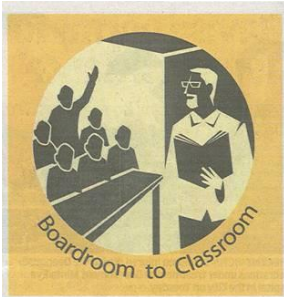




IN THE MEDIA

DECCAN HERALD

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Here, students can choose and learn

They are encouraged to actively participate in academic decision-making

Kaushik Chakravarthi

At present, the student community has no meaningful role to play in the formulation of educational policies that directly affect them. Students hardly have any representation in key academic bodies such as university syndicate, academic council or senate. They simply have to accept what is decided for them by those in the academic administration.

This is certainly not the way it should be. Deccan Herald, through a new weekly series "BOARDROOM TO CLASSROOM" offers a unique platform for students to speak out on key academic issues. In the first of this series, DH takes a reality check on the role the student community plays in the city's deemed universities and autonomous institutions.

Send in your feedback to dhclassroom@gmail.com

The dingy old classrooms with heavy wooden desks intricately carved by termites in part, and in equal part by notorious back-benchers, have given way to modern classrooms complete with cushioned individual seats, over-head projectors and even air-conditioning.

But, the changes at a modern institution such as Jain University (JU), run deeper than more hybrid desks and writing boards. The conventional student union too has been replaced by a student council. This council is more likely to participate in Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) activities and manage cultural festivals than go on a hunger strike outside the Principal's office.

Does this mean that active participation of students has been reduced to mere cosmetics with no real participation in policies that affect them? No, say the students and faculty at JU. Vibhushree, a final year student in Business Management at JU, says that student feedback is constantly sought and acted upon.

"Our syllabus and curriculum is constantly revised and made industry-friendly based



A CLASS ACT Students drive their points home DH PHOTOS BY ANAND BAKSHI

on our feedback. We ask for industry visits and there is an immediate response," she says.

Prakash Katarjiya, a master's student in mass communication at the university, who did his under graduation under the Bangalore University, seconds Vibhushree's opinion. "The student participation in syllabus design is relatively higher and the greater flexibility in a deemed university system also allows for the incorporation of student's opinion," he says.

Meanwhile Geetha Goud, a faculty at the varsity, says that the university does a poll on a regular basis and students vote on a series of parameters. "The Principal of each Jain institution interacts with the students. The students are given voting pads and they vote on a variety of issues and the results are immediately shown on a screen," she says.

Students who make use of the University's residential facility too say that their needs and feedback are always received and there is always a person to go to. Rashi Aggarwal, a mass communication student who resides in the hostel, says:

"We have a counsellor who is our first point of contact for all redressal. We had requested for Wi-Fi facility in our hostel and although it took six months, the problem was addressed." Students also say that unlike a conventional student union, where often the dominant opinion is passed off as student participation, the smaller size of a deemed university allows for the meritorious opinions to come through.

Fee regulation

While participation in an autonomous institution evidently works in the areas of syllabus

and pedagogy, fee regulation is an issue which students feel is a different argument. Both students and faculty agree that in the current set-up, only a section of society can afford it. But they also add that it is for the regulators to ensure that scholarships are incorporated into the system.

S Madhavan, the head of the department of communication, says that there is complete transparency about where the students' money is spent. "We tell the students where and what their money is spent on. Further, we have not hiked our fees and we have flexibility in loan payment," he says.

Pavithra, a master's student in Mass Communication, says, "Though the fee structure is high, it gives the student a sense of authority to question any change."

DH News Service

Policy Matters

Student bodies ignored

The relatively weak student union culture in colleges and universities was further weakened by the shift to the nomination model in 2000. With this, student representation in academic and administrative bodies of universities like the academic council has been nullified.

In a further blow to participation of students in policy-making, scheduling and even syllabus design, the State is moving away from the Lyngdoh Committee Recommendations. The committee's recommendations were upheld in 2006 by the Supreme Court, making it mandatory for all Universities and Colleges to have elections for student representation bodies. Besides recommending elections to all student bodies, the report also suggested that the nomination model must be nothing more than an "interim measure". The report also suggested that all institutions must mandatorily move to a "structured election model" to allow stake-holders including students to participate in decision-making.



S MADHAVAN, HOD, Dept of Communication (Jain University): "The end user is the student. Therefore they need to be sufficiently knowledgeable about the policies that affect them."

However, the argument against student participation in decision-making has been that student bodies are arms of political parties. But with increasing lobbying clout of private institutions and deemed varsities, the two biggest casualties seem to be fee regulation followed by the rights of students.

Classroom Talk



"The turn-around time between our feedback and the response of the management is far quicker."
GEETHA SHETTY, final year BBM student and member of JU student council



"The opinions that the university incorporates are those which are inclusive. Most of all the flexibility in policy allows the needs of each batch to be taken into account."
SABA HUSSAIN, Final Year BBM Student



"Students who are part of representative bodies need to have qualifiers. Each and every whim of a student cannot be taken as serious feedback."
SHREYA KRISHNAN, STUDENT, Mass Communication



"The student's voice has been shut by powerful private lobbies. It has effectively meant that only higher education is reserved only for the rich."
RAJASEKHARA MURTHY, Ex-SFI General Secretary

Office of Corporate Affairs
Jain Group of Institutions