

BEST PRACTICES 2019-2020

Title of the Practice: Use of Google Classrooms via G Suite

Objectives of the Practice: In the context of unprecedented layoff in higher education due to the pandemic, the objective was to continue teaching-learning in an effective and student friendly way resembling classroom teaching. The principle was to keep teachers and students engaged in learning as a way to combat the psychic challenges of the layoff, as also to open new avenues of e-learning.

The context: The greatest challenge in implementing the practice was to include and enable all students to use the Google platform effectively and regularly. Working with a student community coming from poor and working class/agro-based families, economic depression due to the pandemic posed the threat of discontinuation in higher education. The college with limited resources was not able to provide adequate economic assistance, and faced the danger of heavy dropout rates. Many students lacked the electronic device to avail of e-learning, and it was hard to motivate and rope in students from a demoralized state.

The Practice: Reacting quickly to the radically altered situation of higher education, the college started online classes via the Zoom platform in April 2020. The four Honours courses and all the Program courses were brought under a weekly class routine, and students were invited to join over social media and taught the ways to use the platform. About two months later, amid widespread anxieties over the safety of Zoom platforms, and driven by needs of further academically enabling activity, the college contacted Google Inc. for access to the G Suite for Education. After the agreement was complete, teachers and students began to use the suite since May-June 2020, and could perform all regular academic tasks like live online lectures, conducting tests, making surveys and enquiries, assigning projects and providing study material, and assessing student progress with individual care. All this was achieved as regular customized activity at a time far ahead of peer institutions in the region, and preceding government initiative or instruction in the matter. At a time when the higher education scene across India was reeling with news of debacle and dystrophy, the college was able to engage at least 85% of Honours and 60% of Program students in regular curricular activity, and keep them abreast of the heavy schedule of semesterized CBCS courses. The limitations faced were mostly economic inability to avail the internet, and these were supplemented by offline coordination.

Evidence of Success: The chief evidence of success of this practice is the results of the semester examinations held in blended mode (online and offline) since November 2020. The aims of regular online teaching and assessment were to engage as many students as possible amidst economic uncertainties, dropout tendencies and lack of communication. The results of the semester term-end Honours courses were placed in the first class. Considering the disheveled state of students across the nation, this was no mean achievement. The management was convinced that the early entry into the G Suite and its consistent use had borne good fruit.

Problems Encountered and Resources Required: The problems encountered were threefold – to communicate to all students (especially in the Program courses) and bring them within the ambit, to equip all with electronic devices and Internet services, and to keep them glued to this new and unusual mode. The resources employed to address these problems were – special fee waivers and concessions granted by the Principal, provision of Internet data to some needy students, simultaneous use of the college website for providing study material, and surveys, internal assessments and counseling/mentoring by teachers in Google classrooms.

(2) Title of the Practice: Waiving fees in response to economic depression

Objectives of the Practice: The intention was to keep as many students as possible from leaving the arena of higher education, failed by the multifarious crises – economic, social, familial – perpetrated

by the Covid-19 lockdowns. Many families lost steady means of subsistence, jobs, earning members; future plans were destroyed. Girls were taken off from their studies to be married off, boys moved in search of work. Many students appealed that they were unable to pay even the meager college fees. The principle underlying this practice was therefore humanitarian – to keep alive the aspirations of those who were struggling to hold on to education.

The Context: The issue under address was a sad end of education for many whose only drawback was lockdown-induced poverty. The student community largely emerges from agro-based or smalltime business families living in the rural surroundings of the college, and many support their families with part-time jobs. Tertiary education is an auxiliary adjunct to many of these families, which must be jettisoned in times of acute instability. Teaching-learning was continued by the college online, which required devices beyond their affordability. On the other hand the college did not possess funds enough to provide them free. So, the GB decided to stand by the needy and waive fees for both continuing students and new entrants, and completely condoned the application fees for new admission as per government directive.

The Practice: During a period when students across the whole of the nation were stalled and unable to overcome the digital divide, this practice of fee waiver implemented by the college, begun unilaterally, was a large step towards protecting equity and socioeconomic harmony in higher education. Many students were able to continue studies due to the waiver, many used the money thus saved in procuring the gadgets for online education, and many students from poor families could get themselves admitted into their first year. The practice was announced through the college website, and fee structures during online admissions were accordingly altered. Students leaving the college for another institution after getting admitted here were offered their payments back, so that they may keep educational costs within reach. The financial effects of this threefold waiver to continuing students, new entrants and those leaving after admission, spelled serious financial constraints for the college. A serious crunch of college funds was to be faced in the 2020-21 session, but the GB was prepared to put up in the higher interests of education to all. Many financially stronger peer institutions in the region did not take any measure in this regard, rendering our practice unique to some extent.

Evidence of success: While the target was to help poor students hold on to their educational aspirations, the measure of success was to be had from the dropout rates and successes in the semester examinations subsequent to the lockdowns. The fee waivers and the continuous teaching-learning via Google classrooms had a coupled effect to keep the dropout rates below 10% in Honours courses and below 20% in Program courses. Semester end results showed a pass percentage of almost 100%. These figures assured that, compared to the nationwide statistics, the practice of fee waivers had gone some way towards enabling financially weaker students to continue studying.

Problems encountered and Resources Required: There were two major problems faced while implementing this practice. One, the amount saved by fee waivers was not often enough for a student to meet the financial demands of online education. Two, the fact that fees had been waived was not motivation enough in the face of manifold familial crises for many. Resources employed to combat these were offline counseling by the Principal and teachers. Even so, a significant number of students could not be prevented from leaving courses.