



**CENTRE FOR INFORMAL SECTOR AND LABOUR STUDIES
SCHOOL OF SOCIAL SCIENCES-I
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To,
The Vice Chancellor
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CISLS resolutions on New Policies on Attendance and Viva Voce

The Faculty of the Centre for Informal Sector and Labour Studies discussed the new circulars **on Attendance and Viva Voce** issued by the administration in its meeting dated January 11, January 18 and January 25 2018 and has unanimously adopted the following resolutions on the two proposed policies. The faculty request you to kindly place our observation in the Academic Council scheduled on Feb 23, 2018.

The faculty as CISLS believes that given the long-term and immediate experience of the University, a mandatory attendance requirement is neither necessary nor desirable from the point of view of maintaining or raising academic standards and that it embodies a strange contradiction with the new policy on viva-voce. The Faculty also notes that rules regarding student attendance by the administration has been imposed upon the teaching community in JNU without due diligence. No exercise examining the problem of absenteeism in classes, if any, has ever been reported from faculty in JNU. While the Universities across the world, and so has many inside the country too, are experimenting with technologies to enable distance education, JNU is trying to ensure that students are merely 'seen' in their Centre/School every single day, without providing any pedagogical explanation/justification for the same. It is not the substance of education at the tertiary level, but the illusion of it, that the new policy seeks to encourage. The effect is such illusion is worse particularly with respect to research supervision! Contrariwise, while the PhD Viva (also known as PhD defence) is a significant pedagogical tool for getting a doctoral degree across the world, JNU seeks to eliminate this and replace it by a token exchange over video-conference.

The Circular No IV/Eval.II/SA/2017 dated 22.12.2017, and No IV/Eval.II/28/AS/2018/ dated 10 January, 2018, 12 January 2018, 17/1/2018 and 22/1/2018, is against the JNU's much acclaimed pedagogical design. It must be noted that even within our MA programme in Development and Labour Studies, which is mostly composed of taught courses, has a component of a Seminar Paper of 4 credits which is not a lecture course and is based on the student's dissertation submission. In the lecture courses, attendance is implicitly built into the grading system and roughly accounts between 5-10% of the grade in JNU. The degree and quality of learning in the classroom is tested on an on-going basis in class, in the mid-semester and end-semester assignments. The assumption that students need to be coerced to attend class suggests that the quality of teaching and the temptations of learning are not sufficiently attractive to draw them into the classroom. This is not, and has never been the case in our experience at JNU. Not only students but several teachers also like to attend classes of charismatic teachers across schools in the University. Being able to command the attention of students in JNU is done by attracting them to one's lecture and not by coercion!

(Handwritten signatures)

We must not forget that MPhil dissertations and PhD theses in the social sciences submitted in this University are comparable to the best of the theses submitted across the world. And that has not been achieved by forcing them to come and sign in the Centre's or School's Office everyday. To have freedom to spend time in the library, or in the archive or in the field or for attending seminar is a pedagogical tool of doing research. The assessment of their performance should be based on the scholarly work that they produce. Let us not make mockery of research by compelling students to compulsorily sign the attendance register. This also restricts those engaged in teaching and research in a recognized institution or university to pursue their PhDs. Fieldwork in social sciences often take time, even upto two years and hence limiting the time for the conduct of fieldwork will destroy the very roots of the academic rigour for which JNU has been known this far.

ON VIVA VOCE OVER VIDEO CONFERENCE with reference to Circular No.3(43A)/Eval. I dated 17/1/2018:

The faculty believes that viva voce examinations for MPhil and PhD dissertations in JNU are not mere technical necessity of obtaining the degree but a pedagogical tool to mentor/enhance the understanding of the scholar on the issue by engaging with other senior scholars working in the same area in other universities across the world. This can only happen through a face-to-face interaction and not through virtual, non-serious engagement over videoconference. While we are open to having viva-voce through videoconference in exceptional circumstances, the university administration must stop from reversing this understanding. How can the administrators of a leading public university in India imagine that videoconference facility is available in all universities across the country? This will amount to discriminate against those scholars/institutions who either don't have the option to use these facilities or are not fluent in the use of technology because of their age or regional location. The justification of cost-cutting is really poor as in a public university like JNU, the expense of the viva-voce examination is a very miniscule part of the average expenditure that the University incurs in the academic matters. Such expenditure should be a prerequisite and a priority for ensuring quality in a public university.

These are also not mandated by any regulation whatsoever that applies to students presently enrolled in the University. No rationale has been provided in the various circulars as to why these were needed. We, therefore, recommend an immediate roll-back of these policies.

As pointed out on earlier occasions, the faculty feels that the absence of a comprehensive privacy policy and lack of cognizance of the existing laws on data protection (specifically obligations for the protection of sensitive personal data under the Information Technology Act of 2000) also opens up viva over video conferencing to legal challenges as the explicit and informed consent of every participant in the 'public' viva, if held over video conference and adequate level of protection of that data and purpose limitation, is mandated by the laws of the land.

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