

## Semester System in Higher Education : A Choice or Need?

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### *ABSTRACT*

In semester system, each academic year is divided into two equal parts of about six months each, each part being called a semester. Semester examinations are conducted after the end of each semester. Universities play a vital and critical role in the development and evolution of societies. These universities generate new ideas, encourage innovation, educate young minds and create awareness and dynamic citizens in the country. *The University Grants Commission (UGC)* set up a committee for university reforms which emphasized the importance of interdisciplinary, a broader background for undergraduate education, a uniform semester and credit system, a science-technology interface, the importance of enhancing skills in mathematics and languages and changes in the regulatory regimes. Hence, Delhi University introduced the “**Semester System**” to change the structure which will bring quantum leap in the teaching, research and innovation. Considering the role of Semester System in Higher Education, the present study was undertaken.

**Purpose of the study:** The main purpose of the study was to focus the intrinsic worth of semester system in comparison to annual examination system.

**Conclusions:** In the concluding remarks, it can be stressed that:

- Semester system in conformity with the global practices and standards and being the member of this globalized world, every student has to cope him or herself with the new trends and demands.
- Experimentation with the introduction of semester system in India might help growing the quality of the youth's studies. Since universities like JNU, Jamiya Milia Islamia and Delhi University and so on; are successfully implementing this system; all other universities should also try to do so to compete in the globalized world.
- Finally, for a nation like India, semester system cannot be a choice as it is a need for India.

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## INTRODUCTION

In semester system, each academic year is divided into two equal parts of about six months each, each part being called a semester. Semester examinations are conducted after the end of each semester. Universities play a vital and critical role in the development and evolution of societies. These universities generate new ideas, encourage innovation, educate young minds and create awareness and dynamic citizens in the country. *The University Grants Commission (UGC)* set up a committee for university reforms which emphasized the importance of interdisciplinary, a broader background for undergraduate education, a uniform semester and credit system, a science-technology interface, the importance of enhancing skills in mathematics and languages and changes in the regulatory regimes. Hence, Delhi University introduced the “**Semester System**” to change the structure which will bring quantum leap in the teaching, research and innovation.

### DIFFICULTIES IN ANNUAL EXAMINATION SYSTEM:

In our traditional system, the examinations are conducted after one year. In annual examination system, numerous difficulties are faced not only by the students but also by teachers, such as:

- **Too large subject matter**

In annual examination system, there is very vast syllabus

- **Slower coverage - Greater stress**

Both teachers and students feel relaxed at the beginning of the academic session, because examination appears to be far away. This slackness results in slower coverage of the courses and consequently, greater stress and straining the students as the examination draws nearer.

- **Rote learning and cramming**

Courses are covered hurriedly within a few weeks just before the examination, which result in poor performance of the students and encourage rote learning and cramming.

- **Hampers good instructional approaches**

Many good instructional approaches such as continuous evaluation, tutorials, projects, assignments, group discussions and so on are not arranged due to shortage of time and entire teaching-learning process becomes written examination oriented.

### ***CHANGES/BENEFITS IN SEMESTER SYSTEM***

Many developed countries of the world have overcome these difficulties by implementing semester system. Under this system, following changes are brought about.

- **Division of course**

It breaks down the subject-matter of each course/paper into two or more meaningful, self-contained, well-organized and internally homogeneous parts.

- **Regularity and comprehensiveness**

It carries out the teaching work more regularly and comprehensively approaches mutual co-operation and new instructional strategies.

- **Broad-based syllabus**

It makes the syllabus more broad-based with the inclusion of main and subsidiary subjects including core courses and electives.

- **Variation in subject-matter**

It provides for greater variety of subject areas suitable to the intellectual motivational and occupational requirements of the learners.

- **Pleasant and joyful activity**

It reduces unnecessary stress and strain before and during teaching and examination period and makes learning a purposeful, pleasant and joyful activity.

- **Effective teaching-learning process**

It makes teaching-learning process more broad-based by including class discussions, tutorials, assignments, library work and educational excursions as integral components.

- **Improvement in efficiency**

It introduces a system of formative evaluation in order to receive continuous feedback for improvement of learning experiences so as to make them more effective and efficient.

- **Deeper interaction between teachers and students**

Semester system also enhances the interaction between students and teachers, which we know that it is essential for learning and will help both.

- **More in-depth study and understanding**

The examination related study load of the students shall be halved since they would be required to prepare half of the content. This would enable a more in-depth study and understanding of their concerned subjects.

- **Introduces seriousness and study-culture in colleges and universities**

Semester system does not allow any kind of slackness on the part of teachers and students as there is no extra time to waste. This introduces seriousness and study-culture in colleges and universities.

## **NEED OF SEMESTER SYSTEM IN HIGHER EDUCATION IN INDIA**

There has earlier been successful youths from annual

system too. Experimentation with something new is a habit of human beings to beget something better in competing with the other markets around the world -

- The rationale for adopting semester system rather than remaining with the annual system is to improve learning process so that students will be benefited maximally in terms of the acquisition of relevant knowledge, skills and attitudes.
- The move from annual examination system to semester system is aimed at bringing higher education in India in conformity with the best academic practices and standards being followed globally.
- Semester system is the current manifestation of a market-driven 'vision' for Indian Higher Education. (The arbitrary and authoritarian imposition of the semester system in the higher education is nothing but the current manifestation of a market-driven 'vision' for Indian higher education.)

The university committee wants to improve the learning processes to benefit the students so they have introduced semester system rather than remaining with the annual system to enhance value to the students. This semester system is **beneficial** for number of reasons. There may be various advantages and disadvantages of semester system in education. Let's discuss it in detail:

- It will provide an opportunity to students for continuous learning and assessment/feedback and a better paced understanding of the subject. There will more focused class interaction because of continuous engagement between students and teachers. This will provide regular study habits among students. The main advantage is that the performance would not be judged at the end of one year rather conducting

examinations twice a year will help in regularly evaluating the student progress. The examination study load of the students shall be halved since they would be required to prepare half of the content as they are currently required to prepare for the final examination. As a result it would enable a more in-depth study and understanding of their concerned subjects.

- Interdisciplinary would play an important role in the way subjects are being conceptualized and knowledge integrated across diverse disciplines. Semester system would facilitate the possibility of undergraduate students imbibing relevant knowledge and skills that are not contained within the disciplinary boundaries of their primary subject areas. A semester system allows greater freedom and scope for designing and delivering a variety of courses that the students can pick flexibly to enhance the quality of their learning.
- The current situation of University of Delhi is inflexible in terms of accumulation of credits which would allow movement of students across universities in India and abroad. Students from other countries who come on short term 'Study Abroad' programs to Delhi University are awarded credits by their universities for studying but the same is not given by our university. Therefore, introducing a semester system will allow greater exposure to those of the students who get the opportunity to study elsewhere.
- Adopting a semester system at the undergraduate level will lead to a harmonization with the changes made at the postgraduate level as well as with undergraduate courses that are already being run in a semester system.

Some students have accepted the proposal of introducing the semester system and have a number of reasons in support of it. While some feel that the semester system will lighten the

examination load since they would not be confronted with vast syllabus as in the annual examinations. In comparison with the annual system, students perceived the semester system to be favorable and continuous learning and evaluation with a better focus on the program they have opted for.

Some students and teachers are not completely in favor of the new system and feel semester system will create many unwanted challenges for the students. Some felt that the success of the semester system being closely related to adequate time available while others felt that it would overburden them. Some students were under the feeling that the system of examination would become an internal one which would lead to a lack of uniform standards. Anxiety about the less time for extracurricular activities was also spoken.

Some of the **drawbacks** of the semester system are as follows:

### **Inadequacy of Time:**

The classes under the semester system starts on July and the admission keeps on going till August, which adversely affect the proper starting of the classes. When there is no clarity in the system it have been decided that the first semester exam would be held in December. A vacation of 20-25 days before the exams implies that neither the teachers have enough time to complete the course nor the students have adequate time to prepare well for the first semester exam. While teachers in Delhi University reveal that in annual examination system, teachers have the right amount of time to complete the course and students have enough time to prepare well for the exam.

### **Increasing Work Load:**

The Delhi University has many departments and colleges. The declaration of result in every 6 months would double the work load of departments since semester exam implies more revaluation

and on right time the declaration of results.

Comparison between semester and annual systems is very often done. Both the systems have its merits and demerits. Annual system is the traditional system. Annual system covers more syllabuses at a stretch and compels the student to remember all this till the end of the year. Sometimes, two or more topics will be included in the same paper (very often, a paper will have to be set by two examiners under such situations), when specializations are there. Otherwise, certain topics will be omitted and the syllabus diluted. Since at the end of the year only the public examinations are conducted, University gets enough time to prepare question papers and value answer papers. Number of examiners and examinations also can be reduced, which become more economical for Universities. Results can be announced in time and the schedule can be kept.

In semester system, the students get more advantage; since examinations are held within months (what is studied will remain afresh in their brain). The syllabus load also will be less. Different topics need not be combined in the same paper. Students get more chances to improve also. Since examinations come within a few months student unrest also will be less in a semester system. There were many challenges to be faced by the under graduate colleges in preparing the students for the semester system. The semester system is a very proactive system as it engages both the faculty and the students throughout the year in academic activity. While, in the annual system once the student enters the college he feels free and thinks about studying only during the exam time. Semester system not only involves students more throughout the year but also reduces examination burden. The semester system is the need of hour and a very effective one.

**CONCLUSIONS:** In the concluding remarks, it can be stressed

that:

Semester system in conformity with the global practices and standards and being the member of this globalized world, every student has to cope him or herself with the new trends and demands.

Experimentation with the introduction of semester system in India might help growing the quality of the youth's studies. Since universities like JNU, Jamiya Milia Islamia and Delhi University and so on; are successfully implementing this system; all other universities should also try to do so to compete in the globalized world.

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