

# Higher Education Institutions in Uttar Pradesh: Deriving Excellence through Accreditation

Md. Shahadat Hussain, Assistant Professor (Social Work) & Brij Bhushan Yadav, Assistant Professor  
(History)

VHPG College, (University of Lucknow).

Email: [shahadat4all@gmail.com](mailto:shahadat4all@gmail.com)

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## Abstract

*There is a dearth of quality higher education institutions in Uttar Pradesh. Except for centrally sponsored institutions, the state universities and the colleges associated with them rarely shown any excellence. There is a lack of infrastructure in the colleges and the government is also apathetic. Also, Work culture needs to be improved. Accreditation will go a long way in addressing the issues and challenges afflicting higher education institutions in Uttar Pradesh.*

**Keywords:** Accreditation, faculty, management, quality, students, university, colleges.

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## Introduction

Uttar Pradesh is the most populous (19.98 crore)<sup>1</sup> state located in northern India. It covers 243,290 square km, which is 7.33% of the total area of the country. The state came into existence on 1st April 1937 as the United Provinces during British rule. It was rechristened as Uttar Pradesh in 1950. There are 18 divisions and 75 districts. The state capital is located in Lucknow. Hindi is the official language of the state.

The literacy rate in Uttar Pradesh is 67.68% (Male 77.28%, Female 57.18%)<sup>2</sup>. The state has more than 45 universities,<sup>3</sup> including 5 central universities, 28 state universities, 8 deemed universities, 2 IITs in Varanasi and Kanpur, 1 IIM in Lucknow, 1 NIT in Allahabad, 2 IIITs in Allahabad and Lucknow, 1 National Law University in Lucknow and number of polytechnics, engineering colleges and industrial training institutes.<sup>4</sup> Besides, these there is a number of study centers of Indira Gandhi National Open University, Rajshree Tandon Open University etc spread across the state.

Education plays a vital role in the development of any nation. Therefore, there is a premium on both quantity (increased access) and quality (relevance and excellence of academic programmes offered) of higher education. In order to improve the teaching, learning ecosystem; Ministry of Human Resource and Development has stressed the need for accreditation of higher educational institutions. For accreditation of higher education institutions, the National Assessment and Accreditation Council (NAAC) was established in 1994 as an autonomous institution funded by University Grants Commission, Govt. of India; headquartered in Bangalore. It was established in view of the recommendations of National Policy in Education, 1986 to address the deteriorating quality of education in the country. The NAAC facilitate the volunteering institutions to assess their performance vis-a-vis set parameters through introspection and a process that provides space for participation and innovation of the institution<sup>5</sup>.

## Advantages of Accreditation

Following are some of the advantages of accreditation of educational institutions<sup>6</sup>: (a) Institutions shall know their strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats (b) Identify internal areas of planning and resource allocation, (c) Collegiality on the campus, (d) Funding agencies look for objective and transparent data for funding, (e) Institutions initiate innovative and modern methods of pedagogy, (f) New sense of direction for institutions, (g) The society look for reliable information on quality education offered, (h) Employers look for reliable information on the quality of education offered to the prospective recruits, (i) Intra and inter-institutional interactions etc.

Once the accreditation process is initiated in true spirit, learning outcome, teaching research environment etc will improve against the set parameters along with innovations deriving excellence.

## Elements of Assessment

NAAC has identified a set of criteria to serve as the basis of its assessment procedures. NAAC has categorized the Higher Educational Institutions (HEIs) into three major types (University, Autonomous College, and Affiliated/Constituent College)

and assigned different weights to these criteria under different key aspects based on the functioning and organizational focus of the three types of HEIs<sup>7</sup>.

Academic and non-academic staffs will need to collaborate to address concerns for the student learning and collaboration between disciplines and programs, as well as between other education institutions (e.g. primary to colleges/universities), will enhance our ability to address the concerns of education.

Decision-making in higher education is informed by data, which is used for a number of purposes: research, evaluation or assessment. However, many faculty members are not trained in data analysis. With respect to assessment, faculty members will have to be imparted training in developing skills for deciding what to measure, how to measure, evaluating the results accurately, measure student's achievement at the discipline/program level etc.

Since the accreditation assessment now demands more faculty involvement, faculty will need to be aware of accreditation standards and college resources to discuss the best ways and effectively use available resources to meet the set standards. Given the changing landscape of expectations of higher education faculty members need to be vigilant and proactive. The top management must extend all the support including necessary resources to the faculty members and non-academic staffs, while the institutions are striving to improve quality.

Assessment and accountability are words that often trigger not-so-pleasant reactions among faculty members and non-academic staffs also. However, if used appropriately, assessment and accountability in faculty hands have the power to address issues in student learning in real and meaningful ways. Faculty members need to work collaboratively to bring about measurable positive changes in student learning quickly and convincingly to alter the teaching-learning ecosystem.

### **Role of faculty members**

The faculty members are central to the process of assessment and accreditation. The process emphasizes both "assessment for improvement" and "assessment for accountability". It seems very fancy on paper, but in reality, implementation is not easy. The tendency with "assessment for accountability" is to push the areas under the carpet, where the institution has weaknesses. "Assessment for improvement" requires that the institution search out areas of weaknesses in student learning, implement changes, and then re-assess. This shall be a continuous ongoing process. The faculty has to play a direct and important role in the accreditation of the academic institutions. There is a need for more frequent assessment and evaluation; tailor-made standards for different categories of the academic institutions, and emphasize adherence to the respective set standards applicable for a particular category of institutions.

### **Challenges in Accreditation**

It has been observed that where the accreditation process has been initiated, the higher education ecosystem has been changing. But the direction forward is unclear. It is not known what will emerge; colleges and universities are in a precarious position and often feel uncertainty about the outcome. Some questions that linger in the mind of the administrators and faculties are, "What do the "accreditors" want? What will they view as adequate evidence of student achievement? How do we capture the link between assessment and improvements to teaching and learning?" It is not surprising some accrediting staffs like assessors and top-level administrators are also unclear: "What evidence will satisfy various stakeholders?" These are difficult questions with no easy answers.

The top management and the department heads, heads of college and universities need to be involved and all the support be extended like availing necessary inputs like manpower, training etc. It has been observed that some colleges and universities faced shortages of even basic amenities like uninterrupted power supply, computer printers, stationary, pages, drinking water, toilets etc. Without basic and essential inputs, quality cannot be achieved in higher education.

### **Conclusion**

It is really a sorry state of affairs that not a single state university or a college scored A++ or A+ grade in NAAC assessment. To make the accreditation successful, the top management, principals, and vice chancellors and head of the department need to be taken on board and oriented with the needs and benefits of the accreditation. Without the involvement of the top management, the accreditation shall not taste success. Faculties are at the core of the accreditation process. Process-related gaps may be addressed without additional input and lead to better utilization of resources and also lead to innovative thinking. However, structural gaps like manpower including academic and non-academic, buildings, labs etc shall require support from the top management. There is also a need to improve the quality of education at the primary, secondary and senior secondary level. The government has to show generosity and open the purse string to avail at least basic inputs, ensuring adequate provision to derive excellence in higher education.

Changes in the recruitment policy, scrapping of the Academic Performance Indicators (API), initiating measures to curb plagiarism in academic research and proposed Higher Education Commission of India, have all been announced in quick succession. Keeping an eye on the Indian higher education scenario especially in Uttar Pradesh, it can be said that mere



cosmetic changes would serve only to conceal the underlying problems and amounts to chasing the wild goose. Many of the changes do not square with the requirements for improving the quality of education. Adequate training has to be imparted to the stakeholders especially to the academicians and non-academic staff and management must be involved from the scratch. Accreditation fee should be waived off or reduced to nominal.

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