

Best Practices

1. Title of the Practice: Research Promotion

1.1 Objectives of the Practice

The objective of this practice is to promote and inculcate a high quality, research-based culture in the institution both at the level of faculty as well as students, so that the college can produce academically competent people who can be productive and contributing members both in the academic sphere as well as in the society.

1.2 The Context

Synod College is primarily a teaching institution with a total student strength of 3000+. With a vast majority of its students being first generation learners and coming from adjoining villages and rural areas, often from vernacular and academically inadequate schools, there is a greater pressure upon teachers to put in extra time and effort in helping the students reach desired levels in learning and compete successfully with others. Apart from the regular classes, teachers are also expected to mentor the students after class hours as well as help them with remedial classes on weekends. Further, there is also the ever-increasing pressure upon teachers to attend courses and training which are mandatory for their career advancement and promotion. These factors, combined with the challenge of finishing the course on time, leaves very little time for research activities. If the culture of research is to be an integral component of our institution, the college must address the following issues: employ more teachers so that the pressure in the student-teacher ratio may be minimized. Though the college has tried to address this issue by appointing college post teachers, part time teachers and guest faculty to increase the strength of the teaching faculty, yet the teacher-student ratio is still highly imbalanced. If research is to be a key feature of higher education, the government, which is the central funding agency, may also be petitioned to consider the sanctioning of more teachers to the institution so that teachers can pursue their research.

1.3 The Practice

To promote research practice and make it a vital institutional feature, the College has put forward various means and measures into place. Some of the measures include the following: (i) Starting the In-House Research Project: To encourage faculty to engage in research, the college opened a college-funded, in-house research program known as In-House Research Project. This project is of one year duration and can be availed by all sanctioned and college-post faculty. (ii) Strengthening the Research Cell in the College: To strengthen the cell, a team of dynamic teachers with research experience are inducted into the cell. This cell is entrusted with the responsibility of spearheading all research-related activities and initiatives under the guidance and supervision of IQAC. On 16th July 2021, the Cell submitted a comprehensive revised document to augment the existing guidelines of the In-House Research Project. The same is published in the college website for easy access. (<http://www.synodcollege.edu.in/wp-content/uploads/In-House-Research-Project-Guidelines-Synod-College.pdf>) (ii) Through the initiative of the Research Cell, a formal survey of the teaching staff with regard to their engagement in and challenges/constraints encountered, in research was conducted in July 2021. The objective of this survey is to enable the college to map out the research database and take appropriate steps to address findings and observations. The same was submitted to the college on 8th July 2021 (iii) Training and seminars in research ethics and culture as well as research options and

opportunities are organized by the college at regular intervals or jointly collaborated with the parent university and other institutions. On 30th April 2021, two sessions on “Research Ethics and Plagiarism” were organized, and more such programs are scheduled to be conducted in the near future. (iv) To promote research and academic exchanges, two research centers were set up by the college - **The International Center for North-East Studies Synod College** (30th July 2016) and the **Center for Historical Research Synod College** (26th November 2020). The Centers have been instrumental in conducting research-related programs and facilitating research for faculty. (v) The college seeks to inculcate the culture of research right from the level of the students, exposing them to research practices early in their education. The annual **Students Research Project** is a mandatory part of the college’s internal curriculum and each department is expected to have one student research project per academic year. The **Students’ Seminar** conducted every year provides further avenues for fostering research skills in the students and preparing them for research-based scholarship in higher education. (vi) Publication of research papers and academic writing: The college makes every effort to contribute to academics and scholarship by publishing journals such as **The Political Anvil** published annually by the Department of Political Science (PG), and **Journal of Science and Environment Today** published by the Science Departments. In addition, academic papers presented at all conferences/seminars organized by the college are compiled and published in book form by the college.

1.4 Evidence of Success

In recent years, it is noticed that the research output of the college has increased in many ways. (i) The number of In-House Research projects on relevant and inter-disciplinary subjects is substantial. (ii) Some of the faculty are currently engaged in Interdisciplinary and collaborative research projects with external agencies/institutions . (iii) Research papers/ M.Phil dissertations/Ph.D theses of faculty have been published in book form and in reputed journals. (iv) Many of our graduates have/are pursuing research at the higher educational level. The exposure to research practices introduced to them in their under-graduate years in the college through the Students’ Research Project and Students’ Seminar have contributed significantly, giving them needed experience and knowledge in their research pursuits. In a Student Feedback Survey conducted in 2021, 39% out of 50% of students are of the opinion that the Department Seminars conducted annually help in providing in-depth understanding of a topic and serve as a valuable ‘training for research’. These testimonials attest to the success of the practice.

1.5 Problems Encountered and Resources Required

There are two major problems that hinder and challenge research growth in the college: (i) Time factor: The college is basically a teaching institution with a student population of 3000 plus. Priority is therefore given to teaching and completion of the syllabus, leaving very less time for research engagements. As pointed earlier, most of the students admitted to the college come from educationally-disadvantaged backgrounds thereby, entailing additional time and attention from faculty, thus hindering research. Recruitment of more teachers to ease the pressure in teacher-student ratio is very much required. (ii) Funding: The need for funds is a major hurdle to an enhanced research culture in the college. The college has instituted college-funded, in-house research projects, therefore, the demand for research funds is an ever-increasing reality. Secondly, to cater to the growing enrollment of students and provide faculty with the space and time to do research, the college has to recruit more teachers at the college post and guest faculty level which entails additional financial need. Upgrades in library and digital resource facilities will greatly help in contributing to the research pool in the college.

2. Title of the Practice: Student-Centric Livelihood and Entrepreneurial Skills

2.1 Objectives of the Practice

The objective of this practice is to create a space whereby, side by side with academic education, students will be imparted crucial life skills that will serve them beyond the classroom, enhance their ability to work in the real world, and equip them with practical knowledge and learning to compete efficiently and successfully in a rapidly changing, global job market.

2.2 The Context

Synod College was started with the vision of imparting quality and holistic education to the student community, particularly those coming from 'economically disadvantaged' backgrounds and preparing them for a life of purpose, service and leadership in all spheres. A study of the student profile of the college shows that almost 90% of the students hail from such a background. As such, one of the means of empowering the students is through the development of real-world skills that will help them be self-reliant and self-supporting individuals able to stand on their own feet. Simultaneously, it is also hoped that these pragmatic-oriented courses will help students who are not too academically inclined to explore other means and avenues of livelihood after graduation. But since the college is affiliated to a University and has to follow the prescribed curriculum which is mainstream academic in nature, the challenge that needs to be addressed is to design an internal/extra curricula that will provide life skills and entrepreneurship-focused programs in addition to the main academic curriculum.

2.3 The Practice

To support its objective of providing entrepreneurial and life-skills education to its students, the College seeks to organize, as well as collaborate with external agencies who have the required resources and expertise to implement the following programs: (i) Short term training/workshops on entrepreneurial and market-oriented skills that are contextually relevant and practical in nature. Keeping in view the agricultural/rural background of a large number of its students, one of the workshops organized in the last one year was on **'Vegetable and Fruit Processing,'** as well as **'Entrepreneurship and Marketing'** (December 2020). This workshop was done in collaboration with the Department of Horticulture and Meghalaya Industrial Development Corporation. Another workshop scheduled to be conducted in 2021 is on **'Beekeeping and Candle Making,'** to train students on the practice of Apiculture and the harnessing of natural resources as a means of sustainable livelihood. (ii) Add-on Courses of diverse nature: The college endeavors to cater to the varied backgrounds and needs of students by conducting a number of diverse Add-on Courses of three to four months duration that will benefit all sections of the student community. Some of the courses conducted (2020-21) are **ICT-related Courses** with the aim of imparting the much-needed digital skills to negotiate the contemporary job market trend. The closure of the college due to the pandemic in the 2020 session has greatly hindered the successful running of these courses. However, the following Add-On Courses are scheduled for the 2021-22 session: - **Tailoring and Fashion Design; Soft Skills and Facing interviews; Hospitality and Tourism** to explore the tourism industry potential of the state and region; **Baking -as-therapy; Data Analysis, and Statistics** to coach students on preparing for entry into services. All these courses are conducted after class hours to enable students to join without hindering their regular classes. The fee collected for each course is highly subsidized to allow economically weak students to avail of the same. For some categories of students such as persons with disabilities or those

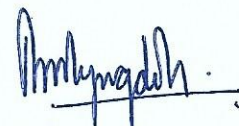
coming from BPL background, the college undertakes to sponsor or charge them at concessional rates.

2.4 Evidence of Success

The College's endeavor to train students in job-oriented and entrepreneurial life skills has greatly helped in producing a generation of self-reliant and independent individuals able to stand on their own feet and be self-supporting. Many of the students who enrolled for the ICT courses in 2020-21 were able to get job placements in reputed IT industries such as TCS and iMerit and have become more digitally competent. Some of the students were able to support themselves educationally through the stipends and salaries earned from these online/part time employment. Similarly, students who have received training in the tailoring course conducted in the previous years have been able to earn an additional living from the sale of tailoring goods such as dresses and masks, especially during the current pandemic. The success of these programs has fostered a demand for more such courses to be run in subsequent years. The workshop on Fruit and Vegetable Processing has helped a large number of students not only to learn this essential skill but also to start micro businesses in their own villages and localities. Some rural-based students were also able to impart their knowledge to others through the Self-Help Groups in their villages. The success stories that came out of these kinds of training have encouraged the College to design and plan more such courses that will cater to the needs of the students and produce skilled graduates able to serve themselves and society.

2.5 Problems Encountered and Resources Required

As already mentioned, the college has to adhere to the mainstream academic curriculum prescribed by the parent university, therefore, its power of launching more such student-centric livelihood training as part and parcel of the syllabi is greatly restrictive. With the ever-increasing urgency and pressure of completing the regular syllabus, there is often, very limited time for students to join these classes. In order to address this problem, the college has made provision for all Add-on courses to be conducted after regular class hours so that students may avail of the courses. This limitation notwithstanding, a large number of students have joined the courses and training and expressed a desire for more such programs in the future. Another major issue encountered is the problem of funds needed to conduct the courses. All the resource persons recruited for the trainings are highly trained and certified in their respective fields and as such, more funding is needed to pay for the honorarium as well as other miscellaneous requirements. Furthermore, though these programs are designed to help equip all students, yet, their particular thrust is to help students who are academically below average to explore other avenues of livelihood, and to empower economically weaker students as per the vision statement of the college. The fees charged for the courses are therefore, extremely marginal, hence more financial assistance is required. Though in the last few years, the college has been able to avail of RUSA funding, yet, there is a need to raise more funds if such programs are to be conducted on a long term basis.



Principal
Synod College, Shillong