

REPORT ON THE US VISIT – PREPARED BY DN RAO

This report is prepared based on the 3 week tour of US higher education system organized by the US State department under the auspices of the International Visitors Leadership Programme. The writer is the only Indian participant in this tour.

The visit was coordinated by the Meridian Center, Washington, DC. The visit started on 24th October, 2007 and completed on 16th November, 2007. The following was the schedule of the programme:

Dates	Place	Prime Focus
24 th October till end of the month	Washington D.C.	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Overview of the higher education system2. Visit to various associations connected with HE3. Process and dynamics of HE lobbying and its impact on the political process of HE policy formulation
1 st week November	San Francisco	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Deeper understanding of the system2. Visits to community colleges, private universities and public research universities
2 nd Week November	Tucson, Arizona	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Look at the State's role in HE2. Issues in not so endowed regions of USA
2 nd -3 rd week November	Tulsa, Oklahoma	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Visit to State universities, private universities and community colleges2. Issues at the state level especially with respect to minorities
3 rd week November	New York	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Visit to Columbia, Nyack college, City Univ of New York2. Issues in big metros, religious colleges etc.

The visit was very beneficial and it served the following objectives:

- It gave a complete over view of the HE system of USA, its scope, evolution, practices and challenges
- It helped understand the basic building blocks of a world class HE system
- It helped in understanding the process of establishing HE linkages with US and Indian universities
- It also helped in culling out some best practices in academic world

Understanding of the US HE System:

1. The US system is decentralized, diverse, market driven and based on the principles of individual freedom, free enterprise and other US societal values. It received a great boost from the government post World War II.
2. The States have a licensing role; accreditation is done by various autonomous bodies and is based on peer review. The federal government limits itself to research funding and providing student loans and grants.
3. The system has K to 12 schools, 4 year undergraduate degrees followed by graduate degrees.
4. There are broadly State promoted public research universities (University of California System), world class private not for profit universities (Harvard University), community colleges(San Francisco Community College) and for profit private universities (Phoenix university).
5. While the Public research universities and private universities concentrate on research as well as teaching, the for profit universities and community colleges concentrate on taught courses which have employability
6. There is tremendous flexibility in the system and students can transfer credits from one system to another. A labyrinth of mechanisms (articulation agreements) governs these transfers.
7. The system of practices, quality of work as well as governance varies from place to place. Faculty can be full time tenure faculty, tenure track faculty as well as part time faculty.
8. It is important to note that most of the capital grants for almost all the colleges come either from government grants or from wealthy private individuals. All good universities have substantial endowment funds (Harvard has about 24 billion dollars, while even a small university like Tulsa University has one billion)
9. About 30% of the operating budgets come from Tuition, another 30% come from government and the remaining comes from private donors. However, the situation is once again different from place to place. It is interesting to note that there is not much of operating surplus in any of the universities.
10. A large system handles up to 300 thousand students while some handle as little as 5000.
11. Even though it is decentralized and diverse, the American ethos, culture, competitive spirit and the general drive for excellence make sure that quality is by and large maintained. Even though there are institutional mechanisms for maintaining quality, in my opinion, they are not such insurmountable mechanisms.
12. The focus is on lifelong education and hence the average age of the students in most of the places is about 29 years.
13. Despite the number of places, the supply of good faculty with a minimum PhD degree is not an issue even in small places.
14. The access part of education is taken care of by community colleges, leaving the big universities to focus on research and extending knowledge.

15. Even a small university has operating budgets running into billion dollars. The sheer scale of infrastructure, money and width and depth of the system is baffling.
16. Despite all such wealth, 200 years of democratic history, there are still issues of access, affordability and quality. Access, especially to non whites, is an issue. Race seems to bother the conscious of the Americans even after 150 years after the civil war. The fact that only 6% of the Americans get more than 1,00,000 dollars per annum income also shows the inequity of wealth distribution .Coupled with this, the general conservative scorn for dole based welfare does not make the life of the poor very attractive. The system of winner takes all (which has made US the power that is) also has created the problems of access and affordability to the losers in the system.
17. Rising cost of tuition, high drop out from the schools (as high as 60% in some states), lack of international language proficiency and international perspective in the American students are identified as some of the major challenges in the US. The federal government is making covert and overt attempts to take things into its hands through imposition of national standards. There seems to be a worry that America's HE system is not making Americans world class or competitive enough. The industry does not seem to get the manpower it wants. Most of the graduate programmes are dominated by the international students and in some cases Indian students. However some of the worries seem out of place given the head start USA enjoys over many other nations (barring the exception of EU). It might stem out of an approach of looking at the glass as half empty rather than half full.
18. Even though many initiatives are market driven, it is interesting to note that none of the Universities have big operating surpluses, depend on the government both for revenue and research funding. While industry may set the research agenda, the research dollars are coming from the government and not the industry.

What India can learn out of the US System?

India has one third of the US area and four times its population. While the US economy is about 13 trillion in dollar terms, Indian economy is about 1 trillion dollars. Even in PPP terms, it is about 4 trillion dollars. It is about 9% of the US economy in nominal terms or 33% in PPP terms. India has started adopting the market economics for the last 15 years while US has done it for the last 200 years. A lot of the US economy has been built on the foundations of the slaves' economy in the 19th century while at the same time, India was being colonized and wealth was transferred to the British.

Any attempts at transfer of US system to India have to bear this in mind. However, the US ethos seems to be very close to a lot of Indian hearts. Indians as private citizens have

been good marketers and entrepreneurs. However as a public system, we are yet to completely come out of façade of socialism and its centralized structures.

Indian system can look at the student centric ness of the US system, mobility and flexibility from one system of education to the other for emulation. Uninterrupted focus on research and publications and creation of new knowledge can be good faculty emulation points. Even the best of the Indian universities or systems are still painfully teaching focused institutions. While they have done an excellent job in providing quality knowledge workers, they have done a poor job in knowledge creation itself.

India can also look at developing a market based, peer review based accreditation system. At present the National Board of Accreditation in India is not taken very seriously. However it will do well to still keep the centralized licensing system in place. Any move to move away from the centralized licensing system of education to a decentralized market driven system should be done over a period of time and keep pace with the over all market development in the economy itself.

Even though private wealth does not exist to the extent it does in USA, Indian universities will do well to start looking at the private donor market for funds.

What can colleges like JITM, Orissa achieve/learn out of the US system?

The visit has given me an idea of what US universities are looking for in international collaborations. They are looking for enriching their students with an international perspective and enriching their faculty in research. As Indian economy develops, more US focus will be on India. At this moment India is known for the quality of its students, IITs and the IT boom. An average American is still a white, does not care about the world and perhaps cannot even locate where India is in the world map. Research Universities are only looking at student exchanges and collaborative research with IITs or world class Indian universities. However many small private universities do look for collaborations. Colleges like JITM can look for such places (a typical such university will have about 10,000 students, good on some departments, is just about making its ends meet and is struggling to find its niche within the US system). The fact that US is at least 20 hours by flight and 12 hours in time difference does not help this either. Institutes like JITM can become intern places for US students. Many US universities are interested in such places. However the Indian side has to see what it gains out of the process. Places like us can also look at collaborative research. Such ventures have to be primarily driven by the faculty. Typical long term collaboration (beyond US student interns) could take up to 3 years to materialize.

Having said that, Universities in Australia are better placed, cheaper, more hungry and willing to collaborate. The decision making is also faster.

JITM will be looking at a collaborative programme with an university in Oklahoma State in Petroleum Engineering. However JITM has already made good progress with

Australian universities and the senior academic team from University of Ballarat, Australia is visiting us this month to finalize joint bachelor's programmes in Engineering.