

CHAPTER 10

Building World-Class Universities as Actors of Social Change and Efficient Public Policy-Making

C. Raj Kumar

BUILDING IMPACT-DRIVEN WORLD-CLASS UNIVERSITIES

Universities have always been forums of knowledge creation and exchange, and they continue to play an instrumental role in transforming nations into knowledge societies. With time, their academic freedom has been curtailed, and their significance as tools of social change has diminished. The Academic Freedom Index established by the Global Public Policy Institute (GPPi) has demonstrated that maintaining academic freedom has been a challenge for universities in several nations. Albert Einstein famously observed: “By academic freedom, I understand the right to search for truth and to publish and teach what one holds to be true. This right also implies a duty: One must not conceal any part of what one has recognized to be true.”

Academic Freedom is the Core of University Governance

At the outset, it needs to be mentioned that academic freedom is fundamental to any university in the world. Democracies take pride in the fact that

they've precious spaces in society where freedom of speech is duly protected and promoted. In a democracy that celebrates freedom of expression of diverse views, ideological dogmatism of any kind, either from the Left or from the Right, will not help universities. At the heart of academic freedom is preserving democratic ideals consistently, promoting pluralism and nurturing democratic institutions.

Our challenge as educators is to recognize the complex role universities play as social organizations. No unique circumstances favour or disfavour a public or private university to promote academic freedom within its institutional context. However, there are undoubtedly historical, social, political and economic factors contributing to institutionalizing academic freedom in some societies more than others.

The fundamental objectives of university governance are based on the following three principles to promote academic freedom, while ensuring institutional autonomy. First, all recruitment, appraisal and assessment of faculty and staff ought to be entirely undertaken within the university. They must be performance-based, following the policies, rules and regulations of the university. The powers for decision-making to implement these processes must be vested in the university's leadership, which includes the faculty and staff. Outsiders, including the most generous donors, should be excluded from this process. Internal governance of a university is central to protecting academic freedom, and it has to be led by the faculty and not anybody from outside the university.

Second, all decisions relating to the formulation of programmes, curriculum, courses, pedagogy and establishment of schools/departments ought to be determined within the university as per established policies, rules and regulations of the university with all powers of decision-making vested within the faculty and staff of the university. While these decisions are taken in consonance with the laws, rules, regulations and guidelines given by the various government and regulatory bodies and based on international best practices, nobody from outside the university should exercise control or influence in these decisions.

And third, all decisions relating to the research that's undertaken by the faculty members, including their publications, ought to be based upon the principles of academic freedom and intellectual autonomy. Those faculty members who're involved in academic research ought to have full autonomy to determine the type of research projects and initiatives, including the topics of research that they undertake and the outcomes of the research. While the faculty members will be engaging in research and publications that'll speak truth to power, it should be based upon evidence, especially when the intention of the research is to inform policy-making.

Going forward, we need to recognize the importance of two central aspects of university governance for academic freedom to be meaningfully

institutionalized in universities. One, regulatory freedom. Regardless of their public or private character, universities are hugely dependent on multiple stakeholders for effective internal governance. These stakeholders are internal and external to the institution. Without achieving substantive regulatory freedom, no university can function in a genuinely autonomous manner and protect the academic freedom of faculty and students.

Two, universities need to develop a culture of transparency in which important decisions are taken after proper consultation with all stakeholders. The need for consultation, communication and consensus-building is imperative. However, for decisions to have legitimacy and acceptance, there ought to be the fundamental and foundational aspect of trust, respect and collegiality among all stakeholders. Only then will disagreements not lead to acrimonious engagements that can vitiate the academic and intellectual ecosystem, and universities must guard against that.

Universities are Social Actors and Not Corporations

Universities are unique social organizations. They are not corporations, nor are they think tanks, research organizations, NGOs, media organizations, government agencies or civil society organizations. Universities perform roles that may reflect some intentions and goals of these other entities, but they are *sui generis* and uniquely situated in the larger context of society.

In the celebrated work, *The Idea of a University*, John Henry Newman observed: "...If then a practical end must be assigned to a University course, I say it is that of training good members of society... It is the education which gives [them] a clear, conscious view of their own opinions and judgements, a truth in developing them, an eloquence in expressing them, and a force in urging them..."

One of the greatest challenges that universities around the world face today is in relation to their governance. University governance has become complex due to the multifaceted nature of the organization and the fact that there are social expectations from different stakeholders — faculty, staff, students, parents, accrediting bodies, government departments, regulatory agencies, international partners and donors. It is in this context that we need to recognize the role of universities in society and how to govern them in a manner that will fulfil these expectations from a diversified set of stakeholders.

While corporations have historically played a role in creating wealth and contributing to the economic and social development of a nation, they remain focussed largely on adding value to their shareholders. The social expectations from a corporation are also limited to that objective. However, there are new forms of challenges to this paradigm in which corporations are also reimagining their wider role in society. The Global Compact and the

UN's vision for implementing the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) encourage businesses to examine their larger role in society.

Corporations are founded on the principles of profitability and return on investment. Universities, on the other hand, are founded on the twin principle of the creation of knowledge through research and its dissemination by teaching. Universities are endowed with the responsibility of providing access to education and are involved in the democratization of knowledge.

Financial parameters such as turnover, EBITDA margin, sales, market-share and resource-utilization have temporal dimensions on which the success of a business and the corporation is measured. Even in assessing the social impact of a corporate entity, quantifiable parameters such as money invested in CSR initiatives annually or the reduction in the carbon footprint define the level of success. However, universities, for the most part, drive individual-specific intangible outcomes of intellectual growth and holistic development, inspiring young people to become transformative leaders, enabling learners to embrace the real world and preparing them for careers that can help society progress. These functions cannot be measured in quarters, financial years or, for that matter, even in a few years. We need a long-term horizon to understand the pivotal role of universities in accelerating the socio-economic growth of a nation and the vision of building a knowledge society.

Corporations measure sustainability in terms of profit, which requires maximizing revenues and minimizing costs. The steadfast focus is on generating maximum possible revenues with a productive workforce that minimizes costs. Universities, on the other hand, are constantly working on improving their faculty-student ratio that reflects the importance of specialized attention to students and the time at the disposal of faculty members to pursue original and impactful research.

Universities work in the realm of ideas — ideas that can shape the future of our society and the world at large. Many such pursuits of ideas may lead to impactful outcomes only in the long term, but it is necessary to pursue those ideas. This is true not only in the case of disciplines such as STEM and medicine, but also in broader areas of humanities and social sciences. Therefore, universities cannot function within binding organizational structures that breach the very academic freedom and autonomy that drive them.

The accountability of a university is to be achieved based on its own commitment and capacities to fulfil its stated mission, which in turn must be benchmarked against global standards of quality. The pursuit of excellence in teaching and research ought to be the most important objective of a university. The students remain at the centre of institutional governance and all efforts need to be taken to fulfil their goals and aspirations. Universities are not comparable to corporations. As William Bruce Cameron observed,

“Not everything that can be counted counts, and not everything that counts can be counted.”

Building World-Class Universities for Shaping Future Public Policy

There is a need to understand and reflect upon what is needed to build world-class universities. World-class universities are built on the basis of a strong foundation that has an inspiring vision and a mission to fulfil the vision. Universities are inherently pluralistic in nature, where there is diversity of disciplines and perspectives. The vision of a university should reflect that pluralism, while recognizing that there is no one model of a university.

Universities need to re-examine their founding vision on the basis of which they were established. It helps to articulate a vision of the university even after many years of its establishment, as the vision will help in galvanizing the academic consciousness among faculty, students and staff towards fulfilling a set of goals and objectives. The vision of the university should incorporate a farsighted approach towards learning and imagination among faculty and students, but be fully conscious of the reality of the university’s existing challenges.

Universities don’t become world-class institutions as soon as they are created, but evolve to become world-class through long years of work pursued by the commitment and dedication of students, faculty and staff. Even then, promoting excellence is an evolving project and that is why the vision of the university helps shape its present and future.

World-class universities around the world are established and developed through a great deal of commitment of resources. However, there is not enough understanding and realization that the resources that are required to build world-class universities are significant. Arguably, the precious resources that need to be available for universities may not, and indeed, cannot come from the state. It is in this context that there is a need for promoting private, not-for-profit philanthropic universities. Deterioration in the academic standards of universities is due to many factors and thus, there is a need for a paradigm shift in the availability of funding and resources.

The role of the government in higher education and university governance, especially in developing countries of the world, deserves serious examination. At present, the role of the government in the case of state-funded universities is significant and the higher education department of the state government is deeply involved in every aspect, from the creation of the university to granting of approvals and permissions that need to be obtained for administering the university. Unfortunately, the need for external checks and balances to maintain high academic standards results in distrust in universities and their

members, and creates opportunities for vested interests and corruption at the level of government departments exercising such powers.

On the one hand, there is a need to ensure quality in universities and higher education institutions for which some degree of regulatory assessment and external accountability is essential. On the other, if we don't achieve the right balance, there is a serious risk of regulatory capture where higher education policies will not be driven by innovation and creativity in institution building, but by bureaucratic timidity, archaic rules and regulations and callous indifference of the regulatory bodies, as well as nepotism and outright corruption.

A better way to deal with this problem is to make the process of establishing a university more rigorous and transparent. The necessary conditions that need to be fulfilled to create a university should reflect the highest academic standards, availability of qualified faculty members and the necessary resources and objective measures to assess the bona fide intentions of the promoters of private universities. After the decision to establish a university is taken, the government's role should be one of a facilitator and not that of a regulator.

Universities need to provide sufficient opportunities, both in terms of time and space for pursuing research and writing. So long as we do not provide for research to be the central focus of higher education, at least in some of our premier universities, we will not be able to build world-class universities. Universities are expected to be knowledge-creating institutions.

Knowledge cannot be created in the absence of scholars who are prepared to read, think, reflect and write. The essence of a great university is its ability to influence change through research and the process of the discovery of truth leading to a rigorous analysis that creates knowledge and promotes innovation. This is true in the case of hard sciences, social sciences and humanities. Public policy needs to recognize this aspect of university education for them to develop higher standards in their pursuit of excellence.

A larger question that universities need to address is about the importance of research and scholarship that can generate ideas for change. Research in every discipline, in the arts, humanities, sciences and social sciences, can have a profound impact on our society and beyond. Indifference and complacency to research have led to the inability of universities to produce knowledge that can impact policy, produce innovation or provide solutions to social, economic and political problems that affect nations. Universities ought to become fertile avenues for the generation of ideas through research and publications. Rigorous research in all fields is critical for humanity, as it will be expected to respond to new problems for which old solutions and perspectives may not be helpful. Research produces knowledge that gives clarity based on an informed and deeper understanding of the issues involved.

The focus of world-class universities also needs to be on providing an experience of transnational education to the students. This will expose them to new and emerging frontiers of knowledge and perspectives. It will also introduce them to new cultures and people, and help them to appreciate diversity in an increasingly cosmopolitan and interdependent world. Therefore, universities have to carefully consider their policies for establishing meaningful global collaborations and activities that promote global interaction and provide for a global student experience. We need to innovate on programmes that enable direct interaction between international faculty and students of an institution, and a true collaboration that provides for a rich student experience as opposed to collaborations that remain only on paper. One important area in which global collaboration can revolutionize student experience relates to teaching and learning. Today's technologically advanced world provides scope for innovation in terms of promoting e-learning and virtual global classrooms based on meaningful international collaborations. Such methods can provide students the benefit of interacting with academics and experts from around the world and gain from their knowledge and pedagogical methodology.

There is an urgent need in universities to reflect upon the question of leadership and its efforts to seek reforms relating to institution building. Leadership is central not only for providing an institutional vision that will garner and galvanize academic consciousness among faculty and students to fulfil the goals and aspirations of the university, but also to reflect upon the larger role and responsibilities of the university that connects it with the industry, government, intergovernmental organizations, think tanks and NGOs. Leadership is also about taking responsibility and being accountable for one's decisions.

Our aspiration to establish world-class universities will depend upon our commitment to create and nurture transformational institutions that will inspire the faculty and students with a spirit of enquiry and instil in them the flame of imagination.

Universities and their Role in Promoting Sustainable Futures

Institutions can be developed and nurtured as world-class educational centres only when all the stakeholders of a university — students, faculty, staff, parents, alumni — in addition to relevant government agencies and departments, institutional partners and collaborators, potential donors and partners, local communities and other stakeholders become active participants in its evolution. We need to contemplate how education and institutions of higher learning can create a sustainable future.

Universities are the hub of knowledge-creation and awareness, and provide community-driven, multi-disciplinary approach to problem-solving. Higher

education institutions, in particular, have a central role to play in achieving a new sense of individual consciousness and intellectual orientation towards creating sustainable futures. Universities can be crucial partners in the initiation of dialogue between regional scholars, academics, policy-makers, researchers and relevant state-level agencies.

International collaborations between academics, researchers, global institutions and non-profit foundations engaged in study and practice on related areas, can increase the potential to study previously unexplored approaches, and potential funding sources for research and initiatives related to sustainability. Specific initiatives could take the form of investing in research that is valuable to local communities, and developing research networks with (in) local communities. Relevant disciplinary areas that could lead, and contribute, to such networks include public policy, law, architecture, journalism, management, environmental studies and the liberal arts. Working in collaboration with local governments is another area for greater exploration by universities and institutional leaders.

Interdisciplinary global networks to include institutional, research and collaborative partnerships on exchanging institutional and pedagogical best practices, along with transnational dialogues and forums to deliberate and explore new approaches should also be encouraged.

For universities to play an effective role in advancing sustainable local, national, regional and global development, students must be made active stakeholders in existing and future approaches to sustainability. A primary mode of cultivating sustainability-consciousness is by grounding relevant themes, issues, challenges and concerns within the curricula. A secondary focus area is to orient teachers to design and teach courses more closely aligned with institutional, national and global sustainability agendas.

Providing institutional incentives for researchers working on long-term sustainability research is another way forward. Educational leaders can prioritize research that may contribute directly to sustainable local and national developmental concerns. This can imply incentivizing researchers who choose to work on these areas through greater research support, more institutional funding, adjusting institutional teaching and research responsibilities.

Universities have a greater obligation to accomplish such representation, given the public character of their mission and purpose, and the broad societal goals they commit to achieve. These aims take on greater significance in developing economies like India, given the value that a robust higher education system can add to achieving national developmental goals.

While 21st-century universities must serve as bastions for academic and scholarly work, they must also serve as models of organizational innovation, agility in a complex world, creative negotiation with change, and be representative in demographics, identity and design with local and national communities. These are key elements that will determine the preparedness of universities to contribute to building more sustainable futures.

THE WAY FORWARD FOR UNIVERSITIES TO PROMOTE SOCIAL CHANGE POLICYMAKING

The Global Competitiveness Report 2021 was published by the World Economic Forum (WEF) with a Global Competitiveness Index (GCI). This report assesses the competitiveness of 144 global economies based on 12 points. These include institutions, infrastructure, health and education, labour market efficiency, technological readiness, innovation and business sophistication. A country's global competitiveness is inextricably linked to its ability to formulate and implement sound and effective public policies. Public policymaking is one of the most ignored aspects of governance in many countries. In fact, the widely established practice, unfortunately, is adhocism for governance, with little or no effort to seek empirical analysis in formulating public policy.

While all empirical analyses have their inherent limitations, they are indispensable in weighing different options from the point of view of policy effectiveness. Public policy is critical in every aspect of governance, not least for making laws, rules, regulations, executive orders and administrative directions, and for formulating policies of the government. The purpose of public policy is not only to provide answers to all questions but also to do so by helping the government to ask the right questions in the first place.

Using empirical analysis

In recent times, public policy as a discipline has brought to bear many fields of inquiry to address the central problems of governance. Public policy analysis requires a more rigorous approach in which many fields of inquiry, including, but not limited to, sociology, political science, law, anthropology, ethics and history, besides economics, remain relevant. This kind of analysis and approach to public policy is indispensable for good governance.

There are some pointers in a road map for public policy-based governance. Here are four points, the first being "evaluating policy effectiveness through empirical analysis". It is essential that empirical analysis forms the basis for determining policy effectiveness. For far too long, public policy formulation has been based on anecdotal evidence, perceptions of what might work and

what would not, conventional wisdom of our political and bureaucratic hierarchies, and specious forms of populism. But, as we develop and become a more mature democracy in which reasonable people can disagree as to what is the best way to govern India, there is a need to develop a stronger and more sound empirical basis for policy formulation. Policy formulation should move beyond the whims and fancies of power holders or the good intentions of a few individuals. It should rest upon sound institutional basis in which there is both continuity and change over time. A potential advantage of policy formulation through empirical analysis is that it reduces the risk of dramatic changes in policy due to changes in government after elections.

One of the unfortunate aspects of governance in a number of developing countries is that whenever any new government comes to power, be it at the federal level or at the state level, it spends considerable time undoing many things that the previous government had done. The strange thing in this approach to public policy formulation is that many a time, the same officers who were involved in policy formulation in previous regimes advocating these policies then end up working to justify why these policies are not good. The root of this problem can be traced to the fact that in the first place, these policies were not thought through properly and were not based upon sound empirical foundations to justify their formulation.

Issue of scrutiny

The second is “rigorous legal and constitutional scrutiny before law and policy formulation”. The last few decades of governance in India have demonstrated the growing importance of courts and quasi-judicial institutions. Today, more than ever before, every law, policy, rule and regulation formulated by governments and regulatory bodies is being increasingly subject to rigorous legal and constitutional scrutiny. The typical government response has been that this is judicial activism which is hindering the process of executive decision-making and policy formulation.

However, if the executive and the legislature accord more time, thought and reflection before passing laws or making policies, the risk of them being challenged in the courts and the courts declaring them to be in violation of the law or the Constitution, can be considerably reduced. Adhocism, vested interests, biases and prejudices, discrimination and arbitrariness in policy formulation and implementation have made laws and policies more vulnerable to judicial negation. It does not augur well for democratic governance when every decision of the government ends up being challenged in a court of law. The effective functioning of democracies through constitutional governance presupposes a minimal degree of trust among institutions exercising their respective constitutional duties and responsibilities.

Building linkages

The third aspect is in “building linkages among government agencies and academic institutions”. Public policy formulation has been an exclusive domain of government departments and agencies. Historically, anybody outside the government giving suggestions to people in government was not only frowned upon but also strongly resisted. Government agencies, including ministries in the Central government and departments in the State government, are woefully preoccupied with a range of day-to-day matters of governance. Their capacity and ability to think and reflect on sound public policymaking is minimal, not because of any inherent limitations of competence, but due to a lack of time and attention, while dealing with the sheer magnitude of bureaucratic procedures of their own making.

Under these circumstances, it can only help the government if it develops strong and substantive linkages with academic institutions, research centres and independent experts. But for these linkages to be effective and meaningful, they should be backed by significant changes in the internal governance structures of government bodies. The advisory role that is hitherto played by people outside the government should give way to a stronger and executive role so that those providing advice feel that their arguments and analysis will be taken seriously and not be set aside after the pretence of consultation leading to an empty exercise in the quest for legitimacy. Public policy should enable people to “speak truth to power”.

Establishing Centres

The fourth is in “building public policy schools and research centres”. If there is one specific area that is crying out for reform, it is the need to establish several world-class public policy schools. Interdisciplinary studies relating to public policy, both as an academic programme as well as a research programme, leading to cutting-edge, empirical and pioneering research in various fields are absent in most countries of the world. This void is particularly felt in the humanities and social sciences more than in sciences, medicine and engineering. Public policymaking, whether it is about building roads, bridges, airports, seaports, or for that matter, launching rockets and creating nuclear power stations, requires not only well-trained engineers and scientists, but also sociologists, anthropologists, lawyers and, most of all, public policy practitioners who can ensure a consultative dialogue among all stakeholders, including government representatives. The heart of a sound public policy programme lies in the amalgamation of qualitative and quantitative methods for training professionals in public policy; a study of economics and sociology, which is critical to the understanding of social and economic development; law, ethics and governance, which are relevant for examining the institutions that are

responsible for public policy-making and to what extent transparency and accountability inform policymaking.

The future of governance is bound to become more complex leading to disputes and disagreements over different visions of growth and development. In responding to these challenges, the urgent need is for public policy-based analyses in which every stakeholder has a voice and where every voice adds dimension and meaning to the development discourse. The need for ensuring public policy effectiveness is essential to achieve good governance. Otherwise, this goal will remain elusive and our global competitiveness will further decline, as has been the case for many years.

REFERENCES

- Kumar, C. R. (2019). "O. P. Jindal Global University: A ten-point agenda for building an IoE", *Education World*, 27 September. Accessed on 28 September 2021 at: <https://www.educationworld.in/o-p-jindal-global-university-a-ten-point-agenda-for-building-an-ioe/>
- Kumar, C. R. (2020). "Can institutions of higher learning help in creating a sustainable future?" *The Economic Times*, 14 February. Accessed on 28 September 2021 at: <https://m.economictimes.com/industry/services/education/can-institutions-of-higher-learning-help-in-creating-a-sustainable-future/article-show/74142215.cms>
- Kumar, C. R. (2021a). "A university is not supposed to be a profit-driven corporation", *The Indian Express*, 3 April. Accessed on 28 September 2021 at: <https://indianexpress.com/article/opinion/columns/university-governance-social-organisation-profit-driven-corporation-7256427/>
- Kumar, C. R. (2021b). "The role of the university: Nation needs it, and it can only thrive with academic freedom and institutional autonomy", *The Times of India*, 22 March. Accessed on 28 September 2021 at: <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/blogs/voices/the-role-of-the-university-nation-needs-it-and-it-can-only-thrive-with-academic-freedom-and-institutional-autonomy/>
- Mohan, Shriya. (2021). "Organisations want social scientists to solve community challenges", *BLOC: business line on campus*. Accessed on 28 September 2021 at: <https://bloncampus.thehindubusinessline.com/b-learn/organisations-want-social-scientists-to-solve-community-challenges/article33822653.ece>