



JNU's Centre for Women's Studies has Zero Admissions: International condemnation for JNU's disappearance of women!

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“I am shocked and concerned that the Centre for Women’s Studies is not given any admissions this year and will not have any admissions for some years to come. JNU Women’s Studies is internationally recognized as a premier Centre, with faculty and students who do outstanding research and teaching. It is particularly unfortunate that the government has pushed the UGC to this decision, given the well-known history of the Centre in training students who come from marginalized communities. I have come to learn that that this reduction of admissions means reduction of opportunities for these students to access graduate study. It also means that the Centre will suffer in many other ways, since the admissions enable all other kinds of resources, including hiring of faculty.

I have visited the Centre, read the research produced in the Centre, met some of the students there. I have long known of its history, and the dedicated work done by eminent scholars to build the Centre. I am always impressed by the discussion and the level of study and research at the Centre. The seriousness of study and commitment to understanding the complexity of women’s lives and histories remains exemplary. Its quality of teaching and research testify to its high reputation, nationally and

internationally. Its faculty are leaders in research. Few institutions anywhere around the world can compare with this Centre and it must not be affected or reduced in any way.

The decisions made by the government and the UGC seem to be shortsighted and misguided. JNU is a premier institution, one of the best known institutions of higher education in India. If India aims to be a great global power, institutions such as JNU — and units such as its Women's Centre— need to be given more funds, rather than divested of funds. No country can aim to be a global force without stellar institutions of higher education. JNU is one of those institutions. Its excellence and reputation cannot be forgotten or ignored and cannot be affected by shortsighted politics.

At my institution, Women's Studies is growing and popular among undergraduate and graduate students. This year again we are hiring more faculty and producing the research and training that is needed to understand the social worlds we live in. Education in Women's Studies is important and fundamental to the education of all students. My administration at Yale University recognizes these needs and have made a commitment to the Women's Studies program in which I teach.

As someone who grew up in India and does research in India, JNU has been an institution that made us all proud. I hope that the UGC and the government recognizes its importance and can restore your admissions. It will be a sad and shameful day if these admission reductions are allowed to stand”.

Inderpal Grewal, Chair and Professor, Women's Gender and Sexuality Studies Program Professor, South Asian Studies, Ethnicity, Race and Migration studies. Affiliate faculty in American Studies and Anthropology.

“I write as someone with extensive scholarly ties and connections to JNU through collaboration with respected scholars and colleagues in the fields of History and Women's Studies. In addition to functioning as key interlocutors for my own research and writing, respected colleagues at JNU have played a signal role in teaching and training some of our finest graduate students here at Columbia University, and in reputable research universities across the United States. Students trained

at JNU are held in high regard, and graduate programs actively seek such students for their intellectual maturity and gifted scholarship. It is also well known that JNU has played vital role in providing opportunities for higher education to students from marginal or difficult backgrounds, whose exposure to world-class training has allowed them to excel in all domains of public life in India. In brief, the impact of JNU's graduates both within and without India is deep and enduring.

I am therefore dismayed to learn of the recent decision to curtail graduate admission to the Women's Studies Program at JNU, an important center for research and teaching of the highest caliber. A vibrant academic program depends on its students, who are ambassadors for the institution in the

public at large, and who foster the vital institutional collaboration on which we all thrive. By curtailing admission to JNU's Women's Studies Program, the institution would be choking off institutional access to the nation's premier public university. Meanwhile, the Women's Studies Program will be starved of necessary faculty and funds as it finds itself unable to keep up with the

growing demand for Women's Studies courses by students across the JNU campus. This arbitrary and artificial ban on student admissions is likely to have a devastating effect on one of the most lively and intellectually engaged spaces on the JNU campus. I hope this decision can be reconsidered on behalf of the students whose lives have been transformed by the Women's Studies Program, and in the spirit of this great public university's commitment to a transformative higher education for students from a range of marginal and difficult backgrounds. Please do not hesitate to contact me if I can be of further assistance.

Anupama Rao, Associate Professor, History and Associate Director, ICLS

“I write with great concern about the implications of the UGC notification on the future of the Centre of Women's Studies at JNU. The halting of new PhD and MPhil admissions to the Centre will negatively effect the Centre and the field of Women's Studies for years to come. No Centre can hope to grow and continue to make scholarly contributions to a field when its lifeblood, the teaching and training of young scholars, is choked. The Centre has been a leader in the field of Women's Studies in India and it

thus causes scholars of Women's Studies around the world great alarm to hear about this attack on its future".

Mrinalini Sinha, *Alice Freeman Palmer Professor of History*

“The arbitrary and high-handed cutting down of student admissions by the UGC will have a disastrous effect on research across the disciplines. A carefully chosen cohort of research students is what keeps both students and faculty intellectually active and productive. Such a decision will be especially detrimental to research in fields that are either smaller or newer, such as Women and Gender Studies. I am absolutely shocked to learn that as a result of the new notification, there will be no new students taken into this Centre at JNU. It is a relatively new field, but one that has already proved to be immensely valuable in opening up new areas of inquiry and transforming older ways of looking at culture and society. In India this field has flourished because of the careful and hard work done by several generations of brilliant and committed intellectuals. Without a consistent and healthy pipeline of students, and faculty, which will be severely disrupted by this action, we cannot keep up the vitality of any discipline, of any intellectual dialogue, and of research. The callous and unthinking imposition of such arbitrary rules goes absolutely against the spirit of a university as “free spaces, as independent, critical repositories of knowledge, and as sources of renewal of liberal values that provide avenues of social mobility and equality to people,” to quote the recent words of Vice-president M Hamid Ansari. One cannot but read this new

diktat as part and parcel of the establishment and right-wing attacks on liberal values and critical thought, which have been, and need to be, an integral part of our country”.

Ania Loomba, Catherine Bryson Professor of English, University of Pennsylvania

“It is with great dismay that I learn that the reputed Centre for Women’s Studies at JNU has been asked to heavily restrict its admission to the PhD-MPhil programme in the coming academic year. Since many of the currently enrolled students are in the early stages of their research, it will be many years before new students can be admitted if restrictive policies are implemented. The long-term impact of this will be disastrous for the future of research training in Women’s Studies. As a scholar who has been part of recruitment committees at JNU, and also been a Visiting Professor in Women’s Studies, I strongly urge the authorities to re-consider the decision.”

Tejaswini Niranjana

“I am shocked at the new admissions guidelines that appear set to cast critical thinking and research in the field of Women’s studies behind by several years. Built along with and in response to women’s struggles and concerns Women’s studies is a project that is constitutively democratic. As Dr Ambedkar never failed to remind us freedom of the mind is the fulcrum of a democratic society. I hope the proposed guidelines are substituted

with other enabling one's". Geetha.

V. Geetha, *Feminist Scholar, Publisher, Writer, Chennai, India*

“I wish to register my strong dismay at the news from JNU concerning postgraduate students no longer being admitted to the Centre for Women’s Studies and other centres at the university. Reports indicate such proposals are based on new statistical calculations. This will have extremely negative effects on student thesis completion rate, faculty appointments and research engagement, not to mention the capacity for ongoing international partnerships and exchanges that we have benefitted from at my university for a number of years. My dismay is even greater considering that our universities in South Africa attempted to apply statistical models concerning staff and student ratios in order to restructure teaching and research economically soon after the democratic transition in 1994, and after considerable damage was caused to teaching programmes and academic departments these models were completely abandoned by the Department of Education.

The Centre for Women’s Studies has a growing postgraduate student body and staff, with a strong international reputation. Our joint participation in various workshop series including the Gender & Region series in Cairo, and the Love & Revolution series in Cape Town, Minnesota and Delhi, brought our intellectual projects and growing student bodies into very meaningful conversation. Important publications arise from such collaborations. Your own contribution to the Centre for Humanities Research annual Winter

School in Cape Town, in collaboration with University of Fort Hare and University of Minnesota, has instated the issues of gender in India very centrally on the table. It will cause enormous concern if the increasingly successful Centre for Women's Studies at JNU were to be cut back and its activities reduced, in the midst of its important teaching and research undertakings. Our flourishing research exchanges that have received international funding and support will also be affected”.

Patricia Hayes, Professor and NRF (National Research Foundation) SARChI Chair in Visual History & Theory, University of the Western Cape

“I write on behalf of the Women's & Gender Studies Department at the University of the Western Cape to express our deep concern at the cuts your Centre faces. Such cuts have particular resonance from the context of South Africa, where struggles to decolonise institutions have taken centre stage, where processes by which certain knowledges are/remain/become marginalised are under such necessary critique. The higher educational opportunities you provide to students from marginalised backgrounds have made an important contribution to global debates around hegemonic knowledges and it is very worrying for us all that powerful institutions such as governments are so eager/willing to work against social justice by reinscribing marginalities and limiting debate”.

Lindsay Clowes, Associate Professor/Chairperson Women's & Gender Studies Department, University of the Western Cape

“As a retired faculty member from the Centre for Historical Studies, Jawaharlal Nehru University, I am devastated by the drastic and destructive changes in the new admissions policies. The earlier admission policy should have been a model for all other universities for its commitment to inclusiveness, social justice and a form of knowledge dissemination which brings different social worlds together in the classroom and in the students’ residences. Instead, it has been replaced by one which is elitist and restrictive and which is repellent to JNU students and teachers alike. The needs of students and the experience of faculty members have been totally ignored by the administrative fiat which practically eliminates research facilities from a university whose students have been eagerly sought out by all leading universities of the world. The new policy and the way it has been implemented indicates the end of everything that has made the university nationally and internationally acclaimed. It also negates the founding principles and values that had led to the making of the university.

The draconian cuts in admissions at research levels will bear especially heavily on smaller centres like the Women’s Studies Centre. They ensure that in the coming several years, there will be no fresh admission of research students at all. It is a move calculated to lead to departmental stagnation in general and the stifling of research in this relatively small but immensely important and successful centre in particular. It is incomprehensible how and why the JNU administration has chosen to comply with the entirely irrational and damaging UGC command rather than put forward the university’s genuine needs to the UGC and to

struggle for them”.

Tanika Sarkar, *Retired Professor, Modern History CHS, JNU.*

JNU is the leading university in India with a unique record of social inclusion and rigorous postgraduate training.

This is being deliberately dismantled under the current dispensation. Strategic changes to admissions policy have cut student registrations and now threaten the existence of this and other small centres at JNU, with severe long-term implications not only locally but far more widely.

As a scholar involved in postgraduate research and education in the field of women's studies, gender and sexuality, I am truly concerned at the recent measures at JNU to greatly reduce admission of students to the Centre for Women's Studies.

JNU has a remarkable record of rigorous and inclusive education, a proud history of academic freedom and democratic access.

The impact of reducing this in a country like India will be profound.

It will also have an adverse effect on sister programmes elsewhere in the global south, whose growth depends on partnerships and transnational dialogue.

I urge those in the management of higher education to review this policy as a matter of urgency.

Prof.dr. Mieke Verloo, *Radboud University, Nijmegen, the*

Netherlands, Winner of the 2015 ECPG Gender and Politics Career Achievement Award.

“The recent U.G.C. notification and its willful interpretation can only be taken to indicate the government’s ruthless resolve to undermine all critical thinking which may thwart its intentions of redefining democracy and national sentiment. What is even more threatening is the willingness of University administrations to play the role of executors abdicating the responsibility they have to defend Universities as spaces of critical thinking and dissent, the absolute preconditions to any democratic structure. It is easy enough to see where this notification and its interpretation is leading to – less intake, less rationale for sustaining faculty recruitment, centres left with ‘no work’ and therefore like ‘sick industries’ to be shut down. For Women’s studies, a field that was born out of social movements and carved with great struggles within university spaces that have always been shy of supporting women’s, studies programmes, the decision is doubly disastrous. It is supremely ironic that as we continue to fight for gender justice and discrimination, for offences against sexual harassment, the government chooses to under cut the already spare investment in women’s studies and actively promotes its extinction. If we do not stand up to this now, we never will”.

Lakshmi Subramaniam, Professor, History, Centre for Studies in Social Sciences, Calcutta

“As a member of the advisory committee of the Centre for Women’s Studies for many years since the inception of the program I have watched the centre grow from a small program to a full fledged teaching and research program. As a centre located in an strongly interdisciplinary social science university like JNU the centre has just begun to settle down to a solid research program and provide opportunities to students from across India to be part of an active women’s studies centre and achieve its full potential for research. Any step that will slash its intake will have disastrous consequences for research in women’s studies and I urge all authorities to desist from any move that will have negative consequences for research and disappoint students who look forward to do their M.Phil and Ph.Ds in JNU.”

Uma Chakravarti, (Retd. Miranda House, University of Delhi) Feminist Historian

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