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John J. Kennedy

Academic brilliance was once defined by the depth of scholarship, rigorous institutional processes, and a culture of inquiry nurtured by universities. Today, the focus has shifted to metrics, badges, and rankings. Institutions showcase it, scholars highlight it, and stakeholders treat it as a seal of quality. Yet, as with all that glitters, one must ask: what lies beneath?

Today, Stanford is gaining recognition, alongside THE and QS rankings, despite the inherent flaws in all three. The Stanford ranking, for instance, seeks to identify the top 2% scientists in various disciplines based on a composite indicator. This includes bibliometric indicators such as total citations, h-index, co-authorship-adjusted metrics, and citations to papers in different authorship positions. While it appears scientific and data-driven, the exercise is not without flaws.

For one, it depends entirely on Scopus data, a commercial database that does not cover all disciplines equally. Humanities and some Social Sciences are grossly under-represented, leaving a large swath of global academia invisible in the analysis. Moreover, the focus on citation-based metrics incentivises quantity over quality. A well-written, widely-cited review paper can push a researcher up the ranks, while a game-

Meaning over metrics

By focusing on rankings, our current education model equates visibility with value and reputation with reality.



changing monograph in philosophy may not even register. What makes it even more problematic is the blind application of these rankings by institutions. Without context, nuance, or disciplinary sensitivity, they are turned into marketing tools. It is less about a commitment to excellence and more about optics and prestige. The ranking becomes currency; a transactional marker to attract funding, students, and media attention.

Indian context

In India, the situation is more troubling. The National Assessment and Accreditation Council (NAAC) has come under intense

scrutiny after the recent revelation of a university in Andhra Pradesh allegedly paying crores to secure an A+ grade. Shockingly, nearly 20% of NAAC assessors were later removed due to various irregularities. The demand for a comprehensive probe into the assessments conducted by these discredited evaluators is reasonable and urgent. In recent years, many institutions have managed to secure top grades, which many argue is inconsistent with the ground reality of poor infrastructure, faculty shortages, and abysmal student outcomes. This raises a troubling question: Have we reduced institutional quality to a game of stra-

tegic networking, financial leverage, and performative documentation?

One cannot ignore the systemic pressures at play. The increasing corporatization of academia has introduced market logic into the university system. As public funding shrinks, universities – especially private ones – are forced to rely on student fees and external rankings to remain afloat. This leads to a dangerous feedback loop. To attract students, institutions ease academic regulations, reduce penalties for indiscipline, and adopt student-centric policies that often border on appeasement. Faculty, burdened with teaching, administrative tasks, and

publication requirements, face burnout. In such an environment, rankings become not just desirable but necessary. They are wielded as shields in an ever-intensifying battle for survival. Institutions chase Scopus-indexed journals to meet regulatory demands, not for the love of scholarship. Researchers pay exorbitant fees to get published and, when that fails, some resort to unethical practices, only for their papers to be retracted later.

Flawed model

In this matrix of manipulation, it is easy to blame the institutions. But the deeper malaise lies in the very education model we have embraced: one that eq-

uates visibility with value, metrics with meaning, and reputation with reality. Awards, too, have not been spared. Today, one can pay a tidy sum and receive an "Excellence in Research" award in a foreign country with a sightseeing tour and conference pass thrown in. These packages are marketed as academic opportunities but are, in truth, commodified experiences engineered to inflate CVs. We must ask: did our finest institutions of yesteryear depend on such scaffolding?

The situation may seem bleak, but not hopeless. To reverse the tide, we need to recalibrate our priorities. First, we must advocate for more context-sensitive and peer-reviewed models of assessment that go beyond metrics. Second, public funding for education must be restored and enhanced. The commodification of education is not an inevitable outcome; it is the result of deliberate policy choices.

Third, academia must reclaim its soul. Universities are not businesses, and education is not a product. Rankings can be tools, but they must not become our tyrants. The rot will deepen until we resist the seduction of easy prestige and short-term gains. It's time to stop asking how to climb the ranks and start asking how to make learning meaningful again.

Views are personal

The writer is a retired professor and former Dean, School of Arts and Humanities, Christ Deemed-to-be University, Bengaluru.

SCHOLARSHIPS

National Overseas Scholarship Scheme for ST Students

An opportunity offered by the Ministry of Tribal Affairs, Government of India.

Eligibility: Students from the Scheduled Tribes (ST) communities who hold a Master's, Ph.D. or postdoctoral degree, have secured 55% or equivalent in the previous qualifying examination and have an annual income of less than ₹600,000.

Rewards: ₹100,000 a year and other benefits.

Application: Online

Deadline: June 30

www.b4s.in/edge/IFBMS6

programme for the class of 2027 at selected educational institutions with a gross annual family income of less than or equal to ₹600,000.

Rewards: ₹100,000 a year

Application: Online

Deadline: June 30

www.b4s.in/edge/NOSF1

FAEA Scholarship

Offered by the Foundation for Academic Excellence and Access (FAEA).

Eligibility: Students residing within the Mumbai Metropolitan Region (MMR) who scored overall 85% or above in Class 10 Board exams in 2025 and have secured admission for Class 11 in any stream in MMR with an annual family income of ₹320,000 or below.

Rewards: Tuition fee, hostel/mess charges, and allowances.

Application: Online

Deadline: June 30

www.b4s.in/edge/FAEA2

Courtesy: Buddy4study

IDFC FIRST Bank MBA Scholarship

A need-based scholarship from IDFC FIRST Bank.

Eligibility: Indian students enrolled in the first year of a two-year, full-time MBA

for pressing healthcare challenges.

Eligibility: Students pursuing MBBS, BDS, B.Sc. Nursing, B.Tech, B.E. or equivalent in engineering. Students pursuing B.Sc., M.Sc. or Integrated Masters in any discipline of Natural or Life Sciences can be team members along with medical or engineering students.

More details at www.incubate2025.in

INCUBATE 2025

Jawaharlal Institute of Postgraduate Medical Education and Research (JIPMER), Puducherry, and the IIT-Bombay have launched INCUBATE 2025, a Med-Tech hackathon to inspire medical and engineering students to innovate solutions



OFF THE EDGE

Nandini Raman

Develop practical skills

Uncertain about your career options? Low on self-confidence? This column may help

I have completed B.Com and am working as an analyst for Deloitte. I have a visual impairment. I saw a course on soft skills and corporate training from an institute called ICBI, which is accredited by SQA. It is expensive, but I attended an online session that was engaging and interesting. On completion, they say, I can apply for a full-time role as a corporate trainer in different companies, and ICBI will also refer me to companies. But no one seems to know about this course. I do not want to leave my current job to study. So I am also looking at online MBA options. What should I do? Shiva

Dear Shiva,

While the course sounds interesting and the SQA accreditation adds credibility, the expense and not many people knowing about it is not okay. Try to find trainers who have passed out of this academy and verify the job placement claims. Do not leave your current job till you are convinced about the course, the certification and the placements.

An online MBA offers the flexibility to study while working and will enhance your business knowledge and management skills. But it will need self-discipline and time management, and may not provide the same networking opportunities as a traditional MBA. Look up accredited universities that have online MBAs and focus on programmes that offer specialisations relevant to your interests and with strong career services and alumni networks.

Try leveraging your Deloitte experience and seek opportunities for growth within the company by

exploring internal mobility options. Identify the transferable skills that you have gained from your B.Com and Deloitte experience and highlight them in your resume and job applications.

I am in Class 10 in a government school. I am not interested in academics, but I do not know how to choose my career. What can I do other than get a degree or look at a career in government service? Prasanna

Dear Prasanna,

Your feelings are perfectly normal. First, identify the activities you enjoy. What are you good at? Do you prefer working with your hands or being creative or solving practical problems? Identify your skills and strengths. Consider skill development and vocational training across automotive repair, electrical work, plumbing, welding, carpentry or consider programmes in graphic design, photography, culinary arts, cybersecurity and network administration if you are interested in Information Technology. Look up courses in ITIs that provide practical skills and hands-on training via short-term courses in various technical trades.

Apprenticeships allow you to learn a trade while working under the guidance of experienced professionals. Community Colleges and Polytechnics offer diploma courses that lead to practical careers. Focus on developing practical skills that are in demand in the job market.

I am doing my M.A. in Modern History. I graduated during the pandemic, and my

practical skills are low. I attempted the UPSC twice but did not clear it. I am interested in journalism, but in light of the drastic changes in the job market, I don't know if it is a good option. Priya

Dear Priya,

Your M.A. in Modern History provides a strong background in research, analysis, and critical thinking. As far as journalism goes, strong research and writing skills are essential. Opportunities in digital journalism, content creation, multimedia storytelling (video, audio, infographics), social media management, content creation, data journalism and media analysis are good options. Build a portfolio and network with journalists and media professionals on LinkedIn. Create multimedia content related to history or current events. Consider specialised journalism, such as data, historical, or political journalism.

You also have opportunities in academia and research, in think tanks, and policy analysis. Consider pursuing a Ph.D. Explore government roles related to cultural heritage, archives, or policy research. Look into state government positions, as those may have less competition than the UPSC. Develop practical skills such as digital and communication skills. Learn digital tools and software relevant to your chosen field, like data analysis, digital marketing, and multimedia production. Practise public speaking and presentation skills and improve your writing and editing skills.

I am doing M.F.A Painting

from Delhi. What are my career options? Moni

Dear Moni,

Delhi has a vibrant art scene, with numerous galleries, museums, and art institutions. Leverage the city's resources and opportunities to build your career. Build a strong portfolio that showcases your work and connect with artists, curators, and other professionals in the art world. You could be a professional artist, creating and selling your work through solo and group shows, art fairs, online platforms or via commissions for private clients or businesses. You could be an art educator and teach at universities and art colleges, private art schools and workshops, community art programmes, or offer private art lessons. Another option is being gallery curator/ manager in art galleries, museums, or cultural institutions, organising exhibitions, managing collections, working with artists and selling and marketing art. Or be an art critic/ writer for art magazines and journals, newspapers and online publications, blogs and websites. This requires strong writing and analytical skills. An art restorer/ conservator is another option. You could also explore creative industries such as set design, illustration, graphic design, animation, textile design, fashion design, interior design or digital art and media. Or work with community organisations to create art projects using art as a tool for social change and engagement.

Disclaimer: This column is merely a guiding voice and provides advice and suggestions on education and careers.

The writer is a practising counsellor and a trainer. Send your questions to eduplus.thehindu@gmail.com with the subject line Off the Edge.

I am doing my M.F.A Painting

Foster an intellectual spirit

By tightening norms on Ph.D. supervision, are we nurturing research potential or fencing it in?

Bhupendar Nandal Kesur

Academic research in India is once again at a pivotal crossroads. In a recent directive, the University Grants Commission (UGC) has stipulated that research supervisors for Ph.D. candidates must belong to institutions with recognised postgraduate research centres. This move, intended to ensure quality control and institutional accountability, comes at a time when the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 is advocating the democratisation and decentralisation of research – starting right from undergraduate programmes.

The apparent contradiction between these two directions raises fundamental questions about the future of research in India. **Quality vs. accessibility** On the surface, the UGC's intention seems well-founded. Research is a rigorous activity demanding access to institutional infrastructure, peer support, and ethical oversight. Restricting supervisors to PG research centres ensures that minimum academic standards are upheld. However, this measure inadvertently sidelines a vast cohort of capable researchers and teachers from UG colleges, who may possess strong academic credentials, extensive research experience, and proven track records but are now deemed ineligible solely due to institutional affiliation. The policy runs the risk of converting what should be an intellectually inclusive process into an exclusive club, centred around a few institutions with "recognised" status. Is research potential a property of an

institution or an individual?

Individual merit

This brings us to a crucial philosophical and pedagogical question: Should research supervision be institution-centric or individual-centric? There are several instances where professors in non-research PG colleges have published in high-impact journals, received fellowships, and mentored scholars informally with great success. By denying these individuals the ability to formally guide Ph.D. students, the system fails to recognise merit and performance outside bureaucratic boundaries. Ironically, NEP 2020 emphasises promoting research from the undergraduate level, allowing students to engage in high-level inquiry and innovation as early as the fourth year. How, then, do we reconcile this vision with a restrictive policy that limits who can guide future researchers?

Repercussions

The implications of this policy could be far-reaching. First, it may lead to overcrowding of researchers under a few supervisors in PG research

centres, reducing the quality of mentorship. Second, it may demoralise qualified teachers in UG institutions who are eager to contribute to national knowledge production. Third, it creates a two-tiered system; those who are "research-worthy" and those who are not, based not on talent but institutional status. Additionally, the assumption that only PG centres have the necessary infrastructure is increasingly outdated in the digital age. With open-access journals, virtual laboratories, collaborative tools, and global research networks, much of the academic work today transcends physical campuses.

Need for balance

A more nuanced framework is urgently needed: one that upholds academic quality while actively nurturing individual research talent. To begin with, merit-based accreditation should be introduced, allowing experienced faculty from non-PG research centres to independently apply to be Ph.D. guides based on academic credentials, such as publication records, citation indices, or leadership in funded research projects. In place of



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blanket bans on entire categories of institutions, regular institutional audits should be conducted to assess and certify research readiness in undergraduate colleges, ensuring that deserving institutions are not unfairly excluded. Additionally, collaborative mentorship models could be adopted, allowing for joint supervision where a researcher has a primary guide from a UG institution and a co-guide from a PG research centre, thereby encouraging mentorship diversity and inter-institutional learning. Policies must also be realigned with the NEP 2020's research-first vision, which calls for building research mentorship capacity across the academic spectrum – including UG colleges – instead of restricting it. Finally, investment in digital infrastructure is essential, enabling equitable access to research databases, tools, and collaborative platforms for all accredited institutions, thereby decentralising research power and making knowledge creation more inclusive.

Research is not the privilege of a few but the responsibility of all in the academic ecosystem. UGC's commitment to quality is laudable, but it must not come at the cost of inclusivity and innovation. As India moves towards becoming a global knowledge hub, it is essential to ensure that the structures we build empower every capable mind, not just the ones housed in designated research centres. The strength of a nation's research culture lies not in institutional labels but in the intellectual spirit it chooses to nurture.

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