



## PART 2

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### CASE STUDIES

While providing an overview of the literature and an analysis of policy, the Commonwealth of Learning Roundtable report (1991) left the task of exploring the future shape of student support systems in distance education to another forum. A group was assembled for this purpose in Delhi in the summer of 1992. It comprised student support administrators from various distance education universities in the south Asian region. Each presented an account of his or her institution's support service and this information was then included in a general discussion of the problems, institutional responses, and future direction of support services in the region.

At the Delhi Symposium, participants were interested in assessing the support service data contained in each case. Although the case studies vary in their organisation, for the most part they do adopt a pattern. Each case study includes an institutional sketch, a description of the existing support service, the problems the service faces, and some of the measures used to cope with the problems. A final section presents a view to the future, which outlines the policies and actions that that support service contemplates. These future prospects occur in the context of each participating university's strategic plan, which is not elaborated in the case studies; however, some of the universities have been described in other papers or reports and these may be consulted for more complete accounts of their institutional structures and policies (see, for example, Shah 1988; Wilson 1990; Singh 1992).

The Delhi Symposium participants had two purposes. The first was to elaborate the problems facing support service development given the changing face of distance education. The second was to recommend ways in which the problems might be further refined and appropriate solutions sought. In their analyses of the case studies, participants referred to relevant regional policies as well as to the general literature on student support services. Nevertheless discussions at the Delhi Symposium were definitely grounded in the reality of everyday practice. On this basis, the assumption was made that maximum impact on important issues of access, academic quality, and efficiency would follow from analyses of issues directly related to the process of instruction. The case studies illustrate the centrality of the problem of instructional process yet at the same time deal with other matters of concern in the development and effective operation of student support services. The case studies follow, together with an overview of the analysis that Delhi Symposium participants' applied to the cases. That overview provides a summary of their deliberations and recommendations for further action.

# INDIRA GANDHI NATIONAL OPEN UNIVERSITY

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*P.K. Mehta*

## UNIVERSITY PROFILE

### Objectives

Indira Gandhi National Open University (IGNOU) was established in 1985 to democratise higher education by taking it to the doorsteps of people in even the most remote parts of India. Its mandate is:

- to diversify and strengthen higher education courses so that they are relevant to the national economy and employment opportunities, based on India's natural and human resources;
- to provide access to higher education to large segments of population, particularly people living in remote, rural areas, as well as working people, housewives, and other adults who wish to upgrade or acquire knowledge and skills;
- to promote the acquisition of knowledge in a rapidly developing and changing society and to continually offer opportunities for upgrading knowledge and skills in the context of research and development in all fields of human endeavour;
- to provide an innovative system of education at the university level that is flexible and open in its methods and pace of learning, combination of courses, eligibility for enrolment, and age of entry, with a view to promoting learning and encouraging excellence in new fields of knowledge;
- to contribute to the improvement of India's education system by providing an alternative to the formal system of education;
- to provide training in various arts, crafts, and skills, improve their quality, and increase their availability to the people at large;
- to provide adequate training for the teachers that such activities or institutions employ;
- to provide suitable postgraduate courses and to promote research;
- to provide counselling and guidance to the student community; and
- to promote national integration and the comprehensive development of the human personality through its policies and programmes. With a view to encouraging and strengthening distance education in India, IGNOU is charged with the responsibility of coordinating and maintaining educational standards in distance education.

### Organisation of the University

Government of the university is as follows. The president of India is the official visitor of the university. The board of management, academic council, planning board, and finance committee are important university authorities. The vice-chancellor, pro vice-chancellors, directors, registrars, and finance officer are the main officers of the university.

The university carries out its tasks through fifteen divisions and eight schools of study. IGNOU has so far launched five degree programmes, eleven diploma programmes, and three certificate programmes. While all programmes are available in the English, six programmes are also available in the Hindi language. One programme has been made available in ten other Indian regional languages. A further ten programmes are at various stages of preparation. Starting with a modest enrolment of over 4,300 in 1987, IGNOU had over 159,999 students on its roll in 1992. During the 1991–92 academic year, 14.4% of new enrolments were women, 68.1% were 30 years of age or less, and 22% lived in rural areas.

## **STUDENT SUPPORT SERVICES**

### **Objectives**

Student support services at IGNOU strive for the following objectives:

- to help students gainfully handle the learning package provided by IGNOU and thereby increase student success; and
- to reduce the isolation of learners by providing academic, administrative, and information support through regular contact.

### **Organisational Structure**

With a view to effectively meeting learner needs, IGNOU has adopted a decentralised three-tier structure to operate its student support services. The overall responsibility for student support services rests with the regional services division at IGNOU headquarters. They operate 16 regional centres and 201 study centres. In addition, some programme-specific or area-specific subcentres have been opened under the regular study centres in different parts of the country.

Policy planning, course production, material distribution, and data maintenance are the main functions at IGNOU headquarters. They provide necessary administrative and academic support to regional centres and study centres.

The regional centres are responsible for the expansion, supervision, and coordination of student support services within the given region and for training part-time staff at the study centres. The regional centres carry out all admissions work. They are staffed by full-time academics and administrators, and equipped with reprographic facilities, telephones, telex, and fax. Although currently sixteen regional centres are established, the prospective plan is to have at least one regional centre per state.

Study centres are located in rent-free accommodation provided by institutions of higher learning and are staffed part time. Major services provided at the study centres include information and guidance, counselling and tutoring, audiovisual presentations, library services, assignment handling and evaluation, and the conduct of term examinations. All study centres are equipped with standard furniture, audiovisual equipment, a library with course material, reference books, and videotape cassettes. To improve communication, telex machines were installed in 1990–91 at 50 study centres that are either located in remote areas or have a large enrolment. The university proposes to equip all study centres with telex and photocopy machines, in a phased manner.

Of IGNOU's 201 study centres, 9 are recognised study centres, for which sponsoring institutions or organisations bear the expense, with IGNOU exercising total academic control. With a view to further expanding the network of support services, IGNOU has evolved the concept of subcentres, which are to be established within the area covered by a study centre. In some regions, subcentres are responsible for counselling, assignment handling, and term examinations.

It has been decided to decentralise to regional centres, in phases, all functions except policy planning and the development of learning materials. Admissions and the training of part-time study centre staff have already been decentralised to regional centres. The evaluation of assignments has been fully decentralised to study centres.

### **Facilities and Functions**

A student affairs cell has been set up in the regional services division at IGNOU headquarters. To further strengthen student affairs, a student support core group has been formed with one representative from each school.

### **Personnel**

The personnel engaged in the student support system work full time at headquarters and the regional centres and part time at the study centres. The regional services division is headed by a director and assisted by joint directors, deputy directors, and assistant directors. Regional centres are headed by regional directors, who are assisted by academic and administrative staff. Study centres are headed by part-time coordinators, who are supported by part-time assistant coordinators and academic counsellors.

In view of the relative newness of the open university system, IGNOU has ongoing staff development programmes for all study centre personnel. These programmes are held at headquarters, regional centres, and even at study centres. They are organised for regional centre staff, coordinators, assistant coordinators, academic counsellors, and secretarial staff of the study centres in three stages:

- (1) initial briefing;
- (2) intensive orientation training; and
- (3) continuing training.

The staff of the student support system play an important role in not only programme delivery but also in providing useful feedback to headquarters about ongoing programmes.

### **Library Services**

With a view to providing students and academic counsellors access to standard reference books, small libraries have been set up at all study centres and regional centres. The books for these libraries are mainly ordered by the central library at headquarters on the basis of recommendations of each school. This ensures that the same books are available at all regional centres and study centres in the country. In addition, regional directors and coordinators can buy books locally. National and international journals on distance education are also subscribed by the central library for all regional centre libraries. The

intention is to develop regional centre libraries as resource centres for distance education in each region. However, books in these libraries are for reference only. A lending facility does not exist, except in the central library at headquarters.

### **Interaction**

Avenues for interaction have been created in the student support services network at different levels to provide effective support to learners. At headquarters there are three facilities:

- In the regional services division, the student affairs cell deals with all problems and queries received from students in different parts of the country.
- A newsletter is regularly published and sent to all students to provide information on vital matters.
- The Open Channel in the IGNOU telecast has been introduced on the national television network, Doordarshan.

At the regional centres similar efforts are made to improve interaction:

- Regional enquiry services have been mooted to systematically deal with student queries.
- Student records are maintained at regional centres.
- Intensive contact programmes are organised by regional centres at places where regular counselling facilities may not be available or where an existing study centre is not activated for a particular programme because academic counsellors are not available.

As one would expect from its closer contact with students, the activities of the study centres are more varied:

- Programme induction meetings are held at all study centres as programmes begin.
- Counselling sessions are regularly organised at study centres for all programmes. During these, students can interact with counsellors, who provide them with discipline-specific as well as general guidance. Counselling sessions mainly concentrate on the tutoring aspect, however.
- The study centre coordinator and assistant coordinators are available to students for advice and general guidance.
- Peer groups are also encouraged and provided with necessary administrative support. Some peer groups have been established at several study centres across the country.
- Tutors comment on the assignments submitted.

In addition, periodic meetings and conferences among regional directors are organised at headquarters or the regional centres to facilitate interaction among the various levels of the student support services organisation and so to improve the system.

## **Technological Applications**

IGNOU has adopted a multimedia system to deliver courses. Effort has been made to gainfully use the technology available, as follows:

- The computer is used to maintain records, evaluate assignments, despatch material, and so on.
- Audiovisual equipment and videotape cassettes are provided to all study centres and regional centres.
- IGNOU programmes are telecast on the national television network, Doordarshan, three days a week. In 1992–93, some 325 video programmes were produced.
- IGNOU radio programmes are broadcast from two All-India Radio stations. In 1991–92, 425 audio programmes were produced.
- Telex and fax are available at all the regional centres, and telex has been installed at some study centres for better communication.
- Photocopiers are available at all regional centres and also at some study centres to provide copies of assignments.

## **STUDENT CHARACTERISTICS**

IGNOU students may possess one or more of the following characteristics:

- They are highly motivated and mature.
- They are thoroughly committed.
- They have been conditioned by the traditional ways of learning and so depend on study counsellors too much.
- They lack the study skills required to handle the instructional materials and learning package.
- They are largely invisible.
- They feel isolated.
- They lack confidence.
- They have previous educational experience.
- They come from a wide variety of both educational and occupational backgrounds.

## **ISSUES AND PROBLEMS ASSOCIATED WITH THE EFFECTIVE OPERATION OF THE SUPPORT SYSTEM**

Although the open university system is relatively new in India, correspondence courses have been offered at dual-mode institutions for quite some time. Still, social, economic, geographical, and linguistic constraints create problems for support services.

### **Problems Using the Services Provided**

Many learners are not able to use the open university support services for the following reasons:

- They live a long way from the study centre and adequate transportation is not available.
- They face disabling economic conditions.
- The movement of women is socially restricted in some communities.
- They depend mainly on postal services for the exchange of information.
- The libraries at study centres remain largely unused because students cannot borrow books.

### **Attrition Problems**

Students, once enrolled, tend to drop out for one or more of the following reasons:

- They are unable to cope with the learning package because they lack proper study skills or are not oriented to open learning.
- They are unable to devote sufficient time to study because of social, domestic, or professional preoccupations.
- Their sense of isolation is exacerbated by delay in receiving course material and other communications from the university.
- Proper support may not be available at the local centre.
- The course content of IGNOU programmes may be too difficult compared with courses offered at traditional universities.
- They are not proficient in the language in which the course material is available.

### **Problems with Technology**

IGNOU has tried to use all the technology available for programme delivery, as well as provide learners with effective support. However, the following issues need to be resolved before the available technology is fully used in student support services. For example, IGNOU has produced audio and videotape cassettes for all its programmes, but these are not well used by many learners because:

- All students cannot visit the study centre and so they miss the cassettes available there.

- The time slot available for the IGNOU telecast on the national television network is inadequate (only 90 minutes a week) in relation to the large number of video programmes IGNOU produces. The facility for broadcasting audio programmes over All-India Radio is not currently available, except in the areas covered by Bombay and Hyderabad All-India Radio stations.
- Another technological problem relates to IGNOU's Central Computer Division, where all student records are maintained. Computers have been installed at every regional centre as well. However, without a computer network, timely information cannot be provided to students especially in cases when there have been changes of address, study, electives, or language, or when there are queries about mistakes in grade cards and examination results.

## **FUTURE DEVELOPMENTS**

IGNOU plans a number of changes in the ongoing development of open learning in India.

- The network of study centres may be further decentralised by opening more subcentres under each study centre.
- The existing infrastructure at the study centres may be further augmented with photocopy and communication facilities such as telephone and telex.
- Mobile study centres may be established for the benefit of learners living in remote areas.
- The frequency and duration of IGNOU telecasts on the national television network may be increased.
- Special facilities to support learners who have handicaps will be devised and implemented.
- Audio-teleconferencing facilities may be created in places like Lakhsdweep, Andaman-Nicobar Islands, and some parts of the North East, Jammu and Kashmir, Himachal Pradesh, and the hill region of northwestern Uttar Pradesh.
- More functions will be decentralised to the regional centre.
- The way study centres are staffed will be reviewed in the light of experience.
- Performance evaluation of part-time staff at study centres will be introduced and less committed employees will be eased out of the system.
- Monitoring and staff development activities at regional centre and at headquarters will be further intensified.
- Frequent interaction among student support services staff in IGNOU and other state open universities may be made regular features under the newly constituted Distance Education Council.



## **DR. B.R. AMBEDKAR OPEN UNIVERSITY**

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*V. Venkaiah*

### **INSTITUTIONAL PROFILE**

The Andhra Pradesh Open University, renamed Dr. B.R. Ambedkar Open University (AOU), was established in 1982. Representing a unique system of open learning, the university helps realise the democratisation of higher education and the ideal of continuing education. Without any restrictions on age, sex, occupation, or residence, the AOU extends educational opportunity to people in all walks of life. It undoubtedly testifies to the vision and concern of the Andhra Pradesh government for raising the educational level of the people and improving their quality of life.

#### **Objectives of the Andhra Pradesh Open University**

The objectives of the AOU as laid down in an Act of the Andhra Pradesh State Legislature are:

- to provide educational opportunities to students who are unable to take advantage of traditional institutions of higher learning;
- to realise equal opportunity for higher education for a large segment of the population, including the employed, women, especially housewives, and adults who wish to upgrade their education or acquire knowledge through distance education;
- to be flexible about eligibility for enrolment, age of entry, admission procedure, choice of courses, method of learning, and the conduct of examinations;
- to complement the programmes offered by existing universities, while maintaining the highest academic standards;
- to promote social integration within the state through appropriate policies and programmes;
- to offer degree as well as non-degree certificate courses for the benefit of the working population and for the benefit of those who wish to enrich their lives by studying subjects of cultural and aesthetic value; and
- to provide for research and for the advancement and dissemination of knowledge.

#### **Student Enrolment**

The Andhra Pradesh Open University admitted its first students in 1983–84 in its undergraduate programmes. By the 1990–91 academic year, new undergraduate admissions totalled 27,446. The university admits undergraduate candidates through both the formal and non-formal streams. Candidates admitted through the formal stream (71% in 1990–91) are those who qualify at the +2 level programme that is conducted by state or central boards of secondary education or who qualify in other equivalent courses that are

recognised by the university. However, in the non-formal stream (29% in 1990-91), candidates must pass the eligibility test that AOU conducts once a year.

More than 91% of the students admitted in 1990-91 are under 30 years of age. Most study in the Faculty of Arts (84%), with 7% in Commerce and 9% in Science. The number of students enrolled in the vocational programme in 1990-91 totalled 2,091. Most students (82%) study in the local Telugu language, but 18% study in English.

### **Organisational Structure**

Like traditional universities, AOU is an autonomous institution of higher education. The governor of the state of Andhra Pradesh is the chancellor of the university. The executive council is the governing body of the university and formulates policies, establishes rules and regulations, and supervises and conducts all university activities for its overall administration. The vice-chancellor is the chief executive officer of the university and chairs the executive council and other policy-making bodies. He or she is guided by the planning board and academic council. Currently, the university's administration functions with four directorates: academic, student services, material production, and evaluation. The registrar and finance officer, as statutory authorities, provide necessary support and extend help in the administration of the university. The academic director is assisted by the deans of each faculty, who are in turn assisted by the heads of the departments and faculty members.

AOU offers two types of study programme. One is the basic degree programme that leads to a degree in Bachelor of Arts (B.A.), Bachelor of Commerce (B. Com.), or Bachelor of Science (B.Sc.). The other study programme includes vocational programmes that lead to either a degree, diploma, or certificate. The bachelor's degree programmes in library science (B.L.S.) and public relations (B.P.R.), a postgraduate diploma in public accounting (PGDPA), and a certificate programme in food and nutrition (CPFN) are offered in this category. Jointly with an autonomous research institute, the university is offering research programmes leading to M. Phil. and Ph.D. degrees in commerce, management, and social sciences. Plans are underway to launch a post-graduate degree programme in management (M.B.A.), mathematics (M.Sc.), political science (M.A.), and public administration (M.A.) during the 1992-93 academic year.

The full administrative structure of the university comprises a number of discrete departments. These include the following branches: academic, material production, evaluation, and examination. One of the newer branches that is central to course delivery and student support is the Audiovisual Production and Research Centre (AVPRC). Although the AVPRC started functioning in 1985, the university has been broadcasting its lessons over All-India Radio for three hours a week in English, Telugu, Urdu, and Hindi since 1983. Broadcasts are currently on medium wave with short wave support to reach out to students throughout Andhra Pradesh. In addition to radio broadcasts, some lessons are supported by audio cassettes, which are prepared and sent to the study centres. Videotape lessons in various subjects are also produced.

## **STUDENT SUPPORT SERVICES AT THE ANDHRA PRADESH OPEN UNIVERSITY**

The student services branch recruits students, organises face-to-face contact sessions, and extends other forms of academic support to its students. They also arrange laboratory science practicals at the study centres for second- and third-year students and intensive coaching programmes known as “Summer/Winter School”. These include lectures by experts in the subject and form part of the student support services this branch provides. The student services branch thus serves as an information bureau; as an office for the admission of students to various courses of study; and as a channel of communication between the university and its students.

The key components of the student services system at AOU include:

- printed course materials supplied by the university;
- face-to-face contact sessions at study centres;
- video and audio tape lessons made available at study centres;
- radio broadcasts on Radio Daily at a fixed time in six half-hour slots four days a week;
- summer school for first-year undergraduate and vocational students;
- laboratory practicals at zonal study centres for science subjects;
- reference library facilities; and
- lectures and seminars on topics of social relevance and current importance.

### **Study Centres and the Counselling System**

The university has a network of 85 study centres spread across Andhra Pradesh. Of these 85 study centres, 22 are located in urban areas, 31 in semi-urban areas, and 32 in rural areas. Face-to-face counselling is provided at these study centres, as well as at university headquarters. Counselling deals with academic pursuits, career planning, choice of optional subjects, course units, assignments, examinations, audio and video lessons, and so on. The university reviews the counselling system from time to time and changes the methodologies of the system whenever necessary, based on feedback from students.

### **Counsellors**

The university organises regular face-to-face contact sessions at the study centres with the help of counsellors, who the university appoints on a part-time basis. The university used the services of 2,894 counsellors for different courses during the 1991–92 academic year. Of these counsellors, 2,778 teach in the undergraduate B.A., B. Com., and B.Sc. programmes, while the others are employed in various diploma programmes.

### **Face-to-Face Contact**

The face-to-face contact sessions relate to course units, summer schools, and laboratory practicals for science courses. Face-to-face contact sessions are held on 21 Sundays in an academic year, that is, for 42 hours per course for the first-year undergraduate programme. For the second- and third-year undergraduate programmes, the contact sessions are held for 24 hours per course. The students of second- and third-year B.Sc.

programmes are provided with 96 hours of laboratory practicals for each course, of which 72 hours are allotted for hands-on experiments and the rest for demonstration and videotaped experiments. A total number of 576 hours are allocated for laboratory experiments for six courses. The second- and third-year B.Sc. students are required to pay an additional fee of 450 rupees towards the lab fee for practicals for six courses.

In addition to the regular contact sessions, the first-year students are provided with summer school for four days, that is, eight hours of intensive teaching per course. During summer school, special lectures are delivered by experts in different subject areas. These summer schools are organised at the study centres. No additional fee is charged for them.

The schedule of contact sessions and the summer school programme are communicated to students by individual letters sent from the student services branch at headquarters. As well, the study centre coordinators give wide publicity about the programmes through local newspapers. Attendance is not compulsory for the face-to-face contact sessions and summer school. But, attendance is compulsory for science practicals. The science students are not allowed to sit the examinations if they do not have a minimum of 75% attendance in the practical sessions. The university does not provide board and lodging to the students who attend either face-to-face contact sessions or summer school.

## **CERTIFICATE AND POSTGRADUATE PROGRAMMES**

Face-to-face contact sessions are available for B.L.S., B.P.R., and the diploma course in public accounting. Attendance is not compulsory for face-to-face contact sessions and summer schools in programmes for the postgraduate diplomas in public accounting and public relations. On the other hand, in the B.L.S. programme, attendance at summer school and the submission of assignments are compulsory. Public relations students are required to submit a project report as partial fulfilment of their degree. Again the university does not provide board and lodging for students to attend face-to-face contact sessions and summer school. No railway concession is available to certificate and postgraduate students.

## **PROBLEMS AND REMEDIAL MEASURES**

Because face-to-face contact is the most important component of the student services system at open universities, a study was undertaken to assess how well undergraduate students (B.A., B. Com., and B.Sc.) use the sessions. The problems faced in organising contact sessions were also examined. Remedial measures are suggested here to make the operation of support services more efficient and effective.

The data relating to the use of face-to-face contact during the 1990–91 academic year have been analysed in this study. The data were collected from the coordinators of 45 study centres of the AOU through a questionnaire. The data constitute information relating to face-to-face contact sessions, laboratory science practicals, and general counselling at the study centres. The study investigated the number of counselling sessions that actually took place at the study centres. Analysis revealed that more than 20% of the study centres did not organise all the counselling sessions scheduled during 1990–91. Reasons for this shortfall included that laboratory space was not available at the host institution or that the heads of the institutions where the study centres are housed

were not cooperative. The rate of attendance of undergraduate students at the face-to-face contact sessions during the 1990–91 academic year was quite variable, ranging from 31% to 50% at all study centres. Among the different teaching methods the counsellors used, lectures predominated (30 of the 45 study centres (67%) offered lectures). The next important teaching method is lecture combined with discussion, which was used at 18 study centres (40%). At 10 study centres, demonstration lectures were used. No study centre offered supervised study. As for the use of instructional materials, it is found that charts, audio lessons, and video lessons are predominantly used in more than 50% of the study centres. Five study centres (11%) used only models and apparatus for demonstration in teaching the course units.

The survey revealed that 31% to 50% of first-year students attend summer school at 21 study centres (47%). At 12 study centres, the attendance is 51% to 70%. The attendance is the lowest, ranging from 11% to 30%, at 10 study centres.

The study helped to identify some problems related to organising and managing face-to-face contact sessions at the study centres. These problems can be divided into two categories. The first relates to the inadequacies of counsellors and counselling methods, and the second relates to the problems coordinators face when organising the contact sessions. In a broader sense, these problems can be of both an academic and administrative nature. These problems and certain of the remedial measures to overcome the difficulties in organising the contact sessions are discussed below.

### **Academic Problems**

The purpose of the contact sessions is to ensure a good deal of interaction and discussion between students and counsellors. In most cases, however, these sessions are reduced to mere lectures, which defeat their very purpose. This is due to two reasons:

- lack of trust in the self-study materials as a medium of learning; and
- lack of pre-study of course units by the students.

Although it is very difficult to break away from the current, popular lecture method of teaching, it is important to note that converting contact sessions into lecture sessions defeats the philosophy of distance education. Therefore, it is necessary to change from lecture-oriented sessions to contact sessions in their true sense. This is possible only when counsellors make use of an integrated lecture-counselling method and slowly prepare the students to adapt to open learning through counselling. One method is for the counsellor to start with a lecture in the first session. As it continues, the lecture becomes interactive, interspersing discussion with general information. At the same time, the counsellor clearly explains that this type of teaching will not be continued in future sessions. The counsellor can also discuss the demands of distance education. This approach makes students familiar with the subject as well as with open learning methods and helps them learn through an interactive exchange. By the second session, the initiative must be slowly passed on to the students, making the session more interaction and less lecture. But the need for talking about open learning and reinforcing the features of distance education should be emphasised. Gradually, what students expect from the counsellor will begin to shift. They will thus no longer expect a straight lecture from the counsellor, but a more interactive session. By the third and fourth sessions, the counsellor can really make the sessions discussion- and interaction-oriented.

Another important problem related to counselling is that a large majority of the counsellors have not been provided with the necessary training in ways to counsel

students in distance education. They have been put on the job and left to learn from experience. Unless a counsellor develops a sincere commitment to counselling in distance education, he or she cannot contribute much to the development of the distance education system. Occasional seminars, workshops, and training programmes on distance teaching methods would help counsellors acquire the skills required for teaching and learning in distance education.

## **ADMINISTRATIVE PROBLEMS**

The coordinators of the study centres have observed that they face many problems in organising face-to-face contact sessions and laboratory science practicals. Distance education operates under a “dependency model” and hence it requires a strong rapport with the principals and management of the host institutions for the successful conduct of the sessions. The main problem in conducting contact sessions is that space is often not available. Although the principals of host institutions are ex-officio principals of the study centres, they may not show a genuine interest in the study centre. They may be committed to other agencies for the conduct of examinations and so on, and on some Sundays principals give preference to the other agencies and not to the open university sessions. When the coordinator contacts the principal for accommodation to hold the regular contact sessions, the principals may shift the responsibility to the district counsellors or the convenors of various examinations. It is desirable for the open university to hold meetings periodically with the principals and management of the host institutions to convince them of the need for holding regular face-to-face contact sessions. This would enable the coordinators to overcome frequent disturbance of the open university’s academic calendar for various outside examinations.

Another important problem that the coordinators express is that some of the counsellors do not attend the contact sessions according to schedule, thereby inconveniencing and embarrassing the study centre coordinators and disappointing students. An open university student is provided with a limited number of face-to-face contact sessions in an academic year. Therefore, it is necessary for a counsellor to attend the sessions regularly and ensure that the students make the best use of the classes provided. If the counsellor plans to be absent from any contact session he or she should inform the study centre coordinator in advance so that alternative arrangements can be made.

## **CONCLUSION**

The face-to-face components provided by the Dr. B.R. Ambedkar Open University for different academic programmes are quite satisfactory and comparable to those of any other open university in the world. The rate students use different types of face-to-face components is satisfactory. It is possible to make these contact sessions more accessible to distance learners and more effective and useful as a component in distance education if the host institutions and counsellors extend full support and cooperation to the university in its endeavour to extend higher education to all people. This will be possible only when change is bought to the attitudes of all university personnel — principals, teachers, coordinators, counsellors, and non-teaching staff.

## **KOTA OPEN UNIVERSITY**

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***K. Gautam***

### **INSTITUTIONAL PROFILE**

Kota Open University was established in 1987 as part of India's open university network. Its objectives are to enhance accessibility to education and support the government's literacy mission. Rajasthan is educationally underdeveloped in relation to the rest of India. Literacy in the state is very low, as is the level of education among women. Therefore, the main objective for Kota Open University is to provide educational services in all disadvantaged areas of the state as well as educational opportunities to people who are deprived of the benefits of higher education for a number of socioeconomic and geographical reasons. Further, Kota Open University serves those who are interested in upgrading their skills and qualifications in order to advance their careers.

Kota Open University contributes to the promotion and achievement of the government's objectives for adult education through its bachelor's degree professional programmes. Each student enrolled in these courses is required to provide literacy instruction to two adults in Rajasthan as a requirement of the course. The students obtain a certificate from the district adult education officer as proof that they have provided literacy training.

### **Organisational Structure**

Kota Open University is organised as follows. The governor of Rajasthan is the chancellor of the university. The board of management, academic council, planning board, and finance committee are important university bodies. The vice-chancellor, directors, registrar, and finance officer are the main officers of the university. They carry out their tasks through the following divisions:

- Admission and Evaluation;
- Materials Production and Distribution;
- Planning and Development;
- Science and Technology; and
- Academic.

So far Kota Open University has introduced eight academic and professional programmes — three of these are bachelor's degree professional programmes and five are diploma programmes. The bachelor's degree in education is open only to in-service teachers. Likewise, the bachelor's degrees in journalism and mass media are open only to practising media personnel. Four of the programmes are offered in Hindi, while the other four are offered in English. The university intends to launch three postgraduate, six diploma, and one new bachelor's degree programmes in the near future. The programmes already offered and those about to be launched indicate that Kota Open University is consciously emphasising vocational and technical programmes rather than conventional degree programmes. The state government is also keen for the university to concentrate on vocational and professional courses.

## **Enrolment**

The first enrolment year, 1988–89, saw 18,000 students register. Of these, 10,618 were in-service teachers registered in the Bachelor of Education programme. In subsequent years the enrolment in the Bachelor of Education course was cut to 5,000. The enrolment in other courses either decreased or remained at the same level. The decline in enrolment in other courses may be attributed to poor student support services at the university. Effective steps are now being taken to strengthen student support services. A proposal is currently under discussion which would decentralise the distribution of printed study materials to study centres and regional centres. There is also discussion of decentralising the admission practices, within the prescribed admissions framework of the university. This policy of decentralising admission procedures will cut unnecessary delays and slow and ineffective delivery procedures, thereby enhancing course enrolment.

## **STUDENT SUPPORT SERVICES AT KOTA OPEN UNIVERSITY**

Student support services at Kota Open University have three main components:

- counselling through face-to-face interaction at each study centre;
- audiovisual material to support and reinforce the counsellor's instructional guidance related to course content; and
- library facilities at the study centres and regional centres.

The development and administration of student support services are the responsibility of the directorate of regional services at headquarters. Implementation is looked after by directors at the regional centres and coordinators at the study centres. A network of six regional centres report to district headquarters. Currently 24 study centres operate, of which three are study centres dedicated to Bachelor of Education students only. A further study centre is planned for each district headquarters. Regional centres are mainly responsible for expansion, supervision, and coordination of student support services within the given region, as well as training part-time staff for the study centres. Regional centres also organise orientation programmes for academic counsellors.

Every Kota Open University regional centre is equipped with a resource library, video equipment, a photocopier, a duplicating machine, and computers. Study centres are managed by the part-time chief coordinator, coordinator librarian, and other support staff. They are equipped with a skeletal library and video equipment. The main functions of the study centres are to organise counselling and tutoring sessions, arrange for video presentations when available, handle assignment evaluation, and conduct end-of-term examinations.



## **PROBLEMS AND ISSUES**

The credibility of the distance education programmes in the open university system directly relates to the efficiency of its student support services. Distance learners, as compared to their counterparts in the traditional system, feel isolated from both their co-learners and the university. Some of the problems which can render student support services dysfunctional include the following:

- Long and tedious admission procedures.
- Incredibly slow delivery of printed study material. Further, the study materials lack clear instructions about the course package, what it should contain, and how to use it.
- Poorly organised and ambiguous tutoring schedules.
- Absence of an enquiry desk at each study centre and regional centre that is staffed by trained personnel who are highly interested in the learner.
- Absence of an academic calendar that gives firm dates for admission, course and programme starting dates, and submission dates for assignments and examinations.

Attrition remains a problem for a variety of reasons. Social, economic, geographic, and linguistic constraints create problems for the support services, because to a large extent they prevent students from using student support services at an optimum.

In addition to these problems, to date Kota Open University has not been able to make its own videotapes to supplement courses, although the Guide for Applicants mentions that printed course materials will be supported by audiovisual material. Unfortunately, the audiovisual material available remains underused because a very small percentage of learners visit the study centres for counselling.

A further problem is that many students expect too much of the faculty. Most students are caught in a “degree/diploma syndrome” and often lack the motivation to learn on their own. While we may be thrilled with the philosophy and prospects of the open learning system, we are not completely disengaged from assumptions about conventional institutions. We need to get beyond our belief in the so-called obvious advantages of face-to-face classroom instruction. Otherwise the effort to strengthen student support services will be ineffective.

## **SUGGESTIONS FOR AN INSTITUTIONAL RESPONSE**

- The student drop-out rate would certainly be minimised if support services provided sufficient orientation to the open learning system. Prompt support at the local centre would reduce frustration among learners and encourage them in their study.
- The regional director should spend 10 minutes each day meeting with support staff “over a cup of tea” in order to promote cordiality and solidarity among them. This should also inspire staff to respond to student queries effectively and humanly. Their responses at the enquiry desk or on the telephone should not be routine, but reflect interest in the students.

- Since the study centre is the immediate contact for students it should employ a permanent, well-trained counsellor to advise and guide them in every component of the courses and ways to learn through distance education. The counsellor should also act as a public relations representative of the university in the area. As well, he or she should stay fully informed about the latest developments in communication media and distance education. He or she should obtain regular feedback from students about the adequacy, efficiency, and responsiveness of various support services, and properly supervise the function and effectiveness of those services.
- Libraries at the study centres should be more functional. They should remain open on Sundays and public holidays. On weekdays, the library should be open for two hours before and after government office hours. These longer hours will ensure that the library is used.
- Every student would get their course packages in time if study centres arranged for their distribution.
- Personal contact programmes could be converted into socially and culturally meaningful get-togethers, as a valuable step towards minimising the isolation learners feel.
- During class, promotional materials can be distributed to give a comprehensive profile of the university and its activities. The university could also distribute articles to educate students in the basic philosophy of distance education and how to be a responsible and responsive distant learner. Further, summaries of the experiences of previous students in the same course should be made available to current students. These materials would give the learner a sense of belonging to a wider community of learners.
- The learner has immense potential as a resource in making the student support services responsive. Past and current students of a particular course can be brought together to interact. The addresses of previous students could be circulated to current students so that they can meet and benefit from their previous experience. This service costs nothing yet works as a viable component of student support services. Senior students in bachelor's and master's programmes can also be involved to enlarge opportunities for students. They can be encouraged to form local study cells which meet frequently to share their learning experiences and difficulties.
- Dependence on the newspapers for conveying specific course information to the student should be minimised because the newspapers reach some regions only after several days. In addition, a large number of students in Rajasthan do not read newspapers. Many cannot afford to buy them. Instead, local schools could be used as resource centres.

## **A VIEW TO THE FUTURE**

Working in distance education should be viewed as a professional commitment. A sense of purpose is needed in all employed in the open learning system. The organisational structure of student support itself cannot make it responsive. Its operation must have a human touch and personal involvement in order to ensure a high degree of responsiveness. Love for all and indifference to none is the most effective support service.

# **YASHWANTRAO CHAVAN MAHARASHTRA OPEN UNIVERSITY**

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***N.R. Bhadane***

## **INSTITUTIONAL PROFILE**

Yashwantrao Chavan Maharashtra Open University (YCMOU) was established in July 1989. Its headquarters are located in Nashik, a city 100 km north of Bombay. YCMOU is the fifth open university in India and the fourth at the state level. The university emphasises vocational, technical, and professional training, as well as general education programmes. Its goal is to be “mass varsity”, a university for all people, providing training and retraining as part of developing a new work culture. The university has set out to create a unique identity on the national education scene. The university’s special features include the following:

- As part of the university’s goal to become “mass varsity”, most of the programmes are offered in the regional language, Marathi. English is used at some levels for courses in science and technology.
- Vocational and technical courses are emphasised.
- The university is committed to becoming self-sufficient in operating costs within five years of being established.
- The university aims to use the latest technology and teaching techniques.
- The university develops networks that are instrumental to national social development.

## **Objectives**

The objectives of the university are:

- to make higher education and vocational and technical training available to a large segment of the population;
- to give special attention to the needs of disadvantaged groups, in particular, women and people in rural, underdeveloped, and remote areas;
- to strengthen and diversify the degree, diploma, and certificate courses at various educational levels and relate all university courses to the development needs of individuals, institutions, and the state;
- to provide innovative, flexible, and open systems of education by using distance learning methods and by applying modern communication technology;
- to provide continuing education to adults, with special attention to retraining adults in new skills that enable them to adjust to a changing technological environment;  
and

- to provide postgraduate studies and research opportunities in all fields of knowledge, especially in educational technology, distance education, and developmental communication.

### **The University Structure**

The structure of the university must be appropriate to the task of fulfilling its objectives. The structure should also allow efficient and cost-effective decision-making and quick implementation. At the same time, it should be accountable and open to change. The university's structure must evolve in the light of experience to provide whatever its educational programmes require.

### **Organisational Structure**

The university is governed by a board of management, an academic council, a planning board, and a finance committee. The YCMOU structure is bifocal, with the board of management as the principle executive body, and the academic council as the principle academic body. The planning board is the principle planning body and is responsible for monitoring the university's development. Currently, the planning board is carrying out academic council functions. Programme advisory committees are appointed to develop educational programmes and guide the schools in various disciplines. The schools comprise divisions, which are the basis of the administrative structure. YCMOU's three divisions include:

- academic division;
- academic services division; and
- student services division.

### **ACADEMIC DIVISION**

The academic division systematically judges the needs of students and society and prepares educational plans to fulfil those needs. It is the function of the academic division to develop printed instructional materials and to help in developing audio and video materials and the delivery of educational programmes. The academic division consists of the following schools:

- Humanities and Social Sciences;
- Commerce and Management;
- Education;
- Science and Technology;
- Computer Science;
- Agriculture; and
- Continuing Education.

## **ACADEMIC SERVICES DIVISION**

The academic services division provides services for improving the overall instructional quality of university materials. It consists of three centres:

- Centre for Instructional Technology;
- Research, Development, and Evaluation Centre; and
- Training Centre.

The functions of the academic services division are closely linked with the academic division, print production centre, and audiovisual centre. The academic services division improves the print and audiovisual learning materials through transformation to another medium, or simply by editing.

The academic services division also includes a computer centre, which provides computer-related services to all divisions and centres. From the beginning the university has aimed at thorough computerisation. It is especially necessary since an institution like YCMOU must create and maintain records for several thousand students over long periods of time. A design for the complete computerisation of all functions has been prepared in consultation with a commercial agency. Currently registration and examination work is computerised.

The central library, a further part of the academic services division, offers services to academics at the university and others associated with the university. The central library also assists students through study centres. At present its collection consists of 7,723 books and 93 journals. A special feature is the Yashwantrao Chavan Collection. The central library also maintains a collection of audiovisual programmes.

## **STUDENT SERVICES DIVISION**

Ensuring that books and other learning materials reach the student and that the student is given adequate individual help through planned contact sessions at the study centres is the responsibility of the student services division. It not only provides all services to students, but manages regional centres, study centres, subcentres, and work centres as well. In addition, the student services division registers students, allocates students to study centres, selects and supervises the study centres, appoints and trains counsellors, and evaluates students. Currently the Student Evaluation Resource Centre (SERC) within this division is developing procedures for a computer-based question bank for use in all forms of student evaluation. SERC is also developing a proposal to create an organisational structure for student counselling.

### **Programmes**

From the beginning, YCMOU's thrust has been to produce and deliver a variety of programmes in different disciplines reaching a diverse strata of society. The general degree programmes provide education to adults who have had to discontinue their education at the primary or secondary level. The general degree programmes also cater to working people who were not able to continue beyond the senior secondary level. In-service courses for teachers and field courses for farmers are also offered. Further, YCMOU concentrates on science and technology courses and vocational continuing education courses. YCMOU currently offers two degree programmes and four

certificate or diploma programmes. An additional 28 certificate and diploma programmes will be launched by September 1992. Since the university opened in 1989, 30,858 students have been admitted. The academic and vocational programmes that the university provides are intended to be taken by a wide section of the community with varying backgrounds. Although the university is unable to operate a true open entrance policy, it has devised a policy with sufficient flexibility to ensure that the majority of potential candidates are admitted. An academic programme is normally offered to potential students only after the instructional material — both print (books) and non-print (audiovisual) is ready, the study centre identified, counsellors appointed and trained, and the method of evaluation decided. The structure and function of the various centres are briefly outlined below.

### **Regional Centres**

YCMOU has very recently established regional centres at Bombay, Pune, Nashik, Aurangabad, Amravati, and Nagpur, the headquarters of the six revenue regions of the state. The regional centres are located in existing colleges and on university campuses. A total of 800 to 1000 square feet of space is exclusively allocated to the regional centre for office, stores, and records. Almost all sites are provided rent free. Meeting and seminar halls are made available by the host institution as and when required. The university has also provided the clerical assistance needed. Initially the university appointed two individuals — one from the host institution and another external appointment — to work as honorary part-time regional directors. Regional directors and the clerical staff have now been trained and oriented to the functions the regional centre provides. YCMOU has equipped these centres with the necessary office furniture, stores, and equipment. As the centres grow, they will be provided with computers and reprographic equipment, among other technological facilities.

### **Study Centres**

The study centre is defined as a “centre established, maintained, or recognised by the university for the purpose of advising, counselling, evaluating, or rendering assistance required by the students”. Study centres have so far been selected on a programme basis and are generally located in the districts. The study and work centres are identified and approved by the regional director with help from a local expert from the region. Most existing study centres are located in colleges, and staff from the college act as part-time course counsellors, who have access to YCMOU instructional materials, in both printed and audiovisual formats. Currently 88 study centres and 25 subcentres employ 1,055 part-time counsellors. The normal student/counsellor ratio ranges between 1:25 and 1:100.

The study centres actually implement the programmes. As well, they regulate and monitor certificate level programmes conducted at work centres and workplaces, and preparatory and foundation courses conducted at subcentres. Host institutions have provided a room where the office of the coordinator, administrative staff, and a store of books and records are housed.

### **Subcentres**

All study centres for the Bachelor of Arts and Bachelor of Commerce programmes are located at the district level. Many times the location of these study centres is inconvenient for students who live in remote areas but want to join the general degree course. Therefore it was necessary to locate some centres at the sub-district level (Tehsil level). These centres are called “subcentres”. In every district, three to five subcentres as required are approved. These centres implement the “preparatory programme” (the qualifying programme for entry to the bachelor’s degree programme) and the foundation courses (first year of bachelor’s degree programme). For optional and applied courses, second- and third-year students are transferred to the study centre at the district level.

### **Work Centres**

Each study centre selected for a vocational programme implements a minimum of three certificate courses, with 20 students in each course. The minimum intake for a certificate course is ten students, and the centre will not function unless a minimum enrolment of ten students per course is achieved. If enrolment is lower than ten, two or three centres can pool their students for common instruction. If enrolment exceeds capacity, the study centre, in consultation with the regional centre and YCMOU, can establish another centre for conducting practicals. This subsidiary is called a “work centre”. Work centres work under the control and overall guidance of the study centre. Its function is to conduct practical and laboratory training in accordance with the workbook, collect manuals from students, assess results, and report to the study centre. The work centre has the necessary infrastructure in place and may have one or more certificate courses, but not more than three at a time.

### **Workplaces**

It is possible that some students are already working in an organisation and would like to complete a course while continuing to work. They can do their practical work at their place of work and need not attend a study centre or work centre for practicals. Such students may attend the study centre to view audiovisuals and to be assessed periodically, as the study centre advises. The students are required to complete practical training in accordance with the workbook and to prepare their own workbook journal after having studied the topic in the learning materials. They may seek guidance and advice from the study centre, which will test and certify the student. The study centre also certifies that the student has completed practicals. The workplace concept is a good synthesis of learning while working to earn a living. The university aims to attract more students in this category, and asks only a concessional fee from these students. Thus, the study centre, work centre, and workplace serve as platforms for learning the knowledge and skill component of vocational courses. The books can be studied at home and difficulties can be solved at the study centres. Audiovisual materials can be shown at study centres and practicals can be done either at a study centre, work centre, or workplace.

### **Pariwar**

A further form of student support is provided through Pariwar. It is a peer group learning approach for some of the agricultural “Crop Wise” courses. A group of learners come together, discuss their problems, and seek guidance from a counsellor and fellow students.

## **PROGRAMME DELIVERY**

### **Registration and Allocation to the Study Centres**

Students are registered and enrolled centrally at the main office as well as at the study centres. First they buy a course prospectus and admission form from the study centres. Then they submit the completed form along with a demand bank draft, the only method by which YCMOU accepts payment for tuition fees. The study centre staff send these admission forms and demand drafts to the main office at Nashik, where lists with permanent registration numbers are consolidated and sent to the study centres. The fee receipts, admission record, and ID card are directly despatched to students.

### **Distribution of Study Material**

Once the number of students enrolled for a particular programme at a study centre is finalised, study materials begin to be delivered. YCMOU initially experimented with delivery by mail to students' homes. However, considering the cost and labour involved, the idea has been discontinued. Now study materials are distributed through study centres. YCMOU delivers the study material to the study centres by various means, including hired trucks, bus parcels, and courier services. The study centre distributes the materials and keeps records.

### **Training and Orientation of Counsellors and Coordinators**

Before the actual face-to-face contact sessions at a study centre begin, the course counsellors and centre coordinators are oriented to the open learning philosophy. This is important as most of the counsellors drawn from traditional institutions are accustomed to lecturing and other conventional methods of instruction. Orientation workshops are held centrally at YCMOU, and conducted by staff from the academic services and student services divisions. They orient the participants in effective ways of counselling and the organisational structure of YCMOU, as well as evaluation methods and their implementation.

### **Face-to-Face Contact Sessions**

Each course is allocated a number of hours for face-to-face contact sessions between counsellors and the students. The exact number of hours is decided during course development by the academic division. YCMOU allots quite a high number of contact hours: around 16% of the total study hours (compared with 3% at the United Kingdom Open University and Athabasca University, and 7% at Indira Gandhi National Open University), for two reasons. First, many students find it difficult to adjust to distance education, and high levels of face-to-face contact are one way of providing additional support. Second, numerous counsellors adopt a more traditional teaching role rather than providing general guidance and support to supplement the distance teaching material. But students and counsellors believe that a YCMOU course cannot compare to a full-time course without a large face-to-face component. Hence, there is pressure for more contact sessions. This may mean that students lack the discipline for self-study. An attempt to tackle this problem is integral to the revised preparatory course, which is a prerequisite for entering general degree programmes.



Contact session counsellors are drawn from the institution where the study centre is located, with YCMOU routinely approving names that the local college principal suggests. Few counsellors have much experience with the needs of distance learners. More guidance about feedback to students and marking standards should be given to counsellors, even though this is financially difficult. Currently YCMOU staff do not monitor activities. Instead YCMOU relies on the local college principal and the course coordinator. The recent establishment of regional centres will help solve this problem.

### **Science Practicals**

Through its schools of science and technology and continuing education and computer science departments, YCMOU is introducing technical courses. Presenting courses that require practical and laboratory experience via distance education is a challenging task. But YCMOU plans to deliver these programmes using a combination of teaching methods. Experimental activities focused at the study centre simplify the equipment and supervision needed. Specially designed experiment kits which the student can use at home are also supplied. These home experimental kits have their limits of course. They must be simple to set up and reliable. As well, they should be low cost. The cost of equipment increases if it is designed so that several experiments can use it.

In addition to practical and laboratory work at study centres and home experiment kits, YCMOU has developed a number of video and audio tapes to support practical activities. Videotapes provide extremely good examples of how to teach practical skills in a dynamic way. Audio tapes provide a commentary that leads students through the sequence of steps to be followed, which is supported with photographs. Audio tapes can be used with numerous small lessons, such as the use of a multimeter, as in the first programme to be introduced involving practical work, the Diploma in Applied Electronics.

Five study centres currently cater to about 200 registered students. The study centres provide counselling and supervision of the experiments, which the students carry out at the study centres. The students are also provided with a home kit with which to perform many experiments.

### **The Workbook**

To provide students with detailed step-by-step guidelines about practical procedures as well as a place to record their observations, YCMOU has introduced a teaching booklet called the "workbook". Every student will be provided with a workbook for each practical course. The students follow the procedure for the experiment, perform the experiment, and record their observations. Students must present the resulting permanent record to the examiner at the end of the course. The workbook can also be shown to prospective employers, and it is thus a flexible and powerful tool. YCMOU has introduced the workbook concept for every certificate level course in the agriculture, vocational, and computer areas.

The workbook may serve different purposes depending on the nature of the course content and its objectives. Thus, for theory courses, the workbook may serve as an extension of practice exercises given in the study materials or it may function as a record for formative evaluation. For practical courses, the workbook may help to record

observations, daily work progress, or reports of experiments in and outside the lab and so on. Whatever the purpose, the workbook as introduced at YCMOU remains an important tool of evaluation.

### **Student Evaluation**

From the beginning, YCMOU has emphasised the development of a student evaluation system appropriate to the objectives of different courses and relevant to the needs of distance learners. Therefore the evaluation system operating at YCMOU has distinctive features, including the development and use of comprehensive, well-characterised question banks. Question banks, maintained confidentially, serve as resource material for the construction of tests and assignments required from time to time.

Each course developed at YCMOU has a certain predetermined value of credit points (based on an estimate of the study hours required for it). Students at YCMOU are not assessed on a “pass” or “fail” basis. Passing all subjects at a certain level is not a necessary condition for admission to the subsequent year. Instead a student may collect credit for courses completed successfully and carry along a backlog of work that he or she must cover in due course. Considering the needs and difficulties of the distance learner, this is a much needed flexibility that any distance learning system should offer. Further, it is possible that a student, having cleared a certain course examination, would like to improve performance in that course by reappearing at the examination in order to obtain a better overall grade-point average. This is possible in the YCMOU evaluation system, which considers an individual’s ultimate grade point average before awarding a degree or diploma. The grading system, though still employed at YCMOU, is used primarily to arrive at course marks. The grading system is used only to reduce the subjective “error” factor when evaluating a student’s performance.

Continuous assessment, as a component of evaluation, is frequently applied to courses and programmes at YCMOU. Periodic class tests, home assignments, and exercises given in workbooks give vital feedback to the learner about the extent and level of his or her learning. A detailed system of communicating feedback, including a qualitative interpretation of the student’s performance, is gradually being undertaken.

The various courses developed by YCMOU may be classified into one of the following three types:

- theory courses that need written examinations;
- courses that require practical work skills; and
- courses that require some project or field work component.

For each of these types of courses, evaluation may be by continuous assessment or by final examination. Continuous assessment for theory courses is done through periodically conducted class tests and home assignments, as well as through self-assessment exercises included in the study material. Final examinations for theory courses make use of pencil-and-paper tests consisting of objective (mostly multiple-choice) and supply type questions. Continuous assessment for practical courses takes the form of lab experiments, home experiments, and oral exams. Examinations for performance in experiments, though not yet conducted, are expected to be held in controlled laboratory conditions. Continuous assessment for both theory and practical courses may also be done through the workbook that is supplied to students.

For evaluation of project and field work, the YCMOU proposes the use of supervisor's periodic ratings as the tool for continuous assessment. The overall assessment of the project report by experts, in addition to an oral exam conducted by a panel of experts, is viewed as a component of the final examination. The average grades obtained in all courses within a programme are combined to yield the cumulative grade point average, which ultimately determines the award of a degree or diploma.

### **Student Characteristics**

Many students in the general bachelor's degree programme are unemployed and under 25 years of age. They lack the discipline self-study requires. Therefore they demand more and more contact sessions for each course and the dropout rate is quite high. On the other hand, many students in professional degree programmes, like the Bachelor of Education, are employed and have years of service to their credit. They are mature, well-equipped for self-study, and happy with distance education. Similarly, most female students are well-motivated and possess effective self-study habits. In the Diploma in Applied Electronics programme, most of the students are employed and have no problem with distance learning.

Almost all programmes enrol more students from urban areas. The rural to urban ratio varies among programmes but averages 1:2.4.

### **Technological Applications**

The extensive computerisation in place at head office will be extended to regional centres and, if possible, some district centres. This network will allow the smooth flow of information. Other technological applications include the university's plans to broadcast its educational programmes on radio and television, to supplement the audiovisual materials already provided to the centres.

## **PROBLEMS AND RESPONSES**

It has been only three years since the university was established. Since procedures are not yet well-established, YCMOU does face many problems in the area of student support services.

### **Registration**

The registration process depends on the postal service and this results in considerable delay. A solution is to entrust most of the admission work to the study centres. The study centre has its final list of students immediately and can thus plan their contact sessions. Meanwhile head office can feed the data into the computer and complete the procedure. Now that regional centres have been established the registration process will be even easier.

## **Distribution of Study Material**

It would be ideal if the academic programme were launched only after the study materials were ready and the evaluation method decided. Often, however, the programmes are launched with only initial study material in hand and the remaining material is delivered as the programme progresses. If the study material is not delivered as scheduled, the students and study centres are greatly inconvenienced. Occasionally study and evaluation materials are misdelivered by the courier services employed. Therefore alternate methods are now being used.

## **Services at Study Centres**

Some of the problems encountered at the study centres include the following:

- Students complain that many times the centre staff, particularly the programme coordinators, are not available to provide the guidance they need.
- Many of the young, less mature students require much more counselling and teaching support. YCMOU must provide them with a large number of counselling sessions.
- Many counsellors tend to use the contact sessions as an opportunity to teach course content rather as a time to counsel students and solve their problems.

Yet student-to-student interaction at contact sessions results in greater understanding of the material and develops skill in solving problems. Interactions with fellow students at the study centre is very beneficial for students because it creates the feeling of togetherness. Students can also exchange ideas and study methods. Encouraging the correct approach to contact sessions is a solution to this problem. More orientation workshops for counsellors will help them adopt counselling methods appropriate to distance education.

Other solutions include a recently revised preparatory programme. This four-month programme qualifies the student for entry into a degree programme. The preparatory programme is skill oriented and aims to teach reading, writing, mathematical, and general study skills that help increase the student's self-reliance.

A further solution is the educational network that YCMOU is proposing, which will better serve the student community. Regional centres, study centres for various programmes, subcentres, and work centres will help to better disseminate information about the distance education programme.

## **Attrition**

The age of most students admitted to YCMOU programmes is under 25 and they are not mature in their study habits. Many of them are dropouts from formal education. When they seek admission to YCMOU programmes, they know very little about distance education and they are not equipped for self-study. Many of them think that open education programmes will be easier than traditional university programmes. Naturally, then, many students feel disappointed with the programme because they believe they do not get enough information from the study centre, they do not get enough attention from counsellors, the counsellors are not covering the total syllabus, the syllabi are too vast, and examinations are too difficult. The university is trying to equip study centres with a

better information network and highly motivated staff — both academic and administrative. Motivated staff at the study centre can interact better with the students and that will boost their morale.

### **Technology**

The YCMOU initially plans to equip its six regional centres with personal computers that will be connected to the computers at head office to establish an information network that can be extended to district and sub-district (Tehsil) level and reach the smallest institution. YCMOU also plans to use radio and television to take education to everyone's doorsteps.

### **Funding and Self Reliance**

YCMOU charges its students a course fee. This means that even the disadvantaged sectors of society — for whom the university was established — must pay. For the disadvantaged, the fee has a high cost; those better off benefit from subsidised education. YCMOU is exploring the possibility of helping students financially by establishing links with the developmental programmes initiated by state and central governments such as TRYSEM (Training of Rural Youth for Self Employment), Integrated Rural Development Programmes, Jawahar Rojgar Yohana, and tribal welfare programmes. Some of the cooperatives, local industries, and social organisations can also support needy students. These agencies may even sponsor our programmes and bear the expenses of their implementation. Students could also be encouraged to pay their tuition fees through their work at the work centres and workplaces.

YCMOU is planning to be financially self-sufficient within five years of being established. To achieve this, YCMOU must develop courses that meet student needs and attempt to increase student enrolment. Increased enrolment can reduce the overhead expenses in producing learning material, a benefit that can be passed on to students.

Our main concern is funding the regional centres and study centres. So far, YCMOU has made a meagre provision of 8000 rupees per study centre for furniture and 2000 rupees per centre for library reference books. YCMOU has provided one small audiotape recorder to each centre. No televisions, videotape players, typewriters, or reprographic equipment could be provided to the study centres. The administration staff, particularly clerical assistants, complain of very low pay. The counsellors also complain of the low honourarium they receive, even though they must work on holidays and Sundays. The six regional centres that YCMOU has established will also have to be equipped with proper staff, furniture, and technical equipment. YCMOU will be hard put to provide the funding to staff and equip our study centres and regional centres unless appropriate funding comes from the state government and Indira Gandhi National Open University.

## **CHANGES AND DEVELOPMENTS IN THE STUDENT SERVICE SYSTEM**

### **Educational Network**

A well-organised educational network is being established, comprised of YCMOU headquarters at Nashik, its six regional centres in Bombay, Poona, Nagpur, Amravati,

Aurangabad, and Nashik and, within this system, its study centres, subcentres, and work centres that are spread throughout each district. Their functions and procedures are being formulated. When YCMOU headquarters, regional centres, and study centres are connected by computer, improved evaluation technology will be possible. Class tests and final examinations will be made more objective and answer books will be marked by computer. Both steps will reduce the length of the examination period. In addition, an extensive computer database will reduce the strain on the student services division as YCMOU's total number of centres increases beyond the 133 now in place, and the university expands its programmes to serve more students.

### **Local Relevance**

The academic programmes developed at YCMOU must be supplemented to meet the local needs of different parts of the state. Instructional materials and designs must accommodate all these variations. Printed materials must be updated with supplements either in print form or on audio cassette, videotape, or computer disk.