

Wide and varied choices

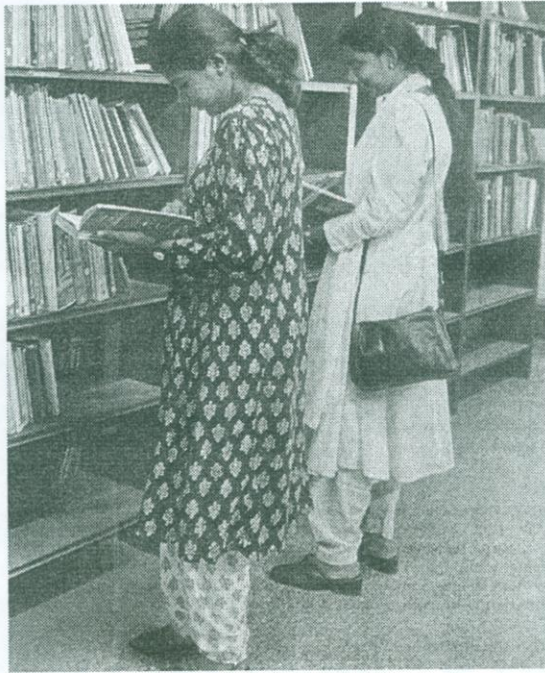
Core courses apart, a student can choose from a variety of electives. Ramya Kannan analyses the merits of the credit-based system that some colleges have adopted.

"The question of education in India, like the summer heat, is a prickly one," the cover story of the August 15 issue of a magazine said way back in 1977.

It seems that a remedy can be found for the irritating prickly heat and it comes in the form of a "student-friendly" credit-based system. Very few colleges in the city, apart from the engineering colleges affiliated to other universities, have explored the possibilities of this system as a viable alternative structure for a study programme.

The credit system aims at enabling a student to make optimum use of college education. Credits are offered for different courses and there is a minimum number of credits that a student must complete before he can be awarded a degree. Simply put, the system comprises basically two branches — core courses which are compulsory and electives which a student can choose. The primary advantage of this mode is that, ideally, it is not time-bound. A student can finish a three-year degree course in less time, if he makes the right choices and tots up the requisite number of credits.

The system also ensures that the students are not trapped within the confines of a rigid pattern of study. For example, a student of mathematics who is interested in photography can choose it as an elective. Dr. P. K. Ponnusamy, Vice-Chancellor of Madras University, believes that this "Cafeteria System" will pervade the city's education scenario in four or five years if bolstered with adequate public response. "It is more beneficial as the purpose is to fill one's



LOOKING FOR MORE CREDITS: The brave new world for colleges lies in the realm of credit-based courses, but few have ventured here. Students have the choice of diverse subjects in this flexible arrangement. — Picture by M. Moorthy

credit system in 1978. Today, about 20 years later, the staff and the students (both UG and PG) find themselves at ease with the system, though they believe that improvements can always be made. Prof. Jacob Kurien, Vice-Principal, says the minimum requirement is a total of 90 credits — 87 in academic subjects

"marketing" as an elective, because he has trained his sights on a career in management. His friends, Sushil Kumar and Swaminathan, have gone in for German and French and are content to "do something you want to do and be graded for it."

Stella Maris College, which has introduced the credit system this academic year, follows a similar pattern. The students are given counselling prior to choosing the credits and new deans have been appointed to guide them. Sr. Annamma Philip, Principal, says, "Several committees went into all the aspects of the system for three years and made sure that additional demands on our infrastructure could be met." The evaluation system has also been revamped, according to Ms. Gita, Controller of Examinations.

Grading is based on a Credit Weighted

Average that is calculated by taking into account the marks obtained, the allotted credit and the total number of credits. Only the first year students have been initiated into this system and feel excited at the "prospect of actually choosing what we want".

The second year Statistics students of the Madras University, Ms. Sujata and Ms. Banumathi say they are slowly getting acclimatised to the more democratic environment, but feel that more benefits can be reaped only when it is delinked from the time factor. The Madras University offers the credit pattern for 28 post-graduate disciplines. Dr. A. Ramesh, Dean of the PG programmes, says the faculty has managed to work within the University set-up, because adequate freedom has been given to the teaching staff to update the syllabi and introduce new electives. The credibility of a teacher will be proved by the attendance in his classes and the instructors will have to make an impact through sheer quality of work.



Campus Jottings

stomach, with what one wants to eat. Through this system, a student wishing to step out of the confines of the core courses has an opportunity now to do so. "Evaluation is done internally. The students can opt for courses they feel are less burdensome. They need not have to 'bite off more than they can chew'.

In Chennai, Loyola College ushered in the

(including three compulsory credits for value education) and three in extra-curricular activities such as the NSS, NCC and sports. However, the process of acquiring credits is time-bound, following the University pattern of a three-year graduation and two-year post-graduation period. Namasivayam, a sophomore at the Loyola College doing Physics is glad that he can choose