

Best Practices – A Holistic Development

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Abstract

Every higher education institution across the globe are in continuous quest for upgradation in quality teaching –learning process in tune with the implementation of best practices which are necessary for holistic development. This noble endeavour is deep rooted in Ignatian pedagogy. The Ignatian pedagogy rests on collective responsibility of all the intellectuals through interplay of experience, reflection and actions. This motivates the current study to look into the best practices performed at St. Xavier's College (Autonomous) Kolkata. The underlying principles of such best practices aim for the holistic development of the institution and its contribution to the society at large. This is embedded in the motto of the institution namely, "Nihil Ultra" with the responsibility of creating men and women for others.

1. Ignatian Pedagogy :

Pedagogy is the way in which teachers accompany learners in their growth and development. The continual interplay of experience, reflection and action in the teaching-learning dynamics of the classroom lies at the heart of an Ignatian pedagogy. It is our way of proceeding in Jesuit educational institutions as we accompany the learner on his or her journey of becoming a fully humane person. It is an Ignatian pedagogical paradigm which each of us can bring to the subjects we teach and programs we run, knowing that it needs to be adapted and applied to our own specific situations.

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All of us in the work of Jesuit education look forward to benefiting from the insights and suggestions that other teachers have to offer. In the Ignatian spirit of cooperation, we hope that teachers who develop their own lessons or brief units in specific subjects of their curriculum utilizing the Ignatian Paradigm will share them with others.

2. Expected Best Practices from Higher Education Institutes

Every Higher Education Institute (HEI) should also encourage research, consultancy and extension activities so that faculty may showcase their talents and also enrich themselves. As a tool of improvement, the institutes are to develop adequate infrastructure and learning resources with an aim at optimal usage of these resources. In order that these objectives are satisfied, students are to be provided with proper support and their progressions are to be monitored on a continuous basis. However, to achieve all these, a robust organizational and management system should be in place which shall lend itself to all possible practices that prove to be healthy for the institution.

3. Best Practices at St. Xavier's College

The Jesuit College aims at forming young men and women of competence, commitment, compassion and conscience. St. Xavier's College thus aims at making its own contribution towards a transformation of the present-day social condition so that principles of social justice, equality of opportunity, genuine freedom and respect for religious and moral values, enshrined in the Constitution of India, may prevail, and the possibility of living a fully human existence may be open before all.

ISO Certification

The administration of St. Xavier's College (Autonomous), Kolkata is aware of the need of Quality Assurance in Higher Education Institutes and is always keen to upgrade the standard in order to cater to the students of present age. Thus, from the perspective of self-evaluation, after much research and introspection, we have gone for ISO certification, which, as one of its essential component, made us gone through the audit of different processes that are being carried out. St. Xavier's College (Autonomous), Kolkata has received ISO 9001:2015 certification for providing Higher Education with the validity from 03.07.2019 until 03.07.2022.

Some of the best practices are :

a). Teaching-Learning

The basic thrust in the teaching-learning process is student-centric classroom academics where every faculty member makes individual effort to cater to the varying requirements of the students. The Continuous Internal Assessments help teachers to distinguish the capable and slow learners so that their individual academic needs may be monitored. Remedial classes are also organized for the weak and slow learners. The Students are motivated to think on their own which sharpens their critical acumen and original thinking. It also hones their analytical and interpretive skills. Regular interactions between faculty members and students beyond class hours improve inter-personal relation between teachers and students.

b).Mentorship

There is a mentor (a professor) is allotted to each class to ensure a close look towards academic, social and other problems the students face. In case of a problem, remedial classes are arranged, special scholarships are granted and other such actions are taken.

c) Counselling Cell

There is a counselling cell in the college which remains open on all the working days. Five qualified counsellors are there to offer counselling services. Apart from our students, this service is extended to all the stakeholders of the college, viz., parents, staff and alumni. The activities of the cell are kept strictly confidential.

d) Environmental Consciousness

The College is highly aware of environmental issues and tries to initiate measures for a Green and Clean campus. Some measures are such as use of solar energy, green clean neighbourhood and regular plantation of trees. The college also actively involves itself in spreading knowledge and awareness among the staff and students to make them environment friendly.

e) Foundation Course

The main objective of this course on “Inter-religious Studies and Social Harmony” is to introduce students to major religious traditions of the world with a brief exposition of basic

tenets of Hinduism, Christianity and Islam. One of the main goals is to understand how these religious movements orient themselves in the world with respect to history, belief and practice.

f). Entrepreneurship Development Cell

We believe that entrepreneurship is the key that can unlock India's latent inventive potential. It will not only push India to the forefront of the world but also help raise the quality of life in the country. While Start-up is growing to be one of the business world's biggest buzz words, the Entrepreneurship Development Cell, St. Xavier's College (Autonomous), Kolkata envisions a time, when youth will look up to the new generation of CEO's and entrepreneurs as their modern day rock stars.

g) Rural Campus

There is a campus of the college at Raghobpur, South 24 Parganas, which is dedicated to rural students. Most of the students of this campus are first generation learners and majority of them are girls. The college administration provides quality education to these students at a highly subsidized tuition fee. In order that the students of this campus feel at home in the main campus, they are involved in sports and other cultural activities of the main campus.

h) Scheduled Caste (SC)/Scheduled Tribe(ST) Cell and Minority Cell

SC/ST and Minority Cells work in conjunction with AICUF (All India Catholic University Federation) in our College. The major purpose is to bring the students of minority community at par with the main stream student body. Teachers with expertise and specialized knowledge are invited to offer classes and help students in subjects like Financial Accounting, Cost and Management Accounting, Economics and Mathematics and Statistics etc.

Minority Cell

As a Christian Minority Educational Institution, St. Xavier's has been very much keen to provide services to the educational and cultural needs of the Minority community along with other caste, creed and Nationality. The Minority Cell basically helps minority students including Christian, Muslim, Jain, Buddhists etc. for their academic development. The Cell is committed to provide assistance to the SC/ST & minority students through counseling, personality development,

development of communication skill, remedial coaching, tutorial classes, and preparatory classes for professional and employment purposes, etc.

4. Initiative taken in Current Pandemic Situation

The College has started its online classes for students from Monday, 10th August, 2020. In order that the staff and students may experience hassle free smooth online teaching-learning, College has purchased licensed versions of “Microsoft Teams” for each of the students, teachers and office staff.

Online Teaching – Learning during Pandemic

To facilitate online Teaching-learning, professors have been asked to prepare e-learning materials. They have been encouraged to use Information Communication Technologies like Video Lectures, Power-Point presentations, Movie links, Google Classroom, etc. Arrangements have been made for secure transportation of the e-learning materials to students. Digital library materials have been made available to the students through Digital Repository.

Orientation programmes for faculty members have already been organised so that online teaching can be carried out effectively. The College has prepared a full handbook for the students explaining various steps for conducting the online teaching-learning process smoothly. The handbook also contains dos and don'ts regarding online pedagogical activities.

Services to the Students and Staff during Pandemic

The College administration has arranged online counselling facility for those students as well as their parents by professional psychiatrists. The service has also been extended to the teachers aiming at their mental well-being. In order to keep the students free of any anxiety, regular communications are being made by the Principal through College website. The same is being done for the staff members. The authority of St. Xavier's College (Autonomous), Kolkata has decided to reduce fee structure of the existing students substantially for the months August, 2020 to December, 2020. Following Jesuit tradition of Service, this fee reduction has been done to give some relief to the families of the students studying in this college under the current pandemic situation.

The College has organized almost one hundred online programmes consisting on webinars, seminars and workshops – both national and international level. Two online faculty development programmes were also organized during this pandemic period.

5. Evidence of Success

The student satisfactions relative to academic benchmarks are determined through structured students’ feedback and quantitative analysis of the same to improve and enhance the academic activities in relation to curriculum, infrastructure, facilities and co-curricular activities. In this context, it is noted that the St Xavier’s College (Autonomous), Kolkata, had bagged the highest cumulative grade point average (CGPA) of 3.77 out of 4 point grade to get an A++ grade from NAAC in 2017. To add, St Xavier’s College (Autonomous) Kolkata under PARAMARSH scheme is granted the right to mentor National Accreditation and Assessment Council (NAAC) accreditation aspirant institutions for promoting quality assurance in higher education in 2019. It gives me pleasure to mention that in NIRF 2020, our college has acquired 7th rank under “College” category. We are now an ISO 9001:2015 certified college as well.

6. Concluding Remarks

Best practices are not something that are supernatural or something out of the world. It is those practices that every educational institution must carry out in order to benefit its student, staff, administration and all other stakeholders. So, best practices encompass all our usual practices, like teaching-learning, examination, student and staff support system, decisions in the management level, quality assurance, etc. In other words, best practices include all those practices that contribute towards the holistic development of the institution. But the practices become best when they are performed with utmost sincerity and honesty.

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