An alternate NAAC for assessment of teachers in universities and degree colleges

During the last few months, the National Assessment and Accreditation Council (NAAC) has been according grades to various universities and degree colleges in a massive nationwide exercise. This assessment is mainly based on infrastructural facilities, the research achievements and academic standards of the institution. Based upon this assessment one can easily decide the worth of any institution. There is no doubt that this exercise is certainly worthwhile and if continued regularly, with supporting incentives and punishments to the institutions, it can really improve the general standards of higher education and research in India.

In spite of all the apparent benefits, one point that baffles the onlooker is whether the general rating of any institution or any department really applies to all the teachers of that department. For example, the overall research or academic level in a department may be dismal, but there may be one or two teachers with exceptional abilities. In spite of their efforts, the department would get a low grade based on its overall performance. In turn, such exceptional teachers will suffer from the consequences of low rating from NAAC. Conversely, in a department which has overall high academic or research standards, all the teachers, however bad they may be, would get the benefits of high rating from NAAC.

Now, if one says that these grades cannot be extrapolated to the individual teaching levels, then what is the criterion for the standards of a teacher? At the same time, how would one explain the consequences of low grade to any department? Low grade would mean lower funding to the department and this would reduce the already scarce resources available to the few good workers. Simi-

larly, high grade would ensure increased funding to even the worst workers in a good department.

In view of the above-mentioned paradoxes, we wish to suggest an internal assessment pattern which would rate the teachers every year, on the basis of their research or academic achievements. With the help of this rating, a merit list can be prepared. Then the funds available to the department for academic and research purposes can be used to fulfil the requirements of the teachers based on this hierarchy list. This means that the most talented worker gets to utilize the biggest chunk of funds for advancement of his own research work or to upgrade his own teaching tools.

Regarding the method of grading, both research work and excellence in teaching should be considered. For grading of research work, publications should be the sole criterion. The impact factor should be used as an index. At the end of the year, the impact factors of all the publications should be added and averaged to get a general score per publication. For teaching or academic excellence, a general grading on a point scale of 0–10 should be done by the students for each teacher, and average of the rating per student should be calculated. Then by adding both research and teaching scores, one may obtain a grade for each teacher. These grades can be used for preparation of a merit list for each department. In this method, each teacher would have ample scope to improve his rating by concentrating on his areas of weakness.

We would further suggest the implementation of this method in deciding the promotions of teachers. It has been seen that in most institutions, interview for promotion is just a ritual and everyone

gets time-bound promotion. In this arrangement, the teachers are left with almost no motivation. Thus, while deciding promotions, the average impact factor and teaching grades from the last promotion should be added. Again a merit list can be prepared in this manner and instead of the routine interview, only a select few should be promoted based on lowest cut-off ratings. This method should be first implemented in the case of selection for professorship and then extended to all levels.

This arrangement would motivate teachers to do good work if they want to advance in their career. It is high time that Indian institutions of higher education constitute an alternate NAAC for assessment of their teachers. This becomes all the more important in the wake of the advent of foreign universities in India, with already better infrastructure and strict quality control on teaching and research work. Otherwise the standards of higher education in Indian institutions are doomed to deteriorate to unimaginable depth.

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Blame it on the pharmaceutical companies

Phonetic pharmaceutical brands do cause havoc in the healthcare system. Sreedhar et al.[1] have rightly addressed the issue in their recent correspondence. We agree with the authors that in recent times marketing strategies of pharmaceutical

companies seem to outweigh practical deliberations while naming a brand. Faulty pharmacy dispensing due to the confusing brand names does lead to medication errors and their consequent adverse effects. There have been anecdo-

tal reports[2] in our teaching hospitals and elsewhere of the confusion of similar proprietary or trade names leading to prescribing, dispensing, and administration errors. However, the pharmaceutical companies should not be totally blamed

for similar brand names designated for different drugs, since the Drugs Controller General, India (DCGI) has not yet taken the initiative to setup a central authority to monitor registration of trade names. For the moment though, pharmaceutical companies should be 'crucified' only if the same brand name is given to two or more drugs. Moreover, we should, in addition, partly blame the medical practitioners for pharmacy dispensing errors.

According to Section 1.5 of the 'Code of Medical Ethics', in the Indian Medical Council (Professional Conduct, Etiquette and Ethics) Regulations[3], every physician should, as far as possible, prescribe drugs with generic names and not trade or

brand names. In our country, it is a known fact that most medical practitioners prescribe drugs using trade names. If medical practitioners adhere to the 'Code of Medical Ethics' laid down by the Indian Medical Council, in prescribing drugs with generic names, as far as possible, pharmacy medication dispensing errors can be reduced, as well as the resulting morbidity.

1. Sreedhar, D., Subramanian, G. and Udupa, N., *Curr. Sci.*, 2006, **91**, 147–148.
2. Dooley, M. and Van de Vreede, M., *Lancet*, 2006, **368**, 1419–1420.
3. Indian Medical Council (Professional Conduct, Etiquette and Ethics) Regulations, The Gazette of India, 6 April 2002.

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Making our science education trendier

Way back in the early nineties, the joint Board of Control (BOC) meetings at Panjab University (PU) debated ways and means to make our Honours School system more meaningful, modern and exciting. Discussion was finally shelved due to many reasons, social as well as political, within PU as well as in the region.

Are we willing once again to think afresh, experiment and innovate? Here are some points which have been accumulating in my mind ever since I came on a sabbatical and interacted with a wide cross-section of teachers, students, administrators of all nationalities in the University of Cincinnati (UC), USA. My final urge to pen down the points came when I was hooked onto the UC Electronic Blackboard as a visiting faculty by a Geology Professor, who not only allowed me to observe him teach but used my inputs on the spot in a system which is flexible and vibrant. Some ideas for all friends back home for a wider debate:

• Scrap the attendance registers but have compulsory surprise tests instead of previously declared scheduled house tests;
• Introduce electronic blackboards with all courses, question banks available online to all students;
• Have a number of electronic lecture halls in the auditoria between various departments; install faster internet facility to make teaching effectively internet and research-backed;

• Log use hours of all projection facilities on line to be visible to anyone; this will encourage better active use of these facilities. If these are not being actively put to use by individual departments, they may be forced to share with less fortunate ones not having such facilities;
• Make it mandatory for every teacher and researcher to put his web-page on the university/college website his most prized publications, achievements, courses offered, guest talks, etc. hyperlinked. He can also put up a list of his favourite academic websites that he would like his students to get hooked to;
• Put useful websites in each subject, hyperlinked online, to be available to any student who wants to further use internet for higher academic standards;
• Students be encouraged to create academic quiz and objective question databank on individual department websites;
• All outdoor teaching through field study tours in applied sciences be on weekends to nearby areas, so that no teaching hours are lost during such tours. Collections made during such tours to be properly catalogued and put to use in teaching as it would yield a higher personal involvement and excitement. Quiz exams for outdoor examination of students during these tours be designed jointly by teachers and students;
• All vehicles meant for study tours be logged online and their use or disuse be

known to all in the university. This would ensure that this facility is not denied by the haves to the have-nots in the name of departmental autonomy. Use it or share/ lose it should be the guiding principle for all facilities, be they instruments or vehicles or lecture halls.

The Physics and Geology departments in UC are in the same building and have costly electronic lecture halls, computer labs, auditoria which are in constant use for teaching, seminars, internet-based practicals using Google earth and multimedia facilities for teaching. Every five years most of our departments get millions of rupees as grants. It is high time we look around the world for multimedia teaching aids for effective upgradation of standards of teaching. Distant and adult learning programmes are normally promoted in our country only for namesake. In UC, these programmes are effectively integrated with normal courses by active faculty, who do teaching and research like all others. In our system, we deny the pleasure of such wholesome occupation to our online teachers as well as students.

We have the first citizen of our country, A. P. J. Abdul Kalam setting a good example in the use of online teaching and use of multimedia projections. It is high time his passion and style spread across all educational institutions. My US colleagues admit that India is way ahead of