

A Weekly Journal of Higher Education
 Published by the Association of Indian
 Universities

Universities Must Reinvent Themselves or Risk Irrelevance

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Across the world, universities are undergoing a quiet but decisive and rapid transformation. The archaic model of higher education organised around rigid disciplines, fixed degrees and lecture-centred instruction is steadily losing relevance. In the knowledge economy, universities are no longer judged by how many students they enrol or how efficiently they transmit existing knowledge. Their real test lies in their ability to *generate ideas, nurture innovation and shape the intellectual foundations of society.*

For India, this transformation is not merely a global academic trend; it is a national imperative. A country aspiring to become a developed economy by mid-century cannot rely on an outdated higher education system. The vision outlined in the National Education Policy-2020 rightly recognises this challenge. But policies, however visionary, do not transform institutions on their own. Real change will occur only when universities themselves are willing to rethink the architecture of higher education.

The first challenge is to dismantle the rigid disciplinary silos that still dominate Indian campuses. The most significant breakthroughs of the twenty-first century are occurring at the intersections of disciplines where artificial intelligence meets medicine, where climate science meets economics, and where technology engages with ethics and public policy. Yet many Indian universities continue to operate as fragmented departmental empires. Such structures may have served the needs of an earlier era, but they are ill-suited to an age defined by complexity and uncertainty. A future-ready university must encourage intellectual cross-pollination, allowing students to combine engineering with philosophy, economics with data science, or agriculture with environmental science. Multidisciplinarity is not an academic luxury; it is the foundation of modern problem-solving.

Equally urgent is the need to rethink the curriculum itself. In an era where information is available instantly on digital platforms, the purpose of higher education cannot be limited to memorising content. Yet much of Indian higher education remains trapped in examination-driven pedagogy that rewards recall rather than understanding. Universities must embed internships, live projects, entrepreneurial training and experiential learning into every programme. A degree without demonstrable skills is increasingly losing its value in a rapidly evolving labour market.

If India seriously intends to become a knowledge power, universities must also rediscover their role as *centres of research*

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