# Best Practices for Quality Enhancement of Higher Education Institutions
## A Case Study of College Information Management System (CIMS) at Sanatan Dharma College, Ambala Cantt, Haryana, India

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## ABSTRACT

*Education is rapidly changing and there is no space for complacency of being in the line. But now the educational institutions have to strive hard to be the best with innovative ideas and by focusing on best practices to enhance its performance. Best Practices in higher educational institutions aim to enhance quality of education and improve the overall performance of an educational institution to keep up with the pace and adapt to changes in the field of education. They are the benchmarks for an institution which help it to differentiate itself among the competitors and to add value in its educational services. College Information Management System (CIMS) is one of the best practices of Sanatan Dharma College, Ambala Cantt. The aim of this paper is not only to acquaint one with CIMS as the best practice of Sanatan Dharma College, but also to throw some light on the ambiguous terms associated in the process of adoption of best practices in regard to an educational institution. The CIMS as one of the best practices of the institution will demonstrate how it has helped the institution to increase its performance and achieve excellence in education.*

*Keyword: Benchmarking, Best Practices, CIMS, Criteria*

### Introduction

In today's transitional India, evolution has encompassed almost everything and development of any country depends upon the quality of productivity of every sector. Education is one of the most important sectors in evolution of a nation. Without education exploration of new ideas will be hampered which are always needed for the development of a society and nation. In present transforming and competitive world if we have to show our presence on the world stage then we have to bring the productivity of every sector at the level of global quality productivity and education is no exception here.

The higher education has now become an international service hence the level of competition and quality has also increased. The higher education institutions in India are not only to show their presence outside but also to compete with others inside as well. The role of education industry is no longer to educate people but to produce skilled manpower. Therefore to achieve excellence the educational institutions have to set some benchmarks and have to adopt the best practices to bring quality through education. Excellence reflects "the outstanding practices in managing the organization and driving it to

give high results" (Karupusami and Gandhinathan, 2006). Higher educational institutions should work along with the concepts, principles of total quality management to achieve excellence.

The identification and adoption of best practices become more vital in the wake of growing concern about quality, standards and recognition. It has become important for the improvement of organizational competitiveness to adopt an effective knowledge system and information technology management system. It is believed that to implement substantial changes in efficiency and productivity of education, a new approach to improve efficiency and encourage continuous improvement must be integrated into institutional systems.

### Best Practices

Best Practices are "those practices that have been shown to produce superior results; selected by a systematic process and judged as exemplary, good or successfully demonstrated", these practices are then adapted to fit a particular organization. Within the institutional framework there can be many best practices that have yielded good results but the need is to identify the practices which have given the desired results and are improved over the time to achieve better results. We need to keep this in mind that one practice may yield good results but it may not yield the same results in another environment or institution. Now when education has become aggressively competitive and to survive, the higher education institutions have to imbibe and add competence to the system by ways of innovations and best practices so as to add value to education. Therefore, in the institutions of higher education there should be some empirical evidence to fix that after the adoption of certain best practice in their campus, it has provided the best results but has chances for further improvements. Best practices which add appreciable value to an institution and its various stakeholders are considered as trustworthy benchmarks.

### Benchmarking

Benchmarking is a systematic process used for identifying and implementing best practices. Benchmarking has been defined as an "ongoing, systematic process for measuring and comparing the work processes of one organization with those of another for the purpose of identifying best practices that can lead to improvements in operations and customer service" (Shafer and Coate 1992). According to Camp (1995), benchmarking's real benefit "comes from understanding the practices that permit the performance and the reasoned transfer of best practices to the organization". Benchmarking in education is important and can be used for improving administrative processes as well as instructional models in any institution. It will help to overcome the resistance to change, provide a structure for external evaluation and create new networks of communication (Gunasekaran, A. 2002). It is a systematic way of self evaluating, learning from others and improving what you do (Epper,1999). Benchmarking is about making comparisons generally with the aim of establishing good or more ambitiously best practice methods. It is used to identify the hurdles and obstacles in performance and to identify the fields of strength. So we need to understand that benchmarking is a continuous process of systematic proactive improvement and it helps to discuss the key areas of strength through one's own experience and from the experience of others. Benchmarking aims to recognize, examine, adopt and implement best practices.

### Need of Benchmarking

Benchmarking helps colleges in a number of ways. It provides colleges:

- A process for establishing baselines, setting goals, and measuring progress

- A method to monitor their performance in areas central to their missions and goals.
- A means of answering the question of how their performance compares to the national average — and a reminder to ask whether that average is good enough.

As a result, benchmarking provides a basis for colleges to set priorities. Benchmarking helps colleges learn about practices that are effective in the field so they can devote resources to programs that are most likely to help the greatest number of students.

Benchmarking also creates opportunities for colleges to share information and promising practices with other colleges that are committed to achieve excellence. When colleges participate together in programs designed to facilitate this kind of information exchange, they typically report that every institution, including the high-performing colleges, benefits from the interaction. Finally, benchmarking sets the stage for colleges to ask and answer questions that will improve their practice and help more students succeed.

### Case Study of Best Practice at Sanatan Dharma College, Ambala Cantt

Sanatan Dharma College, Ambala Cantt has been a pioneer institute in many aspects. Due to some exclusive adaptations at institute level, it has been able to make others feel and acknowledge its presence. It has many best practices to its credit due to which it has been able to achieve excellence and enhance performance in every aspect.

 The following study is about one of the best practices of Sanatan Dharma College, Ambala Cantt. The adoption of this best practice has certainly enhanced the performance of Sanatan Dharma College in terms of academic and administration.

### College Information Management System (CIMS): An Overview

Every institution has staff and students and plethora of data related to students and staff and organisation that is maintained in college records in the form of files. Similarly, the college maintains the daily activities such as timetable, year wise curriculum, and examination schedules.  To organize such huge data for years, the college needs a lot of space and manpower, hard filing system. This extensive file system is often time consuming and costly. Now the question is what is the easiest way to maintain such huge data? The solution is computerized automated system of management.

*As the leading educational institution Sanatan Dharma College, Ambala Cantt has also adapted to digital changes in education*

*College Information Management System* is a single-stop solution that automatizes and systematizes the entire operations of the college that encompasses information about college, practices of the college, other college details, student personal details, academic details, exams details, employee details etc. which in case of manual system, required a lot of time and manpower. Here almost all work is computerized. In a nutshell CIMS is an integrated web application that handles various academic and non-academic activities. CIMS acts like s single window repository of all the information regarding college. It has the simple user interface. This ensures that the user spends less time to learn how to use it eventually enhances the productivity and performance. The CIMS of the college works with the professional support of G Tech Informatics. CIMS can be accessed online with the hi-speed broadband Wi-Fi facility from Airtel and BSNL. The CIMS can be accessed through any electronic device like cell phone, laptop or Desktop. The CIMS of Sanatan Dharma College allows managing the entire academic and administrative processes hassle free. The main objective of this best practice is make information related to the institution 24x7 to all the stakeholders – students, teachers and alumni.

CIMS of the college aims:

- To move towards paperless working environment
- To coordinate and maintain translucency
- To avoid replication
- To increase efficiency of teaching and non-teaching staff
- To implement standard process and procedures across the departments
- To converge departments on a single platform
- To increase decision making efficiency based on data science
- To conduct online exams, assignments, MCQs, online classes and online fee payment
- To consistently develop institutional relationship in all relevant domains with all stakeholders

College Information Management System manages entire management system including the administration, operations related to the ***campus, academic management, administration, and library management system.***

NAAC has introduced criterion statements with seven criteria which help to identify the best practices that contribute to the efficiency and effective functioning of the institution. The methodology of NAAC assesses different policies of an institution so as to know that how much they have affected and improved upon the educational arrangements and quality of performance and potential. (NAAC Manual, Dec 2019)

The seven criterion statements of the NAAC criteria are as follows:

*Criterion I      - Curricular Aspect*

*Criterion II    - Teaching, Learning and Evaluation*

*Criterion III   - Research, Innovations and Extension*

*Criterion IV   - Infrastructure and Learning Resources*

*Criterion V    - Student Support and Progression*

*Criterion VI   - Governance, Leadership and Management*

*Criterion VII  - Institutional Values and Best Practice*s


College Management Information System (CIMS) of Sanatan Dharma College maintain a detailed record of data & institutional information of several past years and keep a tab on every ongoing-operation in the institution which works accurately and according to criterion statement given by NAAC.

***The following table gives a peep into, as to how the CIMS of the college imbues all criteria of NAAC with loads of information.***

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| *I* | *Curricular Aspects* | • Information about courses<br>• Syllabus of Courses<br>• Information on additional online courses<br>• Time Tables<br>• Lesson Plans<br>• Attendance Registers<br>• Provision for downloading old question papers<br>• Competitive exam books<br>• Feedback about curriculum from students, teachers and alumni |
| *II* | *Teaching Learning & Evaluation* | • Online admission form submission<br>• Details of students diversity<br>• Video Lectures, Question banks, Lecture Notes<br>• Attendance Details,<br>• Internal Assessment<br>• Submission of Assignments<br>• University Results<br>• Students Satisfaction Survey<br>• Teacher's profile<br>• Academic Activities by teachers<br>• Achievements of teachers<br>• Creative Publications(Articles, Books, Poems),<br>• Memberships |
| *III* | *Research, Innovations and Extension* | • Web links to online journals<br>• Details of Research Projects<br>• Research Papers by Faculty<br>• Research Presentations by Faculty<br>• Short Term Projects by students<br>• Details of Guest/ Extension Lectures<br>• Details of extension activities by NSS, NCC, YRC and all clubs, departments and associations |

| | |
|---|---|
| *Infrastructure*<br><br>*&*<br><br><br>*Learning Resources* | • E books<br>• Links of Video lectures<br>• Power Point Presentations<br>• Day wise Library usage form<br>• Day wise Library report<br>• Library issue report<br>• Library return report |
| *Student Support*<br>*&*<br>*Progression* | • Career Guidance and Counselling by making groups<br>• Details of activities of Career Guidance Cell<br>• Details of Placement Cell<br>• Advanced and slow learners' groups<br>• Online Grievance Redressal<br>• Mentorship Register<br>• Details of students got placements |
| *Governance,*<br>*Leadership*<br>*&*<br>*Management* | • Details of FDPs by Faculty<br>• Performance Appraisal for teaching and Non Teaching<br>• Fee Register<br>• Fee Collection Report<br>• Staff Salary Management<br>• Resource Management<br>• RTI Reports |
| *Institutional Values*<br>*&*<br>*Best Practices* | • Details of Gender Equity Programs<br>• Details of Programs organized related to environmental and social issues<br>• Details of work done for Environmental Management |

## Conclusion

CIMS has certainly helped Sanatan Dharma College, Ambala Cantt in enhancing its performance. This best practice has definitely helped the college to uplift the college process and stand ahead in the competition to offer quality education. But as said earlier that there is no space for complacency for being stagnant on one place so there should always be a room for the change and adaptations to new techniques and innovations in the field. Sanatan Dharma College is efficient enough to adapt to changes to achieve excellence.

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