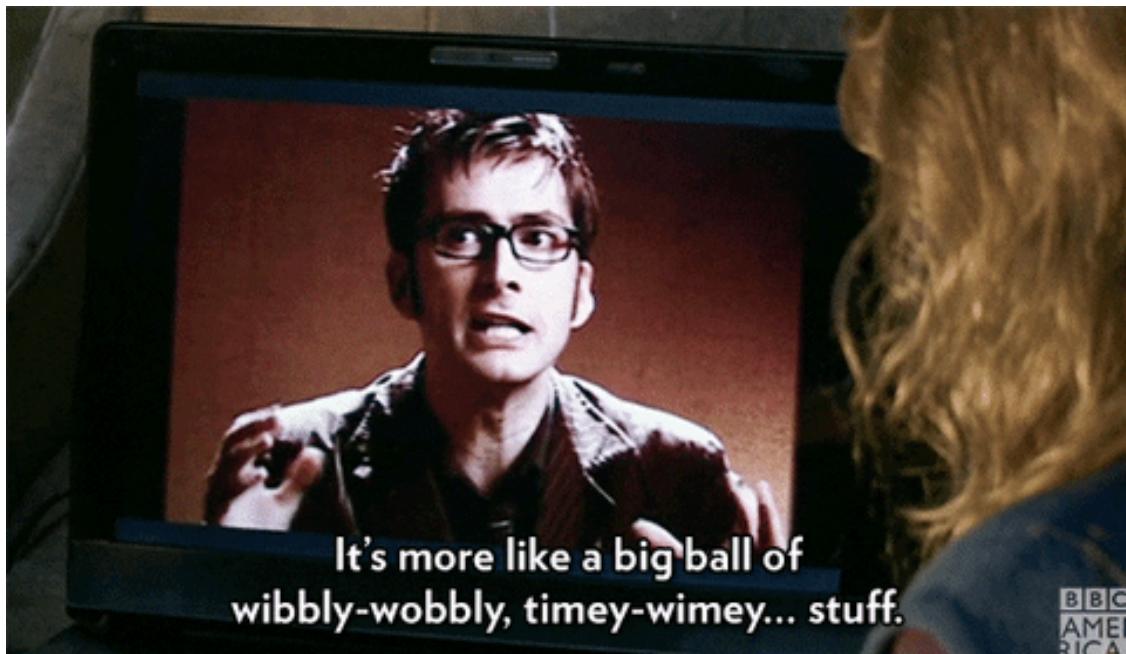


IMP #7. Why is Everything an Emergency?

 thirdworlddecon.substack.com/p/why-is-everything-an-emergency

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This week, a draft “Research Code of Conduct” appeared in our inboxes with only a couple of hours to respond. I flagged it in a university WhatsApp group because the timeline felt suspicious. Within a few minutes of my post, the deadline was extended by 48 hours. The timing itself tells a story. Policies are pushed through so fast that no one can really absorb them, let alone debate them. By the time you look up, silence has already been counted as agreement.

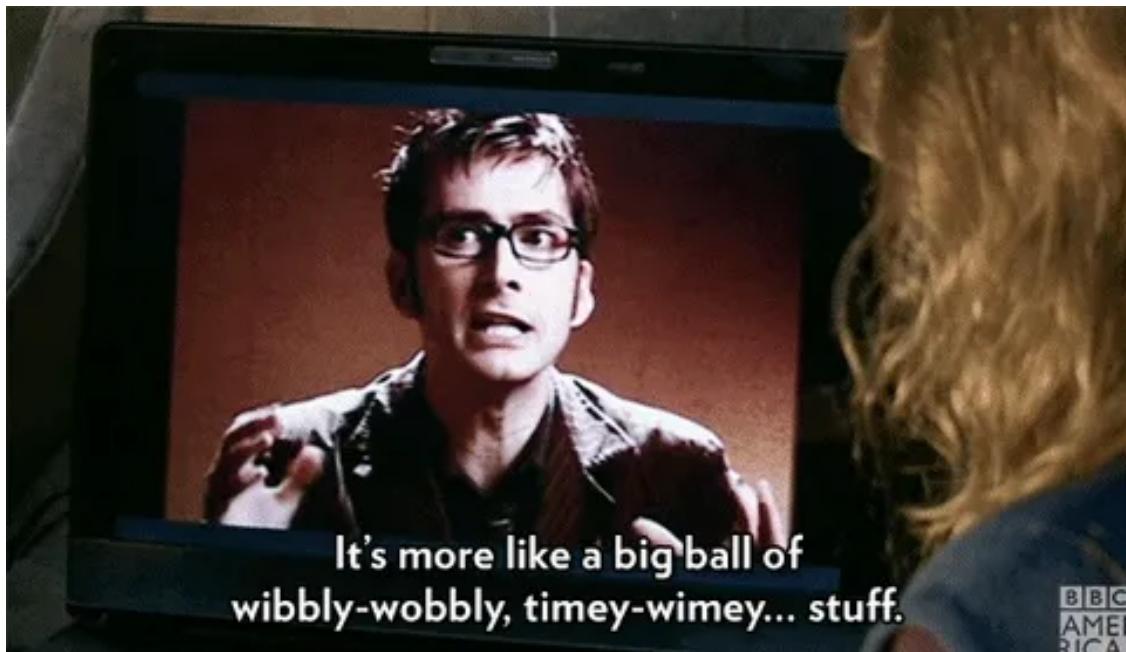
This isn’t new. Over the past year, we’ve been hit with a wave of changes—biometric classroom attendances, digital examination platforms, and quite possibly, a quarterly calendar for the new 1-year M.A. programmes that will wipe out vacations as we know it. Each move is sold as a step toward efficiency or world-class governance. But if you look closely, each one eats way at the actual conditions of teaching, research, and community.

The Logic of Control

Administration imagines that the way to make academics more efficient is to control their time more closely. Scan in, log out, follow the new timetable, submit the new forms. The whole structure is designed as if compliance to these digital systems equals quality or competence.

But academic life doesn’t work like that. Research needs breathing room. Good teaching needs long preparation. Students need unstructured hours to talk, argue, even waste time together. When every part of life is reduced to something that can be scheduled and audited, what gets destroyed is not inefficiency, but trust.

What's happening here is that the messy, lived time of real work, the hours lost in reading, or a week spent planning a student debate, is being squeezed into flat, uniform time. That is time which is measurable, logged, and stripped of context. When that kind of time takes over, universities don't become efficient, the people inhabiting the space just become more anxious and fearful.



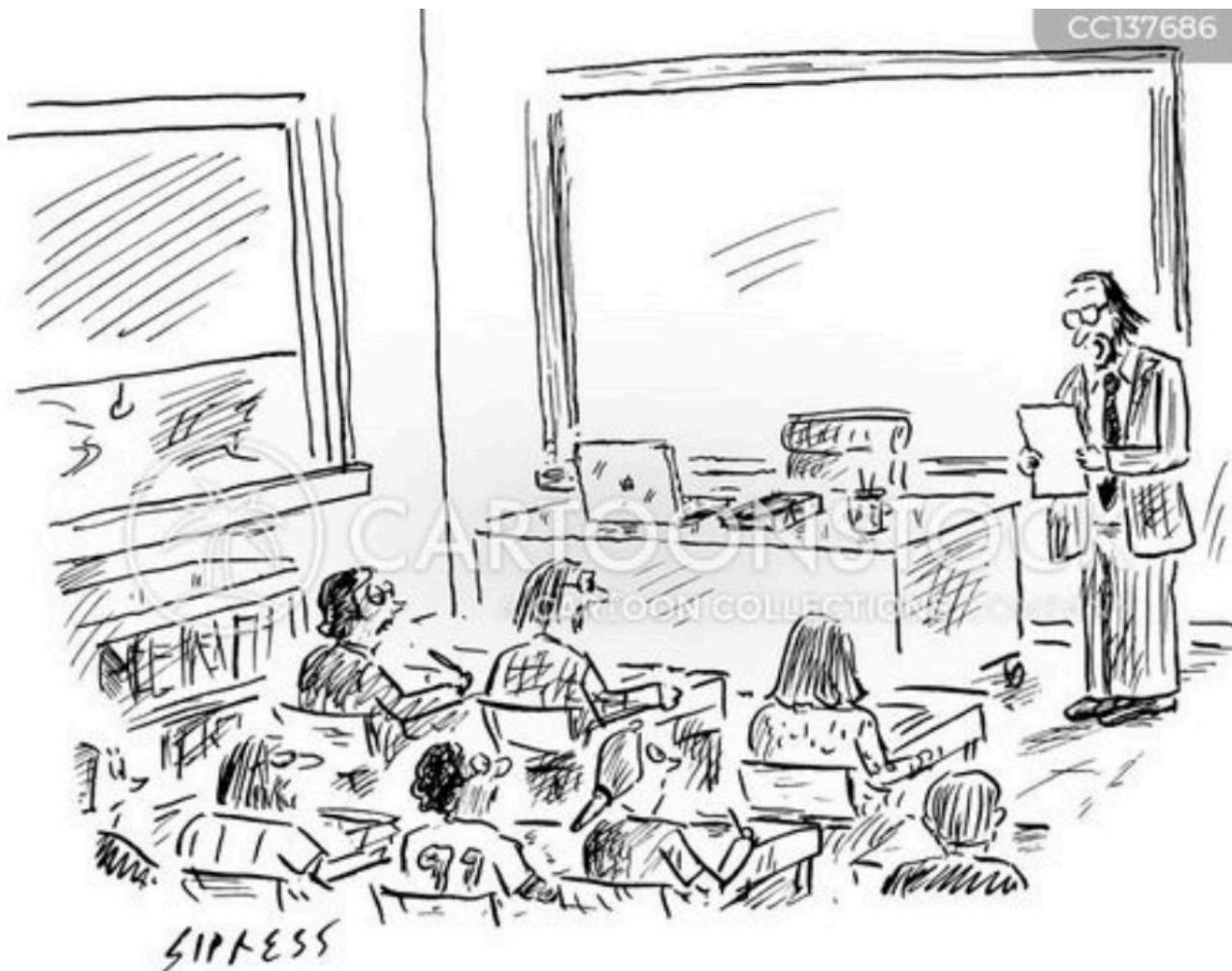
A Quarterly Calendar

I have mostly studied in a marks during the year calendar, and I found the transition to a semester-based system with grade point averages difficult, and also confusing. What does it mean when you get 84 credit points as opposed to 63? What does it functionally tell you, or for that matter, your future employer? A student's ability to land a job doesn't substantially improve if they do 6 more credits of quantitative modelling of some kind even though the supply-side logic of the university will design pedagogy around that. In accordance with the New Education Policy, most of our faculty now know that our M.A. programmes will shrink from two years to one starting next Fall. Fewer realise that the one-year model is likely to run on a quarterly calendar that virtually eliminates vacations. This means that teaching expands, research time contracts, exams and assignments multiply, and electives are cut back.

For students, this means 7-8 courses a semester, three assignments each, plus internships and exchange programmes packed so tight there's no space left for friendships or societies. The outcome is predictable. Black markets for assignments, heavier reliance on AI-shortcuts, and more students falling through the cracks.

For faculty, breaks once used for research and attending conferences vanish. This doesn't just affect our personal lives, but also our ability to flourish as academics outside the narrow confines of own university. For staff, the burden of scheduling and troubleshooting multiplies without new hires.

A calendar is never neutral. It quietly decides what kinds of relationships and futures are possible. This one leaves no room for depth, only acceleration.



“How I Spent My Sabbatical,” by Professor Harvey Brinkman.”

“How I Spent My Sabbatical,” by Professor Harvey Brinkman.”
David Sipress

Source: https://www.cartoonstock.com/directory/a/academic_calendar.asp?srsltid=AfmBOouuJOBdjMB3oX6GYPLHzq16_aA8flZUWxzd4wpiNy6lyTptQOV4

Staff: The Hidden Burden

Every new system lands hardest on staff. Biometric scanners break down and generate long email threads and phone calls of troubleshooting. A new digital examination platform adds new procedures but removes faculty choice over how to run an exam. Ironically, the one thing this platform could have removed, like the need for physical invigilation of regular exams and then the painful number of “resit” exams, is not even removed. In fact, catching cheats in the exam is automated, which creates more bureaucratic hurdles for reporting and bypassing. Moreover, the proliferation of online courses means more to process, and more to track, sometimes over and above our “offline” endeavours.

Faculty: From Research to Firefighting

For faculty, the cost is research time. Administrative “fixes” create more approvals and reports than they solve. Late admission turn teaching into triage, with faculty expected to design retroactive learning plans for students who arrive halfway through a semester.

The new draft research code takes this further. It invents vague new categories of misconduct, requires prior permissions for certain publications, and puts exceptions under the sole discretion of the executive. None of this supports research. It simply extends the culture of permission-seeking.

The Human Costs

Behind all this are actual lives. Faculty commute long distances from Delhi, other districts in Haryana and Punjab to teach here in Sonipat. When floods hit the Yamuna floodplain, journeys become impossible. Staff balance workloads with family illnesses or childcare. Students juggle assignments with internships, often without enough sleep.

Most of us are “immigrants” here, without extended family networks. The costs of care—supporting parents, raising children, surviving commutes—are borne privately. Instead of recognising this, the university piles on new systems that strip away even more time.

That’s why a week of biometric troubleshooting feels like a semester. Time doesn’t speed up under these systems, it drags, stretched out by trivial processing.

The Manufacture of Urgency

The larger design is clear. Institutions manufacture urgency not by making us faster, but by forcing us to constantly recalibrate our lives around somebody else’s clock. Every message becomes a crisis, every delay a risk, every absence a moral failing.

The outcome is permanent emergency in the form of faculty firefighting, staff troubleshooting, and students hustling. Everyone is exhausted, and the mistrust grows.

These systems corrode the very conditions that make a university work.

- Students lose the time to be young, to make friends, to learn without shortcuts.
- Staff inherit more troubleshooting and compliance without support.
- Faculty lose the unbroken stretches of time that research requires.

Slack is not inefficiency; it is the condition for thought.

Surveillance is not integrity; it is mistrust codified.

Control is not care; it is domination disguised as governance.

And this emergency etiquette is the hollowing out of everything that makes education possible.

Who are these measures for?

That is the real question. If they don't help students, don't help staff, and don't help faculty, then who are they for?

They serve no clear pedagogical purpose. They don't improve research outcomes. They don't make governance easier. If anything, they fracture it. What they do achieve is centralisation. More power will now be concentrated in executive offices which means more compliance routines, and more fear dictating the most staple of tasks.

Universities cannot be built on fear and run like steel factories (nor should steel factories for that matter).

I have stayed here for years not because of pay or prestige, but because I believe in what a university can be. I refuse to surrender my time, my thinking, or my freedom to a managerial logic that corrodes all three. Until we name this pattern, nothing will change.

Given the number of life choices we make to work in a place like this—in a remote town, far from family and friends—it is also natural to believe we have a stake in how it is governed. To ask questions is not defiance; it is how one lives in community. When one is told to “talk to HR” instead of having their concerns addressed, the crime is greater than a breach of contract. It is the hollowing out of the idea of the university as a living community.

Thanks for reading Third World Econ! Subscribe for free to receive new posts and support my work.

Notes & Further Reading

For readers who want to explore the ideas behind this essay:

- **Abstract vs concrete time:** From Moishe Postone (*Time, Labor and Social Domination*, 1993) and Jonathan Martineau (*Time, Capitalism and Alienation*, 2015). Abstract time is uniform, measurable, and external; concrete time is lived, contextual, and event-based. Universities often force the former onto the latter.
- **All time is social time:** From Barbara Adam (*Time and Social Theory*, 1990). Calendars and schedules don't just organise tasks — they shape what kinds of relationships and futures are possible.

- **Work-discipline:** From E.P. Thompson, *Time, Work-Discipline and Industrial Capitalism* (1967). Under capitalism, labour shifts from being task-oriented to time-disciplined: the point becomes proving work, not just doing it.
- **Protracted duration:** From Michael Flaherty (*A Watched Pot*, 1999). Time feels slow when overloaded with trivial processing, even if nothing important is happening.
- **Recalibration and urgency:** From Sarah Sharma (*In the Meantime: Temporality and Cultural Politics*, 2014). Institutions exercise power by forcing people to constantly adjust their lives to institutional clocks, producing permanent urgency.