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Stop talking, start writing, VTU tells NRN, Shaw & Co.



An oft-repeated grouse of technocrats in India's IT capital is that engineers who graduate from our universities are unemployable. V-C of VTU expects something more constructive from them

Technocrats in India's IT capital have been thrown a challenge by the Visvesvaraya Technological University (VTU). Stop cribbing about the quality of education and write text books for the engineering undergraduates.

A day after IT honcho N R Narayana Murthy said: "Today, in science education, there is very heavy emphasis on learning, there is not much focus on relating theoretical ideas to practical situations around us," VTU vice-chancellor H Maheshappa told Bangalore Mirror: "It has become a fashion for technocrats to criticise our syllabus and textbooks for lack of employability. Every time, they find an opportunity to blame us for the poor quality of engineers. We are really fed up of this. So, we have decided to invite these technocrats to instead come and write textbooks or at least help us in framing the syllabi."

Cranking up the challenge, Maheshappa further said: "If they fail to turn up, they also lose right to criticise us anymore."

Murthy, however, is not alone in such criticism. A series of surveys point to the poor quality of engineers passing out of the VTU. A NASSCOM survey has said only 25 per cent of graduates were readily employable in the country.

Biocon CMD Kiran Mazumder Shaw, responding positively to the challenge, said she would love to write a chapter on teaching students how to access the right kind of information.

"I think it is a welcome gesture. Industry experts can give good tips and definitely contribute to textbooks. It is important to teach students how to access the right kind of information. I would definitely like to educate students and write a chapter on how to access information. This is essential for making them employable", she said.

VTU's board of studies (BoS) has been asked to send letters to all the major technocrats in the country, including NRN, Azim Premji and Shaw, seeking their time, "to meet us and help us in writing the textbook." The VC said they hoped to complete the process by January.

"For 2014, we want to issue brand new textbooks to students which are penned by industry experts. I contacted various varsities in the country and this is said to be first experiment of this kind in India," Maheshappa said.

Students, calling the current syllabus "dumb and outdated" are thrilled with this plan.

"Over time, it has become increasingly difficult for us to get noticed during hiring. The syllabus being taught in engineering colleges is over 15 years old across branches and though universities have promised a change, it has not materialised. The absence of outcome-based learning (the college behaving more like a finishing school) is sorely missed," he said.

The student said they were forced to attend pre-placement talks organised by coaching agencies, who sell their courses, rather than learn useful things and undertake projects. "Even when we get a job, all new employees take time in learning technologies being used by the company. Companies train employees for at least 300 hours before taking them in, formally, and this is where the colleges must reduce training costs by getting into the picture. For example, companies like GMR, Infosys, Cisco and others have their own platforms, machines and software that take time getting used to. The training for this, coupled with little grasp of fundamentals, results in the colleges getting a bad name and students losing jobs," he explained.

Krish Lakshmikant, CEO of Head Hunters, which is into placing topnotch techies, was doubtful, though, of the plan's success. "We have heard of successful entrepreneurs writing books, but not textbooks. Industry experts cannot come down to the level of students and communicate the way it needs to be done. They will be really good in suggesting the syllabi that need to be taught to students, though."