



## **AN OVERVIEW OF INTEGRATED PROGRAMMES IN HIGHER EDUCATION**

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### **Abstract:**

*Integrated programme is not a new concept in Indian education system. In the field of management studies integrated programmes is gaining a lot of importance recently. Many premiere institutions like IITs and IIMs and some of the central universities have taken the lead and have begun offering flexible dual degree and integrated courses across streams. Such schemes enable students to focus towards multi faceted curriculums within short span of time. The traditional education system in India has certain drawbacks wherein students are passive learners with no exposure to critical thinking and learning, resulting in difficulty in applying their knowledge to society. There is a huge gap between the knowledge and skills required by the industry and the curriculum in the conventional system. Hence the industries have been complaining that the graduates coming out of the existing education system are non- employable. The integrated programmes are designed to be innovative in nature with new curriculum and better insight on subjects. It helps in creating employable graduates. This paper gives an insight on benefits of it for students as well as the teaching community and the challenges faced by institutions in providing such programmes.*

**Index Terms:** Integrated Programmes, Management Studies, Higher Education & Curriculum

### **Introduction:**






The word "integrate" is derived from the Latin word 'integrare' which means to make whole or renew. In the Oxford American Dictionary (2001), definitions of Integrate include "to join as to form a larger, more comprehensive entity," and "to blend, harmonize, synthesize, arrange, incorporate, unify, coordinate, and orchestrate".

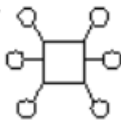
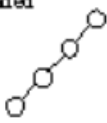



An integrated study programme comprises of a curriculum that is jointly designed by two or more higher education institutions - sometimes from different countries or disciplines - and is regulated by a specific set of guidelines.

Management education integrated with engineering, architecture and pharmacy, offers immense opportunities for students. Interestingly, integrated dual degree programmes are not new to Indian education system, with some of these programmes being in vogue for the last decade. However, it is only recently that universities have begun scaling-up programmes on offer, adding a modern edge to them.

Students who choose the programme undertake defined periods of study in each institution or discipline in terms of duration and content. At the end of the courses and after relevant examinations, students are awarded a single qualification jointly signed by the academic authorities of both institutions and/or disciplines.

The purpose for moving towards an integrated course design stems from the relationship between the classroom and the increasingly complex world of today. Trends towards global interconnectedness, the increase in pace and complexity, and the rapid expansion of knowledge has brought with it mounting concerns over classroom relevancy and the lack of connections between education and real-world issues. Integrated course design provides a solid response to these challenges by Facilitating the application of knowledge, Encouraging multiple disciplinary perspectives, Enhancing relationships between in-class content and out-of-class realities, encouraging

Name	Description	Advantages	Disadvantages
Fragmented 	Separate and distinct disciplines	Clear and discrete view of a discipline	Connections are not made clear for students; less transfer of learning
Connected 	Topics within a discipline are connected	Key concepts are connected, leading to the review, reconceptualization and assimilation of ideas within a discipline	Disciplines are not related; content focus remains within the discipline
Nested 	Social, thinking, and content skills are targeted within a subject area	Gives attention to several areas at once, leading to enriched and enhanced learning	Students may be confused and lose sight of the main concepts of the activity or lesson
Sequenced 	Similar ideas are taught in concert, although subjects are separate	Facilitates transfer of learning across content areas	Requires ongoing collaboration and flexibility, as teachers have less autonomy in sequencing curricula
Shared 	Team planning and/or teaching that involves two disciplines focuses on shared concepts, skills or attitudes	Shared instructional experiences; with two teachers on a team it is less difficult to collaborate	Requires time, flexibility, commitment and compromise

Webbed 	Thematic teaching, using a theme as a base for instruction in many disciplines	Motivating for students, helps students see connections between ideas	Theme must be carefully and thoughtfully selected to be meaningful, with relevant and rigorous content
Threaded 	Thinking skills, social skills, multiple intelligences, and study skills are "threaded" throughout the disciplines	Students learn how they are learning, facilitating future transfer of learning	Disciplines remain separate
Integrated 	Priorities that overlap multiple disciplines are examined for common skills, concepts, and attitudes.	Encourages students to see interconnectedness and interrelationships among disciplines, students are motivated as they see these connections	Requires interdepartmental teams with common planning and teaching time
Immersed 	Learner integrates by viewing all learning through the perspective of one area of interest	Integration takes place within the learner	May narrow the focus of the learner
Networked 	Learner directs the integration process through selection of a network of experts and resources	Pro-active, with learner stimulated by new information, skills or concepts	Learner can be spread too thin, efforts become ineffective

depth and breadth in understanding complex issues, and Enhancing student engagement through experiential and active learning and learning supports an integrated course's capacity to address these challenges by stating "...the brain is

designed to learn from the complexities of real life, an ability unchallenged by the simplicity of textbooks and seat work, as well as the artificial division of knowledge into subject areas.

Fogarty has described ten levels of curriculum integration (1991). The following chart summarizes some of her work; a more complete explanation is referred to Fogarty's book, *The Mindful School*. "The Logic of Interdisciplinary Studies," an exhaustive 1997 research report, found broad consensus among dozens of researchers as to what the report called the "positive educational outcomes" for students in an integrated- studies program:

- ✓ Increased understanding, retention, and application of general concepts.
- ✓ Better overall comprehension of global interdependencies, along with the development of multiple perspectives and points of view, as well as values.
- ✓ Increased ability to make decisions, think critically and creatively, and synthesize knowledge beyond the disciplines.
- ✓ Enhanced ability to identify, assess, and transfer significant information needed for solving novel problems.
- ✓ Promotion of cooperative learning and a better attitude toward oneself as a learner and as a meaningful member of a community.
- ✓ Increased motivation.

India Education Review interacted with some of the people who have designed and implemented integrated programmes in their institution to understand the benefits of these courses for the student and teaching community.

**Advantage for Student Community:**

- ✓ Students are looking at integrated program as beneficial for them, but at the same time these programmes demand four to six years of commitment in the same subject without a choice of change. The experts are of the view that going for integrated programs has a good deal of benefits in terms of career and developing in-depth knowledge on a specific subject.
- ✓ Prof. S G Deshmukh, Director, Atal Bihari Vajpayee Indian Institute of Information Technology and Management (AVB IIIT) said, "These courses are different from the conventional one's as the content of such courses is compressed and application based. Therefore, after laying the foundation in basics, a careful choice is made to migrate to Postgraduate level subjects.
- ✓ Talking about the benefits for student community Prof. Deshmukh said, "It saves one year of the student. Instead of spending 4 + 2, years, a student can get master's degree in just five years. Saving of one year in today's career driven world is a big thing. They get Masters Degree seamlessly. It increases efficiency as students do not have to search for another place or institute to get master's degree. Seamlessly, they are able to get second degree being in the same institute. It also helps student to make their career choice early and an early start in career goes a long way. Higher earning potential from start also helps student in financial benefits. Incidentally, looking at our model, now IIM Indore has introduced the IPG programme."
- ✓ Sudhir Chella Rajan, Professor and Head, Humanities and Social Sciences, IIT Madras is of the opinion that, "Integrated courses, such as the MA programme in IIT Madras, are intended to provide broad inter-disciplinary training with well-sequenced curriculum over a sufficient length of time so as to give students adequate preparation in their chosen field, either for higher studies or professional careers. Students have the advantage of gaining a master's degree at

the end of the programme. They can see the entire scope of their curriculum at a glance and thereby gain better understanding of the material, especially if it is sequenced properly.”

- ✓ Prof. B Chandra, Mathematics Department, IIT Delhi said, “These are the courses which are designed by the two or more departments coming together to develop a new course and they designed keeping in mind the need of the society and industry so that the student can get maximum benefit out of it. These courses are very good for the students as it will help them in pursuing their career and it has better job prospects. This is also good as student from different streams come together to study a different topics and it will certainly boost the research scenario at our institutions.”
- ✓ Experts are also of the view that those students who have research as the goal of their career they should go for the integrated courses as it will save their time on education without losing out on content.

#### **Benefits for the Teaching Community:**

- ✓ Talking about the benefits for the teaching community, Dr S G Deshmukh, Director, AVB IIT opined, “The teachers get an opportunity to teach to the best brains. They also get an opportunity to mould students for postgraduate career which will help students to migrate to teaching careers. Today, there is a serious faculty crunch. Every institute suffers from faculty shortage. Through IPG courses, at least a sizable portion of student community is likely to be exposed to teaching careers.
- ✓ Sudhir Chella Rajan, IIT Madras said, “Faculty have the advantage of following student cohorts over five years and especially in a place like IIT Madras, where the faculty-student ratio is very high, they can have close engagement with the students over a 5-year period. They therefore have the satisfaction of seeing considerable progress during this period.”

There is also an element to it as students often get confused between dual degrees and integrated programmes as both the terms are often used interchangeably. A joint or dual degree program is an outcome to an integrated course of study. An integrated study programme comprises of a curriculum that is jointly designed by two or more higher education institutions. The institution should inform the students about various provisions of integrated programmes and they should also come up with awareness programme to popularise the new system of education and it should not be seen as something replacing the existing system completely as it has its own pros and cons.

#### **Challenges for the Institutions Offering Integrated Courses:**

Higher educational institutions offering integrated courses may have to revamp their curriculum and extend the duration of their popular programmes now. The University Grants Commission has laid down new norms on the duration and curriculum of integrated courses, and many programmes being offered now may not fit the bill. Through a recent gazette notification, UGC said the duration of integrated courses should not be lesser than the sum of the duration of individual courses. Many integrated courses, including popular ones like the five-year integrated M.Tech, and law and teacher education courses, offered by state and deemed universities will not meet this requirement, as according to UGC norms they should be of six-year duration. If the UGC insists on institutions making this change, integrated programmes are likely to lose their popularity. Most students choose these courses as they allow them to get a post graduation degree in shorter time. Experts point out that most of the existing courses

are already considered on a par with international postgraduate programmes, which require five years of college education.

The UGC notification said: "The academic philosophy/rationale behind offering such integrated programmes should not be for economizing on course requirements or award of double degrees in a fast track. On the contrary, an integrated approach should involve a vertical or interdisciplinary discourse." It added that this would necessarily entail an equal, if not longer, course duration, a newer approach towards framing of curriculum and additional interactive courses.

Therefore, an integrated or dual degree programme will be allowed only if there is no compromise on any of the course requirements, including duration, number of papers and intensity of courses, teaching or learning hours and credits. The notification has been forwarded to all degree awarding institutions, including state and private universities. The direction is likely to affect courses offered by many deemed universities, such as the integrated M.Tech programme offered by SASTRA University, the B.Tech - MBA course offered by VIT University and Tamil Nadu Dr. Ambedkar Law University's flagship five-year integrated BA-BL (Hons) and B.Com-BL (Hons) courses.

"The latest UGC circular on integrated degrees is a retrograde step and trespasses into the statutory domains of bodies like the Bar Council of India and the National Council of Teacher Education (NCTE) that have approved these courses," said S Vaidhyasubramaniam, dean of planning and development at SASTRA University. The university vice-chancellor R Sethuraman has written to the UGC secretary seeking a correction to the notification.

The letter has sought an approval for the university's five-year integrated programmes in teacher education, which were approved by an expert committee of the NCTE and the UGC, and five-year integrated law programmes, which were approved by the Bar Council of India.

The notification said students already doing these courses will not be affected and they will be able to complete the course they signed up for, but with admissions to some of the courses for 2014-15 academic year still on, students signing up are apprehensive about the change.

In addition to the new rules with regard to integrated courses, the UGC notification also deals with the nomenclature of some popular courses. While University of Madras allows some city colleges to offer Bachelor of Business Studies (BBS) or Bachelor of Business Management (BBM), the UGC has asked institutions to restructure and rename the courses as BBA or BCOM.

To overcome the challenges the integrated programmes have to be designed to be innovative in nature with challenging curriculum and better insight on subjects. The programmes should focus on creating employable graduates who are required to fill the gap between the demand and supply in the labour market. Institutions have to attract students for the integrated programmes by creating better placements and skill development programmes. Integrated courses do help students to stay focused in their higher education and also relate the same to their practical experience in their respective jobs. Thus, integrated courses do benefit the society at large as it provides skilled human resources.

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