

## **Best Practice: 1**

### **1. Title of the Practice: Faculty Research and Professional Development Fund (FRPDF)**

Presidency University built this exclusive fund for its faculty in order to enable various kinds of activities related to research. It is intended that encouraged by such financial support, junior and senior scholars would complement their teaching duties with international standard, cutting-edge research in their respective fields of study. This fund is supposed to achieve the twin interrelated goals of combining teaching and research of the best form, which would feed into each other, thereby producing a dynamic culture of academic excellence. It was also believed, in designing this fund, that research-oriented faculty would be drawn towards Presidency University from all over the country, as this kind of fund is not present in many state/central government-aided higher educational institutions of India.

### **2. The Context:**

The exclusive scheme for Presidency University could be successfully introduced as Presidency is the most illustrious institution of higher learning in the state, even considered among the best in Asia. In its transformation into a university, it was promised that it would set a similar standard of excellence. To achieve this mighty task, it needed some infrastructural innovations, which would help the institution builders, that is, primarily the academic faculty, to match the present-day standards of excellence in teaching and research.

### **3. The Practice:**

The funds are allocated every year, in the form of fixed and different amounts, to different designations of the faculty members. Assistant Professors, Associate Professors, Professors, and Distinguished Chair Professors receive Rs. 1 Lakh, Rs. 2 Lakh, Rs. 3 Lakh and Rs. 4 Lakh, respectively. The funds are made available to meet various kinds of expenses related to research. They can be used to procure equipment, of all possible kinds, which are needed for field-based, or laboratory-based work, or even any specialised form of teaching. They can be used for the purchase of books, or subscriptions of journals, and journal databases, necessary for any scholar in any particular field of study. They can be used to pay for membership in any professional academic association of scholars. The funds can be used to attend conferences, nationally and internationally.

In order to facilitate appropriate use of the funds, scholars are asked to submit applications, with detailed description of the purpose for which they are requesting for the funds. These applications are assessed by the Vice-Chancellor, and the Finance Officer, following which funds are disbursed. The funds are spent by all scholars following the rules of purchase framed by the Government of West Bengal, and accounts of the expenditure are maintained, submitted, and audited following the same rules. The Finance department of the university, in order to enable these activities, have drafted clear rules of procedure, enlisted different kinds of registered vendors through whom purchase is made, and made all these details available to the faculty.

Equipments, books, and other non-perishable academic material purchased with these funds are considered assets of the University, and not properties of the scholars who purchased them. The University grants full freedom of use of such materials to the scholars who have procured them during their tenure. However, if and when the concerned faculty member leaves the university she/he is requested to return these items, or is given the option to

purchase them, after having deducted the necessary cost of depreciation that the items have undergone over the period of time they were in use. In this manner a just, equitable, and efficient system of allocation, use, and distribution of public funds is maintained by the university administration.

As an innovative practice, inspiring a global standard of academic excellence in a resource-constrained environment of higher learning, which is joined to a practice of fair, free, and methodical implementation, the FRPDF of Presidency University stands unparalleled, in relation to any other institution of higher learning in India.

#### **4. Evidence of Success (Provide evidence of success such as performance against targets and benchmarks, review results. What do these results indicate? Describe in about 200 words).**

In the three years that the FRPDF has been implemented, signs of success are several. Inspired by this scheme, faculty members in different disciplines, of all designations, have invested a great deal of time, energy, and thoughts in different kinds of research activities. They have set up specialised laboratories, with cutting-edge instrumentation, procured books and journals, attended and participated in conferences all over the world, used rare library and archival resources of special collections, or conducted fieldwork. Collectively FRPDF grant set in motion vibrant culture of research in the University global intellectual exposures. This has contributed to their teaching, in the form of introduction of the best and most contemporary thoughts in the form of new courses in different disciplines. It has also contributed to their research, as they have published in high impact-factor international journals, and brought out books from the finest publishers, and become part of some of the most cutting-edge book series of international publishing houses. They have also organised conferences, special lectures, workshops and other similar academic activities, using these funds, thereby building networks with the best scholars in their fields, and making the university visible on the global map of learning. The fund has contributed to research resources by bringing in much needed books and equipment to the institution.

#### **5. Problems Encountered and Resources Required**

In view of the costly requirements of research in both the social and natural sciences, more funds are required to maintain the excitement and positive effects of this scheme. As learning becomes more specialised and interdisciplinary at the highest level, resources necessary to pursue such learning, like specialised databases, computer applications, instruments, books, and other items, can only be obtained if an enlargement of the FRPDF funds are made possible. Moreover, to house these facilities of research, the university needs more, and efficiently-designed physical space. Also, more and more time is required to be involved in such levels of research, which it is difficult to find, given that in most of the departments all faculty positions have not yet been filled. Therefore, the augmentation of funds, space, and personnel is critically required to keep up the beneficial effects of this great innovation at Presidency University.

## **Best Practice: II:**

### **1. Title of the Practice: Gen-ED (General Education) UG Programme.**

### **2. Objectives of the Practice:**

The traditional undergraduate degree curricula are based on a core subject and two related elective subjects from a limited choice for respective Honours programmes. The present-day global university education adopted choice-based curricular system with elements of flexibility. Presidency University from the very beginning embraces the concept of the CBCS through the GenED programme at the UG degree level. The university further intends to promote flexible choice across disciplines and across faculties to bring in the practice of liberal education. The objective of this programme is to offer optimum choices to UG students to pursue subject(s) of interest as elective courses cutting across disciplines and faculty.

### **3. The Context: What were the contextual features or challenging issues that needed to be addressed in designing and implementing this practice)?**

The present-day higher education system globally encourages interdisciplinarity. Many new subjects and areas are being introduced at graduate and more so at postgraduate levels. Such interdisciplinarity is in demand by the stakeholders in the industry, for cutting edge research in emerging fields of Biotechnology, Climate Science, Environmental Science, Space Science, Natural Resource Management, Rural Development, Social Science, Management Science, Media Science, Peace Studies, Nanotechnology, Digital Humanities, Cognitive Science, Cultural Studies, Linguistics, Medical Science and many other areas. University undergraduate and postgraduate curricula should introduce and induct elements of interdisciplinarity to open the expanding horizon of higher education to the students. The GenEd programme introduced in Presidency in a way unique in the country addresses these issues in designing the programme.

### **4. The Practice: Describe the practice and its uniqueness in the context of India higher education. What were the constraints / limitations, if any, faced?**

The GenEd programme is offered to every undergraduate student majoring in different disciplines. Each department offers at least four courses of four credits each in first four semesters. A student has to take ten such courses spread over four semesters in addition to his/her chosen discipline in Major subject. In four semesters the 15 departments offer more than 60 courses. Students majoring in the sciences will have to take at least two courses from the humanities discipline and vice versa. The Gen Ed course modules are designed carefully keeping in mind the interest and subject background of students coming from different disciplines for a particular GenEd course. Some of these courses are open to students of all disciplines. Some courses that require a specific subject background are restricted to students of respective faculties or related major subjects. This provides a unique combination and blending for the elective subjects, so that a student can enrol for GenEd that would facilitate his/her understanding of chosen Major subject. At the same time instead of going through all the modules of such elective subject he/she has the option not to select the modules which are not of much requirement for the specific major. This flexibility offers a scope for selecting other GenEd programmes of his/her wider interest.

## **5. Evidence of Success**

The Gen Ed programme has already engendered a spirit of interdisciplinary in a rudimentary form. Science students are reading literature while philosophy students understand statistics. The most important evidence of success is the broadening of horizons for students beyond disciplinary barriers. Although time has not yet come to present statistical evidence, anecdotal evidences are in plenty. In UG Gen Ed exam a student of English while explaining postmodernism referred to the varying waves of same light in different frequencies that create differences for the viewers. Similarly a political science student while explaining caste incorporates rock stratification from geology Gen Ed to explain the concept.

## **6. Problems Encountered and Resources Required**

The idea of Choice-Based Credit System is based on multiplicity of choices for students. Ideally such a system operates through faculties offering courses which are open across disciplines. Two crucial determinants are then, number of faculties and second the infrastructure to accommodate simultaneous classes of multiple courses. For optimum implementation of objectives of the programme more faculty, lecture theatres with higher seating capacity will be required.