practice in examination were not at all in a mood to adopt the changed practice in the Examination process. Employees of the Colleges who are accustomed with the earlier Rule of Thumb system of Examination had to swallow the new system with much discontent and agony. The stake holders of the University Examination System had also raised doubts on the future of the new practice adopted in the Examination System. The most fortunate part is that all kinds of stake holders who were critical on the new practice were almost numerically a very small group.



The majority of the stake holders have adopted the new System of Examinations with all commitment and sincerity. To overcome resistance and doubts, the University did never show any kind of commanding attitude; rather from the very beginning of the adoption of the new practice, the University has tried to involve all types of stake holders by way of continuous sensitization and awareness programmes. The Vice-Chancellor, the Controller of Examinations and other important dignitaries keep visiting the different Nodal Centres at the District levels and meeting the teachers and employees of the Colleges. Such meetings are held twice every year in the Districts for the last six years. Teachers and Employees of the Colleges get involved in those meetings by their active participation through mutual deliberation and reciprocity. At the University level, a General Meeting of the Principals, Examination Conveners of the Colleges and University level stake holders is usually held every year on various issues relating to Examination. In-house training of the employees has been a regular activity of the Office of the Controller of Examinations. Such in-house meetings help every employee to be aware of the changes adopted in the Examination process. Besides, regular meetings of the Statutory Authorities of the University are held where the policies and planning on Examination are formulated. The Vice Chancellor always takes serious care for the proper governance of the Examination System.

Impact of the Practice

The impact of the practice so far adopted has ushered in tremendous quantitative and qualitative changes. Some of the impacts may be shown as under:

- i) Publication of examination results have been made regular.
- ii) Resultantly, the commencement of the Academic Session has been made regular.
- iii) Since the examinations are held strictly on the basis of a yearly Academic Calendar, a minimum of 180 teaching days have been ensured both in the Colleges as well as in the University Departments.
- iv) Students discontent on delayed publication of results have been reduced to zero.
- v) Involvement of the teachers has been assured.
- vi) A sense of pride has been assured for the employees working in the Examination departments of the University and Colleges.
- vii) Computerized Examination process has made the system almost error free.



- viii) Fairness and transparency have been assured.
- ix) Ordinarily, evaluated Examination scripts are made open to public scrutiny.
- x) Litigation on Examination matters have been reduced to minimum. During the last six years, the University has not been charge-sheeted on Examination matters and the University has not been defeated in whatever petty suits lodged against the University on Examination.
- xi) The Tatkal Yojna adopted in the Examination Department for providing any kind of Examination related service has been a tremendous success and has enhanced the material capacity of the University. The entire practice has brought about a tremendous moralizing effect on every stake holder.
- xii) On-the-Spot payment policy has inspired the teachers to work on any Examination related assignment.
- xiii) Over and above the regularized system of Examination has been able to provide a positive message to society which in return has increased the credibility of the University and has reduced the hiatus between society and the University as an important social institution. The process of legitimization has been almost complete.

Resources required

The Office of the Controller of Examinations is one of those Departments of University which earn more and expends less. During the last six years, the University has enhanced the fees of the Examinations only once. The Examination Department earns revenues from different services it provides to the passed out Graduates, such as Transcription Fees, Document Verification Fees, Provisional Certificate Fees, Duplicate Mark sheet Fees, etc. The infrastructure already created for the Examination Department has been made from its own earnings. Resource requirement is important, however, to change the work culture is more important. Personality factor is important but that must be preceded by the collective culture of work. The University of North Bengal can well boast of the practice that it has adopted in the field of Examination. However, the University is not complacent about its success. There are many things to accommodate and adopt many more things are left to learn. The University has already planned for two days State level Seminar during mid January, 2006 to discuss issues like adoption of credit system in all the Post Graduate and Under Graduate curriculum, grading system, scaling system, credit transferability and credits convertibility as well as credits accreditation



both by the National and International Agencies. It is hoped that the proposed Seminar on Examination reforms will highlight all the issues and would help arrive at certain specific recommendations for immediate future policy making on Examination. Let us all strive to get ourself prepared to implement the future policy practice to cater for our students and society at large in a best possible manner.

РЕЗЮМЕ

В последние годы концепция сотворчества относительно развивающего обучения широко используется в научных дискуссиях и имеет непосредственное отношение к экзаменационной системе университета, так как университет является одним из главных развивающих институтов. Центральной темой статьи является внедрение концепции совместного управления в экзаменационной системе Северо-Бенгальского университета.