Practice I

1. Title of the Practice: Establishing an online-admission platform.

2. Objectives of the Practice:

The ongoing admission's method takes a lot of time to be completed and also involve considerable (avoidable) human effort on the part of the faculty and non-teaching staff. With the admission's process going online the process becomes much faster, transparent and much less laborious. Also the applicants (prospective students) would be benefitted as they can (almost) complete the admission process (apart from the final verifications of the documents) from their own places.

The Context

It has been felt by the college, for quite some time now, that with the growing student strengths in the various courses/classes the admission process needs to be taken online. The NAAC Peer Team during its visit to the college (during accreditation inspection in October 2019) also suggested to go online with the admissions process. Not only will it reduce the labor involved (in manually sorting forms, assigning various weightages, creating merit lists etc.) it will be beneficial to the applicants as well in terms of saving time and money. The online process will also impart better creditability to the admission's process by enhancing its transparency. Also a basic database of the applicants created at the entry point, from their online application-forms, a refined database of the students admitted later can be created very easily. Such a student database is in any case required, almost on a daily basis, by the college administration.

Keeping these details in mind the college had been trying since the last academic session to take the admission's process online. However, last year we couldn't proceed with the process. This year the college contacted some nearby external agencies providing such services (i.e. developing, hosting and support of the online admissions portal) and then floated an online admissions portal suited to its needs. Training sessions, general one for all staff-members and more advanced ones for the online admission committee members, were also held.

The applicants to the various courses operational in the college can now register online (on out admissions portal) and fill the appropriate admissions-

form. They can upload images/PDF's of their academic and other documents. Only at the time of the final counselling do the students (whose are called in for the counselling) need to come to the college physically and get their original documents verified by the admission committee. After this, the students granted admissions can deposit their fees online from their registered accounts on the admissions portal. This again makes keeping track of the fees data easier and transparent for the college administration.

5. Evidence of Success

The success of this process can only be evaluated in the years to come. Besides some dry runs the next academic session (2020-21) will be the first time that the admissions portal will be used by the applicants. But some trial runs with existing students (both UG & PG) have convinced us that the portal is easy to use for an average student and all the steps are (almost) self-evident. Feedback received during the admissions process, during the next session and even after that, will be used to further improve the portal/admissions-process.

6. Problems Encountered and Resources Required

One problem encountered (even in the trial phase itself) is the lack of computer knowledge by some of the non-teaching staff members (who until now had been handling their part of the admissions process manually). Though with the training sessions they have gained some experience with handling their role in the online admissions process but the real test (in fact of the whole setup) will be during the admissions next year.

Practice II

1. Title of the Practice: Organizing Online classes and creating e-repositories.

2. Objectives of the Practice:

With the Covid-19 pandemic hitting India around March-19 and bringing all academic activities in the college to a standstill (due to lockdown) the teaching-learning process had to be shifted to the online mode. Instead of just sending printed study material (in the form of handwritten notes, e-books, images of pages from books) and external online content the college faculty members begin creating their own audio/video lectures and distributed them online amongst the students. Such a method insured that the student could access the study material whenever convenient to him/her as opposed to the live online classes (Zoom or similar platforms) which required the student's connectivity at the exact times of the live lectures.

The Context

The Covid-19 pandemic brought (almost) everything the world over to a standstill. Due to this one of the worst affected communities has been the student community. With the college closing in March 2019 due to the rising Covid cases in the country, it was gradually realized (though only a few days later) that the reopening date of the institution is uncertain and similar situation might loom for quite some time. Some faculty members, with their own limited resources, started taking online classes (basically experimenting with online teaching/learning methods and technologies). It was soon realized that live online video sessions for teaching were not going to be useful/successful (at least for the UG classes). The reason being that the college itself is located in a remote hilly semi-urban location and (almost) all our students belong to remote villages of the region (lying in the harsh Himalayan terrain). With the students staying at their native places, due to the lockdown, continuous internet connectivity, required necessarily for the live video-sessions, wasn't available to them. So instead of teaching solely via live-video sessions the faculty members started creating video-lectures (sometimes only audio-lecture) and distributing them online to the students. Some faculty members created their own YouTube channels for their video-lectures. At other times (for audio materials or short videos) Whatsapp was also used to distribute the content. This meant that the student could access the study material whenever he had the resources to connect to the internet. Gradually more and more faculty members started teaching (specially the UG students) this way. Thus we were able to create a sort of e-repository of educational

content for the students. In classes with smaller student strengths (e.g. PG classes) the live online teaching mode was also employed (wherever/ whenever possible). Later the Higher Education Department of the state invited video-content from all the colleges to be uploaded into a YouTube channel (sort of a state level e-repository). Many of our faculty members contributed their e-content to that end also.

5. Evidence of Success

Noting can compete with the blackboard-classroom teaching environment when it comes to teaching-learning. But with classes in the campus not being possible we had to come with some sort of online teaching process(es). Lack of proper uninterrupted high speed internet connectivity (mainly at the students end) made even the live video-session futile. We feel, that distributing study material via our own video lectures (or audio lectures) was the only optimal solution in this case. The good grades acquired by the final semester students (UG 6th Semester and PG 4th Semester) in their respective final semester University exams can definitely be considered as evidence for the success of the adopted practice.

6. Problems Encountered and Resources Required

Several problems were encountered with this online video-lectures process. Firstly it was a new experience for all of the faculty members themselves and even the most tech-savvy ones had a bit of a hard time tuning things initially. Also with no available resources (and the markets also mostly closed) arrangement of things/setup for recording video-lectures was a huge challenge. People had to come up with innovative ideas with the resources available at hand to create their own recording setups. Also online teaching, in general and by creating video-lectures (and then uploading) in particular, is a laborious and time-taking process. To cover the same amount of material in this mode takes a lot more time as compared to the traditional classroom teaching and even after that the teacher-student connection is absent. At times, uploading of the video-content posed a challenge for the faculty members also (with Internet connectivity going down at their ends.). Some of the students, with extremely poor (or no) internet connectivity at their native places, were not able to access the materials created by the faculty. Some students (those from extremely low income groups) even didn't have access to a smartphone. Watching the video-lectures (mostly) on their small smartphone screens many students reported some sort of eye issues (irritation, watery eyes, redness etc.).

Despite all this, as stated above, this possibly was the best strategy we could have adopted to continue the teaching-learning process. With the pandemic still looming large over our heads and the possibility of the online teaching mode continuing for some time in the future the college is trying to create a few smart classrooms in the college. Even if the students can't come to the college the faculty members can make use of the resources available in the smart classroom (Big smart interactive board, Audio/Video recording devices, High speed internet connectivity etc.) to easily create and distribute the e-content. Also any sort of help to the (extremely) economically deprived students, in terms of providing smartphones (even used/refurbished ones) and data-packs, would be a boon for them. The college wishes to take up this matter with the departmental higher authorities as well as the local bodies & NGO's operating in the region.