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Stella Steps Into Research

By Shilpa Kappur Vasudevan



Students at the centre Research in arts and science colleges has been woefully low or sometimes nil. Taking a positive step towards setting this right is Stella Maris International Centre for Multidisciplinary Research, Chennai. “To build Indo-cultural relations, research is your best answer,” begins Renuka Rajaratnam, dean, research, Stella Maris College. “Colleges have begun to realise that research development should be part of its learning. Through this setup, we hope to collaborate with similar-minded institutions/people while pursuing research on an international level at the same time finding meaning in the local context,” says Rajaratnam.

Inaugurated on December 5, the centre at the moment is focused on career counselling for its students and faculty development. Right from undergraduate students to MPhil and PhDs, anyone can work with the centre, while for the PG students, the centre has been integrated into the curriculum in the form of credits to be earned.

While researchers would get their degrees from University of Madras, in the future there are also plans to facilitate twinning programmes with institutions in the USA and UK. One aspect of research that still continues to worry Rajaratnam is the technical part of it. “We will have to get into documentations and get access to research softwares that are linked to other universities. As arts and science colleges, we tend to ignore the importance of innovation. Research provides great opportunities for innovation and technology, and it is high time we tapped into it,” says Rajaratnam.

Not far behind, is principal, Sister Jasintha Quadras with her excitement being quite palpable. “In today’s transnational world, internationalisation of research and innovation has become the key academic goal in higher education. It is therefore the mandate and vision of our college to initiate an international centre for multidisciplinary research to foster the spirit of enquiry across disciplines. While ensuring that local interests meet with the global, we are open to research collaborations, partnerships and networks with national and international research institutions to strengthen our research capacity.”

Aware of the challenges ahead of her, Rajaratnam says, “Students are very much enthusiastic about the centre, but improving quality of faculty will be a testing time. To what extent will faculty members be tolerant when it comes to embracing change? How best to decide on their assessment parameters? With their teaching commitments, will they be able to set aside time to work on quality publications? These are the areas we will be working on.”

Future plans include exchange trips, working with international and domestic institutes, getting published in reputed journals and much more. Rajaratnam also excitedly informs us that a staff contingent will be on its way to Germany’s Heidelberg University soon to upgrade their skills. Still looking for funds, the centre is also aiming at new early staff recruitment and “providing researchers with good incentives based on their research progress to keep them constantly motivated,” says Rajaratnam. Details at www.stellamariscollege.org.

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