1. ACADEMIC AUDIT - A TOOL FOR ENHANCING TEACHING-LEARNING EFFECTIVENESS

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Abstract

The institutions for their survival and growth have to impart education that will meet the ever increasing demand of employers, coupled with the attitude of lifelong learning in students. This paper aims to discuss the case study of an engineering college situated in rural Maharashtra, which has made a mark at the National Level through the implementation of innovative and best practices like Academic Audit and Faculty Competency Mapping. The process of Academic Audit captures the classroom dynamics in an environment of ease and comfort. Class room dynamics here refers to delivery effectiveness, learning experience of students with different learning preferences and styles, factors that hinder the effectiveness of both teaching and learning. A detailed audit process is laid down including the guidelines to auditors and post audit counseling to faculty. The audit is designed to capture the five important dimensions of a teacher, namely-subject knowledge, preparation, communication, class control and concern for students and opportunity to interact. The audit process is going to map the individual teacher and the course on a 10 point scale with appropriate weights for the five dimensions. Weightages for dimensions are decided based on the opinions of the senior faculty and academicians Based on the scores, the faculty competency enhancement is planned and appropriate actions are initiated to train the faculty in the specified dimensions. The outcome of the audit is evident in terms of improved learning outcomes, enhancement of teaching deliveries and competency, collaborative learning, good academic environment. This process is a pre step in consolidating teaching-learning process resulting in better quality.

1 Introduction:

Institutions of higher education should be effective learning organizations-with institutional cultures that value and support student learning. It requires the integration of planning, assessment, and improvement. Higher education often reflects the growing impatience with the quality of education by decrying the lack of resources to underwrite change. Academic Audit is an initiative focused on improving academic quality without spending more money or abandoning other priorities. It is a self-sustaining cycle of academic quality improvement that is low cost, highly collegial, faculty driven, and uses structured conversation within the department and between department members and auditors to examine the possibilities for improvement and achieve commitments for change. It involves a self study, peer review-site visit by trained auditors, and a report emphasizing agreed-upon areas for

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improvement and acknowledgement of successes. Academic quality work embedded in the Academic Audit systematizes an institution's approach to quality by focusing on a body of content that must be considered before an analysis can be accepted or complete. This body of content is the focal areas of quality work: 1) learning objectives, 2) curriculum, 3) teaching and learning methods, 4) student learning assessments, and 5) quality assurance.

1.1. Questions that faculty should address in the five areas mentioned

i. Determining Learning Objectives

Have we consciously considered what students, who complete our courses/program should know and be able to do for employment? Do we identify and learn from best practices, evaluate student outcome goals of comparable departments in other institutions?

ii. Designing Curriculum and Co-curriculum

Do we work collaboratively on curriculum design? Do we consciously consider how the course design relates to other courses students will take as part of this program? Do we identify and learn from best practices, evaluate curricula of comparable departments in other institutions?

iii. Designing Teaching and Learning Methods

How is teaching and learning organized for students? What methods will be used to expose students to learning resources for the first time? To answer questions and provide interpretation? To provide feedback on student work? Do we strive for coherence in the department's curriculum and educational processes?

iv. Developing Student Learning Assessment

What measures and indicators do we use to assess student learning? Have we defined indicators or measures of achievement based upon our stated learning objectives? Do we assess performance only at the end of the course/program or do we compare beginning and ending performance to ascertain value added?

v. Assuring Implementation of Quality Education

Are we organized to ensure that our mutual departmental objectives and priorities are implemented consistently? How do we assure ourselves that content is delivered as intended, that teaching and learning processes are being implemented appropriately and consistently, that assessments are conducted as planned and the results used effectively? The review by a department of these focal areas is conducted using Academic Quality Principles (Massy, 2003; Massy & French, 2001; Massy, Graham, & Short, 2007).

1.2 Academic Quality Principles

Research at Stanford University's National Center for Postsecondary Improvement identified seven principles of good practice for quality work (Academic Quality Principles). The principles have their roots in business, government, and health care but have been adapted to and tested in academe (Massy, 2003; Massy & French, 2001). They are consistent with the preponderance of ideas expressed in the literature on quality in higher education (Ruben, 1995). Those principles are:

1.2.1 Define quality in terms of outcomes

Learning outcomes should pertain to what is or will become important for the departments students. Learning, not teaching by itself, is what ultimately matters.

1.2.2 Focus on process

Departments should analyze how teachers teach, how students learn, and how to best approach. Learning assessment. Departments should study their disciplines literature and collect data on what works well and what don't work at all. Experimentation with active learning

should be encouraged.

Faculty should be encouraged to share and adopt their colleague's successful teaching innovations.

1.2.3 Work collaboratively

Teamwork and consensus lead to total faculty ownership of and responsibility for all aspects of the curriculum and make everyone accountable for the success of students. Dialogue and collaboration should be encouraged over territoriality.

1.2.4. Base decisions on evidence

Departments should collect data to find out what students need. Data should be analyzed and the findings should be incorporated in the design of curricula, learning processes, and assessment methods.

1.2.5. Strive for coherence

Courses should build upon one another to provide necessary breadth and depth. Assessment should be aligned with learning objectives.

1.2.6. Learn from best practices

Faculty should seek out good practices in comparable departments and institutions and adapt the best to their own circumstances. Faculty should share best practices and help to raise the bar for their department.

1.2.7. Make continuous improvement a priority

Departments should continually and consciously strive to improve teaching and learning.

The impact of system wide implementation of academic quality work (Academic Audit) is notable and significant.

The primary beneficiaries are the students (who are interviewed for feedback purposes by the Auditor team during each Audit site visit). Participating programs have begun surveying graduates for input on program quality and fit with employment requirements, have restructured the curriculum based on a lack of coherence and less than acceptable student performance, have focused on learning outcomes and assessments as a unit where this practice had not existed before the Audit, and in some cases, faculty have learned how to write learning outcomes. At the department/program level, faculty discussions about teaching and learning required for the self study have been rated by faculty as very valuable and, in many cases, were not occurring at all in many programs. One department indicated that faculty did not even talk with each   other until they participate in the Audit.

The initiatives and matrix required in the self study and the recommendations made by auditors give the departments a plan and guideline for improvement and they continue to work on these, after the Audit. At one community college, the entire unit housing economics, business education, accounting, etc. worked as a unit on the Audit and continue to meet as an entire unit, on a regular basis. They discovered through the self study process that discussions and decisions about curriculum impacted across all of the program areas within the unit. They found gaps in content and heavy recycling of the same content in some cases from course to course within the various program areas in the Business Unit.

2. Academic Audits

Academic audit is one of three main types of higher education quality evaluation that is in use today around the world. (The other two are accreditation and subject-level assessment.) David Dill describes it this way: .

In contrast to accreditation, program review, or student assessment initiatives, [academic] audits look deeply into the heart of the academic enterprise. They test whether institutions and their faculties in

fact honor their public responsibility to monitor academic standards and improve student learning. (Dill, 2000, p. 35)

According to Dill (2000, p. 36), the reviewers generally agree that academic audits have:

- Made improving teaching and learning an institutional priority.

- Facilitated active discussion and cooperation within academic units on means for improving teaching and learning.

- Helped clarify responsibility for improving teaching and learning at the academic unit, faculty [i.e., school], and institutional level.

- Provided information on best practices within and across institutions.

Moreover, audit focuses on "education quality work" (EQW, to be defined below), which is emerging as the key element of institutional quality programs. External agencies can evaluate EQW more easily than education quality itself. Panel selection and training appear easier, cycle times can be shorter, and institutional diversity more easily respected than in other forms of evaluation.

2.1 Education Quality Work (EQW)

"Education Quality Work" (EQW) means *the activities of faculty, academic leaders, and oversight bodies that are aimed at improving and assuring education quality.* EQW should provide what higher education quality pioneer Frans van Vught termed "...a framework for quality management in higher education...drawn from insights in Deming's approach [and that of the Baldrige and ISO-9000], but grounded in the context of academic operations."(van Vught, 1994, p. 13). It should empower and stimulate faculty to continuously improve teaching and learning, and help academic leaders and others to discharge their oversight responsibilities without micromanagement.

EQW should not be confused with teaching itself. For example, finding the most appropriate

curricular content and working to improve teaching and learning processes fall under the rubric of EQW, but delivering the content is part of teaching. Working to improve assessment methods falls under EQW, but the actual assessment of students does not. Peer evaluation of teaching would be EQW, but not the act of teaching itself.

The EQW idea is not foreign to higher education. Curriculum committees are familiar parts of the academic landscape, for example, most professors regularly engage in course development and make decisions about teaching and assessment methods. Moreover, student course evaluations now provide a centerpiece for many institutions' "quality assurance" programs.

What make "EQW" different are the breadth, depth, and degree of organization of the work. For example, curricular decisions could be informed by more serious research into student needs and wants. Systematic experimentation and the benchmarking of design alternatives could improve teaching and learning processes and assessment methods. Quality assurance could be improved by regular peer evaluations of teaching. As business found in the 1970s and 1980, quality work needs to be elevated to a "key result area."

2.2 Domains of EQW

The UGC specified four domains of education quality work in the first round of TLQPRs. (A fifth area of review, resource allocation in support of education, is not a domain of EQW.) The first two domains deal with what is called "design quality."

Design of curricula. What is to be taught, in what order, and from what perspective? What are the goals of the course or program, what are their key quality indicators, and how do they relate to student needs? What resources and resource materials will be used as content vehicles? How does the design relate to other courses so that the student will take as part of

his or her program?

Design of teaching and learning processes. How will teaching and learning be organized? What methods will be used for first exposure to material, for answering questions and providing interpretation, for stimulating student interaction with the material, and for providing feedback on student work? What roles and responsibilities will the faculty need to assume. What other resources will be required?

The third domain addresses the design and use of student assessment measures.

Student assessment. What measures and indicators will be used to assess student learning? Will they assess value added, or only performance at the end of the program? How will the long-term outcomes of the educational experience be determined? Will baseline and trend information be available? Who will be responsible for assessment?

The fourth domain covers "implementation quality assurance."

Implementation quality assurance. How will staff organize to carry out the designs effectively, day in and day out, regardless of distractions? How can they assure themselves and others that content is delivered as intended, that teaching and learning processes are being implemented consistently, and that assessments are performed as planned and their results used effectively? What processes will the department and institution use to assure implementation quality?

Indeed, the specific questions provide no more than examples of what might be considered. The best review sessions are informal - participants can take the discussion anywhere that seems relevant at the time. The panel leader should keep track of coverage and pose questions to plug emergent gaps, but he or she ought not to impose a rigid discussion order.

3. Design and Implementation of Academic Audit - Case Study of an Engineering institute

3.1 Institute profile

Rajarambapu institute of Technology is established as self financed private engineering college in the year 1983 with an objective of imparting quality engineering education to aspirants in general and students from surrounding rural area in particular.Currently,the institute offers seven Undergraduate and six post graduate programs engineering and three departments offer research programmes leading to PhD. All the eligible programmes are accredited by NBA .The institute has successfully implemented TEQIP phase I and selected for TEQIP phase II,one amongst the four self financing institutes selected all over India.

3.2 Need to implement Academic Audit

Many of the private technical institutions which have come up in recent past, especially in small towns are facing acute shortage of faculty with required qualifications and requisite skills and aptitude for teaching and research. It is difficult for these institutions to attract best talent and retain them. The institute referred above devised its own strategy to develop faculty by developing its own model to recruit faculty at entry level and plan career growth for each one, extending opportunity to enhance qualifications and upgrading on continuous basis their capabilities both technical and administrative through planned training. Many of the key positions in the institutional administration now occupied by the director, deans and registrar are those who started their career with this institute as lecturer at entry level.

This strategy calls for continuously evolving innovative practices and new systems to improve the quality of teaching learning process, students learning and competency of faculty and staff to meet ever-increasing expectations of stakeholders. Academic audit as a unique

practice to capture the classroom dynamics in terms of how students are learning and are they getting enough resources to prepare themselves for a career in engineering and is power full mechanism to identify gaps in teaching and learning to improve it continuously.

3.3 Purpose

Conventional feedback system which is in practice in majority of the institutions is an indirect method of capturing students voice which has an inherent advantages in terms of easy to implement and no interference from the faculty. As compared to this the academic audit focuses on issues related to teaching learning with an intervention of an experienced academician as an auditor. The auditors visualize multiple facets of teaching learning and come out with clear observations and action plans.

The purpose of the audit is to improve the effectiveness of the delivery of the faculty to enhance the students learning in terms of clarity of concepts, application of concepts for problem solving and grasp of the subjects to secure good grades in examination. The audit aims at bridging the gap between teaching and learning through a proper communication and feedback system.

3.4 Audit Procedure

3.4.1 Selection of students for participation in Audit

Ten representative students from each class are included in the audit process, which forms heterogeneous group representing typical student mix in a class. Monitor of the class will identify the students and ensure that they will be made available to the academic auditors nominated for the class for interaction and giving feedback of teaching–learning process.

3.4.2 Guidelines for selection of students for participating in audit

- Two students having the highest marks in previous semester examination.

- Five students (other than the above two) who are clear pass and having attendance in the class above 75%.

- Two students who are average in academics but punctual in class having good attendance.

- One student who is active in class, good rapport with fellow students, expressive and out spoken.

3.4.3 Appointment of Auditors

Experienced faculty members having a good standing as a teacher will act as auditors. The auditors should be able to establish a good rapport and create conducive environment for the students to interact, express themselves and critically comment without any bias and fear about the class room teaching-learning process. The detailed schedule of the audit including the assigned class, subject teachers and students names will be made available to the auditors.

3.4.4 Frequency of audits : Two audits are planned in each semester

1) First audit preferably scheduled after the first month of teaching (or during the mid-semester test).

2) Second audit after the completion of the teaching activity towards the end of the term.

The schedule will be prepared for the institution and made available to the auditors at appropriate time.

3.4.5 Audit Process :

The auditors are expected to use their expertise and experience to have a good grasp of the classroom dynamics and should be able assess the class room teaching and learning progress. The focus should be on whether the learning of the students is progressing in the right direction and at the same time whether teacher is making good attempt to address the learning of the entire class. During the process of interaction the students should be given ample

opportunity to express their feedback without any inhibitions and fear of after effects. During the interaction the effort of the auditors should be fact-finding through evidences rather than prejudges and perception. The auditors are expected to focus on issues like,

1. Punctuality and preparation of faculty to motivate students to learn.

2. Interaction in the class – making learners participates in the teaching- learning process.

3. Treating students with dignity and providing opportunity for students to raise questions and issues and a stress free class environment.

4. Ensure that everybody is learning (not teaching to a particular group) e. g. only intelligent group , first class group etc.

5. Giving the information beyond the text, discussing issues, posing challenges to students to stimulate their intellectual ability and stretching their imagination and creative thinking.

6. Being a mentor, role model in specific aspects of his /her personality as a teacher to the students.

7. Demonstrating a keen interest in students learning and what makes them distract proper learning.

8. Special attention to slow learners, problem students.

9. A scholarly treatment to the subject (knowledge demonstration).

10. A judicious flexible plan to give due Weightage to entire syllabus and making effort to give broader aspects of the entire syllabus.

11. Promoting discipline, quality and sincerity, punctuality and confidence in students.

12. Unbiased assessment and evaluation scheme.

13. Commands a respect amongst the students of the class and leaves a permanent 'image' in the minds of the students promoting a good value system.

Note: Though this issue is subjective, qualitative and relative, Assessment instrument will be provided to make the Dimensions measurable (quantification using appropriate scales).

3.4.6 Audit Venue:

The audit is supposed to be conducted at a place preferred by the auditors. Only care should be taken to choose the venue other than home department of the students. This helps to maintain the identity of students confidential

3.4.7 Duration of interaction with students:

The audit committee can have maximum two meetings per audit of a class, (as they are required to have feedback of five or six subjects) Each meeting should be of maximum one hour duration. The time and venue can be decided by auditors.

3.4.8 Confidentiality of feedback:

The proceedings of the audit meeting should not be made public and also the feedback should be given only in a format for which guide lines are given.

3.4.9 Audit Report:

The audit feedback should be communicated to the coordinator of Academic Audit in writing in a prescribed format for the individual faculty, within a time period of one week after the completion of audit. Any delay in sending the report renders the whole effort becomes ineffective and fails to serve the purpose of the audit.

3.4.10 Post-Audit Action:

- Dean Academic / Respective Heads of the department are required to review the audit reports after being received from co-coordinator and write special remarks with guide lines to improve in the performance of faculty in areas suggested. Those who have a satisfactory performance should also be

communicated with appreciation .The actions to be initiated are:

- Communicate the performance report in person to each faculty

- Suggest the strategy to improve in areas suggested during the remaining period of this semester and ask teacher to prepare a concrete plan of action to bring improvement.

- Support and motivate the faculty to implement action plan and assess the progress.

- Have an individual counseling meeting with faculty and ask faculty to come out with the lecture notes, teaching plans etc.

3.4.11 Final Audit:

The audit is to be repeated at the end of the semester and the final report is to be submitted to principal highlighting the individual audit grades and also special remarks to improve the planning & delivery of the course, including the suggestions for training in specific areas. The audit report becomes an important document to demonstrate the improvement the dimensions of teaching learning, guidelines to compute audit score and audit report format are given in Appendices 1,2,and 3 respectively.

4 Results & Discussions

The Institute is practicing Academic Audit since 2009-10 for all classes. Inspite of initial teaching problems during implementation, the audit model is tending towards maturity with a substantial co-operation from both faculty and students. This section discusses the results of the sample audit data for the first semester of the academic year 2010-11.

The average teaching index computed on the basis of weighted average scores of five dimensions is 7.13 on a 10 point scale for the

entire faculty of the institute all departments together. Individual faculty index is also computed as shown in appendix III. This has improved by 13.5% as computed to the previous audit due to individual faculty efforts to improve the weak areas. Table 1 shows the average values of teaching dimensions at overall institutional level. The results indicate that planning and delivery, class control and concern for students are the issues still to be addressed, as they are below the average of institutional average teaching dimension. The data given in table 1 is the average scores of the faculty of the entire faculty taken together. In order to improve these areas, the institution has taken up many initiatives like preparation of outcome based course plan, articulating the teaching methodology based on the students learning styles, improvement in communication through toast master club for faculty and also personal counseling to faculty to look in to the problems of indusial students and open and fear free communication between students and faculty.

Table II represents faculty distribution in the range of teaching index taking in to consideration all faculty of the institute.. Special attention is given to improve the faculty whose index is below 6 on a 10 point scale. This is especially with, new faculty just started their career and pedagogical sessions are arranged to this group to raise their competency level as a teacher. Special workshops are arranged to work with them requires to break the initial barriers.

In order to encourage and reward the well performing faculty, a reward system is being introduced because of which they are motivated to improve the overall effectiveness of their delivery. Thus, the analysis gives us a clear understanding of areas to improve and devise training program to improve the performance. It is an ongoing exercise to achieve excellence in teaching learning process. Academic audit is not a mere evaluation and grading of a teacher. It helps to identify the gaps in learning process of students and teaching effectiveness and sets

Sr. No.	Teaching Dimensions	Scored Values	Out of	Percentage
1.	Subject Knowledge	2.14	3	71.30
2.	Planning and Delivery	2.07	3	69.00
3.	Class Management/Class Control	0.70	1	70.00
4.	Communication and English	1.11	1.5	74.00
5.	Accountability and Concern	1.07	1.5	71.80

Table 1 Average Values of Teaching Dimensions

(Entire faculty of Institute)

Sr. No.	Teaching Index Range	No. of Faculty	% of Faculty in Teaching Index Range
1.	0-3	01	0.52
2.	3-4	01	0.52
3.	4-5	01	0.52
4.	5-6	30	15.78
5.	6-7	47	24.73
6.	7-8	68	35.78
7.	8-9	41	21.58
8.	9-10	00	00.00

Table 2 Percentage of Faculty Distribution in the Range of Teaching Index

(Entire faculty of Institute)

a stage for continuous improvement. The mandatory requirement for success of this process is the trust and respect for the students' feedback and integrity of a auditor.

5. Challenges faced during implementation

The challenges and obstacles faced during implementation are listed as follows :

- Students are reluctant to openly share their feedback and opinions about the teacher as there is a fear of revealing their identity to faculty.

- Faculty perceived it as a tool for management to assess their classroom performance and adverse results affect their career in the institute

- As always, faculty assume that students capability to give correct feedback is in question

- Senior faculty involvement in the process was limited and always complained of increased work without many gains.

6. Continuous improvement in Audit process and sustainability

The above challenges in the audit process made the conviction strong to implement the system and improve the system on continuously based on the feedback received from all stake holders. The objectives of the audit are shared with both students and faculty to seek their full acceptance and cooperation. This increases the chances of success and sustainability and whole hearted participation of both faculty and students to make this practice unique and meaningful.

Based on the implementation experience, auditors and teacher interaction is essential to have firsthand information about the course. teaching strategies and students learning preference etc.This is a major limitation of present system which will be incorporated in next audit

7. Conclusions

The process of Academic Audit captures the classroom dynamics in an environment of ease and comfort. A detailed process is laid down including the guidelines to auditors and post audit counseling to faculty. The audit is designed to capture the five important dimensions of a teacher namely, subject knowledge, preparation, communication, concern for students, and opportunity to interact. The audit process is going to map the individual teacher and the course on a 10 point scale with appropriate weights for the five dimensions. Based on the scores the faculty competency enhancement is planned and appropriate actions are initiated to train the faculty in the areas. The outcome of the audit is evident in terms of improved learning

outcomes, enhancement of teaching deliveries and competency, collaborative learning, good ambience for academic environment.

Continuous improvement should be the way of life as what works today may not work tomorrow. We should continuously strive to achieve excellence in what we do.

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Appendix 1

Dimensions of Teaching Learning

1. Subject Knowledge

Command over the subject taught, conceptual clarity, minute details, demonstration of being refer red good books and recent literature, ability to answer any question/ doubts raised by students. Giving the students recent trends and developments in the subject taught.

2. Planning and Preparation

This is an indicator of the focused efforts taken by the faculty in planning the lecture. It includes preparation of teaching and practical plan, lecture notes, power point presentations, planning of assignments, numerical problems, list of good references. Resource material preparations and hand outs preparation.

3 Class control

Ambience for good learning. It is an indicator of faculty's competency to address different learning groups in a class without creating the distraction, noise and withdrawal. The faculty's confidence level , eye contact with entire class, spotting the trouble creators, reacting spontaneously to situations in class are the important aspects in class control

4. Communication & English

Delivery quality of lecture, English language and grammar, Vocabulary, Voice, Body language, Eye contact, voice modulation Listening to students, Clear instructions.

5. Concern for students learning

Responsibility for students learning, approachable to students, giving time to students after contact hours to clear doubts, personal counseling, promoting values and good practices.

Appendix 2

GUIDELINES TO AUDITORS FOR PREPARING AUDIT REPORT

I. Computation of Teaching Index

Dimension	Score (Xi)	Weights	Weighted Score (Wi)
1 Subject Knowledge	X1	0.3	0.3X1
2 Planning & Delivery	X2	0.3	0.3 X2
3 Class Management	X3	0.1	0.1 X3
4 Communication & English	X4	0.15	0.15 X4
5 Ac countability & Concern for student Learning	X5	0.15	0.15 X5
		Teaching Index	Σ [Wi * Xi]

II. Positive Observations

List only prominent three observations based on your interaction with students about the teacher and Feed ba ck given in the form

e.g. 1. Teacher is Strict disciplinarian.

2. Teacher shares knowledge other than the subject currently teaching

3. Teacher presents himself in a attractive way [the way he dresses, Style, the way he interact, hi s image among students and faculty].

III. Negative Observations can also be pointed out in the similar way

Suggestions for improvement: -

Dimension Score	Interpretation
Less than 5	Poor & calls for immediate action to improve on this dimension
Between 5 to 6	Satisfactory but still improvement is expected.
Between 6 to 8	Good and try to excel in your teaching.
More than 8	Excellent and Maintain it through constant innovative

Appendix 3

ACADEMIC AUDIT REPORT

Name of the teacher:-   class:-

Subjected taught: -

Teaching dimensions scores (on a 10 point scale, averages of the responses given by the students)

Teaching Dimensions	Scores of Audit I	Final Audit scores
1. Subject Knowledge		
2. Planning and Preparation		
3. Class control		
4. Communication & English		
5. Concern for students learning		
6 Overall Teaching Index		

Remarks by Auditor. [write three appealing remarks you have come across during the discussion with students and your own observations]

1. ---

2. ---

3. ---

4. ---

1)   2)

   Name & Sign of Auditors with Date