

Newspaper Clips

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Twice as nice

About time universities made dual degrees easier, brought greater flexibility to coursework

INDIA'S higher education system is uncertainly poised on the brink of change. Regulators know that change is inevitable, that greater flexibility and cross-disciplinarity is necessary to equip students for the future. And yet, it lacks the vision and will for a complete reboot, which involves changing administrative structures, giving greater autonomy to colleges and letting students combine courses across subjects. Now, the University Grants Commission (UGC) has finally approved dual degrees — allowing a student to simultaneously work towards two undergraduate or postgraduate degrees, in different subjects, perhaps even from different institutions. This is a welcome step, but only what is minimally expected from the regulator.

Dual degrees double a student's chances in the job market. Unlike the model Indian universities have chosen so far, expecting young people to confine themselves to a single subject, with perhaps a sprinkling of smaller electives, this is a chance to work towards two solid credentials. Some sch-

ools, like IITs, already offer combined technical degrees, but the UGC's move will let students stretch all the possibilities. It could let them choose one professional degree and one of purely intellectual inquiry. Combining subjects across streams, like law and politics, or engineering and urban planning, or communication and business, can open up new career avenues. This option also acknowledges the fact that creativity often occurs at the cusp of disciplines.

It is not enough to introduce dual degrees, though. Universities must also allow students to sample a range of subjects, understand connections between them, and then choose one or two precise areas of inquiry. There has been great pushback against such a transition in Delhi University, for instance. It has proved difficult to move an umbrella of colleges, with different standards, to a system where courses can be independently designed and recombined, or where credits can be transferred. Meaningful reform entails a reconsideration of all these issues, rather than just granting the easier options.

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Soon, a PC chip that mimics human brain

Washington: Scientists, including one of Indian origin, are developing a computer chip that mimics the human brain. Today's computing chips are incredibly complex and contain billions of nano-scale transistors, allowing for fast, high-performance computers, pocket-sized smartphones, and an explosion in handheld tablets, the researchers said.

Despite their ability to perform thousands of tasks in the blink of an eye, none of these devices even come close to rivaling the computing capabilities of the human brain.

But a Boise State University research team could soon change that. Electrical and computer engineering faculty Elisa Barney Smith, Kris Campbell and Vishal Saxena have taken on the challenge of developing a computing architecture that works more like a brain. "By mimicking the brain's billions of interconnections and pattern recognition capabilities, we may introduce a new paradigm in speed and power, and potentially enable systems that include the ability to learn, adapt and respond to their environment," Barney said. **PTI**

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Nasa's star planet hunter retires hurt

Kepler Spacecraft, Which Broke Down In May, Cannot Be Fixed; It Discovered 3,548 Planets

Dennis Overbye

Nasa said on Thursday that its celebrated planet-hunting Kepler spacecraft, which broke down in May when a reaction wheel that controls its pointing failed, could not be fixed and would never again search for planets around other stars.

The disappointing news brings to an end, for now, one phase of the most romantic of space dreams, the search for other Earths among the exoplanets of the Milky Way. Nasa has already asked astronomers for ideas on how to use the hobbled spacecraft, whose telescope is in perfect shape.

Even as they mourned the end of Kepler, astronomers



END OF A DREAM: An artist's rendering shows the Kepler space telescope

said its legacy would continue as they worked their way through a trove of data the spacecraft has gathered.

At last count, Kepler had discovered 3,548 possible planets, and 135 of them — some smaller than the Earth

— have been validated by other observations, including earthbound telescopes.

But hundreds or thousands more are in the pipeline, said William Borucki of Nasa's Ames Research Laboratory in Mountain View, Calif., Kepler's originator and principal investigator.

"The most exciting discoveries are going to come in the next few years as we search through this data," Borucki said on Thursday in a telephone news conference. "In the next few years we're going to be able to answer the questions that inspired Kepler: Are Earthlike planets common or rare in the galaxy?"

Kepler was launched into an orbit around the Sun in

March 2009. Its official mission was to determine the fraction of stars in the galaxy that harbor Earthlike planets by carrying out a survey of some 150,000 stars in the constellations of Cygnus and Lyra, looking for the dips in starlight caused by planets passing, or transiting, in front of their suns.

Three dips, or transits, are considered the criteria for a planet candidate, which means the Earth or a planet in a similar orbit that was habitable would take three years to show up. Accordingly, Kepler was designed to operate for four years, but other sunlike stars turned out to be more jittery in their output than expected, making the detection

of Earth analogues more difficult. Since astronomers could learn a lot more from Kepler if it went on collecting data, the decision was made last year to extend the spacecraft's mission for three more years, until 2016. So far Kepler's mission has cost \$600 million, and its budget for the 2013 fiscal year is about \$18 million.

Among its finds were a planet nicknamed Tatooine, after the "Star Wars" planet with two suns, otherwise known as Kepler 16b, the first one found that orbits two stars at once. Another was the so-called Styrofoam planet, which is again half as large as Jupiter but so puffed up by the heat of its star that it's one-tenth as dense. **NYT NEWS SERVICE**

HT Indore

IIM-Indore to automate its all processes soon

PAPERLESS To invite high-quality manpower, says director

HT Correspondent

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INDORE: Over the next few years, Indian Institute of Management, Indore, will be in the process of becoming a paperless institution by automating all its processes.

“In the next few years, we will move towards automating our processes,” said institute director Prof N Ravichandran while addressing the gathering on the occasion of 67th Independence Day. “We will invite high quality manpower to join our system to contribute to our growth.”

Extending his greeting to the members of IIM-I community, the director said, “The institute will do everything that is possible to look after the welfare of the staff and provide an outstanding academic ambiance to our students, staff and faculty members. We will continue to invest on our staff in helping them to discharge their responsibilities in the context of the institute.”

The institute has already started training its employees on computer skills and has initi-



■ Participants dressed as freedom fighters perform in Hindi patriotic play Kalchakra at IIM-I on Thursday.

HT PHOTO

ated a learning activity for staff to improve their productivity.

Besides, the institute will educate employees who did not have an opportunity to go to school when they were young, Prof Ravichandran said. The institute is also considering adopting schools in the neigh-

bourhood to help them become better institutions.

Followed by director's speech, a Hindi patriotic play, Kalchakra, was staged by the postgraduate programme in management and fellow programme in management participants.

Times of India ND 17-Aug-13 P-21

Hyd univ VC spends ₹3 cr on house

Nikhila Henry | TNN

Hyderabad: The University of Hyderabad is splurging Rs 3 crore on the renovation of the vice-chancellor's bungalow, an amount in multiples of what the Chief Justice of India is entitled to, documents reveal. While the estimated cost of renovation was pegged at Rs 18 lakh according to university records of June 6, 2011, the cost to renovate VC Ramakrishna Ramaswamy's residence shot up manifold and Rs 48 lakh walaas spent merely on the construction of a boundary wall, leaving the academic community baffled.

The plush building close to a scenic water body on the campus is expected to have a tennis court, a swimming pool, a private bar, lounge, leisure seating areas, dais for speakers and even an elevator, according to the architect's blueprint sent to the university administration for approval. The huge expense by the varsity hasn't gone down well with the Ministry of Human Resources De-



The VC's bungalow in Hyderabad

velopment which has sought an explanation for the same. University stakeholders, too, said such exorbitant expenditure is being incurred when it's reducing facilities for students hit by resource crunch.

"The university has done away with scholarship plans for most students. Also, construction of several buildings including hostels on south campus are incomplete due to lack of funds," said a senior faculty member. The furnishing list of the renovated lodge includes wooden storages, crockery shelves, paintings, murals and LED TV among others running into lakhs.

Asked about the expenditure,

Ramaswamy said the VC's lodge and a VVIP guesthouse attached is an asset which will benefit future incumbents as well. "The building houses class facilities which will stay on the campus and be useful for any VC office holder in the future. A chunk of the expenditure is on VVIP guest house which has two rooms with plush facilities for VVIP visitors who would come to the campus," Ramaswamy told TOI.

Interestingly, the seemingly unjustifiable expenditure on renovation is in fact higher than most recent newspaper reports of excessive spending by people in public offices, including residence of director, AIIMS (Rs 42 lakh) and vice chancellor, Panjab University (Rs 12.31 lakh). What has irked the university community is that the renovation work plan was finalized without the approval of building committee and finance committee. "The escalation in cost was not reported to the executive council of the university," said a source.

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Admission can't be denied only on basis of age: High Court

Press Trust of India
New Delhi, Aug. 16

Admission to a course cannot be denied only on account of a candidate's age if it is not barred under an institution's rules, the Delhi High Court has said, and directed Jamia Milia Islamia to admit a 46-year-old woman for a B.Ed course within a week.

Allowing one Sunita Rani's plea against Jamia's denial for admission in the current academic session, Justice V.K Jain said, "I find no logic behind denying admission to the B. Ed course only on account of age of a candidate, when the university statute does not bar such admissions."

"The endeavour of a university, in my view, should be to impart higher education to as many as persons as is possible, instead of insisting upon a particular age limit for the purpose of admission to a course of study with the university."

In her plea, Rani said her candidature was rejected by the university on the ground that there was a long gap between her passing out Master's degree in English (1992) from Delhi University and seeking admission in B.Ed.

The court rejected Jamia counsel's argument that since there was a gap of more than 21 years between the last education of the petitioner (Rani), which she completed in the year 1992, and her seeking admission to the B.Ed course, the university did not allow the admission to her.

Further the court rejected the argument that the petitioner was not eligible for being employed as a teacher, in any Government school/college, no useful purpose would have been served by granting admission to her in the course.

The court observed saying, "The importance of education in the life of a person hardly needs any emphasis. The education comes next only to freedom and justice, and in fact is a pre-requisite to maintain both, freedom as well as justice in its true sense. It is also said to be a great equaliser, which enables the lowly and downtrodden to come up in life and complete with those who are already well placed in life.

"In a course such as B.Ed, apart from benefiting a person seeking admission to the course, it is also likely to benefit others to whom education is imparted by him/her. The attempt of the university, therefore, should be to encourage and not discourage admissions to such a course."

HT Lucknow

Proposal to limit number of colleges within a university

NEW DELHI: The government is planning to cap the number of colleges that can be affiliated to a university to maintain proper academic standards. A proposal on this has been submitted by the Rashtriya Uchattar Shiksha Abhiyan (national higher education campaign) to the human resource development ministry, an official release said here on Friday. The scheme proposes not more than 200 colleges to be affiliated to a university. **PTI**

SILVER LINING

Clear water between Oxford and Cambridge in money stakes

Reuters

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LONDON: Not much separates Britain's two oldest universities, Oxford and Cambridge, in their academic standing or the tally of victories in their annual boat race, but when it comes to finances, Cambridge is ahead by several lengths.

A Reuters ranking of UK university endowment funds showed that Cambridge, whose ivy-covered towers date back to the 13th centu-

ry, cemented its status as the richest university in Britain in 2012, topping the list when it came to growth in its fund, which takes into account inflows of donations plus returns on investment minus expenditure.

Oxford, which traces its history to the 11th century and boasts Britain's PM David Cameron and former US President Bill Clinton among its alumni, spent more than it took in, though its investments performed better.

The latest figures sourced

from 14 UK universities with funds worth more than £60 million showed the £1.65 billion Cambridge University Endowment Fund grew by 6.5% in the academic year ended in July 2012.

Imperial College London and King's College London came next in the growth stakes, managing 6.4 per cent and 6.1% due to a mix of new investments and asset performance.

Oxford came 10th in the list, with its fund shrinking 0.2 % to £854 million.