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REVIEW ARTICLE

A STUDY ON ATTAINMENT OF QUALITY IN HIGHER EDUCATION – A SWOC ANALYSIS OF SACRED HEART COLLEGE (AUTONOMOUS) TIRUPATTUR OF VELLORE DISTRICT IN TAMIL NADU

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ABSTRACT

Higher education institutions especially minority educational institutions are charged with formation of human capital through teaching, building knowledge base through research and knowledge development, and dissemination and use of knowledge by interacting with the knowledge users. Higher education is becoming increasing competitive in terms of students, staff and resource. Because of the increasing demand for access to it by the masses, it has shifted the service of elite that it was, to service open to the masses. Quality is an issue that cannot be avoided in education at present and what institutions do to ascertain quality turn out to be most important and effective of all efforts and initiatives. This paper is mainly focused on a SWOC analysis of Sacred Heart College (Autonomous) Tirupattur of Vellore district in Tamil Nadu.

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INTRODUCTION

Higher education is perceived as an important form of investment in human capital development. Higher education institutions especially minority educational institutions are charged with formation of human capital through teaching, building knowledge base through research and knowledge development, and dissemination and use of knowledge by interacting with the knowledge users. Higher education is becoming increasing competitive in terms of students, staff and resource. Because of the increasing demand for access to it by the masses, it has shifted the service of elite that it was, to service open to the masses. Quality is an issue that cannot be avoided in education at present and what institutions do to ascertain quality turn out to be most important and effective of all efforts and initiatives. However, the entry of “private” providers of high education, coupled with crying voice of declining government funding to public institutions is a response to the increasing demand for higher education that has caused decline in the quality of graduates. The quality of higher education is affected by the 4 Cs forces: 1) the changing University customs characteristics, 2) increasing competition, 3) rising costs, and 4) the impending crises. To understand these forces, minority educational institutions need to continuously improve and strength themselves or else they ceases to be centres of academic excellence.

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About the College (Sacred Heart College)

Sacred Heart College (Autonomous) was established in 1951 by the Spanish missionary, Rev. Fr. Joseph Carreno, SDB. Nestled in a rural hitherland, it has been consistent with the aim of imparting education to the marginalized, both economically and socially and to the rural students who are mostly first generation learners. This target group, disadvantaged at the entry level, after intense formation, is armed with entitlements to face the challenges of the modern society with verve and vigour.

Institutional Vision and Leadership

Vision Statement

We, the community of Sacred Heart College, inspired by the love of the Heart of Jesus and fundamental human values, following the educative system of Don Bosco, are committed to the creation of an education that promotes an ethical and prosperous society where equality, freedom and fraternity reign, by imparting higher education to poor and rural youth, enabling them towards integral human development.

Mission Statement

In the field of Higher Education, We are committed to academic excellence, socially relevant research, courses leading to employment and entrepreneurship healthy standards

in extra-curricular practices and continuous progress of the institution.

Socially, we work towards

Serving preferentially the underprivileged and rural youth, educating them to social consciousness of rights and responsibilities, rooting out social evils, building communities and promoting total literacy, education and development of the neighbourhood.

Spiritually, we aim at

Integrating ethical, cultural and political values, developing a sense of the divine presence in nature and in the human person, by means of group activities and personal guidance, in a family atmosphere.

Motto

“Ad Omne Bonum Instructi” is the motto of Sacred Heart College. It means, “Ready for Every Good Work”. Every student passing through the portals of this institution will be prepared to do every good work or every noble task.

Goal

The general goal of education at Sacred Heart College is the total development and the integral growth of the human person. Towards this end, the College has designed the following objectives

Objectives

- To develop the intellectual capacity of students to search for truth and knowledge
- To offer possibilities by which the students discern their purpose in life
- To form social consciousness in them so that they may be capable of fostering good relationship with others, open to other cultures and religions, possess an attitude of solidarity and dialogue, a sense of participation and co-responsibility and become agents of social change with a preferential option for the poor, weak and downtrodden (NAAC Report-2012)

Distinctive characteristics of the College

The mission statement of the College defines the distinctive characteristics of the College in terms of addressing the needs of the society, nursing big dreams for the students it seeks to serve and the College traditions and value orientations.

If we look into statistics of the students admitted and students who have passed out since the inception of the College, we come to understand that they belong to the underprivileged sections of the society. The sole motive of the Salesian Society to which the College belongs is to educate young people who are poor and abandoned providing them with knowledge and skills of high quality, thus empowering them to fit into the society. It is a preferential option that this College is situated in

a rural hither land away from the district headquarters at Vellore. By the nature of its existence, it serves the rural, first generation learners of this region.

Addressing challenges and expanding possibilities

While leafing through the annals of the College, one is convinced that it has been consistently under the scanner of quality assessment and up gradation on all fronts. The first assessment by NAAC in 1999 opened the doors for several new initiatives and played a vital role for greater quality education. Considering the standard of students entering the portals of this institution hamstrung by poverty and illiteracy and yet moulding them into intellectual adults, has been a great challenge both to the Management and the staff. The Golden Jubilee in 2002 and the Diamond Jubilee Celebrations in 2012 were moments of introspection and renewed vigour in trying to impart holistic education. Starting of several new courses, most of them at the postgraduate and research level, have given greater access to students from near and far. Besides, the ever increasing enrolment ratio of girls mostly from the nearby villages, spurs us on to strive for gender equality.

The introduction of AICTE approved courses has helped the College very much in standardizing the teaching-learning process through quality measures in all areas. Year by year more and more new courses are being added to the existing ones. The courses provided through IGNOU, Placement cell, UGC and the programmes designed to improve language skills like Communicative English Course, have increased the competencies of the students. International, national, state level seminars and manifold association activities have opened up new vistas of opportunities to the students to go beyond their culture and curriculum which would ultimately leverage their position in the job market. Full-time counseling and guidance services have built up confidence and strength among the students to claw their way up the ladder.

Most departments have established networking with institutions and industries in the neighboring districts to promote exchange programmes, thus fostering a close relationship between the world of work and learning. A research culture has been created in the College with the launching of many postgraduate and research courses. We are proud to declare that all the departments have become research departments offering Ph.D. programmes. In fact Abraham Panampara Research Centre has been opened with this specific goal of facilitating research activities in the campus. The infrastructure facilities provided and the wholehearted encouragement given by the Management has resulted in a number of research activities, minor and major projects.

Breaking the mould in the St. don bosco way

Imparting a human face to those in higher education throughout the world has been the avowed goal of the Salesian institutions founded by the great educator of youth, St. John Bosco. The Preventive System of education adopted by everyone paves the way for achieving this aim. Value education is made compulsory for all. Daily pep talks in the morning, afternoon and night have left lasting life-oriented impressions among students. Through organized inter-religious

prayer, talks by leaders of various religions, well-participated cultural fest, the growing numbers in the alternative drama troop, frequented prayer centres and theme-based theatrical programmes have inculcated mutual understanding, cooperation and promoted universal values in a pluralistic environment. The use of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) has made a significant contribution to the quality of education in the campus. Compulsory computer literacy for the students and imparting of computing skills to staff both teaching and non-teaching and the use of ICT has given boost to academic quality. The office automation, computerization of library and networking of the campus have facilitated quick and quality administration. The project office and the documentation centre have ensured resource mobilization and sharing. The library has become a centre of great learning with the linkages established with INFLIBNET, IEEE, Ebsco and J gate.

There has been a concerted drive towards excellence through the formation of IQAC and its contributions to assure quality have been significant. A master-plan document has been prepared to gear the entire campus to the next decade. The introduction of Choice Based Credit System (CBCS) has enabled greater academic mobility and freedom for the students. The strategic programmes and life coping skills planned by the Placement Cell have supported the students to meet the challenges of the job market and fetch well-paid jobs. The introduction of Class Quality Circles (CQC) has created greater awareness of peer learning and promoted responsibility for quality among students. There is a tremendous eagerness among students for capacity building by acquiring dual degrees, certificates, diplomas and language skills. Thus they are better prepared to support their families in life. There is renewed emphasis on the transformation of the neighborhood in partnership with the institution. Extension programmes such as school dropout prevention reaching out to 2500 children, tuition centers in 80 Government schools, computer literacy to the disadvantaged, promotion of self-help groups, SHELTERS and DEEDS programmes and adoption of villages by hostels are steps in this direction.

In sum, the wheel of fortune is spinning around our students who are second to none in the State as amply demonstrated by the ever increasing tally of recruitments among the students. Our unblinking conclusion from this sneak preview is that they will forge ahead to „walk the talk“. Through the motto of the College, we perceive that excellence is not an end but a habit. Undoubtedly, our unstinted commitment to the cause of education will continue to script history by offering plausible vision of the future that will usher in wrenching changes to meet the demands of a growing India.

SWOC analysis of the institution

Strength of the Institution

Sacred Heart College, a service oriented institution with good ambience of learning, is a pioneer in quality higher education for the rural students in and around Tirupattur of Vellore Dt., over sixty years. Autonomy is our greatest strength. Holistic (Physical, intellectual, psychological, spiritual, social and

cultural) development is ensured to every student through a meticulously planned and executed educative system of Don Bosco. From the start of the College, the dedication put in by the European missionaries is perpetuated down the line and as a result the College has gained popularity for its educational ambience and output which has made a lasting impression on the minds of the people. The College has a perspective plan for education called Educative Pastoral Plan (EPP) which facilitates the overall development of the students. Ethical and fundamental human values, our foremost priority, are instilled through various activities including value education classes. Students experience scientific and resourceful learning during their academic journey through regularly up-dated curriculum and innovative teaching-learning practices. Extension programmes like DEEDS and SHELTERS provide students with a platform to experience the movement from „lab to land“. Professional counselors provide the all-important academic and personal counseling to the needy students. To promote understanding, tolerance and harmony among students of various religions, the College celebrates religious festivals, Community Day and other similar occasions.

Financial support is extended to deserving students through 92 different management scholarships and various government scholarships to the tune of nearly one crore rupees per annum. The management also has instituted other scholarships like Don Bosco, Sacred Heart scholarship to the tune of 10-12 lakhs. The income generated from the shopping complex is meant to support poor and deserving students. All these scholarships act as a financial safety net that goads hundreds of needy to join the College. Throughout the history of the College it has helped the sizeable number of SC/ST and first generation students. A larger group of students receive fee concessions. The College also offers subsidized midday meals programme which benefits the poor students. Uninterrupted power supply is ensured through generators. Staff and students are recharged through various animation programmes, meetings, annual retreat, tour, sports and recreation. Students are given guidance in their academic performance through the Student Guidance Programme (SGP) and some of the other students who require counseling for personal and psychological problems are taken care by a professionally trained and full time counselor. A well-equipped modern library with an up-to-date technology satisfies the knowledge thirst of the teaching-learning community. (Higher Education Report November, 2012)

Weaknesses of the institution

Our geographical location has been a major hindrance in providing exposure, bringing the corporate world for placement drives and involving eminent personalities in the activities of the institution. Students from rural background, lacking motivation, focus and quality and with poor Communicative skills in both Tamil and English, get admitted in the College, as better students head for professional courses. The magnitude of career guidance and percentage of placement programme are not up to the mark. Disparity in salary patterns between the aided and unaided staff is a major issue to be addressed. Funding from State / Central funding

agencies for Mini/Major/Research projects and facilities has not been tapped fully. Canteen services have to be improved.

Opportunities for the growth of the institution

The College has opportunities to establish linkages with institutes of prominence within and outside the country. Online courses, video conferencing, teleconferencing and web conferencing technology can be used to bridge the geographical divide. The College has got adequate infrastructure, human resources and academic programmes to claim for 'College with Potential for Excellence' status. There are sufficient opportunities to introduce new professional courses along with already existing programmes. Staff and student exchange programmes between institutions need to be explored to achieve greater excellence and innovation. Strengthening of alumni network and linkages with industries will create more possibilities for increasing the percentage of campus placement. Further opportunities lie in establishing Entrepreneurship Development Cell and Incubator Cell to promote entrepreneurship and new technologies. Enough technology and manpower exist in the College for Software development which can cater to the need for such services in the neighbourhood. The College has a potential to excel as a hub for technology transfer and social transformation. Based on the history and credibility of the institution and the emerging need for higher education in the district, the College will not have any dearth in admissions.

Challenges faced by the institution

Heavy competition from mushrooming new Colleges in the vicinity pose a big challenge. Due to the adverse influence of the media, mobile communications, internet and alcohol, there

is a marked degradation of value system among the youth and its vibrations are felt in the campus. It brings in its attendant problems. The introduction of co-education at the undergraduate level has remained a big challenge for healthy boy-girl relationship among students. Due to the diminishing interest of students in arts and science subjects, there is a decline in the inflow of brighter students into the College. The exponential growth of the institution has led to cramping of campus and challenges further growth. With the existing low fee structure, providing better facilities and quality staff is a big challenge to the Management. Integrating undergraduate teaching with research at College level is another challenge. Matching and adapting to the fast paced technological changes in the field of education is also a challenging issue. Commercialization of education challenges the service motto of the institution. (www.deloite.com/...iIndia/.../Annual status of higher education of states and UTs in India)

Conclusion

India's higher education system is in transition. An educational minority institution helps collectively to pursue quality higher education in Indian society.

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