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**INTERNAL QUALITY ASSURANCE CELL AND ITS CONTRIBUTION
TO QUALITY IMPROVEMENT IN HIGHER EDUCATION
INSTITUTIONS: A CASE OF SIMS**

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ABSTRACT

The internal quality assurance systems of Higher Education Institutions are Self-regulated responsibilities of the higher education institutions, aimed at Continuous improvement of quality and achieving academic excellence. Srinivas Institute of Management Studies (SIMS), being innovative higher education institution, has mechanisms for academic auditing and adopted quality management strategies in all academic and administrative aspects. The institution has an Internal Quality Assurance cell (IQAC) and adopts a participatory approach in managing its provisions. This paper contains the details of institutional Internal Quality Assurance Cell, the composition, the institutional policy with regard to quality assurance and how has it contributed in institutionalizing the quality assurance processes, contribution of management, external members, students and alumni etc., institutional integrated framework for Quality assurance of the academic and administrative activities, institutional training to its staff for effective implementation of the Quality assurance procedures, Academic Audit of the academic provisions the outcomes used to improve the institutional activities, and institutional mechanisms to continuously review the teaching learning process. The paper also analyse the advantages of Internal quality assurance cell in improving quality of higher education at Srinivas Institute of Management Studies.

KEYWORDS - Higher Educational Institution, Internal Quality Assurance System, Internal Quality Assurance Cell, Quality Initiatives in Higher Education.

1. Introduction

The internal quality assurance systems of Higher Education Institutions are self-regulated responsibilities of the higher education institutions, aimed at continuous

improvement of quality and achieving academic excellence. An institutional commitment to quality teaching at top leadership level and at departmental level calls for leaders and staff to identify benchmarks, promote good practices and scale them up across departments, and think up effective support that meets teacher and student expectations [1-4]. An institutional policy reflects the will of the leaders and heads of departments to better understand the teaching process and the experiences initiated by teams or individual teachers. A quality teaching framework allows the institution to monitor support, track teacher and student satisfaction, and study the impact on the learning process [5-7].

Support for quality teaching in the organization encompasses a wide range of initiatives that are grouped under three major headings:

1. Institution-wide and quality assurance policies : including global projects designed to develop a quality culture at institutional level, like policy design, and support to organisation and internal quality assurance systems.

2. Programme monitoring : including actions to measure the design, content and delivery of the programmes (through programme evaluation process).

3. Teaching and learning support : including initiatives targeting the teachers (on the teaching side), the students (on the learning side) or both (*e.g.* on the work environment). Examples include continuing education for faculty, pedagogy enhancement, student support (*e.g.* mentoring and career advice), support for student learning (focused on inputs, such as the introduction of new pedagogical tools, or on outputs, such as the development of certain abilities for the students) [8-9].

The institution has mechanisms for academic auditing. The institution adopts quality management strategies in all academic and administrative aspects. The institution has an IQAC and adopts a participatory approach in managing its provisions. This paper contains the details of institutional Internal Quality Assurance Cell, the composition, the institutional policy with regard to quality assurance and how has it contributed in institutionalizing the quality assurance processes, contribution of management, external members, students and alumni etc., institutional integrated framework for quality assurance of the academic and administrative activities, institutional training to its staff for effective implementation of the quality assurance procedures, academic audit of the academic provisions the outcomes used to improve the institutional activities, and institutional mechanisms to continuously review

the teaching - learning process. The paper also analyse the advantages of Internal quality assurance cell in improving quality of higher education at Srinivas Institute of Management Studies (SIMS).

2. Overview of SIMS

Srinivas Institute of Management Studies (SIMS) is established by A. Shama Rao Foundation, Mangalore, India, with the vision of imparting quality education and expanding opportunities to all the aspirants and across all realms of knowledge. It envisages to become a centre of excellence to serve as change agent in the society by generating a pool of human resources trained in science and technology, management and social service. The college offers bachelor and master degree programmes in Business Management and Computer Science and Bachelor degree in Commerce and Masters Degree in Social Work. The vision and mission of the institute are well publicized through its website, calendar, prospectus etc. The curriculum provided for these courses are effectively improved by resorting to action planning through developing academic calendar, teaching plan, teachers diary and study material. In addition to the specialization required to be taught, the institute offers dual specialization facility of its own, and equip students to wider opportunities for employment and research. A large number of certificate programmes of short duration, customized to suit the students of all courses, are offered to promote skill development to enhance employability. Entrepreneurial talents are cultivated among the students by EDP cell. The institute offers orientation programmes, guest lectures, study tours, video lectures, field practicums, NGO internship, industrial exposures, student exchange programmes and international educational visits also as supplements to the curriculum. It supports research based learning, exposure based learning, experiential learning, event management learning, field work based learning and laboratory based learning. Value addition is incorporated in teaching through adding extra sessions over and above the prescribed syllabus for insight development. Weak students and slow learners are supported through tutorials, counselling and mentoring.

In order to encourage research culture, a number of research centres have been constituted in the areas of expertise available with faculty in-charge of these centres. Opportunity is provided in the curriculum delivery to promote scientific thinking, spirit of questioning, expression of creative ideas, experimentation and learning by doing. Appraisal of faculty performance is done through comprehensive performance management systems

and the feedback is communicated to all concerned. It is found that through this efforts, there is an increase of about 20 percent performance each year. Students appraise the faculty through a structured format on a variety of parameters. Transparency is maintained in internal assessment of students through taking into account internal examination, assignment, presentations and attendance in awarding internal marks. Students with attendance shortage for genuine reasons are encouraged to attend additional classes through its innovative 'Save a year' programme. Absence from class is substantiated through declaration signed by the parents. Both internal examination marks and attendance are communicated to the parents regularly by short message service (sms).

Faculty development programmes are periodically conducted. Consultancy and research are encouraged. Institution takes efforts in attracting eminent persons to visit the campus and interact with teachers and students. Most of the faculty have either secured Ph.D. or pursuing research leading to Ph.D. The institution strives to address cross cutting issues such as environment, gender etc. through conducting programmes related to the theme. Industry – institution – community interactions are maintained through village adoption, organizing job fairs, and short duration NGO internship which involve all students. Grievance committee, sexual harassment committees and anti-ragging committee have been constituted to ensure that students and staff have a hassle free life. A lot of welfare measures have been introduced for the staff of the institute. Alumni are invited as distinguished guests to chair programmes. An Alumni association has been constituted for networking, relating to placement assistance, admissions etc. Student council gives opportunity for students to elect their student representatives and participate in forum activities, annual seminars, conferences through fund raising, and sponsorship from public. College magazine, news letter and e-magazines bring out creative talent among students. The administration of the institute is decentralized.

The institute maintains high academic result at the level of 100% in P.G. Courses and more than 80% in U.G. courses. Placement cell provides career guidance to prepare the students for placements. All alumni are well settled in jobs or successful entrepreneurs managing their enterprise. Introduction of events of innovations and best practices have resulted in substantial increase in the standard of the institute to the merit requirement of an accreditation agency. During these 14 years of its efforts of preparing young men and women for challenges in life, Srinivas Institute of Management Studies sincerely tried to

impart comprehensive knowledge or **Samagra Jnana** and actual experience of the perfection or **Vijnana** to its students.

3. Quality Initiatives

3.1 Internal Quality Assurance Cell (IQAC)

The Centre for Quality Management is one of the important centres formed for the enhancement of quality education in the college. On July 1, 2012. The centre was renamed as Internal Quality Assurance Cell [IQAC] with the objective to realise the goals of quality enhancement and improve the performance of the institute.

Structure of IQAC :

- ◆ Chairperson - Principal
- ◆ Coordinator of all Departments (Faculty of SIMS)
- ◆ Three external members (Architect, Chartered Accountant, Academician)
- ◆ Internal Members (Selected Faculty and Administrative staff of SIMS)

The institutional policy with regard to quality assurance is reflected in the quality policy of the institute stated as - "We, at Srinivas Institute of Management Studies, Mangalore, strive to deliver comprehensive, continually enhanced, global quality professional education through an established quality management system complimented by the synergistic interaction of the stakeholders concerned." We strive to communicate this policy to all the persons at all levels, so that this policy becomes working reality within the organization.

The quality policy has contributed to institutionalizing the quality assurance processes in the following three areas to constitute quality manual.

- Academic
- Administrative
- Infrastructural

(1) Academic :

The Institute is committed in the provision of quality teaching and learning process. Apart from that, it focuses on personality development of students through certificate programmes for skill development, training programmes, and other co-

curricular and extra-curricular activities that expand their horizon of knowledge, development of mind for their overall development. The institute ensures all the measures in upbringing discipline and good character-building in the students. This also strengthens mental maturity of the students and focus on holistic development. The following quality assurance processes have been institutionalized.

(1) *Teacher's Quality* : To enhance the quality of teaching, regular Faculty Development Programmes (FDP) introduced as a regular features. Collaborative programmes with other institutions are organized to enhance teacher's quality. The faculty members are encouraged to acquire additional qualifications, research degrees and impart certification programmes to foster their skills.

(2) *Delivery of the Curriculum* : In order to ensure effective delivery of the curriculum, the faculty members prepare the work dairy, lesson plan and course material for the subjects thought by them.

(3) *Strengthening of Research Activities* : In order to strengthen research activities, the IQAC has recommended the formation of research centres in priority areas under different faculties. The faculty members are encouraged to write articles for publication in journals and to present papers in national and international conferences. Some of the programmes (for example, five national conferences organized last year) have opened up the possibility for preparing and publishing research papers both in conceptual and empirical areas. The scope of the conferences organized in the institution which were earlier confined to management subject only now been widened to include all disciplines offered by the college.

(4) *Personality Development Programmes* : Student Development Programmes are important to equip the students to meet the challenges in their career. Value Addition programmes like Certificate Courses are offered to the students to bridge the gap between the university syllabus and industry requirements, regular industrial visits and industry-academia interactions are organised so as to get the practical exposure about the functioning of the organisation.

(5) *Orientation Programmes* : Apart from career building, institute conducts programmes to develop right orientation and positive attitude.

(6) *Additional Academic Support in order to ensure Holistic Development* : Teaching management principles through examples from the great epics like Ramayana,

Mahabharatha, Bhagavad Gita, Vedas, Upanishads etc., spiritual lectures under Vivekananda study centre and programmes organized during Swami Vivekananda Jayanthi, Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa Jayanthi, Onam, Independence day, Karnataka Rajyotsava etc.

(7) *Mental Maturity and Skill Development Courses* : Corporate Yoga and mind control programmes are offered to the students to enhance the power of concentration, overcome stress, maintain good physical and mental health and to ensure mental maturity.

(8) *Placement* : The Institute undertake a broad range of vocational education, entrepreneurial training and employability skills to facilitate faster placement and better adjustment in the work situations.

(9) *Preparedness for challenges* : The students are encouraged to define their own training and development needs and based on the needs of students & the corporate, the Institute imparts employability skills. As the business world is filled with challenges and risks, the purpose of education is to prepare the students to face these challenges and take up the risk with courage.

(2) Administration :

The administrative system support the institution in the development and enhancement of the quality education. The different committees set up by the institution always respond to the administrative needs. The Advisory Board and the Governing Council body are set up with the members from management and academia. The various course co-ordinators facilitate internal administration of their departments and link it with the overall administration of the institute supervised by the head of the institute.

(3) Infrastructural :

The provided infrastructure supports the requirements of the quality policy conducive to the academic and administrative process. The quality manual mentioned above mainly emphasises on the quality system to be followed in the institute. All the IQAC decisions have been approved by the management and were actually implemented. The Centre for Quality management has external members on its committee. Collective decisions have been taken with regard to all the quality assurance policies of the institute. The alumni effectively contribute to the enrichment and enhancement of the quality of education by associating and involving in fostering professional, academic and social links with the

institution. The alumni as a stakeholder are significant during different stages of Quality decisions. They are instrumental in gaining valuable insights about various industries, employers and society. They assist in identifying the skills required by the students to obtain specific positions in the companies. They regularly provide feedback to the faculty members through which the institution up-dates academic programmes and value added programmes most relevant to the current requirements. With the registration of the alumni association, networking has become more effective and permanent. The de-centralization of IQAC mechanism through bringing in course co-ordinators as members of IQAC, makes it possible to maintain a face to face direct communication with faculty and staff of the college.

The institution has an integrated framework for Quality assurance of the academic and administrative activities. The integration of academic and administrative activities can be witnessed at three levels which include strategic, functional, and operational levels.

Strategic Level : Staff members (both teaching and non-teaching staff) are involved in framing the policies and procedures, guidelines, rules and regulations and effectively implementing the same to ensure smooth and systematic functioning of the institute. Staff members are also involved in framing the procedures for admission of students for the course and examinations [Internal & University] to be conducted by the institute.

Functional Level : All the Teaching Staff participate in sharing the knowledge by discussing on the latest trends in their respective area of specialization. The co-ordinators and the members of different departments meet together and plan the programmes to be conducted. Office staff is involved in preparation of annual budget of the institute, taking in to consideration the approved fee structure. They also correspond with the Mangalore University, Department of Higher Education and AICTE regional office to fulfill their requirements for the smooth functioning of the institute's activities.

Operational level : All the staff members are involved in implementing the policies, procedures, and framework designed by the top management in order to maintain and achieve the quality standards.

The institution provides following trainings to its staff for effective implementation of the Quality assurance procedures :

- Faculty Development Programmes, lectures and workshops to give more thrust on

pedagogy. As a result the innovations across the field are practiced in the teaching methodology.

- Many industry experts and renowned professors interact with the faculty members. This results in enhancement of the performance.
- Attending outreach programmes by faculty members also enriches them in benchmarking services of the institution.
- The administrative staff are service conscious in dealing with student matters.
- The training in office management software has improved the efficiency and time saving.
- The lower staff are maintaining efficiency in the upkeep of the infrastructure.
- The principal of the institute also interacts with faculty members through faculty meetings and shares his ideas and explains how quality initiatives of the institute have to be implemented.

The institution undertake Academic Audit regularly. The Management receives the feed-back about each faculty member in the form of self appraisal and appraisal from head of the institution to know their teaching and learning performance. The details of the subjects handled, percentage of pass and students' performance in the tests & examinations, participation in faculty development programme, participation in the external conferences and seminars, Books or papers published and programmes organized in the college are included in the academic audit.

The observations from the audit are passed on to the head of the institute for institutional improvement. Some of the improvements in institutional activities initiated due to the outcomes of academic audit are listed in Table 1.

Table 1 : Improvements in institutional activities initiated due to the outcomes of academic audit.

S. No.	Audit outcome	Improvements in institutional activities
1	Need for increase in admission	1. Increased publicity 2. website up-dating 3. Additional skill development programmes 4. Concessional fee for female students
2	Need of improvements in result in U.G. Programs	1. Counseling 2. Tutorials 3. More assignments 4. Close supervision of weak students
3	Need of enhancement in faculty performance	1. More motivation through faculty meetings 2. Organizing more FDP's 3. Retaining experienced faculty

4	Need of improvement in research publication	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Providing opportunities 2. Identification of research centres 3. Organizing workshop on Research methodology and publications.
5	Need for further strengthening co-curricular activities	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Introduction of certificate programmes 2. Compulsory projects 3. More programs and events.
6	Need of improving the placement	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Exclusive placement cell 2. More collaborations with industries 3. Conduct of Job Fests.

Internal quality assurance mechanisms are aligned with the requirements of the AICTE and Mangalore University norms. The institute complies with the university stipulations such as attendance requirement of students, number of working days, number of classes conducted, internal assessment mechanism, etc. The institution has structured mechanisms to continuously review the teaching learning process as given in Table 2.

Table 2 : Structured mechanisms to continuously review the teaching - learning process.

S. No.	Mechanisms	Structure, methodologies of operation	Outcome
1	Teachers Diary	Date wise, time wise, classes according to the time table is recorded in teachers dairy. This gives a clear picture that the classes are conducted systematically.	Faculty realize importance of adhering to the schedules.
2	Attendance Register	The number of classes taken versus the number of working days gives a direct measure of teaching input.	Faculty realize the importance of the classes.
3	Student Feedback	Appraisal forms are distributed to the students on the last working day of the semester. This is confidently collected and passed on to the head of the institute for review.	Faculty identify need for improvement.
4	Performance appraisal	Performance self appraisal is done by the faculty. Against each of the appraisal items, the head of the institute marks his assessment in the form of grade point.	Faculty identify weakness.

5	Result analysis	Result analysis is done for finding out the percentage of marks scored by the students in each of the subjects. This together is treated as a measure of the concerned faculties teaching efficiency.	Faculty realize need for improvement.
6	Management meetings with the faculty	Meetings with faculty are conducted by management representatives and head of the institute. Poor performance like low pass percentage and poor marks are sort explanation.	Faculty develops increased accountability.

The institute organises interactive meetings with all its stakeholders in order to communicate its quality assurance policies, mechanisms and outcomes. The following are the stakeholders of the institute :

- ◆ **Management** : Management representatives will interact with the faculty through meetings. These meetings are aimed towards reaffirming the quality conducive of the institution and its compliances.
- ◆ **Parents** : Parent-Teacher Meetings are conducted to inform them the initiatives taken by the institution to attain quality resulting in progress of their wards.
- ◆ **Students** : The institute conducts Orientation Programme at the beginning of every semester to make the students understand the quality concerns and to reinforce the culture of excellence in all aspects.
- ◆ **Alumni** : In the meetings with alumni quality mechanisms and their improvements are discussed.
- ◆ **Industry** : Suggestions on revision of curriculum to include newer areas of knowledge and skill development as per industry requirement are incorporated to convince the employers on the commitment of the institution towards quality.
- ◆ **University** : The local inspection committee which comes to inspect the quality standards maintained by the institute are convinced to obtain renewal of affiliation.
- ◆ **Community** : Propaganda materials which are part of admission campaign, information posted in the website, notifications of rank holders and pass percentage in various courses in

news papers and social service activities convey the quality policy, mechanisms and outcomes to the community.

4. Contribution of IQAC to Improve Teaching – Learning Process

The following are the contributions of IQAC to improve the teaching-learning process based on following three categories :

4.1 Providing Service :

- (a) Distribution of College Calendar & Teaching Plan
- (b) Providing Printed Study materials in each subject as per University Syllabus.
- (c) Quality of teaching
- (d) Use of teaching aides
- (e) Periodic Assessments
- (f) Time bound Assignments
- (g) Review of Attendance
- (h) Parent – Teacher Communication
- (i) Counseling & Mentoring
- (j) Additional Classes & Open book Test Papers
- (k) Concurrent monitoring of classes through spot checking & Video monitoring
- (l) Value addition chapters/topics in all subjects.

4.2 Collecting Feedback :

(a) Student feedback is collected on following parameters :

- (i) *Regularity in conducting classes*
- (ii) *Time -consciousness*
- (iii) *Preparation for the Classes*
- (iv) *Syllabus completion in time*
- (v) *Competency in the subject concerned*
- (vi) *Presentation skill (Voice, Language, Clarity)*

(vii) *Methodology in Teaching*

(viii) *Interaction with the students*

(xi) *Accessibility to the students outside the class*

(x) *Quality & understandability of Study Materials*

(xi) *Timely services provided by the office & library staff to the students*

(b) Student feedback through grievance cell

(c) Student feedback through Suggestion Box

(d) Student feedback through direct access to principal

(e) Student feedback through Course co-ordinators

(f) Parents feedback on various communications from college such as SMS on Attendance & SMS on internal marks & Discipline

(g) Social networking sites (Face book) also provides student feedback.

(h) Feedback through CCD Camera fitted in all classrooms, recorded & monitoring at Principal Chamber.

4.3 Improving service Based on Feedback :

(1) Faculty meetings are conducted based on student feedback.

(2) Appraisal of classroom situation by Course Coordinator/ Principal visiting classes periodically.

(3) The college regularly monitors face book postings and takes corrective actions in genuine cases.

5. Conclusion

1. Academic audit of departments and its impact is an important quality initiative of the institution.

2. The institution has an effective quality management and enhancement systems.

3. The institution reviews its teaching learning process, structure, methodologies of operations and learning outcomes at periodic intervals.

4. Internal Quality Assurance Cell (IQAC) has contributed significantly to institutionalizing

quality assurance strategies and processes.

5. External members contribute significantly in the functioning of the IQAC.

6. Autonomy to academic departments is encouraged.

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