

Leveraging upon Academic Autonomy: Case Study of a B-School

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Abstract: *Granting of academic autonomy to Business Schools confers freedom on them to design their own curriculum in tune with the emerging needs of the industry in particular. The success of the leveraging process is dependent upon the ways and means adopted by B-Schools while taking a shift from the system of identical curriculum, examination and evaluation under the affiliating system to the dynamic and innovative system of academic autonomy. Academic autonomy comes as a boon to those institutions which are forward-looking and have the potential to implement academic programmes of higher standards. Academic autonomy also means accountability on the part of the autonomous institutions. The objective of this case study is to discuss at length the experience of the Post-Graduate Department of Management Studies & Research Centre, Siddaganga Institute of Technology, Tumkur, in leveraging upon the flexibility conferred by the academic autonomy in designing academic programmes, determining courses of study, syllabi and methods of evaluation. The case study discusses at length the process of take-off from the affiliating system to autonomous system, expanding the scope of areas of specialization, pace and form of modifications in the scheme of study as well as the distribution of course credits across semesters and the resultant balanced course portfolio and the evaluation system adopted under autonomous system. The findings reveal that academic autonomy has led to gradual and consistent value adding modifications in the scheme of study, syllabus and examination and evaluation. The insights from students' performance in examination are fed back into the curriculum that reflects an organic growth approach to strengthening the content and delivery. There is a great learning experience under the autonomous system.*

Key words: *Affiliating system, Academic autonomy, Course portfolio, Innovations in teaching, Academic accountability, Pedagogy.*

I. INTRODUCTION:

The popular system of affiliation currently followed by a large number of higher education institutions mandates an identical curriculum, teaching and examination standards for all the affiliated institutions. In the process, the required freedom of the affiliated institutions in meeting the dynamic demands of the society in general and industry in particular is lost. Especially those institutions which have the potential to implement an academic programme of higher standards do not have much freedom to design and offer innovative courses, adopt new teaching methodologies, and implement effective examination and evaluation system. This has led to granting of academic autonomy to promising institutions. Against this background, this case study on "Leveraging upon Academic Autonomy: A Case Study of B-School" presents the saga of the Post-Graduate Department of Management Studies & Research Centre of Siddaganga Institute of Technology, Tumkur, Karnataka, (herein after referred as PGDMS & RC or simply 'Department') in carrying out value adding modifications in its MBA programme. The case study, however, does not make an assessment of impact of academic autonomy.

Objectives, Scope & Methodology:

The main objective of this case study is to discuss at length the experience of PGDMS & RC in leveraging upon the flexibility conferred by the academic autonomy in designing academic programmes, determining courses of study, syllabi and methods of evaluation. The specific objectives set for the study are as follows:

1. To present an overview of MBA programme under autonomous system
2. To trace the process of initial take-off from the affiliating system to autonomous system
3. To identify the expansion made in the course portfolio in the areas of specialization
4. To discuss the pace and direction of modifications in the scheme of study as well as the distribution of credits across semesters over the years
5. To assess whether or not the modifications under autonomous system could lead to a balanced course portfolio
6. To present an overview of evaluation system adopted under autonomous system

The study period covers half-a-decade period from September 2008 (the year of conferring academic autonomy) to September 2013. The data required for fulfilling the objectives of this case study are collected from the internal sources. A simple descriptive approach is adopted in presenting the process of leveraging upon the flexibility of the academic autonomy under the chosen areas.

The case study begins with a brief profile of PGDMS & RC and narrates the conferment of academic autonomy and presents the highlights of an autonomous MBA programme. Later, it discusses the nature and scope, directions and dimensions of leveraging upon the academic autonomy. At the end, the study offers its conclusion.

Pgdms & RC: A Profile

Siddaganga Institute of Technology (SIT) is an autonomous institute affiliated to Visvesvaraya Technological University and rated as one among the top ten institutes in Karnataka state. It is also one among a few engineering colleges in the state to offer MBA Programme since 1997. In addition, it played a major role in formulating policy and curriculum of MBA programme of Visveswaraya Technological University right from its establishment in 1998. SIT-PGDMS & RC has total intake of 120 students. It has a band of renowned faculty at all levels. Besides teaching, the faculty are actively engaged in research. The teaching-learning process is interactive. In addition to teaching, PGDMS & RC offers value adding training to develop communicative, analytical and leadership skills among students. Classrooms are equipped with the latest audio-visual aids. The computer centre is well equipped with broadband connection and latest software and database packages viz. PROWESS, SAP B1 and SPSS. The library is well stocked with 13000 academic and reference books, and 60 journal subscription along with e-journal portals such as J-Gate and EBSCO. The Department is also recognized as Research Centre to offer Ph.D. programme in Management by the Visvesvaraya Technological University. There are 12 Ph.D. scholars who are pursuing their doctoral studies. There is a strong research culture in the department. Above all, the Department has been active in conducting national and state level seminars. The proceedings of these seminars are brought out in the form of volumes.

The Conferment of Academic Autonomy:

PGDMS & RC believes in its abilities to act by its own choice in pursuit of its mission: "To develop competent managers with social concern and high ethical values; offer inputs to corporate world in enhancing productivity through research and consultancy; and act as a nodal center for development of rural and social entrepreneurship". Visvesvaraya Technological University- the affiliating university (herein onwards referred as AU) granted the autonomous status to PGDMS & RC during 2008-09 (Vide Ref: VTU/Aca/2007-08/A11/5188, date 02-09-2008). Later, the Government of Karnataka approved the grant of autonomous status as per section 43A of the Visvesvaraya Technological University (Amendment) Act 2006 and requested the Chairman, University Grants Commission, New Delhi, to accord concurrence for granting of autonomy (Vide:No.ED248UNE2008, dated 20-10-2008). The University Grants Commission, New Delhi, in its meeting held on 10th and 11th December 2008 considered the report of the Expert Committee and agreed to the conferment and grant of autonomous status.

Autonomus MBA Programme: An Overview:

The mandatory guidelines published by Visvesvaraya Technological University (*Visvesvaraya Technological University Guidelines of Implementation of Academic Autonomy at Colleges – 2007*) laid a broad framework for the MBA Programme under autonomous system. The select highlights of the MBA programme as enunciated in the guidelines are as follows:

- Programme duration: 2 years
- Semesters: 4
- Semester duration :
Main Semester (Odd/Even) : 16 weeks
Summer semester : 8 weeks
(for conducting makeup courses for weak / failed students)
- Total number of credits to be earned : 100
- Course load : Average load : 25 credits/semester
Minimum limit : 20 credits/semester
Maximum limit : 30 credits
- Examination : Continuous Internal Evaluation (CIE) and Semester-End Examination (SEE) both having equal weights in student's performance.
- Maximum period a student can take to complete MBA programme : 4 years
- Attendance requirements: All students shall maintain a minimum attendance of 85% in each course registered.
- Each autonomous college shall follow the standards of passing at CIE and SEE for each course registered as score \geq 40% in case of CIE and score \geq 40% in case of SEE.

Leveraging upon Academic Autonomy: Nature & Scope

The Mandatory Guidelines have clearly underscored that the autonomous institutions have to 'gain the confidence, gratitude and respect of all its stakeholders, in particular, students, alumni, parents and the society at large'. The academic freedom conferred on the institutions is a source of strength for fulfilling the mandate of academic autonomy. The highlights of the academic freedom under autonomous system enumerated in the said guidelines are as follows:

- To launch new programmes which shall fulfill the minimum academic quality and standards for the award of Degree prescribed by the university and the national regulatory bodies such as AICTE and UGC
- To make changes in the existing programme including scheme of instruction, syllabi, scheme of examination and other aspects while fulfilling the minimum academic standards prescribed by the university for the award of degree
- To start Diploma and/or Certificate programmes

The autonomous institutions have to leverage upon the academic freedom bestowed upon them in fulfilling the mandate of academic autonomy. The success of the leveraging process is dependent on the mechanism adopted while transforming from the system of identical curriculum, teaching and evaluation processes under the prevailing affiliating system to the dynamic and innovative system of academic autonomy for the larger interests of their stakeholders. In case of PGDMS & RC, in particular, getting freedom to design its own curriculum and offering innovative courses in business administration and management led to greater excitement. In turn, it demanded a complete understanding of the new system as well as the appropriate preparedness for the effective change management. The administration arranged for orientation sessions to the faculty in September 2008 itself to help them understand the mandate of autonomous system. Further, faculty teams visited the autonomous institutions which were offering MBA programmes with a view to gain first-hand understanding of the curriculum design, course contents, teaching-learning processes, examination and evaluation system under the autonomous system.

Leveraging upon Academic Autonomy: Dimensions & Directions:

The greatest strength of the autonomous system is the flexibility and dynamism that the autonomous institutions enjoy in curriculum design, content development, delivery mechanism, examination and evaluation processes while fulfilling the academic standards as prescribed by the respective universities and national regulatory bodies. Designing the appropriate systems, structures and processes goes a long way in leveraging upon the flexibility of autonomous system to a greater public good. Each autonomous institution has to evolve its own governance mechanism at the institute and departmental levels for the smooth functioning of autonomous system. The components of institution level governance structures include Governing Council, Academic Council, Institute Academic Syndicate, Institute Academic Affairs Committee etc. Similar academic structures at the departmental level include Advisory Board, Board of Studies, Board of Examiners, and various committees relating to departmental academic affairs. Against this backdrop, the dimensions and directions of the leveraging upon the academic freedom by PGDMS & RC include the following:

1. Governance structures and processes
2. Initial take-offs
3. Subsequent modifications and initiatives
4. Balanced course portfolio
5. Examination and evaluation

1. Creating governance structures and processes

The academic autonomy required the Department to constitute its internal structures namely the Board of Studies (BoS), Board of Examiners (BoE) and various committees for the smooth academic functioning of the Department. Accordingly, the Board of Studies in Management was constituted on 16-10-2008 with members from industry and academia including the nominee of AU. It was entrusted with the responsibility of preparing the syllabi for various subjects keeping in view the objectives of the institute, interest of stakeholders and state/national requirements, suggesting methods for improving teaching and evaluation techniques, preparing panel of experts for appointment as examiners and guiding the Department with respect to teaching, extension and other academic activities of the Department. Similarly, the BoE in Management was constituted (06-01-2009) for ensuring the quality and standards of the question papers, forwarding the panel of examiners in each subject to the Controller of Examinations and preparing and approving the detailed scheme of evaluation. In addition, various committees such as Departmental Academic Affairs Committee, PG Programme Committee, Placement Committee, Industry-Institute Interaction Committee, Committee for Ph.D. Programme, Library Committee, Computers & Systems Committee, Academic Publications Committee, Accreditation Committee, Purchase Processing Committee, Discipline Committee and Committee for AICTE Projects/Research Schemes were constituted.

2. Initial take-offs

The academic autonomy has to evolve itself gradually and firmly. To begin with, the scheme of study and the syllabus of the AU becomes a baseline. The modifications to the structure and contents are to be gradually built over time. The initial take-offs in the common courses as well as specialization areas of MBA programme are presented hereunder.

Initial take-offs in common courses: The highlights of the take-off in common courses during the first year of the academic autonomy are outlined below:

- The courses offered by the AU were continued to be offered for the first semester under autonomous system for 25 credits. The courses included 'Management and Behavioural Process', 'Managerial Economics', 'Statistics for Management', 'Accounting for Managers', 'Management Information Systems', 'Marketing Management' and 'Business Communication'. The syllabus prescribed by AU for the first semester was retained under autonomous system. However, some modifications were made in the contents of a few courses with a view to make them compatible with the number of credits defined for them.
- In the second semester too, the courses of AU viz. 'Quantitative Techniques for Management', 'Indian Business Environment', 'Financial Management', 'Business Law', 'Human Resource Management', 'Business Research Methods' and 'International Business Management' were continued. However, the titles of 'Indian Business Environment' and 'Business Law' were modified as 'Economic Environment' and 'Legal Environment of Business' respectively. The total number of credits assigned to these courses totalled to 23. The space available for 2 credits was filled up by a course on 'Knowledge Management'.
- Third semester under AU offered three common courses viz. 'Strategic Management', 'Management Accounting and Control Systems' and 'Operations Management'. Among the common papers, 'Management Accounting and Control Systems' and 'Operations Management' of VTU were continued in the third semester under the autonomous system with the change in the nomenclature as 'Cost and Management Accounting' and 'Production and Operations Management' respectively. In place of 'Strategic Management', a course titled 'Total Quality Management' for 2 credits was introduced under autonomous system. The number of credits for III semester under autonomous system was fixed at 30. Among these 30 credits, 18 credits were assigned to common papers (including 10 on project work) and 12 credits on 4 electives in each area of specialization.
- Among three common papers under AU viz. 'Change and Knowledge Management', 'Entrepreneurship Development' and 'Supply Chain Management' in the fourth semester, 'Change and Knowledge Management' was shifted to second semester under autonomous system for 2 credits. 'Entrepreneurship Development' and 'Supply Chain Management' prescribed under AU were retained in the fourth semester under autonomous system. Similarly, 'Strategic Management' was adopted as a common paper in the fourth semester under autonomous system which was in the third semester under AU. The number of credits assigned for fourth semester under autonomous system was 20. These credits were distributed into 8 credits on common papers (including 2 credits to 'Comprehensive Area Seminar') and 12 credits on 4 electives in each area of specialization.

The discussion on leveraging upon specialization areas is presented in the following paragraphs.

Expansion in the areas of specialization: Specialization in three major areas namely Finance, Marketing and Human Resources were continued under autonomous system. A special attention was given on the specialization areas in the first batch of academic autonomy itself in view of their importance in giving a direction and focus to the careers of students. In this context, the emerging issues in each area of specialization were identified and accordingly, new courses capturing the related issues were designed in each area of specialization for third and fourth semesters. In addition, the course portfolio of each specialization area was split into two core papers and three soft electives. Of these three soft electives, a student in a given area of specialization was required to choose two subjects. Whereas the affiliating system offered four courses in each area of specialization, the autonomous system offered five courses in each area. As a result, greater choice of courses was offered to the students in the specialization area. The bird's-eye view of the core and soft electives in third and fourth semesters under autonomous system are presented in Table No.1 and Table No. 2 respectively.

Table 1: A bird's-eye view of the core and soft electives in third semester under autonomous system

#	Area	Subject	Remarks
1	Finance	Core papers 1. Investment Analysis & Management 2. Financial Institutions & Markets	1. The 'Security Analysis and Portfolio Management' paper under VTU 2. The 'Merchant Banking & Financial Services' paper under VTU
		Soft Electives 1. Mergers, Acquisitions & Corporate Restructuring 2. Advanced Corporate Finance 3. Risk Management & Insurance	1. The 'Mergers, Acquisitions & Corporate Restructuring' paper under VTU. 2. The 'Advanced Financial Management' paper under VTU. 3. New subject introduced under autonomous system
2	Marketing	Core papers 1. Sales & Distribution Management 2. Consumer Behaviour	1. Part of 'Sales and Retail Management' paper under VTU plus additional components. 2. The 'Consumer Behavior' paper under VTU
		Soft Electives 1. Business Marketing 2. Services Marketing 3. Retail Management	1. The 'Business Marketing' paper under VTU 2. The 'Services Marketing' paper under VTU 3. Part of 'Retail Management' under VTU plus additional components.
3	H.R	Core papers 1. Advanced Organizational Behaviour 2. Employment Relations Law	1. A part of 'Advanced Organizational Behaviour & Development of Competencies' under VTU 2. Part of 'Legal Environment & Industrial Legislations' under VTU
		Soft Electives 1. Industrial Relations in India 2. Personnel Management 3. Organization - Structure, Process & Design	1. Part of 'Legal Environment & Industrial Legislations' under VTU. 2. New subject introduced under autonomous system 3. 'Organization - Structure, Process & Design' paper under VTU

Table No. 2: Bird's-eye view of the core and soft electives in fourth semester under autonomous system

#	Area	Subject	Remarks
1	Finance	Core papers 1. International Financial Management 2. Financial & Commodity Derivatives	1. The 'International Financial Management' paper under VTU 2. The course 'Risk Management' under VTU was renamed and the contents were modified
		Soft Electives 1. Tax Management 2. Project Analysis & Management 3. Credit Management	1. The 'Tax Management' paper under VTU 2. The course 'Project Appraisal, Planning & Control' under VTU is renamed as 'Project Analysis & Management' 3. New course introduced under autonomous system
2	Marketing	Core papers 1. Integrated Marketing Communications 2. Strategic Brand Management	1. The 'Integrated Marketing Communications' paper under VTU 2. The 'Strategic Brand Management' paper as under VTU.
		Soft Electives 1. International Marketing Management. 2. Rural Marketing 3. E-Business	1. The 'International Marketing Management' paper under VTU 2. The 'Rural Marketing' paper under VTU 3. New course introduced under autonomous system
3	H.R	Core papers 1. International Human Resource Management 2. Organizational Development	1. The 'International Human Resource Management' under VTU 2. The same 'Organizational Development' under VTU
		Soft Electives 1. Team Development & Leadership 2. Training & Development 3. Occupational Testing	1. The 'Team Development & Leadership' under VTU 2. The 'Training & Development' under VTU 3. New course introduced under autonomous system

The expansion in each specialization area (Table 1 and 2) which was effected in the first batch of academic autonomy (2008-10) continues till date. The modifications in the course contents wherever required are carried out concurrently year after year. Further, the efforts are in progress to introduce one more specialization stream on 'Hospital Management' in third and fourth semesters from the next academic year (2014-15).

3. Subsequent modifications and initiatives

Transitions often create shakeups. This could not happen in PGDMS & RC as every academic issue was treated with minute details. At every stage, the administrators inspired to think out of the box, guided in fine-tuning the proposed changes and at times, hammered out the over enthusiastic moves. The collective wisdom of the administration and the faculty team played a key role in the process of stabilization. The highlights of modifications in subsequent batches from 2009-10 to 2012-14 are presented hereunder:

- The result analysis of Semester-End Examination (SEE) of the first batch (2008-10) under autonomous system especially in courses with quantitative bias paved way for the introduction of tutorial components. These courses included 'Statistics for Management' (First Semester), 'Accounting for Managers' (First Semester), 'Quantitative Techniques for Management' (Second Semester), 'Financial Management' (Second Semester), 'Business Research Methods' (Second Semester) and 'Cost and Management Accounting' (Third Semester). A tutorial component of 0.5 credits (one lecture per week) was added to these courses from 2009-11 batch. Tutorial is basically teaching to a small group of students which ensures greater amount of learning among students. At times, the bright student(s) in the tutorial batch could lead the class by solving the problems on the board.

- Considering the results of the second semester under autonomous system, an instrument called 'Subject-wise Result Analysis: Course Teacher's Viewpoints' was designed. Each course teacher was requested to reflect upon the performance of students in SEE of their respective courses covering reasons for the given results and remedial measures proposed by the faculty for improving the results in future. The filling up of this document gave an opportunity to the faculty to introspect on the status of students' performance in his/her subject and explore the ways and means for improving the results in future. This instrument of result analysis designed and used for the first time in July 2009 continues to be used by the faculty even now.
- The course on 'Managerial Economics' (First Semester) in first batch of academic autonomy was renamed as 'Economic Analysis & Managerial Decisions' (EAMD) in the second batch (2009-11) of academic autonomy. The renaming was warranted as topics on national income and macro-economic policies were added so as to deliver the inputs on micro and macro economics in a single go.
- The title of a soft elective in finance in fourth semester viz. 'Credit Management' in the first batch of academic autonomy was renamed as 'Bank Credit Management' during second batch (2009-11) as the contents of this course exclusively focused on bank credit and not on the trade credit.
- The global financial meltdown consequent on the fall of Lehman Brothers in USA (post-September 2008) hinted at 'lack of ethical and moral values among business leaders'. India was no exception. The Satyam debacle flared up the sentiments of lack of conscientious behavior among business tycoons. Therefore, a new course on 'Business Ethics and Corporate Governance' was introduced for 2 credits in the third semester during the second batch of autonomy.
- The training in SAP-B1 which was delivered during the first batch of autonomous system was converted into a 'Certificate Course in SAP-B1'. This certificate course had 18 hours of theory and 22 hours of practical sessions. There were two intermediate tests on theory and lab during the semester. At the end, there was a final test and viva-voce. Viva-voce was conducted jointly by the internal faculty and SAP professional.
- For the third batch under academic autonomy (2010-12), the courses and the credits as formulated in the previous batch were continued. However, there were minor changes in the form of reworking of credits, shifting of project work to third semester and introduction of mandatory courses.
- The project work which was earlier spread over to third and fourth semesters was brought into third semester during third batch (2010-12). It was considered as a single course with 8 credits with 2 components: preliminary project seminar (2 credits) and project report evaluation with viva-voce (6 credits).
- The certificate course in SAP-B1 offered in the previous batch was made as a mandatory course for the fourth semester with a view to ingrain it into MBA programme from 2010-12 batch. The Continuing Internal Evaluation (CIE) components of SAP-B1 consisted of two tests which together made up to 50 marks. The SEE consisted of practical laboratory exercises and viva-voce of 50 marks each. These practical cum viva-voce exams were conducted by a team of internal faculty and external examiner.
- There were no changes in course structure and credit loads across the semesters of the fourth batch (2011-13). This batch witnessed the introduction of mandatory courses viz., 'Communicative English' (I Semester) and 'Aptitude Related Skills Training' (III Semester).
- There were no changes in the course structure and credit loads in the fifth batch (2012-14). However, a set of new initiatives such as introduction of foundation courses in 'Accounting for Managers' and 'Statistics for Management', mandatory course on 'Communicative English-II', self-study components, debates, group discussions, prayers and news presentation sessions were introduced during the fifth batch. In addition, the nomenclature of 'Production and Operations Management' course in the 2nd semester was changed into 'Operations Management'.

It is clear from the preceding discussion that the period from 2010 to 2013 was characterized by expansion with stability. The experiences and insights gained in the first batch (2008-10) of autonomous system were fed into the system in the form of tutorials, mandatory courses, foundation courses, self-study components, group discussions, prayers and news presentations. Thus academic autonomy provided a golden opportunity to PGDMS & RC to formulate the curriculum that met the contemporary requirements. The new course offerings under autonomous system (2008-2013), in particular, are presented in Table 3.

Table 3: New course offerings in MBA under autonomous system

#	Nature of the courses with course titles	Year of introduction
I	Mandatory Courses	
1	Communicative English – I (I Semester)	2011-12
2	Communicative English – II (II Semester)	2012-13
3	Aptitude Skills (III Semester)	2012-13
4	SAP B-1 * (IV Semester)	2009-10
II	Common Courses	
1	Corporate Governance & Business Ethics (III Semester)	2010-11
2	Comprehensive Area Seminar (IV Semester)	2009-10
III	Courses in Specialization Tracks	
	Finance Stream	
1	Risk Management and Insurance (III Semester)	2009-10
2	Credit Management (IV Sem)	2009-10
	Bank Credit management (Change in the course title)	2010-11
	Marketing Stream	
1	E-Business (IV Semester)	2009-10
	HR Stream	
1	Personnel Management (III Semester)	2009-10
2	Occupational Testing (IV Semester)	2009-10

* Initially it was started as a training programme (2009-10) and was later converted in to a Certificate Course (2010-11). Finally it was made as a mandatory course (2011-12).

It is clear Table 3 that the academic freedom was utilized for designing new courses by taking every care to ensure that they fulfilled the minimum academic quality and standards set for the programme.

Dynamism, enthusiasm and stability

Initial two years (2008-10) under autonomous system are found to be too dynamic. It is also indicative of the enthusiasm that prevailed in the early days of academic autonomy. There were minor shifts in courses with varying credit loads across semesters. From third year onwards, it is well settled except for adding mandatory courses. The details on distribution of credits across semesters during last 5 years (2008-13) are presented in Table 4.

Table 4: Distribution of credits across semesters during last 5 years

Batch	I Sem	II Sem	III Sem	IV Sem	Total credits
2008-10	25	25	30*	20	100
2009-11	25	24.5	22.5	28*	100
2010-12	25	24	29*	22	100
2011-13	25	24	29	22	100
2012-14	25	24	29	22	100

* Includes credits for Project Work (10 credits in 2008-10 and 8 credits in subsequent batches)

Table 4 indicates the changes in credit loads in the first two years especially in third and fourth semesters. They were stabilized at later years.

4. Building a balanced course portfolio

The course portfolio of MBA programme (2008-13) under autonomous system consists of basic courses, functional courses, specialization courses and projects and seminars. The basic courses included 'Management & Behavioural Process', 'Economic Analysis for Managerial Decisions', 'Statistics for Management', 'Management Information System', 'and Business Research Methods' etc. which are spread across all semesters. Functional courses included 'Accounting for Managers', 'Financial Management', 'Marketing Management' and 'Human Resource Management'. These courses find a place under functional areas in view of the Department offering specialization in the areas of finance, marketing and finance. The specialization course stream includes an array of courses in Finance, Marketing and HR. An appropriate balance is being maintained between the basic courses, functional courses, specialization courses and projects and seminars. The details of credits relating to semester-wise course portfolio of MBA programme (excluding mandatory non-credit courses) under autonomous system are presented in the Table 5.

Table 5: Course portfolio of MBA programme under autonomous system

	I Semester		II Semester		III Semester		IV Semester		Grand Total	
	Courses	Credits	Courses	Credits	Courses	Credits	Courses	Credits	Courses	Credits (%)
Basic Courses	5	17.5	5	16	2	5	4	9	16	47.5
Functional Courses	2	7.5	2	8	1	4	--	--	5	19.5
Specialization Courses	--	--	--	--	4	12	4	12	8	24.0
Project work and Seminar	--	--	--	--	1	8	1	1	2	9.0
Grand Total	7	25	7	24	8	29	9	22	31	100

Table 5 reveals that the basic courses bear 47.5% of credits in the MBA programme under autonomous system. The number of courses and credits allotted to basic courses is high in I-Semester and II-Semester. The credit load of functional courses (Accounting for Managers, Marketing Management, Financial Management, and HRM) those serve as prelude to each specialization stream constitute 19.5% of the total credits. The beauty of these functional courses is that they are offered as common papers. As a result, each student studies these courses that will enable him/her to develop an integrated view of the functional areas of management. The instructions in basic courses and functional courses are compulsory to all the students. This orientation gives a solid foundation to build on their specialization (Finance/ Marketing/ HR) in third and fourth semesters. The credit load of specialization stream is 24% of the total credits of the programme. Above all, the students of MBA need to have a field exposure and develop problem solving and decision making skills. For this purpose, they are mandated to take up project work (8 weeks), conduct an empirical study, propose recommendations, present seminar, and defend their work. In addition to project presentations, the students in the fourth semester have to present a comprehensive area seminar (1 credit) on current topics relating to their area of specialization. The share of credits allotted to these project works and seminars together constitute 9%. These components in course portfolio collectively make each student a complete MBA student.

5. Examination and evaluation system

Academic autonomy also means academic accountability; greater academic autonomy means greater accountability on the part of the autonomous institutions. Every care has to be taken to ensure that the academic quality and standards are maintained. Alongside teaching, the testing process has to be of high standard. This can be achieved by setting our own standards of quality in question papers, evolving a continuing evaluation process with appropriate components and building a foolproof examination and evaluation process. Above all, there should be a mechanism to assist the weak and/or failed students through make up courses. In this background, the dimensions of leveraging upon the autonomy in the arena of examination and evaluation process by PGDMS & RC are discussed from the point of the following factors:

1. Guidelines on preparing question papers
2. Continuing internal evaluation
3. Pool proof semester-end examinations
4. Summer semester

1. Guidelines on preparing question papers

One-Day workshop on "Preparing Question Papers under Autonomous System" was organized on 07-02-2009 for the faculty of the Department. Discussions were made on preparing the question papers with a focus on knowledge testing, problem solving, quantitative methods and case analysis. The conceptual/theory based questions, problem oriented questions and questions testing application / analytical / critical thinking and case studies that were required to be included in question papers along with their weightage were finalized. Further, the guidelines on framing the question papers of SEE were framed as well as model question papers in each course were prepared for SEE. These guidelines on preparation of question papers and copy of model question

papers are sent to the internal and external examiners for setting the SEE question papers. This gives clarity, focus, and direction to the question paper setters.

2. Continuing Internal Evaluation

The main advantage of academic autonomy is continuous learning and evaluation. Hence care is taken to see that the students are engaged in studies on continuing basis throughout the semesters. To foster this, suitable components such as quizzes, tests and assignments are designed for Continuing Internal Evaluation (CIE). The CIE for the first two batches under autonomous system (2008-10 and 2009-11) included 6 surprise tests/quizzes (6×3 marks): 18 marks, 2 Tests (2×14 marks): 28 marks and Assignment: 04 marks. Thus, total marks allotted under CIE came to 50. However, the components of CIE were changed from third batch (2010-12) to 4 surprise tests/quizzes (4×3 marks): 12 marks, 2 Tests (2×17 marks): 34 marks and Assignment: 04 marks. The rigour of CIE adopted under autonomous system is higher than the CIE components of the affiliating system.

3. Foolproof semester-end examinations

The semester-end-examination and the evaluation systems adopted under autonomous system deserve special mention. The highlights are given hereunder:

- For each course, four question papers are invited (1 from internal examiners and 3 from external examiners) for semester-end-examinations.
- Syllabus, guidelines governing the preparation of question papers and model question papers are sent to the internal and external examiners. They are also requested to prepare the solutions and scheme for each question paper.
- The meeting of the Board of Examiners is convened to scrutinize the question papers and scheme. The question papers, solutions and scheme which are according to the prescribed guidelines are accepted by the Board and sent to the Controller of Examinations (CoE).
- The CoE randomly picks up one among the four question papers in a given course to be administered on the students in their semester-end-examinations.
- There is a system of double valuation. The internal and external examiners shall have to discuss threadbare the solution and scheme and arrive at a consensus before taking up evaluation (grading) of answer scripts.
- A maximum of 40 answer books (20 before lunch and 20 after the lunch) are given to each examiner per day.
- The valuation by internal and external examiners is carried out independently. The marks awarded by the internal and external examiners in each course are averaged for awarding marks to students.
- If there is a discrepancy in the valuation between internal and external examiners leading to a difference of 10 and more than 10 marks, such answer papers are given for third valuation. The nearest two scores are averaged for awarding the marks to students.
- Such of those students who are not satisfied with the evaluation in SEE can apply for photocopy and/or Extended Evaluation on payment of prescribed fee within the stipulated time.

These highlights are indicative of a foolproof examination and evaluation system that is evolved under autonomous system. This has ensured fairness and objectivity in the grading system.

4. Summer Semester

Summer semester is a supplementary semester conducted during the vacation between even and odd semesters which is primarily meant to assist weak and/or failed students through makeup courses. A student who obtains F grade has to register for the summer semester. The duration of the summer semester is 8 weeks. The Department announces the list of subjects to be offered for the summer semester and a maximum of six subjects are offered during summer semester. A student is allowed to register for a maximum of four subjects with a maximum credit load of 16. The components of CIE are the same as in regular semester. It is to be noted that there is no facility of supplementary semester under the affiliating system for conducting makeup courses for the benefit of weak/failed students.

CONCLUSION

This case study throws light on half-a-decade experience of PGDMS & RC in leveraging upon the flexibility conferred by the academic autonomy in designing academic programmes, determining courses of study, syllabi and methods of evaluation. The discussion reveals that PGDMS & RC has treaded a path of utmost care and caution while making a shift from the system of identical curriculum, examination and evaluation under the affiliating system to the dynamic and innovative system of academic autonomy. In the initial phase of the changeover process, it has kept the scheme of study and the syllabus of the affiliating university as baseline and has incorporated the modifications to the structure and contents gradually over time. Normally the transitions of this kind often create shakeups. This could not happen in PGDMS & RC as every academic issue was treated with minute details. However, the initial two years (2008-10) are found to be too dynamic. From third year onwards, it is well settled except for value adding modifications in the programme in the form of mandatory courses. The period from 2010-13 is characterized as the period of academic expansion with stability. Whereas the affiliating system offered four courses in each area of specialization, the autonomous system offered in all five courses in each area. This offered a greater choice of courses to the students in the specialization area. Concurrently, an appropriate balance is being maintained between the basic courses, functional courses, specialization courses and projects and seminars. The greatest virtue of academic autonomy with PGDMS & RC is that the experiences and insights gained in the first batch (2008-10) of autonomous system were fed into the autonomous system. Accordingly, new initiatives in the form of mandatory courses, foundation courses, self-study components, group discussions, prayers and news presentations are introduced. Even the inputs for the results of SEE are injected into the curriculum delivery in particular in the form of tutorials and remedial coaching. These initiatives have collectively evolved an organic growth approach to strengthening the content and delivery under autonomous system. PGDMS & RC has also leveraged upon the academic autonomy even in the examination and evaluation fronts. This is fulfilled by evolving a continuing evaluation process with appropriate components (quizzes, mid-term tests and assignments), setting standards in quality of question papers, and building infallible examination and evaluation process. Above all, summer semester is introduced to assist the weak and/or failed students through make up courses. There is a great learning experience under the autonomous system. It can be concluded in unequivocal terms that the leveraging upon the academic freedom has gone well with the abilities and mission of PGDMS & RC, Siddaganga Institute of Technology.

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