



TEACHING LEARNING CENTRE, BITS PILANI, PILANI CAMPUS

# Taleem

A N E W S L E T T E R

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## The Role of Teaching Learning Centres in Higher Education

In the present times, higher education institutions face multifarious challenges from different directions. On the one hand, the expectations of 21st century students are rapidly transforming and on the other, current requirements of employers are drastically different from that of the past. The learning environment today is majorly dependent on new technologies for knowledge sharing and dissemination. Higher education appears to be at a strategic inflection point; some of the fundamentals are expected to change while we go through a fair bit of churning. The society expects highly entrenched institutions like Universities to exhibit agility while responding to these new challenges. Therefore, meaningful discussion and debates need to be generated from within the academic community.

A Teaching Learning Centre is a forum that addresses the changing needs of the teaching learning paradigm and significant institutions of higher education around the world have been acknowledging it to be a vital part of their academic space. A forum for teaching and learning broadly engages with the following activities:

- Facilitating various forms of engagements including meetings and interactions between groups of faculty and students to find effective ways to improve teaching pedagogy and methods towards a learner centric paradigm of education.
- Creating a bridge between the experience of senior faculty members and the pliability and freshness of the junior faculty members to nurture the best teaching practices.
- Publishing newsletters, research reports, and other works on the scholarship of teaching and learning (SoTL) addressing innovative pedagogical tools and methodologies, latest educational technologies and new insights on assessment and evaluation.
- Communicating across institutional boundaries, connecting and continuing meaningful dialogues with Teaching Learning Centres elsewhere.
- Hosting workshops, conferences, and discussion forums on teaching and learning in higher education.

Let the Teaching Learning Centre at BITS Pilani become the exploration space where we innovate the future and bring the magic back into our classrooms and laboratories.

Prof. Souvik Bhattacharya  
Vice Chancellor  
BITS Pilani



## How the TLC, BITS Pilani Came into Being

Under Vision 2020 of BITS Pilani, the institute had identified seven imperatives and had decided to focus on a mission mode (Mission 2012-15) for achieving the goals and objectives of the Vision statements. Quality Assessment and Assurance (QAA) was one of the chosen imperatives and a small team was formed to work on the subject. The mandate for the QAA Team was to suggest methods to improve quality in research, teaching and all other aspects of academics. While working in this area it was observed that for research activities, it was moderately easy to assess quality, considering the commonly used parameters. However, there were no widely accepted parameters to assess teaching and learning.

The concept of teaching has changed over the years, with the advent of new technologies and the easy access of information for the students from various sources. It was felt that traditional methods of teaching were not going to be very effective in the future and we needed to develop learning outcome based teaching techniques. Thus the immediate target was to educate the faculty members on the new focus of teaching. Also the need for understanding and appreciating new techniques and sharing them with the faculty members was realized. It was also felt that there was a need to carry out research to

develop teaching-learning methods keeping in view the needs at the institutional level. Considering all these and looking at the mandates of TLCs of other universities all over the world, the QAA team proposed the establishment of a Teaching Learning Centre in all the four campuses of the institute. Finally through a notification in 2015, TLCs were established in all the campuses with a clear mandate of improving the overall teaching-learning environment at BITS Pilani.

The TLC of a campus consists of faculty members with considerably good teaching experience and it is coordinated by a Faculty In-charge. A Professor-In-charge at the university level coordinates with the TLCs of all the campuses. TLCs of all the campuses have taken initiatives for strengthening teaching-learning on the campus but it will take time to see the impacts of those initiatives. I am confident that TLC would play a significant role in bringing a qualitative change in the teaching-learning environment of the institute.

Prof. A. K. Sarkar  
Director  
BITS Pilani, Pilani Campus

## TLC Events (Sep 2016 - Oct 2016)

### Intensive Teaching Workshop

Fourteen newly joined faculty members participated in part II of the intensive teaching workshop (ITW) held in the months of September and October in continuation of part I of the extended orientation program held in the previous semester. The participants presented short teaching demonstrations using black board and power point, to a group of resource faculty. The idea was to highlight strengths and point out possible areas of improvement in teaching practices of these new colleagues.

### Open Forum Discussion

An Open Forum Discussion, titled "How do I find my class?" was held on September 23. Students volunteered to share their classroom experiences at the institute with the administrators, faculty members and students present. They spoke on themes such as student-teacher relationship in the BITS campus, the need to revise the feedback system, the necessity of using blackboard teaching, the effective use of video-lectures and other visual aids in the classroom, and a variety of issues pertaining to lectures and laboratory learning experiences. The discussion included topics such as student non-attendance at BITS and the trend of students attending classes without any prior preparation. The event ended with the Vice Chancellor and the Director adding their concluding remarks.

### National Convention

A two-day **National Convention on Current Practices and Future of Classroom Teaching at Higher Education Level** was held from 30 September to 01 October. The convention was inaugurated by Justice (Rtd.) Dharnidhar Jha of Patna and Allahabad High Court. A panel discussion with the Vice Chancellors of Dr. APJAK Technical University, Uttar Pradesh; Shivaji University, Kolhapur, Maharashtra and BITS, Pilani; and the Directors of CEERI, Pilani and BITS Pilani, Pilani Campus brought out insights of academic administrators in higher education. Seven invited speakers from the National University of Singapore, IIT Kharagpur, IIT Madras, Chennai, Manipal University, Jaipur; and C- Cube consultancy spoke during the convention. The themes primarily included outcome based teaching and assessment and use of technology to enhance teaching and learning. Speakers emphasised on learning outcomes as the focus of teaching. These talks provided the base line for discussion on 46 concept notes submitted by about 60 delegates from all over the country.



Inaugural Ceremony of the National Convention

## Upcoming Events till 31st Jan 2017

- ✦ **National Workshop on "Outcome Based Learning Using Pedagogy Framework Model", in collaboration with the Centre for Educational Technology, IIT Kharagpur: 28-29 November, 2016.**
- ✦ **Workshop on Course Handout Preparation focusing on Outcome Based Learning: 1st week of January, 2017.**
- ✦ **Open Forum Discussion on "My classroom experiences at BITS: Perspectives from the faculty": 2nd week of January, 2017.**
- ✦ **"Introspecting My Teaching": one day event-- 3rd week of January, 2017.**
- ✦ **Open Forum Discussion on "Absenteeism": 4th week of January, 2017.**

## Why a BITS Pilani TLC Newsletter?

Teaching-Learning is a complex process which rejects simplistic, monolithic definitions. Often, in a technological higher education institution the packaging and the delivery of 'knowledge' is stressed upon and the educator is lost in the labyrinth of craftsmanship. Teaching perhaps gets embroiled in the overused paradigm of how efficiently one can transmit usable content to the learner. However, an educator inevitably questions such a mechanical enterprise and introspects whether the process inculcates critical thinking, empathy, transcending of local boundaries, and intellectual development in the learner. Notions of employability confront value of the knowledge imparted. Hence, it is imperative at the moment to perceive teaching as a social practice and not merely a craft that has to be mastered. Teaching is rooted in social needs and responds to the dynamics of social change. It is important to understand it as a cooperative enterprise the practice of which upholds certain social norms and behaviour. The changing landscape of social practices and norms naturally brings the discourse on teaching and learning to the open arena, outside closed classroom doors. BITS Pilani has always had a tradition of critically examining its own teaching-learning practices. And the TLC newsletter is another such attempt to bring to these pages perspectives from all stakeholders to welcome a culture of dialogue and discussion. The first issue puts together visions of administrators and patrons for the Teaching Learning Centre and voices of students debating the relevance of such a forum. We request participation from the BITS Pilani community to make this newsletter a success!

*The editors*

## The potential of the BITS Pilani Teaching Learning Centre within the Changing Ecology of Teaching-Learning around the World



It is heartwarming to note that the Teaching and Learning Centre at BITS, Pilani is putting together a Newsletter that will bring to the attention of the BITS community issues concerning teaching and learning and how teaching may be re-envisioned to put student learning at the center stage. BITS, Pilani is arguably one of the earliest, biggest preeminent innovator when it comes to Higher Education in India – any unbiased researcher investigating the progress of higher education in India would arrive at this conclusion. Even as BITS, Pilani is transforming itself into a research-intensive institution, it is actively seeking ways to be at the cutting edge of teaching and learning so that its two primary missions of teaching and research move forward in tandem and in harmony.

What purpose will a Newsletter serve? In an era characterized by explosion of knowledge, technology inundation in the form of mobile phones and apps, students with shorter attention span and seeking immediate gratification, and intense competition for top-class students, it is important that all faculty members in an institution such as BITS, Pilani remain on the same page (or even paragraph) on matters related to student engagement and empowerment. Advances in learning sciences, ability to collect and analyze learning data and the affordances of technology are making it increasingly possible to strategize and design meaningful learning experiences. Just as research is open to public, scholarly scrutiny (as a basis for advancing the field), it is time for educators to share openly their experiences as teachers and use such shared knowledge to innovate and advance teaching and learning methods. One hopes that the planned Newsletter will enable uninhibited, constructive sharing of classroom experiences, results of scientifically constructed education experiments conducted within BITS, Pilani as well as bring to attention of the BITS teaching community the impactful educational practices happening outside for adaptation and scale-up within BITS, Pilani. Given the unique and well-connected multi-campus structure that BITS has (including the highly successful off-campus programmes), there is no limit to how BITS, Pilani can set the tone for the future of education in India – from an empirically based one to one that is based on learning science and associated scholarship. It is my belief that the Newsletter will serve as a catalyst for the above purpose and would like to congratulate the TLC members for coming up with this initiative. As an ex-BITSian, I also request the entire BITS teaching community to support this initiative through active participation.

*Lakshminarayan Samavedham is an Associate Professor at the Department of Chemical and Biomolecular Engineering, at the National University of Singapore. He has been associated with the Centre for Development of Teaching and Learning, NUS and actively engaged in Engineering Education research. He is a distinguished alumnus of BITS Pilani and has extended his support to the TLC, BITS Pilani, since its genesis.*

It was both a pleasure and a privilege for me to lead the newly constituted Teaching Learning Centre (TLC) of BITS Pilani as its professor-in-charge in the very first year of its inception. The centre is the brain child of Quality Assurance and Assessment (QAA) team, one of the seven imperatives set up by BITS Pilani during mission 2015. Many leading universities of the world, conscious of quality and effectiveness of teaching learning, have set up centres with similar goals in the last two decades, and BITS Pilani, ever conscious of quality of teaching, did not want to miss out on this well tested institutionalized means of continual improvement of teaching learning in all its campuses.

The modern education system, that is universally followed, is now nearly two centuries old, and the prevalent practice of knowledge and skill transfer over its entire history has been predominantly through instruction. However, meticulous studies by educational psychologists in the last two to three decades have shown that learning in students can considerably improve by shifting from the instruction-centric mode of imparting knowledge to the learner-centric mode. The teacher should design powerful learning environment in the classroom and act like a guide rather than engage in one-way transmission of knowledge, information, concepts or skill. One major role of TLC in BITS Pilani is to bring this paradigm shift in education to the cognizance of all those who are engaged in instruction – faculty, teaching assistants and research scholars involved in teaching as well as laboratory staff – and train them on how to practice this in the classroom by experts. It was a pleasure as well as a good learning experience for all of us in the TLC to be a part of all the activities that we conducted as part of this important role.

**Prof. R. R. Mishra**  
Professor-in-charge  
TLC (2015-2016)

### The activities of TLC during the academic year 2015-16

The preamble of the Indian National Policy on Education states “No nation can rise above the level of its teachers.” Prof. Shreepad Karmalkar from IIT Madras, emphasized on this point while delivering a lecture on "Improving Our Teaching Through Feedback and Reflection". Senior Professors of the institute Prof V K Chaubey, Prof NVM Rao and Prof Sangeeta Sharma shared their experience of their journey in BITS. Intensive teaching workshop, part I, for the newly inducted faculties where senior faculties introduced them with the BITS system was held on January 7-9. Part II of the workshop for the newly inducted faculties was organised in April where the new faculties gave lectures using Blackboard and Powerpoint presentation in front of senior faculties. Dr. Yogesh Velankar, Consultant and Director of Indo Universal Collaboration for Engineering Education Centers of Excellence delivered a talk on "Outcomes based Education and Accreditation: Opportunities and Challenges". This talk aimed to raise awareness of outcomes based education and accreditation.

TLC took such initiatives as the launching of its website and some videos related to some of the best teachers were uploaded on the website so that interested faculty can visit the site and get benefited. SFC (Student Faculty Council) was constituted in each department of the Pilani Campus so that we could introduce the concept of feed forward. We organised several talks to inculcate necessary enthusiasm for teaching. The decision to financially support the recently concluded convention " Opportunities and Challenges in Classroom Teaching" was taken by me.

**Prof. Rajesh Mehrotra**  
Faculty-in-charge  
TLC, Pilani Campus (2015-2016)

Student Faculty Council (SFC), at the First Degree and Higher Degree levels, is an initiative towards encouraging regular interaction between faculty and students regarding academic matters within the department.

**Yes.**

*Change begins when we accept that there is a need for it. It is no longer the era where the teacher was the only source of knowledge and the means of the dissemination of it. The sources are varied and the methods diverse. It is at this hour that teachers and students must communicate and know each others' positions.*

*With the introduction of the Student Faculty Council (SFC) at BITS Pilani, we see this vision taking shape of what might soon become a channel for change. SFCs see debates between students representatives from all batches and faculty members, resulting in some pros and cons being laid out for each change suggested. Some departments' SFCs have picked up speed and have even begun implementing the changes suggested by the students. The existence of such a council in itself is a major step ahead, it is a sign that there is a willingness to change the rules. In a country that has a history of a Gurukul system, the paradigm shift is more than what meets the eye.*

*Skeptics can find many flaws in the way SFCs are structured, but the truth is, in principle it is just what we want. Should it involve more people and their opinions? Yes. Can it be more of implementation and less of just talk? Yes. Are there still many hurdles in the way that block any big change in the system? Yes. But for its inefficiencies, should it be discontinued? Absolutely not. After all, all the changes we've been anxiously waiting for will be brought in effect by the SFCs as they flourish, and not by shutting down channels of communication, sitting in our rooms and cribbing about it.*

**Are SFCs Effective?**

**No.**

*It is not popular amongst students. When asked what they think about SFC, most of the students first tried to recall what the acronym stands for. "The Finance Council, right?" enquired a 3rd yearite who, like many others, has been missing out the only mail SFC sends every semester. There is certainly a lack of proper publicity.*

*Unlike the student-faculty interactions, the student-student interactions are most often informal. There is no documentation of opinions. That is why not all student opinions are represented to faculty members. Further, the faculty never gets to know of the minority voices.*

*Often there are no internal debates and no trade-off analysis done within the student circle. The whole scheme of having more than one SFC volunteer becomes sometimes useless, given that they always are in harmony with each other and not competent enough to present not one but many opinions.*

*At times, issues are only resolved temporarily and without the proper administrative and academic bodies knowing them.*

**Sneha Kumari  
Niharika Agarwal  
Pranav Diwakar  
Tushar Kaushik  
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## **TLC, Pilani Campus: The Road Ahead**

The Teaching-Learning Centre (TLC) is mandated to work for improving the overall teaching-learning environment on the campus. TLC, Pilani campus has been working in this direction since its inception and aims to further intensify its efforts in creating an environment on the campus where all stakeholders realize the importance of bringing necessary changes in teaching and learning processes to meet the demands of the time. In the coming months the centre intends to (a) further engage with renowned experts in the field of education who could share their expertise with our students and faculty members, (b) get hold of the best resources (books, journals, etc) and make them available to interested faculty members and students, (c) organize seminars and workshops on emerging challenges in science, engineering, humanities & social sciences, and management education, (d) conduct intensive teaching workshops, (e) create avenues for regular interactions among students, faculty and administration on issues related to teaching and learning on the campus, (f) create opportunities for social outreach through seminars and conferences involving college and school teachers, and (g) encourage and help students and faculty members to conduct action research, attend national/international conferences on education and publish their research articles in good journals. TLC, Pilani campus intends to grow as a resource centre which is trusted by all the stakeholders and approached for any help (theoretical/practical) related to teaching and learning.

**Prof. S. K. Chaudhury  
Faculty-in-charge TLC, Pilani Campus**