

## Knowledge factories

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The recently released Times Higher Education World University ranking of 2010 does not feature a single Indian university. The rankings are based on methodologically sound criteria broadly divided into five categories: teaching (30%), research (30%), citations (32.5%), industry income (2.5%) and international mix (5%). The credibility of this year's ranking is underscored by the fact that Times Higher Education itself has noted that it represents "the most accurate picture of global higher education we have ever produced".

The top 200 universities are concentrated in North America, Europe (82), Australia and New Zealand (8) and Asia (27). Within Asia, the most reputed universities are in mainland China (6), Japan (5), Hong Kong (4), Taiwan (4), Korea (4), Singapore (2) and Turkey (2).

Universities should be knowledge-creating institutions. Knowledge is generated only if there are scholars and thinkers passionately committed to innovations in science and technology as well as through empirical and theoretical research in the liberal arts, humanities and social sciences. Academia needs to be made attractive for India's youth to be considered worth pursuing as a career and as a haven for the pursuit of knowledge.

The existing framework of university governance systems in India does not allow for extraordinarily talented individuals to grow to their full potential. Performance-based appraisal and career development initiatives have to be implemented so that the best intellectual talent can consider academia as an option.

We need to hugely incentivise academia, not only in terms of financial rewards, but also by creating a vibrant intellectual environment, providing chances for scholars to be involved in public policy and advisory capacities within the government, offering opportunities to engage in research so that scholars have the resources and funding to collaborate domestically and internationally with their peers, and most importantly, generating academic freedom, functional autonomy and operational independence to pursue ideas and experiments within a conducive environment that's liberal and inspiring.

One of the major challenges of Indian university education is our indifference to engage in rigorous research and scholarship. While teaching is absolutely essential, one cannot underestimate the importance of research in universities, which ought to be breeding grounds for new thinking and innovations. Research ought to inform teaching just as teaching must impact research. It's not possible to undertake critical research if a faculty member is overloaded with excessive teaching duties.

The faculty-student ratio of the top universities of the world are in the range of 1:10. Most Indian universities face the ordeal of dealing with large student bodies and disproportionately smaller faculty support. While this problem is connected to the funding that is available for higher education, it is also a matter concerning policy.