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11 JAN 2018
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JNU Teachers Oppose Skype vivas and to Boycott Compulsory Attendance: Resolutions at the JNUTA GBM on 10 January 2017

GENERAL BODY MEETING

Edit

Resolution 1

The JNUTA General Body strongly condemns the ongoing efforts of the Vice-Chancellor of JNU to further the destruction of the research culture and administration that he has already wreaked.

Whether this comes from a fundamental lack of acquaintance with the joys of learning and thinking freely, or from some darker malefic motivation, the recent diktat on “Skype vivas” by the Vice-Chancellor strikes at the heart of what makes a research meaningful in a university. The JNUTA General Body finds this to be a ludicrous proposal, stemming from on a very limited understanding of the viva voce as simply a verdict or grade. It rejects this proposal comprehensively for the following reasons:

1. No university that claims the highest standards can treat a dissertation defence as an empty formality rather than the rigorous oral examination it is, one which results in mutual edification of both the candidate and the examiners, as well as the gathered audience (particularly students). Subjecting this transformative, intersubjective engagement to the vagaries and limitation of technology and internet connectivity is completely unwarranted, disrespectful of scholarship and the value of an education in the effective communication of research results. A student’s viva voce examination is part of her education; it is only partly a test and is mostly a reward, insofar that it affords her the opportunity to have an established scholar engage with her work in depth. Such proceedings must be conducted in a setting most conducive for this interaction.
2. Contrary to the impression sought to be conveyed, several vivas using video chat software have already been conducted in some exceptional circumstances, and the experience has not been one that supports a general use of the technology, as replacive of the in-person viva voce. Picture and sound quality, particularly voice clarity, varies sharply through any such communication, the presentation by the student simultaneously to a public audience and the examiners is rendered difficult, and in general, the overlapping and back and forth nature of such an interaction is severely inhibited. While the JNUTA General Body believes that the option of a viva voce by video chat should be retained, it should not, and cannot, be made the norm.
3. The JNUTA General Body also points out that making the online mode the norm shall effectively restrict the pool of scholars to whom dissertations may be sent for examination in two ways. First, given the poor penetration of the internet in general, and the unavailability of internet services in most universities and institutes outside the major metropolitan cities, entails that examiners from outside these areas cannot be appointed. Second, not all potential examiners even in the major cities will be willing/able to conduct viva voce examinations by video chat – they may have privacy concerns or may simply be unacquainted/ uncomfortable with this particular mode of communication.
4. It should also be noted that the hallowed UGC Regulations 2016 make explicit recommendations on the how the public viva voce for an M.Phil./PhD should be conducted, in which the online option is not prescribed.
5. The JNUTA GBM also strongly condemns the fact that the VC’s diktat has brought the ongoing process of viva voce examinations to a grinding halt. Viva voce examinations have been cancelled in the School of Social Sciences in particular across the university, there is uncertainty as to whether and how dissertations for which reports are in will be examined at all in this semester. This derailing of well-functioning processes must stop at once and in-person viva voce examinations for dissertations already submitted must resume.

The JNUTA General Body calls on all Centres/Schools to discuss this matter in depth and to forward its resolutions to the JNU administration and the Committee that has been established for working out the modalities of online viva voce.

Resolution 2

The JNUTA General Body opposes the preposterous declaration that henceforth attendance will be compulsory for all categories of students in JNU. It strongly contests the presupposition that such a declaration makes, as there is no problem of mass or generalised absenteeism in classes. To expect Centres and teachers to maintain records of attendance for students doing coursework, specially in a university where a student may take courses from any Centre, drop them formally, or drop out of them, is to load teachers with a highly unproductive and meaningless form of bureaucratic work that does nothing whatsoever to enhance learning and critical engagement with the subject. Similarly, to expect research scholars to report in every day, when their work can require them to be in different parts of the city or on fieldwork or in conferences/seminars etc, is ridiculous, specially when every month Research Supervisors and Chairpersons sign on fellowship forms certifying their presence and satisfactory progress. The JNUTA General Body refuses to cooperate with this penalty being imposed on students and teachers alike. It calls on all Centres/Schools to discuss this matter in depth and to forward its resolutions to the JNU administration

Resolution 3

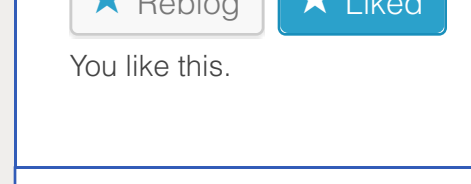
The JNUTA General Body resolves that the conduct of the GSCASH elections for 2018-19 will be kept in abeyance in view of the Court Order dated 19 December 2017 regarding the creation of a temporary ICC for pending cases. The currently elected members of GSCASH will continue to be in office, in accordance with the GSCASH Rules.

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