



# Of UGC, And New Rules For Deemed Universities

**H**igher education in India continues to be over-regulated. The University Grants Commission (UGC) has notified new rules for any college that desires to be a university under Section 3 of the UGC Act-1956—“UGC (Institutions Deemed to be Universities) Regulations-2010”.

Bear with me as I explain some of the rules. Among other things, if these are implemented, then it would mean that a trust (or society) that sets up a college will have pretty much no control over it—once it is declared as a “deemed-to-be” university. The university would be run by a board of management, which will have all power. Half of that board would be employees of the university: including the Vice Chancellor, two Deans, two Professors, Registrar, and Pro Vice Chancellor (if there is one). The sponsoring society can have only one nominee. The Centre will also have an Academician. He or she will be one among the three “eminent” academicians who may be nominated by the Chancellor to the board.

The second aspect of the rule is that there will be no one from the industry on the board (unless the sponsoring society nominates one). There shall be no alumni on the board, (a rule that is incidentally against the current best practices for good governance of universities across the world). Board members,

other than the Registrar and the society’s nominee, must be academicians. Under the new rules, promoters will not enjoy a freehand in appointing the Vice Chancellor. There will be a selection committee comprising a nominee of the Chancellor, the Government and the Board (remember that the board is not controlled by the promoters), that will select the Vice Chancellor. Lest the promoters try to control the board by appointing dummy Deans and Professors, who are then nominated onto the board, the rules clarify that Deans and Professors will be members of the Board by rotation. The Chancellor’s post itself cannot be occupied by the president of the society or relatives. It is expected that the society will nominate someone who is a distinguished public figure. Though well-meaning, I see far too many problems with this model.

## Making Sense

First of all, is it fair to ask promoters to relinquish control of a university that they have created with a lot of care? Would it be fair to ask the Birla family to have nothing to do with BITS, or the Thapar family to wash their hands off Thapar University—incidentally, two of the best Indian institutions.

Second point: is it fair to assume that a Board,

consisting of exclusively academics, will have sufficient experience to manage a university? Again, when world-class universities are contemplating about appointing their alumni and industry people on board, India is moving in a completely different direction.

Also, rules state that a Vice Chancellor (VC) has to be the board's "Chairman". Question arises: who then evaluate the VC? Having an executive head, whose performance cannot be evaluated, is not good governance. Fourth, if the Centre believes that this is indeed the best model, why is it not bringing this model of governance for universities that it has promoted? Over the past decade, there have been numerous demands for more autonomy by IITs and IIMs. Such demands have been rejected by the Centre—it has specified that as a "promoter", it must have control over these institutions. If the Centre feels that IITs and IIMs cannot be given autonomy simply because it has funded these institutions so far, why does the same logic not apply to privately-funded universities?

The UGC rules go on to specify even small details: a 15-day notice requirement for holding a board meeting or a quorum of eight members. I have never

Rules also mandate that a deemed university must be residential. While most famous universities of the world are so, it is by no means a requirement to achieve excellence. So, why has this rule been drafted?

Also, deemed universities will no longer remain autonomous to decide which programmes to run or discontinue. Anytime a new department is to be set up, UGC permission will be needed. If universities wish to grow beyond their current size, UGC permission will be needed.

Why can't a university decide its own course?

New rules also forbid joint programmes between deemed universities, without UGC approval—even if it is between two Indian universities. Regulations also bar the use of the word "university" in a name—unless an institution has been using that word and has a stay from a court permitting it. Under the new rules, a deemed university will have to have a minimum of five disciplines. There have been examples of successful institutions that are focused—ISB for example, which can't be a deemed school now.

These rules also threaten to take away a university's freedom to determine its fee for courses and

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heard of a quorum requirement of eight in a board of 10 people. The panel also specifies membership functions of a council, lists the standing committees of the board and their functions. The message is clear. Innovation is not to be allowed in India.

## Shutting Doors

Beyond governance, the UGC rules take away most of the autonomy that universities enjoy. When the new rules are implemented, admissions will become depended on pan-India tests. Deemed universities often offer direct admission to board toppers for their undergrad courses, which will now be illegal (though research shows that Class XII results are a better indicator of success). Similarly, having a limited number of seats under "sports quota" will become illegal.

Incidentally, none of these rules will apply to the government universities.

makes Central regulations mandatory. One of the most important reasons why a deemed university has been able to provide quality education (compared to the affiliated colleges across the country) is because they are free to charge higher tuition fee. Quality education costs money.

## A Looming Disaster

Overall, the rules are a disaster for higher education. They remove the role of promoters from universities, discouraging companies and individuals from investing in education. They take away autonomy from universities and strengthen the role of a regulator to an unacceptably high degree—destroying islands of quality in a sea of mediocrity. ■■■

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## Dheeraj Sanghi

Dr Sanghi is the former director of Laxmi Narayan Mittal Institute of Information Technology, Jaipur. He is a professor of computer science at IIT, Kanpur. Dr Sanghi has a BTech in computer science from IIT Kanpur and an MS and a PhD from University of Maryland, USA. He can be reached at [dheeraj.sanghi@edu-leaders.com](mailto:dheeraj.sanghi@edu-leaders.com)