

Best Practices for the Session 2022 - 2023

1. Education and Social Empowerment Project, (ESEP-AMM)

Objectives:

The programme was envisioned with the primary goal of accomplishing a synergy between theoretical knowledge and its practical implementation to foster a sense of responsibility among our students and allow them to comprehend and acknowledge their role as instruments of positive social change. The IQAC cell along with other stakeholders of the college had in mind the need to foster a sense of community among the students and encourage them to take-up leadership roles by utilizing their knowledge, for creating avenues for social development. The goal was to instil in the students an appreciation of the socio-cultural-political matrix from which they have emerged. The college firmly believes that the ambit of education extends beyond the precincts of the classroom, and knowledge imparted within the classroom primarily aims at creating the foundation for a more nuanced appreciation of the challenges the world offers, in the realm of the everyday and mundane. The Education and Social Empowerment project was also aimed at creating an 'inclusive' eco-system, involving the students and the people from the immediate neighbourhood, by creating a seamless symbiotic relationship between them and also establish the credentials of the college as an involved and responsible social institution.

Context:

The majority of the students that take admission in Alipurduar Mahila Mahavidyalaya, belong to socially and economically deprived communities from remote areas, with many being the first individuals from their respective families to cross the threshold of an educational institute. Therefore, these students often have witnessed and encountered economic deprivation and concomitant social marginalization from very close quarters and are required to depend on Government aid for continuing their educational endeavour and also fulfilling basic needs of life. This has also resulted in them being aware of the various Governmental initiatives and schemes available for marginalized sections of the society. Moreover, their access to formal education has also made them aware of the procedural requirements required to avail the benefits of the scheme. This awareness is what the Educational and Social Empowerment Project banks upon for its two-pronged goal of creating awareness about various governmental projects among the local populace and also create ideological platform which would fuel interest in the students to enter in the field of governance and administration. It is also aimed at spreading information about existing legal avenues on being denied the facilities which often is the case where unscrupulous individuals mislead the potential beneficiaries, taking advantage of their illiteracy or partial literacy. In taking the information to the common public, the students also are expected to interact with different families and the womenfolk, which the College believes, act as encouragement to parents to take more proactive role in sending their girls to attend schools and colleges.

The Practice:

The project is operated under the guidance of HoDs of various departments of the college, who are entrusted with the task of screening willing participants and then organize them into small groups before they are provided with appropriate training and physical aids to go out and interact with the local community and spread information about existing Government schemes which would benefit them directly. In this process the NSS unit of the college is also involved along with Government officials from various departments and local bodies who are invited to interact with the participants and share their valuable experiences that they have gathered over a period of time working directly at the grass root level. The students are required to attend 3 classes where faculty members familiarize them with existing Central and State Government schemes about which they can then inform the community members. They are also told about the process of filling forms and checking basic documents which they could then help their community members with. After a rudimentary training the students visit nearby localities and often remote forest villages and perform skits in local languages and talk to individual family units and attempt to understand their perspective about governance and their expectations from the local bodies. The students are not provided with any questionnaires as one of the goals of this project is also to strengthen their verbal communication skills and augment their emotional cognitive faculties, which can better be achieved by allowing a more informal communication pattern for their work.

Evidence of Success:

The success of the project is reflected in the surge in the number of candidates willing to participate in the process, so much so that the college is contemplating about implementing a basic screening mechanism to keep the number manageable. Success, particularly associated with socio-cultural empowerment is often excruciatingly intangible and hence excruciatingly hard to quantify and formulate as concrete data. However, the confidence that the participants display while interacting with the local members of the community itself is an affirmation of the project's success, considering the fact that many of them, owing to their socio-economic background have mostly suffered from a crippling hesitance to communicate. Moreover, at the end of the project period, the participants are asked to take part in a group discussion, which is aimed at strengthening their analytical reasoning and ability to detect and work on solving a problem in a logical fashion. The project aims to provide an expansive vision to the students where they could feel themselves to be active participants in the task of shaping the nation. Also the enthusiastic acceptance of the project by the local communities stands testimony to the success of the venture.

Problems Encountered and Resources required:

The successful continuance of the project is premised also on the college's ability to provide adequate logistical support to the students which require dedicated funding, which sometimes becomes a difficult ask as the college has to depend completely on Government largesse for its day to day functioning and arranging for a separate source of fund is an uphill task. Moreover, since most of the participating students travel from remote areas to reach the college, and often the project demands from them to stay beyond normal working hours of the college, getting permission from their guardians becomes difficult for them sometimes. Since the College doesn't have its own means of transport, renting them frequently puts strain on the already stretched financial sources. Apart from this, to convince the guardians about the purpose and fruitfulness of the project in which their wards are involved, require long hours of convincing that often demands participation of faculty members. Arranging for these sessions outside the college premises also becomes difficult often times, as with the introduction of the New Education Policy at the undergraduate level the class schedules are normally exhaustive and it becomes difficult for the faculty members and students alike to find a free slot for stepping outside the college premises without adversely impacting the demands of the curriculum. Moreover, co-ordinating with local authority for their support when the students visit comparatively remote locations also becomes challenging at times. In a politically fraught scenario as exists in Bengal, continuing a project that involves common people and informing them about Government funding sources and peoples' rights, maintaining an apolitical stance and convincing everyone about the apolitical nature of the venture also requires extra efforts.

2. Institutional Cooperation with Business Establishments to Support College Students' Internship Programs.

Objective:

Keeping in line with the thematic focus of the New Education Policy, 2020, the college has endeavored in right earnest to focus on creating and facilitating a platform to ensure that students are provided with an opportunity to realize and use their academic training to bring tangible changes in their lives as well as contribute to the corporate life of the nation. The primary objective of this program is to allow the students to move beyond the precincts of their classrooms and encounter the comparatively harsher environs premised on the demand to marry skill with theoretical understanding of needs and circumstances. Interning with professionals during their formative years, the students are expected to acquire skill-sets which can best be learnt beyond the simulated structures that classrooms can provide at best. The

experiences gathered over the period of their internships can fuel their young and inquisitive minds to comprehend the nuances of the trade and at the same time assimilate the core aspects of their academic training. Apart, from providing them with some economic perks, internship programs are also expected to instill in them a sense of discipline and responsibility, highly valued qualities sought by recruiting institutions across the spectrum. Therefore, intern-training programs facilitated by the college, is also meant as a part of their character-building exercise, apart from the more apparent and immediate objective shaping the students as employable assets for the future.

Context:

The college, being the only higher educational institution expressly meant for women in the district, has the enviable responsibility to provide an enabling platform to the students that would allow them to break the shackles of economic and social impairment, traditionally borne by them, with their challenges being doubly complex owing to the fact that, as inhabitants of a financially backward district, located in a remote territorial region, avenues for their socio-economic development has been sparse if not completely absent. With the majority of the students being first generation learners, belonging from the tribal families from the Tea-Belt, or from landless agricultural families, even daily commute from their places to attend classes in the college takes a financial toll on their families' meager earnings. Moreover, willingly or unwillingly, traditionally, a noted tendency among their parents has been to get their daughters married at a very young age, to dedicate whatever little resources they possess, to nurture their male off-springs rather. Against such socio-economic handicap, providing a viable financial avenue to students, whereby they can exhibit some tangible benefits of college education can stem the regressive social discrimination practiced against them. Internship opportunities in renowned corporate houses allow the female students to have increased financial elbow room that they can use to empower themselves. Moreover, they get a chance to have a taste of professional environments, and can sharpen their professional networking skills, that might help them to seek a respectable job once they cross the thresholds of their academic life. Therefore, the decision was taken in appropriate level in the college, to encourage as many corporate houses as possible to come and interact with the students and conduct training programs with appropriate logistical support being provided by the college for the same.

The Practice:

According to the decision taken by the Governing Body of the college, to create an environment, welcoming willing corporate houses to interact with students and subsequently select from amongst them candidates whom they deem fit to intern with them, after according appropriate training for the same, several seminars and classroom interaction sessions were organized. Along with these, online platforms were also used to hold meetings with interested students and gauge their aptitude for various programs being offered. Eminent speakers interacted with the students, answering their myriad queries, and trained Human Resource professionals deputed by respective companies also were present to ensure that the programs were conducted as per protocol. Students from various Honors and Program courses were made to undergo aptitude tests and on the basis of their performances, they were asked to appear for the subsequent levels forward. The students desirous of appearing for the tests were initially groomed by the faculty members of the college. The fact that the college organizes regular job training seminars also helped, as students attending them already possessed some knowledge about affairs happening in the national and international arena and therefore were more forthcoming with responses when questions to test their knowledge about current affairs were asked during the aptitude tests.

Evidence of Success:

Success is not always a quantifiable phenomenon and therefore also has an intangible facet associated with it. In terms of absolute numbers, a total of 150 candidates found willing to participate in the endeavor can seem like a meager number, but the college believes that the positive carry forwards from the programs entail much more than what meets the eyes. The opportunity to interact with professionals from globally acclaimed corporate houses like Tata Consultancy Services, Mahindra Pride etc. and organizations like India Post Payments Bank is of immense importance for students otherwise hemmed in by crippling socio-economic handicaps as residents of remote and backward areas of our nation. Mahindra Pride held classroom interaction sessions with 42 candidates, and 12 students completed the Tata Consultancy Services training schedule. The session held by India Post Payment Banks saw 02 students being selected for their exclusive internship and training program. The success of the initiative also lies in the overwhelming queries received from the first semester students from various departments regarding the possibility of holding similar sessions in the near future. This shows a welcome shift towards breaking the barrier of hesitance that students are wont to

feel when encountering any novel experience. Many have already registered their names with respective department heads to participate in events of similar nature in the upcoming session.

Problems Encountered:

The college did face some challenges while trying to conceptualize and subsequently implement the events. Being located in a remote part of the country, which has traditionally been left out of the industrial map, getting Corporate Houses to come looking for talent has been the primary obstacle. This coupled with the fact that students who are primarily first generation learners from economically and socially challenged sections of the society were initially hesitant to face such professional overtures. Moreover, the students being schooled in vernacular institutions had an unfounded yet innate sense of insufficiency owing to their discomfiture with English communication skills. The fact, that the institution's resource crunch also didn't allow it to hold remedial English communication classes regularly, also proved to be a handicap. But, the college understands the need to strive continuously to act against all odds to turn these ventures into bigger successes for the sake of the students, and with timely financial help from appropriate authorities and local support, believes that challenges can be addressed.

Resources Required:

A dedicated fund, created to finance seminars with trained resource persons from the various corporate houses can go a long way in ensuring a culture of excellence being instilled in the institute's framework. It will allow the liaison officer the required freedom to approach stalwarts from the industries to come and interact with the students more frequently. Also, regular training sessions in the college can prepare the students to interact more fruitfully with willing recruiters looking for young interns with adequate communication skills. Also, funds are needed to build state-of-the-art audio-visual rooms expressly meant for holding corporate interaction events. This, along with regular subscriptions of magazines related to corporate affairs can provide students with adequate exposure prior to their interactions with corporate leaders and speakers during aptitude testing sessions. The students, the college believes, would benefit immensely, if taken for occasional/regular industry visits to acclimatize them with the climate and demands of a professional set-up.