



JAWAHARLAL NEHRU UNIVERSITY  
NEW DELHI-110067

Centre for the Study of Social Systems  
School of Social Sciences

Tel. : 26704408

25<sup>th</sup> January 2018

To,

Sh. Sajjan Singh,  
AR(Evaluation),  
JNU.  
New Delhi - 67.

Dear Sir,

*Through the Dean, SSS*

This has the reference to the circulars issued by your department regarding compulsory attendance systems for MA/MPhil and PhD students. The faculty committee met on 08.01.2018, 15.01.2018 and 18.01.2018 and discussed the same.

The faculty committee felt strongly against the idea of compulsory attendance and resolved to clarify with the administration :

- (i) Reason and rationale behind taking this major shift in policy because the Centre has its own internal monitoring mechanism. Faculty assesses students' presence/absence during the semester and in case of defaulters Centre has been taking suitable measures.
- (ii) The faculty members also felt that in spite of no attendance the Centre has been ranked very high in the global rankings so the connection between attendance and academic output is unclear.
- (iii) It was felt that the circular also works against the Centre's autonomy as all the power is invested in the Dean of Students and Chairperson's office is just being used as a post box.
- (iv) The Centre also has scarcity of space and inadequate staff to undertake this enormous task of tabulating the attendance of a large number of students.

It reiterated that steps should be taken for strengthening of academic programme through greater participation of students which the Centre has consistently done over the years. The faculty is against bureaucratic surveillance of students and teachers because it does not contribute in any way to academic culture of the university.

We are enclosing feedback of the students on this matter for your perusal please.

Thanking you,

*Dr. C. S. S. S.*  
Yours sincerely,

Chairperson  
CSSS/SSS  
Jawaharlal Nehru University  
New Delhi - 110067

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*N. W. K.*

18th January, 2018

The Chairperson,

Centre for the Study of Social Systems,  
Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi.

Dear Ma'am,

We write this letter with grave concerns over the circular issued by the administration requiring all students of the university to mandatorily provide their attendance. At the outset we would like to categorically state that we (and the classes we represent) reject and will boycott the policy of compulsory attendance on the basis of reasons furnished below.

**First, we would like to bring to your kind attention that at all levels (M.A., M.Phil. and PhD.) there are multiple formal and informal ways by which work done is evaluated and for which students are held accountable. Tutorials (presentations and writing assignments) and exams, Research Advisory Committees, and progress reports are some among the many ways by which students' participation, learning, and research experience are assessed so as to ensure satisfactory standards of the quality of work they produce. Therefore, quality of work could hardly be stated as a legitimate ground to impose mandatory attendance on students and researchers.**

**Second, notwithstanding the fact that JNU continues to be one of the most important higher educational institutions of the country, we can perhaps all agree to the practical difficulty that such a policy of attendance could pose due to infrastructural limitations at the various centres of this university. This issue may not be taken lightly because it is not only related to which student has first right over limited resources, but also to equal access for all on campus including students with disabilities. As students we experience lack of infrastructure - hostels, library, crèche, reading rooms, necessary technology/equipments for disabled research scholars, etc. - which do not provide for an overall wholesome learning and research environment that imposition of compulsory attendance could only make worse. Besides, students would only be constrained further by having to navigate new attendance policy while simultaneously engaging in multiple fieldwork, archival work, and research at libraries away from campus.**

**Third, such a policy of compulsory attendance is gender-insensitive. It would not be news for anyone at the centre that for women students, especially married women and women with**

disabilities, such a policy could only discourage them from pursuing a smooth career, keeping many more women outside of the systems of higher educational institutions. Women as we know only require additional infrastructure and support systems in order to combat the structural obstacles that they encountered when they choose to part of such institutions. In this regard too, therefore, we must reiterate that such compulsory attendance policy would be regressive as it would further perpetuate gender-based structural inequalities within the premiere educational institution rather than facilitating diversity and gender equality.

While the argument regarding infrastructure is a necessary one, it is however not sufficient. In fact, we believe that if vitality is to be restored in our universities, there is an urgent need to shift our focus from mundane and rigid policies to institutionalizing dynamic and inclusive pedagogical practices. Critical pedagogy requires of us to not merely learn, but also to reimagine our classroom spaces and learning environments. All alternative pedagogical practices which have emerged from a rejection of "standardized" education advocate that freedom and responsibility be held by students in order for them to actively participate in the learning and research processes. The first right to any form of holistic and critical learning in an educational space of the nature of a University must rest on students. The recent trend of discounting participatory processes in favour of a top-down approach at our universities could only be to the detriment of students' well-being and academic performance, which is bound to impact the reputation of the institution as a whole.

In the light of the aforementioned points, but not confined to these alone, we would like to emphasize that mandatory presence in classrooms does not translate into active participation. Furthermore, students are not a unified whole and their experiences vary according to their social locations, and education should be provided in cognizance of the above fact. Historically marginalized sections of students continue to find the classroom inaccessible, intimidating and discriminatory. The university would be better off allocating its resources to provide such facilities and structures as mentioned above which would enable students to access the educational space – including, translation of central texts, reading/writing workshops, etc. – without threats looming large if they failed to fulfil criteria of mandatory attendance.

Furthermore, to address the issue of low class presence (a concern repeatedly raised by the faculty), we would like to state that as students and fundamental stakeholders of