

## The Prospects and Challenges of Autonomy

The college seeks autonomous status with no other motive except to restore and enhance what is best in its heritage and relive them creatively in the present context of higher education in this country and the realities in India and the world.

While we are enamored by the promises that autonomy holds for us, we do not underestimate the challenges that it would throw up. However, we want to meet the challenges with what we see as distinctive in the tradition of our college: the committee system, greater participation of the faculty in the administration of the college, the enormous good will of its alumni and the credibility that it has established over the years in strictly following the criteria of merit, transparency, and social justice both in appointments and admissions. To top it all, we have the best faculty that that we can get as they have been selected and appointed with the only consideration of merit and/or community (being a minority institution).

It is important that we should look at the prospects of autonomy which often outweigh the challenges.

1. Essentially, **autonomy is in respect of academic affairs**. That also includes the necessary administrative autonomy to maintain academic autonomy. Academic autonomy that we aspire for includes a desire for:
  - Curriculum development and the organization of the course of study
  - Improving the examination system so that it would be a true measure of learning
  - Innovations in pedagogy considering the “knowledge explosion” in respective domains and new avenues of access to knowledge and to make it more learner centered
  - Maximize the number of working days and learning opportunities
  - Promote extension activities and outreach programs that would enrich the curriculum
2. Administrative autonomy essential to academic autonomy is ensured through the Internal Governance Structure stipulated by the government (The University Laws (Third Amendment) Bill 2014).

Internal governance structure	Management	Faculty	UGC	University	Government	Experts	Industry /placement	alumni	Chairperson
Board of Studies (13)	0	6	0	1	0	2	2	1	HOD
Academic Council	0	HODS+ 1+4		3	0	4			Principal
Governing Council (7)	1 nominee-manager	3+ Principal	1	1	1 Higher edu. Council				An eminent person

3. It will provide UCC the opportunity to build on its distinctiveness and actualize its potential for excellence.
4. It allows possibilities for innovation and creativity to teachers and students and as such, it will provide greater job satisfaction for them

5. While autonomy percolates down to every department and to every teacher, it also adds to their accountability and responsibility. Autonomy will enhance the accountability and responsibility of the College as a whole, though it may not happen automatically.
6. "The world over higher education system is changing radically and rapidly by becoming organically flexible in diversity of programs, in its structure, in its curricula, in its delivery system and it is adopting itself to innovative use of information and communication technologies. This concern for flexibility and innovation cannot be addressed by the affiliating University system" (MadhavaMenon Commission); they are best served in an autonomous model.
7. In the present scheme of autonomy, the State and the University still have a significant role to play as funding sources and resource centers and also in monitoring and evaluating the academic standards and new initiatives of autonomous institutions.
8. The College would be placed in a privileged position to access greater financial assistance from UGC/RUSA for special projects and programs.
9. The characteristic that the Madhava Menon Commission highlights as the essential bedrock of a successful autonomous institution- transparency, participation, decentralization and increased activity- remains as the solid foundation of UCC and hence, if we strengthen them, we could reap greater dividend and effect a smooth transition.

However, the College also recognizes the challenges that autonomy entails so that we can be better prepared to meet them.

1. Whatever we consider as our strengths and uniqueness can prove to be our nemesis unless we nurture and strengthen them with greater care and responsibility and ensure that they are practiced and not touted oblivious of the changing reality of the world.
2. Democracy, decentralization and participation can be counterproductive if we do not make these values truly functional and strengthen them with responsibility. Instead of assuming that some of our "best practices" such as the "committee system" are functional, they should be constantly monitored and evaluated to provide the best results.
3. The College must review its management systems and administrative machinery so that they deliver efficiently and speedily.
4. The College will not resort to unethical or dishonest means of meeting its additional financial responsibilities entailed by autonomy and hence, intentional and concrete efforts must be made to tap into other sources of funding such as UGC, alumni, foundations and business and corporate entities using the mechanism of a Development Office.
5. A disciplined, motivated and responsible faculty who are committed to highest values of scholarship, probity and fair play is crucial to the success of an autonomous college. The faculty of our college cannot be considered any less in living up to these requirements of character and morals.
6. Credibility of an autonomous institution depends on the credibility of its examination system.
  - We must evolve a procedure for examinations and evaluations that strikes a balance between internal and external, continuous and semester-end, acquired knowledge and its creative use in contexts.
  - While we need to respect and uphold the integrity of the faculty in making right assessment of students, we should evolve adequate checks that would ensure that the teachers do not fall a prey to criticisms of favoritism or reprisals.

7. A work ethic and culture that commit the faculty to self-discipline and spend maximum time with students, both inside and outside the class room should be facilitated. In this matter, we should pay more attention to the guidelines on the faculty ethics (code of Ethics for teachers and code of conduct for support staff-UGC).
8. Student evaluation of teachers and self-appraisal by teachers must be properly processed at appropriate forums and followed up to ensure improvements.
9. Political activism must not be at the expense of class hours and many clubs and societies that would facilitate the holistic development of students.
10. Proliferation of self-financing courses is a possibility considering its financial enticement. Hence, it must be consciously resisted and the primary focus must be to strengthen the courses in the aided stream. Whenever self-financing courses are started, it will be done through a transparent process of consultation with the faculty and the internal governance mechanisms and also after ensuring its value in terms of its interdisciplinary character, social relevance and cutting edge in terms of scientific and technological advancement.
11. The PTA and the Alumni association should be strengthened to play a significant role in the life of the college.
12. Preparation for autonomy is the key to the success of autonomy. While we have done a lot of preparation the past and it has been a long cherished vision of UCC, recent effort in this direction have been poor and hence, we need to do a lot catching up.
13. The management is working on an estimate of the additional financial burden on account of autonomy and it will be shared with all constituencies.
14. For overseeing the preparation and implementation of autonomy, the management proposes to constitute an **Autonomy Implementation and Monitoring Committee**; we do not have to wait for UGC to grant autonomy. This Committee must start functioning so that whether we get autonomous status or not, it will contribute to our overall development, particularly in the context of us expecting NAC team during the coming year. We also need to prepare ourselves for celebrating the centenary of our College in 2020-2021.

As I have reiterated on many occasions, it is unfair to expect the management to solve all problems when a lot of it can be addressed only by a change in the matrix of Student-Teacher-Management nexus. We need to build greater trust, greater cordiality, and a work culture that expresses our commitment to students and the society at large. The Management is committed to protect its core values of participation, democratic functioning, transparency and high level of probity in following merit and social justice in admissions and appointments. We need greater engagement of all constituencies for mutual correction and empowerment to prepare ourselves for Autonomy and also for the NAC visit.

Rev. Thomas John

Manager in charge