

Academic Collaborations and Their Benefits

The progressive universities, world over have established strong networks in the last 20 years. These networks offer exceptional opportunities for student and staff mobility, scholarships as well as research and teaching collaboration. Some of the popular networks are Universitas 21 (U21), Tempus, Erasmus, Erasmus Mundus Action 1 and Action 2. Even, the countries all over the world encourage mobility of students and teachers through award of grants. There are instances where each progressive university has established more than hundreds of collaborations and they are particularly true with European and American Universities. University of Birmingham in the UK one of the members of U21 though has a large number of collaborations, still would like to develop range of collaborations with universities in India, China, and North America.

Many times the universities use the term partnership to express their relationship. I am of the impression that the term collaboration is softer and used for teams sharing Knowledge and expertise for achieving shared goals whereas the term partnership is much used in business context. Academic Institutions, world over would prefer to develop collaborations for academic exchange that includes academic knowledge; physical and intellectual resources; research ideas; undertake joint research; research findings and disseminate knowledge generated. The academic exchange can be facilitated by creating a mobility amongst researchers, teachers and students. The funding for such mobility need to be generated by seeking international grants, research grants and sometimes teams have to find funds on their own. The collaborating teams may or may not get into informal or formal agreements amongst themselves towards achieving stated common goals. The teams may have to jointly work with various international organisations which support such collaborative arrangements. The teams that develop better understanding amongst themselves, with time may progress from collaboration to partnership which may benefit the partners intellectually as well as economically.

Now, let me share with you a case study of our international collaboration with Coventry University of the UK.

The founder of our M.S. Ramaiah of University Applied Sciences is Gokula Education Foundation, an educational trust of more than 50 years of existence. Earlier to establishing the University, the trust wanted to experiment international educational practices on the campus of Gokula Education Foundation, hence entered into a collaborative arrangement with Coventry University of the UK in 1999. The Coventry University, allowed 2 of its courses to be offered at the Gokula Education Foundation Campus with 50% of the members of the faculty flying from the UK for the first two years. An independent institute was created, teams were developed at the Campus, team members were trained both at the UK and as well as on the Campus on course development, module delivery, module assessment and problem solving. The institute over 14 years period produced more than 2500 postgraduates in high end technology areas who are spread across the world working for reputed companies including the Jaguar LandRover at the UK, 30 PhDs, undertook more than 100 grant projects, 2 international projects, jointly conducted specialist programmes for industry and had international mobility for students and teachers for whole of European Union. There was an immeasurable learning for members of both the teams. It is worthy to note the collaboration lasted long, though it had its initial hiccups, the project ended up as an excellent learning experience to both the teams and even the British Council regards it as a successful collaboration.

Now, why do we want to collaborate? Although Gokula Education Foundation, as a group, is in the field of higher education for fifty years, but as a University we are new and we have benefitted from our earlier collaborations. **We want to learn, experience and adopt best practices at our university**

in a global context. The best practices could be in teaching and learning, problem solving, joint research and publications, and interacting with communities. We hope to learn efficiently and fast by collaborating with network of universities, of course we have our own strengths and capabilities to share in equal terms with teams.

At present, the University intends to depute undergraduate and postgraduate students in engineering, art and design, management, pharmacy, hospitality and dentistry at least for a duration of 3-4 weeks with collaborating universities for academic and cultural experience; encourage its research students to do split PhD or work for joint award, and members of faculty to undertake joint research. With experience, probably, the University would like to develop partnerships with collaborating universities for mutual benefit. **We are open to international collaborations** and we at **M.S. Ramaiah University of Applied Sciences** welcome any international university of repute located in any region of the world to forward their expression of interest to collaborate with our University. The collaborations could be in Engineering and Technology, Art and Design, Science and Humanities, Management and Hospitality, Pharmaceutical and Dental Sciences.

Happy Collaboration for a Happy Partnership!

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