



## Evaluating academics using scholarly critique: Unprincipled and lethal symbiosis in higher education

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### Abstract

Indian academia is in a crisis! Due to deplorable academic practices such as grade augmentation, coursework depreciation, allowing student enrolments without the required pre-requisites especially for commerce and MBA programs. Internal assessments are not industry suited and easily achievable. Academics are seen as costs but are retained based on preposterous, outrageous parameters such as: faculty feedback forms, involvement in extra curriculum activities, giving high proximity to social interaction and appeasement of senior management even though their academic output is notorious, as compromising on personal ethos and morality is acceptable and lastly (if it makes little difference) contribution towards research. Academics are treated as outcasts during admission process as it's only the number that matter to the management. The admissions department is simply prostitutionalising the whole process without concern for quality and capability. Online student faculty feedbacks are just a farce and are used by management to audit an academician's performance, providing undue pressure on academics to pass undeserving students or face termination. Academics have a daunting task to improve the quality of teaching, besides been forced to adopt unethical practices yet tirelessly endeavoring to compel students to learn.

**Keywords:** academics, admissions, grade inflation, institutional pressures, online student faculty feedback, unethical practices

### Introduction

One often is in awe and wonders what the primary role of academics is? The answer seems obvious: to teach. The heart wrenching question is if this is true, why academics are not evaluated on this criterion but on some hogwash created by 'super specialist management that is totally out of this universe. Academics may excel as instructors which seems irrelevant since no action is taken either way. Conversely, grades are scrutinized by administrators every semester. Academicians have a passion for teaching however not every academic is a researcher, but when forced to compromise on academic standards, it's a catalyst for disaster. There is still an old school of thought by management – academics are to 'judge and sort' students rather than educate them.

### Statement of Problem

It's customary for all educational institutes to be ethical and transparent in their operations and the quality of education and knowledge imparted is totally irrelevant as every regulation is compromised with a golden handshake. It is important to know whether there is a direct relationship between management harassing and blackmailing of academics and in ethical issues in academics and whether the ultimate goal of edification is achieved or not.

The paper is structured as follows: In Section 2 a literature review is presented. Section 3 outlines the research methodology, and the findings of the analyses are presented in Section 4. Finally, a summary and conclusion follow in Section 5.

### Purpose of Research

To ascertain academics' perceptions whether <sup>[1]</sup> the standard of education at Indian institutions has deteriorated, <sup>[2]</sup> the quality of undergraduate students has deteriorated in recent years and why, and <sup>[3]</sup> reasons why academics have resorted to academic malpractices and the inherent consequences.

### Methods

Present study is exclusively based on secondary sources only. The data for study collected from various sources such as journals, reports, government reports and websites.

### Review of the Literature

1. Addy and Herring (1996) observed that faculties were blackmailed by management but unwillingly endorsed grade inflation through awarding pass grading which comes with resounding work incentives such as higher teaching evaluations, positive ratings given if fewer failures in courses taught by them. No one looked at the quality of students passing.
2. (Guthrie, Evans & Burritt, 2014) <sup>[9]</sup>, (Anderson, Johnson, & Saha, 2002; Evans, Burritt, & Guthrie, 2010) <sup>[3]</sup> cites low salary levels, heavy teaching loads, increased level of administration, and limited time and support for research has resulted in significant pressure to award pass grades to students in various schools
3. Andrews Pearson *et al.* (2002), Crowley Flinstone, & Roddington (2012), believed academics deliberately simplifying the course materials and passing students who should have failed since the retention and engagement of students are particularly challenging as it directly affected a university's popularity and in funding.

4. (Maddock, 2014) identified from his research that Faculty feedback forms were used to audit faculties performance but with increased teaching loads and pressure to do more consulting and research assignments than teaching, which meant that most academics just failed to meet student satisfaction requirements thus led to a greater potential for the lowering of academic standards so that fewer students fail
5. (Crumbley, Flinn, & Reichelt, 2010) <sup>[6]</sup> stated that students used Faculty Evaluation Forms to threaten and punish them for grievances related to the course such as not grading them easily, not entertaining them or asking too much of students.
6. (Aggarwal, Vaidyanathan, & Rochford, (2007) <sup>[2]</sup> in their study identified with 'commodification of university education' in recent decades, as the major reasons for universities accepting students largely not on the basis of quality but the financial capacity, in order to promote their institutions as an ideal choice for the masses. While academics have tried to uphold academic integrity in this new service industry era, they are under increased pressure where a questionnaire that treats the student as a customer (not as a student), and instead of educating students, faculty try to entertain them.
7. Helliari (2013) <sup>[11]</sup> states that the purpose of education is about the learning. An excellent summary of the purpose of education is that of Hutchins (as cited in Mackenzie, 1985): It is to unsettle their minds, widen their horizons, inflame their intellects, [and] teach them to think straight, if possible." These challenges and pressures may translate to stress in the academic workplace. On the contrary, universities believed that if they continued to reject students on the grounds of inferior quality, poor communication skills, how would they pay for the running of their institutions.

### Major Issues

#### 1. How students enroll in under graduate program

Students apply for admission in Bachelor of Business Administration (BBA) and Bachelor of Commerce (BCom (H)) degree without considering the necessary pre-requisites such as basic accounting, maths. Three decades ago, approvals for enrollments in a particular program always were given by the respective Heads of Schools in which students desired to read accounting, now, enrolments are approved solely by 'Admissions Cell' who are self-certified experts in all disciplines, just handing out admissions to students. Many universities worldwide are private and receive NO funding from state or central governments so approving student enrolments irrespective of quality, required knowledge or having the necessary pre-requisites are all considered immaterial by most educational institutions, as the ONLY pre-requisite is that you should be financially sound.

#### 2. No pre-requisites required for admission in UG studies

Stanford, Macquarie, Australian National University's accounting department carefully scrutinizes each applicants academic details for relevant prerequisites before considering whether a student is appropriate to be

enrolled in a degree program either at UG or PG level. Students wishing to study accounting at UG level need to have studied basic level accounting, mathematics and all instruction in school should have been in English. For students wishing to enroll in PG program in accounting should have attained a UG degree in accounting which is a necessary pre-requisite.

#### 3. Students demand B+ grade in assignments

Students without the basic accounting, English and maths pre-requisites face tremendous difficulties grasping concepts and are the ones who resort to duplication of assignment, cheating in tests and exams, under the eyes of their faculty whom are helpless to say anything fearing reprisal or attack from rowdy students. During tests, these students would openly adopt malpractices despite the faculty hopelessly trying to create a studious environment. Faculties (95%) tend to be very lenient in evaluating the assignments, tests, projects, and their students are always thrilled and love their classes despite barely understanding what is been taught.

#### 4. Poor results due to poor performance

Students in India, who studied commerce read accounting in Year 11 and 12 and at university level excelled in UG studies in accounting, were expected to progress onwards to more advanced studies in accounting. Even the basics taught are just a refresher for commerce background students but science students are never able to catch up as they already are far behind. Professors even if they hold some catch up classes aren't impressed at the poor turnout from non commerce students. Students who had not studied accounting, economics and business studies really tend to find the lectures and material covered in accounting classes too boring and difficult as there are no lab experiments.

#### 5. Students use emotional blackmail tactics for improvement in grade

When students receive their assignments/projects or end of semester exam results, and the grades are not at all very pleasing, they are very quick to approach their faculties/professor to question about their low or fail grades. Having realized that their excuses have fallen flat, students switch on to persuasion mode and if this does not work in their professors, they then resort to other hostile means such as harassment, threats and some students have even carried out their threats either causing harm to the faculty concerned and/or to themselves.

#### 6. Faculty feedback form used as revenge by unhappy students

On the contrary, some faculties felt that they had nothing to lose as long as the customer (students in this case) were happy as they were sure to give a positive feedback about the faculty which in turn would help him get an increment or secure his employment contract. Those students who had received a lower or failed grade even after having met their faculty and deliberated over the matter, they are the ones who always filled in a negative feedback about their faculties.

#### 7. Evaluation criteria for faculties

Faculties are evaluated in a variety of ways and many institutions follow a Performance-Based-Assessment-

System (PBAS) which largely looks at a set of parameters that are used to evaluate a faculty and 'Student Feedback' is sadly one of them. The faculty feedback form is filled by every student (just after the start of the semester and then again before the end semester exams) about the faculty who had taught them. Their assessment on how the faculty taught and behaved is detailed and the comments are very carefully studied by all those responsible for deciding on the tenure of faculties. A faculty may be terminated or refused any increments or promotion based on the PBAS. Based on the adverse faculty feedback, a faculty may not be given the course to teach in the following semester.

### Results and Implications

The Findings revealed that over the decades despite advancement in technology, the standard of teaching has not nose-dived, but it has in the case of the quality of students enrolled in accounting courses. Many students had gained admission for an accounting degree without having studied basic accounting in schools. These students are under prepared and have poor literacy and numerical skills for university level Study. They are largely incapable of applying principles to unrehearsed cases and problems as the skill set of students does not include problem-solving or taking responsibility for their own learning.

Due to the deterioration in the quality of undergraduate students teaching quality had still not deteriorated in most institutions, however, it was very strongly felt in the academic community that student quality had deteriorated in students lacking basic skills made it difficult to teach their courses at the required level. Many academics felt that overall job satisfaction and the pleasure and sense of achievement have gone out of this occupation. It has become increasingly managerial and rule-based. Institutions have now moved into a managerial conception of education, privileging only measures related to short-term outcomes and considering students as 'customers'. In turn, this has affected the autonomy of the university as an educational institution to just a factory which produces graduates.

This issue has been repeatedly raised with school management and is ignored and people who raise it as an issue are targeted by management. Everyone knows the standards are poor, but no one seems to be able to do anything about it. 'Dumbing' down is a worldwide phenomenon and ultimately, undergraduate degrees will have little value. universities are not selecting students who want to enroll (because universities want money) and you are in the middle; classes with few (or none) smart students who are not able to understand even the basics and want to pass with the least possible effort, on one hand, and the pressures from your institution to higher the level of the courses

### Conclusions

Faculty are caught between satisfying their "customers" and keeping their "bosses" happy in a system where student satisfaction with the professor is often figured into reappointment, promotion, and tenure decisions. It seems to everyone involved in higher education that there is a lot riding on the undergraduate GPA. This paper revealed that

academics are facing many challenges that may tempt faculty to behave unethically and affect their well-being and job satisfaction. Studies have revealed that the standard of accounting education at Indian universities had deteriorated and the main stakeholders very strongly felt that the evaluation criteria for exams are inappropriate but considered otherwise for management and students alike. Many students on the basis of relaxed controls on admissions and without the required pre-requisites have managed to obtain their degree due to institutions accepting these students as 'customers'. Academics have not compromised on teaching styles and standards but are left with nil options to do the unethical plague and adopt blasphemous unethical practices thus putting a smile on the faces of those students who had a smooth run on the crescent of fun assessments and superior grades.

The findings of the project should provide useful information to the industry who should know how the students obtained their degrees and identify the gaps inherent and various regulatory agencies such as Unethical practices in response to poor student quality, and subject to lively debates as to possible solutions as to curb the so called mafia who may also have unsolicited interests in ensuring their aims are also achieved. It's generally agreed that educational institutions expected academics to engage in potentially unethical practices such as making assessments easier and inflating grades and a third of respondents admitted to grade inflation. Three main reasons why academics inflate grades and deflate coursework are (a) school's economic viability, (b) student evaluations, and (c) reputation if their course is singled out as being too difficult.

In sum, the findings suggest the deterioration in the quality of students may put pressure on academics to engage in unethical practices. This paper should pave the pathway to an ongoing dialogue between academics, university management, the accounting profession and public policy makers concerning the key challenges facing accounting education in India. Pertinent issues requires investigation in: higher education managerialism, poor academic job security, fear of student "punishment" through teaching evaluations, grade inflation, and coursework deflation, all of which suggest institutional dysfunction.

However, the literature attempts to uphold the virtues of academic integrity and argues that Faculty Feedback Form should be about what the student actually gained from learning and not about how satisfied they were or not with the teaching staff and courses. While these findings do provide a causal relationship between academic dishonesty and later unethical acts in practice, they do support the notion that academic dishonesty is an activity that has likely ethical consequences in practice. Furthermore, while the accounting profession has always held integrity as one of its core values, in recent years the profession's emphasis on integrity and ethical behavior has significantly intensified Demonstrating impeccable integrity has always been and continues to be essential for accounting professionals. And since today's accounting students will become tomorrow's accounting professionals, it is imperative that these students develop and adhere to the high standards of ethical conduct that will be expected of them by the accounting profession

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