

## **Enhancing Academic Rigor in Management Education**

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Academic Rigor [AR] has been defined mathematically by Craig Nelson [recognized for excellence in teaching] as difficulty multiplied by support. It is, therefore, distinct from difficulty. Difficulty is linked to tolerance level and reaches a plateau and is individualistic. The student either finds it boring or gives up depending on level of difficulty. The challenge would be to identify the tolerance level and increase the support level to optimize AR. It is presumed that support does not increase unless difficulty needs it.

The challenges at a B-school are different from post graduate programs. The students are from heterogeneous academic background and are likely to be less academic oriented but are more street smart. In certain subjects, the students may not be at “post” graduate level but being brilliant & energetic, they need to be challenged continuously; otherwise, they switch off mentally. We try to teach diverse subjects and make him or her jack of all trades since we do not know what the future job will be! The most important challenge is that they are adults.

Adult education is characterized by encouragement of intellectual freedom, experimentation & creativity. Peer & self learning are respected and encouraged. Students involve actively in learning experience [testing against their own past experience] & are not mere passive lecture listeners. Faculties undertake course correction based on their own learning and feedback.

AR gets displayed in the rigors in curriculum, delivery and in assessment. The syllabus calls for revision more frequently than in other frontiers of knowledge. For market related subjects, there may not be a rigid syllabus. We are to be prepared to run a course without a syllabus! The breadth and depth of coverage has to be in tune with market expectations. A significant portion has to be practical and is to be embedded in the syllabus itself, achievable through work books.

Enhancing the rigors in academy, delivery is the core of success. Introducing buddy system – teach while you learn; in his/her area of comfort – is something like outsourcing the teaching. The syllabus is to be neither “covered” fully nor should the flow of thoughts necessarily be in the order of syllabus. Questions, questioning & interaction are the essentials. The student should question all answers till the exam and answer all questions in the exam!

The benchmark has to be raised constantly. There should be surprises everyday which will sustain their level of interest. Since we propose to make them “employable”, we should create necessary work atmosphere and inculcate the discipline in the matter of attendance [not merely 75%], attire and attitude. They may not flaunt their mobiles in the classes. The need for study holiday, inter semester leave etc do not fit in with the corporate life. The holiday list should be that of a corporate. We now teach different subjects in a day presuming that it supports greater learning but that is not the work life later.

Faculty should be competent enough to assess knowledge versus competence by testing not merely knowledge but also other essential traits like participation, jelling with others, positive attitude and team building. The faculty should be able to discriminatively assess even in a class full of Nobel Laureates or in a class of dumb-heads. A dull but street smart student is to be rated higher than a brilliant introvert.

Under “Academic Rigor”, the well known Kellogg School of Management declares: “Our curriculum is intense and dynamic. Our course catalogue evolves with the market. Our professors are world-renowned scholars and educators. With their guidance, you’ll learn when to heed conventional wisdom and when to ignore it. You’ll gain a deep understanding of every subject you study, and more importantly, you’ll graduate prepared to put those lessons to work in your career”. Perhaps this is true to all of us.