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EDITORIAL

ONLINE COURSES IN LINE WITH REGULAR PROGRAMMES

BY INDIA INSTITUTIONS

The University Grants Commission (UGC) has recently approved UGC (Online Courses) Regulations, 2018, as part of the reform programme in higher education. Higher educational institutions can now offer Certificate, Diploma and Degree Programmes, in full-fledged online mode, only in those disciplines in which it has already been offering the same or similar programmes / courses at graduation level in a regular mode (of classroom teaching) or in open and distance learning mode and from which at least one batch has graduated and approved by the statutory councils, as applicable. UGC, in a recent notification, clarified that the Degrees or Diplomas or Certificates, awarded for programmes conducted by the ODL institutions recognised by the Commission, should be treated as corresponding degrees of regular institutions.

According to the UGC (Online Courses) Regulations, 2018, online programmes, requiring practical/ laboratory courses as a curricular requirement, shall not be permitted. Examinations shall be conducted in proctored mode and in conformity with any norms for such examinations, stipulated by the Commission. The regulation also suggests that the online learning shall have minimum four quadrants: video lectures, e- content, self-assessment and discussion forum to clarify doubts.

Higher educational institutions will be eligible to offer Online Programmes if they have been in existence for at least five years and accredited by the National Assessment and Accreditation Council (NAAC), with a valid minimum score of 3.26 on a 4-point scale; and should be in the top-100 in overall category in the National Institutional Ranking Framework (NIRF), for at least two years in the previous three years. However, NAAC and NIRF conditions shall not be applicable to existing government Open Universities till NAAC or similar accreditation system or NIRF are made available.

These regulations will be made applicable from the academic session 2018-19. The Government claimed that the initiative is a big step towards attaining the targeted GER of 30% by the year 2020.

The current challenges facing traditional colleges and universities, including higher tuition, budget cuts and course shortages, have caused many students to search for alternatives. With nearly three million students currently enrolled in fully online degree programs and six million taking at least one online course as part of their degree program, online education has clearly become one of the most popular higher education alternatives. The continually improving reputation of online learning has also helped fuel its expansion, as initial skepticism has faltered in the face of evidence that shows that online learning can be just as effective as face-to-face education.

The Twenty Eighth Issue (Vol.14 No.2) of the SMART Journal of Business Management Studies, consists of ten articles, written by authors of repute, on different themes of contemporary relevance. I hope readers would find the Journal academically challenging and strategically stimulating.

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