

Interview: Older universities tend to take students for granted, says OP Jindal Global University Vice-Chancellor C Raj Kumar

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By: [Vikram Chaudhary](#) | Updated: October 29, 2018



C Raj Kumar, Vice-Chancellor, OP Jindal Global University. (Portrait: Shyam Kumar Prasad)

Last week, Sonipat-based OP Jindal Global University (JGU) broke into QS Asia University Rankings 2019—the annual publication of university rankings by Quacquarelli Symonds, the British education company. Earlier, JGU found a place in QS BRICS University Rankings 2019, from among 9,000 universities. “Asia rankings—the region has 13,000 universities from over 40 nations—are

more competitive than BRICS rankings,” says C Raj Kumar, the vice-chancellor. In an interview with FE’s Vikram Chaudhary, he adds that getting a place among the top 3% in Asia—JGU is ranked in the 400-450 bracket—is an achievement for the nine-year-old university and for India. Excerpts:

JGU is a young university. What helped you find a place among top 3% in Asia?

This recognition comes at a time when JGU has been conferred ‘autonomy’ by the UGC and HRD ministry. What helped was our core strengths including good faculty-student ratio (ranked 191 in Asia on this parameter), global faculty (rank 43 in Asia), inbound exchange students (rank 168), and outbound exchange students (rank 81). In faculty-student ratio, our score of 7.9 is more than regional median (7.2) and close to Asia-wide mean score of 8.1. On international faculty parameter, our score of 17.9 (i.e. 18 foreign faculty per 100) is far higher than Asia mean of 8.9. We send more than three students on outbound exchange programmes per 100 students (on average, an Asian university sends two students for such programmes per 100).

More importantly, we are the one of the few non-STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics) and non-medicine universities to have been included in Asia and BRICS rankings.

What are the initiatives young universities take and older ones perhaps don’t?

The most important thing young universities do, or should do, is they keep their students central to the university ethos. Older universities tend to take their students for granted, because of repute and popularity, but that, somewhere, might lead to indifference towards students.

Secondly, young universities should recognise the importance of research and knowledge-creation. In India, many universities ignore that research needs to be integrated into the curriculum, in all activities. For that, one needs a robust faculty that is not overworked and overburdened.

Finally, we live in an integrated world and it's important for universities to speak the language of global engagement. At JGU, we set out to build global collaborations. We have partnerships with over 250 universities from 55 countries, including faculty exchange, summer schools, joint teaching, research, conferences, publications, short-term study abroad programmes, joint executive education, etc.

Thirty years ago, Prof Nian Cai Liu of Shanghai Jiao Tong University was asked by Chinese President Jiang Zemin to create a ranking system and the Shanghai Ranking was born. Does India need to do something similar?

It's true that many India's universities don't find a place on reputed global rankings, but this does not mean we create our own ranking list. The beauty of the Shanghai Ranking is they were structured in a manner they kept standards quite high. So when they formulated their methodology, they knew that many Chinese universities will not be a part of rankings. This required courage, conviction, intellectual integrity.

I feel that while rankings indicate general performance of universities, it should not be a tell-all story regarding India's higher education. We do not need another global ranking list for India. QS India ranking made us aware of where our universities stand—it has its methodology rooted in Indian as well as international context.

But do we need to recognise the importance of rankings?

Yes, and for that we need to invest in the right type of policies and resources that will empower our institutions. For example, I strongly welcome the move to grant more autonomy to our institutions. What we missed was that this only focused on autonomy given by government of India, but for those like us who work in higher education, it was quite different.

Also, higher education is regulated by the state and professional regulatory bodies. So long as reforms relating to autonomy do not percolate into the state

regulatory system and professional regulatory bodies, some of the objectives of these autonomy policies may not be achieved.

Universities need to consider themselves as important institutional apparatus that can seek fundamental reforms on the basis of which they are governed. The higher education sector in India is over-regulated and under-governed. Unless we deal with this regulatory dilemma, we won't be able to do what we need to, to transform our country's higher education.