

Universities of the 21st century

■ Prof Hari Prasad Sarma

The strategic performance of a university of the 21st century should be governed by a set of core ideas such as outstanding teaching-learning, research, consultancy, support system and distinguished social responsibility.

Teaching-learning environment: To create a stimulating and rewarding academic environment, to foster innovation and creativity with global reach, the university should strive to provide quality education in an excellent learning environment with changing needs and expectations of students to transform their dreams into reality.

The university has to carefully frame course curriculum in the context of globalisation and rapid growth of human culture and civilisation, science and technology with the vision to produce competent, disciplined and quality students with relevant skills and confidence in nation building. Flexibility in syllabus is to be designed to promote convergence of conventional and open and distance learning (ODL) systems.

Transparency in governance, recruitment, strategic management plan, faculty development programmes, etc., should be the given priority for transforming the institution into a top ranking university and first choice of the students. The target to admit students should be more than 10,000 per year but at the same time, the teacher-student ratio should not be compromised along with other necessary infrastructure.

Leveraging technology to continuously engage with its students and other stakeholders, the university will

have to extend the benefits of science and technology-oriented education to all. The new education policy's focus on multi-disciplinary education needs proper measures to integrate the humanities and arts with science, technology, engineering and mathematics. So the university shall have to play an important role of multi-disciplinary education in unleashing creativity and innovation.

The university must work hard to empower a large number of stakeholders through capacity building, augmentation of skills in socially relevant sectors, entrepreneurship development programmes and enabling employability.

Research and consultancy: The excellence of the university depends on the excellent research output such as research projects, research publications, patents, etc. Accordingly, well-defined plans and programmes should be framed and the university should strive to conduct cutting edge research through collaboration across all borders, foster industry-university research linkage for mutual benefit and promote research on indigenous art, culture, language and literature, crafts, etc. Over and above, the different scholarship schemes of the government, institutional scholarships to the research scholars and start-up research grants to the young faculties are to be encouraged.

Excellent support system: To widen the horizon of institutional activities, the guiding spirit of all actions, the university should aim high, strive

to control the destiny, be accountable for all actions, promote harmony, provide quality service, equal opportunities and accessibility to the students and staff and find out smart solutions to society's different problems.

To augment the support system, the university has to revisit its plans and programmes to develop the existing academic and administrative resources, physical and technological infrastructure for effective realisation of its great vision.

Since the students are at the core of all activities, the key priority shall be the students' success and it will be reinforced through quality counselling, both online and offline.

ICT leverage for digital innovation

If the university can transform itself to respond to the needs of a culture of learning, then what is currently perceived as a challenge may become the opportunity for a renaissance in higher education in future.

will support a more engaged, responsive, student-centric and collaborative approach. Preparing the students with more aspiration for competitive exams, pre-examination training centres should be established with all supporting resources.

Establishment of a vibrant placement and career counselling and guidance cell is the need of the hour for a university because it would not only provide better placement opportunities but also develop various employability skills of the students.

To provide all-round physical,

mental and holistic personality development of the students, it would be essential to set up a big sports complex of international standard for indoor and outdoor games and sports, a cultural complex with all facilities, a swimming pool and a techno park.

To remove all odds at the hostels and residential quarters, it is essential to provide all modern amenities for the safety and security of life and property of the students and teachers. Security system with CC camera surveillance on the campus is essential. At the same time, the university must pay attention to provide 24-hour supply of pure and safe drinking water, electricity, Wi-Fi facility, health and sanitation facility, library facility and good transportation system over and above gym, yoga and recreational facilities. Canteen facility with quality food will be a part of the entire exercise of the university. Authorities must give attention for maintaining the proper scenic beauty of the campus as well as its cleanliness.

Again, considering as stakeholders, the alumni should be objectively engaged in different management options of the university.

A university cannot run only with the teachers and students without the support of the officers and employees. So, intense care should be taken for the all-round development and welfare of the officers and employees.

Corporate social responsibility: Perhaps the unique characteristic of higher educational institutions especially the universities, is the strong bond between the university and the

society. Historically, universities have been shaped by, drawn their agenda from, and been responsible to the communities that founded them. Each generation has established a social contract between the university and the society it serves.

To make significant contribution to the society and communities in the fringe areas, the university has to initiate a wide range of extension activities including cross-cultural programmes, organisation of lecture programmes, observance of national integration days and local festivals, village and school adoption, etc. People will impetuously involve themselves in rapid action-oriented programmes like blood donation camp, free health check-up, cleanliness drive, plantation programme, etc.

It is observed that the universities in India are now looking forward to transition and transformation, catapulted by the recent adoption and implementation of NEP 2020 in the fast changing situation. NEP 2020 is also all about nurturing innovation, techno-oriented and student-centric education system. So there will be drastic changes in course curriculum which will further force the universities to bring about massive infrastructure and manpower developments in various fields of academia. There will be an urgent need to develop a blended teaching-learning system for the future by combining both online and offline education.

If the university can transform itself to respond to the needs of a culture of learning, then what is currently perceived as a challenge may become the opportunity for a renaissance in higher education in future.