ACCREDITATION: PANACEA FOR PRODUCING BETTER PROFESSIONALS

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This paper argues that the progress of a nation is directly linked with the quality of education it offers. India, being a vast country, offers one of the largest educational system having more than four hundred universities and twenty one thousand colleges. Library and Information Science education is now being offered in more than two hundred institutions at varying levels, from Certificate to D.Litt. Moreover, the scope of the subjects taught varies from institution to institution. Lack of quality assurance and proper accreditation system affects the quality of LIS education. The paper deals with the need for accreditation that assures appropriate standards of quality and integrity, with the market requirements on one hand, and changing technological advances in the information and communication processes, on the other hand. The paper discusses the importance and benefits of accreditation and how it ensures the quality of LIS education. Agencies involved in India in accreditation are also discussed and it gives suggestions for accreditation in the field of LIS education.

Introduction

The progress of any country is strongly linked with the quality of education. It is, therefore, necessary for any education system to undertake periodic review of the curriculum and subject content to ensure that they are not outdated, obsolete and effectively fulfill the requirements of the country in their field. Today there is need of competent and highly qualified personnel in all the fields for overall growth and prosperity of the country. Therefore there is a premium on both quantity (increased access) and quality (relevance and excellence of academic program offered) of higher education. India has one of the largest educational systems in the world. There were only 20 universities and 500 colleges at the time of independence. There are 416 Universities at present, 24 Central Universities, 103 Deemed Universities, 5 Institutions established under State legislations and 33 Institutes of National Importance

established by Central legislation. In addition, there are 20,677Colleges including around 2,166Women's Colleges. At the beginning of the academic year 2007-08, the total number of students enrolled in the universities and colleges has been reported to be around twelve millions. In spite of these facilities higher education in India is not accessible to many. To meet the growing demand for higher education, the numbers of distance education programs are growing up in India. The growth and expansion of distance education has generated considerable interest in students including those interested in LIS education.

Now days, every body knows that Library and Information Science (LIS) education is not limited to books and their maintenance alone but has extended to computer application, networking and communication, management, operations research, etc. The essential character of the field of library and information studies deals with recordable information and knowledge, and the services and technologies to facilitate their management and use; encompassing information and knowledge creation; communication and identification; selection and acquisition; organization and description; storage and retrieval; conservation and preservation analysis and interpretation; evaluation and synthesis; dissemination and management.

Today the expectation of the LIS professionals is that they should be competent enough to manage, to provide access to, organize, acquire and preserve materials in print and electronic form. For this they will have to keep pace with the technological changes and changing times. The skills required for LIS professionals now cover Intellectual Property Rights (IPR) and Copyrights, Management Information Systems, Content and Knowledge Management, Networking, Telecommunications; and furthermore they also need to have knowledge of alternate publishing models. To face the challenges posed by the fast changing technology; information explosion; scattering of information; multidisciplinary nature; flow of information; and the need for quick access to information, there is a pressing need that LIS professionals should be trained accordingly. Since the challenges are the same throughout the country, the education imparted to the professionals should have uniformity and it should be in conformity to the standards established in the field of Library and Information Science the world over.

Library and Information Science (LIS) Education in India

Education in Library and Information Science is not a new phenomena in India. It started long back in 1911 when W. A. Borden started the first training program for library workers at Central Library in Baroda. The second training course was established in 1915 in Punjab University. In the current scenario LIS education is imparted in several Universities, Colleges and Institutions spread through out the country.

The following LIS courses are available at different institutions:-

- Certificate in Library and Information Science (CLISc)
- Diploma in Library and Information Science (DLISc)
- Bachelor Degree in Library and Information Science (BLISc)
- Master Degree in library and information science (MLISc)
- Post Graduate Diploma in Library Automation and Networking (PGDLAN)
- Master of Philosophy in Library and Information Science (M.Phil.)
- Ph.D. in Library and Information Science
- D.Litt. in Library and Information Science

In addition to this the National Institute of Science Communication and Information Resources (NISCAIR), New Delhi, and Documentation Research and Training Centre (DRTC), Bangalore, provide Associate Courses in Information Science which are equivalent to MLISc degree. Fast changing information and communication system has revolutionized the working of libraries which in turn has great impact on LIS education. Recently International School of Information Management (University of Mysore) has started a new course M. Tech in Information Systems and Management. The scope of the subjects taught varies from one institution to the other. In addition to this insufficient number of faculty members, inadequate infrastructure, lack of quality assurance and proper accreditation system affects the quality of LIS education imparted by these institutions.

Accreditation

Accreditation is a voluntary system of evaluation of higher education institutions and programs. It is a collegial process based on self evaluation and peer assessment for improvement of academic quality and public accountability. Accreditation assures those higher education institutions and their units, schools, or their programs meet appropriate standards of quality and integrity. Accreditation is both a process and a condition. The process entails the assessment of educational quality and the continued enhancement of educational operations through the development and validation of standards. The condition provides a credential to the public at large indicating that an institution and/or its programs have accepted and are fulfilling their commitment to educational quality.

In higher education accreditation has two goals: First, to ensure that post secondary educational institutions and their units meet appropriate standards of quality and integrity, and second, to improve the quality of education these institutions offer.

The two types of post secondary education accreditation are institutional and specialized. Institutional accreditors evaluate and accredit an institution as a whole. Each

accrediting agency is responsible for accrediting institutions within its region. For this reason, institutional accreditation is sometimes referred to as regional accreditation.

Specialized accreditors evaluate and accredit professional occupational education at the unit of program levels; for example, as a specialized accreditor, the American Library Association's (ALA) Committee on Accreditation (COA) accredits programs leading to the professional degree of Library and Information Studies, which is master's degree (MS).

Accreditation has the following benefits:-

1) Helps the institution to know its strengths, weaknesses and opportunities through an informed review process.
2) To identify internal areas of planning and resource allocation.
3) Outcome will provide the funding agencies with objective data for performance funding.
4) Gives institutions a new sense of direction and identity. Provides society with reliable information on quality of education offered.
5) Employers have access to information on the quality of education offered to potential recruits.
6) Promotes intra and inter – institutional interactions.
7) It assures the public the individuals who have graduated from accredited schools have received a quality education.
8) It assures students that accredited programs meet the standards of the profession that they seek to enter.
9) Institutions of higher education benefit through self and peer evaluation and thus get the opportunity for continuous improvement

Accreditation does not, however, result in ranking of programs. Rather it respects the uniqueness of each program while ensuring that all accredited programs meet the same standards. The accreditation process involves the continuous assessment and evaluation of a program and the enhancement of the program's operation using standards. This process through self-evaluation and peer-review is designed to foster relations among educators and members of the profession. Accreditation indicates that the program demonstrates a commitment to quality and that the program seeks to confirm that commitment.

There is no accreditation agency in India in the field of Library and Information Science to ensure reasonable standards and quality of output. The Report of the Committee on National Policy of Library and Information Systems (NAPLIS) has stressed the need for such a body (1997). So far departments of LIS in the universities have broadly adopted the papers recommended by the UGC Review Committee of Library Science in Indian Universities (1965) and its subsequent revision, namely, Kaula Committee on Curriculum Development in Library and Information Science,

1993, Karisiddappa Committee on Curriculum Development in Library and Information Science, 2001.

UGC's National Assessment and Accreditation Council (NAAC)

However, UGC has established an autonomous body, NAAC (National Assessment and Accreditation Council), to assess and accredit institutions of higher education in the country. It is an outcome of the recommendations of the National Policy in Education (1986) that laid emphasis on upholding the quality of higher education in India. NAAC was established in 1994 with its headquarters at Bangalore. The NAAC functions through its General Council (GC) and Executive Committee (EC) where educational administrators, policy makers, and senior academicians are represented. The Chair Person of the UGC is the President of the GC of the NAAC, the Chairperson of the EC is an eminent academician in the area of relevance to the NAAC. The Director of NAAC is its academic and administrative head, and is the member-secretary of both the GC and EC. The NAAC also has many advisory and consultative committees to guide its practices, in addition to the statutory bodies that steer its policies, it assesses and accredits Higher Education Institute in the country, score ranging from A++(95-100 point) to C(55-60point).In order to make Assessment and Accreditation more rigorous NAAC has introduced new methodology with effect from 1st April 2007.

The vision of the NAAC is "To make quality the defining element of higher education in India through a combination of self and external quality evaluation, promotion and sustenance initiatives".

The mission statements of the NAAC aim at translating the NAAC's vision into reality, defining the following key tasks of the organization:-

1) To arrange for periodic assessment and accreditation of institutions of higher education and their units; and of specific academic programs or projects.
2) To stimulate the academic environment for promotion of quality of teaching- learning and research in higher education institutions.
3) To encourage self evaluation, accountability, autonomy and innovations in higher education.
4) To undertake quality-related research studies, consultancy and training program.
5) To collaborate with other stakeholders of higher education for quality evaluation, promotion and sustenance.

For the assessment of a unit the NAAC follows a three- stage process which is a combination of self- study and peer review and make the outcome as objective as possible. For this NAAC has developed an instrument. Though the methodology and the broad framework of the instrument are the same, there is a slight difference in the focus of the instrument pending upon the unit of Accreditation. The three stages are:

1) The preparation and submission of a Self Study Report by the unit of assessment and in-house analysis of the report by NAAC.

2) The on-site visit of the Peer Team for validation of the self- study reportand for recommending the assessment outcome to the NAAC.
3) The final decision by the Executive Committee of the NAAC.

The self- study report to be validated by peers is the backbone of the whole exercise. Manuals have been developed to suit different units of higher education, with detailed guidelines on the preparation of the self-study report and the other aspects of assessment and accreditation. Any assessment and subsequent accreditation is made with reference to a set of parameters so that the standing of the institution can be compared with that of other similar institutions.

NAAC has identified the following seven criteria to serve as the basis of its assessment procedures:

1) Curricular Aspects
2) Teaching – Learning and Evaluation
3) Research, Consultancy and Extension
4) Infrastructure and Learning Resources
5) Student Support and Progression
6) Organization and Management
7) Healthy Practices.

All India Council of Technical Education (AICTE)

All India Council for Technical Education, set up in 1945 as an advisory body, was given statutory status in 1987 through an Act of Parliament. The main functions of the AICTE are coordination for development of technical education, to promote qualitative improvements in technical education and to maintain norms and standards in technical education. The council has its headquarters in New Delhi. The Council has set up a National Board of Accreditation under Clause 10(u) of the AICTE Act, to periodically evaluate technical programs on the basis of prescribed guidelines, norms, and standards. AICTE grants approval to new technical institutions and to new courses and programs in consultation with the agencies concerned. AICTE is primarily responsible for planning, formulation and maintenance of norms and standards, quality assurance through accreditation, funding in priority areas, monitoring and evaluation, maintaining parity of certification and awards and ensuring coordination and integrated development and management of technical education in the country.

National Council for Teacher Education (NCTE)

The National Council for Teacher Education is a statutory body set up under the National Council for Teacher Education Act, 1993 to facilitate planned and coordinated development of the teacher education system in the country, and for regulation and proper maintenance of norms and standards in the teacher education system. The Council, under Section 12 is responsible for the following activities and

functions:

1) To coordinate and monitor teacher education and its development in the country;
2) Lay down guidelines in respect of minimum qualifications for a person to be employed as a teacher;
3) Lay down norms for any specified category of courses or trainings in teacher education;
4) Lay down guidelines for compliance by recognized institutions for starting new courses and training;
5) Lay down standards in respect of examinations, leading to teacher education qualifications; and
6) Examine and review periodically the implementation of norms, guidelines and standards laid down by the council.

The Council is empowered to grant recognition of institutions offering courses and training in teacher education.

Suggestions

1) A committee or an institution at national level should be developed which will be responsible for accreditation program and to develop and formulate standards of education in Library and Information Science as is the case of American Library Association which has developed COA (Committee on Accreditation).

2) The Standards should be formulated with the intent to foster excellence through the development of criteria for evaluating educational effectiveness. Throughout the Standards the requirements for evaluation include assessment of educational processes, resources, and use of these to achieve established objectives. Since Standards identify the indispensable components of library and information studies program so are based on quality rather than quantitative measure.

3) The criteria for assessment can address the following six areas:

A) Mission, goals and objectives:-

I. Published statements of program goals and clientele to be served, mission and /or vision statements, and strategic planning documents.
II. Materials relating to implementation of the strategic planning process.
III. Statements of the knowledge competencies, and professional ethics to be imparted to students and the means by which these outcomes are measured and revised.
IV. Statements that explain the relation ship of the schools and program's goal to those of the institution.

B) Curriculum: - Course description, sample course outlines, list of core and

elective courses for the area of study or specialization. Brief description of how the curriculum addresses technology, diversity and ethics.

C) Faculty: - List of all faculty, the school's policy on recruitment and retention of faculty, faculty handbook and governance policies and procedures.

D) Students: - Standards for admission and policies and procedures for waiving any admission standard or prerequisite.

E) Administration and Financial Support: - Materials and data on budgets, demographic of staff, salary information, description of relationship of school and program within the institution.

F) Physical Resources and Facilities: - Information on library collections supporting the school and program, description of classroom technologies, description of computer labs and equipment, description of institutional facilities available to faculty, students and staff.

4) The Categories of accreditation can be:-

A) Pre-candidate for Accreditation; Pre-candidacy indicates institution and program's commitment to achieve accreditation.

B) Candidate for Accreditation; Candidacy status indicates that the program is ready to begin the process of accreditation.

C) Initial Accreditation; This indicates that program has been accredited for the first time. It can be a new program, or the existing program.

D) Continued Accreditation; A program that has continuous demonstrated evidence of conformity with the standard referred to as accredited.

E) Conditional Accreditation ; This category is assigned to program that must make changes to comply with the standards to enable accreditation beyond the date specified.

F) Withdrawn Accreditation; This category is assigned to the program that, effective on the date specified, is no longer accredited by the accreditation committee.

Conclusion

For economic growth and prosperity of a nation the need is to produce highly professional and competent personnel. This could be achieved by imparting quality teaching to the students. In order to achieve this some norms and standards need to be laid down so as to educate the students with appropriate skills suitable for a rapidly changing scenario. The courses offered by American universities in LIS are re-accredited by the ALA'S Board of Education for Library. Accreditation has served a worthwhile purpose i.e., to see that courses need professional standards of association and thus saving the society from poorly prepared professionals. Accreditation served as a mechanism for quality assessment and enhancement as the effective utilization of resources to achieve norms for any specified category of appropriate educational objectives.

In India there is no accreditation agency as that of the ALA's Committee on Accreditation to ensure reasonable standards of quality and output. However to address the issues of deterioration of quality the National Policy on Education (1986) and the Plan of Action (POA- 1992) spelt out the strategic plans for the policies and advocated the establishment of an independent national accreditation body. Consequently NAAC was established in 1994. Total numbers of accredited universities are 140 and colleges are 3492.In technical education field AICTE has set up a National Board of Accreditation (NBA) to periodically evaluate technical programs on the basis of prescribed norms, guidelines and standards. In view of the fast growing number of schools imparting in LIS, emerging diversity of standards, and the recent trends in training through the correspondence need for a regular control and enforcement of minimum standards in training can hardly be over emphasized.

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